



Making Connections: The Creation of Lesbian Community in Cyberspace

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Abstract

This presentation includes a snapshot of the beginnings of the LGBT web-based communities. In particular, it follows the beginnings of the lesbian online group called shevilleafterdark2 that was based in Western North Carolina from 1999-2001.

Ellern, G.D., & WarEagle, K. (2001, March 24). *Making Connections: The Creation of Lesbian Community in Cyberspace* [Presentation]. 4th Annual LGBT Studies Conference, Queering Mass Media. Asheville, North Carolina.

Archived version from NC DOCKS available at: <http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/wcu/listing.aspx?id=37528>.



Making Connections

The creation of lesbian communities in
cyberspace

Fourth Annual LGBT Studies Conference

Queering Mass Media

March 24, 2001

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Number of users online

- 407 million worldwide (6.7%)
- 154 million in US (55%)
- Roughly 55 million Americans go online everyday
- 3+ hours are spent per week online at home

DAILY Internet activities

(some highlights of the 55 million Americans online daily)

- 48 million sent or read an email
- 20 million got online news
- 19 million surfed for fun
- 15 million looked for info on a hobby
- 11 million sent an instant message
- 9 million did research for school or training
- 6 million played a game
- 5 million chatted in a chatroom

Women's different online lives



- More than 9 million have gone online for the first time last year
- Women use email to enrich their important relationships and enlarge their networks
- They report that email had helped them improve their connections with relatives and friends

Number of Gay/Lesbian users



- Currently 13.5 million
 - a conservative rate of 5% of population
- Expected to grow to 22.5 million by 2005
- Growing at a higher rate than overall internet population
 - privacy
 - relevant information
 - virtual communities

Of those 13.5 million Americans

- About 62 % of gay and lesbian computer owners are online.
 - By comparison, only 38 % of U.S. computer owners are online.
- That's an estimated 5 million gay and lesbian online users.

Biggest Gay Communities

(www.Planetout.com and www.Gay.com)

- Recently merged (Feb 2001)
 - over 2 million registered users
- Planetout.com
 - 1.6 million unique visitors monthly, 850,000 members, 150,000 personals
- Gay.com
 - 2.7 million unique visitors monthly, 850,000 members, over 1500 chatrooms




Women prefer personal/email while men prefer chat



- PlanetOut Partners President Megan Smith said:
 - “Women in general are very much using the Web for communication, for community, to make friendships, to connect.

Lesbian surfing




- www.Planetout.com
 - largest lesbian contingent of any site on web (30% of members)
 - www.LesbiaNation.com
 - large online community for woman
 - www.Lesbian.com
 - large directory of links to lesbian resources
 - www.michfest.com
 - large message board/chat forum about all things about the annual festival
- 

Top 4 Internet Service Providers

- AOL
 - 28 million users (who average 70 minutes a day)
 - with a peak of 2.2 million simultaneous users this month)
 - accounts for 75% of the home online users
 - 150 million emails sent daily
- Earthnet (4.5 million users)
- MSN, At&T Worldnet (couldn't find stats)


Popular Chat software



- Chatting Software
 - IRC - one of the first
 - ICQ
 - Browser-based java chat software
 - very popular
- 


What is online chatting?



- Talking to other people using the Internet at the same time as you
 - “talking” is exchanging typed messages between 2 or more users in a “room” (channel)
 - users choose the “room” they would like to chat in based on it’s topic
- 


Other chatting options



- A private chat can be arranged between two users who met initially in a group chat
 - Chats can be ongoing or scheduled
 - Most are focused on a particular topic
 - some involve a special guest
 - no restriction on number of users or rooms
- 


More about chatrooms



- Literally thousands of chatrooms
 - All subjects
 - sex ranked highest
 - but available on lots of other topics including: sports, tv, teen, coffee, new age, pet, health, products, movies, famous people, parents...
 - Specific chat sites / part of the online community created at a site
- 

What attracts folks to chat



- Meet interesting people
 - Find out about their lives
 - They/you can be helpful
 - Everyone seems less inhibited
 - never dream of walking up to a complete stranger and chatting
 - feeling of safety
 - Can create an intimacy unparalleled in real-time
- 

Chat on www.Gay.com

- Women's Rooms
 - 200+ chatrooms
 - geographical, groups, user-defined
 - easy to access
- Men's rooms
 - 3000+ chatrooms

Gay.com Chat Room

enter room
refresh room
exit floor

change fonts
turn on alerts
room count

Gay.com channel
and chat info

chat help
about Volano chat

Gay.com Chat House (Women's Floor)

Floors Options Explore Gay.com Help

310 rooms: 37 women:

***Gay.com Help Room
AA (No Cyber)
Alanon
Asian Women
Big Beautiful Women
Bisexual Women 1
Bisexual Women 2
Bisexual Women (mixed)
Bisexual Women (South)

Indiana-Girl
tiffany20
BronteLL
Monika (Melt)
sweetlip
beachlover26
sandra.
GO3SUM
Suzie

Room name: Bisexual Women 1 Enter Room

Your name: artgirl Refresh Rooms

Chat bio: looking for fun at Gay.com

Press Enter Room or the Enter key to enter.

Unsigned Java Applet Window

enter name

enter personal info


click to select room

click to enter room

click to update room list

Chatting at www.Gay.com



- NC Room
 - quite popular room for the region
 - as many as 45 woman in the room
 - sponsored parties and outing at clubs in NC
 - people tend to frequent certain rooms
 - can create your own
- 

ICQ (www.icq.com)

ICQ Inc.



- Informs you who's on-line at any time and enables you to contact them at will
 - 80 million users
 - 1.4 million peak simultaneous users
 - 9+ million daily users
 - 67% outside the US
- has chat (1 or many at a time)
- send files directly to others
- many other features (email, games, send URLs, etc)

ICQ.com Program menu

The screenshot displays the ICQ 2000b application window. On the left is a vertical menu titled "ICQ Channels" with the following items: Channels, Welcome!, Games, Life&Love, Money, Movies&TV, Music, Shopping, Sports, Tech&Net, and Travel. The main window has tabs for "Channels", "ICQmail", and "Interests". Below the tabs is the "My Contact List" section, which is divided into "Online" and "Offline" categories. The "Online" list includes Sharon, Daniel, Debbie, MOM, and Z.-home. The "Offline" list includes Valerie. Below the contact lists are buttons for "How to Start", "To Simple Mode", and "Chat With A Friend". At the bottom of the main window are sections for "System Notice", "Add/Invite Users", "Services", "My ICQ", and a search bar with the text "Enter Search Keyword" and a "GO!" button.

Channels

Welcome!

Games

Life&Love

Money

Movies&TV

Music

Shopping

Sports

Tech&Net

Travel

ICQ Channels

Channels ICQmail Interests

icq2000b

My Contact List

Online

Sharon

Daniel

Debbie

MOM

Z.-home

Not In List

Offline

Valerie

Michelle@work

Non ICQ Contacts

Karen--cell phone

How to Start

To Simple Mode

Chat With A Friend

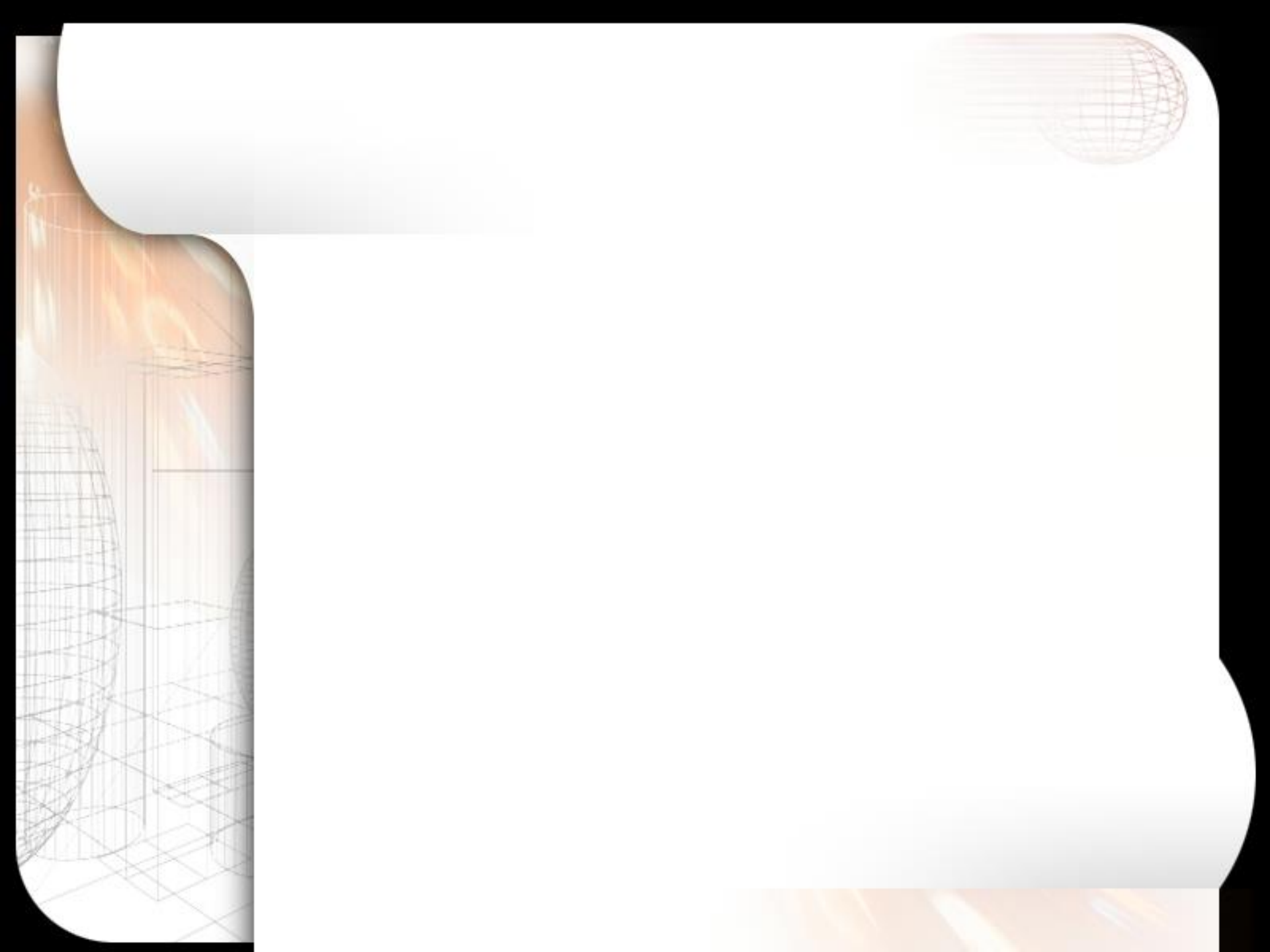
System Notice

Add/Invite Users

Services My ICQ

ICQ Online

Enter Search Keyword GO!




Electronic Mailing List

(aka discussion group, listserv, email distribution list, etc.)

- Been around since email began
- List of email addresses maintained by a computer program
 - has a distinctive name/address that usually tells about the subject of the discussion
 - distributes an e-mail message from one member to all other members on that list just by send a single email to the list address
 - maintains the address list
 - new member subscription, additional information about members, signing off the list, dealing with bounced emails, archives past messages, etc.

Web email group sites



- Once only on campus computers now these Web sites that offer free services
 - Self-serve creation of email groups
 - Hundreds of categories, topics, kinds, etc.
 - Seem to be bought/sold regularly
- 

www.yahoogle.com

(previously www.egroups.com, www.onelist.com)



- Business & Finance (36103)
- Computers & Internet (45471)
- Cultures & Community (88532)
- Entertainment & Arts (77655)
- Family & Home (22787)
- Games (34510)
- Government & Politics (12040)
- Health & Wellness (24796)
- Hobbies & Crafts (13056)
- Music (53647)
- Recreation & Sports (43037)
- Regional (81530)
- Religion & Beliefs (32189)
- Schools & Education (55811)
- Science (31615)
- Sex & Romance (59683)
- World (41462)

Shevilleafterdark2

(Top > Cultures & Community > Groups > Lesbians, Gays, and Bisexuals > Lesbian)

This list is for Lesbians living in or near or moving to Asheville, NC. This list is also open to all lesbians over 18. This list is open for discussion and for planning activities with each other. No Flaming, No name calling, No MEN. This is a high volume list. We chit chat, we plan events, we get together in real time and have **FUN!!!**

History of Shevilleafterdark2



- Sheville
 - Otterson's group
 - She felt it had too much chatting
- Shevilleafterdark
 - Cynthia's group (Sept 99 - Mar 00)
 - She decided to delete the group
- Shevilleafterdark2
 - KC recreated group (Mar 00-present)

Afterdark rules


- No one under 18 years
- No name calling
- No men

Afterdark Statistics since March 2000

- 10,600+ messages
- Of those posting (grouped by 1000 messages)
 - 55 new women (from 03/11/00 to 04/14/00)
 - 10 new women (from 04/14/00 to 05/15/00)
 - 11 new women (from 05/15/00 to 06/21/00)
 - 13 new women (from 06/21/00 to 07/06/00)
 - 7 new women (from 07/06/00 to 08/20/00)
 - 18 new women (from 08/20/00 to 09/14/00)
 - 6 new women (from 09/14/00 to 10/05/00)
 - 6 new women (from 10/05/00 to 11/08/00)
 - 8 new women (from 11/98/00 to 01/04/01)
 - 7 new women (from 01/04/01 to 02/08/01)

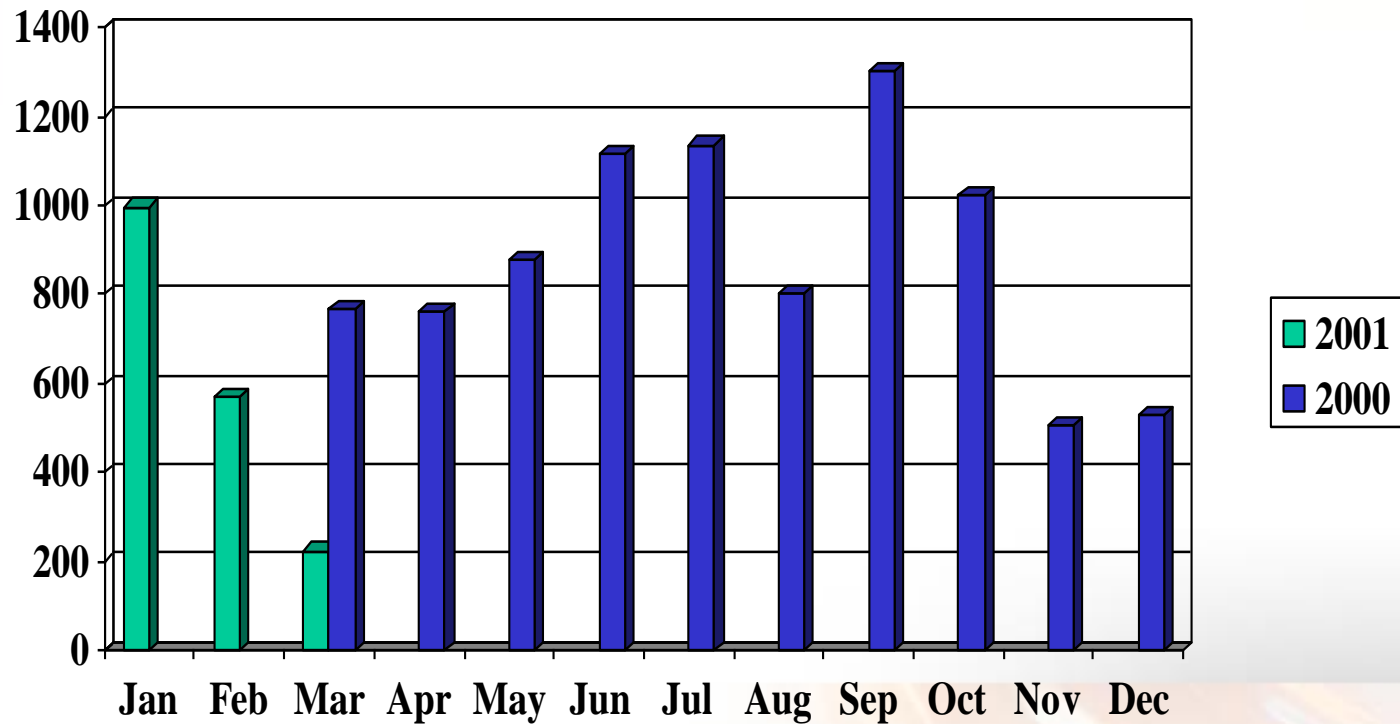
More Afterdark Statistics



- 120 women currently on the list
 - approximately 23 women post on a consistent basis
 - 15 frequently post
 - one month's messages
 - 503 low
 - 1303 high
 - diverse group
 - 18 to 64 years of age
 - leather community to a Sunday school teacher
- 

Messages Sent

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2001	996	571	223									
2000			769	760	876	1116	1136	801	1303	1023	503	529



Afterdark Events

- 1st group picnic



Afterdark Events

- Largest group picnic



Group events

- Most members are local
 - although some of the biggest contributors are not (Asheville wanttobeers)
- Helped 5 women move their belongings
- Largest group get together
 - 35 members show up at a picnic
- Many smaller events
 - play pool, bowl, out to eat, gem mining, hospital visits, parties



What is an “Online Community”?



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