

# Ethnography of cruisers biker bar assignment



On Thursday we all met up at Cruisers at : pm. It was a little early in the day, so it wasn't super crowded but gave us a chance to really concentrate on the surroundings. We went back on Saturday night at 6: pm hoping a band was playing at 7: 00, but there wasn't. It was slightly more crowded than on Thursday, and we also stayed later until 9: pm. The importance of this study was to uncover whether or not our preconceived ideas and biases about bikers, and biker bars were true or not. We all had similar ideas and biases about bikers.

We thought that they would be abrasive and possibly scary, that e would get dirty looks, that everyone would have tattoos, and that they would be tough and rough looking. It was also important to meet and talk to bikers, and to hang out in their bar to see what they are really like, and what they do. It was important to go at a busier time than on Thursday, as well as not sit so far away from the majority of the people. On Saturday we sat up at the bar and had much better success talking with the local bikers. We used the research method of conversation to get to know some of the bikers.

We shared similar tastes in music, which they picked up on when we made some selections from the Juke box. We did a great deal of visual research on our first visit since it wasn't as busy and we didn't sit very close to people. There were a lot of suggestive hangings and pictures to look at. Each time the waitress/bartender came over we asked questions about the bar and the drive-thru aspect of it, when it is open and how it all worked. We asked about when is the most crowded times and when bands were scheduled to play in the future. When we went to Cruisers we observed a very smoky atmosphere when loud classic rock n' roll music playing.

We observed Harley motorcycles parked inside. It was much lighter and had more windows than any of us thought it would. We all had thought that it would be dark in there. It had a feel almost like you were in one large garage, doors opened on each end and there was a road painted on the floor showing where they ride through. It was raining both days so they were not riding through, rather parking their bikes inside to keep them out to the rain. There were suggestive pictures up all over, and a lot of Harley paraphernalia. Second night that we went we were better able to observe the people.

We sat up at the bar and talked to the bartender some, it was the same lady that we had the first time we went, and there was also a male bartender there at times as well. I went and checked out the little gift shop that they have to sell their t-shirts and Cruisers promotional clothing. There is a door that Mimic Calla and I took to the attached tattoo shop. We were invited by a very friendly tattooist to come closer and watch his work. He explained what was involved and how long this woman's tattoo would take to complete. She spoke with us openly about tattoos that he had done on her in the past, and future ones that she would like to get.

Her arm was really swollen, and he was wiping away blood almost each stroke of the ink as he drew individual fish up the side of her arm. I learned a lot about bikers that I did not know through this observation. I learned that they are much friendlier than I thought they would have been. I learned that almost all of them smoked, and all of them drank. Everyone that I talked with and heard talk used very foul language. They all shared the common interest of admiring, owning, and riding Harley motorcycles. I learned that as a group and as individuals they were not scary, or intimidating at all.

I learned that this biker bar at least, is not dark with no windows. We were correct that they would all be tattooed and would be rough looking smokers and drinkers. By talking with some of the people that we met at the bar we were able to learn more about the biker culture. It was interesting how some of them were very nice, but in some ways bitter and more negative than the average people that you meet. If we had visited with more people, maybe this would not be the case, but although they were friendly, they sort of had a chip on their shoulder, so to speak. We recognized some communication theories during our observations at Cruisers.

The strongest theory in play I recognized was the expectancy violations theory. We were definitely not the customers that were expected to be patronizing this biker bar. We stood out to the other customers as well as to the bartender. We definitely got some interesting looks! We also experienced this theory when everyone was much nicer to us than what we had predicted. Another theory that I recognized was the social penetration theory. There was a noticeable difference between how we were responded to on the first visit and the response that we got on the second visit.

The second time we visited Cruisers we were able to be visit more with the others in the bar and got to know the bartender quite a bit better, we were also able to talk openly with the tattooist. I predict that over time, if we visited on a regular basis, the full spectrum of this theory could evolve. All and all it was a good experience, we had some good hamburgers served with their own home made potato chips, drank some beers (except for the 19 yr. Old in our group), and learned that bikers aren't so bad, at least not the ones that we met here in North Idaho.