

“A Hangout with a View” Rural Strip Clubs: An Ethnographic Exploration

Jessica Woods

Faculty Sponsor: Timothy Gongaware, Department of Sociology/Archeology

ABSTRACT

For the last four decades, social scientists have been exploring the many aspects of the strip clubs in the US. Such studies have illuminated the culture surrounding strip clubs and also sparked debate about this very public arena where private pleasures are fulfilled. Most studies, however, have primarily focused on clubs located in urban areas and the women who dance. Very few studies have looked at other players involved in the club--such as the men who attend these clubs--and fewer still have studied clubs in urban areas. The current study is an ethnographic exploration examining two such aspects—rural clubs and their male patrons. The study included observational periods within the clubs, and both formal and informal interviews with male owners, managers, and patrons. Data analysis revealed that strip clubs in rural areas often serve the dual purpose of a local “watering hole” and a sexualized venue for male patrons. Interviews revealed how individuals operate in and make sense of a setting that sells sex but is also potentially a place where “everybody knows your name.” These interviews and observations also explored attitudes regarding gender roles, male and female sexuality, as well as differences between urban and rural strip clubs.

INTRODUCTION

Strip clubs in America are typically places to see half or fully nude women perform sexually suggestive dances, which supposedly creates a “fantasy” environment centered on heterosexual male pleasure (Frank, 2002). Over the years there has been much debate over the legitimacy of these clubs. On one hand, some argue that the clubs are simply voyeuristic opportunities for men, a place of sexual expression both for the women who dance and the men who watch (Schweitzer 2001; Pasko 2002; Brewster, 2003). Others argue that strip clubs perpetuate ideas connected to male dominance and female submission, as well as enforcing stereotypes surrounding appropriate masculine and feminine behaviors (MacKinnon, 1989; Dworkin, 1981; Wesley 2003).

Regardless of legitimacy, strip clubs are an important aspect of our culture, representing certain values and beliefs held by American society. The current study seeks to contribute to previous explorations and move the discussion further from a “for or against” standpoint. Currently there is still too little information as to what these strip clubs represent to their patrons and staff. Debates over legitimacy seem to be lacking until it is fully understood what motivates attendance at and perpetuation of these clubs.

Every social setting in a culture is a reflection of norms and values of that culture (Berg, 2001). Strip clubs are one such social setting which researchers have been exploring for the last few decades. Such research has primarily explored the motivations and experiences of women who dance in the clubs and the men who frequent them. The motivations to work at and/or attend a club are often connected to societal expectations of proper gendered behavior, consumption, and intimate relationships (Egan, 2003; Frank 2002; 2004; Wood, 2000; Ronai and Ellis, 1989). This research and their findings has helped further the understanding of what these clubs mean to those within the setting, and how the clubs’ existence may reflect larger unresolved issues in our culture regarding gender and sexuality.

In the current study, male patrons and male members of management in rural strip clubs were questioned regarding their definition and understanding of strip clubs in rural areas. Goffman’s concept of frame analysis is used, which allowed for the examination of frameworks used by the men that lead to a unique understanding of what a strip club in a rural area represents. Discussion focuses on the significance of men’s dual purpose definition of rural strip clubs as well as implications to issues such as gender roles and sexuality.

Review of the Literature

Research on strip clubs has predominately focused on the experience of the female stripper, resulting in analyses examining topics such as psychological effects, interaction strategies, and typologies.(Ronai and Ellis, 1989; Wesley, 2003; Mestemacher and Roberti, 2004). Other research also explored how frequent attendance and the existence of these clubs can affect individual attitudes about the legitimacy of stereotypical gender roles, ideas surrounding sexual expression, and possible moral implications (Forsyth and Deshotels, 1997; Egan 2003; Lerum,

2004; Schweitzer, 2001). In recent years, researchers have also begun to look at the male patrons of these clubs (Frank, 2002; Brewster, 2003; Erickson and Tewksbury, 2000), thus shifting the focus from the female workers in these settings to the men who frequent the clubs and perpetuate their existence.

To openly desire women sexually is considered a normal part of male behavior; however, for women to openly express their own sexuality is usually considered abnormal (Carey, 1974). This idea would partially explain why women who dance have long been the focus of social research. Social scientists have looked at what leads a woman to begin stripping for a living and what motivates her to continue. Some of the earlier research portrayed these women (sometimes accurately) as coming from broken homes, abused, drug addicts, and alcoholics lacking self-esteem and other skills to do anything else (Boles, 1972; Carey, 1974; Skipper and McCaghy, 1970). Overall, the research suggested that a woman would choose stripping only out of extreme desperation and/or personal emotional hardship.

As research examining strip clubs increased, women often still remained the focus. Over time, though, a larger and more complex picture of exotic dancers emerged. Social scientists took another look at the types of women who danced along with their motivations (Egan, 2003; Lerum, 2004; Mestemacher et. al. 2004; Sloan and Wahab, 2004). Possibly the most solid finding altering the academic view of dancers is that while economic need was still by far the primary motivator, the reason for that economic need varied greatly (Sloan, et. al. 2004; Lerum 2004; Mestemacher et. al. 2004; Forsyth et. al. 1997, 1998). It is generally known that women's economic status in the United States has and continues to be below that of men. So while a women's decision to dance may have previously been connected to substance abuse and/or extreme poverty, researchers have begun to realize that women's lower economic status—and thus increased difficulty in making money—may lead virtually any woman to such a career. Previous ideas about desire for male attention and underdeveloped sexual boundaries were and are still found, but such issues are not as common as previously thought, and often exist as 'side effects' of dancing.

The source of economic need for dancers varies, which means that exotic dancers come from all walks of life. This does not mean that every female dancer today chooses to dance free from any outside influences such as substance problems or difficult personal hardships. However, besides women's general lower economic status, factors such as recent weak economies and an increase in female headed households (Brown and Lichter, 2004; Snyder and McLaughlin, 2004) means the possibility of more so-called 'average' women working in both rural and urban strip clubs. College students, married women, single and married mothers, and women simply looking for a second job are found in strip clubs across the country (Forsyth, et. al. 1997, Burana 2001; Frank, 2003; Sloan et. al. 2004). Stripping is no longer automatically seen as something one 'falls into' due to poor circumstances, but at times a serious, viable option made by women from many backgrounds (Burana, 2001; Sloan et. al. 2004; Mestemacher et. al. 2004; Ronai et. al. 1989).

Choosing to dance, though, does not mean immunity from the negative effects of dancing uncovered by past researchers. Psychological stress is most common, coming primarily from the constant role-playing required of dancers in order to fulfill individual fantasies of male customers (Wesley, 2003; Schweitzer, 2001; Pasko, 2002). As one manager stated, "We don't sell sex, we sell the *illusion* of sex." However, men often do not want just any type of dancer for this experience, but one that appeals to their individual preferences. Dancers must learn to adapt their behaviors to what the customer wants, be it dominating vixen, demure sex kitten, or even a nurturing mother figure (Burana, 2001; Frank, 2002). This constant switching of personas in a single night has been found to not only affect personal identity, but also create a tendency to carry such behavior into everyday life, affecting real relationships with lovers and friends (Wesley, 2003; Reid, 1994; Sijuwade 2005).

The needs of the men who enter these clubs, coupled with an increase in the number of clubs operating in the US (Schlosser, 1997) have led a handful of researchers to explore the male patrons of strip clubs. However, research on men and strip clubs is still very much a new area of study. To date, four works exist examining the topic. Two of the works are typologies of men who attend (Brewster 2003; Erickson and Tewksbury, 2004) and the others examine clubs' connections to consumerism and stereotypes of male behavior (Frank, 2002; Wood, 2000). The typologies examine a number of factors—how one interacts with dancers, frequency of attendance and tipping of dancers, whether one is alone or with others, and general factors like race and age. The typologies provide insight into male behavior in strip clubs, as well as serving as bases for future research to continue.

Frank (2002) and Wood (2000) go deeper by exploring why men go, what they desire from their visits, and how societal expectations of men influence the behavior and frequency of club visits. Frank interacted directly with male patrons both as a dancer and a researcher. She inquires about the meaning men attach to their visits, drawing connections to issues of masculinity, leisure, and consumerism. Wood looks at specifically the enactment of masculine behavior, and how such an objective is met through actions of dancers and patrons.

In addition to their individual findings and discussions, almost all explore the constant debate about whether strip clubs are harmless entertainment venues for men, or an industry wrought with substance abuse and illegal

activity contributing to the sexual objectification of women. Early discussion on clubs presented this debate as two-sided, either for or against (Dworkin, 1981; MacKinnon 1989; Skipper et. al. 1970). However, continued research on strip clubs has broadened this 'for or against' discussion to one focused on the deeper implications these clubs have on society at large (Frank, 2002; Burana, 2001; Pasko, 2002; Wood, 2000; Schweitzer, 2001). The debate continues, but with an understanding that, like human behavior in any setting, it is a complex environment of complex behavior with no simple explanation.

The research on strip clubs thus far has provided a much deeper understanding of what strip clubs mean both to those who work in and frequent them. Again, however, research focusing on men in the club is still very limited. Significant relationships between why men go to strip clubs and ideas about gender roles, sexuality, and sexual expression have only recently been identified and require further analysis.

Also, strip clubs are still generally seen as facets of the urban landscape. Most studies cited here look at social behavior in urban clubs, with the exception of one (Brewster, 2003) which does not specifically examine any relationship between behavior and geographic location of the club. There is anecdotal evidence that suggests strip clubs are becoming more common in rural areas (Burana, 2001; McGarry, 2006; The Rake, 2003; Family Foundation, 2001). However, no scientific research yet exists exploring the environment of rural strip clubs or increase of rural clubs specifically. Residents of rural areas traditionally hold more conservative views of how people are conduct themselves regarding sex (The Family Foundation of Kentucky, 2001). Therefore, the possibility of an influx of strip clubs into rural areas is an interesting phenomenon worth exploration.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Goffman's theory of frame analysis is used here as it is useful in exploring how people understand such a complex environment as rural strip clubs. Rural strip clubs are settings which bring together two very different social and cultural environments—the simple and perhaps sexually conservative small-town with the sexually overt and perceived 'deviant' environment of strip clubs. There is no intent to claim rural residents are unfamiliar and inexperienced with such a sexual setting, but since these settings are not common in rural areas, it adds credence to the view of rural areas as more sexually conservative. Therefore, one's social behavior and understanding of what a rural strip club represents may rest on a blending of one's ideas from the two environments, which is the main idea behind frame analysis.

Goffman's theory explains people's interaction with, and understanding of, their environment(s) through the use of existing mental frames of references. As an individual moves through life, interacting with people and the natural world, they learn proper patterns of behavior in response to different situations and settings. The guidelines learned for those situations are what Goffman calls 'frames', an outline that aides in response and understanding. These frames are the mental foundation people develop and utilize throughout their lives. Frames can be used alone, but more often a person will mentally refer to many different frames depending on the complexity of the activity or interaction.

Goffman also states that the development and storage of these frames in memory are predominantly unconscious events. Some interactions require explanation from another about proper rules and regulations, but one does not consciously store such information away; the events become part of memory and brought out in the future when similar or identical situations are encountered. To accomplish this, one looks for cues in the situation(s) to figure out what frames to utilize for those instances. The main components of particular frames—certain words, actions, etc.—are the cues one looks for that will guide behavior and understanding in those situations.

As stated, the frames of reference serve as foundations, which mean aspects of the frame can be added, subtracted, or altered to change the meaning of behavior. Goffman terms this altering as 'keying' the frame and defines it as:

[...] set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else. (43-44)

The aspects of a setting or situation are altered, which leads to a different understanding of the situation or meaning of particular behaviors. The original definition is not lost, but becomes secondary to or blended with the new. Keying of a frame could involve changing aspects such as physical and verbal cues and/or actions. It is this keying component of frame analysis that aides in illustrating the process of how two frames of reference are mentally and physically combined to create new meanings and behaviors.

METHOD & SETTING

When the goal of social research is to better understand a particular culture or environment, immersion into that environment is key (Berg, 2001). Such immersion often requires the use of qualitative research methods. The current exploration was done using such methods and conducted in two parts. The first part consisted of a pilot qualitative project completed for classroom credit; the second part being the current study under discussion. Both studies utilized qualitative research methods of participant observations along with informal and formal interviews.

The pilot study was a qualitative exploration into one rural strip club and resulted in an analytical typology of male patrons. Results indicated that certain patrons desired a certain experience, ranging from a fun and lighthearted outing with other male friends to a more intimate interaction with a dancer. Categorization was based on factors such as age, whether or not one came with others, and level of interaction with club employees (dancers and bar staff). Much like other typologies of strip clubs, results from the pilot study provided a foundation to for the current study of rural clubs.

For the current study, 11 clubs were originally contacted via telephone and/or mail to be a part of the study. Management was fully informed of the study's intent, given a copy of the pilot project, and told what the nature of my presence would be while in the club. Six clubs agreed to participate. Once granted access to the club, one to three evenings were spent in each site observing and interacting with patrons and employees. At each site, one formal tape recorded interview was conducted with an owner and/or member of management. Formal interviews were conducted during or outside club hours and immediately transcribed. During observational visits, no attempt was made to hide my role as a researcher; notes were taken openly and full disclosure was provided when my presence in the clubs was questioned. Each visit lasted between two to four hours, after which extended field notes of the visits were created.

Research sites were selected based on whether or not the club was located in a rural area. The US Census Bureau defines rural as:

Territory, population and housing units not classified as urban. Rural classification cuts across other hierarchies and can be in metropolitan or non-metropolitan areas. (www.census.gov)

However, the definition here was determined too vague for this study. Therefore, it was decided that a rural club would be one located outside inner city limits and away from any significantly populated area outside inner city limits (suburbs, etc.). Strip clubs are traditionally considered part of the urban area, which is often highly populated with a high amount of economic activity. Looking at *rural* strip clubs meant going to areas the opposite of urban—low population and economic activity. Suburbs, for example, while not always categorized as urban, can still be highly populated with significant economic activity. All sites were located within the same upper Midwest state. The site used in the pilot project was located approximately 4 miles from the nearest city with few personal dwellings nearby. Distance from a significantly populated area for the clubs in the current study ranged from 3 to 15 miles.

Each site varied slightly from one another in size, number of dancers, and whether or not other services such as lap dances and VIP areas were available. Only one club offered solely stage dances, the rest had at least a lap dance area and/or VIP area. The nature of these other areas ranged from an actual room away from the main club area to simply a chair or booth in a corner farthest away from the main stage area. Each club had one stage with one or two poles. Similar to the site used in the pilot study, the main areas occupied by patrons were the stage, bar, and seating located throughout the club.

RESULTS

Analysis of results indicate that rural strip clubs—their management, employees, and patrons—define and understand their environment through the utilization of two primary frames of reference, the 'strip club' frame and what is termed here as a 'local bar' frame. Many of those interviewed referred to the establishments as being "like a local bar" or having a "local bar feel". What this suggests is that both frameworks have been 'keyed', either by management, the patrons themselves, or both to create this dual meaning of rural strip clubs.

The primary components that make up both frameworks revolve around expected physical setting, behavior, and activities. Keying of both frames allows for the development of a rural strip club frame, blending the urban with the rural. The primary components that make up each framework also appear to be the elements keyed to allow the melding of the two frameworks.

The Strip Club Frame

Although the focus of this study is not to compare and contrast rural and urban clubs, I asked nearly every male I came in contact with what, if anything was different about these smaller rural clubs compared to larger urban ones. None were ever surprised at the question, which points to an existing knowledge that rural clubs are different. Many had experiences in larger clubs before attending the rural ones, but some had only attended rural clubs. The rural clubs were discussed comparatively to urban clubs, meaning that the existing frame one has of strip clubs is based off experiences in a more urban, and perhaps stereotypical, setting.

- Owner: Um, no one can see their car there (smiles, laughs a bit). Well, its kind of its hidden, unlike the bigger clubs, but its not, you know?
- Manager: The bigger clubs, they can have more girls on in one night, but they also have a richer clientele.
- Patron: At the bigger clubs, you've got 10 different stages and 40 to 50 girls running around. And expensive! A beer there will cost you 8 bucks, at least.

These responses point to certain physical aspects that define a typical urban strip club— numerous dancers and stages, expensive services and drinks, physical location (big cities, central location), and a perception that 'those with money' are expected patrons.

The activities and behaviors typically associated with strip clubs also arose out of these discussions. Stereotypes of strip clubs as hubs of drug dealings and prostitution also seemed to contribute to one's strip club frame:

- Bouncer: He says at the bigger clubs, nobody knows the clients that come in, 'they have different reasons for coming in.' He also says clients are more active, more social in smaller clubs, 'in bigger clubs, its more of a solo thing.'
- Manager: Everyone thinks that a stripper, you buy em a couple of drinks, you take em home and screw em.
- Patron: In bigger clubs, the girls pay the bouncer to look the other way and lets a guy do whatever he wants. Make more money. The only reason those guys come in is to see how far they can get.

Expected behavior and activities in a typical strip club are highlighted here. There appears to be an idea that in urban clubs men are literally going for sex rather than a sexualized show, and that one would find dancers more willing and able to perform sexual favors. In urban clubs, the experience also appears to be seen as more as an individual endeavor. All these factors make up a general frame of reference for what one expects when entering an establishment billed as a strip club.

It is important to understand that all the individual actions and situations in each frame—strip club and local bar—are themselves conducted through framing. Tipping a dancer a certain way, how to order a drink for a dancer, requesting time in the VIP room, and stage behavior are just some examples of actions requiring their own frames of reference for proper execution.

The Local Bar Frame

"Local bar" was a label given to bars and taverns located in and around the rural areas in which the strip clubs were located. While there is no existing research to confirm such a classification, the way patrons defined the rural strip club setting led to the use of this term to encompass aspects of that definition. Patrons would often describe the club or behavior within the club as "like any other bar in town." Use of the term in relation to the atmosphere of a club was usually met with a definitive nod or "Yeah, exactly!"

The behavior and activities in these bars, just like with the strip club frame, is the main component that makes a place a "local" bar. Patrons typically come either alone or with one or two others and are presumably there to drink. Interaction in these bars can occur between other patrons, but more often than not, the bartender engages in the most conversation with patrons. The bartender will typically know people by name as well as aspects of their personal life to which they inquire—job, family, etc. This could also be said to exist between patrons as well. Examples of

these behaviors, which those spoken with agreed contributed to that 'local bar feel', were seen during observations and confirmed through interviews.

- Bouncer: Lots of times, the people that come in are friends are ours [him or the owner] and just hang out, have a beer, keep me company.
- Observation: Another guy comes in, middle aged, alone. The bartender goes down to get him a drink. She says hello by name and asks how it's going, he says, "Well it just got better, it's Friday", and the bartender smiles and nods.
- Researcher: So there's kind of a *local bar feeling* to the place, where people come in to drink and hangout?
- Owner: Exactly. Most guys that come in we know, I see em in town and they come in here to talk, relax, have a beer.....

Almost all those I spoke with knew what I meant by 'local bar feel' and could readily describe aspects that make up that 'feel' from many personal accounts. The ease of description many had coupled with the amount of personal experience with local bars suggests that the local bar frame would be accessed as a reference point before and/or upon entering a rural strip club. However, such access is dependent upon the presentation and environment created in the club, requiring certain elements to be 'keyed'.

Keying of the Strip Club and Local Bar Frames

One of the central questions behind this study was how the sexual and urban- associated venue of strip clubs could coexist in the rural and often conservative-minded Midwest. Frame analysis allows the identification of primary frames of references which guide how one views a strip club and a local bar which, according to statements from interviews and discussions, was how such establishments were often perceived—as local bars. Therefore, since most clubs were defined by management and staff as strip clubs, yet by patrons as 'like a local bar', the strip club frame appeared to be keyed more in order to cater to the patrons' local bar frame of reference.

The physical settings of the strip clubs were the most noticeable aspect keyed, and also seemed connected to the keying of certain behaviors of staff. In the strip clubs observed, both the stage and the bar area were equal in terms of prominence and as hubs of activity. In some instances, there was more activity and congregation at the bar than at the stage. In 5 of the 6 clubs, the bar was the first aspect encountered upon entry into the club, similar to the physical setup of local bars. This reflects a catering to the local bar frame, offering patrons something familiar in what may be an otherwise unfamiliar setting. In most of the clubs, the stages were located in or near the center with seating area surrounding the stage. By making the bar area equal in prominence to the stage in a strip club, this reflects keying of the strip club frame where the bar area is secondary to the stage.

Since the bar areas in these clubs served as points of congregation for patrons while still being able to view the performance on stage, patrons often never went to the stage, meaning dancers were not making money in the traditional way through stage tipping. Therefore the traditional mode of money making for dancers had to be keyed. This resulted in the 'tip walk', where a dancer, after performing her set on stage, would walk up to each male patron at the bar and asks if they'd like to tip her for the show. Although framed as a request, it was observed as bad etiquette to not tip:

- Observation: The dancer is now walking along the bar soliciting tips. As she approaches Gray shirt, who has a pile of money in front of him, and pulls her g-string away from her hip. He looks her up and down and shoos her away, saying 'That don't impress me.' She rolls her eyes and yells down to the bartender, 'Just a sec, I've got to deal with a jerk down here.'

Clubs also had additional areas, such as a VIP room(s) or lap/private dance area. The areas were out in the open, but made semi-private due to a location away from the stage or bar, the main areas of activity. Two had physical barriers between the area and the rest of the club. Only one had actual VIP rooms monitored by staff through use of cameras. Most had only a lap dance area, except for one which only had a stage for dancing. These areas were typically an unmarked booth, table, or portion of the club reserved for lap dances:

Observation: The raised area to the right of the stage has the most tables, and there is a dancer giving what appears to be a lap dance to an older guy in white. This takes place in the one corner of the raised area, in a booth. There are two mirrors with several finger prints in the middle of each, clustered together and smudged.

Another component of the strip club frame altered here is the lack of prominence or existence of VIP areas. In many studies examining urban strip clubs, VIP rooms were often discussed as being very private but major components of the clubs. In rural clubs, VIP and lap dances were still offered in keeping with the traditional idea of experiences offered in a strip club, but were less of a focus. Keying this component to make such areas less prominent may be done since there is usually more expense associated with these areas. Tipping a dancer for a 3 song set could only cost \$3; the price of a lap dance lasting 2 songs could cost \$30. By using the tip walk and stage dances as the main modes of money making, dancers and management are catering to, as one owner put it, the 'blue collar' type crowd usually in the clubs.

The staff in the clubs also interacted with patrons in a way more reminiscent of that in local bars. While this could be another keying of the strip club frame, staff could also be utilizing the local bar frame as well, since many of the dancers in these clubs lived or grew up in rural areas like the ones where clubs were located. Bartenders welcomed many patrons by name and engaged in the type of personal conversations described earlier. Sometimes such conversations could take place even if the patron was unknown to the bartender.

Typically in more urban strip clubs, dancers' interaction with patrons occurs at the stage, at private tables, or in VIP rooms. In the rural clubs, dancers still often interacted at the stage with patrons, but the bar was also a primary spot to engage in conversation with the men.

Bartender: Most guys that come in here are lonely and want someone to talk to. Sylvia has a guy that comes in here and will just sit and talk the whole night, and pay here to talk to him, you know?

Dancers both here and in previous studies have commented that many men will pay just to talk with a dancer. If the night was slow, the dancer may even talk with the patron(s) more than dance while on stage for her set, reflecting the more casual atmosphere of the rural club.

The keying of the strip club frame to make these establishments feel more like a local bar alters the meaning and definition of the setting for patrons. To staff and management, when asked if they would consider the places bars or strip clubs, almost all chose strip club. Some did use strip *club* and strip *bar* interchangeably, with the former term being more common. The term *roadhouse* was used by one owner, which describes a place in the country offering entertainment. Although he admitted that entertainment usually meant musical, he still saw it as an appropriate descriptive term for his establishment.

Patrons, however, when asked to comment on negative attitudes towards strip clubs, expressed opinions which seem to reflect their understanding of these places as more local bar than strip club:

Patron: I come here with my friends, my wife is at home, you know, she knows we're here and she says, go on, have fun. We drink, hangout, whatever. It's not about getting laid or turned out, just havin' a good time.

Patron: You know I've got four hours to kill and money that I would spend anyway. So what do you do, sit at your hotel watching TV or go out, relax, [have a good time?]. You come here, see some nice things, and then go home. Its not dirty, it's just something to do.

Patron: He says that 90 percent of people that come in here are local. 'It's the same people each night. Like that guy over there.....They're just here to drink and maybe get a little attention, like any other bar.'

Even though patrons saw the places as bars and management saw them as strip clubs, it seems that management may also operate their club using a local bar frame to some extent. All the owners and/or managers here had spent a

number of years in rural areas and thus would be more likely to have developed a local bar frame. When opening a strip club in such areas, then, this frame would have been used in guiding set-up. The limited strip club frame one may have—a place where naked women dance—may also explain why stages do not compete with the bar as areas of activity, and the lack of focus on VIP rooms and lap dances.

Because of how patrons defined the setting—through use of the local bar frame—it was a general belief that local residents and society in general had the wrong idea about strip clubs. Some men even implied that they were more open-minded on topics such as sexual expression, what the performance at the club really was, and sexuality in general:

- Owner: (In response to question about men's visits being negative for marriages): I think they help marriages. Gets guys excited and they go home to their wife..... You can only talk to one person so much. (laughs)
- Researcher: So a marriage gets to a certain point sexually, and this is something that could spice things up?
- Owner: Oh definitely, oh it defiantly gets to that certain point. And there's nothing wrong with that. He's coming home to you, so what's the problem?
- Owner:a lot people still [think] nudity is not something that you should ever do, you know, if its not in your homes its something religiously wrong, somebody that will show their body, there's something mentally wrong with [them].....a lot of people are raised in that. I don't want my daughters to do it. [That's a] standard, you know? I think the female body is beautiful and, incredibly beautiful. Artistic and the whole works but I still—I was raised in the Catholic religion and I don't want my daughters showing themselves on stage. They go someplace else and do it, I probably wouldn't have near as much as a problem with it but.....I wouldn't let them come in here again. (laughs)
- Patron: It's entertainment, you know, a fantasy. People think you're here to fuck a dancer, but it's not about that. It's art; and it's relaxing. I'm just here to sit back, relax, have some fun. Nothing more.

These open minded attitudes, though, only went so far. The local bar frame enabled men to define their visits as a time to relax, be entertained, and socialize, which meant a downplay of the sexual. Since they understood the club as more bar than strip club, they considered themselves more open-minded than others who they perhaps felt could not see past the sexual—wives, girlfriends, and/or society in general. However their open-minded attitudes seemed to only be present when discussing their own place in the strip club. Subjects such as women's sexuality, the kinds of women who would dance in a club and even homosexuality were discussed in what was viewed as less than open-minded terms:

- Owner: It think it's been since time began, like I told you before, that its something that the female body was made fore men to look at. That's why god created it. Just for the man to look at and desire it. And to repopulate the world that's a necessity but you know, men desire women. Women desire men is part of it too, but I don't think it's set up the same chemical and biologically as men are to....compete, and to strut , to show off and the whole works. But then again the women its part of the same thing but they do it in a different way, with make up and the dressing and the sexiness and all that. I think strip clubs are part of the show. The game that god created. It's a basic human thing that we do it. Strip clubs are natural and.....its just part of the same show that goes on all the time, its just a little more in depth, the women get pretty and dance around and you know flaunt it.
- Patron: It's a hard life. Those girls are working real hard for not a lot of money, unless you're working in the city at the bigger places. You know they get up there and take everything off and shake around up there, it's hard. And there is of course the drugs and alcohol involved. But it takes a lot of courage to get up there and do that, they have a lot of courage. You know, but at some places these girls can make 1200-1500 dollars a night,

and over three nights or so that's a lot. That's good money. I mean, but I still wouldn't want my daughter or anything to work here.'

Patron: You know, lesbians, I've talked to them and you know, they could be sitting here with their girlfriend or whatever, and it don't bother me. I mean, they are some of the nicest people and I have no problem. But something I don't understand is that if a guy and another guy were here together sitting and whatever, like with his boyfriend, I'd have to kill em. That's just not right, I mean I guess I could take it for a bit, but you know, he should be here with his girlfriend, you know what I'm saying?

The local bar frame appears to be useful for men to shape a different, less deviant view of their purpose for visiting clubs. Since society has traditionally given strip clubs and those who attend them a negative label, the men seem to construct a new meaning which they perceive as more open than others are not willing to explore. However, this accepting and open-minded way of thinking only seems to apply to their personal visits and not other issues brought up in conversation, especially women. Many men in this study still viewed male sexual drive as trumping female, still view the female body as something for male consumption, and support women dancing, just not women in their own lives—wives, girlfriends, daughters, etc., suggesting an underlying negative connotation. Only one man, an owner, acknowledged his contradiction in both supporting women dancing but not wanting women in his life to do so.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the social environment of rural strip clubs and also examine how male patrons understand and make sense of their visits. Rural clubs have received little attention from researchers and it was proposed that social dynamics and the strip club itself would be different in rural areas as opposed to urban. Frame analysis was used to explain how such understanding occurs and is also used to examine how two very different cultures—that of strip clubs and rural areas—coexist. Results indicate that rural clubs are different not just geographically but also in operation, atmosphere, and what the setting means to patrons. Results also show that patrons see these clubs as more than sexual arenas but also bars just like any other in their communities. While this may suggest a more accepting attitude about sexuality and expression, attitudes regarding the sexual norms and expression of others were more conservative.

This study contributes to others in showing how men's reasons for visiting strip clubs are more complex than to simply watch naked women. For rural areas, strip clubs also serve as local bars for individuals, meaning that motivations for going to bars such as socializing and social drinking were also found as motivations for attending strip clubs. The setup and operation of these clubs reflects the dual purpose of these establishments. The dual purpose also allowed men to downplay what may be seen as their own deviant participation in such an environment and focus on the others activities taking place in the club—socializing with others and “relaxing.”

The study is significant in exploring the social attitudes of male patrons in a rural club. It is interesting that conservative ideas regarding sexuality and expression were found along side beliefs that strip clubs in rural areas led to more open-minded attitudes regarding sex. However this open-minded attitude seems to stem from a belief that “Since I'm not coming solely to see naked women, I have a more open mind.” Because the strip clubs were not viewed as just strip clubs, particularly by patrons, the development of such ideas was possible.

Some of the comments made here are a cause for concern in world which is more and more concerned with hate speech and the pursuit of equality. Patrons are able to understand their environment by blending aspects of two different frameworks, but this also results in, or perhaps perpetuates, stereotypical ideas regarding women and human sexuality.

While the results may have some negative implications, the information gained here is useful to those operating strip clubs in rural areas. Knowledge of what rural male patrons are used to in terms of leisure and social environments can aide an owner or manager to set up their strip club to coincide with and incorporate those understandings. The information is also useful to those operating other public social venues in rural areas in order to perhaps counteract the draw of a strip club.

Continued research looking specifically at attitudes of rural residents regarding sexuality, gender roles, and sexual expression would be beneficial to understand if strip clubs are perhaps influencing or perpetuating such ideas. Exploration into rural leisure and social activities in general would also be useful as it would further help to explain why and how rural strip clubs continue to draw male rural residents. By continuing to examine strip clubs, both rural and urban, society can gain a deeper understanding of the social significance of this particular cultural setting.

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