

## When some gal pals go out as a group, they're not afraid to get boisterous

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Posted: July 28, 2008

Once a month at a stylish storefront wine shop in Brookfield, a group of women raise a glass to one another, simultaneously raising the roof on the store with laughter and conversation. They call themselves, and the event, Divas of Wine.

If you were sitting next to them at, say, a restaurant, you would identify them as "the loud table."

"We get loud and crazy. I like that about us," said Tina Mason, an obstetrician-gynecologist who co-owns WineStyles, 17000 W. Blue Mound Road, Brookfield. "We let down those guards, that aura of being ladylike and demure."

Are women in groups louder than men? There are any numbers of reasons they would be. It could be physiological: The pitch of the female voice is higher. Or, if alcohol is being consumed, it could be the drinks shouting, since women's bodies don't break down alcohol as quickly as men's.

Or it could be social: Women tend to talk about intimate subjects that they're passionate about, and they often talk at the same time.

The notion that women are loud could be a sweeping generalization, too. But it's not hard to find people who've sat next to such a group - or been part of one.

"I've heard those (tables)," said Molly Fay, co-host of WTMJ-TV's "The Morning Blend." She's also been part of the rowdy brunch bunch.

### 'We can get carried away'

Fay and her friend Lisa Hudson, a Wauwatosa police detective, belong to a group that is proudly loud. They're half of a gang of four women who have been pals since their children were infants and try to meet once a month. Such meetings turn predictably raucous.

You don't want to be their waiter or waitress, Hudson warns. If their reservation is for 7 p.m., the four might be swapping stories and advice for an hour before they crack open the menu.

"And we're always the last people at the restaurant," she said. They talk about their children, their families and issues they might be having with the men in their lives. They console one another in bad times and laugh with one another at most times.

"We just don't get out that often," said Fay, who admits having a loud laugh. "We relax. We really have great conversations. We can get carried away in the moment. A glass of wine also adds to it."

Turning the volume to 10 in public might be the way women are wired, according to Debbie Mandel, a New York stress management specialist.

"Women come together to tend and befriend. We are hard-wired for relationships," Mandel said. "And no one listens to us and advises us like our girlfriends with whom we can cut loose and have fun."

"Going out with girlfriends tends to facilitate releasing the hidden girl within through a relaxation response cue of laughter and conversational bonding," Mandel said. "Women usually silence

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themselves and suppress needs and desires. This is an instance of women howling with the pack."

Not everyone appreciates a good howl, however. Fay says she has been with a group that was asked to leave when they got too clamorous.

The Wisconsin Restaurant Association didn't have anyone who could speak about the concept of women being boisterous. The topic could be considered negative toward women.

When Ed and Amy Seckinger opened Piano Blu in Pewaukee, they designated the upstairs as the room for intimate conversations and the downstairs as the party room. The Seckingers no longer own Piano Blu, but they recall the reasons why they had two floors from which to choose.

"You'll have a table of 12 women and have eight conversations going on at one time," Ed Seckinger said.

Everyone can be laughing, but often there are two women at either end of the table crying, his wife added, jokingly.

Fine dining or special-occasion restaurants balance the delicate notion of where to place a group of women with the potential to get loud, and that's probably not next to the couple celebrating an anniversary.

But casual restaurants are likely to take the decibels crashing across the room in stride.

"With a big table of women, there's a lot of laughter and a ton of energy," said Eric Wagner, who owns the downtown and east side restaurants Trocadero, Café Hollander and Fat Abbey Biercafe. He has his own theory on why.

When men go out there might be one or two

conversations circling the table, he said. Women tend to "cover every topic because they haven't seen each other in a while."

In turn, "there is a loudness, a certain excitement of being all together," he added.

## Bonding over sharing

Women also like to get together in larger numbers, said Paula Parnagian, a diversity specialist who is president of World View Services in Revere, Mass.

In the most general sense, women bond over conversation and personal sharing. Not that men can't be loud, Parnagian said. But they bond over sports events or activities that require focus. Expect concentrated quiet followed by bursts of loud behavior.

"Men are not supposed to do so much personal sharing in our culture," Parnagian said. "Get too loose and too silly, then people are going to start looking at you funny."

Brendan Moore, the general manager at Fratellos, 102 N. Water St., agrees that a group of women can get louder than a group of men. He has watched and heard tables of women try to talk over each other, "showboating a bit."

"I think it's mean (to say), but I think it's a little bit true," Moore said. Maybe he's just noticed it because his previous place of employment, Sabor Brazilian Churrascaria, drew a lot of men.

"The average woman has a little bit higher pitch. I think her voice may carry a little bit more," Moore said. "If I'm up talking to a table, I notice that I hear the women more than I hear the men."

Not that Moore minds.

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"When people are having fun, it makes the server have more fun, and the server has more fun with the other tables," he said. "The manager will go over and start flirting with the ladies. I do, anyway."

Rendall Thomas, Mason's husband and co-owner of WineStyles, laughs when he's asked if the Divas of Wine are loud. It's enough of an answer.

Tina Mason's Divas have a standing monthly program for their discussions, where the topics can range from health to jewelry to thinning hair. However, the conversations in the crowd can get even more far-ranging - and ear-piercing.

"Traditionally, women have never really been listened to. And to be listened to, we talk louder . . . ,"  
"Mason said. "When we're comfortable with each other, we are loud."

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