

University of Wisconsin - La Crosse
Undergraduate Research Grant Application - Spring
Cover Sheet

1. Title of Project: Rural Strip Clubs: An Ethnographic Study

2. Applicant: Jessica Woods SS#: _____

Major: Sociology Year in School: Senior

Date of Graduation: December 2006 Local Phone: _____

Local Address: _____

Email: woods.jess@students.uwlax.edu

3. Faculty Sponsor: Timothy Gongaware Email: gongawar.timo@uwlax.edu

Department: Sociology Campus Phone: 608-785-6772

Campus Address: 1725 State Street. LaCrosse WI 54601

4. Synopsis of proposed research (do not exceed space provided)

The proposed study seeks to produce an ethnography of rural strip clubs in the Midwest. Research on strip clubs has provided in-depth analysis of the complex social environment found in the club and what such venues mean in the larger society. Currently, though the amount of significant research remains small and few studies only recently explored clubs outside the urban areas. The proposed study seeks to continue to explore the strip club, but focus on those in rural settings, which it is anticipated will contribute to a different dynamic in the club. Similar to other ethnographies, participant observations and formal interviews will be the primary modes of collecting data. These methods will provide empirical data coupled with personal perspectives to get an overall picture of the social environment of the strip club.

The final results of this study will contribute to research on the social significance of strip clubs and provide a new analysis of clubs in relation to their geographic location. Result will also presented at the Celebration of Undergraduate Research and Creativity ceremony at UW-LaCrosse in the form of a PowerPoint/poster presentation and written report. The written report will also be suitable for publication in the UW-L Journal of Undergraduate Research. It is my hope that this study will prompt more research exploring strip club culture within the context of a club's geographic location and the larger social environment.

5. Grant Effort. (Provide dates of research and time to be spent on project): Data will be collected from June to September 2006; analysis and production of final results will last from October 2006 until approximately February 2007.

6. Total amount requested for completion of research project (from Budget Summary page): \$ 1603.86

7. Compliances. (If "yes" for any of the below, compliance documentation **must** be filed if this proposal is funded.) Does this proposal require review for:

a. Human Subjects? Yes X No _____
b. Animal Care? Yes _____ No X
c. Hazardous materials? Yes _____ No X

8. Signatures

a. Applicant: _____ Date: _____

b. Faculty Advisor: _____ Date: _____

c. Department Chair: _____ Date: _____

d. Academic Dean: _____ Date: _____

Background/Statement of the Problem

Research on various aspects of strip clubs has been a growing area of study since the 1970s. I intend to contribute to this growing area of study by conducting an ethnographic study of several local strip clubs, particularly those in rural areas. Past research has suggested that there is a social environment specific to the strip club (Forsyth and Deshotels, 1997; Brewster, 2003; Frank, 2003; Wood, 2000). However the majority of research has used urban strip clubs for analysis. Rural areas present different social and cultural dynamics that have only been minimally explored in relation to strip clubs (Brewster, 2003; Mestemacher and Roberti, 2004). Using qualitative methods and analysis, my goal is to explore the social environment of rural strip clubs and offer an analysis that examines and discusses various aspects of these clubs within their rural environment and thus broaden current understanding of strip club culture in relation to club location.

The most heavily studied aspect of the strip club has been the stripper—the nature of the job, typologies of women who dance and individual accounts of the effects of stripping on the individual (Sloan and Wahab, 2004; Mestemacher, et.al, 2004). The role of the stripper is not simply to provide visual sexual stimulation to patrons. Strippers must pay close attention to a patron's body language, verbal language, and physical appearance to determine what the patron is looking for—sexual stimulation, companionship, etc.— which in turn dictates the persona employed by the stripper. By correctly identifying the desires of the patron, strippers earn more money and can turn a one-time visitor into a repeat customer, creating a somewhat secure source of income (Ronai and Ellis, 1989; Schweitzer, 2001; Pasko, 2002). Such constant interpretation and manipulation of one's personality has been shown to lead to emotional and psychological problems in strippers (Wesley, 2003; Lerum, 2004).

Research on the women who strip has also provided evidence of a strip club culture through personal accounts of patrons' behavior and the types of places employed. Popular belief is that strippers focus on the patrons with the most money, but researchers have found evidence

contrary to this belief (Frank, 2003). While financial need ultimately drives who the dancer chooses to focus attention on, disrespectful and inappropriate sexual behavior is often not tolerated by dancers or management. Thus dancers have often reported that a mild manner man with less money would be chosen over an obnoxious man with money to burn (Wesley, 2003; Sloan, et. al. 2004; Mestemacher, et.al. 2004). The type and size of a club or bar often determines the level of enforcement of such rules (Frank, 2003). Therefore, patrons' behavior and the overall social environment of a strip club play an important role in the life of a dancer, both in where one chooses to work and how far one will go to earn the tip.

The patrons of strip clubs are another important aspect of the club that has only recently been explored by ethnographers. The type of club and location determine the type of patrons, which can be the key factor in determining social behavior and interactions particular to that setting. The patrons who frequent a more upscale urban gentlemen's club often differ from patrons of typical 'dive' bars (Frank, 2003). Researchers who have focused on patrons—reasons for attending, typologies, and common behaviors—generated data from a wide variety of clubs (Frank, 2003; Brewster, 2003; Erickson and Tewskbury, 2000). However, the current amount of data remains small and has only begun to provide an understanding not only of the club patrons but how the particular location of the club affects the social dynamics within.

Objectives

Orum, Feagin, and Sjoberg (1991) state that “The student who uses the case study can see human beings up close, get a sense of what drives them, and develop claims of how their personal as well as collective lives have been created.” (p.11) Based on this idea, the objectives of the proposed study are to develop an in-depth analysis of rural strip club culture, which will not only expand on our knowledge of the strip club environment, but also explore the social significance of such clubs in rural areas. The methods employed to complete this study will be qualitative in nature, including participant observations within the club as well as informal discussions and formal interviews with individuals involved in the club. The observations and

interviews will be used to guide the focus of the research as it progresses. The goal of any ethnographic study is to gain a better understanding of a social setting through empirical accounts (Berg, 2001). Thus the data collected will guide the development of a theory for the social phenomena particular to the setting.

Methodology

Berg (2001) points out that early on in research design one must determine how to access the desired setting. As a female entering a male dominated environment, I will first contact the management of the clubs to discuss my research objectives and what my data collection will entail in hopes of decreasing concerns about my presence in the club. From February to May of 2006, I conducted what would be the pilot project for this study on one rural strip club in the area. Contact with management prior to entering the club helped establish a level of trust and understanding between management and myself, thus making my presence in the setting more acceptable. Other guides and informants such as regular patrons, dancers, and bartenders will also be sought to maintain access to the club. Ethical issues surrounding the use of human subjects for this study were reviewed by the IRB for the pilot project as well, and received clearance. As almost identical methods will be employed here, no further clearance from the IRB will be necessary.

After access to the settings has been obtained, participant observations and interviews will be the primary means of data collection. Immersing one's self into a setting allows one to examine people in their natural settings exhibiting natural behaviors; this can provide empirical evidence of phenomena particular to that setting. (Orum, et. al. 1991). Thus, I will enter the club as a patron and partake in normal activities of purchasing drinks and tipping dancers when appropriate. As potential clubs are located a substantial distance from the LaCrosse area, funding will be requested for travel costs. During these visits I will be taking written notes of observations and interactions that occur among individuals within the club, along with interactions that take place between me and other patrons or dancers. These notes will later

result in expanded field notes detailing each visit. No attempt will be made to hide my identity as a researcher should anyone in the setting inquire about my note taking.

Berg (2001) mentions how multiple methods of data collection can provide a more thorough understanding of a researched setting. Formal interviews are a method that can garner personal perspectives and accounts of those involved in the setting. Thus, after several visits to a club, individuals will be identified and approached for formal semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview consists of questions developed prior to the interview that will be used as a guide for discussion. However, it allows the interviewer to probe answers for further detail and to ask questions that come up as the discussion progresses (Berg, 2001). The formal interviews will take place at the discretion of the interviewee and will be tape-recorded. After the interview is complete, the recording will be transcribed for later analysis, and the tape will be destroyed. A transcriber, tape recorder, and cassettes will be needed to complete the interviews, thus I am also seeking funding for the purchase of these items.

The field notes and transcribed interviews will constitute the data used for analysis after data collection is complete. Analysis of the data will be done through coding of the data. Lofland and Lofland (1995) have explained coding as the process of going through the data in search of patterns ranging from behaviors and social processes to words used by those in the setting that may be linked to certain behaviors. By breaking down the data into categories based on patterns, common themes of the setting can be identified, which will then be analyzed using theories suitable to the social phenomena discovered in the account.

Final Product and Dissemination

The final product of this study will be an ethnographic account of rural strip clubs in the Midwest. The results will contribute to the already existing body of research on strip clubs but will provide a new analysis of clubs in relation to their specific geographic location. The final results for this study will be presented at the Celebration of Undergraduate Research and Creativity ceremony at UW-LaCrosse in the form of a PowerPoint/poster presentation and

written report. The written report will also be suitable for publication in the UW-L Journal of Undergraduate Research. It is my intention to present any individuals and businesses accessed for the study with a copy of my report upon request. It is my hope that this study will prompt more research exploring strip club culture within the context of the clubs' geographic locations and the larger social environment.

Bibliography

- Berg, Bruce L. 2001. Qualitative Research Methods For the Social Sciences. 4th ed. Long Beach, CA: California State University.
- Brewster, Zachary W. 2003. "Behavioral and Interactional patterns of Strip Club Patrons: Tipping Techniques and Club Attendance." Deviant Behavior: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 24, 3:221-243.
- Egan, Danielle R. and Katherine Frank. 2005. "Attempts at a Feminist and Interdisciplinary Conversation about Strip Clubs." Deviant Behavior, 26,4:297-320.
- Egan, Danielle R. 2003. "Eroticism, Commodification and Gender: Exploring Exotic Dance in the United States—A Review Essay." Sexualities, 6, 1:105-114.
- Erickson, David John and Richard Tewksbury. 2000. "The Gentlemen in the Club: A Typology of Strip Club Patrons." Deviant Behavior: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 21, 3: 271-293.
- Feagin, Joe R., Anthony M. Orum, and Gideon Sjoberg. 1991. A Case for the Case Study. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.
- Forsyth, Craig J. and Tina H. Deshotels. 1997. "The Occupational Milieu of The Nude Dancer." Deviant Behavior: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 18, 2:125-142.
- _____. 1998. "A Deviant Process: The Sojourn of the Stripper." Sociological Spectrum, 18, 1:77-92.
- Frank, Katherine. 2003. "'Just Trying to Relax': Masculinity, Masculinizing Practices and Strip Club Regulars." The Journal of Sex Research, 40,1:61-75.
- Lerum, Kari. 2004. "Defining the Emotional Contours of Exotic Dance." Sexuality and Culture, 8, 1:44-52.
- Lofland, John and Lyn H. Lofland. 1995. Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis. 3rd ed. University of California, CA: Wadsworth.
- Mestemacher, Rebecca A, and Jonathan W. Roberti. 2004. "Qualitative Analysis of Vocational Choice: A Collective Case Study of Strippers." Deviant Behavior, 25, 1:43-65.
- Pasko, Lisa. 2002. "Naked Power: The Practice of Stripping as a Confidence Game." Sexualities, 5,1:49-66.
- Ronai, Carol Rambo and Carolyn Ellis. 1989. "Turn-Ons for Money: Interactional Strategies of the Table Dancer." Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 18,3:271-289.
- Schweitzer, Dahlia. 2001. "Striptease: The Art of Spectacle and Transgression." Journal of Popular Culture, 34,1:65-75.
- Sloan, Lacey and Stephanie Wahab. 2004. "Four Categories of Women Who Work as Topless Dancers." Sexuality and Culture, 8,1:18-43.
- Uebel, Michael. 2004. "Striptopia?" Social Semiotics, 14,1:3-19.
- Wesley, Jennifer K. 2003. "'Where am I going to Stop?': Exotic Dancing, Fluid Body Boundaries, and Effects on Identity." Deviant Behavior, 24,1:483-503.
- Wood, Elizabeth Ann. 2000. "Working in the Fantasy Factor: The Attention Hypothesis and the Enacting of Masculine Power in the Strip Clubs." Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 29,1:5-31.

University of Wisconsin - La Crosse

Undergraduate Research Grant Application - Spring

Project Budget Summary

Project Title: Rural Strip Clubs: An Ethnographic Study

Student Researcher: Jessica Woods SS#: _____

Faculty Sponsor: Timothy Gongaware Department: Sociology

I. Honorarium..... \$ 500

Describe research duties and expected time commitment to project. If multiple investigators, explain how the \$800 honorarium is to be distributed among them:

The primary duties of the research will consist of traveling to the clubs for data collection (4-6 hours roundtrip travel time), documenting each visit in detailed field notes (4-6 hours), conducting interviews with individuals and transcription of interviews (1-2 hours and 3-4 hours, respectively), and finally analyzing data for patterns in social behavior and social processes that will guide in producing final results of the ethnography.

II. Supplies & Services..... \$ 337.86

A. Consumable supplies (itemize) \$ 22.88

Cassette Tapes--- \$15.96 (2 pkgs. of 6 @ \$7.98 ea.)
 Mini-notebooks--- \$5.94 (6 @ \$.99 ea.)
 Pens--- \$3.98 (2 pkgs. of 6 @ \$1.99 ea.)

B. Duplicating, postage, communications, etc. \$ 0

C. Other (describe and itemize) \$ 314.98

Tape Recorder (interviews) \$64.99
 Transcriber (transcription of interviews) \$249.99

III. Travel..... \$ 766

A. Transportation (describe arrangements) \$ 456.00

Use of personal vehicle for transportation to the various clubs, each approximately 100 miles from LaCrosse, 200 miles round trip, for approximately 6 visits, totaling 1200 miles required travel for the project. Mileage calculated at rate of \$.38 per mile.

B. Lodging (describe arrangements) \$ 310.00

As visits to clubs will primarily take place late at night and club locations can be up to approximately 3 hours away, overnight lodging may be needed. Rate calculated at UW-L travel regulations rate of \$62 a night for potentially 5 overnight stays.

IV. TOTAL FUNDING REQUESTED..... \$ 1603.86