Lesbians and gay men's vacation motivations, perceptions and constraints:

A study of cruise vacation choice

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**Abstract**

This study explores the push-pull vacation motivations of gay male and lesbian consumers, and examines how these underpin their perceptions and purchase constraints of a mainstream and LGBT[1] cruise. Findings highlight a complex vacation market. While lesbians and gay men share many of the same travel motivations as their heterosexual counterparts, the study reveals sexuality is a significant variable in their perception of cruise vacations, which further influences purchase constraints and destination choice. Gay men have more favorable perceptions than lesbians of both mainstream and LGBT cruises. The paper recommends further inquiry into the multifaceted nature of motivations, perception and constraints within the LGBT market in relation to cruise vacations.


Keywords: constraints, cruise vacations, lesbian and gay male tourists, motivations, perceptions

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[1] While this paper focuses on gay men and lesbians, other terminology is also utilized. As noted by other researchers (Hughes 2006a, 2006b; Southall & Fallon, 2011) 'gay' is used interchangeably with 'LGBT' (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered) depending on the context. For example, some gay tour operators market cruises as lesbian, whilst others as all-gay which may appeal to both gay men and lesbians, and even some heterosexuals. LGBT is used to represent a range of inclusive identities beyond just gay and lesbian.

**Introduction**

This study investigates vacation motivations of lesbians and gay men, and their underlying perceptions and potential constraints about cruises, an increasingly popular choice for such tourists. The study of travel motivations has a long history within the tourism literature (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981; Fodness, 1994; Goossens, 2000; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Kim & Chalip, 2004; Prayag & Ryan, 2011). Motivations are psychological factors that influence the cognitive organization of environmental perceptions and drive individuals to act in one way rather than another to satisfy specific needs and desires (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012). Travel motivations are complex, dynamic, highly individualistic, and dependent upon a range of interconnected demographic and psychographic variables. A commonly used framework to understand tourist motivation is the push-pull model, which posits destination and product choice is a dynamic combination of push and pull factors (Phau, Lee & Quintal, 2013; Prayag, 2010; Prayag & Ryan, 2011). The desire to escape from everyday life, and to seek rest and relaxation, serves to encourage or 'push' people to travel away from home, while the attributes of a destination, for example, climate, landscape, attractions, or price, attract or 'pull' them towards it. Generally, push factors precede pull factors since the decision to travel occurs prior to choosing a specific holiday product. However, such decisions are complex, often simultaneous, with a dynamic mix of push and pull variables considered to underpin travel choice.

In 2014, more than 22 million people took a cruise vacation, an increase of 24% since 2009. During the same period, industry capacity grew by more than 18% (Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) 2015). However, while the industry has been securing consistent growth it has also been discounting heavily to fill capacity (European Cruise Council, 2011), and so operators need to be cognizant of how cruises are perceived, why people like to cruise, and perhaps more significantly, why others do not. For those responsible for marketing vacation products, understanding tourists' perceptions, motivations and potential constraints of

different types of vacation is critical.  With regard to the general appeal of cruise tourism, a significant body of work exists, especially with regard to factors that influence motivations (e.g.: Elliot & Choi, 2011; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Hyun & Han, 2015; Petrick, 2004, 2005, 2011; Qu & Ping, 1999; Teye & Paris, 2010). Experienced cruisers tend to hold extremely favorable opinions on cruising, and consider them an enjoyable way to escape, relax, enjoy new experiences, (re)connect with family and friends, meet new people, and a convenient way to travel (CLIA, 2011b; Hung & Petrick, 2011; Jones, 2011; Park and Petrick, 2009; Teye & Paris, 2010). While these studies reveal a number of reasons for taking a cruise, their individual degree of influence varies according to previous experience. Industry research reveals prior experience of a cruise positively affects perceptions on attributes such as fine dining, reliability and safety, ease of planning, value for money, and fun (CLIA, 2011a; CLIA, 2011b; Jones, 2011). Indeed, prior knowledge is a critical factor in cruisers' perception of value and loyalty, with a positive impact on future intention (Hung & Petrick, 2011).

To understand why more people do not cruise, researchers have lately focused their attention on the influence of constraints, defined as reasons that limit or prevent participation, or explain why people have stopped taking part in leisure-related activity (Hung & Petrick, 2010; 2012; Park & Petrick, 2009; Yarnal, Kerstetter, & Yen, 2005).  Notably, these studies tend to discuss Crawford and Godbey's model (1987; e.g.: also Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991), which propose constraints consist of three sequentially important levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural.  Intrapersonal constraints refer to physical and psychological factors, such as health, or lack of interest, which interact with an individual's leisure preferences (Yarnal et al., 2005). Because they are reflected on first, intrapersonal constraints are deemed most influential. If not overcome, the desire to participate in a particular activity is very likely to decline (Park & Petrick, 2009).  The second level, interpersonal, relate to factors such as having no one to travel with, or family or work obligations.  Structural constraints pertain to issues such as a lack of

money or time, which impact on all types of holiday choice (Carneiro & Crompton, 2010). Yarnal et al. (2005) also discuss the fluid nature of constraints, arguing that categorizing respondents' constraints as either intrapersonal, interpersonal or structural ignores their inherent dynamism, and the extent to which constraints reflect current life cycle stage, personal and work commitments and travel priorities.  With specific regard to cruise constraints, research indicates people who have either never cruised or have stopped cruising, believe them to be more expensive than land-based holidays, think cruise ships are unsafe, unhealthy, spatially confining and uncomfortable, have inadequate medical facilities, and are full of people they do not know (CLIA, 2011b; Park & Petrick, 2009; Yarnal et al., 2005).

Whilst there exists some acknowledgement of the diversity in product offering (e.g.: Vogel & Oschmann, 2013), and the heterogeneous nature of the cruise experience (e.g.: Teye & Leclerc, 2003; Weaver, 2011), few studies have explicitly articulated the individualistic nature of the motivations, perceptions and constraints associated with cruise travel. Similarly, few studies have focused on particular niches within the cruise sector, even though there have been specific calls for such research, particularly with regard to niche cruise travellers' perceptions and constraints (e.g.: Szarycz, 2008; Weaver, 2011; Weeden et al. 2011). Of particular importance when seeking to successfully attract niche markets is the identification of a set of consumers who are financially lucrative (e.g.: Blichfeldt, Chor, & Milan, 2013).  One such group is the LGBT community, however, while there exists some significant inquiry into cruise decision-making (e.g.: Petrick 2004; 2005; 2011), and the market potential of gay tourism (Hughes 2002b; Hughes & Deutsche 2010; Pritchard, Morgan, Sedgely, Khan, & Jenkins, 2000), few studies have examined the potential of the LGBT market for cruise vacations even though they are an increasingly popular form of vacation for such tourists. Furthermore, while there has been a significant increase in the commercial visibility of the LGBT tourist segment, little attention has been given to the similarities and differences between gay men and lesbian's travel motivations, or their attitudes

toward a specific vacation (Coon, 2012).

Such omissions are also evident in research into the travel motivations of LGBT tourists, where the gay male tourist is often the primary subject of discussion (Clift & Forrest, 1999; Hughes, 2002a, 2007; Hughes & Deutsche, 2010; Pritchard et al., 2000). Indeed, Pritchard, Morgan and Sedgely (2002) note the importance of recognizing the heterogeneous nature of gay leisure choice, and guard against a possible obscuring of the lesbian tourist. Indeed, there has been scant empirical focus on lesbian travel preferences. A notable exception comes from Hughes (2007), who notes that demand for, and expenditure on vacations is much less for lesbians than for gay men, with the former also more likely to seek holidays away from the commercial gay scene.

Significantly, the LGBT market is often treated as a homogenous niche, perceived primarily as a profitable set of 'hyperconsumers' (Melián-González, Moreno-Gil, & Araña, 2011; Pritchard, Morgan, Sedgely, & Jenkins, 1998). While such stereotyping is outdated (Coon, 2012; Ragusa, 2005), many mainstream organizations remain reluctant to address the nuanced and individual vacation choices of LGBT tourists, and have limited understanding of the role of gender and sexuality within them (Blichfeldt et al., 2013). As Community Marketing Inc. (CMI) (2010) indicate, there is no "gay market - the LGBT communities represent a broad and dynamic spectrum of interests, sensitivities, preferences and priorities." Researchers now acknowledge the specific challenges of understanding the diverse, fractured, and fragmented sexual orientations beyond a heterosexual, gay, or lesbian identity (Drucker, 2011). Such recognition however creates methodological challenge (Southall & Fallon, 2011). Indeed, researching gay men and lesbians can be especially demanding when it requires asking people about their sexuality, or finding a sample representative of the community or gay tourist (Browne, 2005; Hughes, 2002a; Melián-González et al., 2011). Arguably these methodological difficulties have resulted in a consolidated 'gay' identity in much of the tourism literature. However, while this study acknowledges the

limitations of categorizing respondents as *lesbians* and *gay men*, such an approach offers a practical framework to explore their similarities and differences, within a wider LGBT population, and so further understand the heterogeneity of this tourism niche.

Considered a niche within the wider cruise market, the gay cruise sector has roots from the early 1990s, when entrepreneurial gay tour operators first approached cruise companies to organize sea-based vacations. The market now includes a range of North American and European gay tour operators, such as Atlantis Events, Olivia, RSVP Vacations, R Family, and Attitude Travels. Cruise lines supply the ship and its staff, while the gay operators negotiate itineraries and provide their own entertainment. The world's largest gay tour operator, Atlantis Events, charters ships that can accommodate up to 6000 passengers. In contrast, lesbian tour operator Olivia charter smaller ships of 600-1300 passengers or take groups of 40-100 people onto mainstream cruises.  RSVP and R Family market to those with children, and/or traveling with extended family.  Some companies use the term 'gay' in their promotion, whilst others use 'LGBT'. Although there is limited commercial information available on the global LGBT cruise market, USA data reveal 16% of gay and bisexual men, and 12% of lesbians and bisexual women took a cruise in 2012. Of these, 11% of men cruised with Atlantis Events, while 20% of women travelled with Olivia.  More than 17% of the sample was aged 45-64 years, while 11% were 25-44 years. The six most popular cruise brands for the USA LGBT market are Carnival Cruise Lines, Royal Caribbean, Holland America, Norwegian Cruise Lines, Celebrity Cruises and Princess Cruises (CMI, 2013). On average, the LGBT cruiser has a younger age profile than for non-LGBT (C. Rounds, Former CEO RSVP, personal communication, 4 November, 2011).

Whilst such information illustrates the range of companies and products categorized as specifically LGBT, it is important to acknowledge gay men and lesbians also choose to purchase mainstream cruises, with some identifying these as their preferred option, hence the focus of this

research on both gay and mainstream cruises. Although mainstream cruises are seen as dominantly heterosexual spaces they can also be described as gay-friendly places, and it is not uncommon for mainstream cruises to host 'Friends of Dorothy' meetings. Indeed, cruise ships' enclavic and liminal characteristics position them as safe, bounded spaces of escape (Lester & Weeden, 2004; Weaver, 2005; Wood, 2000; Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005), and so have the potential to be vacation settings where gay couples can express and be comfortable about their sexual identities. The exact nature of what is perceived to be safe space for the gay tourist is multifaceted. In terms of gay space, these are places that are not necessarily exclusively gay but rather labeled as such because these arenas welcome this market group (Hughes 2002a). Certainly, Hughes' (2002a) research notes the significance of destination choice and/or avoidance amongst gay male tourists, premised on their assessment of risk about possible discrimination. This is also a consideration for some lesbians when they travel (McGehee, 2012).

In summary, the holiday motivations of lesbians and gay men are under-investigated, with a notable lack of research into lesbians' travel motivations. Furthermore, how lesbians and gay mean perceive cruise vacations has never before been studied, and there is no evidence of inquiry into the gay cruise niche. A review of the literature has identified the following key research questions, which this study aims to investigate: what are the push-pull travel motivations of lesbians and gay men, and are they similar or different? What are their perceptions of both mainstream and gay cruise vacations, and how are their intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural constraints invoked? How does prior experience affect people's perceptions of cruising? How do motivations, perceptions and constraints affect their decision to take a cruise vacation? What role does (gay) sexuality play in their travel decision-making?

**Research method**

Empirical research for this study was undertaken at the Gay Games, a quadrennial global sport event attracting around 10,000 LGBT and some heterosexual athletes, which took place in Cologne, Germany, during August 2010. This setting provided a unique opportunity to access lesbians and gay men, with their participation in the survey being secured by a researcher who is an openly gay man and attended the Games as a competing athlete. Data were collected by means of a standardized, self-administered questionnaire, with the researcher being present to answer any queries. Following Meyer & Wilson's (2009) community venue sample method, the researcher approached people who appeared to have some time between sport events to participate in the survey. A concerted effort was made to recruit a representative share of lesbians. As highlighted earlier, the lesbian voice is notably absent from research, with their needs often overshadowed by data on the gay male tourist (Pritchard et al., 2002).

The questionnaire was administered in English. The first part of the survey investigated respondents' motivations to travel, and started with an open-ended question, followed by a series of Likert-type scale push-pull motivation statements drawn from the tourism literature (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981; Fodness, 1994; Goossens, 2000; Hughes 2002a; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Kim & Chalip, 2004; Prayag & Ryan, 2011), and supplemented with a few LGBT-oriented attributes. Respondents were asked to consider their motivations on a scale from very important to not at all important, in addition to a don't know option. Questions in the second part of the survey explored respondents' perceptions and possible purchase constraints with regard to taking a cruise vacation, both mainstream and LGBT. They were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with a range of Likert-type scale-based statements drawn from previous studies on travel perceptions and constraints  (Correia & Pimpão 2008; Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Hung & Petrick, 2010, 2012; Kerstetter, Yen, & Careen, 2005; Park & Petrick, 2009; Yarnal et al., 2005).  The scale ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with a don't know option. The

final section of the survey gathered socio-economic information, and noted whether respondents had previously taken a cruise, or knew of someone who had.

The Pearson Chi-square ($X^2$) was used to explore potential relationships within the data (Wongkit & McKercher, 2013), by type of respondent (for example, lesbians and gay men, previous cruise experience), with their reasons for taking vacations in general, and the level of importance they attached to perceptions and constraints of cruise trips. The key objectives of this study were to compare push-pull travel motivations between lesbians and gay men, and to determine potential differences between these two groups in relation to their perceptions and constraints of mainstream and LGBT cruises. Age, level of education, and nationality of respondents were also recorded. A total of 171 people completed the survey. Whilst 82% of people approached agreed to participate in the study, the refusal rate was higher among lesbian respondents (32%) than gay men (8%). Of those who declined to take part, the reasons offered were being heterosexual, not confident in English, or having no time.

**Results**

The socio-economic profile of respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

From a list of twenty-two push-pull factors related to vacation motivations, respondents were asked to reveal the importance they attached to each (see Table 2). The six most important considerations were opportunities to see local culture, exploring new places, opportunities for rest and relaxation, travelling with friends and loved ones, seeing dramatic or beautiful landscapes, and enjoying quality eating experiences.

Table 2 about here

The factors of least importance to this combined sample were convenient and cheap holiday packages, gay culture and venues, good nightlife, seeing well-known tourist sites, getting away from others, and socializing with LGBT people.

Table 3 presents the responses to an open-ended question about the factors important in vacation decision-making. A combination of push (seeing culture, relaxing, traveling with friends/companions) and pull factors (climate, gay friendly culture, range of activities available) were among the most cited responses.

Table 3 about here

Table 4 presents the Chi-square analysis between gay men and lesbian's responses, and reveals differences in eight of the twenty-two factors important in their vacation preferences. The data reveals opportunities for casual sex on vacation were of far greater importance to gay men than lesbians, with good nightlife also being valuable. Likewise, socializing with other LGBT people, gay culture and venues, and high quality accommodation, were more attractive to gay men than lesbians. For lesbians, getting off the beaten track, and opportunities to see wildlife and nature were more significant.

Table 4 about here

Table 5 presents responses to a series of statements about mainstream cruises, and a range of positive and negative perceptions.

Table 5 about here

Respondents were aware that cruise vacations visit several destinations, and believed they were a convenient vacation that was both luxurious and relaxing, but expensive. They believed cruises offer good quality dining options, provide a wide range of entertainment and activities, and are a romantic experience. Other responses revealed they did not want to dress for dinner, believe ships are overcrowded, and not enough time is spent in port.  Some considered cruises boring and claustrophobic, whilst others thought they offered an opportunity to enjoy the sea and to get close to nature.

Table 6 presents the responses to a series of selected perceptions in relation to LGBT cruises. Respondents believed they could be themselves onboard, could meet potential partners, and be able to socialize with other LGBT people. They also considered them primarily for gay men, with too much emphasis on partying.

Table 6 about here

The Chi-square test revealed further insight into the difference between gay men and lesbians' perceptions of mainstream cruises (see Table 7).

Table 7 about here

**Discussion**

There are two areas of difference between the respondents in this study and the wider LGBT community. Firstly, 92% of the sample held college, University or post-graduate qualifications, compared to 71% of the general LGBT community (CMI, 2012, 2013). Secondly, participants were significantly younger than the wider LGBT population, with people aged above 55 years being specifically under-represented. Arguably this latter point was due to data being

collected at a sporting event. However, although they were younger, the age profile of respondents was representative of the LGBT cruise market, which is approximately ten years younger than that of the average cruise passenger (C. Rounds, Former CEO RSVP, personal communication, 4 November, 2011). Significantly, respondents had comparatively more cruise experience than the wider population, and so were less likely to have unfavorable perceptions of cruising (e.g.: CLIA, 2011a; Hung & Petrick, 2011). Additionally, more than 19% of respondents knew people who had taken a cruise, (almost 16% of which were LGBT cruises), which may also have positively influenced their views.

As reminded by Correia and Pimpão (2008) and Wright (2006), people's travel motivations are complex, and interconnected with perceptions and constraints, as well as socio-economic status, personality, age, place of residence, mobility, previous experience, and knowledge (Axelsen & Swan, 2010). In relation to general vacation motivations, and in support of previous research (Clift & Forrest, 1999; Hughes, 2002a; Pritchard et al., 2000), this study indicates lesbians and gay men share similar push-pull attributes to heterosexuals. For instance, they share a desire to explore new places and cultures, like to travel with friends and loved ones, and want to see dramatic and beautiful landscapes. In addition, their motivations revealed a dynamic combination of both push and pull factors, with little evidence that push variables were more dominant than pull, or vice versa (Phau et al., 2013; Prayag, 2010; Prayag and Ryan, 2011).

As called for by Blichfeldt et al. (2013), this study examined the nuanced connections between travel decisions and lesbian and gay sexuality. However, as noted by Pritchard et al. (2000) it is a complex task to determine the impact of this relationship. For example, in this study, of the ten most important factors in vacation decisions, only one LGBT-related attribute (gay friendly/culture) was cited. Of more importance were destination choice, cost, climate, relaxation, exploring new places and cultures, and traveling with friends and loved ones.

Much research into the LGBT traveller has viewed them as an homogenous group (Melián-González et al., 2011; Pritchard et al., 1998). However, this study reveals a clear differential between gay men and lesbians' holiday motivations. For example, in line with previous research, gay men prioritize good nightlife, opportunities to socialize with other LGBT people, high quality accommodation, and gay culture and venues (Clift & Forrest, 1999; Hughes, 2002a; Hughes & Deutsche, 2010; Pritchard et al., 2010). Conversely, lesbians want to get off the beaten track and enjoying wildlife and nature are of prime importance, with high quality accommodation being far less significant. Such differences are perhaps not unexpected, given that previous research indicates that although lesbian tourists seek safety in gay space, want to escape from heterosexism and be amongst like-minded people (Pritchard et al., 2002), they are less interested in the commercial gay scene (Hughes, 2007).

Further analysis reveals additional complexity and difference. For example, at first glance the survey appears to dispel the myth that both lesbian and gay male tourists are highly motivated to seek sexual experiences on vacation. For instance, 79% of the combined sample declared it unimportant, which supports Clift and Forrest (1999), and Blichfeldt et al. (2013), who both argue sexual promiscuity is becoming less important to LGBT tourists. However, the Chi-square test revealed a more nuanced landscape, with 35% of gay men stating it was important, as opposed to only 4% of lesbians. Such a binary categorization does not fully capture the multifaceted nature of LGBT sexualities, and while they may play a part in travel motivations and decision-making, they are only one factor in vacation choice.

Of additional significance in this study, and one not previously addressed in tourism literature, were respondents' perceptions and constraints of mainstream and LGBT cruises. In line with extant research into cruise tourism (e.g.: CLIA, 2011a; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Hung &

Petrick, 2010, 2011; Jones, 2011; Park & Petrick, 2009; Teye & Leclerc, 2003; Teye & Paris, 2010; Yarnal et al., 2005), lesbians and gay men possess a broad range of perceptions about mainstream cruise vacations, both positive and negative. However, whilst gay men and lesbians hold different beliefs about the cruise product, the extent to which these differences are due to their gender and/or sexuality remains opaque. For example, lesbians held more negative views of cruise vacations, although it is not clear whether this was due to a structural constraint like perceived high price, a lack of knowledge and experience, or a belief that wildlife and nature are not available as part of a cruise. Similarly, their perceptions of LGBT cruises as being too party-oriented, whether or not rooted in reality, indicates they may consider them to be gay-dominated patriarchal spaces, and therefore of limited appeal.

A further finding of this study is the significant relationship between an individual's previous cruise experience and positive perceptions of such vacations (CLAI, 2011a, 2011b; Hung & Petrick, 2011; Jones, 2011). However there is a need to be cautious on this point because there was evidence of ambiguity in reported beliefs. For example, the majority of respondents agreed that cruises are more expensive than other vacations, although whether this was a positive or negative attribute for either lesbians or gay men is unclear. It is true that cruises aimed at the mass-market are promoted on value for money, and when compared against land-based holidays, the price per day is often extremely favorable. However, given the all-inclusive nature of a cruise, and the necessary additional expenses incurred throughout a voyage (Weaver, 2005), perceived as good value or not, cruise holidays are not inexpensive purchases. As such, attitudes towards structural constraints like price, and its relationship with notions of affordability and value, require further examination, especially for those who have yet to cruise. It is also important to avoid conceptualizing a cruise as an homogenous leisure experience. Whilst there is a tendency to treat them as such, in reality this is far from the truth, with highly differentiated products adorning the market place (e.g.: Vogel & Oschmann, 2013). It is therefore critical to understand individual

perceptions and constraints of cruise vacations to further inform the theoretical framing of consumer choice, travel motivations and decision-making.

**Conclusions and further research**

In conclusion, individuals' sense of self and expressions of such are inextricably linked to lifestyle choice, and so travel decisions and vacation purchases are significant in this respect. Whether mainstream or LGBT-oriented, destination choices, and specific vacation products such as cruises, clearly evoke a range of perceptions, both positive and negative, which are inherently subjective. While taking a cruise significantly lessens many of the negative perceptions of the product (Hung & Petrick, 2011; Jones, 2011), how these intersect with motivations and constraints, produce significant challenges for both mainstream and gay cruise operators seeking to broaden the appeal of cruising.

This study offers insight into the travel preferences of the lesbian and gay traveller and their views of both mainstream and LGBT cruise vacations. The research also reveals gay male and lesbian sexuality plays a role in travel decision-making, although its exact significance is hard to determine. Sexuality and gender are two of a number of factors that influence people's travel behavior, motivations, destination choices, perceptions and constraints. It is therefore recommended that future studies could utilize factor analysis, not only to determine the influence of sexuality and gender, but also to examine how variables such as prior cruise experience, education level, age, nationality and income may account for variations in motivations and perceptions. Likewise, there is scope to extend knowledge through the use of qualitative inquiry, which would unpack the intricacies between motivations and how they underpin and influence perceptions of mainstream and gay cruises.

The findings of this research also reveal insight into respondents' perception of cruise ships as vacation spaces. While cruise ships may provide safe places for gay men and lesbians, as well as space for them to freely express themselves, the enclavic nature of this tourist bubble may act as a limitation. As such, the concept of gay-friendly vacation settings, such as cruises, both mainstream and LGBT warrants further investigation, particularly given their heterogeneous nature (Lester & Weeden, 2004; Weaver, 2005; Wood, 2000). Cruise ships are host to a transient community, spatially confined, incurring temporal, intimate encounters with others. Therefore, further research into both individual and collective conceptions and experiences of cruise ships, have the potential to deepen understanding of LGBT tourists' attitudes towards vacations in general and cruise in particular.

When set against the ways in which gay cruises are advertised, this latter finding has implications with regard to how these vacations are mediated and to whom, which highlights a continuing challenge for the industry's promotional activities. For example, this study reveals that lesbians seek individualized experiences and opportunities to see nature and wildlife on vacation. However, these activities are often 'hidden' in the mediated imagery of LGBT cruises, and obscured by the dominant 'party ship' theme. Moreover, this study prompts questions not just regarding dominant associations with the concept of holiday vacations at sea, but more significantly how these come into being and continue to permeate society's psyche (Weeden & Lester, 2006). These are significant issues for the industry, particularly if they want to widen their portfolio offering to different markets, and important when set against the findings that prior experience of cruising counteract potentially negative associations with the product. Failure to engage with niche tourists, such as those within the LGBT market, could increase the risk of over-supply, which in conjunction with continued discounting, may lead in the long term to a reduction in market appeal.

This study has provided valuable and original insight into lesbian and gay men's perceptions and constraints of a cruise, as well as how their motivations influence vacation decision-making. However, in line with Southall and Fallon (2011), certain methodological challenges persist. For example, surveying the views of attendees at the Gay Games may not offer a representative set of opinions of all LGBT people, with their participation in an international sporting event may serve merely as an indicator of their mobility and financial status. Additionally, no respondents identified themselves as bisexual, transgendered or any other sexual identity, and it was assumed all male respondents were gay men, while all females were lesbians. Consequently, there is scope for future interdisciplinary inquiry to recognize the complex identities of this consumer grouping, and the needs of bisexual, transgendered and queer tourists, rather than the traditional binary of gay male and lesbian travellers.

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## Table 1 Profile of Respondents (n=171)

| | % of respondents | | % of respondents |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender: | | Education: | |
| Male (Gay Men) | 53.8 | Secondary/high school | 7.1 |
| Female (Lesbians) | 46.2 | College | 16.7 |
| | | University | 47.0 |
| | | Post-graduate | 29.2 |
| Age: | | Been on: | |
| 18-24 | 3.0 | · Cruise Before | 23.4 |
| 25-34 | 19.5 | · LGBT Cruise Before | 7.0 |
| 35-44 | 38.5 | Know LGBT people: | |
| 45-54 | 30.2 | · have cruised | 19.2 |
| 55-64 | 8.3 | · have LGBT cruised | 15.8 |
| 65+ | 0.6 | | |
| Nationality: | | Nationality: | |
| German | 24.0 | Other: Australian, Irish, Italian, French, | 36.2% |
| American | 15.8 | Swiss, Austrian, South African, Spanish, | |
| British | 12.3 | Singaporean, Greek, Belgian, Danish, | |
| Dutch | 11.7 | Brazilian, Croatian, Swedish, Chinese, | |
| | | Hungarian, Slovenian | |

Table 2  Importance of selected push-pull factors when considering taking any holiday

| Push-pull factor | Very Important % | Somewhat Important % | Not Very Important % | Not at all Important % | * Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Push:** | | | | | |
| Opportunities for rest and relaxation | 55 | 35 | 8 | 2 | 1.57 |
| Opportunities to socialize with other LGBT people | 14 | 42 | 39 | 6 | 2.37 |
| Opportunities to have casual sex | 4 | 17 | 29 | 50 | 3.25 |
| Getting away from other people | 14 | 43 | 31 | 12 | 2.42 |
| Travelling with friends/loved ones | 51 | 38 | 10 | 1 | 1.61 |
| Opportunities to see local culture | 47 | 47 | 5 | 1 | 1.61 |
| To do exciting things | 37 | 44 | 14 | 5 | 1.88 |
| Live in luxury | 8 | 21 | 38 | 33 | 2.96 |
| **Pull:** | | | | | |
| Guaranteed sunshine | 18 | 53 | 26 | 4 | 2.15 |
| Good nightlife | 12 | 36 | 32 | 20 | 2.61 |
| Gay culture and venues | 12 | 39 | 40 | 10 | 2.48 |
| LGBT friendly destination | 29 | 44 | 25 | 2 | 2.00 |
| Dramatic or beautiful landscapes | 41 | 47 | 12 | 1 | 1.74 |
| Getting off the beaten track | 19 | 43 | 27 | 11 | 2.29 |
| Convenient and cheap holiday package | 12 | 40 | 38 | 11 | 2.47 |
| Seeing well known tourist sites | 13 | 46 | 30 | 11 | 2.39 |
| Visiting art galleries and museums | 20 | 34 | 34 | 12 | 2.38 |
| Opportunities to see wildlife and nature | 28 | 46 | 21 | 5 | 2.03 |
| Good sporting facilities/to be physically active | 24 | 33 | 33 | 11 | 2.30 |
| Quality eating experiences | 41 | 42 | 15 | 2 | 1.77 |
| High quality accommodation | 20 | 43 | 29 | 8 | 2.24 |
| Explore new places | 58 | 35 | 4 | 2 | 1.49 |

* Mean relates to scale score of 1 for very important to 4 for not at all important

Table 3   Important factors in decision to take a vacation (open-ended)

| Factor | % of respondents |
| --- | --- |
| Destination | 31.0 |
| Cost | 30.4 |
| Culture | 21.1 |
| Climate | 20.5 |
| Relaxing | 14.0 |
| Activities | 14.0 |
| Travel with friends/family/companions | 10.5 |
| Gay friendly/culture | 10.5 |
| Fun | 7.6 |
| Sun | 7.0 |

Table 4

Results of Chi-square test for differing push-pull factors when considering taking any holiday, by sexuality

| Importance of push-pull factor | Gay men % | Lesbians % | $\chi^2$ df=1 | p value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pull:** | | | | |
| Getting off the beaten track | 54 | 73 | 5.696 | p = 0.017 |
| Good nightlife | 61 | 32 | 14.054 | p <.001 |
| Opportunities to have casual sex | 35 | 4 | 23.993 | p <.001 |
| Opportunities to socialize with other LGBT people | 64 | 45 | 6.334 | p = 0.012 |
| Live in luxury | 36 | 21 | 5.061 | p = 0.024 |
| **Push:** | | | | |
| Gay culture and venues | 59 | 41 | 5.408 | p = 0.020 |
| Opportunities to see wildlife and nature | 63 | 87 | 13.454 | p <.001 |
| High quality accommodation | 71 | 54 | 4.988 | p = 0.026 |

Table 5    Level of agreement with selected perception statements about a mainstream cruise

| Perception statement | Strongly Agree % | Slightly Agree % | Slightly Disagree % | Strongly Disagree % | * Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| It's a great way to enjoy the sea and be close to nature | 20 | 42 | 22 | 15 | 2.32 |
| Cruising is boring | 23 | 45 | 16 | 16 | 2.26 |
| A cruise holiday is a luxurious experience | 31 | 45 | 21 | 3 | 1.96 |
| Everything is included in one price | 30 | 42 | 23 | 5 | 2.03 |
| Cruising is convenient – only have to unpack once | 34 | 46 | 15 | 5 | 1.91 |
| Visiting several destinations is important | 51 | 30 | 14 | 5 | 1.74 |
| Cruising is a claustrophobic experience | 24 | 40 | 19 | 18 | 2.31 |
| Cruising is only for old people | 13 | 34 | 29 | 24 | 2.63 |
| I won't have anything in common with other passengers | 15 | 32 | 33 | 20 | 2.58 |
| I don't have to make any decisions once I am on the ship | 13 | 33 | 42 | 13 | 2.54 |
| Having to dress for dinner is appealing | 12 | 29 | 27 | 32 | 2.78 |
| Cruising is more expensive than other travel options | 29 | 42 | 20 | 9 | 2.07 |
| It's a great way of meeting other people | 19 | 39 | 32 | 10 | 2.32 |
| It offers a variety of activities to suit everyone | 17 | 41 | 35 | 7 | 2.33 |
| Cruising negatively affects the environment | 17 | 29 | 38 | 16 | 2.53 |
| A cruise is a romantic experience | 11 | 47 | 26 | 16 | 2.47 |
| I have no interest in taking a cruise | 33 | 29 | 16 | 23 | 2.28 |
| There are too many people on the ship | 29 | 34 | 29 | 8 | 2.16 |
| A cruise ship is LGBT friendly | 13 | 42 | 28 | 17 | 2.48 |
| There are opportunities to have sex with new people | 13 | 43 | 23 | 21 | 2.52 |
| Cruises offer good quality eating options | 18 | 50 | 27 | 5 | 2.18 |
| Cruises offer a wide range of entertainment | 17 | 52 | 24 | 6 | 2.20 |
| Not enough time is spent in port | 28 | 37 | 25 | 9 | 2.15 |
| It is a relaxing experience | 28 | 48 | 20 | 5 | 2.01 |
| Everyone gets seasick on a cruise | 5 | 16 | 40 | 39 | 3.13 |

* Mean relates to scale score of 1 for strongly agree to 4 for strongly disagree

Table 6    Level of agreement with selected perception statements about an LGBT cruise

| Perception statement | Strongly Agree % | Slightly Agree % | Slightly Disagree % | Strongly Disagree % | * Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| They give you freedom to be yourself | 47 | 34 | 14 | 5 | 1.77 |
| They offer a chance to socialize with other LGBT people | 64 | 31 | 4 | 1 | 1.41 |
| They offer a chance to meet a potential partner | 17 | 52 | 24 | 7 | 2.22 |
| They are primarily for gay men | 27 | 42 | 15 | 15 | 2.18 |
| There are opportunities to have sex with new people | 35 | 44 | 11 | 11 | 1.96 |
| There is too much emphasis on partying | 31 | 41 | 21 | 7 | 2.04 |
| I won't have anything in common with other passengers | 7 | 28 | 38 | 28 | 2.86 |
| I dislike socializing with people I don't know | 2 | 19 | 37 | 43 | 3.20 |
| I have no interest in taking a LGBT cruise | 32 | 17 | 24 | 27 | 2.46 |
| It is important to have lesbian only/gay male only cruises etc. (not have a LGBT mixed cruise) | 22 | 28 | 26 | 25 | 2.54 |

* Mean relates to scale score of 1 for strongly agree to 4 for strongly disagree

Table 7

Results of Chi-square test for differing perceptions of mainstream and LGBT cruises, by sexuality

| **Perception statement of mainstream cruises** | **Gay men %** | **Lesbians %** | $\chi^2$ **df=1** | *p* value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| It's a great way to enjoy the sea and be close to nature | 71 | 54 | 4.945 | *p* = 0.026 |
| Cruising is boring | 58 | 79 | 8.216 | *p* = 0.004 |
| Cruising is convenient – only have to unpack once | 88 | 70 | 7.344 | *p* = 0.017 |
| Cruising is a claustrophobic experience | 53 | 77 | 9.160 | *p* = 0.002 |
| Cruising is only for old people | 38 | 58 | 6.378 | *p* = 0.012 |
| Cruising is more expensive than other travel options | 64 | 81 | 5.338 | *p* = 0.021 |
| It's a great way of meeting other people | 72 | 43 | 12.759 | *p* <.001 |
| It offers a variety of activities to suit everyone | 66 | 46 | 6.108 | *p* = 0.013 |
| A cruise is a romantic experience | 69 | 43 | 10.229 | *p* = 0.001 |
| I have no interest in taking a cruise | 54 | 71 | 4.818 | *p* = 0.028 |
| A cruise ship is LGBT friendly | 65 | 42 | 6.298 | *p* = 0.012 |
| There are opportunities to have sex with new people | 68 | 35 | 11.185 | *p* = 0.001 |
| There are too many people on the ship | 56 | 71 | 3.923 | *p* = 0.048 |
| **Perception statement of LGBT cruises** | | | | |
| They are primarily for gay men | 81 | 54 | 11.482 | *p* = 0.001 |
| There are opportunities to have sex with new people | 87 | 67 | 8.167 | *p* = 0.004 |