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The Price of Passion: Performances of Consumption and Desire in the Philippine Go-Go Bar

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The Price of Passion: Performances of Consumption and Desire in the Philippine Go-Go Bar

by

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The Price of Passion: Performances of Consumption and Desire in the Philippine Go-Go Bar

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The emergence of a global, (post)modern 'consumer culture' has resulted in an increasing commodification of people and their relationships, destabilizing many 'traditional' ideas and practices concerning sexual intimacy. This is especially evident in those encounters between foreign men and local women that arise in Philippine go-go bars, where an assortment of sexual arrangements – from prostitution to marriage – are negotiated according to the variable desires of the participants. Analyzing the activities within this space from a dramaturgical standpoint, I show how women and men adopt particular social / sexual identities and 'scripts' to achieve their personal aspirations through the manipulation of others, creating myriad gendered discourses and performances to express their diverse sexual, socioeconomic and political longings. Through the production and consumption of individual narratives and (re)presentations, actors in this liminal setting can satisfy their desires for personal autonomy and 'success' insofar as they embody desired 'lifestyles' through the active incorporation of goods, images and services. Moreover, in the enactment of these alternative biographies and practices, people also challenge the prevailing socioerotic discourses by modifying the symbolic meanings of sexual relations in line with notions of consumer sovereignty and personal agency within a liberal, late-capitalist framework.

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Introduction
Angeles City, July 1995

"Blowjob, sir."

Is that a proposition? Or simply a means of introducing one's self in a setting where public expressions of sex are commonplace? The timid utterance coming from the ramshackle bungalow caught me by surprise, even though it was precisely what I was looking for this evening. Strolling along in my capacity as a social 'scientist,' I was not seeking physical stimulation, but rather an opportunity to discuss and observe human sexual behavior – a pursuit that is itself pleasurable. The matter-of-fact manner in which the young woman announced the availability of this service highlighted the ambiguity of her erotic suggestion as well as my research. Neither of us had any yearning to engage in this type of intercourse at the time (as far as I know), yet the stereotypical expectations of sexual performance made it difficult to base our brief encounter on anything else. As a foreign male in this setting I am supposed to crave sex-on-demand, and be willing to pay for it; as a Filipina occupying this particular location in the sexual landscape, she is expected to provide such services. The statement "blowjob, sir" should have removed all doubt regarding her availability for oral copulation or anything else I was willing to purchase from her: simply put, she wanted money and I wanted information. However, I continued down the road because I had already learned that for most women working in the sex industry, a 'blowjob' is easier than, and often preferable to, revealing one's identity and desires.

There are many similar offers indicating the availability of sexual services in the bars, massage parlors, and streets of the Philippines (as well as in other venues across Asia and the rest of the world) designed to draw consumers into various spaces and relations. Walking down a dimly lit side street away from the main strip of nightclubs along Fields Avenue in Angeles City, you may stumble across a row of houses known locally as Blowjob Alley. It is where foreign men go if they want to receive that specific service, and the refrain of "blowjob" resonates in hushed tones from doorways and

windows (spoken by women and also men performing as women). The audacity of such a statement emanating from the dark recesses conjures varying images in the mind of the casual observer: of privilege and poverty, excitement and danger, desire and disgust. However, the imagery of this oral / aural fantasy does not always coincide with reality. "Blowjob, sir" is not necessarily an offer to perform an act of oral-genital intercourse; it may be just a declaration to pique your curiosity. It is a promise of touristic adventure and romantic possibilities, an enticement to gaze at and experience private intimacies in a public venue. What you actually encounter within these liminal settings – or read in the following pages – may be something entirely different from what you initially anticipated.

My first venture down this lane was probably similar to that of other men: I acknowledged the presence of people in the shadows with an uneasy smile, not always certain of what I was looking for. I had simply heard of the place, and thought I should see it for myself as part of my ethnographic study concerning the local sex industry. It was late in the afternoon, so business was slow because many men were still preparing for a long night of sexual exploration. There was a dizzying array of voices emanating from all directions, communicating the same suggestion. As usual, I was wary of pursuing any particular offer lest someone misinterpret my interest or intentions, so I stuck to the middle of the road. Eventually one young woman emerged with a more forceful effort to attract my attention. She grabbed my arm and began pulling me in the direction of the establishment she worked for, laughing all the way. I laughed too, realizing that I could not refuse her – after all, I had willingly walked down this street knowing that I would probably end up in such a position. I wanted to see what it was like; to 'participate' and 'observe' in the grand anthropological tradition. To resist would signify that I did not belong there. Arriving on the porch of the wooden shack, I found myself in the company of other male patrons who were visibly amused that she had "caught another one." She offered me a beer, and I joined my fellow customers at the bar to observe the proceedings. I was asked once if I wanted a blowjob, and upon replying "no" was never asked again. The British expatriate sitting next to me indicated that he

never came here for oral sex; he just wanted to "chat with the girls" and to "watch the other blokes having a good time." I started to wonder if I was any different from the others.

Each establishment has two distinct spaces: the main area serves as a bar for drinking and conversation and an additional room above (or in back) where the women live and conduct their 'business.' The bar consists of an open area facing the street, with chairs positioned so people can view and participate in the activities outside. More importantly, such an arrangement also permits the passer-by to see what is taking place 'inside' – a means of revealing female sexual availability and masculine leisure without showing too much (in accordance with government regulations). Chatter flows freely between women and men who have never met each other, and they employ other forms of contact that serve as visible cues indicating the tenor of the exchange or nature of their relationship. One couple I observed appeared to be long-time lovers, staring at and caressing each other while conversing in soft tones, seemingly oblivious to their surroundings. Their conversation could be considered 'private' according to the unspoken rules of social engagement: quiet dialogue between two people is usually identified as an expression of exclusive companionship, and does not warrant the involvement of others. This is in marked contrast to an adjacent gathering, where a group of men and women were engaged in rambunctious behavior, groping each other and laughing at bawdy jokes. Those who are in the immediate vicinity of such displays may also become participants as flashes of exposed flesh and loud banter invite onlookers to become members of the group. To take part in these and other erotic performances reveals one's sexual identity to others and reinforces the prevailing discourse of male domination and promiscuity that makes such venues possible. Again, things are not always as they seem, as all of the aforementioned men left this establishment without having taken part in any form of copulation with the female employees. However, they did satisfy certain physical and emotional desires through other means of intercourse. Thus the question remains, did they or did they not 'have sex'?

I had arrived in Angeles earlier that afternoon in a minivan full of foreign men on their way to visit the city that one passenger described as "Disneyland for guys." There were three German tourists: one had visited the Philippines repeatedly over the past fifteen years, and was regaling his compatriots with the lore of local femininity and his previous sexual escapades. Another older gentleman from Australia, accompanied by his Filipina 'girlfriend,' was returning from Manila where he had extended his tourist visa. I sat next to two US servicemen – Kyle and Stan – based in Okinawa who had come to Angeles for some 'rest and recreation.' We ended up at the same hotel on Fields Avenue with large mirrors strategically positioned over the beds. Arriving at noon, we barely had time to toss luggage in our respective rooms before heading to the bars 500 meters down the road. Along the way we passed a landscape littered with constant reminders of Angeles City's past: the ever-present volcanic ash that blows in from the slopes of nearby Mt. Pinatubo; the former US airbase, many buildings stripped bare by looters after the hasty pullout; the decaying structures of former bars destroyed during that cataclysmic eruption of 1992. Out of the rubble has emerged a new version of Fields Avenue aiming more for the tourist market, but not in a manner that is noticeably different from its previous incarnation.

Our first stop was the Viking bar. It was quiet when we initially went in (we were the first customers of the day), but soon after our arrival the music started and dancers took to the stage dressed in bikinis. We played a few games of billiards in the back of the bar and talked to the waitresses – my first clumsy attempts at 'fieldwork' in this setting. Lydia hailed from the island of Samar on the eastern reaches of the archipelago and was quite blunt about why she was working in such a setting so far from home: her sister had married an Australian, and she wanted to find a foreign husband as well. Such opportunities are not available in the marginal spaces of the *probinsya* ('province'), so the city serves as a global market for these and other intimate relations. I met several waitresses and dancers in this initial outing, and bought a few rounds of drinks over the next three hours. My final tab was P600 (US$24 at that time). The women earned commissions from the drinks they consumed, and I learned more about their work

environment and their lives – a form of exchange that I repeated innumerable times during my research. Despite the fact that it was still early (and this was our first stop), Kyle and Stan both paid a 'barfine' so that a woman could accompany each of them from Viking. Suzy and Rika were waitresses – 'guest relations officers' (GROs)[1] are usually the objects of male desire in these settings – but there appeared to be no problem in paying P500 (US$20) each so they could leave work early. The manager told me that there were always other women who could assume their duties.

Kyle, Rika and I wandered down to another bar, while Stan and Suzy returned to his hotel room. Later in the afternoon, Kyle ran into an old girlfriend, Katrina, at a large nightclub named Ziggy's. They talked for a while, and then – much to my surprise – he paid for her barfine also. He told me Rika was "just a friend," and he identified Katrina as "someone special." The four of us then had an early dinner at a nice Thai restaurant, but Rika's demeanor was obviously soured by the fact that Katrina was with us (she would later tell me that she thought the situation with Kyle was "more than friends"). Rika went home after dinner, and Kyle and Katrina informed me that they were going to return to the hotel for a "quick nap" – that is when I followed his advice to go check out Blowjob Alley. After that brief sojourn, I returned to the hotel to find Stan, Kyle and Katrina ready for a night on the town (Stan said Suzy had already gone home). Katrina

[1] The acronym 'GRO' is not a common label used by the women working as entertainers, as both employees and male customers apply specific occupational terms ('dancer' or 'receptionist') or the more general descriptors ('girl') to refer to women in this setting; when women do apply this term in the bar setting, it refers to receptionists. I use the term GRO in this narrative because it is an official category for employment in the Philippines, and because it is specific to this setting: offices also have 'receptionists,' but only go-go bars and other venues involved in masculine leisure employ GROs (entertainment venues also use the term 'GRO' in their advertisements for job openings). 'Entertainer' is also used in other circumstances, most notably among overseas workers. Similarly, I use the term 'go-go bar' to describe these establishments so as not to confuse them with other locales. Most customers and employees refer to these places simply as 'bars,' but there needs to be a distinction between these spaces and other venues where alcohol is consumed (some men refer to the go-go bars as 'brothels,' but this has an entirely different meaning within the spectrum of locales involved in the sex industry; see Chapter 3 for a discussion of these distinctions).

informed us that we had to go pick up her sister at a disco, but we were assured that paying her barfine was not necessary.

Walking along Fields Avenue in the evening was a noticeably different scene from our earlier venture down the same lane. These urban spaces for sexual assembly come to life once the sun sets: neon signs light the way and loud music serves as a signal that the business of entertaining men is already underway. Open-air drinking establishments are interspersed between the walled spaces of the clubs, allowing men and women to congregate together in public – yet another situation that permits people to see and be seen in the endless parade to satisfy the desirous gaze. Women are stationed at the entrances to the go-go bars, calling out to foreign men on the streets in an attempt to attract their patronage. The doors swing open every time a potential customer saunters by, giving him a glimpse of what lies within like some Venus flytrap: bombarding him with images and sounds to draw him nearer, but never revealing the true nature of what lies beyond. Interiors are relatively dark, so he must go inside for a closer look if he is really interested in seeing what is offered. In some places, women are instructed to descend on the customer as he enters the domain to keep him from leaving right away. They hand him a cold beer, dance provocatively in front of him, carefully massaging his body and his ego as they tell him how attractive he is. Thus another patron is snared with this brief assault on the senses; a production staged repeatedly through the night to fulfill the male fantasy of sexual abundance. We peeked into a few spots, but managed to extricate ourselves before becoming too comfortable or making any other commitments.

We finally made our way to Music Box – a 'disco' in the local entertainment lexicon. Unlike the go-go bars that are officially classified as 'nightclubs,' the female employees at this venue are not allowed to go out with customers during working hours, but it is known as a spot where one can find other women who are also willing to accompany men back to their rooms. It was crowded on this Thursday night, and we found Katrina's sister, Lizelle, with a group of her co-workers huddled around a small table covered in beer bottles. Both Katrina and Lizelle worked as dancers at Ziggy's, and several of them had decided to pay their own barfines (half of what male patrons would

pay) so they could enjoy a night on the town together. Kyle and Katrina were deep in conversation at this point, and Lizelle filled me in on their situation: they met last year in Ziggy's, and on his last visit to Angeles in January they had agreed to get married. However, in the six months that followed, Katrina had decided to marry some other male suitor because she did not believe Kyle was serious about their relationship (her husband had returned to the U.S. after the wedding, and she was waiting for the approval of her immigration application). Now they were discussing what had gone wrong in their relationship while also expressing their continued love for each other: in the following days, they were inseparable, although they again drifted apart toward the end of Kyle's two-week vacation.

As the night wore on, it became a bit too rowdy in the disco, so our group – eight of us in all – went to Margaritaville (now called Margarita Station) for a snack and some drinks. This 24-hour restaurant-cum-bar is a popular institution in Angeles, where women working in the go-go bars congregate before and after work to play billiards, eat, drink, and flirt. Needless to say, it is also popular with male tourists. Stan quickly developed a liking toward one of Lizelle's friends from Music Box, and I was informed that there was someone "available" for me should I desire company for the night. Not wanting to express any false interest (or perhaps, to reveal my own *naïveté*), I did not inquire further as to who or what was actually "available." This was my first day of research in this setting, and I was already bewildered by what I had experienced and observed. What had been described simply as 'prostitution' in the literature suddenly appeared much more varied and complex: relationships comprising emotional elements as well as considerations of material gain; sex involving more than genital coupling; identities shifting according to circumstance, with little regard for job descriptions or behaviors.

It was during this moment of clarity (a departure from my struggle to remember names and the intricate details of information for my study) that I realized what a full day it had been. Angeles is like that: there is always some establishment open where male visitors can drink and pursue their sexual desires, so 'nightlife' is available all day, every

day. Time and space become irrelevant in these erotic pursuits – the constant potential for personal fulfillment on Fields Avenue is thus actualized precisely because it is readily obtainable in our construction of the modern urban space. We were now behaving like 'tourists,' attempting to experience everything that was possible only because we did not want to miss out on anything. This is also the dilemma of the anthropologist who can never fully 'participate' in local culture, nor 'observe' everything of interest to the study. Rather than winding down, our group appeared to be gearing up for yet another run at the bars because the women in our party were interested in visiting their friends working in other establishments (now that they had male escorts to take them inside). Before we departed Margaritaville, I asked Stan what time it was.

It was two o'clock in the morning. The party was just beginning.

Chapter 1
Ethnography or Pornography?
Tales of Sex (Work)

> pornography – a description of the life, manners, etc. of prostitutes and their patrons; hence the expression of obscene or unchaste subjects in literature or art (*Oxford English Dictionary [OED]*).

I never saw Kyle and Stan after those first two weeks in Angeles, but Lizelle said they had returned the following year for another vacation. Katrina eventually joined her husband in the U.S. after several delays in the processing of her immigration papers. In December 1995, Suzy married a man from the Netherlands that she met through her job at Viking. Lydia returned to Samar after working on Fields Avenue for just two months. Her sister had a relatively easy time in finding her husband (a "nice man" who gave money to her parents and even made annual visits to their family) but Lydia had no such luck. I encountered Lizelle many times over the next four years, and our relationship over that period epitomizes the intricacy of conducting ethnographic research in this setting.

Writing about Lizelle brings back memories from years past of us dancing at Music Box and her alcohol-fuelled fights with co-workers, the joys of friendship and concerns of misinterpreting our relationship, her expectations of motherhood – and her fears of possibly growing old alone. Her story is typical for men and women I encountered in the go-go bars in that it shows both pleasurable as well as painful experiences that make this such a difficult subject to explain to those who have not been in these situations themselves. Yet these narratives do concern people's lives, and they are notable precisely because of their familiarity: even though they take place in a setting where few have ventured, they are still recognizable as everyday occurrences with which all of us can empathize. Everyone wants success (however defined), political autonomy,

sexual pleasure, personal security and happiness, although we may attempt to fulfill these desires through radically different means.

Approaching these relationships from an ethnographic standpoint requires that people suspend 'normal' patterns of interaction to facilitate the compilation of information. This is difficult enough in any site where the social scientist engages the subject(s) through personal, long-term relationships; research becomes all the more challenging when it involves a situation that appears to contradict the existing literature on the topic or when participants are wary of divulging personal attitudes. Complications arise not only in terms of the socially integrated methodology of anthropological inquiry, but also in the continuing conceptualization and reformulation of ideas regarding the varied structures and activities observed in these surroundings. What was originally intended as a seven-month rapid appraisal project expanded into an eight-year odyssey. It is through these years of intimate association with the men and women I encountered in the Philippine sex industry that I have acquired an understanding of the multiple conceptions and personal expectations that shape local opinions regarding sexual 'entertainment' and its associated issues of power, subjectivity and desire.

Within these pages I describe the views, activities, and personal histories of female employees and male customers of the go-go bars along P. Burgos Street in Makati (Metro Manila) and Fields Avenue in Angeles City (in the central Luzon province of Pampanga) through ongoing narratives of shared experiences and observations. I have chosen to focus on the individuals in these particular locales because of the complexity of those relationships arising in the various establishments along the two avenues.[2] Some of the stories presented herein are based on short conversations: fleeting encounters in an occupational setting known for high employee turnover and the mobility of male clientele. Other accounts are the result of years of continuing dialogue, noting transformations as circumstances evolve.

[2] As it will become apparent later in the ethnography, the bars of Makati and Angeles provide a unique setting for sexual interaction insofar as the intentions and activities of participants (male customers and female employees) do not follow the typical scripts of

Dialogues with men and women not only reveal personal characteristics and viewpoints, but also provide insights into the communal environment in which these identities, relations and opinions are formed. This is a closed community in the sense that networking and most other forms of interaction between 'sex workers' and 'customers' occurs within the confines of the go-go bar,[3] but the bar is just one location in the spatial organization of people's everyday existence. Employees and patrons alike negotiate their constructions of self and others through their readings of this distinct setting as well as through the sociocultural lens that emerges beyond its doors. So while the emphasis in this text is on people's activities within the framework of the sex industry, I am also interested in how these individuals mediate their identities and relations between this marginal locale and what is widely considered 'normal' society.

The Price of Passion is precisely about the rationalization of these 'expenses' involving various forms of capital in the pursuit of personal dreams, material wealth and socio-psychological control within a broad array of sexual narratives that both accommodate and resist normalizing discourses – an accounting of gains and losses for women and men in the course of their intricate social, sexual, and economic relations. The cost may be measured in dollars spent, hopes dashed and even lives lost, but the rewards for those who do find riches and happiness always seem to outweigh the risks involved in navigating the intricate meanings of desire that inform and emerge from the specific geographic and conceptual space of the Philippine go-go bar.

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identity and bodily comportment in similar spaces found elsewhere in the global sex industry.

[3] My use of single quotation marks around certain identities (such as 'sex worker') or activities ('prostitution') serves both to highlight and challenge the accepted definitions and applications of these terms. However, to avoid redundancy (and a cluttered text), I will limit such punctuation to situations where I feel it is necessary to emphasize the uncertainty.

anthropology-a-go-go

This ethnography is about people and the circumstances of their lives as gleaned from my interaction with various individuals throughout Philippine society. More specifically, it concerns the role of personal and institutional desires in creating and maintaining the space of the go-go bar for the enactment of diverse performances of gender and sexuality that lead to different types of relationships and exchanges within this social setting. Considerations of political economics play a key role insofar as the go-go bar is positioned as a workplace for women and a site of leisure and consumption for men, but the women who are identified as 'employees' are also utilizing this occupational space to address their own desires for leisure and sexual expression. Moreover, the narratives of romance and fantasy that saturate these establishments distinguish them from the 'real' world of work and home as well as other spaces in the global sex industry.

In producing this ethnography, I wanted to write something meaningful that adds to the voluminous body of knowledge on the subject, and attempt to set aside those predetermined political theories and ideologies that have driven many previous inquiries on these and other instances of commercialized intimate encounters. What is often lacking in the literature on sex work is the situating of personal behaviors within the social, political, and economic conditions that inform people's attitudes and government policies. This results in either a theoretical treatise on the evils or benefits of sex work with few, if any, examples of real human beings (Barry 1995; Pateman 1988), or personal vignettes that describe the horrors and/or positive aspects of prostitution without presenting the social and historical background of such experiences (Chapkis 1997; Delacoste and Alexander 1998; Nagle 1997).[4] This is not to critique these writings as being 'false' in their depiction of people, places and events because they serve as examples from which to evaluate the hypotheses put forward by these and other authors.

[4] Maggie O'Neill (2001) also notes these deficiencies in the literature, and her approach to addressing prostitution in England focuses on the representation of prostitution in the arts (literature, cinema, photography) and the resulting social discourses in comparison to women's own views of their situation.

However, to underestimate or ignore the range of situations and conditions that people experience in these settings further limits our understanding of the many issues that should be considered in order to address the problems people face when they enter into these spaces and/or transactions.

As sexual actors, people possess a certain amount of autonomy in their expressions and performances of erotic desire, yet the power to enact these sexual longings is informed by the symbolic makeup of local culture and the constraints imposed by the religious, scientific, and pedagogical institutions that provide the 'schemas' or 'scripts' for appropriate social interaction (Laumann and Gagnon 1995; Sewell 1992). Those who want to assert or maintain their power over individual desires will develop and promote a particular vision of social and sexual demeanor that takes into account various status markers (age, ethnicity, marital status), locations (office, home), and socioeconomic conditions (work, leisure) in an attempt to influence or otherwise compel community members to behave in a certain way. Accordingly, the go-go bars of Makati and Angeles assume a 'carnivalesque' ambiance as

> domains of transgression where place, body, group identity and subjectivity interconnect. Points of antagonism, overlap and intersection between the high and low, the classical and its 'Other' provide some of the most powerful symbolic dissonances in the culture (Stallybrass and White 1986: 25).

This representational ordering of social hierarchies occurs across various physical and psychic realms including our bodies, bounded spaces, and social configurations in creating relational categories of 'high' and 'low,' or, in the case of women, 'good' and 'bad.' The 'carnival' then emerges as a specific time and/or place where alternative forms of personal expression and consumption are permitted. Thus, the go-go bar functions as a bounded and highly-regulated site for 'public' sexual interaction.

These meanings and social formations result from calculated human actions, so people are continuously involved in the repetition of local discourses of sexuality that they accept *and* challenge as guiding principles for behavior in a continuing process of cultural reproduction *and* transformation. Relating this recursive account of 'structured agency' involves showing how people's actions in the go-go bar are influenced by the

delineation of appropriate spheres for behaviors organized around issues of labor, gender and sexuality in the modern city. So while many of the activities and identities that emerge from the space of the go-go bar maintain prevailing patriarchal and capitalist perspectives, people also confront these authoritarian mores by revealing inconsistencies in these ideological pronouncements as well as the absurdity of synchronic models that incorporate 'nature' or 'tradition' in the development of hegemonic discourses.

Research and writing on this topic requires a balance between personal accounts of motivations and the theoretical interpretations of sociopolitical domination that inform human agency. Moreover, a complete discussion of the social and historical context should also include the different social systems (such as family, community, state) and the myriad divisions of power (race, gender, class, etc.) that influence intimate relations in every society (Ross and Rapp 1981). Accounting for these different perspectives involves an analysis of the actions of female go-go bar employees and the men in their lives through a critical methodological process that interprets diverse discourses, activities and personal histories in the constitution of a social 'structure' that informs human behavior.

> [T]he little routines people enact, again and again, in working, eating, sleeping, and relaxing… are predicated upon, and embody within themselves, the fundamental notions of temporal, spatial, and social ordering that underlie the system as a whole. In enacting these routines, actors not only continue to be shaped by the underlying organizational principles involved, but continually re-endorse those principles in the world of public observation and discourse (Ortner 1984: 154).

It is through these social performances that people reproduce the cultural 'system,' and yet, the emergence of consciousness involving a reflective analysis of dominant structures and practices engenders the creation of new meanings and activities to challenge the status quo.[5]

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[5] This serves as a cursory introduction to the main tenets of practice theory that are presented in greater detail elsewhere (Bourdieu 1977; 1990; Ortner 1984; Sewell 1992; Turner 1994). While I do not intend to construct this ethnography according any particular theoretical framework, it will become evident throughout the text that people's

Such information is rarely discernible through analysis utilizing quantitative surveys or even in-depth interviews with key informants or focus groups. Instead, what is required is an ethnographic approach involving observations of social interactions in a variety of settings and situations over time. Add to that an examination of the various persons (friends and relatives, employers, officials), institutions (family, religion, government), and media representations that also influence personal activities and identities. What results is a detailed investigation of the discourses and social networks that shape our relations and actions within a specific construction of shared values, ideas and practices that comprise local 'culture.' The narrative presented herein incorporates a comprehensive investigation transcending the disciplinary boundaries of economics, psychology, geography, history, demography, media studies, linguistics, political science, and public health to depict the contextual basis for complex practices and events commonly represented as 'prostitution.' However, it is not enough to simply describe social phenomena in today's political economy, especially when the activities in question are rendered problematic by society. Ethnographic interpretation then assumes a greater role in producing a reasoned evaluation concerning such matters, for as Eric Wolf notes, "[a]nthropology at its best is analytic, comparative, integrative, and critical, all at the same time" (1999: 231-232).

It is also important to mention at the outset that an analysis such as this does not come to fruition without complications, particularly when it involves people who are wary of divulging personal information. In my relationship with Lizelle (and many other women and men involved in this study), efforts to mediate between my roles as 'researcher' and 'friend' often resulted in conflicting interpretations and interests. The normalizing discourses of interaction among and between men and women in the delineated spaces of the 'sex industry' not only influence how we view our own relationships, but also how onlookers read our actions toward each other. Our identities are constantly (re)constructed through such scrutiny, and in a setting where people

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attitudes and behaviors derive their significance and meaning through the interplay of personal desires and institutional discourses.

usually create multiple and fictitious identities for themselves, my credibility as a researcher is subject to skepticism. My sincere, personal interest in the lives of others is sometimes mistaken for sexual attraction. On the other hand, maintaining an objective or 'professional' distance leads to accusations that I am *mayabang* ('conceited' or 'stuck-up'), resulting in social isolation. Lizelle and I worked out these conceptual difficulties after a couple of months (and some embarrassing revelations); other people still have difficulty figuring out exactly what I am "doing" in the bars at night. Through writing – and subsequent reading – I have been able to remedy most of these misconceptions regarding my presence.[6]

To accurately gauge the nature of relationships between men and women in the various environs and circumstances presented herein requires a comprehensive discussion of participants' conduct as well as their motivations for working in or patronizing such a venue. Because of the stigma attached to these specific locations and associations, gathering such information necessitates a level of trust that can only be established through a long-term, personal involvement with women and men in this setting. In addition to being time-consuming, such an approach presents numerous quandaries regarding ethics and methodology in anthropology – dilemmas encountered by many others in the discipline but rarely addressed in their ethnographies (however, see Hart 1998; O'Neill 2001). Such matters are not only salient when it comes to writing the ethnography, but should also be considered in the process of conducting research as an embodied subject engaging in social interactions with other people (Reger 2001; Turner 2000).

Despite attempts to portray ethnography as some form of social 'science' in a purely objective sense, it remains an intimate and subjective enterprise between people. Thus, the results of my investigation are not simply composed from dialogues between 'anthropologist' and 'informants,' but also involve a variety of relations and exchanges

[6] Reading (by both women and men) has become an important component of my research because it enables people to understand the product of my activities, as well as allowing them to evaluate my interpretations. I also find that people are more enthusiastic in their participation when they can actually 'see' the results.

between myself and people I consider friends, kin and neighbors. Furthermore, while most encounters could be described as friendly or cordial, as in any relationship there are 'good' and 'bad' times to bring up certain topics, and there are also a few people who do not enjoy my intrusive companionship at all. This introductory chapter serves as a discussion of the problems I encountered in this inquiry into these gender / class / racial relations and sexual activities, but this assessment also applies to a wider range of studies involving people in other social settings. Since part of this study involves analyzing the reasons why Filipino women and foreign men decide to go into a go-go bar in the first place, it is only fair that I account for my own introduction and entry into this setting as well.

erotic positions: introducing myself (among others)

> Listen to my voice; it is a blend of many voices. I am a graduate student, a wife, a daughter, an erotic dancer, a friend; the quantity of potential identities extend into infinity… (Ronai 1992: 102)

It often comes as a shock to colleagues when I announce that my identity in the go-go bar is not only that of an anthropologist, but also a 'customer.'[7] Research involving people does not occur in a vacuum of objective empiricism, but instead transpires in a world of convoluted relations involving the researcher in social networks and group affairs within the community. To enter into the realm of the nightclub is in itself a sign of membership: you are considered either a 'sex worker' or a 'customer' once you walk through the door. Refusal to accept these identities is usually interpreted as meaning that you do not belong in the bar, or that you are positioning yourself above the libidinous crowd. Those who attempt to maintain their distance are seen as 'strangers,' or perhaps labeled 'troublemakers' by patrons and staff. A well-intentioned priest visited a go-go bar in Angeles City on several occasions to learn more about the lives of women so he could provide pastoral care, but his presence was incomprehensible to the women and viewed

[7] I am also identified as husband, drinking buddy, and *kuya* ('older brother') in this setting with regard to my interaction with others.

with a modicum of mistrust by management and customers. "What is he doing here if he is a priest?" asked one of the waitresses. She posed the question with a disgusted look on her face, perhaps doubting his true motives. He was simply a man who had ventured beyond what others construed as the boundaries of his customary domain and character. He had taken a vow of celibacy, but there he was gazing upon and interacting with women in a sexually charged atmosphere. Similar queries were posed concerning men who did not openly flirt with women in a manner that was associated with the typical customer. I was initially shunned in many bars because people thought I was a journalist.

Unlike most other anthropologists working in foreign settings, when I am conducting research in the go-go bar I do not appear to be an 'outsider' in the sense that I am visibly out-of-place – the urban communities where I lived and worked is comprised of Caucasian men and Filipino women. Also, my activities are not necessarily distinguishable from those of other men. I mingle with people in this setting in much the same way as everyone else does. The only difference between most other customers and myself is that I am not seeking sexual gratification through physical stimulation (but even that is an oversimplification of sexual experience).[8] I am perceived to be a heterosexual male like any other who walks through the door, and the differences in my attitude and behavior toward women are seen as a reflection of my marital commitment – although some women have jokingly insinuated that I may be a *bakla* ('gay').

In forming this recognizable identity (that of a customer), communication is necessarily dialogic, requiring an agreement as to the nature of personal relationships and an acceptance of appropriate sexual identities and performances. We play billiards, and laugh together at the antics of dancers and inebriated customers. Conversations involve recent events, personal problems, gossip, and sexual innuendo. I point out various behaviors and forms of communication and contact occurring between others, offering my opinion as to what they indicate in terms of relations between people; the women and men sometimes correct my assumptions based on what they know about their co-workers

[8] As I will emphasize throughout the text (especially in Chapters 4 and 5), the go-go bar is not a site of genital copulation, but instead serves a location for more elaborate displays of hetero- and homosocial contact (Frank 2002; Liepe-Levinson 2002).

and friends. As I am drawn into the world of the go-go bar and the lives of its inhabitants, so are the people who work in and otherwise frequent such establishments involved in my study as subjective participants in their own right.

My foray into the nightlife of Fields Avenue presented in the prologue was not my first time to wander into a go-go bar in the Philippines. Formal research into the activities of people in the Philippine sex industry commenced in July 1995, but I have resided in the country since September 1993 when I began studying schistosomiasis (a parasitic disease) and health care delivery on the island of Leyte. When I was not engaged in fieldwork in a rural *barangay* ('village') on the island, I was in Manila interviewing government officials, transferring data to computer or transcribing taped interviews, and enjoying a break from fieldwork. It was during these urban sojourns that I would venture out to see the city and take pleasure in some of the experiences that were not available in my bucolic residence: eating pizza, shopping in the many malls, and essentially engaging in activities that I did not relate with 'work.' Manila, for me, became a location for leisure as well as research.

I was aware that there is an extensive sex industry in Southeast Asia, but I primarily associated it with Thailand, so unlike many other travelers to the Philippines I was relatively naïve when it came to nightlife options. An American tourist told me that Mabini Avenue in the infamous Ermita district of Manila was "a happening place," so I went there one evening. Being new to the scene, I had no idea what these establishments were like much less what constituted the rules of engagement with the female employees, so at first I was hesitant to enter any place. I stumbled through a few small bars, not knowing how to respond to the question "would you like a girl?" Sure, someone to talk to is always nice, but what exactly are my obligations? At the time, I possessed a basic aversion to negotiating any type of relationship in such an explicit manner, although I was acutely aware that for these women 'time is money.' I was also circumspect in how I presented myself, sincerely wanting to know more about their lives and conditions

without creating the impression that I was interested in anything more than verbal intercourse.[9]

In April of 1994, I was in Manila for another brief respite, and decided to indulge myself by staying in a nice hotel in the city of Makati – the center of business in Manila, and location for many multinational offices, shopping malls and five-star hotels. While reading a tourist newspaper one day, I noticed an advertisement for a bar on nearby P. Burgos Avenue that offered reasonably priced beer during happy hour. I went to the bar (Papillon) that afternoon, and was surprised to find that it was devoid of customers. Sitting down at the counter, I was quickly surrounded by women, although by now I had a routine: cheerfully answering basic questions about my identity – name, country of origin, marital status, etc. – without exhibiting the same sexually aggressive mannerisms as I had observed in most other male customers. As expected, several women soon left when they realized that I was not going to buy everyone drinks (turned out that the ad in the paper contained a misprint, and drinks were actually more expensive than most other establishments). There was one person in the bar who caught my attention because she did not behave like the other employees – in fact, she did not want to have anything to do with me. Leonor had been the cashier in several of the nightclubs along P. Burgos for the previous five years, and had seen every manner of customer saunter through the door. She was not impressed with any of the usual masculine performances she encountered during her tenure behind the bar, and apparently I did not initially give her any indication that I was different from other men.

I returned to Papillon several times over the next week as I found it to be more relaxing than most of the other venues I had previously patronized. Each time I positioned myself at the same stool along the bar where the waitresses and bartenders make drinks and tend the cash register. In this spot the lighting is brighter, and I am able to control the personal space around me unlike in the darker recesses of the go-go bar where contact tends to be of a more intimate nature and women tend to be bolder and

[9] Later during that first evening in Ermita, I joined a group of Australians who visited Manila regularly, and it was through observing them that I learned more about (im)proper etiquette in the go-go bars.

more assertive in their actions. Yet for all of my attempts to ward off any unwanted sexual advances from others, I was not devoid of desire myself. I was simply uncomfortable expressing sexual feelings in a situation that I associated with inequality and domination. I was, however, infatuated with Leonor, who still viewed me with some trepidation. Her roommate, Tina, also worked at the same bar as a receptionist, and another one of her roommates was a floor manager there.

Over the following months I became a regular patron at Papillon, and developed close friendships with many of the women employed there. Since Leonor worked the daytime shift from noon until 8:00 p.m., I decided to ask her out on a dinner 'date' one evening. She accepted, provided we take Tina as a chaperone. I acknowledged this as the custom in the Philippines through my experiences and observations of gender relations in the provinces, but I was still surprised to see conservative values surface in this particular setting. Nevertheless, we went out several times under such arrangements involving her other friends and roommates. One evening we also went bar hopping to visit their friends who worked in other go-go bars along P. Burgos, staying out quite late and drinking too much. I was obviously in no condition to take the long bus journey back to my dormitory, so she suggested that I stay at her place that evening – on the small couch in their living room. Upon relating this story to my foreign male friends, they remarked that I was crazy to go out with someone like that when there were literally hundreds of other women who were more than willing to have sex for a small fee. But that was not the type of relationship I desired, and I realized that what I wanted was something different from what many men seek when they enter into a union with women who work in these venues.

Leonor and I were married in a simple civil ceremony in the Makati city hall in January 1995. We resided with three other women from Papillon in a crowded apartment less than 50 meters from P. Burgos; over the next two years, we would move several times, always staying in the same vicinity so all of us could get to work easily. There were also many other nomadic co-workers and relatives who would stay with us for varying periods while they looked for employment and someplace else to reside.

Although much of what is portrayed in this ethnography focuses on events that take place within the go-go bars, I have also examined their experiences that occur beyond those premises, as well as other aspects of society that inform women and men's attitudes and activities. My initial research in Leyte and Samar (1993-94) facilitated a return to these locations to examine family / household dynamics and migration (1999-2000). The schoolchildren I knew before are now young adults embarking on their own voyages of discovery to what they hope will be a better life in nearby urban centers or perhaps some faraway country. As my investigation has progressed, informants have become friends, and friends have become family. I have found it next to impossible to detach my self from others, as there is no longer any discontinuity between 'the field' and 'home.' My life is intertwined with the women and men in this study to such an extent that it is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to dissociate my own understandings of the situation from those of others presented herein. I revel in the implications of such intimacy, not only as an anthropologist striving to uncover personal and social meanings among the researched other, but also as a human being dealing with my own issues of family, sexuality, economics, migration, and desire. While our destinations are different and our experiences along the way have varied greatly, we have nonetheless taken this journey together.

<u>problems in performance and inquiry</u>

Funding for my previous research ran out in early 1995, so I had to find some other means of supporting myself while the U.S. government slowly processed Leonor's immigration application. I met the director of the ReachOut AIDS Education Foundation, Jomar Fleras, who was interested in conducting research in the go-go bars along Fields Avenue in Angeles City because they were starting a new HIV intervention program there. He provided financial assistance for a short research project (July 1995 to January 1996) to learn more about the activities of women in this setting.

I had originally intended to focus on the various issues of migration of the female employees since a disproportionate number of those working in the bars originally come

from the Eastern Visayas where I had previously conducted research. However, my attempts to use a formal interview technique to obtain this structured demographic data were thwarted by the reluctance of women to submit to such questioning. There were numerous times when managers, medical personnel and other people in official positions directed women to talk to me when it was clear that they did not wish to, and I was unwilling to force people into submitting to something they did not want to do. I also felt uneasy about replicating a methodology that was biased toward the interests of academics and program planners.

Instead, I want to know more about the dreams and expectations of women in this setting as well as their fears, their reasons for entering the sex industry (and staying), and the ways in which they negotiated the many complex relations with the people in their lives. Above all, I sought the concerns women voiced themselves, rather than guiding their comments according to my own limited preconceptions. I realized early on that I was learning more about women and men's relationships simply by talking to Leonor, Tina, and the many other persons who wandered in and out of our home. As in my aforementioned personal interactions in Angeles, these informal conversations reveal aspects of the sex industry that are not evident in the literature. So rather than setting out with even so much as a set of open-ended interview questions, I decided to see if I could gain some insight into the world of the go-go bar by simply allowing people to present themselves as they desired.

Concerns over interview strategies are particularly relevant because of the nature of relations between investigator and subject in social research, as well as due to the importance of avoiding conflict between persons in Philippine social settings. The disparity of power between the two parties in the investigative encounter places a particular burden on those who are given the task of supplying information. Differences in educational attainment, class, and official status generally structure the interview so that it resembles an interrogation rather than a conversation. This is especially true in cases where information is of a sensitive nature (such as revealing personal income or sexual practices) or where the subject is situated in a marginal social position or involved

in illegal pursuits (such as those identified as 'prostitutes' or 'drug addicts'). In these cases, the interviewer may have the authority to enforce normative views or behaviors if the information presented goes against local laws or community standards. Thus, the subject of inquiry is at a point where his or her primary motivation in supplying answers is to protect him- or herself from recrimination.

These conversational strategies are also indicative of Filipino notions of interaction embodied in the ideal of *pakikisama* ('smooth interpersonal relations'). According to this widely held value, one should not discuss anything controversial or bring up sensitive topics so as to avert any undue discord between people. However, such cultural niceties are usually not factored into the empirical process where any topic of discussion becomes fair game. The informant must therefore choose whether to challenge ideas broached by the interviewer – and risk embarrassment, censure, or worse – or provide what they feel is the correct answer in that particular social context. Most Filipinos select the latter option in formulating their responses.

My work on schistosomiasis (*sistom* in the Waray language) in Leyte and Samar is illustrative in this regard. I was interested in discerning the meaning of this parasitic infection, so I wanted to see where the people in endemic areas located this affliction within the panoply of other illnesses. This was initially difficult to ascertain because the residents knew I was researching this affliction and they wanted to impress its significance upon me because they thought that was what I desired.[10] Upon realizing this, I switched my research focus to encompass all illnesses to see if *sistom* would come out in their narratives of what they thought was important in their conceptualization of local health. *Sistom* did not emerge as a perceived health threat in this line of questioning. Those who did mention *sistom* without prompting were then asked why they believed this illness to be of concern to the community. "Because the doctors said so" was the most common reason people gave when they voiced the concerns regarding

[10] I should also point out that the *barangay* where I was working was the beneficiary of jobs and political capital as a result of their involvement in this WHO / World Bank project, so there was an added dimension in their desire to overemphasize the significance of schistosomiasis.

sistom. From an experiential standpoint, very few people believe schistosomiasis is something they needed to worry about, in large part due to the continual presence of an active program for treatment, but this perception among local people only became evident after I had gained their trust through residence in the village and refrained from asking pointed questions. It also required an effort on my part to understand their particular views and experiences of *sistom* rather than attempting to rationalize their behavior according to something that the medical community calls 'schistosomiasis.'

I have observed similar reactions involving research and education efforts regarding AIDS in the go-go bars. While the person conducting a survey or seminar on AIDS prevention is in the establishment interacting with the subjects, the women do their best to accommodate his or her interests, answering questions and wholeheartedly participating in the activities: filling out questionnaires, watching videos, fitting condoms over bananas or cucumbers. However, after the departure of the investigator or outreach worker, the women revert to what they were doing as if nothing had happened. Often managers have to round up the female employees using veiled threats of fines or other punishment (such as withholding wages) to enforce cooperation. Money and food are also used to goad women into participation. In one instance, I observed several women being physically dragged into a room to answer survey questions against their will.

For most of the women in the bars, the researcher / educator is simply someone else who must be 'entertained' while s/he is in the nightclub; the rapt attention and eager participation becomes simply another performance for these particular 'customers.' Additionally, women working in the sex industry know that condoms prevent the spread of HIV and other STIs just as they know that they are supposed to entice men to use them during sexual intercourse. They also perceive those who are asking questions to be in a position of authority – to have the ability to enforce behavior changes because STI prevention in the Philippines is monitored according to the ideology of 'social hygiene' (Luker 1998), employing the police if necessary. To avoid punishment, or at least the stigma of non-conformity, women have learned that they should not give a wrong answer because that may result in increased surveillance and other disciplinary measures. The

'correct' reply provided to many questions posed in this setting is not always a reflection of what is actually taking place, and so it is necessary to examine these and other 'hidden transcripts' of resistance to discern the real meaning behind these performances of subordination (Abu-Lughod 1990; Scott 1985; 1990). When someone makes a statement that supports the dominant ideology does s/he truly believe what s/he is saying, or does s/he only want to provide the 'right' answer according to the particular situation? Such is the difficulty of research concerning issues of hegemonic discourse, as the public statements of subordinates are designed to assuage those who possess power and to aid in the interpretation of dominant practices.

Many of the aforementioned problems related to the validity of observations result from the hurried approach used in the collection of data via surveys and other forms of 'rapid assessment' (Chambers 1981). The AIDS pandemic has added to the urgency of producing and disseminating knowledge concerning 'risky' sex, yet the quality of scholarship in this area has been sacrificed in the process. Public health surveys that focus on the 'knowledge, attitudes and practices' (KAP) regarding intimate sexual behaviors present numerous problems regarding respondent bias and interpretive limitations (Catania, et al. 1990; Schopper, et al. 1993; Smith 1993), yet for many programs in AIDS prevention, they continue to be the only source of information concerning people's sexual behavior. We may know more about specific sexual practices at a certain point in time, but the significance of these activities is concealed within a rich collection of social conventions and personal idiosyncrasies that cannot be discerned through surveys or focus group discussions (Laumann and Gagnon 1995; Linder 2001; Lyttleton 2000; Weitman 1998). Efforts to find out more about the exchange of body fluids tend to overlook the processual aspects of human sexual behavior, so that other features of the relationships (emotions, histories, etc.) and the myriad events leading up to coitus remain obscured. Moreover, sex is a social practice that involves a number of stakeholders who have an interest in the sexual activities of others, so parents, friends, co-workers, and government officials all have a role in promoting and maintaining particular intimate arrangements to further their own goals. Despite the importance of

these social institutions and political ideologies in the construction of human sexuality, research remains focused on the individual as the unit of investigation.

It is also necessary to consider the inter-personal encounter in conducting face-to-face interviews or surveys due to the sensitive nature of people's intimate revelations in the process of social inquiry. Even within the go-go bars of Angeles and Makati – where talk of sex is commonplace – many people are reticent in discussing the specifics of their erotic desires and sexual activities. Patience is important in obtaining a more accurate representation in this setting, and it is essential that researchers abide by local customs related to the communicative encounter. Sharing intimate information in the go-go bars often requires that I purchase drinks for women and men,[11] just as most of my discussions with people in the rural villages involve the consumption of food and alcohol as a matter of customary hospitality and courtesy. Fostering trust through long-term involvement in people's lives helps, as does crosschecking statements and observations with other people. Structuring 'interviews' in this type of research also entails dispensing information: answering questions they may have concerning AIDS or providing my opinions on issues that concern them (relationships, contraception, etc.). Furthermore, the intimate nature of these conversations involves revealing some personal details about myself as part of the effort to diminish the social distance between interviewer and interviewee as well as providing a basis for recognizing the commonalities of our fears, desires, and sexual experiences that adds to our intersubjective understanding of meanings and behaviors in this setting.

Even after investing considerable time and effort into such a project, individuals still manufacture identities, distort events, and manipulate relationships to suit their own desires in the go-go bar. I am often asked how I distinguish between people's lies and the truth during the research process, and I always respond that I am not necessarily interested in 'the truth' because there is no single representation of prostitution that could

[11] Buying drinks for men is simply a common form of exchange demonstrating camaraderie, but in the case of women, my purchase of 'lady's drinks' provides them with income through the commissions they receive, and also augments their status as 'good employees' who bring in revenue for the establishment.

possibly account for the many disparate perceptions and experiences encountered in this complex social environment (see Fechner 1994). In many cases, the overstatement or fabrication of events reveals other 'truths' that are just as important to reconstructing relevant relationships and ideologies, thus uncovering aspects of human behavior and social structures that would otherwise remain hidden. For example, women working along Fields and P. Burgos understand that they can earn more money if they present themselves in a manner that elicits sympathy from customers. *Kawawa* ('pitiful') stories employ the common bar identities of 'struggling student' or 'dutiful daughter' by relating to the customer the difficulties of paying for tuition or supporting numerous siblings, respectively. Yet few women who portray themselves as students actually attend school, and while many women may want to send money home to families, very little income finds its way to relatives in the provinces (see also Fuwa 1999).

This does not mean that these and other similarly voiced falsehoods and exaggerations are not salient to the analysis of the go-go bar. Performances of socially acceptable personae reveal how women want to present themselves and be viewed by others to avoid the stigmatizing identities associated with prostitution (Cook 1998; Goffman 1959; 1963b). This is accomplished through the embodiment of ideas that position 'the prostitute' as someone who is subjected to various social, economic and political considerations, thus distancing themselves from responsibility for actions that are socially unpalatable.

Just as women in the sex industry know that they should wear condoms to appease the health officials, so too do they recognize the importance of subscribing to feminine ideals to divert attention and blame for their circumstances onto customers, government officials, and kin. Filipinas are not supposed to seek sexual satisfaction, put their own pecuniary interests before those of their families, or choose to work in the go-go bars – but many of them do, nonetheless. In an effort to affirm their own virtuous character, they present themselves as 'good Filipinas' who are following the prevailing dictates of filial piety in addressing the desires of others by working in these settings. Depending on one's vantage of the situation, such performances assume the guise of

reality because they are acceptable within the dominant framework of disempowerment that has been established for women who are often described as being prostituted by forces beyond their control.

These 'mythologies' of female sacrifice and victimization reveal the ideological context in which middle-class morality achieves and maintains its hegemonic position as a supposedly 'natural' representation of society and shared values (Barthes 1957). Statements that run counter to these fundamental readings of 'prostituted women' are thus obscured or rendered 'false' in mainstream discourses because they are incomprehensible according to the patriarchal leanings of observers who wish to problematize those desires that stray beyond the boundaries of what has been designated as proper Filipino femininity. The researcher (or interested activist / observer) navigating this setting according to notions of objective empiricism is thus in an untenable position because s/he can only observe what people want him or her to see. If the subjects are unsure of the motivations and methods informing the study, then their presentation will be skewed toward those ideas and images that comply with the dominant paradigms. Like the customer looking for a pleasurable experience, the person conducting research or scrutinizing the behavior of others is always in a position to find exactly what s/he desires as well.

In analyzing the various discourses (moral, romantic, patriarchal, resistant, etc.), the diversity of perspectives not only reveals the viewpoints of men and women in this setting, but also the complexity of experiences for those who are involved in these activities and relationships. The customers and GROs I work with all express ambivalent feelings regarding what takes place within the go-go bars, and few people I encountered in this setting could be neatly categorized according to their sociopolitical views on this topic. Women who are very articulate in their concerns about the political economy of gender relations in the Philippines will break away from serious discussion to mention how cute the guy is at the next table or to describe a night of drinking and debauchery. Male patrons similarly vacillate between the expected performances of masculine sexual domination and their apprehension over the boorish activities of fellow customers. I

always give manuscripts to those customers who seem interested in my research, hoping to receive some feedback regarding the 'facts' as I re-presented them as well as stimulating further discussion. When I have subsequently asked them what they thought of my account, almost all respond with a discernable degree of discomfort:

> I really liked what you wrote, but it wasn't what I expected. I was actually embarrassed by it because I saw myself in your story, and it wasn't a pretty picture. (visiting Australian businessman in Makati)

Female employees express similar reticence upon reading what I have written about them. They are taken aback by the blunt portrayal and language I use to describe their activities – a few of the women see this as an act of betrayal (Visweswaran 1994) because I have exposed their 'true' motivations, and called into question the veracity of their staged performances and identities:

> You really know our secrets now (laughs)! How will I make any money if customers read this? Now I have to make another story. If the customers really know who I am and why I am here… then they will not buy me drinks! (receptionist in Makati)

A handful of women avoided me after reading my re-presentations, but most returned with a desire to tell me more about their lives:

> You know I want to say something so that the people understand what this [working in a go-go bar] is like. When I come to work, riding in a *jeepney* or walking on the street, I know people look down on me because they know who I am, but they don't know who I am! They think just because I work in this kind of place that I am [a] bad person, but they don't know me. I wish I could show this paper to other people so they would understand, but I am afraid. Even if they read it, maybe they will not understand. (dancer in Makati)

'Giving voice' to the subjects of social research has become a trendy means to deflect some of the criticism leveled against authors who seemingly impart their own viewpoints concerning the lives of others. Only when they are deemed acceptable by those with the power to define 'agency' do many subject narratives achieve validity (Beverley 1999; Taylor 1993); in this case, social scientists, government officials, feminists and other activists define which accounts are 'representative' and which are aberrations. Ethnographic convention also insists that the subjected other in research is

brought to the forefront in the writing process because the empirical gaze involves the formation of distinctions between 'us' (as anthropologists) and 'them.' But this approach to writing conceals the dialogic aspects of social engagement that are so much a part of research involving sexual subjects and ethnographic inquiry in general (Reger 2001).

The setting of the Philippine go-go bar also presents particular quandaries in both fieldwork and writing because of my position as both a member of the community (in my identity as a regular male customer) and as an outsider (in my identity as an American male ethnographer working with Filipino women). The voice that is presented in ethnographic texts and all writings on prostitution is that of the author, and his or her editorial choices determine which of the subject voices are to be discarded, and thus, ignored. This text is no different from the others in that regard, as there is no possibility for communicating every observation or conversation, and I remain the sole authority in determining what is important in producing this text. Nonetheless, I derive this perspective from the stated views of women and men according to their own political economic perspectives and personal histories. Most of the bars presented herein are still open for business, and those who have a sincere interest in the lives of 'sex workers' and 'customers' would learn more from personal conversations with them than any written account could ever provide. The women and men I worked with have their own voices so there is really no need for me to provide them with an outlet for their expression. What they require – and, in most cases, want – is for more people to listen to what they have to say.

different 'truths' in perspective

Another aspect of ethnographic production that is salient to this discussion involves the extent to which the limited sampling of individual accounts is typical or 'representative' of the community as a whole. Writers on this topic use the labels 'prostitute' and 'sex worker' to cover every situation from a high-class Hollywood escort to a young girl locked away in a back-alley Indian brothel, and without a proper grounding in the local context, it is difficult to discern whether these case studies presented by authors and

activist critics are exceptional individual experiences or reflections of broader conditions for women and men in these varied settings.

'The prostitute' – along with the more recent identities of 'prostituted woman' and 'sex worker' – has emerged as a monolithic and universal symbol that does not necessarily represent the people engaged in these types of socioerotic encounters,[12] but instead, more often reveals the political positioning of those who utilize these images to suit their own purposes. As examples in the ever-changing discursive project to define people and their behavior, these accounts attempt to apply a specific model to every setting in which they can discover and categorize a social arrangement as 'prostitution.' Authors (as supposed 'authorities' on the subject) evoke such imagery with the expressed intent of addressing the problems that women and men categorized as 'prostitutes' face as a result of their marginalization – a noble cause, to be sure, but one that cannot be achieved solely through this process of incorporation.

What is required is a perspective generated from those who are involved in these activities and relationships: an interpretive approach that analyzes their statements and expressions provides a clearer picture of how discrepancies in power are maintained (and resisted), and thus, how these women and men make sense of their circumstances within these particular social arrangements and local cultural systems. Employing the 'thick description' of ethnography (Geertz 1973), the meaning of behavior becomes evident through an examination of shared symbols and values within a community; aspects of a common understanding that reveal the underlying significance of actions and beliefs for those involved in these intimate performances.

The existing literature on the subject almost always incorporates a feminist viewpoint,[13] but there are several divergent streams of thought that fall under the heading of 'feminist,' resulting in considerable conflict among women as the proponents of each

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[12] My use of the term 'socioerotic' follows the example provided by Sasha Weitman (1998) who outlined the similarities between intimate encounters and other forms of everyday social intercourse.

[13] Accounts of go-go bars that emphasize a 'masculine' perspective are generally (dis)regarded as travel accounts or sexual biographies that are written to titillate a male audience through descriptions of sexual escapades.

side strive to promote their own version of 'the truth' regarding the relationships which develop within the spaces of the street corner, brothel, or go-go bar.[14] The 'radical' position emphasizes the primacy of sexual difference in patriarchal domination, and that the sexual exploitation involved in prostitution mirrors the subordination that all women experience within heterosexual relationships. 'Socialist' or 'materialist' criticism focuses on prostitution as an element of the sexual division of labor, approaching the issue from the standpoint of class domination and the political economy of capitalist production. 'Liberal' feminists view prostitution as simply another occupational choice (hence the label 'sex worker'). This particular perspective emerges from the idea that differences between men and women are based on social and political considerations, and that restricting women's choices when it comes to how they use their body is an extension of the biological essentialism that subordinates women.

These different viewpoints are often posited as comprising discrete and contrasting perspectives, but there is considerable overlap in their positions: all oppose the essentialist rhetoric that distinguishes women from men; 'socialists' and 'liberals' often agree that prostitution should be considered a valid form of labor; 'radicals' and 'socialists' also deploy discourses of neo-colonialism and globalization in discussing the problems of transnational prostitution. Each representation is truthful in that they all formulate logical arguments with examples from life histories of women to support their views, but none can be considered 'the' truth when it comes to addressing every woman identified as a prostitute. As Holly Fechner points out, "[t]he relevant question is not which theory is the truth… but rather which, if any, represents most closely the experiences of women in prostitution in a particular time and place" (1994: 63). Studies that utilize ethnographic (Ankomah 1999; Hart 1998; Helle-Valle 1999; Nencel 2001) and historical perspectives (Findlay 1999; White 1990) show the futility of trying to collate these disparate experiences under a single heading of 'prostitution.' Additionally,

[14] This paragraph is intended simply to present a brief overview of the three main viewpoints espoused by feminists, as there are numerous books and articles that compare different sides of the argument in greater detail (Aguilar 2000; Fechner 1994; Jenness 1993; Marshall 1999; O'Connell Davidson 2002; Overall 1992; Shrage 1994; Zatz 1997).

the diversity of these stigmatized sexual spaces is related to local circumstances, and the settings encountered within the Philippines are no different in that regard. Every change in political leadership results in a different level of policing according to the views of the person(s) in charge (see Chapter 3), and the fortunes and tribulations of women working in along Burgos and Fields are dependent on so many variables (tourist arrivals, foreign investment, sociocultural structures, migration and labor policies, etc.) that it is altogether impossible to correlate the interactions from these locations to similarly labeled activities elsewhere.

By outlining many of my own desires that have gone into the production of this text, I am conscious of the fact that I am trying to evoke some critical reflection in those who read this work. I had originally set out to write a manuscript that would not offend readers' sensibilities by being too pornographic in its depiction of the people and their actions, but I now realize that such an approach is impossible according to the *OED* definition of pornography. Everyone has some idea what 'prostitution' entails, and most observers have strong feelings regarding the activities that are covered by such a vivid term. Indeed, many people find the idea of prostitution and its associated imagery to be 'obscene' in its very public representation of a transgressive human sexuality that does not conform to the governing model of the monogamous heterosexual couple idealized in marriage.

This ethnographic 'pornography' is neither a liberal polemic on the virtues of Philippine go-go bars, nor is it a response to the numerous political feminist tracts that have uncritically problematized these venues and the resulting relationships between women and men.[15] Instead, I want it to serve as an 'incitement to discourse' (Foucault 1978): a text that stirs emotions and thoughts within the reader regarding this poorly-understood social labeling of human sexual interaction that is evident in every culture and in every country. I hope to accomplish this by revealing the intricacies and

[15] While I have made every attempt to avoid leaning one way or another along the political spectrum, in the final analysis, both viewpoints – the liberal view of individual freedoms and the perception of structures of domination – emerge as salient concerns for

contradictions with regard to the diverse manners in which women and men experience and express desire through these particular venues of commercialized sexual activity. In compiling numerous observations and events from the past eight years, I use broad strokes to paint a picture of what is commonly referred to as 'prostitution' – much of the information that is partitioned into discrete chapters deserves more extensive treatment than space allows. This is not intended to be the last word on the subject, as there remains no possibility for producing an incontrovertible 'truth' on the matter. What I am presenting here is an impassioned description of a small segment of the global sex industry that adds to our comprehension of the diversity of experiences in human intimacy by describing the interweaving of social institutions and individual desires in these socioerotic encounters.

outline of text

The compilation of this ethnography is designed to provide the reader with an understanding of how people who are considered 'normal' in other social settings use the go-go bar to construct meanings and identities that appear to deviate from cultural norms. To do so requires an approach to writing that mimics the experience of entering these venues, watching and evaluating the various performances, and engaging in socioerotic interaction with other people. Therefore, I have chosen to organize this account from the perspective of someone who is navigating the physical and social realm of the go-go bar so that the reader can chart the experiential progression of customers and employees who spend time in these establishments.

I have also included examples from Philippine news media (print and television) as representations of official and middle-class attitudes concerning the go-go bars and other instances of 'prostitution.'[16] Everyone involved in these discussions must wrestle

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all those who are associated in one way or another with the go-go bars of Angeles and Makati.

[16] 'Official' representations espousing the government's positions are found in the regular news stories, while middle-class views are encountered more often in letters to the editor or television talk shows. I say 'middle-class' because lower class Filipinos do not have equal access to the media – the authors of most letters to newspapers live in

with competing ideas regarding the political economy of labor and leisure, the difficulties of interpreting fantasy and reality in go-go bar performances, and the inconsistencies associated with personal consumption and social responsibility. A comparison of these various discourses reveals the complexity of social scripts that inform the interactive dynamic as participants attempt to reconcile these conflicting perspectives within the go-go bar.

Whereas in this initial chapter I have described the ethnographic processes related to this study, in Chapter 2 I provide an historical background and discursive context for go-go bars in the Philippines. In challenging the construction of 'prostitution' as it is applied to this setting, it is necessary to explore the term in greater detail along with the effects labeling has on those who are identified as 'prostitutes' or 'sex workers.' The struggles over the use of these labels are indicative of the ways various interested parties assert their own desires through the formation of discrete status groups that enable those in power to distinguish themselves according to the moral, political, and medical discourses concerning sexuality. Coupled with these 'official' pronouncements are popular media representations of women as objects of sexual desire in the Philippines that also inform local ideas of sexuality and femininity. Within such a framework of gendered imagery and discourse, the activities of women in go-go bar achieve legitimacy as simply another form of sexual entertainment for the viewing public. I then explore the practice of consumption as it relates to 'sex work' in an emergent, late-capitalist society where the correlation between modernity, democracy, and the consumption of goods and services influences how people construct their selves through the appropriation and display of particular fashions, technologies and performances. Thus, the desire associated with 'being' and 'becoming' a certain type of person helps us understand individual intentions and relations of power according to those images and ideas that have garnered symbolic 'value' within this cultural / economic setting.

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middle class neighborhoods, or serve as spokespersons for non-government organizations.

The body of the ethnography (comprising Chapters 3 through 5) serves as a narrative of these negotiated practices involving an assortment of desires within the go-go bar. From the time the individual decides to go into this venue until he or she leaves, there is a constant process of transgression and transformation involving a determination of how one wants to be identified and then constructing a suitable character and performance. Yet even before an individual enters these establishments, s/he is responsive to the presence of such places in his or her conceptualization of the metropolis as a space in which to intimately interact with other strangers. In Chapter 3, I describe how the go-go bar is positioned physically and conceptually within the city. The establishment of these bounded spaces within the urban landscape results in distinctive physical and economic structures that identify venues for sexual performance so that the government can observe and manage these interactions. I then provide a basic layout of these venues and discuss the organization of labor according to a basic capitalist model that informs management practices and relations with employees.

Once a person has accounted for his or her positioning within this sexual / spatial configuration, s/he then becomes concerned with the activities of other individuals, watching their performances while being acutely aware of his or her own competency in providing a recognizable and acceptable presentation of the preferred character for that particular social occasion. This dialogical process of interaction in the go-go bar is presented in Chapter 4. Rather than focusing solely on the intimate transactions between women and men within a purely sexual framework, it is also necessary to examine how they interact as customers, employers and employees in the symbolic economy of late-capitalism where the ideology of consumption influences other structures and relations. I also illustrate how people use various dramaturgical strategies to satisfy desires that often differ markedly, but require interaction between various parties nonetheless. It is the negotiation of these desires (for personal fulfillment and social acceptance) that calls for the staging of certain sexual roles that match the expectations of audience members as well as capabilities of the performers in creating a credible persona. Achieving one's goals in this setting involves the continuous modification of his or her character and

presentation as people move from 'performer' to 'audience' (and back again), employing the cooperation of others in the development of sexual / material fantasies. Insofar as these rituals project some semblance of 'reality' through the performative competency of all the participants, they enable these actors to transcend – and even transform – the symbolic and social environment that at first glance appears to constrain agency through the repetition and reproduction of hegemonic (hetero)sexual practices and identities.[17]

People may then decide how – or if – they want to pursue a relationship according to the information they derive from these brief encounters, and so sexual intimacy in the go-go bar is the subject of Chapter 5. First and foremost, it is important to define the parameters and potentialities of these encounters: How do people define 'sex'? What are some of the other means people use to realize erotic agency and personal desires in this setting? What are the expectations involved in the different types of relationships? Ethnographic accounts provide a glimpse into the ways in which men and women struggle with the prevailing ideologies of (hetero)sexuality while engaging in various pleasurable experiences that do not always conform to the supposed ideal represented in the (re)productive coital coupling of bodies. It is this ability to deviate from the expected performances of modern sexuality that enables people in this setting to form a variety of relationships that reflect individual desires to a greater extent than would otherwise be possible in other social settings. Women and men can thus form relationships to their liking, and in the process change their identities to something that is more socially acceptable: from 'customer' to 'boyfriend,' or from 'sex worker' to 'wife.' Yet in negotiating these relationships and identities with each other, people in the go-go bar must also contend with a world beyond the doors that is increasingly hostile to any acts that challenge the supposed 'natural' order of sexuality and power.

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[17] My inscription of the term '(hetero)sexual' in this manner signifies how all aspects of human sexuality are defined according to a particular ideology that is primarily focused on male sexuality, incorporating middle-class images of monogamy, conjugality, and patriarchal socioerotic structures. Within this construction, alternative sexual practices (prostitution, homosexuality, etc.) derive their meaning from this 'mainstream' perspective.

In Chapter 6, I conclude this account with an attempt to re-inscribe the seminal identities of 'entertainer' and 'customer' that have shaped societal attitudes and government policies, arguing that these portrayals are largely inaccurate in their representation of women and men in the go-go bars, the activities they pursue, and the relationships they form therein. The diversity of perspectives and performances staged by GROs and go-go bar patrons reveals their attempts to negotiate identities according to the prevailing discourses concerning gender and sexuality as well as their continuing re-evaluation of each other's presentations in this socioerotic setting. Although their practices are generally scripted according to those identities that are most important in late-capitalist society's construction of individual difference (man / woman, customer / employee), considerable effort is expended to open new possibilities through narratives that enable people to adopt different roles – even if only for the brief time they are in the bar.

Chapter 2
Discursive Struggles

> In case any of you readers happens to be a member of the Public, that mysterious organization that rules the world through shadow-terrors, I beg you not to pull censorious strings merely because this book… is partly about that most honest form of love called prostitution – a subject which the righteous might think exhausted with a single thought – or, better yet, no thought at all – but the truth is that there are at least thirteen times as many different sorts of whores as there are members of the Public…
> from *"Butterfly Stories"* (Vollmann 1993: 3)

My principal interests in writing *The Price of Passion* are to 1) challenge the conventional belief that women working along P. Burgos Street and Fields Avenue can be accurately represented by the label 'prostitute,' and 2) to dispel the notion that women who are so labeled are somehow fundamentally different from those women identified as 'good' or 'chaste.' In addressing these pervasive images, it is necessary to consider the interweaving of different aspects of the go-go bar involved in the creation of identities and lifestyles represented in personal presentations and sexual expressions. For example, the political economy of the bar as a workplace informs relations between men and women as customers and employees, respectively, but its concurrent positioning as a site of leisure and fantasy adds a different perspective to these interactions. Practices of consumption are also employed to demonstrate power through the acquisition of goods and incorporation of stylistic behaviors that are supposed to distinguish the subject from the masses. Participants intentionally deploy a variety of performances and identities to satisfy their many desires (sexual, social, emotional, material); the attempts of female go-go bar employees to manipulate public opinion also alleviate some of the stigma they experience.

This analysis requires an evaluation of the label itself and an examination of the socioerotic settings in which it is deployed, for while most of the theorizing and research

regarding prostitution and sexuality in the Philippines has emanated from a Western perspective, the significance of these activities remains embedded in local systems and symbols (Garcia 2000; Manderson 1992). To apply this marker of 'prostitution' and/or 'sex work' and all of their accompanying ideological baggage without considering the convoluted genealogy of the terms and their multiple interpretations results in a distorted view of what actually transpires in these relationships. The various parties also develop their own meanings, policies, and performances in dealing with these encounters according to their construction of persons and spaces.

The modern (Western) definition identifies the prostitute as someone who exchanges sexual services for material gain (Marshall 1999). This is further reinforced by the recent use of the term 'sex worker,' which highlights the notion of remuneration within this occupational context. 'Prostitute' as a verb carries a wider meaning regarding the sale of "one's honor" or to use "one's abilities for infamous use" (Pheterson 1996: 37), and this meaning is usually conflated with the noun to form the basis for popular opinions regarding prostitutes. Women who sell sexual services in such a manner are viewed as abrogating their dignity, and, more importantly, the honor of their families and the paternal state. The origins of the term 'prostitute' also emphasize the immorality of female sexual expression, as demonstrated in these definitions from the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

> Offered or exposed to lust (as a woman), prostituted; …abandoned to sensual indulgence, licentious;
> A woman who is devoted, or (usually) who offers her body to indiscriminate sexual intercourse, esp[ecially] for hire;

Similar representations are also evident in Philippine surveillance and policing activities, where laws as well as customary practices of masculine domination limit women's mobility and behaviors in public. For example, the Philippine Criminal Code (Article 202) defines prostitutes as "women who, for money or profit, habitually indulge in sexual intercourse or lascivious conduct." There is no mention of men as 'prostitutes.'

Perhaps the most common view of 'the prostitute' in the popular imagination involves those who work in settings where they have no job other than satisfying clients

through sexual intercourse, such as those women who work in brothels or as 'freelancers' on the streets. These vocations are considered form of 'direct prostitution,' and are usually associated with the Euroamerican model for the sale of sexual services. In other sex-work settings (go-go bars, massage parlors and karaoke lounges), prostitution is described as 'indirect' because employees have a primary occupational activity that does not involve the sale or exchange of sexual services. Waitresses, massage attendants, singers, and GROs may also engage in sexual relations with customers, but their first order of business involves providing other services to the clientele.[18] In many cases, arrangements for sex are conducted with the knowledge of company owners / managers as well as the local government, but may be portrayed as a clandestine activity to divert responsibility and blame.

Go-go bars occupy a special place in the sexual landscape of the Philippines because of the mythology surrounding the activities that occur within these establishments and their resulting socio-political visibility. The predominant view of these venues is that they serve as 'fronts' for prostitution, and because they are linked to those activities, they are a legitimate target for protests by women's advocacy groups as well as police actions conducted by the state. Yet these nightclubs legally fall under the guidelines of 'entertainment' for purposes of regulating and profiting from women's sexual labor. The Philippine National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB) has an official category within the service sector for "escort, hostess, and hospitality girl" that identifies women involved in activities such as

- accompanying clients to restaurants and other outings;
- acting as a dancing partner;
- welcoming clients to a night club and ensuring they are entertained well

(National Statistical Coordination Board 1992, section 5, p. 10)

The 'entertainer' (or GRO) is thus defined as a legitimate profession according to Philippine law, although because the term has become synonymous with 'prostitute' it is not a vocation to which women aspire. 'Prostitution' in the Philippines is illegal, but

[18] Escorts who work for particular hotels or on call from an agency also ostensibly provide services other than sexual intercourse (companionship, tour guide).

'entertainment,' as it is ambiguously defined by the state, is not. Where the issue becomes particularly confusing – if not outright contradictory – is in the government's monitoring of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among employees in this occupational setting. This amounts to a tacit acceptance of sexual interactions that are illicit are still taking place, and so they government steps in to ensure that these infectious diseases do not spread to the 'general population.' Through this recognition and other forms of surveillance by the state, society has come to accept these relations involving the exchange of sex for goods because they are merely extensions of the sanctioned sexual roles involving women.[19]

The vast array of erotic offerings and environments within the global sex industry also make it more difficult to generalize when constructing a theoretical perspective for this unique locale. Go-go bars in the Philippines are often identified with prostitution because some female employees do engage in genital coitus with men solely for financial remuneration, but few of the encounters within these establishments lead to this specific form of intercourse. Meanwhile, the emphasis on aural and visual stimulation in this setting is similar to that of topless bars in the U.S. (Frank 2002; Liepe-Levinson 2002), but the potential for expanding or transforming the employee-customer relationship in Philippine clubs means that these examples are also of limited utility in explaining the activities and motivational desires of actors. In formulating an interpretive approach to these spaces and relations, I draw from varied examples of sexual commerce encompassing an assortment of erotic possibilities because the people who participate in these discourses – as critics or actors – also use a diverse range of sexual images to develop their own opinions and performances.

What follows in this chapter is a discussion of the various ideologies and discourses regarding sexual 'deviance' (versus 'normal' feminine and masculine behaviors) that people deploy to control the practices of others. I begin with a review of

[19] The literature now also acknowledges the presence of male prostitutes, although the notion of deviance is then couched in terms of their identification with 'homosexual' activities rather than an idea of male sexual promiscuity (which is rarely considered deviant behavior in and of itself).

the numerous efforts to control the discourse of 'prostitution' / 'sex work' (as well as the people involved in these activities) through the formulation of discrete labels and identities. Gail Pheterson's (1996) analysis of the 'whore stigma' is particularly relevant to this discussion as it links the paternal state's efforts to control prostitution to the project of maintaining sexual domination over all citizens. I then provide a contextual basis for these gendered / racial encounters through a brief history of sexual relations between foreign men and women in Southeast Asia, followed by an assessment of the various representations of femininity and masculinity in the media that serve as guiding scripts for proper gendered comportment. It is through this essentialist imagery of human sexuality – disseminated through textbooks, news outlets, and entertainment media – that the go-go bar achieves a level of social acceptability within Philippine culture.

In the final part of this chapter, I offer a theoretical framework for understanding the practices of men and women in the go-go bars of Makati and Angeles, where consumption – broadly defined as a social practice wherein people incorporate images, ideas, and material goods into their identities and performances – forms the basis of my interpretations. The (post)modern 'culture of consumption,' provides a fertile background in which to discuss the process of situating the individual subject within a complex amalgamation of discourses that attempt to separate work from leisure, fantasy from reality, and self from other. A crucial element in the formation of identities within this system of symbols and meanings involves the mediation of desire, where one's personal longings are often pitted against notions of social responsibility and 'traditional values' that inform individual expressions through an awareness of others' desires. The dialogical process of developing an individual identity through social interaction is all the more apparent in the liminal setting of the go-go bar where structural distinctions are not as well defined and socioerotic scripts are not as rigidly enforced, and so people are engaging in leisure activities while also conducting business or trying to construct their fantasies into some sort of narrative 'reality' that addresses their desires. What emerges within this chapter and throughout the text is an analysis of these interwoven cultural systems that influence the sexual activities of both women and men that, in turn, are

reflected in our constructions of and attitudes toward those who are labeled 'entertainers' and 'sex tourists.'

re-presentation and domination

Sexual encounters that fall under the heading of 'prostitution' attain some semblance of authenticity (or 'reality') through the fabrication of various images and attendant social meanings according to the dominant discourses concerning gender and sexuality. There are many factors to consider when discussing the interactions between men and women in the Philippine go-go bars, and each aspect of these complex relations entails some negotiated agreement regarding their significance. It is for this reason that I describe this ethnographic effort as a *re*-presentation involving multiple narratives of experience rather than a single, homogenous 'representation' that portrays the go-go bar and its denizens according to a specific point of view. In addressing the multiple misconceptions commonly associated with go-go bars in Makati and Angeles, it is imperative to examine the development of these representative images and discourses that have come to symbolize 'deviance' or 'immorality' for the women and men involved in this specific form of socioerotic interaction. Before exploring the public discussions associated with the labeling of 'prostitutes' in greater detail, it is necessary to present a broader view of the emergence of (hetero)sexual discourses as they pertain to the promotion of ideas about local values that inform our understanding of these relationships.

One of the principle means of governing sexual performances in society involves establishing normative ideas that designate appropriate times and places for socioerotic conduct. Various discourses concerning intimate activities and relationships influence our behaviors by situating erotic desires within a foundation of cultural values and morality that are supposed to serve as a guide for proper human behavior (Hunt 1999; Seidman 1991). For example, the prevailing ideology of 'compulsory heterosexuality' that emphasizes the essentialist ideologies of masculine vigor / feminine passivity and conjugal monogamy through marriage is deployed around the world by governments that develop local institutions (religious, educational, economic, security) to instill this model

of sexual behavior among their citizens (Rich 1980). Sexual desires are thus, ideally, restricted to the 'private' space of the family domicile, or, in absence of a family, to the proper settings identified with leisure.[20] Within this ideological 'matrix' of heterosexuality (Butler 1990), the 'red-light district' that has become a ubiquitous feature of the urban scenery is but another element in the continuing compartmentalization of desires according to the negotiated processes between individuals, society and state where political and economic considerations also involve deliberations on matters of sexuality. Hence, the ability for people to articulate their erotic desires is severely restricted by a system that endorses particular social and geographic boundaries for gendered performances and by public pronouncements that stigmatize those who engage in inappropriate behavior beyond these given limitations.[21]

Lorraine Nencel (2001) calls these ideological boundaries 'gendered enclosures,' constructed through discourses and policies that limit women's movements by repeating the same essentialized misconceptions regarding female sexuality. Thus, a 'natural' representation of female sexual desire (or, rather, lack thereof) is put forward as factual, and this notion of a 'traditional,' passive female sexuality then becomes the model that all women are supposed to embody. Those who transgress these discursive boundaries or enclosures risk stigmatization, violence and incarceration because they are labeled 'immoral' or 'criminal' for refusing to uphold a specific ideal. Moreover, since women

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[20] 'Leisure,' in this instance, applies to a broad assemblage of performances related to non-productive activities. The emergence of the 'separate spheres' ideology occurred in conjunction with the Industrial Revolution that ushered in a transformation in labor and living arrangements (see below). A re-conceptualization of domestic life accompanied similar appraisals of work so that the two 'spheres' were seen as complementary elements of a functioning capitalist system. To cope with the increasing migration of men to urban areas, prostitution emerged as a 'necessary evil' in providing domestic services such as cooking, care, as well as sex. Luise White's (1990) eloquent discussion of colonial policies and cultural practices in Nairobi, Kenya provides a comprehensive account of a system that encompassed the related issues of gender, labor, mobility, and sexuality – elements of which persist to this day in many different settings.

[21] In his discussion of urban sexual geographies, Phil Hubbard shows how "the moral terrain of sexuality is not simply shaped by a dominative power of control and exclusion, but takes shape through a more complex spatiality of power, desire and disgust which *encourages* people to adopt specific heterosexual identities" (1998: 61, emphasis his).

lack agency (as suggested by this discursive framework), there is a tendency to rationalize conduct that deviates from the expected norm by referring to political and economic aspects that are seemingly beyond their control. In constructing this imagery of female vulnerability, the state projects itself as the protector of virtue, ensuring its paternal authority over the sexual lives of the citizenry.

Sexual expression outside of these spatial and conceptual boundaries is, in almost every country, frowned upon (in instances of pre-marital sex), if not outright illegal (in instances of adultery and homosexuality). Yet one does not have to be actually engaging in illicit forms of sexual contact to be subjected to extreme violence and control. Same-sex couples walking hand in hand down the street are subject to harassment in many communities because of what this demonstration of intimacy symbolizes to an unknowing gaze. The identities and histories shared within the union, the actual manners in which they demonstrate their feelings to each other, and implications of the relationship between the two individuals are of no consequence to those who would judge such gestures between persons according to some imagined activity that evokes disgust and hatred in some casual onlookers. Sexuality is no longer a 'private' matter between consenting adults. It has become an embodied element of our personal identities, often presented for all to see and experience as socioerotic beings.

The dominant ideas that inform our behaviors are neither fixed nor universally shared by those within a community. Instead, the discursive formations (or 'structures') that are usually portrayed as 'forces' governing human actions are in fact simply guidelines that people in power invoke to preserve their sociopolitical status. Religious leaders, government officials and advertising executives for multinational companies all want us to follow their examples so that they can gain capital (political as well as economic) and the power they derive from such influence. Yet every person is involved in the creation and maintenance of these structures, and as agents, we decide when to follow the dictates of what has been presented to us and also when to resist the pressure of conformity, often generating opposing counter-discourses in the process. Within the venues where I conducted this study, there were numerous instances where individuals

used normative ideas to explain actions that deviate from social acceptability; at other times persons would express views that distorted or completely discounted the prevailing ideas regarding their attitudes or conduct. Discourses and representative imagery achieve authoritative status within the local culture through the vocal assertions of people who wish to impose their ideas on others. However, as it will become evident throughout this ethnography, such efforts do not necessarily result in the manifestation of shared values among community members, and therefore any account that purports to reveal the 'real' conditions or sentiment concerning the situation of 'prostitution' and other activities in the go-go bars should be viewed with caution.

representation through discourse: sexuality and morality

The dominant discourses of sexuality that have emerged in modern times do not repress erotic desire through silence, but rather attempt to manage human passions and behaviors through the explicit voicing of all matters concerning sex.[22] However, these utterances of sexual activities and emotions are supposed to occur in a controlled setting, involving 'experts' who can then use this information to dispense advice or otherwise guide people's sexual desires by incorporating this knowledge within an ideological framework of social norms:

> …[A]fter all, the Christian pastoral also sought to produce specific effects on desire, by the mere fact of transforming it – fully and deliberately – into discourse: effects of mastery and detachment to be sure, but also an effect of spiritual reconversion, of turning back to God, a physical effect of blissful suffering from feelings in one's body the pangs of temptation and the love that resists it. This is the essential thing: that Western man has been drawn for three centuries to the task of telling everything concerning his sex; that since the classical age there has been a constant optimization and an increasing valorization of the discourse on sex; and that this careful analytical discourse was meant to yield multiple effects of displacement, intensification, reorientation, and modification of desire itself. Not only were the boundaries of what one could hear and say about sex enlarged, and men compelled to hear it said; but more

[22] One ironic example of how sexual discourse works involves the vocal protests against 'pornography' in the Philippines: through their public outcry against sexual imagery, conservative voices actually increase the consumption of these materials by publicizing their presence and content.

> important, discourse was connected to sex by a complex organization with varying effects, by a deployment that cannot be adequately explained merely by referring it to a law of prohibition. A censorship for sex? There was installed an apparatus for producing an even greater quantity of discourse about sex, capable of functioning and taking effect in its very economy (Foucault 1978: 22).

This 'confessional' atmosphere achieved greater currency after the Enlightenment in the form of scientific rationality and methodology.[23] Researchers, physicians and law enforcement personnel employ interrogative techniques to extract personal accounts of activities and desires to further the state's administrative power over 'private' sexual lives that had become a 'public' concern for reasons of health and security. Statements are recorded and actions observed to form an empirical basis for the creation of standards that are then used to identify differences in attitudes and behaviors for the purpose of correcting deviance. Thus, the open discussions and performances of sexuality that have accompanied the increasing movement of people to urban centers allow people to fulfill their voyeuristic desires in these anonymous settings, and yet it is also these dialogues and displays that enable us to police each other and ourselves in the most brutal fashion.

> [D]iscourses about the human body have a privileged role, for transcodings between different levels and sectors of social and psychic reality are effected through the intensifying grid of the body. It is no accident, then, that transgressions and the attempt to control them obsessively return to somatic symbols, for these are the ultimate elements of classification itself (Stallybrass and White 1986: 26).

In this manner, moral and legal boundaries have been established between 'us' and 'them,' structuring the social order around identities that are applied according to the assumed innate differences in people who are assigned labels of deviance because of particular forms of sexual expression. For example, the seventeenth-century definition of

[23] It is important to note that 'science' and 'rationality' have long been the perceived domains of masculine thought, as male physicians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries attempted to understand the 'nature' of women through the unveiling of the female body according to empirical methods. Despite the best attempts to represent such analyses as objective in the tradition of 'science,' many of the studies have been informed by sociopolitical concerns over gender and sexuality (Jordanova 1989), striving to support what many had already assumed to be factual.

pornography cited at the beginning of Chapter 1 had very little to do with nudity or other visual representations associated with the term's current connotation. Instead, it was the presence of women in public spaces that was deemed 'obscene' and 'unchaste.' Any woman walking the streets at night without a male relative to accompany her was considered a prostitute and subject to harassment or arrest in much the same manner as the law against 'vagrancy' is applied in the Philippines today (see below).

Before the advent of photography and other technologies of visual reproduction, the only way women were visible as objects of sexual desire was when they ventured beyond the home. The movement of people beyond the domestic domain began when industrialization and other changes in the capitalist systems of production brought city-dwelling men out of their household workshops and into factories and the streets (Bocock 1993; Ross and Rapp 1981). Women subsequently followed men into these spaces of social interaction: first as consumers using male wages to buy goods, and then as productive laborers themselves. Alan Hunt's (1999) work on the history of moral regulation reveals how these changes in mobility altered the social landscape, resulting in a critical examination of sexual differences between men and women:

> The attempt to understand sex and the sexual body was always a commentary upon a wider set of social problems that came into sharper relief. It is useful to emphasi[z]e how large a part was played by the imagined natural relation between the sexes found in a natural sexual division of labor that was increasingly being disrupted by the transformations that may for convenience be grouped around the image of the Industrial Revolution, of urbanism, industry, consumption and domesticity – the whole stirred by a profound sense of the disruptions set in motion by an accelerating pace of technical and social change (pp. 90-91).

Concerns over the perceived moral decline of the urban population led to the construction of gendered 'separate spheres' as an element of moral reform. This involved the discursive organization of the 'public' male realm of work (as well as particular forms of leisure) and the 'private' world of female domesticity – an ideological formation that is still widely accepted in academic as well as popular discussions concerning the 'nature'

of men and women.[24] Ironically, the 'private' achieves its prominence within this discourse through explicit public disclosure of what takes place behind closed doors, and the resulting pronouncements that condemn activities which are regarded as unacceptable while promoting an vision of what ought to be (Chase and Levenson 2000; Ross and Rapp 1981). Women who ventured into public spaces "constituted both a threat to male power and a temptation to male 'frailty'" (Wilson 2001: 74), but concerned officials could not forcibly prevent women from leaving the household. Instead, they devised and promoted an ideal bourgeois image of the home, portraying it as a protective refuge from the depravity of city streets (Stallybrass and White 1986).

'Proper' women from the burgeoning middle class – or, perhaps more importantly, those women who want to pass as middle class – are thus given a special place within the urban setting as well as a means to distinguish themselves from the 'immoral' other in what many have come to represent as the 'Madonna / whore dichotomy.' Another part of the female domestic disposition involves characterizing women as possessing "more developed emotional and moral sensibilities" (Hunt 1999: 95), providing them with the opportunity to partake in political life through their contribution to discourses and policies that target the sexual activities of men and 'fallen' women.

Through this discursive construction of feminine domesticity, women have been accorded some political power, but only as long as they subscribe to this imagery and perform a certain role within the space that has been assigned to them. However, from a feminist viewpoint, this positioning of women as the moral gatekeepers of society also has its drawbacks because it is part of a complex symbolic and cosmological system that

[24] While the idea of 'separate spheres' as an inevitable (or 'natural') distinction between men and women has been discounted (Rosaldo 1980), it remains a potent discourse in explaining the apparent universality of masculine domination (Bourdieu 2001; Comaroff 1987; Ortner 1996), and it also serves as a model for describing the apparent gendered complementarity in Southeast Asian cultures (see text below). Thus, the concept continues to hold sway in the dialogues concerning the relations between men and women not because the public / private distinctions are 'facts' of male / female difference, but because people have been influenced to accept these as preordained traits associated with gender and sexuality.

structures and legitimates gendered differences to enhance masculine domination (Bourdieu 2001).

The portrayal of women as morally superior (or 'pure') is usually associated with the notion that women are innocent and naïve when it comes to matters of sex. Acknowledged as being closer to nature by virtue of their role in reproduction, women have been depicted as possessing an innate sexuality (Jordanova 1989), and since women are guided by their passions they lack the ability to 'reason' and are unable to contend with the masculine realm beyond their prescribed domestic sphere (Jackson and Scott 1997; Peletz 1996; Seidler 1987). This reading of 'nature' also plays a part in the gendering of sexuality, whereby men are accorded an 'active' function in matters of sexual expression, while women must play a 'passive' role when it comes to sex. Through such logic, women have become subordinate to men in matters of sexual intimacy: in many cultures, female sexual expression is only realized in her status as a wife, and even then she is dependent on the yearnings of her husband. As unwed daughters or sisters, women require the protection of male relatives to prevent them from engaging in sexual relations until the husband assumes guardianship. The nineteenth-century representation of prostitution as 'white slavery' followed this paternal rationale in the construction of young women as victims who were unable to make their own decisions when it came to movement beyond the physical and social boundaries of the family. Similar discourses of female vulnerability are again at work in contemporary discussions of prostitution, 'trafficking,' and 'mail-order brides,' where women are represented as lacking adequate knowledge when it comes to finding a job, negotiating urban and transnational spaces, or establishing intimate relationships with men (Doezema 1998; 2001; Murray 1998).

Additional boundaries are erected with regard to gender because sexuality in many societies is represented as a double standard: men are allowed to have premarital and extramarital sexual relations, yet women are expected to be virgins before marriage and then faithful housewives. The Madonna / whore duality used to categorize women according to sexual expression emerges from this ideology that locates 'normal'

femininity within the domestic roles of wife and mother. Male sexuality is one of privilege because he is allowed to have multiple partners, and sex with his wife is for *his* satisfaction – an expression of desire on her part would be viewed with suspicion of infidelity, or an immoral lustfulness that is beyond cultural acceptability (de Zalduondo and Bernard 1995). Additionally, she is supposed to be tolerant of her husband's wanderings because "this is a part of *kahinaan ng isang lalake* ('male weakness') and of the painful experience of married life" (Andres 1987: 7). She is not supposed to enjoy sex or declare a yearning for it because she will not be following what Philippine society has presented as a model for proper sexual behavior for women.

Women and men who venture through the doors of go-go bars and other establishments designed to regulate certain forms of intimate contact are keenly aware of the many normalizing pronouncements that certain segments of society have imposed on these spaces in an attempt to encourage moral policing of the self (Hunt 1999),[25] and yet they continue to challenge these regulatory commentaries and restrictions by participating in these and other similarly stigmatized affairs in ever-increasing numbers. Voices emanating from newsrooms, churches, schools and government offices continue to stress what are perceived to be the 'traditional' views of society on these issues, leaving few avenues for people to convey different perspectives without fear of criticism and social

[25] There are many different discourses that impact the lives of women working in these establishments (as well as the male customers, but to a lesser extent), including various assertions of criminal, public health, religious, psychological, and economic conditions that attempt to influence their attitudes and behaviors. However, my project in composing this re-presentation of the go-go bar is to focus on those discourses that emerge within the bar among its employees and patrons, rather than taking a broad, constructionist view that represents the opinions of those positioned 'outside' the bar. For example, the moral-medical discussions concerning AIDS have had a profound impact on the women in the bars through the increased surveillance and regulation of their activities resulting from this serious public health problem, yet the women themselves broach the topic only when prompted by others and I never participated in a conversation where women seemed overly concerned about this dreaded disease. Thus, the usual anxieties expressed in writings on the sex industry – sexual violence and inequality, poverty, disease – are mentioned here only when they materialize in the statements and actions of the women and men in this research setting.

censure, so the go-go bar and its surrounding environs have emerged as a space where people are able to express alternative discourses regarding sexuality.

Dominant representations are proffered by those who possess the power to express their views and are adept at using the various media to circulate these images and interpretations. Social normalization is achieved through inclusion in a group (Goffman 1963b), so while people may be separated from society-at-large by the labels of 'prostitute' or 'john,' they find acceptance with each other's company. In this manner, the 'red-light districts' that encompass venues for sexual relations (as well as the many ancillary retail, service, government, and financial institutions) emerge as separate communities through the development of identities that confer membership on those who subscribe to similar views, and thus, are positioned outside of what is usually considered 'mainstream' society. However, just as returning travelers bring back ideas and images of faraway lands (Littlewood 2001; Mills 1999; Runganga and Aggleton 1998), so too do male customers and female employees return to the everyday world of work, family and the other demands of citizenship, carrying with them different perspectives on sexuality and what it means to live on the margins of social acceptability.

Few of those people who rail against the go-go bars along the avenues of P. Burgos or Fields have spent much time even attempting to understand what transpires within these establishments.[26] What occurs inside is irrelevant to their concerns; one simply has to call forth the specter of prostitution to vilify the men and women who pass through the doors of the bars in Makati and Angeles. In this instance, 'knowing' comes from viewing, identification, and labeling. We have been informed time and time again that this type of relationship is antithetical to our existence as caring persons, so the mere mention of 'prostitution' is enough to expose deep emotions and hostile reactions against such forms of interaction and the participants; an 'incitement to discourse' (Foucault

[26] Lilian Robinson (co-author of *Night Markets: Sexual Cultures and the Thai Economic Miracle*) has been a vocal critic of the sex industry in Thailand, yet her own analysis of the situation consists of observations from the 'outside' as she reasoned that she could not have conducted research within the go-go bars of Bangkok because she is a woman. In contrast, Lisa Law's work in the bars of Cebu City, the Philippines (1997a; b), shows that women can participate and observe in these spaces if they so desire.

1978) that forms a basis for controlling desires through the ideology and regulatory mechanisms of 'social hygiene' and moral reform. These reactions are often based on personal judgments imposed by those in power rather than a comprehension of the activities and experiences of those who frequent these establishments, and the repeated stories of degradation and abuse emerging from this and other similar settings belie the fact that it is a place where people also receive something they deem beneficial or desirable.

putting women in their place

The 'prostitute' in literary representation and aforementioned cultural discourses serves an important function in defining the boundaries of feminine sexuality and social comportment. This is achieved through the process of symbolic inversion, whereby a culture's classificatory scheme is structured by those negative discourses that reinforce the dominant ideologies of behavior and public decorum, bringing marginal activities and identities to the fore so that "what is socially peripheral is often symbolically central" (Babcock 1978, quoted in Stallybrass and White 1986: 20). The establishment of a classificatory scheme promotes models for personal behavior in line with the desires of those in power; to depart from these standards one risks being positioned 'outside' – or, in some cases, denied rights accorded to other citizens or community members. Stereotypes are deployed for political purposes in promoting overriding images and ideologies as an aspect of sociopolitical domination, and yet they also open new spaces for parodies of and resistance to such normative discourses because they often reveal the practices of power behind these rigid depictions (Dyer 1993; Valentine 1997).[27] Thus,

[27] Stereotyping – as a form of categorization – promotes a normalizing vision of social organization and supports existing relations of power by highlighting deviance as a threat to society (Pickering 2001). The creation of these distinctive and immutable identities follows the notion that certain traits or behaviors are indicative of deep-seated, sociobiological differences, and these differences are subsequently accentuated within popular discourse to establish a rationale for discriminatory practices and policies. Referential traits that define the boundaries of particular assemblages give rise to narratives of identity, often expressing an imagined consensus that implies collective values or morals through the (mis)representation of others.

go-go bars and other locales identified with illicit sexual performances serve as symbols of 'abnormal' identities in an effort to control behavior while, paradoxically, also providing a venue for people to challenge these characterizations.

To maintain control over people's public expressions of sexual desire, governments are involved in curbing socioerotic interaction primarily through legislation that limits female mobility. Fears of social disruption through feminine seduction pervade the imagination of the ruling classes who have identified the unregulated availability of sex as a threat to the patriarchal stability represented in monogamous heterosexuality. The perceived fluidity of female sexuality and uncontrollability of feminine passions inform the activities of the masculine state which must channel this disruptive potential into productive labor by limiting female visibility at certain times and places.[28] Through the labeling of women in public as 'prostitutes' or 'whores,' the state is able to segregate these women into their proper spaces, forcing them into the back alleys where they cannot 'contaminate' the general public (Hubbard 1998; 2001). In the case of Filipina 'entertainers' with proper work permits, they are restricted to appropriate venues so that their activities can be monitored and the earnings from their sexual labor can be used to augment government revenue (Tyner 1997). Women in general are also accorded particular spaces in the urban landscape that have to do with their ascribed productive (workplace, shopping center) and reproductive (market, home) roles.

> The spaces of femininity are those from which femininity is lived as a positionality in discourse and social practice. They are the product of a lived sense of social locatedness, mobility and visibility, in the social relations of being seen. Shaped within the sexual politics of looking they demarcate a particular social organization of the gaze which itself works back to secure a particular social ordering of sexual difference. Femininity is both the condition and the effect. (Pollock 1988: 66)

[28] It is interesting to note that the news media in the Philippines refers to local legislators and government officials as 'dads.' The use of this paternal label gives the activities of governance an aura of benevolence by invoking this imagery of the nation as a family, where state officials are responsible for discipline in line with their masculine roles as 'head-of-the-household' that is the Philippine nation. These national 'dads' are thus responsible for the activities and welfare of the women under their charge, and so they take a keen interest in the sexuality of all Filipinas.

'The prostitute' as a social archetype and mediated identity is all about instilling sexual discipline for women in line with prevailing norms established by the state through the regulation of gendered performances and sexual relationships.

Imagery associated with 'the prostitute' thus becomes a powerful tool used to control the movement and behaviors of women throughout society who must learn to police themselves in order to avoid sexual violence directed at them because of minor transgressions in bodily comportment. This social, spatial, and legal marginalization of women is maintained by state surveillance that identifies and labels those individuals whose performances deviate from the structured scripts, singling them out for social ridicule, rehabilitation, or incarceration. Many nations (including the Philippines) have 'vagrancy' or 'loitering' laws that specifically target and criminalize women who dare to reveal themselves at the 'wrong' place or time.

> The police, they will stop you if you have long hair or hair that is a different color, or you are wearing makeup or jewelry. They also try to arrest you if you are wearing sexy clothes, or even just talking-talking to somebody on the street. I think they [the police] just want sex or money. (receptionist in Angeles)
>
> This is really frightening, because they have been branding women as prostitutes based merely on the way they're dressed… this is no different from the time when women with long hair were arrested during the periods of martial law… what is alarming is that policemen have been issuing statements branding the women as pickup girls [prostitutes] when their offense is vagrancy. (Liza Masa, secretary general of GABRIELA)[29]

In most of the cases involving law enforcement, the crime associated with 'prostitution' does not involve genital copulation for money, but instead reflects a broader concern with women who stray beyond those locales that have been identified as part of the private or 'feminine' sphere such as the home or other spaces where they are

[29] Quoted in "Soon, cops will arrest women with long hair" (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 7, 2000). An extensive public discussion of the vagrancy laws emerged after the arrest of four women in a restaurant in Quezon City because, according to the police, they appeared to be 'call girls' due to their manner of dress and behavior. Vagrancy in the Philippines is defined as being in public without any "visible means of support" (Article 202 of the Philippine Criminal Code), yet it is almost exclusively applied to women suspected of being prostitutes as a means of removing them from public view.

involved in domestic activities of care and entertainment (Agustín 2002; Chang and Groves 2000; White 1990).[30]

Women working in the sex industry usually leave their occupational personality of 'dancer' or 'receptionist' behind as soon as they remove the accoutrements of the go-go bar (such as dress and makeup) and walk out of the establishment. However, shedding the aura of sexual deviance and objectification is always incomplete in a society where the vulgar catcalls and masculine ogling remind all Filipinas of their sexual subservience. Furthermore, the feminine roles of mother and daughter associated with the world of domesticity are also part of the 'sex worker' identity through the construction of occupational choices in terms of providing financial support for parents, children and siblings. In response to the increasing criticism in the 1970s, the Philippine government set out to sanitize the sex industry through discursive as well as regulatory means. Women who were previously labeled 'prostitutes' were given a new occupational designation as 'hospitality workers,' continuing to play on the essentialist imagery of Filipino femininity (Roces 1998). The government seeks to improve the productive performance of its female citizens by exploiting the feminine stereotype as an economic resource (Youngblood and Caul 1995), so work in these and other difficult labor settings (such as factories and households overseas) is also situated within a religious discourse of sacrifice for both families and national development according to the representation of the Filipina as *martir* ('martyr') in addressing these and other issues related to mobility and sexuality.

Distinctions between women's roles and identities in society are thus blurred by the fact that 'sex-as-work' (involving feminized social and economic [re]production) occurs throughout modern society (Pateman 1988), making sex work an intelligible – if

[30] This is all too evident in the local media representations of police raids involving 'prostitutes.' The headlines usually evoke the imagery of sexual intercourse and other sexually transgressive behavior, yet closer reading of the news articles reveals that women are rarely charged with prostitution because this requires law enforcement personnel to observe the sexual act in progress. Instead, women usually face charges of working without proper permits (for establishment-based employees) or vagrancy (for streetwalkers).

not always acceptable – occupation within the prevailing gendered social order. The subjectivities we create and stage for the consumption and approval of others are therefore rendered meaningless if they do not correspond to how others want to view us, or if these performances are acted out beyond the boundaries of accepted spatial and behavioral limitations. Displays of power permeate this struggle to negotiate and manage women's identities in homes, workplace, government agencies, and streets. The women who work in go-go bars constantly deny and discard these dominant assertions regarding their stigmatized character, but male customers, feminist activists, researchers and state officials often insist on maintaining this difference to privilege their own voices in public discussions of gender and empowerment.

The global discourse concerning prostitution today revolves around women and men described as 'sex workers' in the medical / academic literature. The label 'sex worker' in today's lexicon has a much different meaning than when it was originally coined in the 1980s by women working in various sectors of the sex industry. Recognizing that the label 'prostitute' is primarily about the 'public' display of female sexuality, some women argued that this form of (re)productive labor should be legitimized as 'work' (Leigh 1997). The focus at the time concerned those activities that traditionally fall under the heading of prostitution, but the label has a broader meaning that can be applied to anyone who earns a living through the sale of labor that involves some type of sexual intercourse, be it tactile (as in the case of prostitutes), aural (phone sex operators), or visual (models and exotic dancers).

Such a bold statement from the women and men who identify themselves as 'sex workers' – or any of the other labels mentioned above – emerges as another example of Foucault's 'incitement to discourse': a description of self that challenges the deployment of knowledge that institutionalizes erotic practices within a politico-economic framework to control the populace. In this case, it is a conscious and concerted effort by those in the sex industry to counter the prevailing perceptions and discussions concerning identities, personal activities and labor choices that have been imposed on a segment of the population in order to monitor and modify their actions under the guise of public health

and morality. Physicians and other researchers working on AIDS and other STIs have since adopted the term as a means of avoiding the stigma associated with the label 'prostitute' (Nelson and Celentano 1994). However, the medical community has applied the label 'sex worker' in a manner that is no different from their use of the old, pejorative term. What has materialized in the wake of this scientific appropriation is a 'reverse' discourse that once again asserts authority over people's sexual behavior, placing people identified as 'sex workers' under their professional guidance in matters of social hygiene and disease prevention, and so a label that had originally been used to describe a variety of occupations and situations has become just another term for 'prostitute.'

The generalization of prostitute identities also obscures the sexualization of women (and, to a lesser extent, men) who are involved in occupations that fall under this broader application of the 'sex worker' concept to include people in marketing, entertainment, or any other vocation where an attractive physical appearance (or pleasant speaking voice; Flowers 1998) is central in evaluating a person's job performance. Accordingly, the frequent labeling and construction of the Filipina secretary as a 'sexytary' reveals the pervasive perception that this and other semi-skilled occupations dominated by women require sexualized performances.

> What we do here [in the go-go bar] is like in other jobs. When I work[ed] in a department store, my job [was] to stand there and look pretty… I did not know anything about what I was supposed to sell, so I cannot answer any questions [from the customers]… I just stand there and try to smile. (dancer in Angeles)

Moreover, the construction of 'sex work' as a distinct practice within the go-go bar obscures those sexual activities that are also part of domestic (re)production, but do not necessarily involve the same commercialized process of negotiation or scripted outcome (Shrage 1994; White 1990).

While the label 'sex worker' is bandied about regularly in the various discourses of surveillance and research, I had never used this term while conducting research because no one working in the Philippine sex industry used it to describe themselves or others in the go-go bar. Maintaining the integrity of the 'work' environment enables 'entertainers' to define their performances as well as their identities (Ho 2000), so while

the term ‘sex worker’ is used within government, media and academic circles to group particular sexual activities and personae, the women working in go-go bars use the occupational descriptors ‘dancer,’ ‘receptionist’ or GRO to define their own status, and to separate themselves from ‘sex workers’ and ‘prostitutes.’

Male customers generally use the same vocabulary as the women, but also employ a variety of derogatory labels to differentiate them from other women in society, or to debase them as part of their imposition of masculine authority. Indeed, the academic use of the term ‘sex worker’ to describe women in this setting is no different from a man calling a go-go bar employee a ‘whore’: in both cases, the speaker is asserting dominance over the identity of people so labeled to suit his own purposes. Those who apply the term ‘sex worker’ haphazardly do so at the risk of alienating those with whom they are working. The imposition of such an identity within the discourse of biomedicine also has serious implications in addressing the spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (Ratliff 1999).

In earlier manuscripts, I used the term ‘sex worker’ to describe the women I work with simply as a matter of academic convenience. In speaking to an audience usually comprising anthropologists or other specialists researching HIV/AIDS, this is the conventional manner in which we refer to some of the people working in the sex industry who would otherwise be labeled ‘prostitutes.’ It has become a form of shorthand to facilitate discussions, saving time and space – some carry the notion further in using the acronym ‘CSW’ to refer to ‘commercial sex workers.’ I knew that women in the bars did not regard themselves in that manner, but I had assumed that they at least accepted how others viewed them from the outside, so I was somewhat surprised when I saw the reaction of women who read these texts, seeing how my reference to them as ‘sex workers’ upset them. Using my privileged position I had replaced their constructions of self with a concept that I could not even support. The fact that I have employed this term to challenge academic classifications does not matter to the women who read my work. My use of the label was seen as evidence of my complicity in maintaining the current structures of hegemonic discourse involving so-called ‘experts,’ and consequently,

implied an ignorance on my part of their situation and desires for self-identification. The label simply represents women in this setting according to ill-conceived models of behavior and morality, and it does not accurately portray them or their activities through its current meaning and use. For that reason, I no longer use the term 'sex worker' to describe women working in the sex industry, and where it does appear in this text, it refers to those discourses that attempt to control the lives of others through the formation of monolithic categories and universalizing identities.

situating go-go bars in society

The discussion of gendered ideologies above draws primarily from research on changes in Europe and America during the Industrial Revolution (Hoganson 1998; Hunt 1999; Luker 1998; Ross and Rapp 1981), but similar imagery regarding sexuality and power is employed throughout Asia today. Ethnographic accounts concerning gender in Southeast Asia are replete with examples of women working to define new socioeconomic and political roles within local discourses that continue to stress the importance of 'traditional values' where the differences between men and women are accentuated in line with the 'separate spheres' ideology (Brenner 1998; Peletz 1996; Van Esterik 2000).

As with the rapid changes in the West at the end of the nineteenth century, the booming Asian economies of the past twenty years have brought about similar anxieties concerning the mobility of young women in nations across the region. Governments have aggressively promoted the special talents and attributes of the local female labor force according to stereotypical models of feminine pliability and subordination in order to lure multinational firms to their shores (Ong 1987; Ramirez 1987), but the resulting social and geographic mobility exhibited by young women has become a concern for parents and politicians alike.

> State encouragement of female industrial employment was paralleled by increasing surveillance of multiple 'transgressions,' as viewed by dominant groups in society. While the conditions differ in each country, the widespread stigmatization of working women came to define public spheres where female productive activities were deemed necessary but their civil rights were not (Ong 1991: 293).

From the ideological construction of the workplace as an extension of 'the family' (Constable 1997; Kelsky 2001; Ong 1987; Wolf 1992), to the references and official pronouncements concerning their responsibilities to relatives back home (Mills 1999; Trager 1984) or to the nation (Brenner 1998; Heng and Devan 1995), notions of morality continue to influence those women who take on what has customarily been a man's role in venturing beyond the household for work. Conflict arises when women's desires for material goods and other manifestations of personal independence interfere with the desires of state officials and family members for increased economic production and earnings to fuel their own consumption (see below). Images of proper behavior are then deployed to temper these individual desires by constructing a vision of femininity that incorporates the virtues of sacrifice and restraint, using the media and various institutions to disseminate the idealized representation.

emergent sexual relations in Southeast Asia

The history of Southeast Asia reveals numerous examples of intimate arrangements between foreign men and local women that provided the foundation for trade in the region. Barbara Andaya (1998) shows how a system of temporary 'marriages' helped establish kinship ties between Filipinos and foreign traders in the sixteenth century to facilitate market transactions between strangers. Women – mostly from the 'noble' classes and possessing considerable autonomy – used these relationships to accumulate wealth and power which they retained once the 'husbands' returned to their home countries (these marriages were easily dissolved, and women did not suffer the modern stigma of being labeled 'abandoned wives'). These long-term arrangements involved other aspects of domestic intimacy that included feminine performances of 'care' and nurturance for men who were far from 'home' in exchange for material support (Morris 2002; White 1990). This type of relationship suited everyone involved as long as local customs regarding adultery were followed.

However, the Chinese and European traders did not fully appreciate or accept the power of Southeast Asian women in matters of marriage and finance, so they began

turning to female slaves as sexual partners to avoid ceding political and economic control to wives and their families. The arrival of more Europeans and establishment of permanent outposts in the seventeenth century also signaled a change in attitudes where the local women were derided as 'lascivious' in part due to the moralizing discourses emanating from the European metropole, but also because the men found that they could get what they wanted (in terms of sex and trade concessions) through other means. The idea of 'the prostitute' thus emerged as a paradigmatic image and identity for Southeast Asian femininity via the colonial enterprise. During the period of geographic expansion and colonialism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, prostitution was mentioned with greater frequency in travelers' accounts of Southeast Asia because of changing attitudes regarding female sexual behavior and also as a result of the emerging cash-based market economy that simplified such arrangements to suit the sexual and material desires of those involved (Andaya 1998). It was perfectly acceptable to participate in these short-lived 'marriages' in the days of exploration and conquest when marauding swashbucklers were simply taking account of the 'resources' in the East Indies, but the project of colonization and the attendant economic exploitation required a more measured approach to extracting labor and goods as well as in establishing the foundational ideologies that would govern not only the periphery of vast European empires, but also influence sexual attitudes and behaviors at 'home' (Stoler 1996).[31]

In some cases, asserting a 'civilized' vision of manhood through local women has also been constructed as one of the primary ideological reasons for colonization (Hoganson 1998; Stoler 1996). Ideas regarding masculinity and the imperial enterprise in Europe were fueled by the notion that effeminate Asian and African men were unable to "protect and revere women" (British official quoted in Enloe 1989: 49), so colonial guidance was required to lead the heathens on the path of civilization according to European notions of gendered propriety in governance. Western women were also

[31] The process of building empires included sexual as well as economic and political domination by the European powers where colonized women provided domestic and plantation labor as well as sexual services; there are also examples of female slaves being used as prostitutes to earn money for their masters.

intimately involved in this effort, although they were fighting their own battles as well for equality on the homefront, so in a sense, their rule over colonized peoples (particularly the domestic help) were attempts to show that they could perform the civilizing role as well as men. Both European men and women were involved in constructing sexual discourses that contributed to the emergence of prostitution in Southeast Asia, creating "an environment where upper-class values presented a woman's chastity and fidelity to one man as ideal behavior, while a man's sexual experience with many women was regarded as a demonstration of masculinity" (Andaya 1998: 28).

There are examples today of similar arrangements between men and women that emphasize the sexual double standard allowed under patriarchal social structures, clouding the boundaries between acceptable relationships and those that are derided as 'prostitution.' Recent articles in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*[32] and *Newsweek* [Asian edition][33] point to the presence of second 'wives' in the context of rapid capitalist expansion and increased opportunities for travel in the region.[34] As with the 'temporary marriages' from the early colonial period, these unions also function in the realm of business, although maintaining a second household in the modern context serves a slightly different purpose. Rather than forming ties to wealthy families, the 'temporary wives' of today serve as a marker of status and success, revealing to others the extent to which the subject can accumulate wealth and various forms of social / symbolic capital.[35] The 'concubine' in this situation is no longer a 'slave' (though this perception is debatable among feminists), but she is usually portrayed in an entrepreneurial light,

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[32] "One China, two wives" July 5, 2001.

[33] "Second wives club" July 30, 2001.

[34] This phenomenon is particularly common among the recent influx of businessmen from Hong Kong and Taiwan into mainland China, although these relations are present in every transnational setting.

[35] In his analysis of Javanese political power, Benedict Anderson has presented a compelling description of sexual 'potency' as it applies to performances of masculinity (1990). According to this notion of sexual power and desirability, women (as signifiers of power / control over others) gravitate toward those who possess such potency. It is in this manner that recently deposed Philippine president Joseph 'Erap' Estrada explained his many mistresses and children born out of wedlock, saying he could not help it that so many women were drawn to him.

purposefully seeking these types of arrangements to satisfy her social, material, and sexual desires. The fact that women identified as 'concubines,' 'mistresses' or even 'prostitutes' may also be labeled 'wives' reveals the extent of such practices among men in Asian countries, and the tacit acceptance of these relationships under the guise of masculine sexual 'needs.' It also shows how marriage and prostitution are closely linked in the continuum of heterosexual relations from a masculine / patriarchal standpoint. Polite society – defined by morals that separate 'us' from 'them' – may look askance at such a calculated approach to intimacy, but the increasing number of people involved in these unions reveals a growing recognition of these relationships as an integral element of the socioerotic fabric in a 'modern,' mobile population.

gendered difference in the media

Many of the perceptions and practices that emerge in the transnational setting of the go-go bar result from a blending of media imagery and political ideologies concerning gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. The coalescence of these discourses creates a situation where race or national origin serves as a marker for identifying differences in gendered comportment and sexual expression (Ignacio 2000; Johnson 1997; Kelsky 1994, 2001; Pettman 1997), and the global transmission of imagery through print media, television and the Internet fosters the development of stereotypical representations of the 'Oriental' woman and 'Western' man in this regard.

> I love that while they [Filipinas] still hold strongly to fundamentals of religion and family, when it's just the two of you, they're so caring, *malambing* ('loving'), and love to take time to care and think about you. (quoted in Philippine edition of *Cosmopolitan*, May 2002)[36]

These images of Filipina femininity are necessarily constructed in a complementary relation to men (Western and Filipino) and other (Western) women. In line with these representations of 'Oriental' women, Filipinas are believed to be more attuned to a man's domestic desires and sexual fantasies. They are generally described as

caring, deferential, family-oriented, and exotic, with a propensity for fulfilling the wishes of others (an essential part of their *martir* identity). Having established this foundational imagery for Filipinas, their female counterparts in the West are often portrayed as selfish, haughty, career-driven women who will quickly break-off a relationship when it becomes too difficult for their liking. Foreign men who venture to the Philippines articulate this discourse of contrasting femininities, and GROs wholeheartedly embrace the portrayals of Filipinas as *malambing* ('loving' or 'caring') in their narratives of identity, repeating the refrain from popular beliefs and 'scientific' studies represented in the local news media.[37]

Customers hailing from Western countries are generally depicted in a sympathetic light in GROs' narratives because they represent the best chance at economic and/or social 'salvation' for those employed in this setting.[38] The relative wealth of expatriate businessmen and foreign tourists translates into a perception of generosity, where increased spending and consumption (as integral elements in leisure and business entertainment) signify kindness as well as economic power. Political declarations concerning democracy, equality, and individual liberty that emanate from Europe and the United States are also projected onto the belief that Western men are more inclined toward equitable treatment in their sexual relations.

> Many [Filipino] women are dissatisfied with the lack of respect from men in their own country and nationality… By the way, American men have a "very good"

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[36] In this survey fifty Filipino and foreign men were asked what they find "sexy about the Pinay"; almost all expressed similar notions regarding the idealized combination of loving domesticity and lustful sexuality.

[37] "Filipinos truly romantic – poll; Valentine's stresses them out" (*Today* [Manila], February 14, 2002). Comparing surveys from the United States and the Philippines, the article states that "[i]t is also a fact of life that Filipinos are more *malambing* [than Americans]."

[38] Male go-go bar patrons from other Asian countries (Japan, Korea, Malaysia, etc.) or the Middle East are regarded with less enthusiasm because they are seen as sharing many of the same patriarchal values as the Filipino men that women are trying to avoid. However, they are generally not treated differently within the scripted confines of the go-go bar because their engagements are limited to the usual types of exchange (drinks and cash for sexual performances).

> reputation towards how they treat women in other countries, unlike in the US. (*Cherry Blossoms* 'mail-order bride' catalogue, January/February 1997: 4)

The construction of masculine power is linked to his physical stature, sexual prowess and his role as a provider for the 'the family' (the nuclear, monogamous, heterosexual household) as an integral element of his desirability to women, and GROs enhance their own social status (as employees as well as potential 'girlfriends' or wives) by supporting these patriarchal views through their performances of 'emphasized' femininity in the go-go bar setting and beyond (Connell 1987; George 2002; Wood 2000).

As with the respective discourses of divergent femininities between East and West, there are similar pronouncements used by male go-go bar patrons – and supported by many GROs – to malign Filipino masculinity. The first customer I met back in 1993, an American World War II veteran making his way down the boulevard in Ermita with the aid of a walker, said that he came to the Philippines twice a year "because the women are so beautiful and the men are so ugly!" The 'ugliness' of the local men he described is not an indication of a defect in their physical appearance, as many of the foreign men who frequent the bars of Makati and Angeles are all too aware that the advancing years have not been kind to their own physiques. Rather, the deficiency voiced by many foreigners concerning Filipino men involves the poor treatment of Filipino women.

> You have to be careful when you have a Filipino boyfriend… they are tricky, and they just want to use you since you have a job and earn money… he will say he loves you just so you will stay with him and support him, but I guarantee that he will leave you if you become pregnant. (Australian expatriate talking to a receptionist in Makati)

> The problem isn't that the women themselves are throwing money away, it's their Filipino boyfriends who sit at home drinking with their buddies or taking *shabu* (methamphetamine) all day while their girlfriends are here working in the bar… these women run the house now, earning a living and doing all the work to take care of their families; the men just sit around and do nothing. (Australian businessman in Makati)

A principle element in the formation of the Western male 'savior' imagery involves the denigration of Filipino men as effeminate, or otherwise unable to care for the local women properly – a perception that has had profound implications for Philippine

history and continues to affect international relations (Enloe 1989; Hoganson 1998). Very few women working in the bars of Angeles or Makati think very highly of their countrymen, either from perception or personal experience, and this has led them to consider marriage prospects in go-go bars or other commercial introduction services (online or through 'mail-order bride' catalogues). Many reveal stories of local boyfriends who have abandoned them after they became pregnant or abused them physically and/or emotionally.

> [I]'m scared to be married with our own race due to the reason that men in our place don't have much respect for their women. I'm not trying to put them down, but in my opinion most Filipino men are womanizers, wife beaters and just plain irresponsible. They make babies left and right and don't even know how to support the family… [I]t's not a stereotype it is real. ('Lilibeth' from <www.newfilipina.com> mail-order bride discussion forum; last accessed September 27, 2002)

> All the men my age in my hometown, their jobs are *istambay* ('standby' or 'loitering') so I don't like them, they scare me… Filipino men look like rapists when they are drunk. (dancer in Angeles)

The local news media adds to this disparaging view of Filipino masculinity, emphasizing stereotypical macho portrayals.[39] This essentialist coverage of gender issues reinforces the notion of complementarity, where women are the aggrieved victims of the boorish louts who control society; the hard-working Filipina always juxtaposed against her lazy male compatriot.

> Our men come out looking idle even when they are doing something. Compare the male sidewalk vendor with his female counterpart. A male vendor sits there, looking bored as bored can be, puffing away on the cigarettes he's supposed to be selling, while ogling the women who pass by. In contrast, a female vendor will find something to do besides watching what she's selling. She'll tend a child, mend clothes, cook. ("Juan Tamad" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 30, 2000)

Special sections of newspapers on Mother's Day remind everyone of the many maternal contributions and sacrifices, recounting stories of exemplary role models and

[39] "The Filipino male: Wife beater, sweet lover, home partner and guzzler" (*Philippine Star*, August 30, 1995); "The Filipino as cowboy" (*Today [Manila]*, April 7, 1999).

the tender love that only a maternal figure can provide.[40] In contrast, Father's Day sections are always much thinner, and usually inform male readers how they could work a little harder in their parenting skills and in fulfilling their paternal duties.[41] Regardless of the occasion or the identity of the proponent of a particular ideology (man or woman, foreign or Filipino), one gets the impression that if it were not for Filipino men, Filipino women would have much easier lives, and it is this view that structures relations between 'entertainers' and 'customers' in the go-go bars of Angeles and Makati.

beautiful and 'bold': images of Filipina femininity

While the news media charts the difficulties and accomplishments of Filipino women within a male-dominated world, there is also the perspective of the advertising and entertainment industries that provides a more sexualized vision of femininity to the public. Advertising appeals to individual desires through the manipulation of symbols that link utopian aspirations to personal relationships and practices of consumption, where the imagery focuses on sexual desires as a means of marketing products and a cosmopolitan lifestyle (Illouz 1997). Erotic iconography is used extensively to stimulate 'need' for products, identifying an object or service with some 'valued' social status that is represented by physically attractive bodies positioned in desired settings (i.e. young, vivacious people carousing at the beach, or a well-dressed couple at a fancy restaurant). In many of the cinematic depictions, women are once again subjected to the male longing for images of feminine weakness as a means of expressing masculine strength and virility (where men become both actors and spectators; see Chapter 4). However, women also emerge as desiring subjects themselves through 'bold' revelations on stage, screen, and in print.

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[40] "In praise of mothers" (*Philippine Star*, May 14, 2000); "Honor thy mother" (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, May 14, 2000).

[41] "Fathering is unlike mothering" (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 18, 2000); "Does paternity maketh a real man?" (*Philippine Star*, June 18, 2000); "Letting fathers in" (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 18, 2000).

The erotic (re)presentation of female bodies is obvious in the international promotion of tourism.[42] Exoticism and beauty sell consumer goods as well as images of national identity, constructing 'the Orient' as a place of "[s]ensuality, promise, terror, sublimity, idyllic pleasure, intense energy." (Said 1978: 118). Men flock to the Philippines in search of women who are sensual and accommodating because that is what the government sells through tourist and other development policies that construct citizens as an economic resource and marketable commodity (Karch and Dann 1981). The portrayal of white beaches and 'friendly natives' are a way of exoticizing the islands (Crick 1989), drawing people from northern countries of Europe and the U.S. with promises of sun, sand, and sex – the first two occur naturally, but the imagery of the third item in the tourist's triad is created specifically for his or her benefit. A recent campaign by the Philippine Department of Tourism exhorted travelers to "visit the beautiful Philippines," juxtaposing local scenery with young Filipino women in the foreground. The women in these photographs were dressed appropriate for the particular site, with those on the beach presented in bathing suits.

Similar imagery was employed for the world to see during the 1994 Miss Universe pageant in Manila, where contestants posed against various backdrops depicting famous landmarks in the Philippines.[43] Portions of the televised special – trumpeted by the government as part of its drive to promote tourism – also showed the women frolicking in the sand and surf at various beach resorts throughout the country. Regardless of the amount of bare skin revealed in these promotional images, the message remains the same: "The beautiful Philippines" corresponds to the nation and its female

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[42] This is not the view most often seen by locals, but this is the type of imagery used to 'sell' the Philippines as a site of leisure to a global audience.

[43] Pageants are popular throughout the archipelago (although many local contests are decided by the amount of sponsorship money the competitors garner), and they are considered the one area where Filipinos are competitive in a global event against other nations (Aguliar 1996). There have been three Miss Universes from the Philippines; all are popular local personalities and have moved on to become successful businesswomen, and several of the foreign contestants from the 1994 Miss Universe pageant stayed in the Philippines after the performance because they realized they possess a trait that is in demand in the local entertainment industry.

(or feminized) citizens, both of which are represented as essential elements of the pleasurable tourist experience where sex with locals is part of the romantic construction of leisure (Black 2000; Illouz 1997; Karch and Dann 1981).[44]

The conceptual linkage between the tropical exoticism and sexuality was etched into the public imagination during the eighteenth century, when travel accounts to the South Pacific were popularized (Littlewood 2001). Disaffection wrought by capitalist industrialization in the West has led to a growing desire for the periodic 'escape' from work through travel, and the imagery of an erotic other lounging on a beach in a faraway land is appealing to men and, increasingly, women vacationers who seek pleasurable experiences beyond the limitations of (re)production at home. This is not lost on those who create images to entice male travelers to the Philippines with such claims as "Filipino women are among the loveliest in the world" (Travel & Leisure 1974), or "the exotic cocktail of genes that makes up the Filipino race was mixed with rare finesse – the Filipinos are unreservedly beautiful people" (Philippines in Focus 1981; both cited in Tyner 1996).

Television provides the most accessible representations of femininity and gender relations to the viewing public, and, as a visual medium, there is the inevitable focus on corporeal aesthetics when it comes to depicting the Filipina. The local construction of Filipino women as *maganda* ('beautiful') relates not only to physical appearance but also involves an assessment of feminine performance that emphasizes local virtues (Cannell 1999; Johnson 1997; Roces 1998). Portrayals on television adhere to *maganda* ideals, but tend toward the stereotypical dichotomy of patriarchal imagery involving the representation of women either as virtuous and self-sacrificing ('Madonna') or sultry and seductive ('whore'). Both representations can be interpreted as *maganda*, but for different reasons: the attractive woman who vamps in front of the camera is desired as a

[44] The sexualization of tourism reached its nadir in the 1970s during the reign of Ferdinand Marcos (Rafael 1990). Subsequently, the Department of Tourism has backed away from the use of such explicit imagery in recent years, although private tourism companies, travel magazines and the Internet continue to offer such depictions to sell their own services.

sexual object whereas the long-suffering mother/wife is valued for her maternal tendencies. The beauty pageant contestant embodies both versions of *maganda* through her (re)presentation of Filipino femininity,[45] but critics still bemoan the excessive emphasis placed on physical beauty in these popular displays.

Go-go bars are marginalized in the public imagination and so few people would ever find themselves in these venues, but to see go-go dancers perform all one has to do is turn on the television. Several local channels (most notably ABS-CBN and GMA) provide variety shows for the viewing pleasure of the noontime audience, complete with young women in tight-fitting costumes dancing provocatively in the background as the hosts go through some competitive games with participants from the general public or the audience (on occasion, the dancers also become more involved in the interactions with participants on stage). One group of dancers – the Sex Bomb Girls from GMA's lunchtime offering, *Eat Bulaga* – have become celebrities in their own right, releasing an album and a feature-length movie in 2002. Their success has also spawned a large fan base that is desirous of their feminine performances on several levels:

> I imagined that the bulk of the fans would be guys. Much to my surprise, most of them turned out to be young girls… They don't want to date the Sex Bomb Girls, they want to *be* them… The fact is, for all their booty-shaking, the Sex Bomb Girls are wholesome family entertainment. ("Sex Bomb Girls take over" *Sunday Inquirer Magazine*, August 25, 2002, emphasis in original).

The local movie industry also incorporates the performances of the go-go bar into feature films in different ways depending on the genre and the intent of the message within the movie. Many action movies use venues associated with the sex industry to reinforce the deviance of underworld figures in the 'good-versus-evil' storyline: the 'evil' man is represented by the rapist who defiles the innocent woman, in effect, forcing her into a life of shame and misery (devious women are also evident in the guise of conniving bar managers). In the end, a male 'hero' may rescue the vulnerable lass from the clutches of these depraved pimps and disingenuous father/mother-figures. Go-go bars also serve

[45] Local calls for contestants in major pageants require applicants to have 'good character' in addition to being a specific age, height, etc. See "Queenless and winless for a generation" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 10, 2002.

as a primary setting for stories of 'fallen' Filipinas, combining a morality tale with titillating entertainment. A recent film entitled *Huling Sayaw* ('Last Dance') repeats many of the common tropes of gender and sexuality when it comes to constructing these spaces within Philippine society:

> Alma is a daughter of an ex-club dancer trying to live a decent life despite her mom's reputation. When her mom, died, she and her kid sister are forced to live with their good-for-nothing stepdad who later tries to force himself on Alma. To avoid this, Alma flees to the big city leaving behind her kid sister and her boyfriend who in turn gets disillusioned when he learns that Alma is working as a club dancer just like her mom, in a sleazy joint in the big city (Gosengfiao 1997, from the liner notes).

Several paradigms common to go-go bar / 'prostitution' imagery are at work in these films. The innocence of the rural landscape is contrasted with the bustling urban jungle that promises unknown dangers as well as pleasures. Family is also important for the message of sexual morality: reference to an abusive 'step-dad' shows how marital dissolution negatively affects children,[46] and the fact that the mother was a dancer in a go-go bar reinforces the common belief that sexual 'deviance' is an inherited trait. Finally, the stigma of this vocation is evident in the reaction of her boyfriend who becomes "disillusioned" by the prospect of maintaining a relationship with such a woman.

The depiction of go-go bar settings in local films also provides producers and directors with an excuse to reveal more of the female body and erotic activities in an increasingly censorious atmosphere.[47] Women who bare their bodies in these movies are subsequently identified as 'bold' actresses – a label that has an ambiguous meaning in the contemporary moral climate of the Philippines. Vicente Rafael (1990) argues that the manner in which these women are first uncovered in the film and then through the 'confessional' interviews that inevitably appear in the daily press provide the public

[46] Divorce is illegal in the Philippines, and despite repeated attempts to introduce legislation for its legalization it is unlikely that this situation will change in the near future. The most common reasons for keeping quarreling spouses together are God and children – so the violent step-parent is a potent image used in these arguments.

audience with an articulation of female agency and desire as the actresses go through the process of explaining their decision to "go bold."

> Klaudia [Koronel] says "Live Show" is the boldest and most difficult movie she has ever done in her five years in show business… "I have disrobed so many times on screen it has become second nature to me now," she said. "But it was different in 'Live Show' because there were many people watching us and I had two sex partners. That 'threesome' scene took the entire night to shoot."[48]

These ubiquitous representations of a sexual Filipina femininity provide a sanitized perspective of a world that is otherwise hidden from most women, and they serve a crucial role in revealing both the pleasures and dangers that accompany such performances. By presenting the female viewer with a glimpse into the go-go bar, these industries and institutions are marketing a vision of desire and sexuality that requires a particular form of female comportment. The portrayal of desirability in the form of female sexualization provides a model that other women want to emulate so as to achieve the recognition, capital, and power that *maganda* Filipinas possess. That one can describe the "booty-shaking" of the Sex Bomb Girls as "wholesome family entertainment" troubles some observers (see "A bomb just a fatal to RP's future as the real thing?" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 23, 2002), and also brings to mind the efforts of some in Angeles City who want to promote a similar view Fields Avenue to attract more tourists. This expansion of the 'pornosphere' into mainstream culture is largely a result of technological advances that transmit sexual imagery across the globe in an instant, with few regulatory barriers to prevent people from observing graphic imagery in the privacy of their homes (McNair 2002). What was once considered risqué is now considered commonplace because everyone has seen it before, and thus the go-go bar

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[47] See "Sex and the film fight" *Newsweek [Asian edition]*, December 6, 1999; "Moral panic" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 27, 2001.

[48] "The bare facts about the daring stars of a daring movie" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 13, 2001. The 'daring movie' in question, *Live Show*, depicts the experiences of men and women who perform live sex acts for audiences (earlier in the article, the writer notes how the lead actress Klaudia Koronel had been "discovered" while working as a GRO in a local nightclub). See also "When good girls go bold" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 8, 2002.

emerges as a ubiquitous feature of the Philippine urban environment because the supporting imagery of 'public' sex through the advertising and media industries has legitimized this type of 'entertainment.'

The aforementioned images help reinforce the dominant imagery of femininity as a patriarchal enterprise within Philippine society and culture. Thus, the ideal Filipino woman represented within these discourses resembles that offered by the male respondents to the *Cosmopolitan* quiz: she is passionate, industrious, faithful, sexy, and considerate. She is held in high regard for the sacrifices she makes to home and nation, but faces contempt should she consider her own desires before those of others; her beauty provides her with considerable economic power and cultural capital, yet good looks can lead to seduction and unwanted attention. Cultural discourses focus on certain attributes to ensure proper bodily comportment within a dialogical social setting (Bourdieu 1977; George 2002), and so a woman quickly learns the spatial and behavioral limitations she must follow, because if she oversteps the prescribed boundaries she may get into trouble.[49]

Discourses of femininity establish a structure wherein women may exert considerable personal autonomy and control over others, but only within the confines of certain roles (mother/wife, fashion model) and spaces ('home,' theatrical stage) that are deemed appropriate for female displays. The recent ascendance of development discourses equating personal / national 'progress' with particular economic indicators has resulted in significant tension where these 'traditional' models of femininity are concerned. Demands of modern production entice women away from the protection of home and nation where their 'dads' can no longer follow their everyday activities closely, and women use this newfound 'independence' to engage in behaviors that they could not practice at home (Mills 1998; Ong 1987). The departure from 'traditional' values and conservative corporeal displays not only raises questions concerning women's safety and

[49] Headlines such as "Caloocan girl leaves dad, gets raped" (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 18, 2000) also help keep women in line by constructing certain times (night) and places (anywhere in 'public') as dangerous or 'risky' (Koskela 1997), thus creating a safe space under the watchful eye of the father-figure.

their commitment to maintaining family honor, but also calls into question those national identities that construct women in such a manner (Lynch 1999; Morris 2002; Wardlow 2002).

consuming narratives: identity and agency

Notions of 'traditional values' are also prominent in contemporary discussions surrounding the commodification of social relations and the 'conspicuous' consumption of goods, images, and all manner of bodily comportment. This is because consumption is more than just another aspect of economic theory – it is also a sociopolitical process involving the deployment and appropriation of certain symbols that are indicative of an individual's identity and status within the realm of cultural signification (Bocock 1993; Edwards 2000; Slater 1997). With regard to the constitution of the agential subject in a (post)modern, capitalist system, the material goods and behaviors that an individual accumulates and displays over the course of his or her life indicates to others who s/he 'is' because that is how s/he chooses to present her/his self within a particular set of cultural signs and collective standards. When considering a product's worth in this economy of symbols (where that 'product' can be an object, an idea, or a performance), the practice of personal consumption is more about the imagery associated with the product than simply the cost to create it. Thus, the 'value' of a product – as an indication of its social importance – is generated through overt activities involving acquisition and subsequent incorporation wherein people accrue 'cultural capital' as well as material wealth (Bourdieu 1984; Joseph 2002).

Creating and maintaining these shared meanings and practices requires a cooperative system of socialization where the ideology of capitalist production is promoted as the principle means of satisfying personal desires through the purchase goods and services. Don Slater (1997) shows how Western culture has evolved into a 'culture of consumption,' insofar as the processes related to consumption have become the foundation for a way of life as well as a means of identifying something (person, object, idea, behavior) as 'Western' or 'modern.' Advertising plays a significant role in

sustaining a cycle of desire for personal accumulation by showing people what they do not have, and then creating reasons why they should have it – primarily by revealing other people in possession of it. Consumption is promoted through the representation and reproduction of these social inequalities, so that consumers are always looking to move up the socioeconomic ladder by wearing the best clothes, reading the 'right' books, and being seen at proper social functions as defined by the imagery of differentiation and privilege.

Modern identity is intertwined with consumption in that the adoption of particular symbols and the acquisition of certain commodities reveal who we 'are' and want to be by distinguishing the self from an other (Bourdieu 1984). Prior to the eighteenth century, people's identities were based on their ascribed status in life according to kinship. The Industrial Revolution then brought about significant changes in the mode of production as well as demographic shifts in the population, resulting in the emergence of anonymous urban centers where people were disconnected from the feudal social systems of old. Separation from traditional dependencies on family entails greater individualization and personal agency in controlling one's own status and identity (Joseph 2002; Warde 1994), and the discursive distinctions between different aspects of society – such as the 'public' / 'private' split – encourage the construction and representation of a self that is similarly partitioned according to fluctuating social conditions (Holstein and Gubrium 2000). The emergence of this perspective within a capitalist system allows people to make decisions based on the concept of 'consumer sovereignty,' where one's 'freedom' is linked to his or her ability to acquire anything s/he desires on the open market.

People thus conceptualize personal independence according to liberal political and economic discourses that permit the consumer to buy anything that others are willing to sell, and sell anything that others are willing to buy. Yet the freedom to choose these goods and images also leads to anxiety if such choices are deemed 'inappropriate,' so most people tend to follow the advice of others (friends, family, advertising executives, government officials) when deciding which items to purchase or how to present one's self to society. Desire plays an important role in terms of how the subject wants to

construct his or her self where advertising provides a running narrative of self-indulgence and an endless selection of lifestyle options from which to choose (Slater 1997). However, desires are never completely satisfied, so the system of production and consumption is perpetuated in the continual drive to accumulate more economic and cultural capital. Furthermore, constituting the self through consumption entails 'possession' or manipulation of people as well as goods and images (Howells 2000), and because efforts to dominate others ultimately fall short of expectations, the desired self remains largely unrealized.

These discourses of 'choice' within the context of a consumer culture link goods, images and identities to create symbolic narratives that people continually incorporate to develop a sense of self. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is instructive in this regard (1977, 1990), where the material and symbolic aspects of social existence (what he describes as the 'field') are interwoven into the practices of consumption and the development of individual agency through narrative. Unlike some other theories of subjectivity that are more deterministic in their emphasis on performative or discursive constraints (e.g. Butler 1990, 1993; Foucault 1977, 1978), Bourdieu's *habitus* provides a generative account where people experience and express the embodied realities of power through their everyday reactions to these hegemonic social structures and institutions. Accordingly, the subject must interpret his or her position and behaviors within the 'field,' employing the multitude of signifying images and narrative potentialities as resources in the active and dialogic construction of personal biographies (McNay 2000).

This diversity of possibilities encourages individuals to take chances with alternative identities because there is always an opportunity to seek a new beginning should one make a poor decision regarding style or relations with others, just as the are always 'new-and-improved' products on offer within the market (Bauman 2001). No choice is final or irreversible, so subjects tend to try out different (re)presentations and biographies in the same manner as they appropriate and discard other fashions, always with an eye toward changing social conditions and personal desires.

the production of leisure and fantasy

While go-go bars in the Philippines occupy a certain geographic space and offer something recognizable in terms of entertainment (for men) and employment (for women), these are also sites for contemplating or enacting one's fantasies: a 'virtual' environment where meaning is created according to the desires of individuals. This fantasy perspective applies to both men and women in this setting, so that just as these spaces facilitate business transactions among the male clientele, it is also evident that they provide female employees with a venue to fulfill their own desires for leisure and other forms of 'distinctive' consumption. Older men who find themselves undesirable to women in their home countries become attractive in the go-go bar, and they may take on the 'swinging bachelor' role that is usually reserved for younger men; similarly, young women from impoverished, rural backgrounds are able to engage others as upwardly mobile, cosmopolitan women. The world beyond the doors becomes irrelevant to what takes place within as the structures of social propriety are relaxed, enabling people to transcend the 'public' / 'private' distinctions commonly associated with sexual interactions. From the discourses informing consumption and leisure to the conflation of economics and intimate relations, the go-go bar emerges as a realm of infinite possibilities, presenting numerous opportunities for achieving wealth, power, and pleasure. Thus, the many illusory configurations and performances in this setting are no accident, as they are designed to generate suitable narratives and practices of consumption to satiate people's diverse longings.

What is often represented in popular discourse as the 'real' world of scientific modernism and capitalist production is juxtaposed against the 'virtual' existence of leisure activities, and for many, sex represents the ultimate pleasurable pursuit. Masculine 'entertainment' of the variety found in go-go bars is predicated on this distinctly patriarchal view of labor and sexuality, whereby the sublimation of emotional and physical longings in the workplace creates sexual 'pressures' (because men supposedly 'need' sex) that require release through the relaxation provided by attentive hostesses and receptionists. In her study of Tokyo hostess clubs catering to the Japanese

sarariiman ('salary man'), Anne Allison (1994) found that the displays of masculinity with female employees are a response to the rigid, de-sexualized world of the post-industrial workplace that renders men 'impotent' because they cannot express the erotic aspects of their masculine identity.[50] Katherine Frank (2002) also notes the appeal of 'difference' ascribed to topless bars where

> the behavioral structure of everyday life is inverted for many customers… women do the approaching rather than the men, and thus face the possibility of rejection; women 'ask' to be looked at naked; and usually 'private' performances of sexual desire or sexual display are suddenly made public. Further, although intimate relationships between individuals may be covertly facilitated with money in everyday realms, inside the clubs this facilitation is blatant, immediate, and far less apologetic (p. 91).

It is within this configuration of a 'real' world of work and other social obligations that spaces of fantasy and sexual inversion emerge as alternative sites for consumption and identity formation.

The construction of leisure is particularly salient when considering the expense of going to the Philippines when one could presumably purchase sexual services at home in Europe, the United States, or Australia. One of the reasons men expend so much effort venturing afar for sexual adventure is that traveling to a different country for vacation represents a radical departure from work and the grind of everyday life.[51] Tourists engage in activities that are not available at home, or are perhaps beyond their time and budgetary allotment. This is especially true for those men visiting Angeles, who are by-and-large blue-collar workers, military personnel, or retirees with fixed incomes and limited time for vacation. Visiting a prostitute in their home country may represent a temporary diversion, but traveling to a faraway country to partake in sexual relations

[50] In a variety of cultures and social environments (Allison 1994; Brewis and Linstead 2000; Frank 1998), the office or factory merges with the 'gentleman's club' or hostess bar to secure labor participation and reinforce the identity of the masculine worker by extending the labor environment into the 'private' sphere of leisure and domestic life. In Makati especially, go-go bars are also used for entertaining business clientele, once again showing the linkage between business and pleasure as well as the blurring of ideological boundaries between labor and sexual performances.

encompasses other aspects of leisure that are desired within the modern constructions of labor and production.

> At a resolute distance from the ruck of commonplace tourists, the Byronic traveler carries with him a fantasy of escape from all that defines their ordinariness. It is a dream whose chief ingredient is sexual freedom. (Littlewood 2001: 119)

Most men who spend their vacations in the Philippines are often looking for sexual affairs with local women as a primary objective, but they also seek adventure beyond the go-go bars or what is presented to the typical visitor. In these instances, male customers may adopt 'traditional' dating scripts involving romantic language and referents (talking about 'love,' describing the woman he is with as a 'girlfriend'), as well as those rituals that are part of the modern discourse of courtship (going out to public places as a couple, meeting the woman's family). Traveling to some distant tropical isle thus represents some type of spiritual pilgrimage in realizing this patriarchal ideals; where the sexual availability of women – particularly those who are adept at playing the proper sexual role associated with feminine heterosexuality and intimate domesticity – provides an experience that is not obtainable at home (Ryan and Kinder 1996). The sexual imagery generated through advertising, entertainment, and the news media fuel the fantasy of 'the Filipina' as a desired object because the link between image and person promises a possibility for active engagement with someone who embodies these ideals (Kibby and Costello 2001), and, in almost every case, if male travelers do not find what they are looking for, they will occupy their leisure time with other available options.

Like any other tourist or traveler, the visitor to the Philippines seeks to uncover what is considered 'authentic' within a particular culture, and the customers who patronize go-go bars to purchase sex are equally enamored with the idea of women as cultural escorts. Personal intimacy in this setting involves developing an understanding

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[51] The detachment from social support networks (and the possible critique of 'wasteful' and 'immoral' practices) also allows people to become fully immersed in the fantasy.

of each other's cultural background, and women are often constructed as local 'guides' who assist in translation and dealing with the nuances of travel in a foreign country.[52]

> I am only here [in Angeles] for one night… I am looking for a girl who already has her passport, and can take off [work] for a week so she can sail with me back to Guam… just a quick romantic, vacation (American tourist in Angeles).

> We went out a couple of times, and then she said we could go visit her province… we stayed with her family for a few days and traveled around the island a bit before coming back here… I really enjoyed that part of my vacation. It's something I would not be able to do on my own, or with any tour group, so that made it special. (American tourist in Angeles)

Given these distinctions between 'work' and 'leisure' within the capitalist system of production, the notion of 'sex work' emerges as a paradox in which to locate one's erotic practices or construct an identity. The reality of 'sex-as-work' is tempered by the fact that the Philippine go-go bar represents a space of leisure in the social imagination, and for those men and women who are identified as prostitutes, sex in the context of 'work' is often differentiated from relationships that are considered 'private' in line with the modern bureaucratic view that work relations should be clearly demarcated from personal intimacy.[53] Researchers examining sex work in the West note that prostitutes avoid kissing and cuddling with clients to signify a separation of the working body from emotional intimacy reserved for partners identified as 'boyfriends' or husbands (Day 1994; O'Connell Davidson 1998; O'Neill 2001). These distinctions relate to the Cartesian separation of mind and body, and thus, the construction of 'sex work(ers)' in the Western setting requires disembodiment on the part of practitioners so they can

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[52] 'Tour guide' is a euphemism used by some male customers to describe the women they have paid to accompany them from the bar, employing the notion that these women are also available to show them sights as a tourist as well as a sexual partner – a convergence of what are conceptualized as similar leisure services. Since 'barfines' are now illegal, some tourist websites also use 'tour guide' (or 'early work release') as a means of describing this activity.

[53] Prostitution in its pure form – as the exchange of sexual service for material gain – is a desirable form of sexual interaction for both the prostitute and the client because it is a market transaction that requires no further obligations from either party once the contract is completed (Marshall 1999), thus allowing either parties to pursue other desires and relationships without concern for the other person in these sexual encounters.

"claim a status as a rational worker in the public sphere" (Carpenter 1998: 395), and yet, as with many other aspects related to sexuality, economy, and identity in such settings, the activities of men and women in the go-go bars of Makati and Angeles reveal a situation that is much more complex than that offered in the existing literature.

The appeal of the go-go bar is similar to that of pornography in its many forms (Internet, phone sex) because these represent departures from 'reality' where the viewer is able to convert erotic imagery into a variety of imagined possibilities for sexual pleasure (Flowers 1998; Kibby and Costello 2001; Manderson 1992; McNair 2002; Rival, et al. 1998). Foreign men who patronize Philippine go-go bars establish an identity based on a reading of consumer consciousness wherein they ascribe to the notion of lifestyle choices rather than the obligations of social values or other regulatory regimes (Brewis and Linstead 2000; Hostetler and Herdt 1998; Slater 1997). Here, issues of morality or ethics are subsumed by the overriding notions of rationality and 'freedom' embedded in the ideology of consumer sovereignty, and the commodification of human sexuality in modern society is indicative of a consumerist subjectivity that privileges individual pleasures. In many instances, the male customer simply projects his own desires onto the female object, disregarding her longings in his quest to get what he wants from the encounter; the same can be said for those bar employees who will interact with a customer in a sexual manner for the sole purpose of receiving some form of material remuneration.

The key difference between the go-go bar and most other venues for sexual entertainment is that there remains the potential for transforming the sexual fantasy into a real relationship that mirrors one's dreams. The conceptual positioning of the go-go bar and the consumerist approach to these encounters provide a cover for customers and employees so that they can maintain the structure of fantasy without giving into the 'real' desires of others. For example, those men who do not wish to engage in an intersubjective experience or other performances to unlock the 'confessions' of female desire will simply project their own lustful images (Benjamin 1986; Williams 1989),

preferring to maintain the mystery of sexual desires for fear that they might reveal too much about themselves.

> [T]he suspension of the 'real' seems to underlie the very existence of the strip club. My regulars gave me many reasons behind their presence in the club which implied that the *illusion* of intimacy provided by the interaction was more desirable than the outside relationship – in the club, they were granted safety from the struggle to attract 'real' women, from the necessity to form 'real commitments and from the demands of those 'real' women on their time and emotions. (Frank 1998: 189, emphasis in original)

It is this escape from reality – an extension of the idea that sexual 'leisure' is preferable to the modern romance that often requires 'work' – that men find desirable in the relationships they form in spaces of socioerotic commerce.

However, there are also men who visit these bars precisely because they are seeking answers to those sexual questions that cannot be pursued in other social arenas. Many are willing to get swept up in their emotions for a short fantasy relationship, and the aforementioned displacement of physical and emotional intimacy in the encounters involving prostitutes in Western settings – where women separate the 'public' life of a 'sex worker' from their 'private' encounters with husbands and lovers – serves as another reason why men venture across the globe to seek sexual relations in the Philippines and other Asian countries. Engaging in socioerotic intimacy in an anonymous setting adds to the rush of excitement that is part of any encounter deemed 'unusual' or 'dangerous,' and the risk involved in having sex with someone identified as a prostitute is another important aspect in understanding the desire men express in regard to this activity (Monto 2000).[54] Prospects for realizing sexual scenarios that were heretofore considered unattainable adds to the fantasy, but also leads to problems when the participant(s) cannot maintain the distinction between these two perspectives during the course of their interaction. It may seem trivial at first glance, but for many, the risk of losing control over one's emotions by 'falling in love' becomes an adventure unto itself.

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[54] In this context, the message of 'safe sex' in STI/AIDS discourse becomes counterintuitive, as sex is never completely 'safe' with regard to physical or emotional security.

The motivations of men identified as 'sex tourists' are myriad and complex, involving social, emotional, and even spiritual fulfillment in their intimate dealings with the exotic/erotic other. The consumerist view that men have a 'right' to sex informs the attitudes and practices of many male visitors to the Philippines who rationalize their behavior according to the 'traditional' or Orientalist notion that the GROs they encounter in the bars of Angeles and Makati are representative of a femininity that has been 'lost' in the West (Brennan 2001; O'Connell Davidson 2001). Of particular concern to these men is the demise of the authority of 'the white male' in countries where the rights of women, 'homosexuals,' and racial/ethnic minorities have expanded since the 1960s. In desiring relations with Filipino women, many foreign men are seeking a relationship that approximates their 'memories' of sexual accessibility and domination in the discursive histories of their own cultures (Connerton 1989); a longing for 'traditional' feminine performances of compliance that emphasized the erotic desires of men. Like those in the Philippines who possess the power to get their point across to a mass audience – government and Church officials, movie and television producers, editorial writers, advertisers – the male traveler seeks to construct and promote his desired vision of the Filipina other as a means of situating himself within specific social, cultural and economic discourses.

<u>imagining 'sex work(ers)'</u>

For the young Filipino woman in these equations, the accumulation of various forms of capital through consumption greatly enhances her status, and working in the go-go bar provides many of the resources necessary to transcend class and social restrictions that are part of the marginality she experiences as a *probinsyana*. Jewelry, cell phones, and the other accouterments of a modern lifestyle transform the *barangay* lass according to an image of cosmopolitan sophistication, and the incorporation of products and images

related to *istyle* ('style')[55] provide her with a modicum of autonomy insofar as beauty is linked to social and political power in the local culture.

> Consumption here is not the drunken excess of physical indulgence but rather the subtle lack in the very display of cosmetic repair. The body of the rural woman, reflected in 'looking-glasses from Venice,' witnesses a triangulation of desire and body image through 'worldly' goods. These commodities measure the body by another standard, they reveal its provincialism at the very moment of provoking, and appearing to satisfy, narcissistic desires (Stallybrass and White 1986: 39).

'Shopping' thus becomes a metaphor for social mobility in that it represents the transformation involved in embodying the persona of someone who has the time, money and taste to spend on name-brand luxury items (Bourdieu 1984; Bowlby 2000), and since foreign male customers can provide the means to achieve these goals, then they too may be constructed as commodities in the sexual market.

However, Filipino women do not have the same 'freedom' as their foreign male counterparts when it comes to practices of consumption. Clothing that is deemed stylish in other countries often reveals too much of the female body for Filipino sensibilities, creating the distinction that the consumer often desires, but not always in a manner that is accepted within the local culture.

> See her over there… you can tell she is *japayuki*… smoking, talking loud and laughing with the boys like that. She has been away so long that she forgot how to act here in the *barangay*. It is okay to act like that somewhere else, but she should not embarrass her family while she is here. (female resident Samar)[56]

> [Commenting on her *balikbayan* daughter in a swimsuit] It is shocking for some people to see, but it does not matter to me… you see the people here, they wear their blue jeans and t-shirts into the water! Anyway, she is American now. (female resident in Samar)

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[55] *Istyle* in this context relates to one's ability to appropriate a transnational identity through fashions and performances that are deemed 'modern' or 'American'/'Western' (see Johnson 1997).

[56] The label *japayuki* is used to define someone going to Japan to work, but is primarily used as a euphemism for 'prostitute' since most Filipinos migrating to work in Japan are young female 'entertainers.' As with the term 'passenger women' in Papua New Guinea (Wardlow 2002), *japayuki* is an identity that concerns narratives of migration, consumption, and transgression.

Those who adopt dress and mannerisms that seem alien to family and friends in the rural setting may evoke stares and gossip, but they rarely lose their connections to 'home' by taking up these unfamiliar appearances and performances, and most of these presentations of feminine fashion or behavior that appears 'foreign' are usually recognized as elements of a transnational identity. Those who can manage the different personae associated with the rural / cosmopolitan divide attain a privileged status among their peers who also want to engage in similar displays of consumption (Johnson 1997), and a simple alteration in behavior is often enough to satisfy the conservative expectations of others. Criticism at the local level is mediated through the performance of 'traditional' roles and acceptable identities so that the stigma of being labeled a *japayuki* or GRO is diminished if she fulfills her responsibilities as a 'dutiful daughter' by helping her relatives (Fuwa 1999).

Despite the notion of consumer sovereignty and the 'freedom' associated with personal consumption, people must still take into account the social ramifications of their actions and moderate their performances of consumption accordingly. Consumption becomes problematic in this regard because it is linked to passionate or irrational behavior that is most often identified with femininity in popular discourses where women appear unable to resist shopping and other acquisitive practices (Slater 1997). As consumers, Filipina migrants must choose whether to spend money on material items in order to achieve this modern, mobile identity, or remit some of their earnings home as dictated by the ideology of traditional Filipino femininity that has firm roots in the stable, cooperative family. A crucial component of the late-capitalist economic system and (post)modern culture, consumption is sustained through the instrumentality of pleasure without any compelling 'need' for additional accumulation.

> Whatever the rationality of consumer society may mean, it does not aim to rest… on the universalization of rational thought and action, but on free reign of irrational passions (just like routine rests on catering for the desire for diversion, uniformity on the recognition of diversity, and conformity on the agents' liberation). The rationality of consumer society is built on the irrationality of its individualized actors (Bauman 2001: 17).

Desire plays a dual role in that the individual consumer longs for social approval as well as personal fulfillment through the acquisition of goods and services.[57] Young women in the Philippines are all too aware that they are subject to various structures of patriarchal and symbolic domination that fall under the headings of 'tradition' and *istyle*, but they still do their best to address their own longings while, at the same time, fulfilling their prescribed responsibilities to others in their desire for social acceptance. These tensions are evident when considering the local construction of 'desire' (*aliw*) as an element of personal agency. Deconstructing the term reveals some of these ambiguities since it is related to Filipino concepts of *loob* ('disposition'),[58] *ginhawa* ('the alleviation of suffering'), as well as the more common usage involving *libang* ('amusement, diversion'; see Francisco 2000). This comprehensive approach to *aliw* accounts for diverse meanings of individual behavior and social relations in a manner that gives agency to the subject regardless of whether s/he is acting out of personal will or adherence to cultural conventions, so that a person is accorded subjective autonomy if s/he is engaged in either personal consumption (*libang*) or similar activities that are intended to address the 'needs' / desires of others (*ginhawa*).

These contradictions of desire in consumption require biographical construction to position the individual within a particular social context so that the audience can validate his/her performances and identities. It is in this manner of dialogic interaction that desire does not necessarily focus on an object as is commonly posited in discourses of consumption, but rather involves a "desire for the desire of the other" (Hollway 1996; Schrift 2000). Our choices for consumption and performance are guided by the opinions

[57] This constant mediation between personal longing and social responsibility is grounded in philosophical debates that differentiate egoistic desire from altruistic desire (Marks 1986; Neely 1974; Silverman 2000). For example, wanting to address the desires of others is not a purely selfless approach when one considers that in so doing, the subject receives personal satisfaction through social recognition of his or her generosity and observation of social values. In the case of those Filipino travelers who engage in 'conspicuous consumption,' they receive adulation if they also follow local customs regarding the redistribution of wealth (through *pasalubong* or 'gifts'), or if they otherwise reflect other 'traditional values' in their practices of consumption.

of others who have the power to judge our competency in adopting (life)styles or otherwise appropriating desirable signs, and thus, individuality is ultimately a social construction since "at the very moment of realizing our own independence, we are dependent on another to recognize it" (Benjamin 1990, cited in Hollway 1996: 98). Consumption goes a long way in asserting subjective agency because it is an indication that the consumer is 'free' to choose his or her lifestyle and identity, although *istyle* is always subject to the vagaries of taste and opinion. As will become evident in the following discussion of erotic interactions in the go-go bars of Makati and Angeles (Chapters 4 and 5), this confirmation of the self assumes many forms depending on the setting, the emergence of particular discourses in these relations, and the personal histories of the participants.

The espousal of a 'lifestyle' involving certain goods and practices is important in this regard because it provides a biographical narrative that often charts the author's developmental progress through the practices of consumption, taking special note of milestones in socioeconomic (im)mobility. For women working in the go-go bars of Makati and Angeles, the seminal chapters in their personal biographies concern relocation to urban areas (or a return to the *probinsya*), continuing relations with relatives (or separation from 'home' and other aspects of sociocultural reproduction), the joys of raising children (or the problems of being a single parent), and their romantic liaisons with foreign men (or accounts of heartbreak and abandonment). These narratives necessarily refer to past events to account for present situations, allowing the author to continually remake his or her self according to changing social conditions and desires.[59]

Moreover, the stories that people construct in these fluid settings are always partial, generating multiple (re)presentations of self along with varied readings of social experience. This is due, in part, to the uncertainty that characterizes those encounters that

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[58] The concept of *loob* deserves much more consideration than I am able to provide as it relates to Filipino identity as a 'shared inner self' (*kapwa*; see Jocano 1997).

[59] Temporality is a crucial aspect of narrative construction, where the practices of developing and telling personal stories involve the consideration of past experiences as well as the anticipation of future results from the deployment of these biographical narratives (Bauman 2001; McNay 2000).

take place within the go-go bar, where people are attempting to reconcile their differences by forming some semblance of agreement between author and reader in the creation of these narratives (Ochs and Capps 1996). Biographical performances that emerge during the course of erotic interaction are dependent on the spatial context, the interests of participants, and the availability of textual 'resources,' including different narrative possibilities and the recognition of and adherence to local conventions of storytelling (Holstein and Gubrium 2000). Within this performative environment dedicated to leisure and sexual expression, it is no wonder that the crafting and sharing of these varied, artful narratives emerge as essential components of 'entertainment.' The rigorous scripts of work and family roles in the 'real world' prompt a desire for these textual diversions (*aliw*-as-*libang*) where people can pursue fantasies of being someone else and taking part in the creative re-visions of others.

> *Aliw ding maituturing ang pagbabasa ng mga nobelang naisulat sa wikang makulay, madamdaming, at retorikal… Aliw ang pagdama ng mambabasang ng mga damdamin sa isang di-tuwirang paraan habang nakikipag-isa sa mga dinaranas ng mga tauhan sa nobela.*
>
> Pleasure (*aliw*) is derived from reading novels that are written in language that is colorful, expressive, and rhetorical… [The] reader takes pleasure in the immoral ways [of the characters] while empathizing with the experiences of the people in the novel. (Reyes 1982, cited in Francisco 2000: 22)

Katherine Liepe-Levinson (2002) describes the appeal of erotic performance in striptease as a 'spiral' of fantasy involving transgressive acts that extend the narrative structures beyond those repetitive scripts that people encounter in 'normal' life. Similarly, what men and women encounter in Philippine go-go bars is the unanticipated pleasure (*libang*) emerging from their exploration of these diverse narrative possibilities, where "[t]he ambiguity of the intersubjective space… has much to do with the range of possible interactions that customers and dancers are constantly negotiating, and with the different psychodynamic processes involved in this negotiation" (Frank 2002: 24). This perspective on socioerotic interaction leads to the realization that men primarily patronize these establishments for the 'experiences' they offer rather than seeking a particular sexual service or product that is more easily obtainable in some other setting.

The following chapters will discuss in detail the spatial and social intricacies of performances involving men and women in Makati and Angeles, but one should not look upon these acts and relationships as simple, rational routines to satisfy basic sexual and economic desires. Instead, the reader should track these biographies as do the customers and GROs: as part of a continuing narrative where people interpret and construct different characters as the stories unfold over time; where interactive experiences related to social and sexual intimacy are pleasurable objectives in and of themselves, providing excitement and anticipation precisely because the outcome is uncertain. It is through this intersubjective recognition of the other that enables participants – as actor / audience and author / reader – to transcend the fantasy (and mythology) of the go-go bar in forming 'real' relationships and achieving a better understanding of our differences and commonalities.

Chapter 3

Sexscapes

> It seems as if urban space is inherently eroticised. One reason perhaps – largely unacknowledged – for migration from country to city is the promise of the bright lights, of excitement, glamour, of night made day and sexual encounters. It is a particular kind of eroticism, an erotic life based on strangers, based on chance, unregulated. (Wilson 2001: 141)

When discussing the sex industry in Southeast Asia (especially with regard to Thailand and the Philippines), the go-go bar is the first image that materializes in the minds of most people. Visions of exotic-looking women dancing on stage – either nude or in seductive attire – amid the flashing lights and pulsating rhythms of loud music are a familiar sight, either because we have observed similar venues in our own cities or because the global reach of television has transmitted these pictures into our homes. Titillating documentary and news features escort the viewer into the bars and brothels of various Third World countries, using a 'hidden' camera to add to the transgressive excitement that comes with entering a space that seems forbidden and foreboding. Yet these brief presentations cannot possibly explore the complex reasons and multiple meanings accounting for the involvement of men (as customers, tourists / businessmen, boyfriends, etc.) and women (as 'sex workers,' girlfriends, daughters, etc.), so the portrayal of these relations ignores such nuances to satisfy the voyeurism of television audiences by emphasizing the more sensational aspects of erotic behavior. In so doing, the go-go bar is fashioned into a locale that represents the politico-economic viewpoint and interests of those who evoke and represent such imagery, employing the same biases that shape much of the academic writing on the subject.

For many readers, my approach appears to be no different than that of the aforementioned *exposé*, as it is necessary to literally guide the reader through the daily activities in this setting. Those who have spent a significant amount of time in the

Philippine go-go bar as employees, customers, or even casual observers will recognize much of what I have to say, although inevitably everyone walks away with different interpretations of their experiences. Using mere words to communicate an assortment of sensuous encounters, the greatest challenge in composing this ethnography is to convey to the reader what it 'feels' like to be in the go-go bar mingling with people who are all attuned to the sexual aspects of this social setting.

In this chapter, I show how the go-go bar is both physically constructed and conceptually positioned in accordance with notions of sexuality and anonymity in the modern city, and the reasoning behind the creation of these spaces in line with the paradigms of 'social hygiene,' morality and gendered differences in leisure and sexual desire. From the social and spatial segregation of these establishments to the marginalization of male customers and female employees as sexual deviants, state policies involving surveillance and criminalization are used to control people's expressions of desire by limiting mobility and behavior. Intimate relations between persons are influenced by the same public / private discourse that informs other aspects of gender, so certain locations are deemed appropriate venues for sexual interaction depending on whether one is a man or a woman. For example, Philippine discourses situate feminine sexuality within the domain of the home and solely for procreative purposes, while the sexual desires of men are satisfied in the public spaces through their interactions with *queridas* ('mistresses') and GROs (guest relations officers). It is within this formation of social relations and practices that the go-go bar attains its tenuous legitimacy in what I refer to as the 'sexscape.'[60]

To assuage the demand created by male sexual cravings as well as protecting innocent women from lustful impulses (both the supposedly uncontrollable desires of men and women's own sexual longings), social, legal and geographic boundaries are

[60] Arjun Appadurai (1996) also uses various *scapes* (*technoscape*, *ethnoscape*, etc.) to represent the fluidity of those cultural dimensions that acquire their recognized form through the perspectives of agents who navigate the myriad discourses of social life. Here, I am using *sexscape* to convey a similar view of how sexual interaction is structured in various temporal and spatial locations through the continuous negotiation of competing ideas.

required so that 'good' women can be distinguished and separated from 'bad' women according to the concept of sexual purity. The go-go bar (or any other edifice designed for sexual interaction) is created specifically to accommodate the desires of individuals in areas where they can express themselves sexually, and this partitioning of certain spaces for erotic activities also serves the desires of the state in keeping the general population from being sullied by these libidinous activities (Hubbard 1998). Within this ideological framework, the government can continue to decry prostitution and arrest women for straying beyond the home or the brothel – locales that have been officially established in the name of sexual 'care' and 'entertainment' for men.

I also examine the material makeup and operational aspects of the go-go bar through an analysis of the physical layout and working conditions. As outlined in Chapter 2, the ideology of scientific rationality – based on the supposedly 'natural' distinctions between men and women – is deployed to create the division of public and private in a distinctly gendered and sexual manner, and it is the control of these feminine passions within the public realm of the workplace that serves as a marker of modern civility and masculine subjectivity (Brewis and Linstead 2000; Carpenter 1998; Peletz 1996). This desire for conceptual distancing between sexual intimacy and economic production is also invoked in the vehement refusal of many feminists to consider erotic performances and interaction associated with prostitution as an official occupational designation under the heading 'sex work' (Barry 1995; Marshall 1999; Nencel 2001). Yet, however objectionable the go-go bar is portrayed by some, being an 'entertainer' or GRO is still recognized as a viable employment option by the local governments as well as most of the populace, so it is important to consider this setting as a place of work for the purposes of evaluating labor relations and activities. Since economic necessity is always presented as the sole reason women enter into these occupational settings, I will also discuss women's earnings. This analysis reveals that the financial aspects of working in this setting are overplayed in media representations and the scholarly accounts, so I will also re-present what women have said about the job, as there are other

features of the work environment to consider in the overall assessment of go-go bars within the context of other employment opportunities.

Makati and Angeles: "fucking business, fucking vacation"

Cities have long been identified with the trappings of modernity that draw people into these ever-expanding sociocultural amalgamations. Serving as the centers for government, industry, commerce, and higher leaning, urban areas are primarily associated with productive activities, functioning as the economic engines of advanced capitalist societies. Workers, merchants, civil servants and students are attracted to cities because they offer numerous prospects for personal advancement that are otherwise unavailable in the hinterlands. As people move into the metropolitan area, the government responds by providing additional services that, in turn, fuel the desires of those who want to migrate to the city in order to avail of these conveniences. A more recent construction of the city – what some might consider a post-industrial (or even postmodern) perspective – emphasizes the role of the metropolis as a "landscape of consumption" (Zukin 1998: 825; see also Slater 1997). Cities such as Las Vegas and Orlando are identified primarily as sites of leisure and are among the fastest-growing urban centers in the United States because the increasing arrivals of tourists to these cities requires a concomitant rise in the number of local residents employed to serve the desires of vacationers. The cities in this study – Makati and Angeles – strive for similar growth and recognition as sites of production and consumption in spite of the difficulties associated with rapid urbanization.

Thus, 'the city' also operates as a symbol of socioeconomic development and national identity in official discourse as well as the popular imagination. Visions of soaring skyscrapers, pedestrian shopping malls and traffic-clogged streets are juxtaposed against the bucolic scenery of verdant expanses of land and dispersed settlement patterns of the countryside, creating the urban / rural dichotomy that differentiates these spaces and links them with other opposing signifiers of valuation such as 'advancement' / 'backwardness.' By promoting the city as the culmination of an evolutionary process, the

probinsya ('province' or 'countryside') is relegated to the nostalgic present – a memory of a way of life that serves as a reminder of simpler times, as well as those traditional communal values and rituals evoked in nationalist discourses.[61]

However, the simplicity associated with a rural existence is not a standard of living to which most people aspire in a sociopolitical environment that encourages 'progress' according to international standards. An important element of both national and individual advancement in this regard involves the adoption of status markers that emanate from the pervasive imagery of 'urban lifestyles' (Zukin 1998). Governments espouse this perspective by investing in grand infrastructure projects, whereas individuals use their earnings to purchase items that they can then display to others. Consumption of this type is not limited the various material goods that denote class. People in the Philippines also model their attitudes and behaviors on a reading of *istyle* ('style') that is appropriated from cosmopolitan or transnational messages endorsing a particular performance of modernity that denotes social mobility as well as an understanding of 'foreign' places and performances (Johnson 1997).

Playing the part of a sophisticated and well-traveled urbanite requires the correct attire and accessories, proper speech, and refined behavior that are identified with 'culture' (Bourdieu 1984), yet many rural Filipinos coming home from their long sojourns in the city or abroad make due with a collection of blue jeans and gold jewelry, a greater command of English, Arabic or Japanese, and a manner of conduct that distinguishes them from the friends and family that have been left 'behind' in the continuing quest for social advancement. Most Filipinos look toward the United States as a symbol of 'progress' for national as well as individual achievement, so the *balikbayan*

[61] The *probinsya* is more than a geographic subset of the national map; it is also part of the cultural psyche in the social and political marginalization of people from those areas (Tsing 1993). Women deride each other's 'backward' mannerisms – such as eating rice without utensils or being unable to speak English – with the epithet of *probinsyana*, or by referring to a specific region that is perceived to be geographically and socially distant, such as *bisaya* (for the central islands of the archipelago, the Visayas). Geographic locations have also become euphemisms for prostitution, as women who are identified 'sex workers' in Leyte are called *cebuana* because many come from the nearby island of Cebu.

('one who returns home') are able to transform their greater knowledge and material wealth into sociopolitical capital that sets them apart from their compatriots.[62] For those who cannot venture overseas to seek such experience and riches, the city – in this case, Manila or even Angeles – becomes an acceptable substitute, providing the requisite opportunities for realizing the dream of individual success through the 'adventure' of migration.[63]

The two cities that constitute the focus of this study are notable for their differences, even though both P. Burgos in Makati and Fields Avenue in Angeles are similar in scope and substance, as the media and local government identify both of these streets as 'tourist areas' because they contain a concentration of go-go bars that target a foreign clientele. Makati is one of many incorporated cities in Metro Manila, and within its borders are the headquarters of most banking and financial institutions as well as offices of the larger multinational firms conducting business in the Philippines. It is also home to numerous expensive gated residential subdivisions (ironically called 'villages'), and the most exclusive shopping centers, restaurants and five-star hotels are also located along its boulevards, making Makati the area most often identified with wealth and power in the Philippines. The fusion of commerce and leisure on an international scale in this location has transformed Makati into "a site of transnational identification" (Tadiar 1993: 160). Not only are you more likely to encounter the *kano* ('American' or other Caucasian) in Makati, but the Filipinos who shop and dine in this city speak English to a greater extent than seen in other parts of the country.

Angeles City in the central part of Luzon has a population of approximately 300,000. It first gained notoriety as a destination for male desire when it was the location

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[62] Vicente Rafael explains how these *balikbayans* serve as "neocolonizers whose ambitions lie in setting themselves apart from the rest of the 'natives' rather than affiliating with them" (Rafael 1997: 271), denigrating all things Filipino as they regale their compatriots with stories of how developed other countries are compared to the Philippines.

[63] Even though migration involves a high level of uncertainty, 'mobility' and 'change' are desirable lifestyle attributes when it comes to personal development because many people view translocation as a way to 'start over' or otherwise alter their previous identities by beginning a new 'chapter' in their personal biographies (Bauman 2001).

of Clark Air Base, which was for many years the largest overseas U.S. Air Force installation. During the Vietnam War, it was a center for 'rest and recreation' (R&R), and veterans still reminisce about their experiences in the nightclubs along Fields Avenue. Afterward, a constant presence of military men fueled the bar scene, resulting in jobs and an infusion of dollars along with many marriages and even more *mestizo* children.

Along with differences in location, it is also important to consider the historical changes that have defined both places, especially the recent (post-1997) economic downturn that has affected everyone in the Philippines. Angeles underwent a dramatic transformation after the American military abandoned Clark Air Base, and between June 1991 and June 1993, there were only a handful of clubs along Fields. With the closing of Ermita,[64] many of the owners moved to Angeles because its government has been more receptive toward incentives that bring in much-needed visitors to the area. Despite the city government's efforts at attracting other businesses, foreign investors have not embraced the Clark development zone as they have in the Subic / Olongapo sector (site of the former U.S. naval base), and efforts to promote sustainable tourism have been unable to draw significant numbers of visitors to the regions other attractions (primarily adventure tours on Mt. Pinatubo). Angeles City has become the center of the sex industry catering to foreign tourists in the Philippines the way Ermita in Manila used to be. The officials cannot afford to close the clubs, so they attempt to control them through surveillance and law enforcement, trying to promote "wholesome, family entertainment" along Fields Avenue while maintaining this primary source of foreign earnings.

Unlike Angeles, the emergence of Makati as a premiere destination for male patrons occurred primarily from within, where the number of establishments mushroomed due to expansion efforts by a small number of owners.[65] In the cases of

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[64] The district of Ermita in Manila was infamous for its nightlife before mayor Fred 'Dirty Harry' Lim decided to close the go-go bars after his election in 1992. However, the Philippine Supreme Court has subsequently determined that these closures were unconstitutional because the owners of the clubs were denied due process.

[65] The local government of Makati City ceased issuing business licenses for establishments employing GROs in November 1993, soon after the closure of the bars in

both Angeles and Makati, the development of a political climate to regulate rather than prohibit establishments that cater to masculine sexual desires has stimulated tourist arrivals as well as employment opportunities for young, migrant Filipino women. Coupled with the specifics of Philippine culture and history (Chapter 2), the urban environment enables these venues to flourish within an ideological and bureaucratic framework that encourages the particular forms of intimacy encountered within the go-go bar.

sex and the city

Perceptions of the metropolis as a destination for productive work or as a site of consumption and leisure invariably influence sexual performances in these social settings. According to Henning Bech (1998), the city is a sexualized space and modern sexuality involves a decidedly urban performance. Described as a "routine world of strangers" (Lofland 1973, cited in Bech 1998: 217), the city is a site for 'public' congregation – a space that is available to everyone – and it is the possibility of meeting new people that engenders freedom in matters of social and sexual conduct. Within this world of 'strangers,' it is possible to gaze upon and otherwise interact with people in a manner that is difficult in rural settings where familiarity entails greater surveillance of socioerotic activities. It is difficult to imagine prostitution or other forms of urban sexual expression occurring within a 'rural' environment where such performances are not possible because everyone already has a 'history' that has become part of the social memory of these close communities (Connerton 1989). Gazing and other socio-sexual relations become more circumscribed within the small town or *barangay*, so the anonymity afforded by intermingling with unfamiliar people in an urban setting allows for everyday voyeurism and opportunities for intimate encounters.

Ermita because city officials were concerned about developing a similar notoriety ("By nightfall, the difference blurs" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 31, 1997). However, some owners have skirted this executive order by registering new bars as 'extensions' to existing venues, and the recent (2002) opening of several new venues signals yet another change in policy.

While much of the literature continues to focus on the visual aspects of metropolitan living (Tadiar 1993), it is important to note that the eroticism of urban space involves all of the senses. Just as overcrowding enables anonymity within the omnipresent gaze of others, so too does it provide opportunities for experiencing physical closeness that many people seek within the depersonalized urban world. Olfactory and tactile stimulations are plentiful within the urban crush of humanity, so perfumes and casual contact in the jostle of bodies provide additional avenues for fleeting sexual fulfillment. However, the visual is still privileged in these discourses concerning 'immoral lifestyles' because public displays of erotic behavior run counter to the notion that sexual intimacy should take place under the veil of privacy – preferably within the sanctity of the family home, or discreetly in a motel.[66]

The physical proximity of city life creates a level of intimacy that can be disconcerting for those who are not used to living in such conditions,[67] but the presence of crowds also allows people to blend into the mass of humanity. Personal activities are more conspicuous in rural areas because neighbors and family can closely observe every move, but the city and its distinct forms of interaction serve as a cover for the occupational activities of women working in go-go bars, as well as concealing their personal desires.

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[66] The issue of 'love motels' in Philippine cities is problematic in this regard because they serve as a visible symbol for the supposedly illicit affairs that take place within. Many of these establishments go to great lengths to ensure the privacy of their customers – such as allowing guests to drive into a garage adjacent to their room, thus concealing their identities to the outside world. However, these establishments are particularly conspicuous in their advertising, and every Valentine's Day the local media revisits these erotic spaces and the popular representations of Filipino men and their mistresses ("What's Feb. 14 without the ritual motel trip?" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 13, 2000).

[67] Despite the popular fantasy of unexpected romantic encounters, the closeness of city life is also distressing to some: several urban centers in East Asia (including Manila) now offer separate buses or train carriages for female passengers due to concerns over unwanted intimate contact initiated by sexually-aggressive men. These 'mashers' (a local label for men who engage in this type of behavior) employ the pretext of urban overcrowding to fondle others in public.

> When I come to work, I dress up in these nice clothes because I told my parents that I am a receptionist at a nice restaurant here in Makati… I am not afraid they will find out I am working here [in the go-go bar] because it is still far to our home, and they do not go out at night. (dancer in Makati)
>
> I don't like to fly when I go home to the provinces… yes, I have the money, but I like to take the bus because it is fun, and I get to meet men while traveling *(laughs)*. You know I can't do that once I get home. (receptionist in Makati)

The urban environment affords anonymity to the streetwalker because it is easy to hide one's sexual inclinations through the appropriation of 'normal' public behavior such as strolling or 'window shopping.'[68] As noted by Miralao and colleagues in their study of Angeles City (1990), most of the streetwalkers and freelancers are local residents with familial ties to the community while the bar women are migrants from other parts of the country. Long-term residents are more knowledgeable when it comes to developing a system whereby they can reveal their availability to prospective clients without attracting undue attention from law enforcement or concerned friends and family members, often working in conjunction with others (security guards, transportation personnel, etc.) who can procure customers. Those women and men who work in establishments such as go-go bars or massage parlors cannot hide the obvious fact that they enter and exit these premises on a routine basis, so it would be foolish to seek employment in these venues in their hometown if they wanted to keep their occupation a secret.[69] While most observers would identify go-go bar employees as 'prostitutes' based solely on their daily passing into these venues, the behaviors and relationships that emerge within such spaces indicate otherwise.

malayo: 'independence' through mobility

Migration in the Philippines is framed by a discourse of 'sacrifice' for those who leave their rural homes, but it should also be recognized as a desired means of achieving

[68] However, governments continue to regulate many instances of innocuous public behavior through laws against loitering and vagrancy (see below).

[69] Familiarity with a locale and its residents enables such 'freelancers' to move about without drawing attention; 'strangers' who loiter are subject to greater scrutiny.

personal independence. Within this context, 'the city' functions as a magnet for those seeking the cultural capital they acquire through the consumption of goods and identities as well as greater personal freedom through mobility and anonymity, so rather than approaching this relocation solely as a means of addressing some economic need through the expansion of employment opportunities, the movement of people toward urban areas may also be viewed as a way in which people escape the constraints imposed on many forms of socioerotic expression (Agustín 2002; Mills 1998; Stein 2001). Public voices continue to espouse the official doctrine of duty and responsibility, but privately many young people view their urban sojourns as occasions to address other desires that are not so readily articulated within the gendered power disparities and rural prejudices of 'home.' *Barangay* residents usually experience their first extended journey away from home when they migrate to the local *municipio* ('town') to attend high school at the age of 12 or 13.[70] From there, many will move on to a larger city to attend college, look for work, or to find an appropriate setting in which to develop a new identity and/or lifestyle. At this stage, young people live together in boarding houses (unless they have relatives living in the city), providing ample opportunity for intimate socializing beyond the watchful eyes of neighbors and kin.

These ideas regarding migration in the Philippines evoke considerable anxiety for young women who must balance their own desires with those of their relatives and the state. A survey conducted among female college students in the provincial city of Tacloban, Leyte revealed a striking uniformity in their answers concerning migration and family formation, but subsequent discussions with individuals revealed some discrepancies.[71] All of the survey respondents wanted to get married between the ages of

[70] The public educational system in the Philippines provides only 10 years of schooling, so high school consists of the 7th through 10th grade, after which graduates may go on to college.

[71] A written, self-administered survey of 90 female students at Leyte Normal University (conducted in May 1999) focused on basic demographic information and attitudes concerning post-graduate occupational choices and family formation. Eighteen of the students were then invited to participate in face-to-face discussions exploring the meaning of their responses (sixteen were grouped in two separate focus groups, while two women agreed to individual interviews).

25 and 30, enabling them to establish a career in their chosen field before starting their own family (in this particular sample, that involves either teaching or social work). In many cases, women wanted to earn money so they could support the studies of younger siblings, as they believed that they would no longer be able to pursue their professions once they had married and set up a household of their own. Some families exert pressure on daughters and sons to find work to support aging parents and younger siblings, and the state also encourages the virtue of filial piety by stressing the importance of *utang na loob* ('debt of gratitude') as an integral element of Filipino identity (Kaut 1961).[72]

In spite of the expectations of sacrifice and responsibility, young people have their own intentions when deciding whether or not to seek employment outside of their home community involving personal considerations of freedom and exploration associated with the modern urban lifestyle. Through the informal discussions, many students described migration as an opportunity to experience "independence"[73] – to have the ability to make decisions on their own. In trying to explain the meaning of this personal 'independence' in a local language, one woman used the term *malayo* ('far away')[74] to describe her ambiguous feelings toward migration: she wanted to remain 'close' to her family and help them financially whenever possible, but she said – as have many other women, including those working in the go-go bars – that if she did not move away then they would be asking her for money all of the time and she would be unable to

[72] Research in Leyte and Samar found that the idea of *utang na loob* is problematic for many parents, primarily because they associate 'debt' with a business transaction that is not appropriate for close, familial relations. This could simply be a difference in translation – although none could come up with an analogous Waray term – or it could be indicative of the Tagalog-centric approach to Philippine culture and identity. The promotion of this and other local 'values' is also part of the state's efforts to promote a cultural basis for economic co-dependence so there would be no need for a government-based system of welfare.

[73] The focus group discussions were conducted primarily in Tagalog, but the women always used the English terms 'freedom' or 'independence' when conceptualizing the experience of migration.

[74] In distinguishing personal from political 'freedom' or 'independence,' Benedict Kerkvliet (personal communication) also uses the Tagalog term *malayo* to signify a spatial as well as conceptual distance that enables many migrants to break away from the constraints of rural lifestyles and familial surveillance.

save anything for her own future. For most young women who seek a better life through migration, their own desires become those of their relatives (and vice-versa):

> Before, I want to just stay in my province, but then I found out that there was something else in life… I did not even know there was such a thing as a lamp; we would just light a match and that was our only light. Then I had experience with a light that you could simply plug in… now that I have lived here in the city, I do not think I could live in the province any more… I work here in the bar to pay my tuition and so that my family can also experience these things. (receptionist in Makati)

For her relatives to also "experience" socioeconomic progress, she must engage in consumption as it relates to the 'freedom' to transform one's status and identity through 'shopping' (Bowlby 2000), purchasing the tangible items and transmitting this knowledge and the material accoutrements of "something else in life" back to the *probinsya*. The ideologies and practices of capitalism represented in urbanity and modernity are thus perpetuated through their association with these durable goods and the imagined possibilities for personal 'development' and 'independence,' maintaining these networks of migration and consumption. This lexicon of transformation that posits a spatial-temporal shift from the 'here-and-now' to 'then' and/or 'there' also provides a powerful narrative framework in which to represent changes in one's identity and social condition (Bauman 2001; Robinson 2000).

Several recent studies reveal that Filipina migrant workers feel compelled to repeat the discourses of 'economic necessity' and 'familial duty' in their statements regarding migration because the other reasons – such as desire to fulfill various personal goals – do not accommodate the dominant Filipino feminine imagery of selfless sacrifice (Barber 2000; Chang and Groves 2000; Constable 1999). Thus, the contradictions evident in these discussions are to be expected as women negotiate the discrepancies between what they believe is socially agreeable and those desires that deviate from expected roles and behavior. As in the quote above, most women do their best to accommodate everyone's desires, thus fulfilling their cultural obligations; yet there is still considerable debate as to which desires take precedence in these practices. Moreover, when it comes to erotic longing, not only must they navigate their perceptions of what is

'right' and 'wrong'; they must also contend with a society that is becoming increasingly intolerant in the application of exacting standards when it comes to the public expression of human sexuality.

Given the aforementioned discourses concerning prostitutes as women-in-public, it is no wonder that keeping one's occupational status concealed is a primary concern for those working in the go-go bars since their job description is usually associated with stigmatized practices and identities. Usually, women will keep their bar relations within the bar, avoiding contact with those who could expose their occupational identity, and a chance meeting with a woman known to be a GRO outside of the bar setting, in many instances, becomes an encounter fraught with difficulties. This 'shyness' expressed by women in these public encounters is not necessarily indicative of their status as GROs, but instead reflects the pervasive perceptions and discourses revolving around female sexuality that structures the behavior of all women in Philippine society.[75]

Seeing a Filipina in public conversing or otherwise intimately engaging a foreign man evokes images of 'prostitution' regardless of the circumstances concerning their relationship, as it is the 'foreignness' of these encounters – involving racial and performative differences – that renders these displays of intimacy unacceptable (Harrison 2001; Kelsky 1994; Valentine 1997). Even Filipinas who meet and marry men from other countries through more socially acceptable arrangements describe how their public interaction with boyfriends and spouses is informed by the stigma attached to the prostitute / client relationship. They refrain from holding hands or walking side-by-side, preferring to distance themselves spatially and socially from their husbands lest they be misidentified as 'whores':

> My [Filipino] wife refuses to walk with me in public because she says everyone looks at her like she is a prostitute, because most of the women you see here with foreign men *are* prostitutes. It's okay when the children are with us because then everyone can see that we are married. (American living in Makati, emphasis his)

[75] More than just a reaction to unfamiliar people, 'shyness' among Filipino women encompasses many feminine attributes such as demureness, modesty and virtue.

The presence of children in these situations allays the stigma they may experience, for while Filipino women are castigated as 'prostitutes' in consorting with foreign men, they also gain acceptance by submitting to the roles of mother and wife according to the ideal of compulsory (monogamous) heterosexuality. Such is the discursive power emerging from the panoptic gaze of public scrutiny that people often police themselves such a manner as to avoid transgressions of social/sexual propriety for fear of being labeled deviants or criminals.

knowledge and surveillance

The power to control people's behaviors results from the construction of personal beliefs and attitudes as 'natural' facts, and then transmitting such 'knowledge' to the populace to secure their assistance in maintaining a particular version of 'reality.' Restricting sexual imagery and activities entails greater exposure of these issues, so that extensive media attention and subsequent public discussion of prostitution have the paradoxical effect of making go-go bars visible when many of the people involved want to keep these establishments hidden from view. Government officials demand observable, public venues for sexual entertainment to control the activities within, and yet local laws have stringent requirements concerning public displays of sexuality to limit accessibility. The go-go bars too generally strive for less visibility even though their businesses require public knowledge of their presence in order to attract both customers and employees. From the standpoint of officials and bar owners, a well-defined red-light district addresses the concerns of both parties as it provides a limited space to facilitate labor management and surveillance.

The various restrictions on accessibility – imposed by governments as well as go-go bar owners – also have the effect of limiting knowledge. This provides a modicum of protection for those who wish to limit the criticism they would face with greater exposure, yet those detractors who are adept at using the various information outlets can still promote their own views through the representation of women as 'prostitutes.' By making these marginal spaces visible through the media, the public is then able to see the

'dangers' and take appropriate actions to avoid unwanted exposure or 'contamination.'[76] Such representations utilize the imagery of 'victims' and 'vamps' to portray women working in go-go bars and associated areas. Both versions of femininity are used to satisfy the voyeuristic desires of those who want to view the denizens of the red-light district from a safe distance for their own edification: to provide a means of gazing upon the disempowered and depraved other in order to develop a 'higher' sense of self.

> Within this social and psychic economy, a key figure was the prostitute… It was above all around the figure of the prostitute that the gaze and touch, the desires and contaminations, of the bourgeoisie male were articulated… through the discourse on prostitution they encoded their own fascinated preoccupation with the carnival of the night, a landscape of darkness, drunkenness, noise and obscenity (Stallybrass and White 1986: 137).

From a more pragmatic standpoint, the knowledge that is produced from this psycho-spatial construction justifies the restriction of women's movements so as to 'protect' them as well as the sexual 'innocence' of others.[77]

Given the precarious legal status of go-go bars in Philippine society, the common strategy of reactionary policing exemplifies local attitudes and policies toward these establishments whereby increased visibility arouses public desires and condemnation. In July 1995, the local government of Angeles City instigated a crackdown of the nightclubs of Fields Avenue because a group of women from Australia and New Zealand had voiced their concerns about the sex industry to the president of the Philippines, Fidel Ramos. The foreign women were also displeased at the way they had been treated by local businessmen who did not want the negative publicity that accompanied the high-profile

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[76] The concern over sexual 'contamination' is prevalent in many societies, where erotic behavior is seen as possessing miasmatic qualities that cause people to commit 'immoral' acts against their will because they cannot control the sexual desires that result from coming in contact with 'pornographic' imagery or deviant others: there is a new movement among conservative voices in the Philippines to ban 'homosexuals' / *bakla* from teaching children because it is feared that they could influence a child's sexual development simply through their presence and daily presentation of self.

[77] While the main purpose of the red-light district is to segregate 'bad' women from the rest of society, it also functions to bring together men from different social backgrounds, nationalities and classes who share similar views of this sexual order (O'Connell Davidson 2001).

delegation. In their attempt to deny access to these "meddlesome feminists," some bar owners and hotel managers had unwittingly created more 'bad press' than would have resulted had they simply allowed the women to enter the establishments in question. Thus, an embarrassed government sprung into action in the only manner it could: arresting some of the women who were employed in the bars for minor violations. Photographs of bikini-clad women being led away by policemen graced the headlines of Manila newspapers[78] – a token gesture designed to provide maximum political exposure in their attempts to combat what they described as 'prostitution.'

This police action was followed by the obligatory condemnation of the raids by women's groups, including those women who precipitated these events. Several of the bars were temporarily closed for infractions involving non-compliance with STI checkups, 'lewd' shows, and even dirty bathrooms, but they soon re-opened after paying the requisite fines and addressing the problems.[79] One bar owner told me that Angeles City officials stressed that they were interested in regulating the go-go bars rather than shutting them down. Another exasperated manager said "we would love to follow the laws here, if we just knew what they were and how they were going to be enforced." The local government did proceed to enact an old law banning bikinis in public places, so women resorted to shorts and t-shirts while dancing on stage (the anti-bikini ordinance was rescinded after the election of a new mayor in 1998).

Other elements of surveillance have been enacted in the effort to 'clean up' the sex industry: the government's social hygiene clinic renewed its efforts in the weekly compulsory testing for STIs among female employees. Those women who do not comply with the directive are threatened with arrest, and establishments face closure if they do not do their part to ensure employee participation. Dancers are also required to

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[78] "Angeles sex dens raided; 41 girls held" *Philippine Star*, July 19, 1995.

[79] According to several bar owners in Makati and Angeles, the enforcement of regulations concerning go-go bars is used to generate revenue for the local government. For example, in Angeles, after three violations of ordinances, the bar must change its name which costs P80,000 (over $3,000 in 1997). It has also been noted that those responsible for enforcing the laws – including police and local officials – tend to show up on establishment premises more frequently around Christmas and election time.

wear identification cards while at work bearing their full names and photographs. They consider this regulation particularly odious because they almost always use fictitious names in the bars to conceal their identity – now their real name is pinned to their bodies. Birth certificates are now checked with greater care to prevent women under the age of eighteen from working in these establishments. Fake documents are fairly easy to procure, but there is more scrutiny by the local government and higher penalties for those who are caught using falsified papers. There have also been attempts to eliminate the barfine, which is widely equated with prostitution. This law, like every other regulation implemented during this campaign has resulted in little substantive change regarding the availability of sexual services and performances. Instead of paying a woman's barfine one can now buy her a 'special drink.' Same price, same result – just a different label. Similarly, the ban on public nudity is evaded simply by locking the door to the establishment – a 'public' place is thus made 'private' for those who are already inside.

Despite the apparent return of the Fields Avenue to its 'immoral' ways, the are continuing efforts to make Angeles more of a 'family-oriented' tourist destination, involving participation of the city government, women's groups and the local association of bar owners. In conjunction with this endeavor, the League of Angeles City Entertainers and Managers (LACEM; a local non-government organization for bar employees) has decided to promote the 'clean and fun entertainment' (CAFE) aspects of the local sex industry. One example in legitimizing the performances of women in these venues involves the staging of 'cultural dances.'[80] As with every other initiative submitted by government and non-government entities, the intention is to change the image of the sex industry rather than abolishing it completely – to eradicate 'prostitution' without denying women an opportunity to work in a country where few other employment options are available. Moreover, these repressive policies fail to address the basic issues that make the venues an attractive form of employment for many young Filipino women, preferring to criminalize acts and persons as a means of relegating

[80] "Clubs go Filipiniana in their shows" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 8, 1999. Lenore Manderson (1992) also notes the use of local cultural referents in sex shows in the go-go bars of Bangkok.

certain individuals to the margins of society where they are easier to monitor and control. It is through these images, discourses and actions that the go-go bar attains its tenuous position as a venue for both the entertainment of men and employment of women.

seductive spaces

The go-go bar / nightclub is just one of the many locations in the Philippine urban landscape where sexual labor and leisure occur. Bright lights and gaudy signs signal the existence of such a venue to the outside world, and go-go bars catering to Western patrons tend to have more ostentatious displays than those establishments aiming for Filipino patrons.[81] This visibility results from the desire of owners to disclose their presence to a transient clientele unaccustomed to the 'strange' surroundings they encounter as visitors to the Philippines. The glittering array of visual cues also has an aesthetic purpose, rendering these nightclubs familiar to patrons who have visited similar locales in the U.S. or Europe. Names such as Cuddles, Bottoms, Dimples (in Makati), Tahitian Queen, Pink Pussycat or the Happy Hooker (in Angeles) are explicit indications of the sexual focus of these establishments, as are the colorful murals and curvaceous silhouettes of feminine forms that grace their exteriors.

Venues targeting Filipino clients are more low-key in line with the sociopolitical position of these venues in the local culture. Instead of the risqué allusions displayed by the bars along P. Burgos and Fields, beer halls and 'sing-along'[82] outlets are usually distinguishable by the use of strings of Christmas lights wrapping the doorways and façades of these establishments. *Casas* (brothels where sexual intercourse takes place on the premises) are relatively invisible because direct prostitution is unambiguously illegal, so they are not conspicuous in their public presentation. Those who are familiar with the

[81] Establishments that market their services to Asian men (primarily Japanese and Korean) approximate the subdued presentation as seen in Filipino bars, although go-go bars that aim for a 'Western' (EuroAmerican) clientele also attract Filipino and Asian customers using the seductive imagery of an imagined 'American' setting of sexual liberty and abundance.

[82] 'Sing-along' is a label for working-class karaoke venues.

neighborhood can immediately recognize the presence of these concealed venues for sexual interaction, but these places do not endeavor to attract attention in the same manner as other sites. There are go-go bars patronized primarily by Filipino men that do exhibit the gaudy lighting characteristic of the bars of Makati and Angeles,[83] yet the intention of this exhibition is purely aesthetic. Drawing their business from the upper echelons of society (they are much more expensive than nightclubs for Western men), such bars want to project an air of sophistication and class. These nightclubs have names such as Lexus or Pegasus, and instead of 'dancers,' they advertise shows involving 'models.' Despite these subtle differences in appearance, the composition of the go-go bar and the performances within share many common features to facilitate access and interaction.

structuring the go-go bar

The typical establishment located along P. Burgos or Fields has a very basic layout, and all go-go bars have the same elements that distinguish them from other entertainment venues. In line with the idea of maintaining an element of mystery (and the 'privacy' required by law), glancing inside the door to a go-go bar does not reveal much to the outside observer. There is a curtain, partition, or some other obstruction to navigate before actually entering the main area. The composition of the bar includes elements that are required by law in any public gathering place (such as clean restrooms and a well-marked emergency exit), along with those features that are specific to the go-go bar. A dressing room for women is always located upstairs or in the back (and out of sight), and functions as a space where women prepare for work and engage in activities that are forbidden for employees in the public areas of the bar, such as eating, sleeping and smoking. Stereo equipment is located in a small compartment, usually near the stage – larger nightclubs employ a disc jockey to govern musical selections (some of the smaller

[83] These establishments are scattered throughout Metro Manila, but there are concentrations in Quezon and Pasay cities. Such nightclubs are also evident in Cebu (in the central Visayas) and Davao (on the island of Mindanao). For an account of Filipino nightspots in Quezon City, see Arnel de Guzman's (1996) lively ethnography.

establishments in Angeles simply have a stereo behind the bar). Each establishment also has a bar area where alcohol is stored, drinks made, and financial transactions conducted involving payment for goods and services.

As far as the customers are concerned, the main spaces of the go-go bar are the seating areas and the stage(s) where dancers perform. In terms of seating, there are two types: tables and barstools in the central part with booths / couches and tables located along the walls. The table and barstool combination seems to be preferred by groups of men, as well as those visitors who do not want to get too physically involved with the female employees – although the openness of these spaces also allows for contact between more people.[84] Patrons may also sit in chairs located along the bar itself, but this is usually interpreted by women as a sign that the customer is not interested in company since space is limited. Booths in darkened corners allow for more intimate interaction between customers and employees to take place.

Private rooms are also available in many of the bars along P. Burgos, and can be rented an hourly basis for a fee that may also include drinks. Outfitted with KTV (karaoke television) systems that ostensibly permit customers to engage in their own vocal performances with an adoring female audience away from the prying eyes of other customers, these secluded space are often targets of city governments (including Makati) who want to ban these so-called 'VIP rooms' because of the privacy they afford patrons and employees to engage in illicit sexual activities. Many establishments in Makati also have booths surrounded by curtains that serve the same purpose as the separate rooms with permanent walls, and employees also refer to these spaces as 'VIP rooms.' These bounded areas within the bar serve to segregate some interactions from others by providing greater privacy, although there are other means of securing seclusion that will be presented in Chapter 4. Moreover, it is important to note that not everyone desires such discretion for their sexual activities, as many customers also want to become part of

[84] Many customers prefer the barstools because they can literally surround themselves with women and adjust their position among the throng accordingly. They also allow for greater visibility in these presentations of self by situating customers in the 'front.'

the spectacle through the staging of their own sexual performances (Liepe-Levinson 1998; Prewitt 1989).

Whereas the seating area is the location of interaction between men and women, the stage (or dance floor) in these venues serves primarily as the site of feminine performance for the male gaze as well as for women's own entertainment. Spatial limitations within the walls of the establishment determine the placement of the stage as well as its distance from seating. There is almost always a raised stage for dancers, and the height varies depending on the perspective the owner wants to provide the customer. Some nightclubs in Angeles also have seating that abuts the raised stage, allowing for more contact between dancers and customers. Most Makati bars have space directly in front of the stage where men and women can dance with each other. One aspect of this staging of female bodies that is consistent in all of the nightclubs in Makati and Angeles is the use of mirrors. Owners and managers have an ambivalent attitude regarding the presence of mirrors, noting that the dancers often spend too much time looking at themselves rather than engaging in eye contact with customers. However, attempts to cover or remove them result in considerable protests from the women. Mirrors are, in fact, a crucial part of the go-go bar in that they are instruments for gazing and preparing the self for performance (see Chapter 5).

Nightclubs also vary in style according to how the owner wishes to market his perceptions of sexual accessibility to male patrons. This is generally in line with the tastes that accompany the owner from his country of origin or his preference in décor and presentation. All manner of colored flashing lights, strobes, mirrored balls and other visual effects add to the discotheque atmosphere while maintaining the darkness desired by those seeking privacy and anonymity.[85] Several venues in Angeles and Makati use backdrops that evoke the romance of travel such as jungle motifs (Café Mogambo; Wantok Sports Bar) or imagery and props indicating faraway lands (Cleopatra; Geronimo's) to augment the exoticism that accompanies the presentation of Filipina

[85] Some bars have also installed black lighting (causing an ultraviolet glowing effect) only to remove it shortly thereafter because the women complained that it revealed the extent of their dental work to their discriminating customers.

bodies. On these two streets that are cluttered with go-go bars, it is important to design a place that stands out from the rest ensuring a steady stream of new visitors as well as maintaining a constant base of regular patrons. In any case, the primary draw for male customers is the re-presentation of a sexualized femininity in the appearance and actions of GROs employed in these establishments.

Roadhouse in Angeles provides a very disciplined presentation in line with its American owner's impression of what 'sells' – in this instance, it is rock-and-roll music with dancers in white bikinis. The dancers in Roadhouse are mobilized into a chorus-line format, moving in unison to the songs. Waitresses are trained to be extra-attentive to the customer's needs as they are always on the lookout for someone who needs a prompt refill or a cigarette lit. Management rigidly enforces order in these performances of service. This managerial approach reflects the owner's own concept of service, along with the fact that he is present in the establishment much of the time. Such an approach to management is appreciated by many of the customers who frequent these establishments, as noted by one regular customer on an Internet site devoted to go-go bars along Fields:

> Roadhouse has several advantages. Firstly it is unique in AC [Angeles City], there is no other place like it in AC or in the Philippines. Love it or hate it, that is a fact. Secondly, because it is run according to certain standards and because certain rules are enforced this means that you are less likely to get any hassles or game playing from the girls, staff, etc. Thirdly, the customer always knows what to expect from a visit to Roadhouse. Many customers appreciate this bar's consistency. Fourthly, Roadhouse plays music for the customers not for the girls… Fifthly, when the girls are bought a drink they will often stay dancing then come down and thank you later. There are a number of reasons for this not the least of which is that they do not have an abundance of dancers as in some other bars so the girls will often choose to finish their 'set' or 'group' before coming down to talk to you. This way the stage stays active. Often they will wait for you to physically call them down. Doing it this way ensures that there is never any unwarranted pressure to buy [lady's] drinks… Sixthly, the emphasis in Roadhouse is on drinking and partying on with the boys, whereas in other bars it is on the attainment of female companionship. Of course Roadhouse offers female companionship but the emphasis is not placed here. As Mark [the owner] said some time back, Roadhouse is a drinking bar. In short Roadhouse is unique and it has carved out a definite market segment. (<www.gr2.com/angeles.html>; last accessed April 10, 2002)

In speaking to customers about which bars in Angeles they like, almost all note that Roadhouse appears 'classier' in comparison to the other establishments.[86] The discourse of 'class' in terms of presentation has to do with what people perceive to be greater personal effort in the performances of service, as well as additional expenses toward improving the aesthetic appearance of the space and the performers. Clean bathrooms, uniforms for staff, and themed costumes for the dancers (such as sailor outfits, bridal lingerie, and other revealing dress involving sexual motifs) are just as important in attracting customers as the sexual performances of the employees. Because first impressions are based on appearances, many customers do not even have the opportunity to interact with GROs before they have formed an opinion of the establishment, and the smallest detail in presentation does not go unnoticed:

> I know this sounds crazy, but the shoes that the dancers wear show what type of bar it is: those bars where the dancers wear nice high-heels always seem to be cleaner and more inviting to the customers. Many of the bars here [along Field's] have dancers who wear those crappy fake-leather boots that are falling apart, and so they look like worn-out old hookers. Some guys like that, but not me. Whenever I go into a new bar, the first thing I look at is the shoes that the dancers are wearing. (American tourist in Angeles)[87]

This conceptual division between 'high' and 'low' is particularly evident in the physical and ideological conversion of erotic entertainment venues in the United States from 'titty bars' into 'gentlemen's clubs,' providing an upscale environment that legitimizes the performances of male customers and female employees according a discourse of culture that privileges the bourgeois voyeur within a modern, consumerist society (Frank 1998; Stallybrass and White 1986). A similar distinction is evident in the Philippine sex industry, where the visible differences between the presentations of bars in Angeles and Makati are linked to the marketing of these cities in attracting foreign

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[86] The arrival on Fields of Papillon in 1998 has added to the customer perceptions of 'class' in this regard (it is owned and operated by the same consortium as its namesake in Makati; another Papillon also opened in Cebu City in the central Visayas at the same time).

[87] Among customers, the dancers' footware was the most common means of evaluating the 'classiness' of a go-go bar (GROs also have similar concerns with the status perceptions of place; see Chapter 6).

capital. Makati has positioned itself as the business center of the Philippines, so the bars along P. Burgos embody the same cosmopolitan sophistication that comes with the transnational, urban location, promoting an aura of exclusivity and service that appeals to a more selective customer that expects to be wooed in a manner that is befitting to his 'public' identity as a worldly investor or businessman.[88] Meanwhile, the government of Angeles City wants to attract more tourists so it endorses a vision of leisure in its economic development policies, although it has not been very successful in shaking the imagery of 'sex tourism.'

This is not to say that the bars of P. Burgos strive to promote an exclusive image in the same manner as those nightspots that cater to an upscale Filipino clientele, as the current economic situation means that they try to accommodate every customer who walks through the doors.[89] However, attempting to attract all-comers does not please everyone. In a magazine article entitled "The Thrill is Gone,"[90] Bill Cranfield waxes nostalgically for the bars of yesteryear. For him, the city of Manila takes on a life of its own, becoming a living, breathing entity, personified in the image of some love-sick go-go dancer he left behind: "this intoxicating city that never slept, that was waiting, expectantly, everlastingly, just for you." He yearns to return to her, but she has changed over the years. Dismissing the current fashion of what he describes as "conveyor-belt sex" in the bars along Burgos, he longs for the Ermita of old, "where decorous dress and civili[z]ed conversation encouraged a degree of foreplay that for many was an erotic end in itself." Like the customer / author of this travel piece, every man has his own vision of

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[88] The link between business and sex within this realm cannot be overstated, as erotic entertainment is an important component of business transactions around the world. Many 'meetings' occur within the confines of bars along P. Burgos to the extent that 'work' and sexual leisure become conflated in the drive to extend the amount of productive capabilities by creating a corporate culture of masculine homosociality that requires greater investment in labor, often to the detriment of the individual's domestic or 'private' life (Allison 1994; Bernstein 2001).

[89] Some Filipino clubs try to catch the attention of a more 'cultured' crowd by advertising that their GROs are 'college girls,' and while I have never been turned away from bars that cater to Western men, I have been denied entrance to venues that target wealthy Filipinos, or Japanese and Korean clientele.

[90] *Business Traveler Asia-Pacific*, May 2000.

what constitutes 'entertainment' in these settings, and those who visit or live in the Philippines are involved in a continuous search for the 'perfect' bar.

> I like this bar… the girls are nice, I know the DJ and he plays the songs I like when I am here, and I always have a good time because the manager does not interfere too much… of course, I also like Wild West because I know I can count on a free beer or two there, and Rogues has a billiard table… come to think of it, there is no single bar, that has everything I want. (Australian businessman living in Makati)

> I can come in here and have a nice conversation with the girls and dance with them and there are no hassles. In other bars, I am either hassled or completely ignored… it is difficult to develop a system where you find exactly what you want, so when you do get that, you keep coming back to the same place. (visiting American businessman in Makati)

Like most customers, these men found what they were looking for, or perhaps, they simply stumbled upon a setting that approximates what they want in terms of social interaction and sexual intimacy. There is no single model to satiate the myriad desires of those men who patronize such venues, so each owner ends up displaying his own vision and desires of sexual service to customers in the hope of attracting more business. [91]

the business of 'entertainment'

'Entertainment' in the Philippine go-go bar is a multifaceted arrangement involving continual interactions and negotiations between employees, employers, and customers who have common interests in maintaining this liminal enterprise. The organization of labor within the go-go bar is predicated on a particular arrangement that allows for a dialogical approach to these intimate exchanges involving few set regulations, and the marginal position enables participants to negotiate identities and relationships without the bureaucratic regulations concerning sexual expression and behavior in other spaces (Brewis and Linstead 2000). Restrictions that influence attitudes and actions in the 'real'

[91] On occasion, male customers parlay their ideas regarding sexual entertainment into employment or business opportunities. In some cases, customers have become managers through their conversations and appraisals with bar owners, while other male patrons have gone on to develop their own segment of the sex industry, usually involving websites that provide information on the Philippine nightlife and/or erotic photos.

world are blurred within the setting of the Philippine go-go bar because it is a place where one can transcend the many normative discourses concerning 'public' and 'private' acts as well as the distinctions between 'work' and 'leisure.' Moreover, given that the go-go bars of Makati and Angeles are identified as sites for the production of fantasies, the few rules that are evident are not as intransigent as found in similarly positioned venues elsewhere in the panoply of the global sex industry (Frank 1998; Montemurro 2000). Everything is subject to negotiation, depending on the desires of the various participants.

Institutional structuring of the go-go bar emerges from a late-capitalist context that legitimizes sexual imagery and intimate relations for consumption, and the basic operational configuration of the Philippine go-go bar follows a standard business model in its form and function:

> In this process a third party (an employer) buys the labor power of the sex worker (employee) and consumes it in the process of producing and selling a commodity to others (clients). The employer pays the employee a wage equal to only a portion of the total value the worker contributes to the enterprise and appropriates and distributes the surplus. (van der Veen 2000: 127)

A portion of this surplus goes to the government in the form of licensing fees and regulatory fines, which in turn influences state policy toward the legalization of these controlled work environments and the criminalization of those women and men who attempt to sell their own labor without proper supervision within this rigid, capitalist regime. The material desires of employers, employees, and the state are thus satisfied through the coordinated production of sexual images and performances that fulfill the sexual desires of paying customers. Employers provide the initial capital outlay and managerial organization; the state legitimizes the venture and, in many cases, assists in marketing; employees provide the labor and/or product to be consumed by the clientele. With their earnings in hand, the employees are thus 'free' to purchase consumer goods to signify their participation in the modern lifestyle / economy, or perpetuate the capitalist system through investment; women who transform their wages into capital usually purchase farmland in their home province or set up a small *sari-sari* ('sundry goods')

store.[92] The formal recognition and regulation of these venues within such a framework encourages participants to construct their socioerotic interactions in a rational, business-like manner.

> Since I have been taking this [marketing] course, I have learned to look at how I present myself here at work: what is the product that I am offering to the customer, and how can I improve that product? I need to know how to look at myself that way because that is how I make money. (receptionist in Makati)

> All I have here is my body, so I have to take care of it… if I take care of myself then I can earn money because customers will buy me drinks, but if I get fat and ugly then nobody will like me and I cannot make any money then… this is a job for young girls, because when you get old, then no one wants to look at you, and you have to find something else to sell, like blowjobs! (dancer in Angeles)

> These women are here for my entertainment, and if they want to make money from me, then they have to offer me something I want… sure, there is negotiation as to what they are willing to do and what I am willing to pay for, but if I don't find what I want here, then I can always find some other woman or another bar that will give me what I want. (American tourist in Angeles)

> We were closed for a week and had to pay a fine because we didn't have the proper papers… no, we have a license to sell alcohol; we didn't have a license to sell girls! (bar owner in Makati)

This commodified perspective is incorporated in the performances and identities of go-go bar employees because that is what the work setting demands in terms of the disciplined production of sexual imagery and interaction. Distancing and alienation are always involved in the adoption of a 'worker' or 'employee' identity as people distinguish between the different selves that are necessary to fulfill different needs and desires. A woman's first and foremost role is that of an employee in this setting, and this is the identity that employers, customers, and the state desire from her because it gives them greater control within the capitalist system. While it is readily apparent that these patriarchal interests are involved in the commodification of the GRO according an ethos of leisure and expectations of service, it is not always apparent that the women are also

[92] Women in go-go bars often deride these entrepreneurial ventures as *sira-sira* ('broken') stores because they often provide only supplementary income, and thus are not viewed as a suitable substitute for earning a living wage.

consumers of these images and their own bodies in the production of the commodity that will generate the exchange value that the women desire (Brewis and Linstead 2000). However, the moral and feminist discourses that rail against 'sex-as-work' place GROs in a liminal position with regard to their status as laborers, de-legitimizing their employment activities and preventing them from organizing for better working conditions or even availing of basic rights and services that are offered to other Filipino citizens.[93]

The regulation of go-go bars reflects the institutionalization of these establishments within the local socioeconomic system as required with official recognition by the state. Ownership is a contentious issue in local politics due the patriarchal / feminist sentiment regarding the protection of 'our' women from the moral and sexual degradation wrought by foreign men in nationalist discourse. According to Philippine law, a Filipino citizen must own at least 51% of these establishments, which legally precludes foreign investors from possessing a controlling interest in such venues. However, most of the bars that cater to foreign customers are 'owned' by expatriates who employ a local business partner to serve as the signatory on official paperwork,[94] and as with many other features of the sex industry, the pattern of bar ownership is different in Angeles and Makati. In Angeles, most of the operations involve a proprietor (or a group of businesspersons) who runs a single venue, whereas consortiums and corporations that

[93] Because women working in go-go bars are effectively marginalized by these discourses, they do not receive the same consideration as other citizens, particularly when it comes to sexual violence. In most cases, women feel that they cannot count on the government to protect them because they exist outside the boundaries of proper feminine comportment, so many instances of rape go unreported. Furthermore, the actions of police – as represented in the local news media – sustain the view that the sexual abuse of 'public' women is acceptable (see "Malate cops rape vagrancy suspect" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 25, 2000; "Cops beat up, rape sex workers" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, December 6, 2000).

[94] These 'silent' owners are called 'dummies' in the local parlance because they supposedly do not assume any responsibility for the daily operations of the go-go bars. In some cases, the 'dummy' is a girlfriend of the person who furnishes the working capital for the business, but in other instances, there is a relationship between the local and foreign owners that involves a formal business association.

own several establishments are evident in Makati.[95] For example, the McBass Entertainment Corporation is involved in almost a dozen venues along P. Burgos.[96] In both cities, minority ownership in go-go bars reflects the same distribution of nationalities as is evident among the male clientele, with North Americans and Australians accounting for the majority of investors, interspersed with a smattering of European interests.

In terms of labor organization within the go-go bar, there are several occupational categories that form a hierarchical structure according to pay scale, benefits, and managerial authority. Larger companies with multiple entertainment outlets will have a more extensive system of administration, complete with accounting and marketing divisions as well as a form of centralized control over all of the establishments under their purview. The primary division among employees within the go-go bar involves the distinction between 'staff' and the GROs who are designated 'temporary' workers. Women employed as managers, waitresses, and other support personnel (cashiers, disc jockeys, handymen, etc.) are considered regular employees, and receive benefits such as minimum wage and health insurance while also paying the requisite taxes.

There is some variation in the nomenclature, but every bar has a female 'operations' or 'floor' manager (sometimes referred to as a *mamasan*)[97] who is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the bar. Depending on the size of the bar and

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[95] The pattern of ownership in Angeles has changed somewhat in the recent years, as existing bar owners have begun to purchase those establishments that have gone out of business. See <www.singletravel.com/faq_phil/angeles.htm> (last accessed on September 14, 2002) for a cursory genealogy of go-go bars along Fields Avenue.

[96] The number of establishments within their control is in constant flux as they expand and contract business according to the vagaries of the economy, political climate, and building leases (when I began research in 1995, this corporation owned five go-go bars on P. Burgos). It is also difficult to obtain an exact number because of the 'connections' between some of the establishments, and the different arrangements with regard to their involvement in the management of other venues.

[97] The origin of the term *mamasan* in this setting are not clear, but probably results from American military personnel who have used it to describe any female Asian brothel manager. Some managers do not like to be called *mamasan*, and while most of the employees refer to the manager as "mommy," it is more likely a reflection of the familial formations in the go-go bar than a derivation of this introduced label (see Chapter 4).

number of employees, there may also be assistant managers – also called *mamasan* – who are there to ensure that customers are attended, and also to resolve any disputes that occur within the bar. Waitresses are primarily responsible for serving drinks, but they also assist in negotiations between men and women, and they are often the ones who initiate the rituals of exchange by asking the customer if he wants to buy a lady's drink for his companion in the bar.

GROs are considered 'casual' or 'contractual' employees, and as a consequence do not receive any of the benefits given to regular staff, and, in the case of receptionists, do not even earn a daily wage. Among those classified as GROs, the distinction between 'receptionists' and 'dancers' is related to their occupational performances. Receptionists are in charge of providing entertainment to the customer in the form of verbal communication as well as various tactile activities (caressing, massaging, etc.) according to the customer's wishes and their own willingness to engage in these physical encounters. Dancers are required to perform upon a stage for the audience for a specific amount of time in order to receive their salary. In between 'sets' they may mingle among the customers in a similar manner as the receptionists, although in most instances they must return to the stage when it is time to resume their duties as dancers.

Some establishments also employ a foreign male to help manage the bar.[98] The main job of the *papasan* is to ensure that the customers' desires are attended, but his work may also include overseeing the activities of female employees. Some customers and owners feel that a male managerial presence is required because he can better understand the desires of the male patrons and enforce feminine discipline accordingly, but female managers have a different point of view when it comes to running the go-go bar:

> I really try to be fair, you know 50-50 between customers and the girls [in resolving disputes]… I think I can handle customers better than a guy because you think a customer is going to punch me in the face? I just talk to him and try

[98] This practice is more common in Angeles where there is a seasonal influx of tourists (from December to April) that must be accommodated, so some venues will hire temporary help (see footnote 91). In some bars (such as Roadhouse), the owner performs the role of *papasan*.

> to calm him down; if there is a problem we just call the police… But you see over at _____ they are always having fights because they have so many bouncers and doormen who behave macho when they confront a customer. We don't have any fights here. (manager in Makati)

Aside from the quarrels between customers and employees, there is also considerable friction among women who work in the bar, especially between managers and GROs. Arguments over punctuality, job performance and interpersonal relations (between employees and customers as well as among the employees themselves) often result in disciplinary actions and/or fines, although there are examples where employee complaints have resulted in the dismissal of managers (see example below). From a business standpoint, there are differences of opinion as to the proper way to run these venues as well as divergent personal desires to address in the management of the go-go bar:

> She [the floor manager] is very good at selling drinks, but she is very strict with the girls… some of the dancers and receptionists have gone to other bars because they can't work with her… I don't like her very much, but she is good for business here. (assistant floor manager in Makati)

> Sometimes I don't agree with her [the operations manager] but you just have to find a way to work around it so that people don't get too angry – you still have to work with that person, so you don't want to create too many problems with them. I try to work it out with her, but if there is a big problem, or something I think needs to be done that she will not do, then I just go to the owner, because they are here all the time. (manager in Makati)

> If I find out that a girl goes out with a customer after work, then she is fined for 'sneaking out' because she met him in the bar and went out with him, but he did not pay the bar fine. If we did not enforce these rules, then we would never earn any money… and it's also for the girl's protection, so if anything happens to her, then we know who she is with because we write it down on her pass. (manager in Angeles)[99]

[99] The use of 'passes' for go-go bar employees was evident when I first began research in Angeles in 1995, and the police stationed along Fields Avenue would periodically accost those women who were in the company of foreign men to make sure they had the proper documentation to leave their place of employment. However, the practice was discontinued shortly thereafter as efforts to eliminate the barfine meant that women could not legitimately leave the bar during work hours, so there is no need to account for their presence on the streets.

More often than not, disputes involve a clash of personalities, where there is a perception of preferential treatment or discrimination in assigning blame and subsequent fines. The manager from Angeles quoted above was singled out by one of her employees for engaging in such behavior:

> She [the manager] has favorites… if she likes a girl, then she will give her the good customers, or not fine her for sleeping and eating and being late to work… if you are her friend then you can even sneak out with a customer after work. If I do something wrong, then I get fined… sometimes I don't even do anything wrong. (dancer in Angeles)

Order is maintained in the go-go bar through a continual process of compromise and conciliation – finding the middle ground to address the various desires of customers, employees, owners, and state officials. Managers in the go-go bar assume the role of mediator between the desires of different participants in their daily activities: fostering mutually beneficial and consensual exchanges between customers and GROs to further the economic success of those who have a financial stake in the bar, all the while ensuring that the laws of the state are enforced. Furthermore, the managers must deal with their own longings for higher income (they also earn commissions from drinks that are sold to customers and GROs) and experiences of socioerotic pleasure while maintaining their authority. Attempts to control the behavior of dancers through various disciplinary means provide the best evidence for the intricate ways in which people address these conflicting desires. For example, bars in the McBass Entertainment group have a weekly award of 300 pesos ($6) for the 'best dancer.' Compiled from daily evaluations by the floor manager, the criteria involve attendance and job performance rather than an aesthetic assessment of their movements on stage:

> To be best dancer… they have to be at work on time, they have to be on stage when it is their turn – so I don't have to yell at them… they have to move their ass, they just can't stand there talking to each other… it [being named 'best dancer'] doesn't depend on [lady's] drinks because if they are sitting and drinking with the customer then they are not on stage where they belong. (manager in Makati)[100]

[100] There is also a monthly competition for best waitress in these establishments as well where the employee with the most sales is awarded P1200 ($24) at the end of each month. At first, only sales of lady's drinks were used to determine the 'best waitress,'

'Dancing' is an integral part of the go-go bar, yet a dancer is unable to earn commissions from lady's drinks during the period she is on the stage. In most bars, even if a customer purchases a drink for her while she is circulating in the crowd, she must return to the stage when it is her turn to dance. Those women who garner the most lady's drinks do not qualify for 'best dancer' because they interact with customers away from the stage, and are reluctant to leave a paying customer when it is their time to perform. Conversely, women who win the 'best dancer' prize most often are considered 'shy' by the management, and because they do not interact with customers much, they focus on their performance as 'dancers' in this work setting. For these women, being a dancer assures them of a steady income, and in some bars there is competition to secure a spot on the stage.[101] Indeed, the decision to work as a dancer in this setting reveals the desires and motivations of the female employees in expressing their occupational choices as well as their socioerotic competency.

> I want to dance so that I can have a salary because I have a baby at home… sometimes we do not get any [lady's] drinks, so there is no commission for that day… see how hard it is: we have to spend money to come here [on public transportation] and sometimes we go home without any money, so I dance… at least I know I will get something for my work here. (dancer in Makati)

> I used to be a dancer, but then I would be talking to a customer who bought me a drink and the *mamasan* would tell me to go dance… it is no good to leave a customer after he buys you a drink because he has paid for your time, but you have to dance to get your salary… then I decided to become a receptionist so I would not have to do that to customers, because I earn more money from commissions. (receptionist in Makati)

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but then the staff began to compete for those customers who were known to be big spenders – ignoring the casual beer drinker in the process – so the rules were changed to provide a more accurate assessment of 'service.'

[101] Due to the recent economic downturn, some Makati bars have limited the number of dancers during daytime hours, so those who show up to work first can choose to work as dancers until the quota is filled (at night, there is no limit as to the number of dancers). Because there are fewer customers – and thus, fewer opportunities to earn commissions – dancing is a desired position for those women who work the afternoon shift because the earnings are guaranteed. Some managers also decide which women may perform on stage, limiting those employees who are deemed too short or overweight to receptionist duties.

"it's not always about the money"

In attempting to provide a rationale to what many observers consider an irrational occupational decision, most people believe that money is the overriding (if not the only) reason why women and men work in the sex industry. The economics of sex work has also been a primary focus for those who set out to study women working in the these settings (Chant and McIlwaine 1995; Ofreneo and Pineda Ofreneo 1998), where money is considered the main attraction because there is the potential to earn more than in other unskilled-labor vocations, but the financial aspect is not necessarily the greatest concern of the women as revealed in their own narratives concerning earnings and employment histories:

> When I was fourteen I came here [to Manila] to work as a *katulong* ('domestic helper')… I then worked in a factory here in Manila, then another… and one more [factory] until I went to Saipan. Then I worked as a hostess in a bar there for six months… when I came back here, that's when I started working at this bar… that was four years ago… I like working here, always talking and eating and drinking. The only thing I don't like is the *away-away* ('disputes') [between GROs]. (receptionist in Makati)

> We don't earn much money here… what I like is that I don't have to find another job all the time; I can go home to the province and when I come back here, there is always a job here for me. It is also nicer here than in the factory: there it is hot and dirty and boring; here we have air-con and we just sit around talking to each other or to customers… maybe I don't earn as much because I don't have salary, but it is still a better place to work [than the factory]. (receptionist in Makati)

> Sure, we don't have [lady's] drinks everyday, but sometimes we have a good customer who buys us many drinks, so some days I don't have any money and other days I have maybe one thousand, two thousand pesos ($20-$40) to take home. (dancer in Makati)

Most GROs have been employed in other sectors of the labor market, usually as household help, on production lines in factories, or in retail sales, yet for those who do find formal employment it is usually short-lived: employers generally fire their 'contract' workers after six months on the job because after that point they become 'permanent' employees and qualify for benefits. Thus, there is little incentive for employers in these low-skill industries to maintain a stable workforce, especially since there is a continuous

supply of impoverished laborers who are willing to sacrifice long-term security for short-term gains in this political economic context. Other employers find ways to trim the workforce that are illegal according to local laws, but are rarely challenged within the discourses of gender and sexuality that continually inform relations of power in Philippine culture:

> I worked in the factory [in Cebu] for three years but had to quit because I became pregnant… being pregnant was not the problem, it was because I was not married… a lot of businesses here in the Philippines will not allow you to work if you are pregnant or have a small child and you are not married. (dancer in Makati)

While employment as a GRO entails a lack of respectability and, in some cases, does not even guarantee a steady wage, it does provide job security in an uncertain labor market along with the possibility for other material, emotional, and social rewards.

Despite the financial focus of research and criticism concerning the sex industry, the earnings of women and the income generated for owners and the government have not been examined in detail. This is due, in large part, to the difficulty in obtaining records or conducting extensive research within these venues: owners (or the government, for that matter) are not eager to let the public know exactly how much profit they take in or what percentage of the establishment's income goes to female employees. Trade secrets abound in an effort to avoid legal scrutiny and to maximize earnings in an increasingly competitive business setting. The questionable legality of practices in these venues related to the exchange of money and services creates difficulties not only for the researcher, but also for those who are involved in these relations; in many cases, women who accompany customers to their domiciles for sexual intercourse do not receive the remuneration they were expecting. Often the customer will plead ignorance regarding the previous arrangement due to intoxication or communication difficulties, or he may say that he does not have any money and needs to go to the bank.

Women are also reluctant to bring up the topic of remuneration the next morning because they do not want to appear as 'prostitutes' in placing what might be considered an undue emphasis on money in the initial encounters, perhaps mindful of the long-term

economic or emotional potential of these relations (Phillip and Dann 1998). In most instances where a woman leaves the bar with a customer in Angeles and Makati, it is for the remainder of the night or even longer, and this extended companionship may include dining and other leisure activities in addition to physical intimacy – rituals of interaction that resemble 'dating' more than the stereotypical portrayal of prostitution.[102]

Additionally, there are few avenues of recourse for those women who do not receive payment, as there remains no possibility for establishing any type of legal contract for the purchase of sexual accessibility and exclusivity outside of marriage. Several women in one Makati bar attempted to get around this dilemma in 1999 by having the customers charge their 'tip' to their credit cards before they left the bar together, but this practice was soon halted by the management because it was impossible to officially account for these earnings in accordance with local laws regarding purchases for 'entertainment.'

Daily wages in the go-go bar are comparable to those in other jobs because of minimum-wage legislation: in 2002, dancers in Makati earned P250 per day (P50 = $1), and in some bars receptionists who do not receive a daily wage can collect what is called an 'allowance' of P60 to help defray the cost of transportation and meals, but only if they garner two lady's drinks during the workday.[103] Commissions amount to P100 for each lady's drink (cost to customer is P300; about half price – and half the commission – during 'happy hours').[104] Employees may also earn monetary 'tips' from customers for massages or companionship as some customers who understand the commission system

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[102] There are other sexual arrangements known as 'short time' encounters where the duration, activities, and payment are specified beforehand.

[103] Discussion of earnings in this paragraph focuses on go-go bars from the McBass Entertainment Corporation, but other Makati establishments have a similar price structure. Bars in Angeles charge considerably less for lady's drinks, but GROs generally receive a higher percentage (sometimes 50% of the total drink cost) for their commission.

[104] Because of the crackdown on barfines (which signify 'prostitution' in the minds of many observers), there is no longer a separate designation for these earnings; instead, they are included in with the drink commissions for the purposes of payment – in both Makati and Angeles, these 'fines' for leaving work early are now calculated as a specific number of lady's drinks.

prefer to give cash directly to women, although this is frowned upon by management; women may also prefer lady's drinks – even if they earn less in the process – because their contributions to the bar enhances their status as 'good employees.' Factored in with the daily earnings are also a series of deductions, such as shoe and costume rental (for dancers), and a variety of fines related to non-performance and violations of work regulations.[105]

While it is a common perception that these venues are 'fronts' for prostitution (thus emphasizing the practice of the 'barfine' in abolitionist discourses), most owners and managers would prefer keeping their employees in the bar during work hours. For example, one evening a customer attempted to persuade a GRO he fancied to accompany him for the night. She declined, saying that she was tired but promised to go out with him the next evening. This persistent patron then showed up at 8:00pm the following evening – just as the night shift was starting – so that he would be certain to 'reserve' her services. She seemed somewhat reticent to leave so quickly after arriving at work, and she told the manager that there were some other customers she wanted to 'entertain' before leaving. The floor manager then went over to speak with her impatient admirer, and she told him to come back in a couple of hours because it was the policy of the bar to require women to work for a certain amount of time before they would be allowed to leave the premises. Afterward, she explained her views on the practice of GROs leaving work:

> I really don't want the girls to go out with customers who pay their barfine – especially if they are popular with the customers – because if they leave the bar, then we do not make any money from them for [lady's] drinks… that's why I told him [the customer] to come back later, so that she could earn some more drinks before she left for the night…. If all of the girls go out while they are supposed to be working, then there will be no one here to entertain the customers, and we will have to close.

A bar owner in Angeles put forward his case against barfines more succinctly:

> Hell, why would I want employees to leave work early? What they do on their own time is their business, but during our hours of operation, they should be

[105] In the case of Makati bars, these fines go toward an annual employee party that usually takes place at some beach resort outside of Manila.

> here… What we offer here in the bar is dancers who entertain customers while they are drinking, so if they go out on barfines then we lose money because that employee is no longer performing her job. If a guy wants to pay a girl's barfine to take her out early, then he will have to go somewhere else.

In some cases where business is slow or there are plenty of dancers and receptionists for that evening (see discussion on attendance below), the manager will consider such requests – provided the GRO agrees to go out with the customer. There is an unwritten rule in the business that women should not be 'forced' to go out with customers, but, as with many other aspects of the go-go bar, the relations of power among participants often lead to disparate practices in this setting. Women who are facing an emergency that requires money will sometimes remark that they "need to go on a barfine" to solve their short-term financial dilemma. Women may also face additional coercion to accompany a customer from the bar: in 1997, an Australian *papasan* at a bar in Angeles required women to go out on a barfine once a week in order to receive their paychecks (he also forced them to perform oral sex on those customers who were his friends and requested this service). When a couple of dancers challenged his authority to instigate this policy, he simply responded that they had no choice in the matter, saying they were too "ignorant" to do anything about it – so the women went to the mayor's office with their grievance. He was subsequently deported as an 'undesirable alien' and the policy was rescinded, but the bar was not shut down and the women who filed the complaint continued to work there.

Before the Asian financial crisis of 1997, money was easier to come by in the go-go bars. Tips were larger, and distributed to a greater number of women; companionship that involved only conversation was a commodity that commanded a high price, particularly from Japanese businessmen who paid handsomely for these performances of 'corporate masculinity' involving an adoring female audience (Allison 1994). Lucille always reminisces about "the good days" when customers and money were more plentiful. She is a woman in her forties who has worked in the bars along P. Burgos since they opened over ten years ago, yet she never took part in any of the sexual activities like most of the other women in this vocation. Her job has always consisted of providing

conversation as well as back massages to customers, and she has recently been saving money for the construction of a house in her home province, noting the progress toward completion as an indicator of business in the bar. However, the pace of construction has slowed as her earnings have dropped precipitously in the past few years:

> Business is not like it was before. Before, we had lots of customers and they all bought many drinks for the girls, and gave good tips; sometimes they would even tip $100… Now, many customers don't even buy drinks. They just sit back and watch, don't even want to talk to the girls because they [the customers] are *kuripot* ('stingy'). Or maybe they want a blowjob if they buy lady's drinks. It's not like before… all I need now is the roof, but it is taking a long time to come up with the money.

The nostalgia for the time 'before' is echoed by employees and customers alike: for employees, there are stories of 'big spenders' and wild parties; for the customers it is memories of sexual abundance and fewer restraints generated by the free flow of cash. Other go-go bar employees are equally vocal about the declining earnings and worsening labor conditions:

> Look at _____ [pointing to her co-worker sitting on the floor to massage a customer's foot]… see how we have to sacrifice now! Now we can't just sit and talk for lady's drinks, we have to do other work for customers, like blowjobs or touching them all over. It's okay if they are clean and *mabango* ('possessing a pleasing odor'), or if they give us drinks, but many of the customers now are not as rich as before… and sometimes they don't even take a bath before they come here! (receptionist in Makati)

Another consideration for female employees involves the manner in which they receive their earnings: in most instances women get a weekly or bi-weekly paycheck, but some bars distribute salaries daily (most notably, the McBass venues). Payment on a daily basis is preferred because many women live hand-to-mouth on their meager earnings. Women also favor this system of payment because it enables them to collect their money on their own time since many do not work every day. With declining earnings there is less incentive for women to show up for work on a regular basis, so they attempt to maximize their productivity by only working on those days where they expect a greater number of customers, such as on weekends or when there is a special occasion (arrival of a foreign naval vessel, long holidays, local sporting events, etc.). GRO

attendance is irregular at best, and while the 'casualization' of female labor in this setting serves the interests of owners who want to avoid payment of wages and benefits, it also allows women to negotiate some of the conditions related to their employment that would be impossible in some other vocation – such as the decision to work on certain days and not others. Some women limit their work to just two or three days a week; others take off for weeks or months at a time because they go home to attend to family affairs or because they have gone on vacation with a customer / boyfriend.

> I only come to work one or two times a year because I am bored at home… I just watch TV and take care of my daughter, but sometimes I want to come here and see my friends and have a drink or two with some customers. I miss the life here, but I have to take care of my baby, or I would be here everyday. (dancer in Makati)

> I came back yesterday… I [have] been in my province for six months. I do this every year: when there are no more tourists, I just go home to see my family and my daughter, then when the customers come back to the Philippines, then I come back to work again. (dancer in Angeles)

Sometimes dancers and receptionists simply disappear with little indication to the management as to when or even if they will return to the bar someday – but they remain on the employee roster nonetheless. Due to the uncertainty regarding the occupational commitment of GROs, some bars employ hundreds of women at any time realizing that only a handful will show up to work on any particular day.[106]

> Today we have thirty-five dancers and about the same number of receptionists because it's Friday night. Yesterday, we only had eight dancers… sometimes there are not enough, and other times there are too many, but what can we do? (manager in Makati)

These issues of attendance and the freedom of movement for GROs are particularly relevant in considering their motivations for choosing to work as a dancer or receptionist in a go-go bar. Under such an arrangement women can work whenever they

[106] This is especially true for bars in Makati, as the highly urbanized setting of Metro Manila provides more employment alternatives that women explore while also keeping their jobs as GROs. In Angeles, there are fewer opportunities and leisurely diversions, so the go-go bar employees tend to focus on their work until they decide to move elsewhere.

want, so they are able to address their other social responsibilities (such as childcare and family emergencies) and personal desires (for leisure and other relationships). A few women admitted that they would like to have the benefits given to 'regular' employees – the idea of a minimum wage was especially appealing for those women who are unable to earn a sufficient amount through drink commissions – but most find the regulations for this form of employment too rigid for their liking.

> If a girl wants benefits, then she can be a waitress; all they have to do is meet the requirements: be at work on time, come here everyday… but most cannot do that, they enjoy their freedom too much… we always have openings for waitress, so any girl who wants to do that can, but they don't really want to do the job to get the benefits. (manager in Makati)

> No, I do not want to be like staff… because they have to come to work every day. If I want, or if my baby is sick, then I can just stay home, or if my boyfriend is in town, then we can be together… but the other girls [the staff] have to be here all the time, and they cannot go on vacation when they want. (receptionist in Makati)

> I tried being waitress for a while, but the manager was always yelling at me to work harder. I couldn't be late, and I couldn't talk to customers, so I came back to [being a] dancer. (dancer in Angeles)

Moreover, since many have come to work in these bars to meet foreign men in the hope of finding a suitable husband, the financial benefits do not appear to make up for the loss of time and effort that could be invested in developing a long-term, romantic relationship:

> It is so hard to have a boyfriend here… I don't have time to talk to anyone, especially if I work at night [as opposed to the slow daytime shift]… I always have to take care of the girls and make sure everything is working because if our sales [are] low, then the administration will blame me. (floor manager in Makati)

While women who are not considered regular employees by the bar do not receive benefits from the government in the form of insurance or social security, they are also not subjected to some of the same regulations as applied to other workers. Dancers and receptionists must undergo periodic (weekly or bi-weekly) STI examinations, but their status as 'casual' employees exempts them from other forms of surveillance:

> I don't mind the drug test… because we [staff] are not the ones using drugs. It is those girls [dancers and receptionists] who are the ones using drugs, but they are not tested. (waitress in Makati)[107]

The separation of 'us' from 'them' pervades every aspect of this social setting, where there is a struggle for power and control over others as well as the self. This involves a reformulation of identities, practices and relationships according to the changing notions regarding sexuality, subjectivity, citizenship, and morality. Situated within a specific space (an urban red-light district in a developing country) and assigned to a particular role (as employees in the liminal sexual service sector), women working in the go-go bars of Angeles and Makati face numerous constraints as thoughtful agents and desiring actors in this setting, but these restrictions usually do not prevent them from making meaningful decisions regarding their lives. These geographic and conceptual constructs bring to the fore their duties in addressing the desires of others as 'good employees,' 'dutiful daughters,' sexual partners, or sexualized objects, and yet the dialogical processes in performing these social identities entails a significant amount of negotiation between various interests as to the forms of exchange that more or less satisfy the wants and 'needs' of everyone involved. It is through these different personae and performances that GROs realize their potential to overcome what to many outside observers appears to be a 'bad' situation. The structure of the go-go bar within this 'sexscape' presents numerous social and political hurdles that women must navigate, but most importantly it also provides what they believe to be the best chance to achieve their dreams within the limitations of Philippine society.

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[107] Drug testing for regular employees began in 1999 after it was 'discovered' that women working in these establishments were using illegal substances ("Makati fun joints now drug 'havens'" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 24, 1999). The use of drugs is not as explicit or widespread as one might infer from the sensational headlines, but some women do use marijuana or *shabu* (methamphetamine hydrochloride) as intoxicants or (in the case of *shabu*) to maintain their weight.

Chapter 4
The Dynamics of Gazing

So what do you see when you look at me?
It's just an empty space
Your space

Because I am you
Whatever you see comes from inside you
You created me because you need me
I am an empty space for all your waste
You don't see me because you have made me
invisible
you pretend I'm not there
from *"Whore"* (Bailey 2001)

One of the principle means by which we make sense of our social environment is by observing the activities of those around us. The information collected through this process of gazing is then used to develop an acceptable presentation of self according to the situation at hand (Goffman 1959). Interpreting the intricacies of gender comportment is especially useful in this endeavor because of the primacy accorded to the differences between masculinity and femininity, and the importance of maintaining proper sexual decorum in public spaces. By scrutinizing the physical attributes and the behavior of other individuals in a sexualized manner, we can begin to assemble appropriate identities and position ourselves in line with the "principles of vision and division which lead to the classifying of all the things of the world and all practices according to distinctions that are reducible to the male / female opposition" (Bourdieu 2001: 30). Realizing that we are being examined and judged in a similar fashion, we reflexively seek to influence how others view us through performances that we believe to be desirable or will otherwise achieve our goals within diverse and dynamic social settings.

In spite of this tacit recognition that we possess the subjective ability to make an impression upon others, the gaze invariably objectifies because it provides an incomplete reading of people and events. Gazing is supposed to complement other modes of interaction in forming these interpretations, yet the myriad demands of modern urban life

leaves little time for developing an intimate knowledge of others. Without the additional input from more extensive personal encounters involving different types of communication, we are left with constructions based largely on what we summarily gather from different sources – and often these are the gazes of others who then circulate their own incomplete perceptions. Thus, we must contend with mere caricatures of persons, using scant visible evidence to develop a complex elucidation of who (or perhaps, more accurately, 'what') people 'are.' It is through this practice of 'vision and division' that subjectivity is obscured, especially if those people who are the objects of this gaze cannot articulate their own identities or desires. The go-go bars of Makati and Angeles are all about gazing, providing customers, employees, and critics alike with bodies that they can use to fabricate their own fantasies of power through the deployment of objectifying discourses and imagery; and yet they are also places where people act out their desires in an effort to alter those imposed characterizations that they find objectionable.

The go-go bars in this study are areas where women can openly express their sexual aspirations, though many still subsume these desires to avoid the aforementioned stigmatizing labels and consequences that go along with such behavior. Women in these venues often choose to perform as dancers rather than receptionists so that customers will be able to gaze upon them; many dancers reveal that being the object of a desirous gaze satisfies certain psychological requirements (Ratliff 1999; Scott 1996), although, as mentioned in the previous chapter, financial considerations also affect their decisions regarding occupational performances. The desire for sexual objectification that results in financial remuneration or other forms of gratification influences these presentations so that the female employee also becomes a desiring sexual subject, and in much the same manner as accommodating performances can also represent acts of resistance, the apparent concession to an objectified identity may also be indicative of subjective agency. This dialectic of opposing and contradictory readings of these performances makes it more difficult for the observer to discern the multiple meanings that inform

attitudes and behaviors in these encounters, as noted by a researcher who studied exotic dancers in the U.S.:

> The most striking feature I encountered during the field research was the many ways in which the various strip shows simultaneously upheld and broke traditional female and male sex roles and other related cultural rubrics as an integral part of the performance. (Liepe-Levinson 1998: 10)

Women and men in these establishments reveal similar ambiguities and contradictions in their performances because they are generally expected to behave in a manner that is in line with the cultural rules governing space ('public' vs. 'private') and social status (gender, age, race, etc.), yet because these venues are positioned on the margins of society, customers and employees are not subjected to the same pressures to conform as are those people located in the mainstream. Accordingly, gazing in the go-go bar involves a variety of people with diverse interests in positioning themselves physically and socially within these establishments:

> I don't like this new place… they have me working over here in the corner, and now I can't see anything! Also, nobody can see me! How can I find a boyfriend if nobody can see me here? That's why I have to come over here [away from her assigned space] all the time… (bartender in Makati)

> I don't understand why those customers like to sit in the dark corners. I want to be up here, in front, right by the stage so that all the dancers can see me. That way, I can make eye contact with the girl I like, and she can see that I am interested. (Australian customer in Makati)

> The three men came to occupy the same positions at the bar as they had previously during the past week. _____ tried to coax them toward a table where there is more space, but one of the customers refused, saying "this is our spot." The ease with which they secured their customary seats was simply a prelude to the choreographed erotic display that followed. The regularity of this performance was duly noted by one waitress who remarked "they [the customers] don't even change their clothes!" As if on cue, the same three receptionists gathered around one of the patrons as they had on earlier occasions, with the one of the women deftly maneuvering her hands into his zipper to give him a 'hand job' while the other two assumed flanking positions to block the view of others. _____ noticed that I was watching, so she averted her gaze in a reflexive manner after realizing that I am someone who 'knows' her [I was seated behind the customer, so the women involved in this performance were facing me]. I too looked away so as not to cause any undue embarrassment among the women, but

> _____ then made a motion to catch my attention, and while one hand was busy pleasing this customer, she used her other to raise her glass to me in a toast. Everyone got what they wanted. (fieldnotes)

The brief account above is a good example of the complex management and synchronization of gazing within these establishments. When these regular customers entered the bar, everyone knew what was going to take place soon after so a couple of the women tried to maintain some sense of propriety by ushering them to a more discreet location within the bar. However, the men would have none of that; they wanted to sit at the bar where other people congregated, next to the bright lights of the stage. They desired the gaze of others as a means of revealing their own masculine power and desirability to an audience. The two receptionists who stood beside the couple also received drinks for their performance, but these efforts at blocking the view of others almost always results in greater visibility as such obvious attempts imply a 'secretive' activity to curious onlookers.[108] The woman who looked away upon noticing my gaze did so because that is what 'good' Filipinas are supposed to do as an act of contrition for what is perceived as shameful behavior.[109] However, another woman in this group, upon seeing my reaction as an effort to minimize the perception of social transgression – and perhaps believing that I was embarrassed or otherwise feeling out-of-place – made a counter-gesture by raising her glass to indicate that I was welcome as a member of the audience. Or rather, was she recognizing my participation as a supporting performer in this instance?

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[108] Much like the drawing of curtains around the 'VIP rooms' in these bars, there is no serious attempt to conceal these sexual activities from other customers and employees. Rather than hiding such performances from the intended audience, these partitions create a semblance of mystery that adds to the voyeuristic experience and, from a more practical standpoint, they also function to 'obscure the obvious' for legal purposes, giving the participants a few seconds to cover-up and compose themselves in the event of a police raid.

[109] Observers often assume that women in these settings are 'without shame' (*walang hiya* in Tagalog), which influences the perceptions of those who believe that this lack is indicative of some deep character flaw or psychological disturbance (Scott 1996).

A performative approach that considers the various practices and positions of individual actors in this social setting is crucial to the development of an accurate representation of the activities and identities that emerge in this particular space and time. In this chapter, I examine interactions between persons who deploy diverse behavioral routines that account for varied interests and goals in the process of cultivating relations with others while also developing a desired (re)presentation of the self. To illustrate this convoluted process of 'being' and 'becoming,' I begin with a discussion of the many stereotypical portrayals of customers and employees in the go-go bars of Makati and Angeles. Also, since 'the family' is such an important component of Filipino identity, I will discuss how the female employees of the go-go bar develop relations and employ kinship terminology to engender familiarity and meaning to their relations with others in these venues.

In the second part of this chapter, I analyze the performative aspects of everyday go-go bar interactions by examining how mainstream narratives and the various discourses that emerge within these venues construct a space for people to engage in routines that both support and challenge preconceived identities and ideologies. Subsequent interactions between men and women incorporate these characteristics in their performances to achieve personal goals through the manipulation of these master scripts and narratives concerning gender and sexuality. Here, I apply the writings of Erving Goffman (1959; 1963a) to show how the go-go bar serves as a 'stage' for the enactment of exacting roles that are designed to elicit a specific response from the audience. In using this dramaturgical framework, I demonstrate how the distinctions between the various regions of this stage ('front' and 'back') and participants (involving 'teams' of performers and members of the audience) are not always fixed or even well defined in this environment as people move around, adopting different guises as the circumstances evolve. As a consequence, our views of the self and the constructions of others are transformed through the intimate processes of gazing and intercourse between performers and audience in this sexualized setting.

"I'm barfine, how are you?"

In passing through the doors of the go-go bars along P. Burgos or Fields, women and men enter into a realm where their identities are formed through the voyeuristic imagination of observers who always maintain an appropriate distance through gazing and subsequent stereotyping. Customers, bar owners, government officials, and sundry social critics create images of Filipino femininity to suit their own social, economic, and political desires, using the labels 'sex workers,' 'girls,' or 'Filipinas' to place women in a particular position – usually subordinate – when it comes to intimate relationships. Even those who invoke the imagery of the 'prostituted woman' in order to 'save' them from this lifestyle engage in the same objectifying (and, ultimately, masculine) fantasies of domination. As noted in the quote that forms the title of this section, the 'barfine' becomes the singular referent in developing an identity for the GRO: regardless of any other personal attributes, she is always defined by that one practice. A woman does not even have to engage in the exchange of sex for financial remuneration to be identified as a 'sex worker' – simply crossing into this space carries all the attendant meanings associated with prostitution. Categorization of this order informs the dominant gaze by providing a signifier that informs social interaction and maintains existing relations of power; the recognition that individuals have different personal histories and motivations does little to alter the stigma and disempowerment that often accompany the labeling and formulaic portrayals of people and practices.[110]

To mitigate the stigma that inevitably accompanies the stereotypical representation of GROs, women working in go-go bars often modify their identities while immersed in this vocation. Distancing begins with relocation to another city, and they

[110] Within this setting, there is a definite disparity of power where men dominate interactions according to their identities as customers and the prevailing discourse of (hetero)sexuality which situates them in the active / aggressive position when it comes to matters of sex. However, this does not necessarily negate the stigmatizing effects of labeling that occurs beyond the go-go bar, where men identified as 'sex tourists' or 'johns' are considered deviant and, in some cases, criminalized for behavior that falls under the 'natural' construction of masculine sexual performance.

may also alter their names to provide additional anonymity from those who would disapprove of their presence in this setting.[111] Further dissociation from societal norms is achieved when men and women tailor their performances to attain personal goals in this liminal environment. Inasmuch as each individual has a distinct set of interests (or at least prioritizes their desires differently), their actions will vary according to mood, condition, or the opportunities at hand:

> It [how she approaches a customer] depends on how I feel… if I just want money, then I do not try as hard with him, just talking *na lang* ('only')… I will only drink juice then, and if he doesn't buy me a drink, I will go somewhere else… but if he is cute, or if I just want to have fun – like just drinking or playing around – then I will smile and be more *malandi* ('flirtatious') with him… he doesn't even have to buy me a drink if I am enjoying myself, but those times, I will drink tequila if he buys me a lady's drink! (dancer in Makati)

> Sometimes I don't want to talk to customers, but I have to… it's really *mahirap* ('difficult') sometimes when you don't want to work, but you have to. You have to smile and pretend that you like someone, even if you don't, because you need to make money and make the manager happy. (dancer in Angeles)

> You can always tell which ones [GROs] are in it for the money. Just give them a few minutes and see if they are willing to put up with your nonsense… I always start out with a crowd, and then let a few of them wander off to other customers. There are plenty of other punters who will buy them drinks, so some of the girls are impatient and they go looking somewhere else… the girls who stay usually just want to talk to you – if you don't ignore them completely… I will buy drinks for those who stick it out because they are usually just bored and want someone to talk to. (Australian tourist in Angeles)

The (inter)actions of women and men in go-go bars reveal their desires through their presentations of identifiable personae according to our constructions of proper behaviors and the appropriate spaces for expression. Performative competence in this

[111] The economic and geographic mobility of male customers from industrialized countries provides them with the legitimate cover of a vacation or holiday – complete with the sexual overtones of modern, romantic leisure – to avoid recriminations from family, friends, and concerned citizens at home for engaging in behaviors associated with 'prostitution.' Men who say "I would never do this at home" are commenting on their desire to steer clear of the stigmatizing gaze as much as they are professing a preference for the intimate encounters specific to foreign settings.

and other social settings entails knowing what the responsibilities are for the various characters involved in this complex socioerotic dramatization, and accounting for the myriad potential outcomes. The go-go bars provide their own form of "covering" that renders such characterizations intelligible through archetypical representations of gender and sexuality (Barthes 1957; Prewitt 1989), so GROs must adopt a manner of comportment that is both recognizable and pleasing to a broad array of interested parties, including employers, patrons, friends, co-workers, and government officials. Desire thus becomes an important aspect of identity formation, as individuals engage in those activities and espouse attitudes that they hope will be acceptable to discerning and judgmental observers with the power to confer social approval or distribute resources. To accomplish this, GROs mediate between the various available characters that are familiar to the bar's denizens, playing the sultry vamp as well as the coquettish rural lass in fulfilling the continually changing conditions and expectations.

Stated values concerning gender in these transnational sexual encounters is mutually reinforcing in that they re-present complementary attributes of masculinity and femininity coupled with national / racial overtones. The creation of 'red-light' districts as sexual 'ghettos' for foreigners and Filipinas employed in go-go bars often exacerbates the essentialist beliefs of racial and sexual difference because there is little opportunity or need to interact with people beyond this limited space. Expatriates gather in the restaurants and bars that dot the landscape surrounding both P. Burgos and Fields avenues, where there are also retail outlets, hotels, housing developments and other essential services that cater to the tastes and everyday needs of foreign residents, so tourists can spend their entire vacation without venturing far beyond the boundaries of these and other 'red-light' districts. Women's experiences are also focused on this space, in part, because they feel they are discriminated against when they attempt to move beyond the confines of their liminal world.[112] Ensconced in this small community of

[112] This is especially true for women working along Fields Avenue in Angeles, which is positioned on the outskirts of the city. Also, because Angeles represents a smaller urban setting, women are more vulnerable to discrimination in dealing with people outside of this segregated area. P. Burgos is in the middle of a congested mega-city, and so people

'sexpats' and 'bar girls,' many men and women simply repeat the same stereotypical imagery while employing few examples of counter-discourses that would challenge these racist and misogynist narratives (Killick 1995). GROs in particular – in their position as poor, young, undereducated women in a 'Third World' country and as an element of their role as service workers in the sex industry – incorporate this ideology to earn a living and avoid violence as part of the socioeconomic 'patriarchal bargain' (Gavey 1996; Kandiyoti 1988; Silberschmidt 2001).

These discursive structures influence personal beliefs and performances, but do not have absolute command over the actions of people, and there are many examples of women and men deploying different perspectives and personalities to fulfill their desires in the go-go bar. Through the practice of negotiation – among the varying discourses as well as other actors – people make use of a variety of subjective positions to achieve their goals. For many customers, this involves the realization of erotic desires and the acknowledgement of their masculinity as proffered in popular discourses, while the female go-go bar employees are generally interested in fostering relationships and forming identities that allow for greater social and geographic mobility. Thus, most men in this setting assume a conservative viewpoint in wanting to uphold those social conditions that allow them to maintain sexual control on this and other public 'stages,' whereas the women are more interested in the transformational prospects that are possible within this context.

In the presence of these potentially opposing perspectives and motivations, customers and employees collude form a 'working consensus' by acknowledging the desires of others (Goffman 1959). Participants devise performances that they believe will address the varied interests within this setting, also taking into account the prevailing discourses of sexual propriety in the broader social milieu. So while the traveler can generally experience some form of sensual and emotional release by escaping the behavioral limitations of 'home' (Littlewood 2001) – either as a Western tourist on some

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who are not part of the go-go bar scene move in and out of this area even, and thus, it is difficult to distinguish between 'normal' people and those who are accorded 'deviant' identities.

'romantic' getaway or a Filipino migrant to the city – s/he does so within a new set of restrictions according local notions of public decorum. The go-go bars along P. Burgos and Fields avenues thus emerge as transnational sites where desiring actors from different backgrounds negotiate multiple images and ideas emanating from complex personal beliefs and cultural discourses. Men and women then incorporate these perspectives – gleaned from their experiences as well as their inculcation into a particular class or gendered role – into a (re)presentation of self that is acceptable (if not always desirable) to the gaze of others.

dutiful daughters and cheap Charlies

Go-go bars in the Philippines offer a unique opportunity to partake in conversations with a broad array of characters, including Japanese businessmen, Middle Eastern traders, American basketball players, Australian military personnel, and European diplomats who either live in Manila or are simply passing through on their journeys elsewhere. Class, educational attainment and employment status among the male customers are irrelevant because nobody knows exactly who is walking into the premises: appearances in dress and demeanor reveal something about the individual, but those who wish to deceive the assembled audience for whatever reason can easily appropriate various performative masks to suit their own goals (see below). Encounters that transpire in these venues would not likely occur in other public settings because of the prevailing behavioral scripts related to class and occupational distinctions, so positioning these go-go bars as sites of leisure – separating them from the 'real' world of work and family – enables people to bridge these socioeconomic barriers so that men and women from different walks of life can approach each other with fewer constraints.

The diversity evident among men in this setting is offset by the prevailing iconography of what is perceived to be a singular GRO identity that is inexorably tied to the 'barfine.' All women working in these bars as dancers or receptionists are assumed to be taking part in sexual intercourse with customers, however each bar will usually have at least one or two 'cherry girls' (virgins) who are also considered 'sex workers' despite the

fact that they have never engaged in genital copulation.[113] Regardless of actions or intent in this setting, people are defined by their outward presentations, or, in the case of women, by their job description. In addition to the aforementioned stereotypes concerning sexual comportment, the Filipinas who work in these establishments are universally portrayed as impoverished, naïve, uneducated, disempowered young women who are present in these spaces only because the misery of their lives leaves them no other options. This emphasis on gendered difference situates female go-go bar employees in a subordinate position relative to men and other women because they are identified within an ideology that conflates sexual and nationalist discourses to create the stereotypical 'Filipina' as a discursive commodity in a global economy of symbols (Ignacio 2000).[114]

Male go-go bar patrons are also subject to similar portrayals regarding national origin as GROs employ racial or ethnic criteria in evaluating potential customers in addition to their considerations of various observable markers of material wealth and other desirable attributes. The economic power of Japan in the early and mid-1990s translated into a favorable image of Japanese customers who were very generous in their spending habits. However, the number of Japanese men frequenting the bars along P.

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[113] Go-go bar employees are identified by occupational definitions that imply a specific type of sexual activity sexual activity in line with the legal and ideological dictates of 'social hygiene,' so that women who work as managers or waitresses are not compelled to partake in periodic STI testing even though many of them engage in similar sexual activities as those who are classified as GROs. There is variation as to how these 'cherry girls' are treated within the social hygiene system. In some cases, they are examined only once a month (or less frequently), and the clinic physician takes responsibility for the examination (usually the examinations of GROs are conducted by medical technologists). However, some of these women did relate examples where visiting male physicians would take part in the examination, which caused them undue stress – a practice that they described as "rape."

[114] 'Filipina' is a word that has become synonymous with 'maid' in Hong Kong, Singapore, and elsewhere. These constructs reveal the racialized nature of Filipino identity, where Filipinos are seen as different from Chinese, Singaporeans, or other nationalities because of their status as a permanent underclass (Aguilar 1996; Constable 1997; Piper 1997). The subordinate position of OFWs overseas – and the fact that most of these migrants are women – adds to the image of a feminized (and thus, degraded) national identity (Rafael 1997).

Burgos has dropped precipitously since 1997,[115] and the Korean entrepreneurs who have come in their wake do not possess the same corporate expense accounts, nor do they share the same 'traditions' of socioerotic interaction in these venues that calls for generous tipping (Allison 1994). Western businessmen also have less money to spend on 'entertainment' these days, but their appeal to women extends beyond purely pecuniary interests, as men from Europe, Australia and the United States also represent prospective husbands who provide a different set of rewards regarding socioeconomic mobility.

Approaching men in go-go bars for some short-term financial gain is a straightforward process involving scripted roles of 'customer' and 'employee,' but the desire of many women to find a husband within this environment reveals a host of additional considerations. In their initial assessments of a man's marital potential, GROs often employ what they call "the three Ms": *mayaman* ('wealthy'), *mabait* ('kind'), and *matanda* ('old').[116] The importance of affluence and respectfulness in these intimate relationships is self evident, but the 'third M' in the troika of male desirability requires further explanation as it reflects on the other two characteristics. In the go-go bars, women believe that age is correlated with wealth, so that older men have more money because they have been in the workforce longer, and, presumably, have amassed greater savings as well as progressed to higher-paying occupations within their field. As age relates to being *mabait*, women also believe that older men are less sexually active than their younger cohorts, and thus, less likely to stray from a relationship of mutual commitment – although those women who have had experience in a variety of relationships know better than to adhere to these stereotypes.

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[115] Angeles City (largely marketed as a destination for Western tourists) has never attracted many Asian men to the go-go bars along Fields Avenue.

[116] Sometimes women jokingly refer to a 'fourth M': *mamatay* ('dead'). This implies a modicum of ambiguity among some women regarding marriage in this setting, as they desire the benefits that come with marriage to a foreigner, but do not necessarily relish spending the rest of their lives with that person.

> I want to have an older man [as a husband] because then he is more mature and maybe not so 'butterfly'[117] like a young guy, but I know all men are not the same, so it depends on the person… but I think if he is young, then he will be hard to control. (receptionist in Makati)

Moreover, the demographic breakdown of male visitors to the Philippines supports these broad characterizations, as there are relatively few men under the age of forty that frequent the bars of Makati and Angeles,[118] and many of the youthful males who do find their way to Philippine go-go bars are military personnel who do not have much disposable income and are not as inclined to form lasting, monogamous unions. Despite their apparent shortfalls in these matters, young men are still desirable commodities in this setting:

> I like the young customer[s] because they are so *gwapo* ('handsome') and they can have sex many times – all night long even! But if I get married, then I want it to be someone who's older… not too old, maybe ten years [older] than me. (dancer in Angeles)

> The young guys, they don't always have much money, but I like being with them because they look nice… if a person sees you with an old man, then they don't have any respect for you because they think you are only after his money, and they tease you because you are having sex with *lolo* ('grandfather')… as long as he is *mabait* it [age] doesn't really matter, but I still like the young guys more. (dancer in Makati)

GROs use these personal attributes of race and age along with other discernible characteristics to develop their own classificatory schemes for future reference. As in other social settings, many of the characterizations discussed in go-go bars are based on personal experiences as well as the knowledge imparted by others who have been in similar situations. In formulating and asserting these stereotypical portrayals, the actors are attempting to manipulate the responses of others in explicitly voicing what they have

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[117] 'Butterfly' is a common term in go-go bar parlance used to describe a person who moves quickly from one intimate relationship to another – like a butterfly that flits from flower to flower.

[118] This is in contrast to the situation in the red-light distracts of Bangkok or Pattaya (Thailand) where young foreign men (as well as women) may be found in large numbers as the result of aggressive marketing strategies and tourism policies enacted by the Thai government.

determined to be acceptable identities and behaviors under these circumstances. For example, the label 'Cheap Charlie' is applied to those customers who do not partake in the economy of purchasing lady's drinks for the women who spend time entertaining them. A single visit to the bar does not necessarily entail significant financial outlay in terms of paying for women's time and effort, but repeated visits (or a long afternoon / evening spent in the company of others) without some sort of remuneration garners considerable resentment among employees and other patrons. People use these descriptive labels and other communicative means (such as gossip) to shame others into performing according to social expectations.[119] Websites promoting Philippine nightspots also attempt to structure proper behavior through the use of reinforcing imagery associated with this particular customer identity:

> Buying a drink for a girl you find attractive is a good way to break the ice. A man who doesn't buy drinks for any of the girls while he's bar hopping is called a Cheap Charlie. Generally, eight drinks will buyout a dancer or waitress from her shift and she will be free to join you. (<www.balibago.com/nightlife.html>; last accessed on July 7, 2002)

Women in go-go bars are also subject to similar discourses of femininity and national identity representing the 'Filipina' in a manner that both influence and rationalize her behavior. These broad characterizations materialize as archetypical identities that people employ to manage impressions in this social setting, so that casual observers as well as those directly involved in socioerotic interaction can (re)act in accordance with customary roles and activities. Perhaps the most common identity among female employees encountered in the go-go bar is that of the impoverished young woman, supporting herself, a child, and numerous relatives on some distant island. As proffered by the prevailing discourse of 'family values' in the Philippines, children (especially daughters) are responsible for aiding in the financial support of parents and

[119] While conducting interviews among the rural residents of Leyte island, I asked a *barangay* leader what would happen if someone's actions went against local values, and he responded "nothing much… we would just talk about them." In small, bounded populations (such as the go-go bar) where social obligations are pertinent to the functioning of the community and relations between individual members, gossip is used to maintain group cohesion through the enforcement of communal values.

younger siblings. The construction of the young woman as the main breadwinner in the household is thus an accepted persona in contemporary Philippine society, recognized by everyone who plays a part in the sex industry – including families, social activists and the government. This stereotype is also reinforced among customers who realize that they are relative wealthy compared to the Filipinas they meet in bars, but the expectations of masculine privilege associated with 'entertainment' often preclude other considerations and performances that might degrade the desired atmosphere.

> I should print a T-shirt that answers all the questions that women ask me… "no, I am not married; I am 42 years old; no, I am not an American"… I should also print one for the girls that says "I come from a poor family in the provinces, I have twelve brothers and sisters, three babies, and infirmed parents to support"… It would get the small talk out of the way because, frankly, I don't want to hear this every time I sit down and talk to someone. (Australian expatriate in Angeles)

Nevertheless, this common portrayal of the Filipina as downtrodden is essential to the proper functioning of the go-go bar because it enables the various parties to pursue their own interests as they relate to this particular social arrangement constructed from foundational narratives of gender and power. Male customers can manipulate the encounter so that they feel better about themselves because they are contributing to the prosperity of the woman and her family – indeed, foreign men who are repeat visitors or residing in the Philippines often boast about how many women, families, or "entire villages" they are supporting through their habitual carousing. Imagery of the oppressed GRO also serves the interests of numerous activists and NGOs who receive significant political capital as well as funding through their attempts to 'rescue' women from this vocation, yet these well-intentioned groups would not merit such consideration if they did not produce and publicize this sensationalistic version of 'the Filipina' for the compassionate consumption of others (Tadiar 2002).[120]

[120] This 'benevolent' form of objectification and exploitation is perhaps best represented in the actions of Father Shay Cullen in Olongapo who has earned considerable publicity and funding for his foundation through his campaign against foreign pedophiles in the Subic area. Several high-profile arrests in the 1990s have made him a celebrity among politicians and activists who want to keep this issue in the headlines, although many others in the community – most notably local Church officials and law enforcement

Another variation on the poverty theme involves the image of the 'entertainer' attempting to put herself through school. Some of the student-GROs are pursuing degrees at four-year colleges, but most opt for vocational education toward a particular occupational goal in information technology or secretarial work. The identity of the 'struggling student' provides another socially acceptable rationale for working in the sex industry by indicating that such employment is temporary; once women have completed their courses, reasoning follows that they will then have the opportunity for a more 'decent' line of employment. Thus, working in go-go bars is represented as a short-term measure to provide money for tuition and books – a noble enterprise at self-improvement that many men are happy to support. However, the reality is that few women who portray themselves are actively involved in such studies, or they may start classes, but drop out if there is no continuous source of financial aid or if they cannot devote sufficient time to their academic endeavors. For those women who are academically inclined, the flexible work schedule of go-go bar and the possibility for garnering wealth quickly allows women to attend classes while working:

> I like working here now because I only have to come once or twice a week… if there is a test or project, then I can ask the staff to change my work days… sometimes I don't have any [lady's] drinks, but then there are some nights when I have enough to pay for my tuition and expenses, so this is a good job for me. (receptionist in Makati)

While many dancers and receptionists want to go to school, not all find themselves in a work environment – with accommodating staff and sufficient earnings – to pursue their studies. Jackie (24 years old when I met her in 1995) has been dancing in a bar in Angeles since 1991. At the time, she lived with her parents and young son in a small apartment near Fields Avenue; her cousin (also a dancer at the same bar) and aunt (a *mamasan* at a different club on Fields) resided next door. She initially presented herself as a student at a nearby computer college, but her work schedule, domestic

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personnel – have questioned his methods of securing evidence against the accused, and some of the convictions he instigated have been overturned (Kirk 1998: 113-124; see also "False charges against activist priest" (letter to the editor) *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 6, 2000).

responsibilities, and extensive socializing outside of the go-go bar appeared to leave little time for studies. After a couple of weeks, I asked her some detailed questions about her coursework and she then admitted lying about attending classes, saying "all the girls tell the customers that they are students when they first meet them."

For many of these women, embracing victimhood is an act of agency that reveals their recognition of their subordinate position within society (as young women) and in the sociopolitical landscape (as 'prostitutes'). In the same vein as Goffman's description of 'negative idealization' (1959: 49), these performances of 'poverty' also garner greater sympathy (as well as more lady's drinks and tips) by living up to the expectations of customers and others who demand piteous identities to satisfy their own political motives or sexual fantasies of domination. This enables men and concerned politicians or activists to boost their own standing by providing largess that comes with this disparity in power and status; an incongruity which is made all the more apparent through the staging of compassion and generosity as a feature of the patriarchal desire for control.[121] Women play upon these sentiments in assuming these *biktima* ('victim') identities to obtain material considerations as well as assert their own power in the performative process: as Carole Anne Taylor notes in her discussion of agency and narrative (1993), the appropriation of a subordinate persona may, ironically, constitute a position of power and success for those who competently adopt these identities. Moreover, the embodiment of 'good girl' imagery through the 'dutiful daughter' or 'struggling student' identities displaces much of the 'bad girl' persona attached to their employment in these go-go bars (Suzuki 2000; Chang and Groves 2000).

This presentation of self as a victim of patriarchal society, a poor economy, and an ineffective government is only one way in which women working in the Philippine go-go bars actively portray themselves to others. The desire for social mobility is also important in the formation of identity among women in this setting as they strive to 'learn' the mannerisms and values of the cosmopolitan middle class they observe in the local media as well as among their foreign male customers. The symbolic ordering of

race, class, and nationality that often constitutes one's identity and in many cases, limits social opportunities, can now be transcended through the conspicuous consumption of goods and images. Women working in the go-go bars who come from meager, peasant backgrounds now sport expensive jewelry, designer clothing and the latest models of cellular phones. Social mobility of this sort follows government desires and discourses concerning 'development': just as the Philippine state espouses grandiose infrastructure projects as indicators of economic progress, so too do young women embrace the material trappings of a consumer society to reveal their own personal advancement.

Given that consumption of this manner is supposed to be viewed by others as an indication of 'success,' these displays of good fortune complicate the aforementioned performances that emphasize poverty, and thus challenge those discourses that position GROs within the realm of selfless sacrifice and other common feminine tropes. Some men have remarked that they do not want to give money to their Filipina girlfriends because "they would just spend it on crap," and several bar owners have also used the spending habits of female employees to justify low wages and commissions:

> These women aren't poor. Their boyfriends send them money and they are always taking vacations, going to Hong Kong to buy stereos and clothing. You see their jewelry, clothing and cell phones. They live the good life. (manager in Angeles)

These images of consumption and leisure associated with the go-go bar have led to charges that women working in the sex industry are 'lazy,' and just looking for a quick and easy way out of their socioeconomic predicament (Ho 2000; Morris 2002; Muecke 1992; Peracca, et al. 1998). Moreover, women as consuming subjects are often criticized for rejecting certain rituals of social reproduction in their quest to satisfy individual desires.

> [Female factory workers'] relative economic freedom was linked with the irresponsible use of that freedom to indulge in an orgy of pleasure-seeking activities. Greater public control came to be exerted over their 'leisure' time (which in actuality was very limited), while simultaneously diverting attention from the harsh realities of their 'working' time (Ong 1987: 183).

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[121] Such scripted performances are not unlike those of other patron-client relations found throughout Southeast Asia (Scott 1985).

Women counter such assertions by reverting back to the discourses of feminine 'sacrifice,' describing the extent to which other family members depend on them for survival.

> I am the third oldest in my family, and we are twelve [siblings]… the oldest brother already has his own family,[122] and the second [brother] is in college now… so it is only me working to help my younger brothers and sisters go to school because my father is dead, and my mother is already old now. (receptionist in Makati)

The paradox of these simultaneous presentations of wealth and poverty among go-go bar employees is not always apparent, nor does it matter to most observers who have come to expect the embodiment of both of these essentialized feminine representations in a (post)modern consumer culture. Women must purchase nice clothes and accessories to meet the labor demands for a 'pleasing appearance,' just as they are also expected to use their earnings to buy durable goods for relatives that will enhance their own status (as dutiful providers) as well as that of their kin. Meeting these contradictory demands for model Filipina roles and responsibilities places a great strain on women in this situation, and many do not return home for holidays simply because they have nothing to show (in terms of *pasalubong* or 'presents') for their time away when they are supposed to be working to improve the socioeconomic standing of their families.

the bar 'family'

Since many of these idealized presentations within the go-go bar incorporate the discourses of gender from the broader Philippine culture, there is considerable overlap between the personae women present to others within this setting and those characteristics that possess greater currency outside the work environment. In deploying these different narratives and identities, women are not simply providing excuses for what may appear to be incongruous positions; rather they are continually adjusting to

[122] It is widely assumed that daughters are more dependable than sons in providing support for their parents and siblings, especially once the sons have married and formed a separate household.

changing experiences and interpretations in this complex social setting (Phoenix 2000). Still, some women try to maintain an explicit distinction between their identities at work and the self that emerges beyond the go-go bar (see also Castañeda et al. 1996), usually because they still reside with family members or because they do not wish to become fully integrated into this particular socioerotic milieu:

> I try not to make too many friends here because I want to leave as soon as I can. I am going to dance only a short time only because this is not really who I want to be. (dancer in Makati)

> I still live with my parents… they think that this bar is just where people come to drink and talk to each other, so they don't really know what happens inside, and they think I am just greeting people at the door… I work daytime only because nighttime is crazy! I don't want to get any bad habits…as long as I am a 'nice girl' then there is no problem at home. (dancer in Angeles)

Others become so immersed in the lifestyle and relations within this occupational setting that it extends into the 'private' realm, just as elements of 'home' find their way into the go-go bar. Existing on the margins of society far from friends and family in the provinces, women working in the go-go bar turn to each other for comfort and support. In the same manner as runaways and other disaffected youths in New York City have formed 'houses' and taken up the lexicon and practices of kinship depicted in the video documentary *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1985), so too do young *probinsyanas* establish familial relationships with people they encounter in the red-light districts of Makati and Angeles. Employees often live together (some bars in Angeles provide dormitory-style living arrangements for those women who cannot afford their own accommodation), so they spend a significant amount of time in each other's company, sharing expenses and domestic responsibilities.

Socialization that occurs between GROs outside of the workplace is another important aspect in maintaining camaraderie and a sense of belonging for women in this setting. The odd hours of work and deceptive performances required to keep this vocation hidden from those who might disapprove creates a condition whereby women must often rely on each other for social validation. Women who are labeled 'sex workers' form a community that is defined by shared values and experiences that result

from stigmatizing discourses and confining policies that relegate them to the darkened recesses of urban spaces. GROs who have similar perspectives and status within the go-go bar may form a *barkada* ('peer group') that often functions as performative 'team' within the go-go bar (see below), but also engages in leisure activities together outside of the workplace. The *barkada* is a homosocial assemblage most often associated with masculine performances in Philippine society (Dumont 1993), although the freedoms associated with rural-urban migration for women enable them to partake in similar activities as men (drinking, ribald discussions, etc.) that are generally not possible at 'home.'[123] The mobility of GROs means that these groups are often not as durable as those formed in their home communities, although some women who have 'retired' (through marriage, other employment, etc.) will continue to return to visit those friends who remain in the go-go bar.

The emergence of these close relations between co-workers supplants existing familial influences when it comes to matters of sexual information and attitudes. Urban social networks are crucial to the transmission of sexual knowledge where rural communities and families have been reluctant to impart the basic facts to young women (Ross and Rapp 1981; Runganga and Aggleton 1998), and the go-go bar similarly functions as a clearinghouse for information related to reproductive health. Additionally, many of the values regarding female sexuality (virginity, passivity, etc.) that the parents instilled in young women have dissipated as they have moved away and adopted the practices of their peers, co-workers, and housemates in the extended socioerotic network of the 'red-light' district. The extent to which women become fully integrated into the freewheeling lifestyle of the go-go bar as it reflects their activities outside the immediate

[123] The male *barkada* emerged in the 1950s and '60s as an institution that emphasized rituals of bonding and mutual support, with some overtones of criminality (Dumont 1993). The *barkada* image has softened in the last two decades to incorporate the positive attributes of social intimacy and community enculturation, although the assembly of peers away from the prying eyes of others (most notably, concerned spouses and parents) may lead to conflict at home when the *barkada* takes precedence over family matters. However, for those persons residing beyond the immediate surveillance of 'home' – as in young, single migrants – such concerns become irrelevant, and the *barkada* in these instances may function as a 'family.'

work environment largely depends on their contact with other family members. Those who reside with kin (or have relatives living nearby) do not have the same 'independence' as those who left their families and associated forms of paternal surveillance on some distant island.

> I can only work daytime because I live in an apartment next to my auntie. She is very strict, so I cannot go out at night, or she will tell my parents… if my boyfriend [from Australia] is in town, then I have to tell her [a lie] so that she will not be suspicious when I go out with him at night, or away on vacation. (receptionist in Makati)

There are also numerous examples where women work in the go-go bars with other female relatives. Groups of cousins and sisters are found in both Angeles and Makati, and usually all family members are employed in the same establishment. In some cases, they have arrived together looking for a job, but a more common procedure involves one woman inviting her other relatives to join her once she has established herself in the city. Younger relatives may try to find some other line of work or continue their education, but many eventually gravitate toward employment in the go-go bar because of the hardships they encounter in the Philippine labor market.

> My sister came here [to Manila] after high school, and she could not find a job so she worked here as a waitress and then [as] a floor manager… she told me it was a nice job, so I came here from my province after I finished high school to work in the bar… my sister only started working here last year, and there is another sister living with us, but she is still in school. I don't know if she will work here also because she is very shy – even more shy than _____ [other sister] – but that is her choice. (dancer in Makati)

In some cases, guardians (aunts, mothers, and grandmothers) have arranged for their young female wards to work in the go-go bars. Usually, they simply encourage their nieces and daughters to find a job in the sex industry, although there are a few instances where the guardians have accompanied women to the bar to ensure that they know the location of employment and working conditions.[124]

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[124] While conducting research in Leyte and Samar, I came across several communities where many of the young women had migrated to Manila for the sole purpose of working in *casas* (brothels where sexual intercourse takes place entirely on the premises). Recruiters / owners of these establishments had already established a network of rural

Aside from the aforementioned residential arrangements and occasional connivance among relatives, the familial atmosphere in the go-go bar is maintained through everyday use of kinship terms for co-workers and participation various ritual celebrations that are traditionally times when relatives get together, such as birthdays, Christmas, and bar anniversaries. It is important to note that the development of this type of collegial intimacy within the bars is not unique to this setting, as it is also evident in other workplace environments in the Philippines.[125] Kinship terminology structures the realm of sexual possibilities by classifying the intimate encounters between certain relatives as incestuous, and the construction of relations within the go-go bar setting functions in a similar manner. Co-workers are usually called *ate* and *kuya* ('older sister' and 'older brother,' respectively), and while these deferential terms are often associated with differences in age in the Filipino family, in this setting they may also be indicative of job title (staff vs. GRO) or seniority within the establishment.[126]

The designation of a man as *kuya* generally ostensibly precludes the possibility for sexual relationships, as is the case between GROs and the men who serve as doormen, disc jockeys, and handymen. Male owners, managers or *papasan* are never accorded the status of *kuya* (in part because they do occasionally become sexually involved with

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families that encourage daughters to take up this form of wage labor, usually because they had kinship links to these communities, and also the previous experiences of women and families are known to others. There appears to be no stigma attached to this work because it has become a "common practice," and the visible wealth (in the form of permanent housing structures and durable consumer goods) from this form of labor is difficult to ignore in these marginal *barangays*.

[125] This personalistic approach to Philippine commerce and the labor environment creates a situation that allows for flexibility and negotiation in the development of social and political capital as well as financial profits, but is not always the business model that fulfills capitalist doctrine or the expectations of those foreign owners and managers who do not adapt to these practices and relations within the local workplace (see Scott 1985; Szanton 1998).

[126] *Mamasan* is also usually abbreviated to 'mommy,' although this is usually interpreted as simply a shortening of the job title (in line with the Filipino penchant for assigning nicknames and/or acronyms to people) rather than an indication of a motherly relationship between the manager and employees – even though the activities and interactions often resemble a form of parenting in instilling sexual and occupational discipline.

female employees), and few foreign male customers have been described in this manner. Similar to their use of *ate* for female co-workers, women use the term *kuya* to indicate to others a special closeness in relationship that entails different obligations and expectations from those who are simply customers: these men are expected to assist and protect women, rather than becoming sexually involved.[127]

Kinship terms are almost always used to describe co-workers in a respectful manner, but their application to customers and other foreign men in the go-go bars reveals more ambiguous meanings. Considerations of age are evident in the use of many terms to describe men, so that men who are obviously much older than others (over 60 years of age) may be described as *lolo* ('grandfather'). As seen in the dancer's narrative above, *lolo* is often used in a derisive way to indicate that the man is simply 'too old' to be engaging in a sexual relationship with someone who is much younger than himself, often reflecting poorly on those women who accompany men in this age category. *Tito* ('uncle') is a respectful term for older men, and is often used to refer to those in a position of authority, such as some of the bar owners. Customers may also earn kinship titles – such as 'papa' and 'daddy' – which carry an air of fatherly benevolence, but are not indicative of sexual exclusion in the same way as a designation of *kuya*. Indeed, 'papa' and 'daddy' are generally employed to signify a particular financial arrangement similar to that of the 'sugar daddy' (Erickson and Tewksbury 2000).[128]

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[127] In my case, some women also used the label *kuya* as a warning for others to avoid getting too close to me. Tina would often admonish new dancers and receptionists who behaved in a sexually aggressive manner toward me by saying "he is my *kuya*" or "he is married to my sister [Leonor]." Women who describe me as *kuya* generally approach me in a non-sexual manner to discuss everyday issues relating to their lives or my research. My distinction as a 'relative' in this construction of fictive kinship means that they also come to me for advice on sexual matters without worrying that I will misconstrue the conversation as an expression of erotic attraction.

[128] The two terms are not necessarily interchangeable, as women's use of 'papa' to describe a man appears to emphasize the emotional aspects of their relationship, while 'daddy' applies a broader interpretation of the relationship to encompass other paternal attributes. A more recent usage of 'papa' in Filipino slang simply denotes an 'attractive man,' and does not involve any sense of familiarity in its application as such.

These relations – particularly those involving 'siblings' within the bar – entail further interaction beyond the occupational setting to maintain the relationship as one of mutual dependence in a socioerotic environment that leads to considerable uncertainty when it comes to achieving economic success as well as psychological fulfillment. So while co-workers who express a close, familial bond are not actually sisters in the sense that they share a parent, their relationship over the years may take on greater significance as they assume certain obligations and participate in cooperative activities that are indicative of kinship. Rituals celebrations such as *compadrazgo* ('godparent-hood') and marriage require sponsorship and a level of involvement that is indicative of a lifetime commitment to helping one another in times of need.[129] Foreigners are desired as wedding sponsors and godparents because of the wealth and power they symbolize in the transnational setting of the go-go bar, so that men who are identified simply as 'customers' may be initiated into the bar 'family' as a *ninong* ('godfather' in baptism or marriage sponsorship) or *kupare* ('co-godfather')[130] even though they have not developed the lasting friendships that lead to similar participation in rituals of fictive kinship in Euroamerican settings.

The development of these social categories helps inform behaviors within the go-go bar by providing structures that engender familiarity in what for many (at least initially) is an unfamiliar place involving socioerotic encounters that are generally beyond the scope of everyday interaction. While this form of scripting establishes normative discourses that knowledgeable subjects can easily manipulate according to their interests, it also encourages people to pursue their fantasies within this marginal space by enabling an endless repertoire of identities to choose from depending on the particular circumstances and the desires of the actors.

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[129] *Compadrazgo* in the Philippines is perhaps the most important means of establishing kinship ties between people who are not related by blood, so while the formalization of marriage can often wait a few years until the couple has accumulated sufficient resources for the ceremony, a child's *binyag* ('baptism') is of critical importance in both the spiritual and social realms.

[130] The relationship between co-godparents (men are called *kupare* and women *kumare*) is almost as important as that involving godparents and the subject(s) of the ceremony.

stages of transformation

Few people fully understand what they are getting into when initially entering the go-go bar, regardless of whether they are seeking employment or simply looking for a "good time." Foreign men venture into these premises with the basic idea of what is constitutive of prostitution, and the male clientele wandering the streets of Makati or Angeles are often rather worldly in their experiences with this type of activity as many have been to Bangkok and other centers of what has become a global sex trade. Compared to their previous experiences or expectations, most men will admit that the Philippines is a much different scene regarding interactions with women in the context of the commodified sexual encounter.

> This is not really prostitution… you don't just sit down and start discussing prices for sex. It is like going to a really good singles bar because you have to interact with them like you would with any other woman in public, but they are more likely to respond in the way you want. (American tourist in Angeles)

> The reason I like these bars is because you can always find what you want: if you just want to have a drink and talk to the girls, or find someone for quick sex, you can do whatever you want. But then it's also nice because sometimes you don't find what you are looking for – like when you are looking for someone to have sex with – so that makes it more fun because it is a challenge. (Australian expatriate in Makati)

Filipino women also have a rudimentary notion of what GROs are supposed to do in entertaining men since their ascribed role in society is one of feminine care and support (Roces 1998; White 1990), and also because the local news media and movie industry provide a stark portrayal of women working in go-go bars.[131] Still, most women are taken aback by the extent of physical contact that occurs within these establishments, and also by the aggressive behavior exhibited by many male customers.

[131] The go-go bar is a prominent location in the Philippine news media as well as mainstream entertainment features. Daily newscasts provide graphic imagery of bar raids, showing women in various stages of undress being hauled off to the police station as they attempt to hide their faces (male customers rarely take cover, as there is nothing illegal about their presence in these venues).

> When I decided to work here, I already know that this is a place that has a bad reputation. But I did not know that the men would be so *bastos* ('rude') in the way they treat the women, and I did not know how sexual the women behave either. I just thought that this was a place where people drink and talk, like in the movies. (waitress in Makati)

Men have different intentions and motivations upon enter these establishments, and it is the responsibility of GROs to discover what exactly it is the male patrons desire as customers and how they should interpret and respond to the various cues they come across through interaction. However, most bars provide little, if any, training for women concerning proper means of communicating with customers. The basic regulations of employment are established in terms of employee behavior (i.e. rules regarding sleeping, smoking, eating, etc.), but the intent of most managers is to allow the situations involving social intimacy to unfold without too much interference.

> We don't give them any information on how to behave with customers… of course we handle their problems when they come to us, or tell them when they are doing something wrong, but we don't provide them with any training. Mostly, the girls talk to each other to learn how to approach customers. And they watch. (floor manager in Makati)

Here the gaze serves several purposes related to entertainment as well as the development of knowledge. From the leisure perspective, people want to see something titillating or unique – an event that can then be relayed as an adventurous narrative to those who were not present at the time. The learning gaze is used to evaluate personal presentations as well as the social environment for future reference: What performances are expected within this space? Which GROs are more accommodating, and which customers buy the most drinks? Women occasionally discuss the specifics of their presentations with each other, especially when they are involved in a cooperative effort so they can maintain the storyline for their performances: "How many siblings should I have?" "Do I say that I am studying?" Formulating and performing these identities requires cooperation among all participants in this setting (managers, co-workers, and to a certain extent, customers), so that the presentation of self achieves a level of credibility that is required to maintain the situational fiction of sincerity and intimacy. Sometimes

people have difficulty keeping their stories straight, but failure to provide a competent enactment in this setting does not necessarily result in censure or reprobation. Part of the 'entertainment' in go-go bars involves evaluating personal biographies and critiquing people's performances in these public displays.

As previously stated with regard to other aspects of the go-go bar, the development of performative competency in this setting involves the reconciliation of one's personal goals with the expectations of others outlined in individual requests and institutional structures. Arlene arrived to work as a dancer on P. Burgos in October 1999. She is very friendly and outgoing, although her command of English was limited in the beginning and her initial movements on the dance floor also revealed her inexperience in this setting. Like many other women who have recently started work, her dancing appeared jerky and uncoordinated, as if she had difficulty moving about in high heels, or, more likely, was uncertain as to what constitutes an erotic presentation in this setting. Women who are uncomfortable on stage usually realize that their feminine performances are suited more toward the receptionist role, but some women stick with dancing, in effect 'learning' the type of movement that is desired by customers as well as management while accommodating their own desires and limitations in physical posturing.[132]

The discipline Arlene displayed in appropriating the proper movements on stage is also evident in the improvement of her English over the two years she would work in the bar. Our early conversations in Tagalog were often interrupted by staff who would admonish her to "speak English." I was never scolded in a similar manner for speaking

[132] Dance routines are sometimes a contentious subject in the bars. Those establishments that prescribe a specific shoe type – such as high heels – require women to either purchase them, or rent them on a daily basis. Dancers who rent their shoes risk getting a pair that does not fit, as well as dealing with the problems of navigating in unfamiliar footwear. There is also the issue of time spent on the stage, as most women do not want to dance for long periods without a break because of the physical difficulties as well as the need to interact with customers to earn their commissions. Bars work on various forms of rotation, either sending a new dancer on stage with each song (and thus allowing one to exit), or replacing the entire lineup after a certain amount of time (usually 20 to 40 minutes).

Tagalog (and thus hindering the proper 'development' of GROs), but I was informed on several occasions that the women need to speak English to "improve" themselves as well as their marketability in this commercial setting. Along the same lines as the government's promotion of Filipino citizens as a transnational labor resource because of their fluency in English, women in this environment also recognize that their exchange value increases with conversational proficiency. In fact, many foreign men have expressed a preference for the go-go bars in the Philippines to those in Thailand precisely because verbal communication with women is more difficult in the bars of Bangkok or Pattaya.

As with improving English language skills and appropriating the latest dance steps, women also observe how to comport themselves in spaces that are usually off limits to people of their class and status. Relating her narratives of accompaniment, Arlene described how she has used her work experience on Burgos – and the resulting excursions with her male "suitors" and customers – to develop her confidence in dealing with different social settings:

> I have been to nice restaurants and Shangri-La and Mandarin [five-star hotels in Makati] several times, so I now know how to behave in those places. That is what I learned from going out with customers. They also take me traveling, and I have been on a plane, so now I can also use the airport if I need to.[133]

From the awkward, young *probinsyana* first encountered in 1999, Arlene fashioned herself into what she considers to be an urbane, modern woman. Gone were her stories of her 'hard' life on some distant island, replaced by new accounts of her many vacations and a list of boyfriends scattered across the globe. Accompanying

[133] Learning to use the modern trappings of society is important. While teaching a short course on ethnography at Leyte Normal University in Tacloban, I asked the students to write a brief account of some event they had recently witnessed. Several described a recent trip to Manila where they went shopping at a large mall, yet their movements were restricted because a few people in their group could not bring themselves to use the escalator because they did not have any experience with it (they used the stairs instead). In this example, their physical mobility was impaired, but the inability to navigate different social settings can be just as paralyzing for those who are unaccustomed to changing situations and surroundings.

foreign customers to these five-star hotels represents socioeconomic as well as racial transcendence – a form of individual autonomy through her association with these and other images of power. Even though she has never been to Melbourne or Minnesota, she maintained a connection to those places through the regular correspondence with (and occasional visits by) her paramours in those faraway lands. The simple dresses she would wear to and from work were discarded in favor of designer blouses and blue jeans purchased by her earnings and as gifts from her admirers. In a later conversation, she elaborates on other forms of cultural capital she acquired by working in the go-go bar:

> The most important thing is I learn how to communicate with different people, because I work with many kinds of men. If he is asshole or have cruel heart, I learn to talk to him and not get angry. I have to learn how to keep him happy, even if I don't like him… that is important to know if I want to have another job where I talk to people.

Arlene's story shows the transformational potential of the go-go bar as a stage where desiring actors can alter their identities by embracing practices that are not available within the discursive confines of mainstream society. Her expressions of sexual and material longing provide a potent counter-discourse to the normalizing effects of stereotypical representations of Filipino femininity, but it should be noted that she is also following the aspirations of the Philippine government and millions of her compatriots in her pursuit of a modern, progressive lifestyle according to the universal dictates of socioeconomic 'development.' Furthermore, her appropriation of ideas concerning social status, taste, commodification, and mobility reveal her adherence to the values of individual freedom as evidenced through her consumption of specific goods and images.

Analyses of other performances in these socioerotic settings generates narratives that expose the complexity of institutionalized desires in making decisions regarding personal comportment and the processual nature of negotiating between acts of accommodation and resistance. As a 'stage' for the enactment of these divergent interests, the go-go bar exposes the importance of liminal spaces in maintaining social order, setting aside a location (red-light district) or period of time ('carnival') where people can follow those desires that are not acceptable in other instances (Kapchan 1996;

Parker 1991; Stallybrass and White 1986). Go-go bar performances involve the replication of the power relations evident in mainstream society, but the construction of this space also allows people to alter some of these foundational discourses through their innovative theatrical presentations and narratives.

the dramatic aspects of bar interaction

Evoking the imagery of 'prostitution' that involves the physical coupling of sexualized bodies pervades the public imagination, yet this form of intimacy is a relatively rare occurrence when considering the amount of time male customers and female employees interact with one another in the nightclub setting as well as beyond the boundaries of these venues. As happens with the labeling and categorization of employees and customers, these encounters are constructed in accordance with the existing discourses of perceived reality concerning similarly positioned sites elsewhere in the global sexscape. In most of the cited examples of prostitution, the sexual activities, the duration of the transaction and the form of payment for such services are specified beforehand in a highly-scripted ritual of exchange.

Conversely, the intricacies of intimacy and subtle nuances of power in the relationships that materialize in the Philippine go-go bars are not as straightforward as implied by those who would apply their own rudimentary and objectifying perspectives to this issue. To understand these venues and their appeal as a places of work and leisure where people can engage in varied relations according to their particular desires, one must examine the performances that take place within these spaces as they pertain to the formation of identities, the expression of desires, and the fabrication of meanings that are used to manage these conflicting narratives in a more-or-less coherent fashion.

Following Goffman's ideas regarding the everyday 'presentation of self' (1959), the enactment of gendered and sexual scripts in go-go bars reveals more about the task of 'entertainment' than it does the personal biographies and psychological characteristics of the performers. These establishments educe certain sexual attitudes and activities through their position as visible, semi-'public' representations of patriarchal mythology

when it comes to relations between women and men, drawing upon notions of male sexual 'needs' along with foundational fictions regarding the lack of female erotic desires (McIntosh 1988). The reinforcement of these dominant ideologies is achieved through the unrelenting promotion of commercial and sexual activities associated with masculine leisure and feminine service that requires both customers and employees to perform according to certain gendered expectations if they are to receive what they desire (money, sexual gratification, social recognition, etc.), and it is the responsibility of the female employee to fulfill customers' wishes through performances that are believable in their demonstration of erotic attraction (Frank 1998; Prewitt 1989). As with any other performance – whether the stage is within the formal setting of a theater or simply a presentation of everyday life that unfolds in the domestic realm or other public setting – people must engage in presentations that are suitable for that particular time and place to achieve credibility as knowledgeable and successful actors. In its construction as a separate venue for 'entertainment,' the go-go bar is acknowledged as a theatrical setting where identities and presentations are created and managed for the explicit purpose of stimulating sexual desire and intimate interaction among the various participants.

The performances of men and women as sexual actors are usually highlighted in discussions concerning the go-go bar, but it is also important to consider the locale in its totality as a work setting as the construction of identities and scenarios associated with labor will also impinge on displays of leisure and intimacy. Encounters in this setting are usually structured according to customer expectations because of his position as the primary consumer in this environment, and also because managerial practices are guided by market discourses that privilege capitalist production and consumption over other 'emotional' considerations. So from the perspectives of owners and managers, the women are there to function as employees, and their performances related to labor take precedence. As employees within this system, the women recognize that their earnings are dependent on a disciplined routine that emphasizes efficiency and the 'pleasing personality' that are the hallmarks of service work worldwide, but from a more strategic or entrepreneurial standpoint, their desires and practices often transcend the strict

boundaries of this employee model (Phillip and Dann 1998). For one thing, their earnings as GROs or staff often pale in comparison to what they can gain – materially, socially, and psychologically – as 'girlfriends,' so they may adopt a performance that does not necessarily call for a customer to purchase lady's drinks, instead opting for a more intimate approach that is designed to entice a man into a more lasting emotional (and financial) commitment (Cohen 1982; 1987).

There are also distinctive spaces within these dramaturgical domains with regard to presentations. Goffman (1959) employs the designations 'front' and 'back' to differentiate performative regions according to the intent of the actors and the composition of the audience. Applying this framework to the go-go bar, the 'front' space includes the stage and seating areas where employees and patrons are engaged in sexual interaction for all to view. The staged productions in this region of the establishment represent the 'show' that all audience members (including customers and other employees) are supposed to view. Elements of these ritualized (hetero)sexual performances include dancing, conversing, drinking and gazing that ostensibly require female employees to assume the sex-object position to satiate the desires of the audience. The physical layout of these venues focuses audience attention on the dancers – chairs are positioned for viewing and spotlights are directed toward the stage while the rest of the bar remains dark – but the performances of interest occur throughout the premises, and so the 'stage' shifts according to the location of various activities and the desires of the audience. A group of boisterous men and women positioned away from the dance floor will inevitably draw notice from others, and even the dancers on stage have a tendency to depart from their own routine to become spectators of those sexual exhibitions elsewhere in the bar that are deemed more appealing.

In keeping with Goffman's division of performative space, the restrooms and dressing areas for employees constitute the 'back' region of the go-go bar. The preparatory activities within these spaces are generally beyond the gaze of male audience members, but they are critical to the staging of performances in the 'front' of the bar and the process of exchange in this commercial environment.

> These histrionics require constant tension: when with her husband, or with her lover, every woman is more or less conscious of the thought: 'I am not being myself'… With other women, a woman is behind the scenes; she is polishing her equipment, but not in battle; she is getting her costume together, preparing her makeup, laying out her tactics; she is lingering in a dressing-gown and slippers in the wings before making her entrance on the stage… (de Beauvoir 1953, quoted in Goffman 1959: 115)

Female go-go bar employees use their time in the 'back' spaces to formulate the proper persona for their presentations: discussing their different approaches to customers with each other, attending to their own bodily requirements (such as eating), and applying makeup and other fashion accessories before the 'battle.' For some, it is also a place of relaxation, but regardless of the region they occupy in the bar, employees must be in a constant state of preparedness in case a regular customer asks for them or if they need to replace a co-worker who is absent. These and other 'back' spaces also provide actors with the necessary privacy and separation from labor-intensive these socioerotic encounters so that they can evaluate and reformulate their presentations.

Women also employ speech acts (such as code switching) to establish a boundary that momentarily generates a 'back' region even while they are engaged in 'front' performances. This involves the use of various Philippine languages (Tagalog, Cebuano, and Waray being the most common in the bar) to denigrate customers while in their presence, speaking rapidly or using slang in case the customer has managed to pick up some rudimentary local vocabulary during his stay in the country. They may also maneuver out of the customer's line of sight (usually behind his back) to make derogatory gestures that they do not want him to see. There are times when the customer in this situation suddenly realizes that he is the topic of conversation between the women, and he then feels uncomfortable because he is no longer in control; women may then attempt to allay his concerns by fabricating a more acceptable narrative of their 'backstage' conversation:

> The customer… I was massaging him down there [points to the genital region] and I was so surprised. I told the other girls… "*masyadong maliit ang titi niya*" ('his penis is so small')… and I don't know, maybe he understands a little Tagalog, so he gets mad. And then I tell him "No, no. It's not what you think"

> and I tell him *bola-bola* ('lies') about how big he is and say that is what I was talking about. (receptionist in Makati)

As should be apparent by now, all of the interactions that take place within the go-go bar involve 'team' work in the staging of presentations. The most successful 'teams' are usually comprised of a *barkada* in which they develop routines and readily introduce their friends to customers who are willing to buy a round of drinks for all. In situations where the customer is known to buy only a few drinks, some women may forgo participation knowing that later they will receive consideration from those who do receive a lady's drink. For example, women who are successful in acquiring drinks will purchase food to be shared among their friends; in some cases, there is even a redistribution of earnings if women have helped entertain a customer, but did not receive a tip or commission – but even among the closest of friends, disagreements still occur:

> I am so mad at her… the customer gave us all P500 [for each GRO], but then she and _____ went back and asked him for P3000 more, and he gave it too them but they will not share with us… yes, we all did the same things, just drinking and talking, but they got more money for it. I told the *mamasan*, but she just said we should have asked him for more also. (receptionist in Makati)

Usually customers and GROs are distinguished from one another when it comes to these sexual transactions, conceptually positioned as having opposing interests that inform their disparate presentations. However, these performances also provide avenues for cooperative efforts, as in instances where a regular customer wants to provide a visiting friend an enjoyable experience: in such an event, he acts in concert with the women to put on an appropriate display of heteronormative leisure to provide the uninitiated audience member(s) an experience to remember.

> These guys came in from Hong Kong for the weekend, and I wanted to show them the sights' of Burgos… a couple of the girls from the bar went with me to pick them up at the airport, and they wore bikinis and served them beers while we drove them to the hotel… we then went to some of the bars on Burgos where I had made arrangements with the *mamsan* to provide some girls who would be sure to show them a good time. (Australian businessman living in Makati)

Even where the is no explicit agreement for cooperation between men and women in this social setting, the parties are nevertheless dependent on each other in achieving

their desires. Women must create an expression of subjectivity that conforms to what they believe the customers want in the encounter, while the customers are also responsible for presenting themselves in a manner that enables GROs to fulfill their duties as employees (Wood 2000). Both men and women must therefore discern the interests of others if they are to enact a competent presentation of self to achieve their own desires within these intimate social arrangements. This is accomplished through focused interaction (Goffman 1963a), where participants gather information about each other through cooperative communication.

Rhonda began working on P. Burgos in July 2000, and she quickly established a niche for herself through her outgoing manner. Her approach to the business of marketing her self is striking in its calculated assessment of the bar environment as well as her recognition of commodified performances that are critical to earning money in this setting:

> Since I just started here I am only now learning about how things work. I am a careful observer and I know that it is important to find out what people want. So when I meet a man and I get to know him, then I know what he wants. When I find out what the customer wants, then that is who I am. If he likes someone to talk to, then I can do that; if he wants someone to be like his girlfriend then I can do that too. I am good at figuring out what others want from me.

Here Rhonda is talking about her interactions with customers, but she did not apply the same skills of perception when it came to the other employees in the bar, although she had indicated that she was not interested in "making friends." She quickly alienated many of her co-workers who found her to be too forceful in her pursuit of male patrons, and on several occasions she was accused of 'stealing' customers from other GROs. Not concerned with the opinions of the other employees, she focused on the job of entertaining customers, saying "This is just a job for me…but I also want to find a foreigner who will marry me. I don't care what the other women think; I am not here for them."

Some women engage in similarly aggressive performances with customers to distinguish themselves from those GROs who take the typically 'shy Filipina' approach,

although they usually do so with an understanding that not every man is seeking such encounters. Women who assume these sexually explicit performances and identities implicitly rely on other dancers and receptionists to step in and assume the role of 'lead actor' in cooperative performances when the customer does not react as expected. Katyn (a receptionist in a Makati bar) consistently presents herself in a provocative manner that raises eyebrows among customers and co-workers alike, exposing her breasts and pushing her body up against customers:

> I can't behave that way [like Katyn]… sometimes if I am drunk, or I really like the customer, than maybe I can be all sexy like that, but she does it to every customer who comes in. Some of them, they like it, but some don't… it is bad when they get up and walk out; sometimes we ask her [Katyn] "why do you do that?" but that is who she is… but sometimes she helps if the customer doesn't like her, because then we can play the [role of] 'nice girls,' and show the customer something else he might like. (receptionist)[134]

Katyn's erotic displays are dependent on the other women to succeed. As a group, they provide a range of choices for the customer and a means of playing off one another depending on his reactions to the varied presentations. When men respond in a positive manner to her 'bold' comportment, the other women support her performance through facilitation (i.e. pulling down her top) or imitating her (inter)actions, but most of her co-workers would not adopt her strategy for acquiring lady's drinks unless the customer in question was known to respond positively to such behavior. Customer feedback to Katyn's overt verbal references to sex acts and her penchant for grabbing their genitals range from arousal, to indifference, to disgust, and for all her efforts she is no more successful in obtaining lady's drinks than the other GROs at the bar. In some instances, she makes the customer feel uncomfortable with the whole setting, and thus he will spend less time (and money) in this particular venue; on other occasions, she enhances the bar atmosphere by providing something unexpected (or perhaps, exactly what the customer was looking for) in her atypical (re)presentation of Filipino femininity. What is important to note in this example is that her co-workers – as supporting cast

[134] The 'nice girl' identity is also marketable in other labor settings (Lynch 1999; Ong 1987).

members in this particular staging – are prepared to engage in a variety of performances depending on audience response.

altered scripts

These coordinated efforts often go awry, especially when people are new to the scene or otherwise unable to organize the collective performances to their advantage. In one instance, a group of women worked together to manually and orally assist a customer to reach sexual climax in a dark corner of a Burgos bar. Afterward, he said "thank you" and simply left without offering the women payment or even lady's drinks. The women then argued among themselves about who was at fault for not bringing up the issue of remuneration before service was rendered. Several stomped off angrily to the dressing room, but one woman came over to explain what happened.

"We were too shy to ask for money like that!" she exclaimed.

In not wanting to appear as 'prostitutes,' the women in this situation had simply engaged in sexual intercourse without payment as they would with a man they identified as a 'boyfriend.' Yet this man was definitely classified as a customer in their minds, so his departure without payment for services rendered was tantamount to robbery – although the women blamed themselves for not charging him anything. The lack of defined regulations within the Philippine go-go bars permits these 'misunderstandings' to occur on a regular basis, enabling both customers and employees to avoid participation in these encounters if the activities go beyond what they want or expect – or if they simply change their mind during the course of interaction.

There are also examples where the breakdown of teamwork leads to a noticeable transformation of the structure and/or practices within the go-go bar, particularly when there is increased competition for declining resources or commodities (such as money or customers). Diminishing earnings after the Asian financial crisis in 1997 caused women to rethink their marketing strategies in this competitive business environment, and women's desire for supplemental sources of income is evident in the recent increase of oral sex in the bars of Makati. Before 1997, such practices were rare, but the economic

downturn resulted in an important shift in the composition of clientele in these venues that subsequently led to the rise in this particular sexual activity. Executives traveling on expense accounts have dwindled precipitously, and so an increasing number of bars were thus left with fewer customers who had less money to spend. Additionally, Japanese businessmen virtually disappeared from Burgos, and with them went an ethos of masculine entertainment that emphasized the art of conversation. In their place remained a smaller number of Western businessmen and expatriates who do not necessarily subscribe to similar views of what these establishments are supposed to provide in terms of 'entertainment' that places a greater value on playful socioerotic banter. I began to notice increasing congregation of bodies and movements in the darkened recesses of the bars, and asked women on several occasions what was going on.

"We are having a *promo* today," they would laugh.

Their *promo* (or 'promotional'), as they put it, was providing oral-genital copulation to customers, but it is unclear whether men's desires and requests introduced the idea or if its inception was based on the economic initiatives of female employees. Lucille once related the story about how the practice became widespread:

> A couple of years ago the girls working in daytime began to offer customers blowjob, so now they have come to expect it all the time. Even then, when the nighttime girls would show up for work, the customers would be asking for it and they refused at first, but the customers would get angry and say that the girls in daytime were better. Now, if you want to make money, that is what you have to do.

This particular activity has spread to other bars as well, and is now a part of the go-go experience along P. Burgos. Men talk to each other and give information regarding the ease with which oral sex may be procured in various venues, and who in these locales provides the best service. Still, not every woman engages in such activities, creating a distinction between those who practice this behavior and those who prefer to earn their money in some other fashion. It is also apparent that women who do not participate in this form of exchange look down upon those who do, primarily because they feel that it reflects poorly upon them as well.

> There are some girls who will do anything for money… like blowjobs. Sometimes you have to if you want money because the customers will go somewhere else, so you give him what he wants. I don't do that… it's *bastos* ('rude')! I feel sorry for those girls who have to do that kind of work. Sometimes customers ask me why I don't do that, and they say "what is wrong with you?" Then I say "nothing is wrong with me; I just don't like!" (receptionist in Makati)

The uncertainty and lack of clearly defined behavioral scripts in this setting leaves men and women in a state of limbo when it comes to initiating interaction. On the one hand, men as 'customers' desire a certain amount of attention that will satisfy their egos and expectations of service in a commercial setting, and yet, they do not want to be overwhelmed by too many interested employees that could cause them to lose control of the situation. Furthermore, customer demands for the demure performances of 'Filipina' femininity conflict with their desires for encounters instigated by women that demonstrate their desirability to others (men do not want to appear unattractive or too needy in actively pursuing the company of a woman). GROs are not always sure what they should do when a customer enters the bar, so most of them simply sit back and watch for some sort of cue from a customer – such as lingering eye contact or a smile – that indicates his desire for companionship.

> It depends on the customer… sometimes when they sit in the back [of the bar], they just want to watch the dancers, but many times they want someone to talk to – they just don't want anyone to watch [their interactions with women]… [I]t's hard for the girls to know what to do because we don't want to make the customer uncomfortable, so if they sit in back, the girls will leave them alone. If they want a girl to talk to, they [customers] will just ask the waitress for one. (manager in Makati)

As an employee in this socioerotic setting, the GRO has an obligation to initiate communication with the customer, yet the proclivities of many dancers and receptionists toward 'Filipina' (re)presentations of demureness and the desire of many customers to be left alone creates greater uncertainty as to the rules of engagement in many instances. Waitresses and managers within the go-go bar play a significant role in 'directing' these interactions between customers and the GROs, especially when it comes to negotiating lady's drinks and barfines. Dancers and receptionists rarely ask customers for drinks

because of the prevailing discourses related to Filipina 'shyness' and the desires of some men for more romantic or 'natural' engagements that avoid overt references to remuneration. It is up to the staff to initiate this portion of the encounter, as well as introductions between men and women who are not versed in the finer points of go-go bar social etiquette. Women at the top of the employee hierarchy are also in a position to change the rules of engagement according to the situation, and sometimes are given considerable leeway in establishing policies that determine the tenor or atmosphere of the bar – such as extending 'happy hour' for good customers.

This is part of the continuing negotiation of practices within the go-go bar, where men and women are engaging in the fine art of impression management (Goffman 1959), adjusting their presentations of self to generate the desired responses from the audience and other performers. Some actors take a singularly instrumental approach in their social interactions, choosing to participate in 'teams' only insofar as these fluid assemblages satisfy their immediate desires for material acquisition or power over others. Most men and women, however, recognize the importance of cooperative social engagement whereby people depend on each other in these productions to provide competent supporting performances that satisfy various short-term goals as well as credible evaluations that will validate their sense of self within this socioerotic milieu.

In some instances, women remove clothing or provide a brief glimpse of what lies underneath their garments – often at the urging of the customer who promises to buy more lady's drinks, or who demands to "see some flesh" for drinks he has already purchased. Since nudity is illegal (and a cause for closure of establishments that violate local ordinances), the management and staff may attempt to curtail such behavior by threatening the employee with fines should she continue, but in most cases these threats do not result in cessation of these activities (or any penalties against the employee). In her managerial role, Tina often argues with dancers who reveal too much, yet despite her position of authority, there is not much she can do to prevent the women from disrobing. "That's what the customer wants, and that's how the girls make money," she reiterates as

she fumes over her predicament.[135] Here, Tina functions as the 'director' in this performative space, managing the performers to ensure a smooth presentation for an audience that desires such 'revelations' about the embodied true self (Bourdieu 2001; Goffman 1959), yet in these instances, her 'performance' as floor manager also threatens the continued staging because her (in)action does not address state prohibitions against 'lewd shows.'

The consumption of alcohol by dancers and GROs has always been problematic because it diminishes the employee's ability to function in the work environment according to the rules of proper behavior set by management and the state, yet it is an activity that is essential to the success of this type of establishment. Customers ply women with drinks to loosen their socio-sexual inhibitions; women consume alcohol to earn money from the commissions as well as for its intoxicating effects.[136] Women may be fined for being drunk while working, but that is exactly what many customers desire in their bar experience, so management tends to look the other way if women overindulge from time to time or if occasionally the action get a little rowdy.

Attempting to control the behavior of women through sobriety, certain bars along Burgos would often serve a different type of tequila as a lady's drink.[137] The staff tried to pass it off as merely a less-expensive brand, but it did not have the pungent aroma of tequila, and the bartenders were accused of adulterating the original contents. Some staff did admit (in private) to mixing water with the tequila in the bottle, but reasoned that it

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[135] Most of the time managers will overlook such transgressions as there is little chance for police action in a setting with foreign male customers. However, the recent increase in Filipino clientele (particularly in Makati) is a cause for greater vigilance on the part of management because they are wary of undercover officers who masquerade as customers.

[136] The women in this setting drink for a variety of reasons: to assert their membership in bar culture through ritual alcohol consumption, to celebrate an event, or simply to have fun. I have also encountered a few women who drink as a means of dealing with the problems that arise from working in this environment, but this is not a practical approach because in almost all bars female employees are not allowed to imbibe alcohol on their own, and the scarcity of lady's drinks in many venues means that opportunities for alcohol consumption are limited for most GROs while they are at work.

[137] Tequila is one of the more popular ladies drinks with alcohol content (along with margaritas, gin-tonics, and an assortment of shots).

was necessary to prevent the women from becoming intoxicated. Customers consider this substitution of tequila 'brands' a form of deception, much in the same way as if their own drinks have been watered down. They perceive the effect to be the same – less alcohol for women, in this case, means less 'fun' in the go-go bar environment. As a result, some customers who intended on spending a long afternoon in a particular bar would simply purchase an entire bottle of tequila (at grossly inflated prices) to ensure that their female companions were drinking the same quality of beverage.

Women are motivated by the setting to consume as many lady's drinks as possible to earn money for themselves and the owners, and most choose to remain sober so they do not order alcoholic beverages. This is possible as long as the customer does not mind paying $5 for a tiny glass of juice or iced tea, but in those instances where he feels that his own inebriation demands company of a similar mindset, the GRO must choose between augmenting her meager salary and maintaining her sense of self-control (as well as her physical well-being). Thus, many women find themselves 'forced' to consume alcohol, sometimes resulting in fights with staff and co-workers, or engaging in performances that they would later regret. When Asha first began working in a Burgos bar in 1998, she was a dancer during the daytime shift. One afternoon, she became very inebriated after consuming numerous tequila shots with a group of male customers and fellow employees, and while dancing on stage she managed to remove all of her clothing before falling down and collapsing in laughter (she then went to the dressing room and passed out). The next day she switched her job to that of a receptionist, assisting the staff in serving drinks rather than actively engaging the customers like many other GROs. She did not appear overly embarrassed by the incident, dismissing it as simply another "wild day," but it was obvious that her drunkenness and subsequent public disrobing resulted in a meaningful evaluation of her activities in the bar and a revision in her presentation of self.

Almost all GROs go through similar shifts in their (re)presentations as they learn more about the eroticism that is part of this work environment and their position(s) according to various relations of power. Many come to the realization that the go-go bar

does not provide what they want in terms of monetary rewards or other means of socioeconomic mobility, and so they quit working in these establishments and move back home to the provinces or on to some other form of employment in the city or overseas – although they may take a year or two to reach this decision.[138] However, some women remain in this vocation through difficult experiences and periods of lackluster business, altering their identities and performances along the way to meet changing conditions and goals. It is through the desirous gaze that they learn more about their expected roles and develop relationships that will augment their performances by adopting proper practices of kinship and fulfilling their prescribed duties as employees and 'Filipinas.'

Dancers and receptionists often find themselves in precarious situations as they wrestle with personal desires while also trying to maintain their safety and sense of dignity in a hostile political environment where they must satisfy the longings of others (customers, employers, relatives, state officials) through displays of essentialized femininity. Even though men and women may experience autonomy through sexual self-expression, these performances of desire through consumption of erotic (inter)activity should not be considered liberatory because the meaning of such acts – and, ultimately, the assignation of identity and agency – is constrained by the perceptions and demands of interested observers who desire power and control over these matters. The fact that the go-go bar is set apart, physically and conceptually, from 'mainstream' society makes it more difficult for people to accept the behaviors, images and identities proffered within these spaces. As actors, both employees and customers incorporate various dramaturgical devices to cultivate the appearance of social conformity when it comes to engaging in intimate relations, presenting different selves according to the context and the presence of a voyeuristic and discriminating audience.

[138] Women working as staff (waitresses and managers) tend to stay at the go-go bar much longer than those employed as GROs – most of the staff along P. Burgos have been at their present jobs six years or more.

Chapter 5
Of Masks and Mirrors

> It [the mask] provides a hiding place for the enactment of desired scripts, dreamed of scripts, feared scripts, forbidden scripts. It provides different stages to enact other possibilities – those that escape the narrow, rigidly defined roles that we conventionally inhabit… It is the quintessential postmodern device for destabilizing categories, questioning, defying overdetermined images, problematising certainties, subverting established meanings, exposing the seams of crafted façades and the rules of narrative, the practices of ritual, the mechanics of the act, the stylized elements of the performance. (Tseelon 2001: 11-12)

Deception is an integral part of go-go bar interaction, where both customers and dancers / receptionists must competently engage in illusory performances to achieve their desired goals. Staging these fabricated identities is greatly enhanced through the dramaturgical 'mask' that knowledgeable actors employ as a matter of navigating delicate situations or addressing personal desires according to the social dialectics of self. Women in these venues develop multiple personae through their consumption of goods, images and ideas that they accumulate over the course of interaction with others. Similarly, through his commodification and fetishization of women, the male patron "supports deception in the presentation of self – the customer acts out a role consistent with his cultural values but often inconsistent with his everyday personality" (Prewitt 1989: 142). From either standpoint, actors generate (re)presentations of self that do not always reflect who they 'really' are, or even who they want to be. Rather, these performers strive to accommodate the expectations and desires of others through different renditions of gendered and sexual archetypes.

Aside from the literal masking that occurs through the use of makeup and costume, the metaphorical 'masks' of performative identities provide additional cover for

enacting the hegemonic or desired displays of masculinity and femininity as they might deviate from a person's 'true' self. Everyone recognizes the fallacies embodied in these theatrical presentations, but they accept these identities and performances, nonetheless, because they also serve their own interests. Moreover, participation in constructing these narratives and socioerotic scenarios is an essential part of 'entertainment' as people act out those personal fantasies that are not feasible beyond the doors of the go-go bar.

Mirrors positioned throughout the go-go bars supply the means of contemplating these 'masks,' as the reflective surfaces in this setting enable people to evaluate their own appearances while also allowing for indirect gazing and interaction. The primary purpose of the mirrors (as far as the women are concerned) is readily apparent early in the shift when employees are arriving for work. Women check their makeup, adjust the line of their costumes, and, in general, prepare and maintain the mask of Filipina femininity that they present to the customers.[139] Because dancers are often running late and the dressing room is crowded, women bring these preparations to the performance area, examining their masks on stage in full view of the audience. This activity has emerged as an element of the expected performance because customers can now see what occurs 'backstage,' furnishing the male audience with privileged insight into the GRO's process of self-objectification (see also Liepe-Levinson 2002).

These mirrors also aid socioerotic contact by providing another means of visual interaction across boundaries that are rigorously enforced in other areas of society. From the audience's viewpoint, mirrors provide a three-dimensional perspective of the performer up on the stage so that nothing is hidden from the customer's gaze. Many women, particularly those who are new to this setting, have not learned the many different nuances of bar performances, so they reflexively continue to employ the 'shy' mannerisms that define Filipino femininity. Dancers will often look away if they happen

[139] Most dancers will also use the mirrors to examine their routines while performing on stage, although when customers are present, the women are expected to face the audience. Receptionists will also take to the dance floor in front of the stage and observe their own dance moves through the mirror. These reflections allow women to evaluate their presentations in comparison to those they have observed on television or learned from watching others perform.

to make eye contact with an unfamiliar customer because that is what they are supposed to do when they encounter strange men in public.

> If a customer is staring at me, sometimes I [become] uncomfortable so I hide behind a pole on the dance floor or I will talk to the other dancer… but I can still watch him through the mirror. If I like a customer, then maybe we look at each other through the mirror – it's like flirting, but happens far away, and I feel like it's not *bastos* ('rude'), like when you stare at somebody. (dancer in Makati)

Here mirrors allow the Filipina employee to appropriate a masculine (subjective, desiring) gaze without entirely divesting herself of the 'shyness' that is expected within the local culture and by many customers. The use of these props in this and other social settings allows people to defy the normal rules regarding 'civil inattention' where people avoid staring because they recognize the disruptive or threatening potential of the unabated gaze (Goffman 1963a). While it is understood that men patronize go-go bars so that they can openly ogle women's sexualized bodies, the mainstream discourses of feminine comportment persist within this setting so that not all dancers have completely adopted this particular aspect of corporeal objectification and they react in a manner that is consistent with their identity as 'Filipinas' by trying to avoid the male gaze (which is virtually impossible on the mirrored stage).

These performances of femininity maintain 'good girl' appearances for the benefit of women who wish to position themselves outside of the discourses of prostitution and promiscuity while also providing the male customers with an image of how 'real' Filipinas behave, thus supporting the fantasy of authenticity in these socioerotic encounters. Additionally, because the rules of civil inattention call for visual avoidance in most social settings, direct eye contact becomes more meaningful for those who want to express their sexual desire for another through the gaze. GROs are thus in a position to openly demonstrate their longing by staring back at the male customer.

In a symbolic sense, the reactions of the audience to the presentation also serve as a 'mirror,' offering moments of self-awareness where the performer sees the impression s/he gives off through the expressions of others. This is a dialogic process, whereby the dominant discourses that guide social interaction are evident in the activities and

identities put forward by customers and employees as they observe each other's performances with a critical eye toward influencing public opinion through a similarly dramatic response. Presentations are altered according to how people reflectively view themselves through these responses, continuously evaluating the social situation and their position in relation to the stage and audience for any subtle changes that require an adjustment.

Communal acceptance for deceptive practices within the red-light district permits people to adopt radically different repertoires and performances than would otherwise be permissible within the strict boundaries of polite society, and yet because men and women move in and out of this space, they are always conscious of the fact that the masks they employ in the go-go bar may be revealed to those on the outside. Employees in these venues deal with the constant threat of stigma from public disclosure of their illicit and 'immoral' activities, so they often temper their performances within the go-go bar to maintain the appearance of social propriety in revealing their selves and desires. Thus the adoption of different masks according to social circumstances effectively separates the occupational identities of 'sex workers' from their personal lives so as to avoid complications arising from public exposure and censure (Castañeda, et al. 1996; Wolffers, et al. 1999).

Any analysis of identity and performance inevitably refers to the writings of Judith Butler (1990; 1993), who outlined the connection between these hegemonic discourses of gender and sexuality and the everyday public presentations that people enact to reaffirm the apparent 'natural' division of man and woman within the structuring ideologies of heterosexuality. However, one should approach her theory of performativity with a critical perspective, as Butler's reading of the 'heterosexual matrix' is overly deterministic in rejecting human agency in her representation of actors who are simply involved in the 'repetition' of discursive identities.[140] According to her

[140] Several feminist critics (Hollway 1996; McNay 1999; Nelson 1999) argue that Butler's focus on the discursive elements of performativity requires the refutation of a subject that exists beyond the boundaries of hegemonic discourses. This abstraction of the subject in Butler's writings also ignores the importance of social, historical and

theoretical model, alterations in discourses and performances occur through unintentional 'slippage' rather than the motivated actions of thoughtful actors. A comprehensive analysis of the relationship between performance and identity should incorporate Butler's insightful work on heteronormative performances alongside a discussion of the individual motivations behind these and other presentations, where "[s]ubjects can be constituted through hegemonic discourses of race, gender, and sexuality while remaining reflexive of, and (potentially) intervene in, that process" (Nelson 1999: 341).

By changing their performances to meet expectations in this dynamic and transitional setting, men and women are at once upholding and challenging various discourses regarding gendered identities and performances with the hope that the 'mask' they reveal to others will be attractive (or, at the very least, adequate, depending on the circumstances).[141] Most of the time they present a competent rendition that serves the desires of both audience and actor, and occasionally they will expose some aspect of self that they would otherwise want to remain hidden.[142] It is this combination of uncertainty and anticipation that brings men and women together in this setting – where participants are hoping that their dreams will be realized through their performances, all the while

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geographic positions in personal development – aspects that are directly addressed in this analysis because they are crucial to understanding these subjective performances as they occur within specific social (patriarchal; consumerist), political (regulatory; populist), temporal (modern; post-economic crisis) and spatial (urban; 'separate spheres') contexts that provide guiding principles for behavior, but do not necessarily obviate the ability of people to make decisions regarding their desired performances and identities.

[141] There are occasions when a man or woman in the bar simply does not care how s/he is perceived by others, and his or her only concern is controlling the situation through sheer will and the construction of an identity based on what little they are willing to reveal. For example, a man who is not interested in socializing can still drink and gaze upon women because of his position as a 'customer' in a situation where "the customer is always right."

[142] Those who are confident in their presentations of self and particularly adept at performing in this unpredictable social environment often try to coax some unexpected revelations from others for 'entertainment.' Designed to surprise or shock even those who have come to expect the unexpected, these departures from the loose go-go bar scripts often result in embarrassment, where the aggrieved may then retreat to backstage areas such as restrooms to correct his or her presentation – but eventually they must return to the stage if only to address these attempts at unmasking.

recognizing that the presence of competing desires leads many people to fabricate personal histories and feelings.

At first glance, these varying interests might appear to oppose one another, creating tension in the actions and attitudes of bar employees and patrons, yet what is interesting is that these different desires coalesce into performances that allow for flexible interpretations. The go-go bar engenders narrative coherence because most participants enjoy the multiplicity of perspectives that are available in this social / theatrical setting (Ochs and Capps 1996): being able to act out your own fantasies while also playing a role in the fantasies of others, as well as watching various scenarios unfold. After all, an important aspect of 'entertainment' in the go-go bar involves trying to influence the outcome of these sexual narratives and speculating on how these intensely personal stories involving 'real' people will develop.

After providing a broad description of go-go bar identities and performances in Chapter 4, my discussion in this chapter focuses on the sexual nature of these interactions as they relate to discourses concerning 'compulsory' (hetero)sexuality and the transgressive behaviors associated with these venues. The go-go bar as a performative stage is constructed for the validation of identities through those erotic forms of masculine and feminine comportment that are severely restricted in other public spaces, and even though the women and men presented herein follow a similar pattern of erotic performance that is evident in similar settings elsewhere across the global sexscape (Allison 1994; Frank 2002; Liepe-Levinson 2002; Nencel 2001; Scott 1996), there are also several aspects of these interactions that are unique to the nightclubs of Makati and Angeles. Overt exhibitions and pronouncements regarding sexual desire in the go-go bar adhere to the prevailing constructions of heterosexuality that inform behavior and interaction throughout society, but people who enter this space as employees or patrons are more inclined to voice and act upon those desires. Auditory and visual revelations of sexual arousal permeate the bar environment which goad onlookers into enacting comparable performances, and these demonstrations validate hegemonic gendered and

sexual identities through their representation of established heterosexual roles and practices.

It is possible to transcend many of these performative limitations because the go-go bar is positioned as a bounded, liminal space set within the realm of leisure on the margins of society. The lack of precise rules prevents the establishment of resolute scripts when it comes to sexual performances, so relationships – and the distinct forms of power that emanate from these personal arrangements – are not as structured or predictable as some might want. This creates problems for those men who come across strong-willed GROs that do not behave in accordance with the stereotypical imagery of the 'Oriental' woman, and because women's expressions of desire and autonomy challenge patriarchal domination in this setting, they are subject to violent recriminations from customers as well as authorities of the state. Men would appear to have the upper hand in the struggle to assert control over others because of their position as customers (along with their attendant traits of wealth and sociopolitical status), but there are many women who have also learned to effectively utilize those attributes they possess that are desired by others.

In the second section of this chapter, I examine the manifestation of lasting relationships in a setting that is primarily associated with brief sexual encounters. Marriages arising from these encounters are exceedingly rare, but the persistence of romantic 'success stories' keeps the dream alive and it is the potential for long-term emotional commitment that entices men and women into performances that foster such imagery. Even if there is no intention to follow through with promises of love and matrimony, actors will continue to promote their own fantasies and demand credibility in the performances of others in the interest of 'entertainment' and narrative continuation in what would otherwise become a dull and repetitive form of interaction for both customers and employees who spend hour after hour in each other's company.

love for sale

> *Mahal* means 'love'
> It also means 'expensive'
> Love is expensive!
>
> (Video message on tourist bus to Angeles defining some basic Tagalog terms)

While the primary opposition to relations between men and women in the go-go bar has to do with the discrepancies in power and the objectification that results from the essentialized differences in gender, race, and status, many critics are disturbed too by the commodification of intimacy that satisfies sexual desires without any apparent emotional involvement or consequences. The interpersonal arrangements in these establishments not only circumvent the established socioerotic order by extending sexual relations beyond the 'private' / domestic realm, they also subvert the ideology of romance which says 'true love' cannot be purchased, and thus, all instances of intimacy that emerge from the go-go bar are deemed illegitimate and morally suspect.

According to the prevailing discourses associated with 'normal' heterosexual performance, sexual relations are supposed to simply unfold during the course of everyday interaction between subjects – hence the linkage between erotic behavior and other social activities (Weitman 1998). The notion of 'love' within the sexual dyad embraces the spontaneity of irrational passions and informs our modern perceptions of equality in intimate relations[143] – potent imagery that stands in stark contrast to the motivated rationality that structures the world of economic production. However, embracing the discourse of romance creates a level of uncertainty with regard to its effects on women, for while this ideology enables women to express their sexual desires, it marginalizes those desires as 'irrational' and also requires acquiescence on the part of those who 'fall in love.'

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[143] Romantic imagery coalesces into what sociologist Anthony Giddens describes as the 'pure relationship' where "a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from sustained association with one another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it" (1992: 58).

Conjugal (or 'romantic') love came to fruition in the nineteenth century as an integral element of the 'separate spheres' ideology (Chapter 2), and provided women with a modicum of autonomy by highlighting the importance of their roles in social and biological reproduction within the domestic realm. Romance also altered people's considerations of self as they devised new narratives that included a 'significant other' in the development of personal histories (Giddens 1992; Warr 2001), thus giving greater importance to the conjugal dyad compared to other social relations. Much of this ideological push toward emotional commitment within matrimony resulted from the increasing concerns over sexual promiscuity and the threat of seduction that accompanied the rapid industrialization and urbanization of this period. As a means of refocusing sexual activities on (re)production, the discourse endorses a companionate vision of marriage that emphasizes equality between husband and wife, although women's subordinate position in many other aspects of society means that most do not experience any meaningful alteration in their intimate relations or domestic activities (Seidman 1991).

In the anonymous, transient world of urban and transnational interactions, it is impossible to form the same types of relationships that have been idealized in these collective memories and our cultural constructions of close-knit communities, so many people resort to other arrangements to fulfill their longings for intimacy. Rather than expend time and energy to develop the type of union prescribed by the prevailing romantic and moral discourses, people often opt for brief sexual encounters that demand less 'work' and fewer obligations, utilizing material resources to achieve physical, social, and psychological satisfaction. In late-capitalist society, payment for sexual encounters is simply "a natural extension of the increasing commodification of normalized relations" (Brewis and Linstead 2000: 195; see also Liepe-Levinson 2002), as increasing demands for production have led to the expansion of work related activities into the realm of 'leisure' and 'home' so that the distinctions between these different areas of social interaction are blurred (Allison 1994; Bernstein 2001). This hybridization of 'public' and 'private' performances leads to the creation of a 'marketplace' for socioerotic encounters

(Kapchan 1996), where the buying and selling of embodied pleasures mediates between the impersonal world of the workplace, the adventurous lifestyle of the traveler, the freedom associated with shopping and other forms of consumption, and the considerate care found in the domestic arena.[144]

The construction of women in Philippine go-go bars as a commodity for sexual service is characteristic of what many would describe as 'prostitution,' but many accepted social interactions between men and women – such as courtship, dating and marriage – also involve the exchange of goods and other forms of support for emotional and physical gratification. Money is usually seen as undermining the development romantic or 'pure' relationships between people,[145] and yet within the commodified arena of the sex industry, financial outlays that are part of the customer-employee relationship facilitates erotic contact between strangers (Frank 2002) – which, in turn, may lead to different types of relationships. Moreover, in many non-Western settings, 'love' includes 'gifts' for sexual intimacy (Ankomah 1999; Hamilton 1997; Helle-Valle 1999; Runganga and Aggleton 1998; Wardlow 2002; Wolffers, et al. 1999). As noted by Barbara de Zalduondo (1991: 229), "the key issue distinguishing prostitution from other forms of sexual-economic exchange appears to be the difference between 'exchange' and 'sale,'" so that the intent and explicit approach in 'selling' specified services single out prostitution from these other intimate 'exchanges.'[146]

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[144] Karen Kelsky (2001) relates an interesting example involving young Japanese women who pay considerable sums to attend parties in Tokyo where they will meet eligible American men (mostly white and well-to-do). It is through such commodification – and subsequent intimate association – that these women achieve what they believe is a modern, more liberated lifestyle than that prescribed by the discourses of traditional Japanese femininity.

[145] It is ironic that the discourse of 'romance' assumes this anti-consumerist perspective when it is such a large part of advertising, and consumption is essential to romantic practices (Illouz 1997; Slater 1997).

[146] In the Thai go-go bar setting, Marc Askew (1999b) considers the 'entanglement' of emotional commitment and displays material wealth as Thai women and Western men negotiate the symbolic meanings of activities and objects to make sense of these transnational relationships, always trying to maintain some separation between the romantic imagery and relations of capitalist economics (Illouz 1997).

definitions and practices

Given the difficulties of labeling these relationships according to the interpretations of participants and various observers / stakeholders, it should come as no surprise that defining the act of 'sex' also depends on individual proclivities. In discussing the meaning of sexual encounters between 'customers' and 'entertainers' within the bar, it is necessary to consider how patrons and employees constitute 'sex' within the totality of pleasurable experiences that occur through their interactions in this setting, also taking into account the prevailing societal notions on the matter. Beyond the obvious physicality of intimate encounters emanating from the go-go bar, 'sex' involves a host of sensual pleasures that symbolize the erotic and romantic, yet participants base their understanding and experiences of 'sex' on gendered discourses that give meaning to particular activities. For example, it is a common practice to link masculine sexuality to the physical elements of genital stimulation while emotional closeness is most often identified with feminine sexuality (Hillier, et al. 1999; Jackson and Scott 1997; Warr 2001). These beliefs have assumed hegemonic pre-eminence in discussions of heterosexuality as modern society has embraced the ideology of masculine sexual agency to explain men's aggressive tendencies in everything from business dealings to violent behavior.

Performances of 'sex' that unfold within the go-go bars of Angeles and Makati are more circumscribed than most people realize, and the publicity regarding 'lewd' shows in the local media primarily reflects the prurient interests of a readership that wants a quick peek into the activities of these 'forbidden' spaces. Despite the imagery of transgression that is often associated with these and other carnivalesque settings (Kapchan 1996; Parker 1991; Rival, et al. 1998), socioerotic behaviors in the go-go bars are informed by a conservative, patriarchal perspective that emphasizes (re)productive heterosexuality as the means by which people realize their desires and achieve their goals for consumption while maintaining good social standing through compliance with cultural / sexual norms.

Accordingly, the narratives employed by men and women focus on genital copulation and the male orgasm as the defining elements in (hetero)sexual intercourse. This view originates from an essentialist portrayal of male sexual desire that is firmly rooted in biological notions of a sex 'drive,' rendering this particular form of intercourse necessary for healthy sexual relations. The 'coital imperative' identifies the penetrative and ejaculative version of heterosex as 'normal' so that people believe they must engage in this form of intercourse if they are to be identified as a 'normal' couple with regard to their sexual activities (Gavey, et al. 1999; Linder 2001; McPhillips, et al. 2001). In the case of sexual encounters involving foreign male customers and Filipina bar employees, the absence of coitus would reflect negatively on the man because there is the possibility that he might be considered impotent.[147] GROs do not face similar scrutiny because their sexual satisfaction / performance is rendered irrelevant by their status as 'prostitutes.'

Because of the broad dissemination of this 'coital imperative' discourse – as well as the association between go-go bars and 'prostitution' (which also generally focuses on genital 'sex') – people tend to overlook the involvement of the other senses in considering human sexual experience in such settings. Just as the gaze plays a pivotal role in surveillance, personal expression, and the development of knowledge regarding proper identities and performances (Chapters 3 and 4), so too does the visual take precedence in matters of erotic pleasure within the go-go bar. Voyeurism is a key element to this experience involving the excitement of sexually transgressive imagery as well as the belief that the observer is uncovering some hidden element of the performer's 'true' self in the process.

> Even if I don't have sex at the end of the night, I still have a good time when I come here [to the bar]… I just like watching people and talking to them. I know it's all a game, but that's what is fun, trying to figure out who people really are and what makes them tick. (American living in Angeles)

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[147] 'Impotence' here not only relates to the physical / psychological inability to perform sexually, but it may also imply sociopolitical dysfunction if he cannot effectively exert power over those women who are (supposedly) sexually available to all (Anderson 1990).

An important aspect of the fundamental (hetero)sexual duality involves the visibility of male sexual arousal – evident in the erect penis and male ejaculation – versus the invisibility of female sexual arousal. Linda Williams' (1989) analysis of pornographic imagery is particularly relevant to this discussion of go-go bar interactions where the visual 'confession' of male erotic excitement represented in the erection and orgasm is juxtaposed against female silence when it comes to corporeal demonstrations of desire. Accordingly, this obvious revelation of male arousal leaves no doubt as to the pleasure he derives from this type of intercourse; it also indicates quality of female performance(s) in generating such a response. The physical manifestation of male arousal in the go-go bar is then orally imparted to others in the audience through descriptive terms such as *matigas* ('hard'), *malibog* ('horny'), or *malaki* ('big'), using either Taglog or English terms depending on the intended audience, as if to announce the successful completion of an assigned task and thus lending credibility to her devised persona and performance.

Customers seeking sexual pleasure through physical contact will usually retire to a 'VIP room' or some darkened corner of the bar to steal a furtive grope, but in some cases they will act out their lustful impulses in full view of other employees and patrons. When openly engaging in these 'public' performances, the intended effect is to signify male privilege and power to the audience rather than express intimate affection – although these displays are not necessarily devoid of emotion either. There are other similarly staged indicators of masculine control in the go-go bar, such as when a customer pulls down the top of a woman's garment to reveal her breast(s) to other men. The pleasure of observing such interactions comes from the development of sexual knowledge and its application in the socioerotic arena, where the male actor who unveils the object of desire can reveal his power to others through his mastery of performances and domination of persons. Those who gaze upon these activities then develop an understanding of which 'customs' are acceptable within this social realm, thus reproducing the practices and ideology of heterosex through performance.

Most activities take place out in the open spaces of the bar, and even where there are VIP rooms to provide cover for greater intimacy, the sight of drawn curtains or women and drinks passing into these restricted spaces serve as visual cues for imagined activities. While being upon the sexual stage for others to view is a desired part of the go-go bar experience, there are also instances where men want to hide certain aspects of those sexual activities that occur:

> One time I had to wash a customer's shirt because there was makeup all over the front… the girls were giving him a blowjob and going up and down… so they got mascara and lipstick and makeup all over [she gestures to the abdominal area]… he said his wife would be mad, so I went upstairs [in the bar] and washed it. I even ironed it for him while he waited. (receptionist in Makati)

Even the act of a customer achieving sexual climax from genital stimulation is made public through audible means for those who cannot directly observe the act. This is accomplished through visual and auditory presentations that are designed to both reveal the achievement of desired goals and inform others of proper interactive behavior. Some establishments in Makati provide hot and/or cold washcloths so that customers can 'freshen up' once they leave the tropical, polluted city behind. However, these 'towels' are also used to wipe up the ejaculate after those sexual activities that take place in darkened corners. These are sealed in plastic bags so that they can be heated or cooled without accumulating excess moisture, so when women retrieve one of these towels from the cooler or steamer for cleaning themselves and/or the customer, they open it by grasping it firmly in one hand and hitting it against the other hand, causing a loud popping sound. In reaction to the sudden noise, people turn to see what is happening and where the woman with the towel is going. This brief parade indicates to everyone else in the bar that the recipient of this service and the GRO(s) who assisted in the effort have performed as expected. Watching these events unfold, the uninitiated customer or employee also learns what they are supposed to do if they are to fulfill their desires for pleasure and/or material reward.

The auditory rendering of sexual arousal becomes all the more salient in uncovering female erotic desire. Women working in go-go bars attempt to 'show' men

that they are experiencing similar physiological responses in the course of interaction through various indicators. The female go-go bar employee verbalizes these feelings with terms such as *malibog*, 'hot' or 'wet' that will, hopefully, convince the audience that she too has achieved a state of arousal. She may also guide the customer's hand under her clothing to reveal those physiological changes associated with her stated condition of being 'hot' and/or 'wet.' These demonstrations of female sexual enjoyment serve to further excite the male customer as 'sex' is not only about the physical feat itself, but also involves actors and audience members reaching a common understanding of what constitutes pleasure, how to realize their desires through these cooperative performances, and then revealing the experience of sexual satisfaction to everyone else in an effort to maintain the narrative and performative structures.

problems in performances of masculinity

In addressing the myriad desires of male customers, the bar is not simply about the pleasure derived from physical stimulation, but also involves a convoluted assessment of self that emphasizes the production of masculinity through erotic interaction with women. With advances in the status and rights of women, displays of male hegemony involving assertive (hetero)sexual expression are now more restricted in public, yet expectations regarding masculine temperament and attendant behaviors have changed very little. 'Macho' stereotypes persist and inform the ways we construct identities within a system of gendered practices and embodied signs that distinguish 'real' men from effeminate men as well as women. As a result, some men may be unable to establish what they perceive to be a masculine identity without the participation of women who ascribe to a feminine presentation which complements their notions of what it means to be a 'man.'

The late-capitalist bureaucracy of production and consumption in an anonymous, transnational, urban environment leaves few opportunities for men to demonstrate their sexual prowess, so the go-go bar emerges as a site for the development and maintenance of masculinity. These venues for 'entertainment' are socially constructed according to imagery associated with an active male consumption through his position as a customer

with the political and economic power to demand certain identities and performances under the guise of 'service.' In this context, the masculine presentation of self becomes a means of revealing status and power by demonstrating greater (hetero)sexual competence through performance and the fostering of homosocial relations (Allison 1994; Redman 2001). This process of affirming one's manliness through male peer groups within the go-go bar involves identification with the hegemonic imagery of the 'coital imperative' while positioning the self in opposition to male effeminacy and homosexuality (Hillier, et al. 1999; Seidler 1987), so men seek within the go-go bar an audience that is willing to engage in supporting performances and provide the validation necessary to affirm their embodiment of masculine potency as it is represented in popular culture and official discourse (Allison 1994; Kruhse-MountBurton 1995; Ryan and Martin 2001). Dancers and receptionists play a crucial part in these displays of manhood by enacting a more 'traditional' version of femininity in their role as 'guest relations officers.'

Due to the extensive interaction between participants and the dialectical nature of the gaze, there are opportunities for men to take part in the enactment of their own fantasies that go beyond the usual audience-actor distinctions on the expansive stage of the Philippine go-go bar. When in close contact with GROs, the customer becomes part of the spectacle for the audience members who observe these interactions with varying degrees of erotic curiosity and amusement. Conditions required for state surveillance (lighting, open spaces) also encourage voyeurism so these two distinct – and sometimes opposing – perspectives are both attempts at developing knowledge of socioerotic activities to exert control over the self and others.

According to the scripted role of 'the customer' in the go-go bar setting, men are paying for the pleasure of controlling the erotic performances that take place within the context of these encounters, including "the commodity of their own stage time – for moments in the spotlight where they can be seen by the dancers and their fellow spectators, where they can become the object of the gaze" (Liepe-Levinson 1998: 12). Yet despite this power customers wield over female employees in this setting, the women do not always respond according to men's desires.

> The good thing about this bar is that there aren't a bunch of women hanging all over us, begging for drinks. Of course, the downside is that there aren't a bunch of women hanging all over us, begging for drinks! (English expatriate in Makati)

This is the usual quandary experienced by men in this setting: finding the right situation where they can manipulate these performances to their liking. Too many women may create an environment that overwhelms the customer, but a lack of attention from GROs is also problematic in terms of (re)presenting the masculine self to the audience.[148]

Much of the difficulty men experience in their dealings with women and other men has to do with the relatively limited means of defining masculinity within the discursive confines of the coital imperative. In contrast to women who have developed extensive narratives of intimate relations and self through their consumption of romantic imagery (Giddens 1992), most men have not undergone a similar pattern of socialization and often struggle when it comes to expressing matters of emotional importance with each other. Thus, men use tales of their sexual escapades to confront issues of intimacy without broaching those aspects that are considered 'feminine' (such as romance or 'feelings') that might cause some to question their masculinity. The acceptance of these sexual narratives as indicators of masculine identity confers membership to those who react approvingly to these ribald accounts and provide stories of their own erotic encounters.

A case in point: Harley moved from Australia to Manila in 1996 and quickly established himself within the community of 'sexpats,' spending his time in bars along P. Burgos seeking business contacts among the male patrons and sexual relations with various dancer and receptionists. His jovial demeanor won friends among men and women alike, and he reveled in the newfound power and freedom to pursue his desires. Moreover, he always had a story to tell of his latest experience, always providing the (mostly) male audience with a tale that seemed more outlandish than the one before. Like most masculine sexual 'confessions,' these narratives stress those experiences that

[148] The ambiguity of these encounters is also represented in the Tagalog phrase *putang aalis, putang babalik* (which roughly translates "go away whore, come back whore").

are unusual, involving either sex in out-of-the-ordinary places or other circumstances that render these encounters noteworthy.[149]

> I was standing right here [in the back of the bar], and everyone else was watching what was happening on the stage, there must have been about a hundred people [watching a special show that evening]… so I just bent her over and started having sex with her. Only _____ [the bar's owner], noticed what was happening, but no one else had a clue.

Discussions of sexual activities among men are designed to amaze and titillate, although many of these stories of erotic encounters with women belie a more tender approach enacted beyond the view of other men. So while Harley could easily play the typical 'lad' who was always ready to have a beer with the guys and share in some raunchy discussions, he also displayed a more considerate and caring aspect of his personality in his interactions with women outside of the homosocial bar environment.[150] Nevertheless, while the sheer number of relationships he cultivated with women (along with the children he fathered) enhanced his status within a particular cohort of male bar patrons, these affairs caused a great deal of consternation among women – especially those who desired a long-term relationship with Harley.

These acts of serial seduction that characterize the contemporary womanizer reveal his dependence on women to achieve what he believes to be a proper presentation of self as scripted within the go-go bar as well as the heteronormative world beyond its doors. Furthermore, such activities expose a common underlying sentiment that frames Western male patronage of these venues and their interactions with Filipinas in general, depicting identities and relationships according to some idealized capitalist / patriarchal model of gender and (hetero)sexuality that achieves some semblance of reality through the performances and relationships that occur within Philippine go-go bars. Men who

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[149] Women working in the go-go bars also engage in similar banter about sexual experiences, although they do not actively seek an audience as do men. Instead, they talk about these matters in private among a select few friends. However, the topics of discussion, coarse language, and audience reactions are the same.

[150] Peter Redman (2001) describes how men adopt romantic practices and discourses after they are separated from those male homosocial assemblages that emphasize group cohesion through displays of hegemonic masculinity.

become too immersed in this fantasy setting may have trouble developing 'real' relationships with women unless both parties subscribe to the same sexual ideas.

Particular social conditions and assemblages of men (business associates, military personnel, sporting teams, etc.) emphasize group cohesion to the extent that sexual difference – and distance – is highlighted in their collective performances. Women in these mixed gatherings function mostly as supporting actors because men interact with each other while employing the women as theatrical 'props' for their performances of masculinity.

> There was a group of seven [U.S.] navy men and five dancers seated at the table [in a bar in Angeles]. The men behaved in a boisterous manner, highly animated in their discussions of life in the military and their memories of home. They paid little attention to the women at the table, and the women didn't seem to mind too much as they had already procured their [lady's] drinks. They [the women] were mostly interested in watching the men having such a good time with each other, and the women laughed at their antics: a drinking competition followed by some mock wrestling on the dance floor. Roles thus appeared to be reversed, as men were now entertaining the female spectators – but they primary audience for these displays were the other men as they demonstrated their drinking prowess and physical strength to each other. One of the men began negotiating with the floor manager, trying to get a discount on lady's drinks as well as barfines. The GROs themselves were not involved in this conversation either (I later learned from the manager that they had agreed to go out with the men). The entire time they were in the bar, the men essentially ignored the women, only acknowledging their presence when they wanted to prove something to their buddies. Nevertheless, the men had a limited amount of time on shore leave, and they were there to engage in sexual encounters with women, even if it was only to demonstrate masculinity and/or camaraderie to those who mattered most: the other men in their group. By ten o'clock in the evening, there was not a single woman left in the bar. (fieldnotes)

This performance continued the next day in the hotel swimming pool where the men's loud proclamations about 'last night' stood in stark contrast to the quiet conversation (and giggles) emanating from the group of Filipino women at the opposite end of the courtyard.

The bar and all of its occupants thus comprise the dramaturgical 'team' that maintains the imagery of stereotypical masculine (hetero)sexuality through the staging of practices that employ what many consider to be a 'traditional' view of gendered roles,

intimate behavior, and relations of power. Women in these instances do not share equal stage time with men because their role is to help sustain a particular image of masculinity. The GRO is paid to accompany a male customer and to serve as an admiring observer and confidant, so her evaluations of these performances of manhood rarely carry the same weight as the opinions of other men when it comes to affirming masculine performance. Nevertheless, she plays a critical role in supporting his presentation through her own embodiment of sexual difference according to her gender, race, and socioeconomic status as a Filipina 'bar girl.'

The woman's gaze also becomes part of the show insofar as she becomes a member of the audience for performances of masculinity, serving the desires of those men who wish to display themselves in such a manner while also asserting her own authority to judge the competency of these presentations (Scott 1996). As a member of the audience, she possesses considerable power to refute his masculinity should she choose to overstep her boundaries and challenge these gendered scripts.

> You can't just say things to a man like he says to you… calling you names and saying you are no good woman… girls here have to be strong. It is really the men who are weak. That is why they come to these [bars], because in their own country they cannot find a woman. (manager in Angeles)

Men engage in acts of domination within the go-go bar because the setting demands appropriate presentations of masculinity that emphasize control over self and other, but there are numerous ways in which audience members – both in the bar and society at-large – challenge such performances as valid indicators of manliness. Many of those who observe men engaging in these types of relationships consider their sexual activities to be a sign of personal 'weakness' because they have to use their power in a coercive manner that is antithetical to a 'strong' portrayal of masculinity and potency (Anderson 1990). Accordingly, men who have to actively seek out women or purchase their companionship do not possess the same potency as those who can attract women with little or no effort, so some men rationalize their relationships with GROs by saying that they do not pay for sex. For example, Harley's early stories that emphasized promiscuity at any cost changed over time in accordance with shifting social networks

and audience attitudes for such behavior. He subsequently modified his interactions to counter such impressions, adopting discourses and practices that created some personal distance from the imagery of 'prostitution.'

> I will not pay for sex… As soon as she mentions money... it is over. If I feel like giving a girl some money to help her out, then I will do so. In some cases when I didn't have any money coming in, I could only give maybe 100 or 200 pesos (about $2-4)… I just don't want to make it a habit.

Other customers may also passively 'pursue' women in go-go bars by playing hard-to-get or otherwise ignoring the socioerotic advances of women, although the attention they do receive again points to profound differences in social status and politico-economic power that is not always an accurate indicator of masculinity or sexual desirability for some members of the audience.

Men expecting to have complete control over these interactions are often disappointed when they cannot woo the woman of their desires, or when they cannot get rid of the GROs that do not interest them. They also have problems when they encounter employees who are not as demure as they had imagined, since dancers and receptionists have developed creative ways to subvert those foundational hierarchies that position men over women, or customers over service personnel. Power is generally structured according to a purely economic model where the customer retains primary control over encounters with women who are thus identified as 'employees.' Those who purchase sexual services in such a manner possess the financial and political means to demand this type of institutional subjugation as individual consumers with their attendant rights, although those who are in the business of 'selling' these objectified performances may also retain at least some autonomy because they are in a position where they can define the parameters of interaction (Frank 1998). However, because the Philippine go-go bar setting involves numerous other disparities that impinge on personal liberty within this particular system of relations (such as differences in age, educational attainment, social / political / legal status, etc.), Filipinas working in these establishments do not have the same institutional safeguards afforded to women in other sex-work settings.

The exclusion of dancers and receptionists from negotiations – particularly those discussions involving barfines – may lead to misunderstandings later in the relationship. For example, a customer may approach the floor manager looking for someone who will perform a specific sexual act, such as anal intercourse. She subsequently arranges for him to meet one of the GROs that she knows has performed this act in the past, although she may not inform the employee that the customer is seeking this particular type of sexual encounter. The woman then steers clear of discussion of sexual specifics through her feminine performance of 'shyness,' while the customer avoids revealing his intentions until they are back in his bedroom where he has a greater chance of controlling the encounter and imposing his desires. A more direct approach involving specific negotiations between male customers and female sex workers gives greater control to the women because they are then personally involved in defining the terms of exchange beforehand (Ho 2000), but the situation for dancers and receptionists working in the go-go bars of Angeles and Makati leaves women with less control in negotiating these agreements due to the tenuous legal situation regarding intimate encounters that extend beyond the premises of the establishment. The organizational structure of the bar, the desire for particular gendered performances, and the vague language of interaction create a system that is deployed to limit female autonomy by privileging male sexuality within discourses of feminine passivity, objectification, and service.

Lydia, a waitress in Angeles, experienced a traumatic episode that exemplifies the difficulties of subscribing to the purely consumerist model when it comes to sexual relations. One day in July 1995, a customer paid her barfine early in the afternoon, and then they returned to his hotel for sex. "We did it two times, and he wanted more!" she exclaimed. Unwilling and physically unable to submit to any more sexual intercourse, she said she wanted to leave – so he 'returned' her to the bar for a refund. The manager of the bar said that if a customer is not pleased, that it is his right to ask for a refund (which is usually granted). In some cases, the woman can even be penalized for "not

performing her duty," although in this instance Lydia did not have to pay a fine.[151] She held herself tightly and kept wiping her hands against her jeans as if to separate herself from the body she no longer cared for. An older waitress stepped forward to console her although the other women shrugged their shoulders, choosing to ignore what most of them had experienced as simply another hazard of the work environment.[152]

The legal notion of 'consent' is difficult to apply in situations where actions are not discussed beforehand (Day 1994). In Lydia's experience, her status as a 'sex worker' signifies to others that she is actively seeking sexual intercourse – or, at the very least, willing to engage in such encounters for the right price. Women identified as prostitutes function as an example of improper feminine comportment in public spaces in that "the eyes and smiles and sallies with which she approaches a man tell us precisely how all other women must be careful not to conduct themselves, lest it be assumed that liberties can be taken with them" (Goffman 1963a: 141). The privatization of sexual acts through the ideology of 'separate spheres' serves these patriarchal interests in locating feminine sexuality within a domestic, reproductive framework (Gavey 1996; Richardson and May 1999), and so women who are labeled 'deviant' because they engage in sexual activities outside of prescribed relationships and spaces are seen as 'deserving' of violence (or 'asking' to be raped) because they have transgressed social norms.

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[151] I found numerous other instances during the course of research where men obtained a refund of their lady's drinks or barfines because they believed that they "did not get what they paid for," although this usually occurred because women refused to have sex with them. Patrons may also request reimbursement for lady's drinks if they feel that the woman did not give them enough attention, as sometimes the GRO will wander off to the dressing room or to attend to another customer if she feels that her presence is not necessary to secure the drink commission.

[152] It is important to note that women working in the bars do not consider this job to be any more dangerous than other occupations. When a young woman was murdered by a customer who was a regular in the bars along P. Burgos ("Japanese strangles, pushes Filipina, 19, from 21st floor" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 15, 2001), I attempted to ascertain their perceptions of danger in this setting, but the women countered by describing incidents of sexual abuse that occur throughout Philippine society (for example, see "Parents, neighbors top child abusers in C. Luzon – DSWD" *Philippine Star*, February 10, 1999; "No sex, no passport" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, May 13, 2000;

In some instances, radical feminist activities have created or maintained sexual exploitation by blocking the decriminalization or even encouraging the criminalization of prostitution (van der Veen 2000). The current situation in the Philippines provides women with little, if any, recourse to address the problems they face while working in go-go bars. There are laws that protect women from rape and other forms of abuse, but within the discourses of criminality and immorality – fostered by activists and politicians who want to abolish these spaces – most women do not realize that they have any rights in their identities as GROs, and employers are wary of any additional involvement of the state beyond what is absolutely necessary:

> Soon after I stated working here in 1991, an American soldier [from Clark Air Base] paid my barfine. I was very shy because I was still a virgin, but he knew the *mamasan* and she said he would be nice to me. But he took me to a hotel room, and he and five of his friends raped me there. I came back to the bar, and I wanted to go to the police, but the *mamasan* said it would be no good because they could not do anything… she said the police would want some money, and it would just be problems for me and the bar. (receptionist in Angeles)

The narrative above reveals the extent of collusion between parties in the maintenance of this system of sexual exploitation. State officials / 'dads' have effectively ceded control of these women to the establishment employers, much in the same manner as a father 'gives away' his daughter in the ritual of marriage, and vigilant policing is then used to force women from the streets into the controlled labor environment where surveillance is more effective.

Even though these performances linked to the discrepancy of power between customers and employees help validate masculine identities, the gaze of women within this setting also has a destabilizing effect because it positions female employees as both commodity and consumer that, in turn, causes anxiety among some men. Women working in go-go bars are in a position to evaluate the gendered performances of the customers, and are emboldened by the go-go bar setting to assert their desires for those particular markers that signify masculine power, such as wealth and virility – either

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"Sales ladies asked to show legs at work, according to study" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, December 10, 2001).

experiencing this power vicariously through valued commodities (such as 'gifts' or 'boyfriends'), or taking on 'masculine' identities and performances themselves through the appropriation of the gaze. In their role as spectators, women may directly challenge a customer's masculinity by criticizing his performance as being that of a *bakla* ('gay'), or engaging in other 'backstage' critiques that are visible to a circumspect audience:

> Sometimes the guy, when I show him my boobs he just doesn't care, so I think maybe he's *bakla* or something like that… I know he probably isn't *bakla*, but if I say that to him, then he will start talking to me to show me he is not *bakla*. (dancer in Makati)

> I hate when they start those little rumors about customers… they tell all their friends and then everyone looks at you like you're some sort of creep. I try to ignore it, but eventually you have to go back and correct it if you ever want any of those women to pay attention to you again. (American expatriate in Angeles)

Prostitutes and other marginal women on the streets have often been described as the archetypical protagonists of the feminine gaze (Parsons 2000), but they often pay an exacting price for this minor indiscretion. Some men feel threatened by this usurpation of power, while others could interpret a woman's interest or inquisitiveness as a sign of consent; either instance may result in sexual violence. To 'protect' women (or, more importantly, to maintain patriarchal control over female desires), the state responds with its own observational apparatus in the form of surveillance to preserve sexual order (Foucault 1965; 1977), of which the go-go bar is a prime example in the spatial and discursive confinement of the desirous feminine gaze.

For those women who desire power and are prepared to act upon these desires, to reveal their true intentions would destroy the fantasy of a submissive femininity that has been built up in the imaginations of customers, relatives, government officials and concerned activists. To address these fears of seduction and independence, GROs adopt a passive (feminine) stance as women who are employed to serve the desires of others. However, discerning what others desire is not a straightforward process in this complex social environment where people are trying to maintain a particular identity that suits their own longings while also extending the boundaries of selfhood to accommodate the expectations and fantasies of others.

female expressions of desire

Within the space of the go-go bar where the strict discursive boundaries of proper Filipino femininity are diminished, there are increased possibilities for adopting different performances according to one's own desires, but women still produce multiple masks and personal narratives to allay stigma and to cope with the desires of others (Davies 2001; Goffman 1963b). In many cases, women have internalized the predominant discourses regarding femininity to the extent where their only hope of realizing power and 'independence' is through the acceptance of their role as sex object (Hollway 1984; McNay 1999). However, *contra* Butler's (1990) structuring notion of the 'heterosexual matrix,' women in the go-go bars of are committed to changing the circumstances of their lives, although they may accomplish this through performances that obscure their 'real' motivations behind the façade of 'the Filipina' and similar identities that accommodate the wishes of others. Compiling these varied desires and presentations within a single space also leads to collective efforts of resignification within this liminal community. The social and symbolic meanings of these foundational identities (involving master narratives of gender and national origin) are transformed in the process of acting out one's personal desires in a setting that accepts – and even demands – transgression as an integral element in the normal course of self expression and socioerotic interaction.

Despite the efforts of GROs and other women working in these establishments to assert their own viewpoints and desires when it comes to matters of sexuality and erotic expression, men (and some female / feminist critics) are in a position of power to see only what they want to see. The directionality of the gaze is often situated within a gendered context, where men – as desiring subjects – are the ones who gaze upon women, and since women are often portrayed as having no gaze themselves, they can only legitimately recognize their sexual longings as objects of male desire (Parsons 2000; Pollock 1988; Wilson 2001). Women who internalize this objectifying gaze may thus experience their own bodies as 'body-for-others' in considering the social ramifications of their presentations rather than the subject positioning of the 'body-for-self' where personal desires prevail in considerations of social performances (Bourdieu 2001; George

2002). Within this construction of 'body-for-others,' those who are objectified are complicit in such a representation as evidenced by the care in which they choose their dress and performances that signify a particular identity to others, always aware that they are presenting a certain set of signs in the way they carry themselves into the ever-present, sexualized gaze. Women thus become active participants in the construction of the heterosexual gaze by controlling what the subject sees, thus directing the objectification according to their own desires for particular representations (Doane 1982; Hollway 1984; Riviere 1929).

> I like working here because I can make the man do what I want… if I want, I can go out with a customer, but if I don't like him, I just turn and walk away. But men, they don't like that, so you have to be careful, and play like you are, you know, innocent if you want to get drinks from them… but still, sometimes I like to treat them bad just to make them cry! (dancer in Angeles)

> My goal is to marry an American, go to the U.S. and wait two years until I get my 'green card' (permanent residency document), then divorce him and find someone better. That is what my auntie did and she is very happy now. But of course, I can't tell the customers that or I will never get married… so don't tell anyone else, ok? (receptionist in Makati)

The literature focuses on male sexual desire because it represents the 'active' position within the coital dyad; as 'passive' partners in this construct, women have no sexual desire, or it becomes trivial because of the gendered disparity in power that elevates sexual intercourse as a masculine right and requirement. Thus, in the current sociopolitical climate, women must look to men – or to those women who have subscribed to the paternal ideology – for guidance on matters concerning sexual agency and expression because there is simply no means of accounting for female desire within a masculinist symbolic framework (Benjamin 1986; Irigaray 1985).

> One could argue that most females would not consent to participate as sex-trade workers in these events if they had other comparably lucrative opportunities, or, if women were not culturally indoctrinated to think of themselves as objects for male sexual use. But then again, how much of this rhetoric has been informed by the double standard that insists that sexual representations and public expressions of sexual interest are categorically bad for women? Or, if one contends that a good or an authentic expression of female sexuality exists, who defines it? (Liepe-Levinson 1998: 30).

Women's heterosexual desire is rendered problematic in many feminist discourses because it is almost always associated with inequitable relations of power in the construction of intimacy within patriarchal society (see Barry 1995; Butler 1990; Rich 1980; Warr 2001). Moreover, the relative invisibility of female sexual stimulation means that her 'confessions' of arousal are always challenged. Many writers on the subject of 'prostituted women' argue that sex is simply a mechanical process for earning money within the context of the 'prostitution' (Barry 1995; Chant and McIlwaine 1995; Miralao, Castro and Santos 1990), but denying women the possibility of physical pleasure in these and other discourses that promote female desexualization ultimately upholds patriarchal control through the essentialist portrayals of women as passive, ignorant, and weak.

These dominant discourses are thus woven into young women's fantasies of freedom-as-distance ('*malayo*') that are part of the urban and transnational sojourn. Marc Askew (1999b) finds that there are a significant number of women working in Thai go-go bars who are motivated by a sense of adventure or *sanuk* (Thai for 'fun') to seek employment in these venues and escaping the patriarchal controls of rural family life. Leisure activities of women working in the bars of Makati and Angeles support such a view, for even though they spend their working hours drinking and engaging in sexual play with customers, when they go out with their *barkada* or co-workers they have a tendency to go to another nightspot and engage in similar performances as they would while at 'work.'

> No, I did not transfer here [to the bar where she was dancing on the stage in street clothes]; I still work at _____. Me and [co-workers] paid our own bar fine to go out tonight… we are here because it is a fun place, we don't have to wear those *pangit* ('ugly') costumes, and we can dance and flirt with the guys however we like. (dancer in Makati)

In most instances, women will go to another go-go bar to visit their friends (if the bar has the same ownership as the one in which they are working, then there is no problem in gaining entry).[153] Another popular outing for women in Makati involves

[153] It is also possible for women to engage in 'work' while they are ostensibly 'visiting' other bars within the same consortium, as they are allowed (and in many cases, encouraged) to solicit lady's drinks from customers.

going to an establishment that offers *macho* dancers or male GROs where women can play the customer role.[154] These and other practices of female sexual desire are dismissed and otherwise silenced because they do not conform to the prevailing imagery of Filipina femininity and 'prostituted woman' victimhood.

Just as businessmen in go-go bars use this site of leisure for reaffirming personal commitments to the company (Allison 1994), or negotiating contracts and sealing deals, so too do the female employee transform this workplace into a space where they can address their own desires for recreational practices and consumption. Flirtation in this setting may be indicative of sexual desire on the part of customers and/or employees (see below), but more often it is simply a form of play that is used to provoke a response in the audience. Performances that involve explicit expressions of erotic cravings may escalate to a point where someone backs down – usually it is the woman who relents.[155] If there is a hint of uncertainty in the response of the audience or if she believes the customer is taking her seriously (and she does not want to follow through with the suggested activities), she will diffuse the situation by saying "joke only," but part of the 'game' involves seeing how much each person will invest of themselves in these presentations.

As in other expressive situations, parody and ambiguity allow female performers to transcend gendered conventions in articulating their desires (Kapchan 1996; Valentine 1997). For example, dancers sometimes mimic (hetero)sexual penetration on the stage, engaging in wild pelvic thrusting and holding each other in mock ecstasy until the tumble

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[154] There are expanding avenues for women in Asia to explore these types of commercial arrangements involving sexual intimacy (see "Rent Boys" *Time* [Asian edition], January 21, 2002; Kelsky 2001). In the Philippines, the recent rise in the number and visibility of ballroom dance instructors (DIs) has caused some concern among the governmental 'dads' as women now have their own form of 'entertainment' that takes place outside the home ("Iloilo dad seeks ban on illicit affairs of DIs" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, December 6, 1998).

[155] Women who know me sometimes behave in a sexually assertive manner toward me because they realize that I will not react aggressively. Some have also admitted using me to practice different performative strategies, fearing they might not be able to control the response from a 'real' customer.

to the floor in laughter. One might interpret these enactments as an effort to excite the male audience through coital representations, except there are usually no customers around to view these performances: they generally occur early in the day when there are no male patrons to 'entertain.'[156] Women generally have no explanation for this behavior other than to say "we are just playing" or "we are bored." Such play is a way of expressing familiarity and solidarity through the homosocial parody of heterosexual activities, serving the same function as drinking games and other competitive displays among men in these settings. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain whether these and other sexual exhibitions are simply performances designed to earn money (or, as in the case above, to fend off boredom), or if they are evidence of 'real' female sexual desires that adopt phallic symbolism in performance because there are no other avenues for expressing feminine longing beyond the prevailing orientation of masculine heterosexuality (Jackson and Scott 1997).

the emergence of intimacy

When it comes to sexual practices, the defining feature that separates the go-go bars of Angeles and Makati from other instances of sex work and prostitution involves the expressions and, in some cases, the realization of 'love' and other possibilities for romantic involvement. Unlike relations between dancers and customers in the topless bar or 'gentleman's club in the U.S. where there is a tendency among women to maintain a physical and emotional distance from their customers (Frank 1998; Liepe-Levinson 2002; Montemurro 2000; Prewitt 1989; Scott 1996), the capacity for developing long-term intimate relations in Philippine go-go bars informs the intentions and identities of participants for all sexual encounters. It is precisely the potential for such affective involvement that draws people into these arrangements, yet the ambiguity of these encounters also creates problems in trying to ascertain the motivations of others.

[156] The job of 'entertainment' is to focus on the customers, so most owners / managers do not want to see women interacting with each other in such a manner unless it has the customer's approval.

To understand why people pursue these different types of sexual encounters, it is important to consider the objective of desire rather than the object (Jacobsen 1993), and within the postmodern framework, the intertextuality between material objects and narratives of consumption links object and objective. Men are motivated to seek the transitory arrangements of prostitution as well as other similarly 'bounded' sexual relations, in part, because they do not wish to engage in long-term emotional and financial obligations prescribed by the modern discourses that link sex to romantic love. In such instances, the scripted enactment of sexual intercourse in prostitution allows men to maintain control over sexual expressions and identities so that there is no threat of intimacy that could challenge their domination over the feminine self and the female other (Hollway 1984; Seidler 1987).

While there are a number of men who exclusively practice those erotic exchanges exemplified in the Euroamerican prostitution encounter, the setting of the Philippine go-go bar described herein is preferred by many because of the seemingly endless repertoire of potential outcomes, and the opportunities for affirming desires and identities that might otherwise be unattainable.

> I can't imagine going to a prostitute back home… it seems so cold and emotionless. I went to prostitutes there a couple of times, but didn't enjoy it; too businesslike. It really didn't seem like sex to me. There was a specific payment for a specific time, and we discussed what we would do before. There was no chance of going any further once the agreement was made. Hell, they won't even kiss you! There's no way I'll go back to that type of arrangement again. (American tourist in Angeles)

Illusory intimacy is also available in Western settings associated with prostitution, but because it generally requires the services of someone who is willing to put in more time and emotional investment in such performances (such as a high-class escort, see Lever and Dolnick 2000), it is more expensive and thus inaccessible to most customers. The capitalist adage "time is money" is not as stringently followed in those encounters that take place within the Philippine go-go bar, and without the rigorous controls exhibited in prostitution elsewhere, men and women are free to establish a relationship that evolves according to the changing desires of the participants, allowing people to

unveil as much about themselves as they care to in developing mutual trust and the other reciprocal arrangements that are essential elements of modern intimacy (Jamieson 1998; Weitman 1998).

Men who are seeking a marriage partner in this setting are influenced by a different set of concerns and perspectives. The rational management of personal life within the late-capitalist system now also involves mate selection using commercial services to break down the traditional rituals of dating into a process of matchmaking through objective criteria. Physical proximity is no longer a determining factor in intimacy, as advances in transportation and communication technologies facilitate introductions and the maintenance of transnational relationships. Moreover, a union based on 'love' is of little concern for most of these men – especially those who are older and/or divorced – so they adopt a more pragmatic approach that skirts the awkward, time-consuming processes of nurturing a relationship and trying to learn more about a potential spouse by evaluating his or her performances.

'Love' thus becomes a contentious issue when considering the actions of women in these settings. Some observers believe that women's expressions of attraction are simply strategies to garner additional lady's drinks or other material considerations, adding that women in this situation are "unable to separate emotional from financial needs" (Chant and McIlwaine 1995: 249). It is true that in many instances women will feign sexual infatuation for purely economic goals (for example, see Brennan 2001), but it is also evident that these women are capable of forming a loving union of their own accord,[157] and since working in the go-go bar involves selling intimacy, the fantasy of universal male desirability creates problems for those men who are seeking relations that

[157] I have encountered a few women who approach these sexual encounters from a purely pecuniary standpoint in their efforts to acquire wealth without any consideration of forming some lasting fondness to men they identify as 'customers,' but the majority of women working in the establishments along P. Burgos and Fields have chosen these particular venues because they offer the possibility of meeting potential husbands from other countries. In some instances, a woman will use the skills she has learned in the go-go bar to maintain financial support from her male admirer even though she has no desire to cultivate a relationship that might lead to marriage.

are supposed to be exclusive and based on 'real' emotions. Intimate relations that emerge in Philippine go-go bars are classified as 'mixed' in that they include both material and emotional components (see Askew 1999b; Cohen 1982), although the relative importance of either of these aspects varies with individual motivations as well as the duration and dynamics of the relationship. Money continues to play a significant role in these 'loving' relationships, but the parties tend to view such transactions as more of an obligation toward a loved one where the 'gift' is considered a sign of commitment (Ratliff 1999).

The value of such gifts is embedded within the relationship of the exchange rather than some objective sense of commodity worth. Discourses of consumption are at work in the marketing of ideal relationships, using the premise of rational choice to develop shared scripts of romance. A woman's interest is often initially manufactured in order to obtain a lady's drink, but the dancer/receptionist can also develop a sincere attraction toward the man. These feelings may then intensify over time with increasing familiarity and according to the stated (or perceived) intent of her partner. As these relationships evolve so does the 'value' of the exchange, where new meanings become embedded within something as simple as a drink commission. A dollar is still a dollar regardless of the context in which it changes hands, but when money is coming from a 'boyfriend' or a potential 'suitor,' consumption – and the value of that dollar – is based on symbolic agreement as to the nature of the exchange. Fashion, cosmetics, cellular phones and international travel are not only symbols of purchasing power and economic success; these displays of affluence also signify a successful embodiment of the romantic dream and the acquisition of a modern lifestyle and identity. Thus, the explicit economic strategies associated with this occupational setting and the initial encounter do not preclude the presence or possibility for establishing a relationship that also incorporates the romantic mythology of 'love.'

There are many ways women demonstrate intimacy, such as giving a customer the designation of a 'boyfriend' or otherwise making him believe that he is special – occasionally forgoing a lady's drink or finding ways around the barfine payment so that it appears as though the relationship is more 'romantic.' In some instances, a woman will

also forgo using a condom during coitus to show that they are distinguishing a particular partner / encounter from one labeled 'work' or 'prostitution' (Ratliff 1999; Warr and Pyett 1999). She may then appeal to his masculine obligation as provider, or play on the man's generosity by invoking the 'savior' role to garner additional earnings so that she does not have to work in the bar. Using the common stereotype of the 'dutiful daughter' in the context of a close Filipino family, she might even cajole him into supporting other relatives in establishing small businesses or paying for their education. For this reason, repeat customers or 'boyfriends' are highly desirable because they will furnish additional 'gifts' for a longer and more intense 'emotional' attachment.

The development of relationships within the go-go bars of Makati and Angeles involve a variety of personal deliberations and social discourses for men and women alike in deciding how these intimate encounters should progress. From both perspectives, there are benefits in establishing long-term, committed relations, where issues of social acceptance and personal preference are just as important as the prevailing financial considerations when accounting for these manifestations of fidelity. Greater earnings are certainly a benefit that some women accrue from their relations with 'boyfriends,' but many GROs are also interested in improving their socio-political capital through marriage to a foreigner, hence the substantial mail-order bride business involving Filipino women (Tolentino 1996). Especially for those women with children, feelings of affect are a secondary consideration to economic security and a brighter future.

> No, I don't really love him [her American fiancée] in that way, but I need to think of my daughter… what is best for her is most important for me right now so that is why I am getting married… I do care for him, just not like in the movies! (receptionist in Makati)

A 'boyfriend' may also become a crucial component of the go-go bar employee's identity, showing others that she can fulfill the romantic ideal by cultivating and maintaining a successful, long-term relationship in this setting. Through her identification with the monogamous, conjugal model, she effectively separates herself from the realm of the anonymous 'sex worker,' successfully deploying the props and

practices of 'the couple' (exchange of gifts, photographs, vacations together) as symbols of commitment and a brighter future through marriage and family life.

Using an argument similar to that put forth by women in other developing countries (Ankomah 1999; de Zalduondo and Bernard 1995; Helle-Valle 1999; Murray 1991; Wardlow 2002), it is evident that the sex industry is viewed by many who work in this setting as an opportunity for socio-economic advancement rather than a limitation imposed upon them. Without a venue to meet foreign men, most women in this study feel that they would have no chance at marriage because the presence of children and their sexual past renders them undesirable in the local marriage market, thus depriving themselves and their children of financial security and social acceptance in a society that still employs a sexual division of labor. Whether this is an accurate assessment of Filipino male sentiment regarding marital partner choices is beside the point as women have internalized the 'spoiled' identity from being labeled 'prostitutes' so they do not consider marriage to their male compatriots to be a viable option.

> You can't blame [the girls]. Because foreigners, they don't care who you are. As long as you are a nice person, they don't care what is your background... Even if you have a lot of kids, if that guy like you, he gonna marry you. And do you think Filipino going to marry that girl? No way. Just put you down. (manager in Angeles)

Women who work in this setting are engaged in a form of emotional labor through their role as 'entertainers' and companions (Frank 1998; Hochschild 1983; Hollway 1984; White 1990), so in that respect the go-go bar is considered an ideal place to seek a spouse. Male go-go bar fantasies often incorporate what are perceived to be women's 'natural' proclivities toward 'care' – an ethic that is often embodied in notions of this and other service industries.[158] According to Neferti Tadiar (1993), the metropolitan bodies of women in the Philippines already transcend these public / private distinctions where 'homework' – those labor activities usually associated with domestic

[158] Even though men as go-go bar customers represent an active role in their expressions of desire, appropriation of identities, and purchasing of 'services,' many male patrons want to cede a certain amount control in these encounters to women, effectively enacting

roles as mother and wife – have become part of the informal global labor market where the employment of women in services involving 'care' (as housemaids and nurses), cultural reproduction (as teachers), and 'entertainment' (as GROs) extends their domestic identities beyond the home into various public venues and institutions, as well as other people's households. For those women working in the go-go bars of Angeles and Makati, their affairs with men require the adoption of roles and identities that are not generally associated with the well-defined boundaries of the typical prostitution encounter.

> I love the women here…first they'll fuck your brains out, then fix your breakfast and wash your socks. (Canadian tourist in Angeles)

In their construction of the 'Filipina,' foreign men expect have come to expect the coalescence of feminine roles involving sexual intimacy and domestic labor regardless of whether the relationship begins as that of GRO and customer, secretary and employer, or housekeeper and homeowner (Chang and Groves 2000).

These emergent social / sexual arrangements must also account for the varied demands of interested parties (other customers and employees, employers, relatives, and state officials) in the ever-changing marketplace. Those contemplating a relationship that could lead to marriage must come to terms with different values and expectations as they negotiate the roles and responsibilities in their relationship. So while relations between men and women in this setting are often idealized according to liberal political discourses of individual freedom and agency when it comes to positioning the self within these hedonistic circuits of consumption, they are also informed by a worldview that establishes a natural hierarchy in line with colonial notions regarding masculinity, race and 'civilization' (Bishop and Robinson 1998; Hoganson 1998; O'Connell Davidson 2001; Said 1978). Thus, it is primarily men who enjoy the 'freedom' of sexual liberty at the expense of women, even though many women working in go-go bars employ the same discourse of personal independence in structuring their own ideas and actions.

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their own fantasies of inaction or 'docility' that is part of the leisure experience (Ryan and Martin 2001).

Whether or not the various expressions of attraction represent 'real' emotional involvement is rarely self-evident, but it is this ambiguity that allows people to negotiate the extent of their relations according to changing circumstances and desires. Following the modern companionate discourse of matrimony, romantic love is the only valid reason for marriage, and all other motives render the union fraudulent in the eyes of the state, so many governments do not recognize the legitimacy of marriage for financial purposes or socio-geographic mobility. Filipino women who are in the market for marriage to a foreign national understand this ideology, and in most instances they have adopted a similar perspective because they too believe that love is important for a happy relationship. They do not deny their material motivations (and most foreign men also understand their predicament and accept the rationale for marriage), but for legal and social acceptance they must subsume such interests within the discourse of romance – as do most Europeans and Americans (Illouz 1997).

sustaining the illusion of romance

The romantic discourse of 'love' becomes problematic in the go-go bar when these conceptual differences emerge during the course of intimacy, since engaging in sexual activity has several meanings depending on the context of the encounter and each individual's personal desires. As noted in several studies from Thailand (Cohen 1982; 1987; Morris 2002; Phillip and Dann 1998), the nurturing of relationships by female go-go bar employees is part of the entrepreneurial decision-making process employed by young women in these settings to increase their earnings, but this does not necessarily negate their interests in forming a romantic relationship that could ultimately lead to marriage. Women will often avoid explicit discussions of money as an exchange for companionship or other sexual services that might indicate 'prostitution,' hoping to receive a 'gift' instead. The ambiguity embedded in this form of compensation allows both parties to maintain the particular illusions they desire: the woman can counter any charges of prostitution because she did not ask for remuneration while the man can use this arrangement as an example of his generosity or benevolence, and either participant

can also fashion these encounters into a loving relationship according to the 'traditional' gendered roles involved in courtship and marriage where the man functions as economic provider.

In preparing the mask of femininity for consumption (by both men and women in this setting), the dancer or receptionist must account for the various reactions that result from her presentation – especially when one's feelings are exposed. By adopting a hyper-feminine approach through the use of make-up, skin care products, sexy clothing, and behaviors associated with 'shyness' or modesty, the GRO constructs a non-threatening persona to conceal her own sexual desires as well as her desire for power (Riviere 1929; Tseelon 2001). Formulating an appropriate identity or performance in any social setting depends on how the person situates his or her self within a panoply of different interests and motivations, but it is often difficult to ascertain the 'true' desires or intentions of others if one is evaluating these activities from a perspective where you can only see what you want to believe is 'real.' Misinterpretations often occur in the go-go bar setting where the desired outcome from these encounters is different, as revealed in the following example where a GRO was commenting on the performances of a co-worker:

> Gemma is so good with customers… she holds their hands and looks deeply into their eyes, and you really believe that she is in love with them. That is why she is so popular. She really knows how to make a man feel like he is loved. (receptionist in Makati)

Gemma's performances as an employee are exemplary because she garners revenue for the bar and earns a considerable amount for herself, thus receiving praise from her employers and a mixture of envy and awe from other GROs. The actions of the receptionist who proffered the admiring assessment above reveals her own mercenary approach to work as she regularly moves about the bar from customer to customer, quickly appraising whether he is the type of person who will purchase a lady's drink for her or whether her time is better spent in the company of someone else. Thus, her interpretations of Gemma's performances are perhaps a reflection of her own attitudes

toward work. Meanwhile, Gemma imparts a different set of desires in explaining the intimacy she engenders:

> Of course I want to earn money because I have two children… but I also want to find someone to love. I feel lonely at home, and would like to have a husband before I am too old… some of the girls here just want money, so they get one or many boyfriends to send them money, but I am just looking for one nice guy to be my one love. To see if they are interested in me like that, I have to be very *malambing*… if they are not *malambing* to me, then I will leave them alone because I want more than just [lady's] drinks and sex.

Gemma's validation of her performance in keeping with her own longings shows how many go-go bar employees rationalize conflicting discourses and desires. The fact that other women in the bar consider her to be a 'good employee' improves her status in their eyes (jealousies notwithstanding), but can also cause difficulties if potential romantic partners come to view her in a similar manner.

It is often unclear what customers are looking for exactly, but judging by their interactions and conversations in the bar, it is evident that they are more interested in flirtatious engagement and companionship than the physical act of sexual copulation alone. Dave, a single American in his fifties, moved into a hotel on P. Burgos in January 2000 in what was his first stop on a global journey to find a place to retire. He is considerate and gentlemanly in his demeanor, does not drink alcohol, and is genuinely interested in the lives of women he encounters in the go-go bars. As a result, the women look to him as a 'friend' – if not a 'boyfriend' or potential husband – and he maintains a variety of different social /sexual relationships.

> Do you know how difficult it is for a man my age to find someone who wants to have sex? …there are not many places where I can go in the U.S. to meet other women my age… but I really don't even want to go out with women my age anyway. Here I can find young women who don't look down on me because I am older – I am actually desirable to them. I meet them here in the bar, and give them my phone number… they just call me if they want to go out, or come by my place. Where else in the world can you find a place like this?

Men who patronize these venues recognize that women's expressions of desire are usually staged solely for their benefit, but for the most part, that is precisely what they want. Unless the patron is specifically seeking a spouse, it does not matter if women's

expressions demonstrations of 'love' are 'real' or not – yet women must still follow the performative scripts of Filipina femininity in this setting. Displays of intimacy boost the person's ego, and also indicate to onlookers the successful embodiment of 'normal' heterosexual identity through this staging of desirability and appropriate sexual behavior for this setting. For example, Dave voices the feelings of many customers when he described how he expects these 'entertainers' to behave in his presence:

> It doesn't matter if they really like me or not, but if they want to receive drinks or a tip they have to pretend that they enjoy my company and I have to believe it…I don't really care to have a long-term relationship at this time, but I *do* want to believe that such a relationship is possible. (emphasis his)

In prostitution, clients are not paying for 'love,' but rather the illusion of affect represented in the act of sexual copulation, since the desirability of the subject is contingent on his or her ability to evoke reciprocal feelings from the other. However, because interactions in Philippine go-go bars may involve genuine emotional attraction, those deceptive demonstrations of arousal become more powerful and thus the imagined potential for sincerity in GRO expressions of sexual desire drive the masculine fantasy. 'Real' expressions of desire – even if they are contrived – provide the customer with an experience of intimacy that goes beyond the impersonal relationships of everyday life. These performances of 'authentic' emotions also provide the woman with the power to manipulate the encounter according to her own wishes.

Moreover, these relationships often represent much more than purely sexual affairs for those involved. In this and other similar settings (Frank 1998, 2002; Prewitt 1989), men who engage in these sexual encounters are interested in the performances of seduction as a display of power, so the existence of affect between customer and GRO is not as important as the credibility of the performance as seen through the eyes of other audience members. As such, the interest expressed by the customer is not necessarily a desire for a sexual(ized) object, but instead, a 'desire for the desire of the other.' This is perhaps most evident in the way male patrons assert themselves as customers within the bar who possess the social, economic and political power to demand attentiveness and

credible or 'sincere' performances from the Filipinas employees who occupy this space of commercialized intimacy.

Steering clear of the orchestrated machinations of the 'typical' prostitute-client encounter is the primary means of achieving those ends, so rather than allowing people to openly negotiate the terms of their relations, the varied cultural discourses, patriarchal practices and government policies have come together to develop a system (complete with its own defined space) that fosters deception and manipulation as part of the socioerotic experience. Regulations and expectations are vague enough to permit a variety of performances and identities according to the wishes of the actors; the managers are there to provide minimal stage direction to maintain their legal standing as well as the atmosphere of sexual pleasures and possibilities. Male bar patrons and female employees either know the customary practices, or they navigate these relations carefully until they develop an understanding of the situation. People can deny that prostitution occurs within the go-go bars of Makati and Angeles because all of the overt allusions to sex-for-money have been disguised through performances that rarely reveal what is 'really' taking place – and even the participants themselves are often deceived.

Go-go bars maintain their fragile existence through an adherence to those few unwritten rules of engagement that suggest multiple possible outcomes. It is this 'structured ambiguity' that allows relations between customers and employees to unfold as they would in a 'normal' encounter between individuals, and this is exactly the type of situation desired by many customers as revealed in their statements about the Philippine go-go bars. In wanting to avoid the appearance of supporting or engaging in prostitution, there is a cooperative effort among all of the interested parties to construct an environment where there is the outward appearance of mutual desire and consent in these relations. The illusion of affect – even when money does exchange hands – serves as an indication of desirability and potency, and whether fabricated or 'real,' performances of kissing, caressing, lingering eye contact, and romantic utterances are always indicative of genuine attraction if the performance is believable.

Many participants think these sexual revelations are a means of uncovering the 'true' self because of the trust and mutuality involved in developing close relationships, and also due to the conceptual positioning of eroticism as a 'private' matter that is not easily 'unveiled' in our everyday encounters with each other. Interaction in the go-go bar and in other liminal sexual spaces such as the Internet (Kibby and Costello 2001; Rival, et al. 1998) or through 'phone sex' services (Flowers 1998) provide avenues for self expression that are not tenable outside of these socioerotic venues, so there is a widespread belief that actors are expressing 'authentic' desires through those sexual performances that take place beyond the gaze of the general public.

The discovery of personal 'facts' during the course of social engagement is a desired experience because it is indicative of social acceptance and intimacy – along with the power that inevitably accompanies such knowledge. Having someone share personal secrets is an act of exclusivity and shows confidence and trust in the ongoing development of a close relationship. However, when the actor is unmasked during the course of performance within the go-go bar, the supporting cast will usually engage in some light-hearted teasing punctuated by the exclamation "see how you are!"[159] The reflection of the audience's reaction discloses to all (including the offending performer) who s/he really 'is' and how the performance deviates from earlier presentations or from what is generally expected of that person. And yet, just as with the aforementioned expressions of 'real' desire, these 'revelations' of a 'true' self are sometimes another theatrical ploy to engender the illusion of intimacy through the staging of confession.

Aside from the excitement of these revealing encounters and the possibility of finding 'true' love, there are many problems when it comes to establishing a lasting union in this transnational setting. As long as the affairs between men and women remain within the spatial and conceptual confines of the go-go bar, the roles and responsibilities tend to follow the designated scripts that inform the customer-employee relationship. However, extending intimacy beyond these boundaries results in significant changes

[159] Women are the one's who usually deploy the phrase in this setting, although men who are regulars in the bars of Angeles and Makati have also added it to their verbal repertoire.

regarding the expectations, identities and performances for those involved. Even though these spaces are identified as sites of sexual autonomy and promiscuity, the monogamous relationship between men and women remains the idyllic model in the imagination, if not in actual practice. Thus, there remains a mixture of trust and suspicion among those male suitors who want to maintain a relationship but cannot be present in the Philippines all the time. Many women with boyfriends overseas continue working in the go-go bar to supplement their income, or more often, to fend off boredom, but this is almost always kept a secret from those admirers who are removed by distance.

Once again the theatrical team of the go-go bar comes into play in fostering and maintaining these conjugal narratives and practices, if only to give hope to others who are seeking romance. The bar environment changes when 'entertainer' and 'customer' are identified as a couple, as the romantic notion of mutual (and monogamous) 'love' informs perceptions. If the 'boyfriend' in question is in town, he is treated with the familiarity reserved for members of the bar 'family,' and the 'girlfriend' employed in the bar is given extra leeway in her work schedule. Co-workers and other customers tend to respect these relationships as 'private' affairs, but sometimes they become involved. In 1998, a young English man returned to Makati to marry his fiancée who supposedly had quit her job in the bar to wait for him in the provinces. The night before their wedding, Harley and his girlfriend at the time (who was a friend of the couple) accompanied them to dinner, where Harley revealed that the young woman had not been in the provinces, but instead she had been sleeping around with other men in Makati. The wedding was called off, and the dejected suitor returned home.

The bar always remains a point of contention when a 'girlfriend' continues to spend time there. Jackie first came to work in the bars of Angeles in 1990. She had a relationship with a serviceman stationed at Clark Air Force Base and gave birth to a boy, but the boyfriend had to leave before the Pinatubo eruption in 1991 and he never returned. When I met Jackie in July 1995, she had another boyfriend in the British Royal Air Force who she planed to marry when he returned later that year. He liked her son,

and was sending her about $800 every other month, but he did not know she was still employed in a bar.

In January 1996, I ran into Jackie and her English boyfriend while strolling down Fields Avenue. She had earlier informed me that he was coming during the holiday season, and she said that he wanted to get married and adopt her son, so this was more than the usual long-distance boyfriend. We went out for dinner and drinks together, and everyone seemed to be having a good time. I saw Jackie again a few weeks later after he had returned home (and she had resumed working in a bar along Fields), and she told me that the relationship had ended much to her dismay. I pressed her on the details of the breakup, and she said that it was mostly due to my presence: he had his suspicions regarding the exact circumstances of Jackie's relationship with me, believing that we were somehow "more than just friends." Jackie said that no amount of explaining could convince him otherwise, as he reasoned that it was impossible for men and women in that setting to have a close relationship that did not involve 'sex.' She said that she did not blame me for the demise of their relationship, although it did become apparent over the following months that she had become more embittered regarding her personal situation, believing that she would never be able to leave this lifestyle.[160]

Women's performances that defy gender norms are acceptable (and in many cases, even preferable) within the confines of these venues, but it is expected that once a woman is 'removed' from the setting that she will revert to an idealized domestic identity. A man will often send money to ensure his 'girlfriend' does not have to continue her employment in the go-go bar, but unless he resides in the Philippines he can never be certain of her activities.[161] Those women who are serious about the relationship will occupy their time with some other endeavor, such as going to the gym or enrolling in

[160] My relationship with her was not necessarily indicative of any sexual activity between us, but instead revealed that she was still in a situation where she was meeting other foreign men – and therefore, the potential for other intimate relationships remained.

[161] Erik Cohen (1986) notes that most of the foreign men who maintain long-distance relationships with Thai go-go dancers usually have only the one girlfriend, but the situation in the Philippines is somewhat different, as many of the men with 'girlfriends'

a vocational school. In some cases, women garner enough support to build a house or start a business in which they immerse themselves.

Despite the prevailing discourses that promote monogamous unions in this setting, women often manipulate several overseas 'boyfriends' at once. They do so primarily to ensure that at least one of the 'boyfriends' will maintain a lengthy relationship in socioerotic conditions that are, at best, uncertain. Juggling these simultaneous intimate relations involves negotiating multiple narratives and performances to ensure that the men do not find out about each other. Adora quit her job as a receptionist in 1997 to move in with her boyfriend who had a condominium in Makati. He was often called away from the Philippines on business, and she would then return to the bar to 'work,' cultivating sexual relations with other men. However, he found out about the other men in her life, and subsequently deposited all of her belongings outside the apartment for her to retrieve. She was upset at the turn of events, as the remaining boyfriend could not provide the same amenities, and she also harbored strong emotional feelings for her former lover. Nevertheless, she vowed never to be "greedy" again when it came to men, and altered her approach to these 'boyfriends.'[162] These efforts also involve considerable expense: during the time we resided together, Tina would amass phone bills amounting to hundreds of dollars a month trying to maintain two or three far-flung relationships with men at the same time, so much of the money that she received from her suitors was put back into sustaining this enterprise.

Relationships are also difficult to maintain when the boyfriend lives in the Philippines. The aforementioned expectations of masculine performance coupled with the ever-present sexual temptations in the 'sexpat' community provide men with the incentive to 'shop' for the best socioerotic match, similar to the tactics taken by women in this setting. Modern sexual discourse within the framework of romantic love implies equality and reciprocity in terms of pleasure and the expression of desire between men and women in heterosexual relations, but the overriding ideology of male sexual 'needs'

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in Angeles or Makati are already married or have a person they identify as a girlfriend in their home countries.

[162] In 2001, she moved to Australia and married a man she described as "nice and quiet."

often structures intimacy so that women are more '(for)giving' when it comes to intercourse (Gavey, et al. 1999; McIntosh 1988).[163] Women often feel that they have to submit to coercive male sexual desires, or that they must accept their partner's infidelities because they cannot go against male 'nature' when it comes to sex.

As much as women would like to abandon their GRO identities and practices once they leave the occupational confines of P. Burgos or Fields Avenue, many of the relationships that emerge from this setting continue the pattern of interaction that is associated with commodified sexual encounters. This is exacerbated by the mobility (geographic and social) of men and the relative immobility of women, where male transience becomes a more or less 'permanent' way of interacting with women so that relations lasting months or years become no different than those which transpire over a few hours. One day, Marnee (a receptionist in Makati), found herself back in the bar after her Australian boyfriend of two years kicked her out of his house:

> He said I was too lazy, just sitting at the house and eating all day… so when I got too fat, he told me to leave his house… I asked him "what am I supposed to do now," and he said "you can go back to the bar where I found you." I had to get all my clothes, and he just gave me a few hundred pesos to cover my fare home.

Her narrative is all too common in this setting, where men use the ambiguity that is built into this system to their advantage in defining the terms of their relationships with women. In Marnee's case, the relationship did not live up to the romantic ideal, as he simply gave her money for the taxi as men do for those women who engage in one-night-stands with 'customers.'[164]

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[163] In the construction of complementary erotic performances within the heterosexual dyad, women play a significant role in reinforcing the mythology of the male sex 'drive' by adopting the caregiver role in assuming responsibility for contraception and safe sex practices. Since male sexuality is viewed as uncontrollable, men are seen as incapable of taking responsibility when it comes to these important matters (Vitellone 2000). This perception of a lack of control among men when it comes to sex contradicts those patriarchal philosophies that identify men as more rational than women (Peletz 1996; Seidler 1987), although these discourses usually address this discrepancy by blaming seductive women for male weakness.

[164] She was relieved, nonetheless, that he told her in person and allowed her to collect her belongings. In many other instances, women are locked out of their boyfriends'

In considering the suitability and sustainability of these relationships outside of the go-go bar environs, it is important to note the objectives of both women and men who seek partners in this setting. Desire, in this case, plays on the notion of lack, where we want what we do not possess. European, American and Australian men are often seeking women who approximate their 'memories' of emphasized femininity, where intimate relations are structured according to the domestic division of labor according to the ideology of 'separate spheres.' Filipino women want the financial security of marriage and living in a 'developed' country (especially if they have children), but they are also looking for that 'modern,' consumerist lifestyle that they envision as part of living in 'the West.' In both examples, the persons are searching for someone who will complement their sense of self through a supporting role in these lifestyle performances, and both foreign men and Filipino women use the transnational space of the go-go bar because they believe they cannot find what they want within their own culture. The men look toward Filipinas to find something that they feel Western women have 'lost' in terms their commitment to domestic (re)production, whereas the Filipina working in the bar looks to Western men to provide her with the 'freedom' of consumption and liberation from 'traditions' of masculine domination. Through narratives and performances, they negotiate identities and the terms of their relationship to fulfill their desires, so that women often continue to embody the domesticity of 'traditional' Filipino femininity in line with the fantasy of foreign men, but many of the women reason that they get 'paid' better by a foreign husband than would be the case with a Filipino spouse.

Since women have more opportunities to become financially independent in the late-capitalist economy and are thus no longer bound to marriage as a socio-economic necessity, the discourse of romantic love and companionship becomes more prominent in their considerations of marital options. But this focus on love as the foundation for companionship in marriage also has its drawbacks. The increasing rationalization of society according to the discourses of modernity, liberty, individualization, and consumer

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residences without notice, and their personal items are discarded or simply given to the next 'girlfriend' (as happened to Adora).

choice makes it more difficult to assess risks for those who seek intimacy within this 'irrational' romantic framework (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Slater 1997; Warr and Pyett 1999). This emphasis on personal happiness in matrimony and other instances of intimacy means that couples must make a greater effort to maintain the relationship during stressful times – people must 'work' on their marriage while they also labor in other aspects of household subsistence and confront other 'real world' issues. Moreover, according to the modern romantic link between marriage and leisure, lovers and spouses can no longer simply be efficient – they must also be 'entertaining.'

Chapter 6
Narrative Re-Visions

> The notion of a narrative of personal experience implies that a person has his or her own experiences, that selves are ultimately discrete entities. At the same time, the unfolding narrative defines selves in terms of others in present, past, and imagined universes. (Ochs and Capps 1996: 28)

To conclude this ethnographic account of activities, identities and desires within the go-go bar I want to return to those issues mentioned at the outset of Chapter 2, namely the discursive power some people use to label and control the behavior of others and the ways in which these 'others' embrace and resist the prevailing imagery to achieve their goals. Discourse – as an ideological abstraction as well as the act of speaking – functions to manipulate social practices toward the realization of personal desires, and people aggressively deploy different ideologies and linguistic devices to create and impart their own sense of self as well as to serve their own longings for social and sexual autonomy. Thus, the authoritative gaze remains fixed on simple representations (such as 'the prostitute' or 'the sex tourist') because most observers do not want to see another perspective that might complicate their own social status or political position. This form of identification and labeling is predicated on the powerlessness of categorized persons that, in turn, is used to bolster the power of those who construct women and men in such a manner. Many people want 'sex workers' to be poor, uneducated, and otherwise 'disempowered' so that we can look at them lasciviously, contemptuously, or pitifully – but never respectfully.[165]

[165] In focusing on fashionable terms such as 'empowerment,' few have taken the opportunity to examine how such ideas are defined, much less implemented within complex social settings (Kabeer 1999; Kaler 2001). Empowerment for individuals involves the ability to make choices and being able to achieve personal goals as defined by so-called 'disempowered' people themselves. Sex workers are often denigrated as clinging to a 'false consciousness' as though they cannot even comprehend their own

Domination assumes many forms in this setting, and even those who wish to help women in the sex industry are also responsible for limiting personal expression according to their own interests. For some (e.g. Barry 1995; Enloe 1989), the prostitution of 'Third World women' serves as a political trope for the discussion of women's subordination in many aspects of social life, using the 'injured identity' of women in the sex industry to signify the suffering experienced by all women (Doezema 2001). Many feminists and non-government organizations purport to have the best interests of 'sex workers' in mind, but adhere to a conservative, middle-class political agenda that views women in the go-go bars simply as 'victims' who must be brought back into respectable society (Cook 1998).[166] Public health officials concerned with the spread of AIDS also speak of empowering sex workers, but only in terms of enabling them to follow medico-moral ideologies that demonize what is considered 'unsafe' sex. Ironically, these perspectives ultimately reveal the hegemonic hold of patriarchy over matters of gender and sexuality because these 'feminist' discourses replicate paternal control over women through the formulation of a sexual taxonomy that necessarily opposes individual agency in the construction of a marginalized other for political purposes (Hostetler and Herdt 1998).

Power is both a condition as well as a practice whereby most people abide by the recognized sociopolitical hierarchy and those with authority use various institutions to maintain the structure of domination. Intimate encounters between men and women in the go-go bar are informed by social and political ideologies (promoted by the

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predicament simply because they have different choices and goals in life than other women. Furthermore, the empowerment that women experience while working in go-go bars is not always recognized by those who can only see them as 'disempowered' according to a 'dominant' viewpoint of gender and sexuality (Dominelli 1986; Suzuki 2000; Taylor 1993).

[166] Women working in go-go bars and other venues associated with the sex industry are often vilified by their middle-class female compatriots because they give all Filipinas a 'bad name' in much the same manner as undocumented Filipino emigrants reflect poorly on those who cross borders in a more legitimate fashion (Rafael 1997). The presence of large numbers of 'sex workers' gives the impression that all Filipinas are commodities for sexual and domestic services, and regulations that limit the movement of Filipino women throughout society shows how pervasive and widespread this imagery is in the minds of foreigners and locals alike.

entertainment and news media) that those in power invoke to maintain their influence over others. So rather than hedonistically exploring alternative lifestyles, most dancers and receptionists embrace marriage and 'traditional' family structures (such as the gendered division of labor) as appropriate goals. Men too follow the conservative dictates of a hegemonic masculinity in their singular pursuit of 'sex' (as defined by the 'coital imperative'), eschewing other forms of intimacy and socioerotic interaction because society has defined no other means of signifying what it is to be a 'man.' Go-go bars in the Philippines are still constructed as transgressive spaces where people extend the boundaries of sexual behavior, but participants arrive on the scene with conservative values from the 'real' world and they tend to police each other to keep activities within certain guidelines.[167] Thus, even though the foundational representations associated with go-go bars and other forms of 'prostitution' have been set apart as distinct practices to promote a particular vision of 'mainstream' society, people should recognize that the relationships, identities and practices within these stigmatized spaces emerge from the same normative discourses of individualization, consumption, romance, and socioeconomic development that everyone follows.

The privileging of structural models for human behavior in these discourses ignores the fact that individuals, while constrained by cultural and political values as well as specific historical conditions, are still able to make meaningful decisions regarding their lives. So while women in the sex industry are socially devalued because they do not submit to those mores put forth by the state, the Church, and other members of society, many of them still feel empowered because they are able to enact sexual and other consumptive desires as they strive for a more 'modern' lifestyle (Kelsky 2001; Ong 1987; 1991; Wardlow 2002). Earnings from their labor in the go-go bar allow women to

[167] Women keep each other in line through gossip, although because of their role in the go-go bar (as employees) they are given greater leeway in terms of behavior. Men also try to maintain decorum, in part, because they recognize the tenuous political position of these venues and they do not want to do anything that might jeopardize the continued operation of these establishments. Gossip among men is also used maintain a masculine go-go bar ethos, but known pedophiles seen in the company of children and men who are excessively abusive toward women in public are often subjected to violent retribution.

redefine their roles and responsibilities, and since most GROs keep their employment in these venues a secret from family members, those wages above and beyond the minimum wage obtained in their fictive occupations (as factory workers or waitresses in restaurants) are also hidden from relatives.[168] In this case, social marginality due to the stigma of deviance compels women toward illusory performances when it comes to relations with their kin in the provinces, but it is this deception that enables them to pursue goals and desires that would otherwise be unattainable.

The expression of myriad desires – sexual, material, social – by Filipina dancers and receptionists and their efforts to achieve satisfaction (defined as 'happiness' or 'success') through these various presentations of self reveal the extent to which agency is realized within this liminal, yet circumscribed, setting. As Joanna Phoenix (2000) found in her analysis of narratives from British prostitutes, the interplay between institutional structures and individual agency is also evident in the statements and performances of Filipina 'entertainers,' yet in these and other marginal situations, agency remains undertheorized because these activities of resistance and resignification do not follow the patriarchal models of domination and opposition that are usually privileged in discussions of power (McNay 2000). Thus, the notion that women can express agency through the willing consumption of imagery associated with the go-go bar is an indefensible position to those who cannot ascribe any redeeming value to such an identity.

The apparent paradox of people 'choosing' to engage in a stigmatized vocation or intentionally adopting what is perceived to be a subordinate identity illustrates not only the difficulty people experience in making these personal decisions, but the open discussion of these issues also shows how the rest of us try to 'make sense' of these situations in constructing our own social world. Accordingly, narrative serves a key function in mediating between the discourses of determinism and volunteerism, providing a constructivist perspective that involves agency on the part of those who develop stories that reflect their own personal accomplishments and perspectives.

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[168] Women generally use this 'extra' money to fulfill their own requirements and desires, but many also save for future investment, or in case of emergency.

rewriting the 'entertainer' and the 'customer'

As part of the continuing effort to better understand the motivations of people in the sex industry, there have been several attempts to develop typologies of men and women who engage in these types of intimate encounters (Askew 1999a; de Albuquerque 1999; Erickson and Tewksbury 2000; Oppermann 1998; Ryan and Kinder 1996). These classificatory schemes focus primarily on the intent of the individual in question – whether the 'sex tourist' plans to pursue these intimate arrangements before s/he sets out on vacation, or if s/he engages in these activities only after the opportunity arises during the course of his or her journey.[169] Performances within the go-go bars of Angeles and Makati also reveal similar distinct patterns of behavior that are amenable to such generalizations, although a closer examination of individuals over time uncovers a variety of practices that women and men use to resist these simple acts of categorization.

Ambiguity in the customer-entertainer encounter allows both parties to configure the relationship so as to avoid activities that would construct it as one of 'prostitution,' thus avoiding stigmatizing labels of 'sex worker' and 'sex tourist.' Male customers and female employees in the Philippine go-go bars frame their transactions in non-economic fashion (thus avoiding the charges of 'prostitution') by describing money as a 'gift,' or situating remuneration within the masculine construction of provider / protector. Armin Günther's analysis, in particular, reveals how men distance themselves from the 'sex tourist' identity in their narratives, employing various arguments against such classification:

- the argument of lacking intent – person does not intend to have sex with a local;
- the argument of lacking restriction – person does not restrict his/her vacation to having sex with locals;
- the argument of lacking promiscuity – person does not have sex with multiple locals;
- the argument of lacking amorality – person did not allow sexual impulses to control behavior;

[169] In this general discussion of the 'sex tourist' identity, I am including both men and women in this category, although my analysis of 'customers' in the Philippine go-go bars involves men only (for accounts of female sex tourism, see de Albuquerque 1999; Karch and Dann 1981; Taylor 2001).

- the argument of lacking payment – person did not pay for sex. (1998: 72-73)

Customers in Philippine go-go bars use all of these explanations to justify their behavior and position themselves beyond the 'sex tourist' designation, but some have no qualms about openly pursuing their sexual desires according to the ideals of consumer sovereignty.

> This place is amazing… I have only been here seven days, but I've already slept with ten women… now I'm getting bored with it though, and want something different – I think I will just stick with one girl my final week here. But I will definitely come back. (American tourist in Angeles)

Individuals also exhibit different behaviors depending on the socioerotic environment, so these labels tend to shift with changing circumstances. In the example above, the American resembles the stereotypical 'sex tourist' in his gluttonous approach to sleeping with the most women in the shortest amount of time; however, he approximates the monogamous ideal of "stick[ing] with one girl" toward the end of his trip. Harley exhibits similar alterations, evolving from the 'sex tourist' to the 'sexpat' – maintaining a steady 'girlfriend,' but carousing with others as the opportunity arises – during his residence in Makati, and then reverting to 'sex tourist' when he travels to another country. However, he recently admitted that he is "bored" with the current sexual selection in Angeles and Makati, and wants to relocate to another country where he can relive those experiences that he had when he first moved to the Philippines. As with many bar regulars, the erotic appeal of the go-go bar diminishes with familiarity and the sense that these activities are no longer transgressive (McNair 2002).

A few men tailor their presentations to set themselves apart from the mass of (stereo)typical 'customers' seen stumbling from one bar to another. One case in particular stands out: a German on long holiday would go into the same bar just off Fields Avenue in Angeles every Thursday evening, pay a woman's barfine, take her to dinner, and she would then go home on her own (or wherever else she wanted to go). He took a

different GRO out each week (employees set up a rotation),[170] and the ladies always looked forward to this brief respite from the everyday grind. He later explained his activities this way:

> [T]hese girls, I feel sorry for them… Of course, I feel sorry for all the girls here [on Fields Avenue] but especially these girls because they have to work in such a crappy bar. I just want to show them a good time for a while, and let them know that not all the customers they meet are bad men.

By revealing another version of masculinity to these women, he was attempting to set himself apart from other customers who in his eyes are "bad men" because of the way they treat women. But his pity – and resulting performance – was reserved for this one venue, as he returned to the usual 'customer' behavior when he went to other bars.

Women also organize their stories and behaviors in a manner that challenges simple characterizations, providing an important counter-text to the historical and ideological narratives of patriarchal rationality. On several occasions, Arlene described how she visited other childhood friends from the province who were also working in different go-go bars in Manila, and she used these occasions to represent herself as being in a better position than other women in the sex industry:

> You know, I am really lucky to be working in this place [on Burgos]… I saw my friend working in a bar in Pasay city that has lots of Filipino customers, and it was so very different. It was really dark and smelled like *ihi* ('urine')… all the girls there were using *shabu*, and they take their clothes off when they dance. She also has to go out with customers almost every day because the owners tell them to. I was so scared for her, but happy to know that I don't have to work in a place like that.

Just as the go-go bar is a site of transgression wherein people confront the normative restrictions of daily performances and identities, it is also a site of transcendence where those who wish to construct or maintain social distinctions can also find pleasure in identifying their 'exalted' position through the embodiment of desire and disgust in their interactions with the other. Subjectivity is often framed as a passive approach in addressing these and other differences (McNay 2000), but it is evident that

[170] The bar in question was particularly small (even by Angeles standards), had no air-conditioning, and only four dancers.

people can approach difference in a creative fashion through the creation of their own narratives and performances. The use of discourses of 'respectability' offsets the images of ordinary prostitutes or sex workers within the GRO imagination, particularly for those women working in what are considered 'high class' clubs in Makati:

> I would never go back to work in a bar in Angeles… they wear those *pangit* ('ugly') clothes and shoes, the bars are dirty, and the customers are all too old and poor. I am glad I came here to Burgos because I make more money and can buy nicer clothes… there [in Angeles], all the women look like prostitutes. (dancer in Makati)

Women can thus alter their identity by working in a different space – in this case, the transnational, urban enclave of Makati – or by adopting the appropriate masks of propriety in relation to those women who fit the popular image of 'prostitutes.'

Filipinas working in these establishments do not view this temporary occupational choice as a career any more than they consider it a reflection of their personal identity. For some, it is a provisional measure to provide money for a family emergency, school tuition, or financial support until they find a better job; for others, working in a go-go bar is a means of achieving some other personal goal that will result in better conditions through marriage and/or migration. As with the male customers, they will structure their personal narratives and performances according to whatever goal they are pursuing at the time, so the dancer or receptionist hoping to find a spouse in this setting will adopt a more *malambing* presentation that markets those 'caring' attributes that she would employ with a husband – provided that the customer in question is someone she would consider marrying. Conversely, if she is only interested in fostering a short-term relationship for financial gain, she can use a variety of different presentations depending on the mood of the customer.

Regardless of their intentions or desires, women generally want to keep their occupational activities in the go-go bar a secret – even from each other. Arlene recently married an American, and I helped her through the processing of her immigration papers. However, she did not want anyone else in the bar to know of her impending marriage.

> I have only told you and my mother and father… I don't really want anyone else here to know because I want to start over with my life… yes, they are my friends, but only like a *barkada* for the bar, not really friends I share everything in my life.

Another woman who moved from one bar to another across the street in P. Burgos to work as a waitress also discussed her situation with me in hushed tones, fearing that her co-workers might uncover her previous employment as a receptionist:

> No one here knows I used to work as a receptionist, they all think this is my first time… I don't know why, I just don't want anyone here to know who I was before.[171]

The opposition expressed by women to an open discussion of their condition stems from their basic aversion to public disclosure in a climate where, historically, any mention of the sex industry, no matter how constructive, has resulted in oppressive policing.

> I talked to the girls last week about getting together a group to talk about their problems, but they aren't really interested… sure, they want things to be better here in the bar, better salaries and commissions, better working conditions, but they don't want to create any problems… most of them, they just say to me "*ate*, I am only going to be here [working in the bar] for a short while," so they don't think that they should spend time on these issues, but look at them now… two or three years later they are still here, and they have the same complaints! But they all want to believe that this work is just temporary, so they don't want to put any more time in it than they have to. (manager in Makati)

Many resist the idea of labor organization for the same reason they are averse to the 'sex worker' label: any discursive act that foregrounds the 'work' aspect detracts from the ideology of 'love,' leading to conflict in their attempts to establish conjugal relations with men. Additionally, the acceptance of a 'sex worker' identity would involve the incorporation of other undesirable attributes associated with social deviance and/or psychological pathology. So even though the various strands of feminist activism seek

[171] Women who used to work in go-go bars go to great lengths to hide these 'before' identities relating to their employment as 'entertainers.' Especially when introducing me to family in the provinces – or new friends in America – it is important to develop novel narratives of self and association with others (i.e. explaining how she met me – as a foreign male – in Manila).

better working conditions and improved rights for women in these establishments, the practice of arguing these positions only leads to problems when the women themselves ascribe different meanings to their activities and relationships.

Some observers argue that people involved in prostitution have greater difficulty in achieving an acceptable sense of self because modern identities are so inextricably linked to sexuality, which are, in turn, espoused or denigrated according to local cultural meanings and sociopolitical discourses (Pateman 1988; O'Connell Davidson 1998). In developing these contingent narratives of self, storytellers must account for the presence of others to construct a socially acceptable persona, but this does not mean that discourses of sexuality, race, or other cultural considerations determine individual practices of identity formation. Others' confessions of self offer numerous alternatives for those seeking coherence in their own presentations, so women and men in go-go bars are always on the lookout for alternative identities and performances that might better serve their interests. Thus, the subject 'consumes' an identity through a process where s/he selects specific (re)presentations from a range of possible narrative templates, and incorporates these into a more-or-less seamless biographical portrayal. So even though the individual subject is often constrained by the institutions and dominant discourses of society, s/he is still in a position to select those narratives and practices that are suitable for a particular time and place.

Of particular interest in analyzing these different practices is the recognition that the self is not some fixed entity, but rather "a *practical project* of everyday life" (Holstein and Gubrium 2000: 70, emphasis in original), where the performative representation of subjective agency is embedded in mundane and otherwise inconsequential or reflexive behaviors and descriptive stories. Go-go bar employees readily implement a variety of narratives to suit whatever situation arises during the course of their interactions with others. Most customers do not care about the GRO's personal histories, so the women will simply approach these men with the intent of supporting masculine egos, limiting their subjective interests to lady's drinks and the pleasure that accompanies these performances of leisure and sexual permissiveness. For the customer who wishes to

delve deeper into the background of his female companion(s), the dancer or receptionist is usually ready to supply a biographical story that satisfies the desires of everyone involved. If the customer appears to be considerate in his demeanor, she may present herself as a 'dutiful daughter' to garner sympathy (and lady's drinks), enabling him to incorporate the imagery of a 'gentlemanly savior' or intimate confidant.[172]

However, for all their efforts to exert agency in selecting these particular stories and identities, many female go-go bar employees still find themselves subjected to broad characterizations emanating from observers positioned on the 'outside.' This is largely due to the preeminence of a Western perspective on 'sex work' / prostitution within the literature, where the stereotypical streetwalker embodies society's fears regarding 'deviant' women in public spaces. Drug-addicted, diseased and abused, the narratives of these women almost always include examples of behaviors that they employ to separate sex-as-work from their experiences of sexual pleasure with boyfriends or husbands.[173] Having established the diversity of practices and identities within the go-go bars of Makati and Angeles, I maintain that 'the prostitute' as a definable category does not exist in the Philippines. Instead, what one encounters are dancers, receptionists, and GROs; freelancers, streetwalkers, and call girls; singalong girls, massage attendants, and DIs (dance instructors); *akyat barko* ('ship climbers') and *bontogs* ('birds').[174] The list is almost as infinite as the situations in which women, men and children find themselves

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[172] Others who venture into the bar with the intent of 'empowering' women (researchers, feminist critics, etc.) are also offered (re)presentations of feminine victimhood that enables these 'customers' to also embody the 'savior' identity.

[173] The situation in Philippine go-go bars is more complex, primarily because men initially identified as 'customers' may then become 'boyfriends' or even husbands. Presentations of self take on different meanings when women are trying to evaluate the potential for long-term monogamous unions within a space that is most often associated with multiple transient relationships.

[174] *Bontog* refers to a local bird that goes from nest to nest, and is used to describe the actions of local teenage girls who have "promiscuous sex." A newspaper article entitled "Flesh trade thrives in Davao's fishport" (*Today* [Manila], March 30, 1997) notes that the girls called '*bontog*' do not necessarily get paid for sexual intercourse, but according to one official "[t]hese are the youth who wouldn't mind having sex for free beers and good times."

within the local sex industry. It is important to distinguish between the different environments and activities that occur within the sex industry to avoid broad generalizations that ignore the diversity of circumstances for people who are linked to this and other similarly stigmatized categories.

As knowledgeable actors within the go-go bar setting, women engage in performances that entail active desire as well as passive desirability, and mediating their identities through these different discursive domains itself becomes an act that entails agency on their part, even when they adopt a position of powerlessness.[175] The fact that many bar employees are able to develop and maintain identities that they themselves choose (as 'dutiful Filipinas,' 'modern women' or simply 'girls') in the presence of overwhelming efforts to define them as 'sex workers' or 'prostituted women' is a testament to their resolve and the agency they display in creating their own discursive community based on a different set of standards and motivations. For example, S.E. Marshall notes that sex associated with prostitution tends to objectify the participants, where the 'sex worker' sees only the money s/he earns while the 'client' is only interested in the service she provides, and thus

> Mutual pleasure… is not a part of prostitution. The prostitute does not get paid to experience sexual pleasure. S/he does not se his/her body as a source of his/her pleasure in the transaction, nor indeed is the customer's body seen in that way… (1999: 146)

It is clear that most relationships in the go-go bar are far more complex than those encounters involving the simple exchange of money for coitus as represented in 'prostitution.' Certainly, there are occasions when one or both parties are simply interested in gaining something (material wealth, socio-psychological satisfaction) without going through the process of 'knowing' the other person, but the construction of

[175] In accommodating the dominant discourses of feminine passivity and subordination in the go-go bar, women provide what Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps (1996) describe as fundamentalistic narratives to support these communal norms. In contrast, relativistic narratives are employed when participants in social interaction want to make sense of their experiences or offer alternative viewpoints.

the go-go bar also entails a greater investment in socioerotic interaction and performance because that is what everyone desires.

For some of the actors, the formation of identities in these encounters does not involve the same level of intersubjectivity as represented in the discourse of romance, but rather a common understanding of the consumerist perspective within the social market that informs the construction of self and other in this setting. So while flirtation may be considered the quintessential socioerotic activity because "it is neither instrumental nor consequential" (Weitman 1998: 90), within the go-go bar, it is instrumental and does have consequences insofar as the man identified as the 'customer' is paying for this type of response from women through his sexual advances, and, as 'employees,' women must demonstrate attraction to earn a living. However, there remains the constant potential for achieving a 'pure' relationship that does not involve the intimations of prostitution, and it is this aspect of the fantasy – where the necessary fictions of go-go bar performance ultimately reveal 'real' persons – that prompts men and women to invest considerable time and energy in manufacturing dynamic narratives and performances during their interactions with each other.

Through the consumption of these images and identities, women achieve a modicum of autonomy as desiring subjects in appropriating the gaze, even though they are acquiescing to the desires of others through their performances of Filipina femininity that, by definition, require objectification. As desire entails the commodification of social relations and gendered performances within the late-capitalist economy, there remains the possibility for challenging heteronormative practices. For example, Karen Kelsky (2001) shows how Japanese women have revised the prevailing gender hierarchy through their consumption of Western goods and men, and while Filipino women working in the go-go bars do not have the same political or purchasing power as their female counterparts in Japan, they do engage in similar practices of consumption through their commodification of male customers. Marginal spaces such as go-go bars also become sites in which to challenge hegemonic ideology because the process of forming symbols and discourses to control sexual performance also creates alternative

possibilities for the construction of identities (Butler 1990; Foucault 1978; Robinson 2000).[176]

A crucial element in the promotion of romantic imagery is the designation of the individual as a locus of 'freedom.' These visions of modernity are particularly salient in the transnational spaces of urban go-go bars in the Philippines, so that women working in these establishments appropriate diverse performances as a means of transforming the social and symbolic capital of imagined femininity into economic capital. From displays of overt eroticism to coyness, GROs are simply applying what the various institutions (most notably, religion, state, and education) have promoted as the proper functions for women in society in accordance with the notion of what it means to be *maganda* ('beautiful') in every aspect of feminine presentation. Most of the dancers and receptionists have learned to perceive their bodies according to the fetishized desires of the masculine gaze, so they engage in self-commodification through their performances of consumption, learning the latest dance steps and purchasing various fashion accessories and cosmetics to maintain the 'pleasing appearance'[177] of feminine comportment that is embedded in our corporeal construction of gendered difference. What renders these particular performances of femininity unacceptable in the eyes of critics is that they take place beyond the prescribed realm of 'private' domesticity – staged within the public market for all to consume.

From a political standpoint, the identification of the prostitute / sex worker as a 'victim' needs to be reconceptualized to enable the development of women as agents (Carpenter 1998), recognizing that the social legitimization of these and other informal sexual relationships signifies a shift in dominant mores and gendered imagery. The

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[176] While the go-go bar is often represented as a site where masculinity is reinforced through performances of domination, one also finds situations where men assume a submissive role by allowing women to control the sexual encounter (Frank 2002; Liepe-Levinson 2002; Ryan and Kinder 1996).

[177] The phrase 'pleasing appearance' is often used in advertisements that grace the doorways of those establishments seeking women to work as GROs. It serves as a euphemism for all things feminine that are required for the job: youth, physical beauty, as well as a good personality and positive attitude toward serving the desires of male customers.

social and legal barriers that deny recognition of prostitution and the myriad ancillary forms of sexual 'entertainment' from a labor standpoint leads to situations where women are at greater risk because they do not possess the same status as other 'workers,' yet the increasing pornificiation of popular culture and eroticisation of the economy legitimizes the identity of the 'sex worker' within the realm of popular culture and validates his or her activities according to the dominant imagery of consumerist desires and commodification.[178] Within the dynamic cultural setting of Philippine society, 'mistresses' may now also be classified as 'wives,' enacting the same performances of domestic intimacy as those who are bound by the marital contract (see White 1990), and the 'bold' transmission of sexualized female imagery pervades the media and advertising industries to the extent that the performances enacted within go-go bars now extend into the 'public' for all to gaze upon.

For all of the evidence pointing to tremendous changes in local discourses and practices regarding sexuality, policies continue to focus on correcting the behaviors and desires of individuals without addressing the social structures that sustain inequalities, so the efforts of men and women to define new identities and narratives related to socioerotic interaction fall on the deaf ears of those who want to maintain the heterosexist, reproductive models of masculine domination to further their own goals. This discursive perpetuation of sexual difference and domination is aided by the symbolic economy of images and ideas where people succumb to the existing relations of power as a means of achieving the social and political capital they desire. Participants in go-go bar interactions have an opportunity to generate their own meanings and identities as

[178] There is a growing movement to decriminalize women involved in 'sex work,' although in many cases, the 'customers' are then criminalized ("Making it hard for sex buyers" *Philippine Star*, May 25, 2002; Bernstein 2001). This approach to legislation mistakenly focuses on individual identities (as 'prostitutes' or 'customers') rather than the illegal act itself, which necessarily involves both parties. Thus, criminalizing one person in the relationship has the same effect on the other so that neither can be considered legally involved in an illegal act to which they consented. In light of this perpetual conundrum, there is also talk of legalizing prostitution in the Philippines ("Legalizing prostitution" *Philippine Star*, March 15, 2002).

consumers and producers of these images insofar as they recognize the desires of other actors when formulating their own sense of self.

As the proponents of these competing discourses vie for social, political, and economic superiority, the Filipino women and foreign men who find their way to the go-go bars of Makati and Angeles continue to challenge conservative ideologies by creating new personal narratives, enacting innovative practices related to the presentation of self, and developing varied means of expressing desire through these socioerotic relationships. What remains to be seen is if they can find acceptance for these transformations when those who possess the power to recognize such efforts refuse to consider any act of subjective agency other than their own.

Conclusion
Makati, February 2003

This ethnographic account of go-go bars in Makati and Angeles concludes here, but the stories of people and events continue unabated by the departure of those who have passed through these spaces and this text. Marriage, migration and other transitional events alter the social makeup just as periodic shifts in public opinion or government surveillance create temporary adjustments in practices (such as the occasional suspension of bar fines). Yet the basic structure of this interactive, erotic 'entertainment' persists as a model for heterosexual behavior and gendered relations in society, inspiring an environment in which people are able to act upon their myriad desires through the construction of fluid narratives and performances. The marginality of the go-go bar encourages men and women to adopt different personae and the fantasy of these experiences endure because the people who inhabit the go-go bar as employees and customers demand the 'freedom' to consume and otherwise pursue their desires in this fashion.

For most people, the pleasure involved in crafting and participating in these personal biographies is an incomplete process, as the stigma associated with identification as a 'sex worker' or 'customer' entails a certain amount of secrecy regarding those activities and aspirations that extend beyond the boundaries of the go-go bar. Having invested time, money, and considerable effort in developing these relationships and theatrical presentations, we want to know how these intimate scripts conclude: does the downtrodden *probinsyana* find her 'Prince Charming' among the drunken masses, or does she meet a more tragic end that plays on our fears concerning the anonymous, indifferent metropolis? The absence of closure in these biographies creates problems for those whose own sense of self is connected to narrative outcomes involving others since a cooperative, intersubjective engagement provides the validation for individual identities and performances in any social setting.

Perhaps the most common (and traumatic) example of narrative disjuncture in the go-go bar involves the 'disappearance' of a boyfriend or girlfriend: since sexual and gendered identities are largely dependent on the presence of a 'significant other,' the sudden absence of an intimate referent calls the subject's presentation of self into question. Biographies originating in the go-go bar almost always come to an abrupt 'end' when the subject departs from the stage without indicating destination or intent – as happened when Arlene left the bar to marry an American without telling any of her co-workers.

There are, however, examples where these biographies continue on to the next 'chapter' in a person's life, particularly when people return after an extended absence to maintain friendships and narrative continuity. Irene quit working as a receptionist three years ago when she became pregnant, but she has kept in touch with her *barkada* ('peer group') in the bar through occasional visits. The support of her family in the *probinsya* provided her with the means to leave the abusive father of her child (a man from the Middle East she describes as "very bad"), and she recently passed the licensing exam to become a registered nurse, securing a lucrative job in Canada in the process. In addition to her tales of economic and social mobility, she also shows pictures of her daughter who 'models' in local advertising campaigns. I asked her about the details of her overseas contract, wondering if she would be able to renew it after the initial two-year period or if she would have to come back to the Philippines. "Of course, I want to find someone to marry while I am there. That would be better" she replied with a coquettish smile.

Irene's story of transcendence shows how she has been able to accomplish her goals through her performative competence in embodying the different scripts of femininity and citizenship. Such accounts also provide hope to those who remain in the bar – examples that others can follow or 'consume' as narrative templates for success. Not everyone is able to supply a 'happy ending' to their bar stories, but all stories do reach some sort of 'conclusion' insofar as they no longer serve the interests of the bar denizens, and there are always new actors who are willing to uphold the dominant scripts by adopting the masks of compulsory/hegemonic heterosexuality. Like the rotation of

dancers at the end of each song, when one woman leaves the bar to start a new chapter in her life another steps off a bus from the *probinsya* ready to take her place on the stage. And so we watch – longingly – hoping she will perform as expected. However, as any employee or regular customer of the go-go bar can tell you, the only thing you can anticipate with any certainty is that people will not perform as expected.

We want to believe in these fabrications of self and other because our desires for physical pleasure, financial rewards, or psychological affirmation are fulfilled through our interaction with like-minded individuals who are seeking similar experiences. There is no other reason for the existence of the go-go bar or for being in such an establishment other than to satisfy our 'needs' for these socioerotic relations and representations. Even those of us who approach this setting from a supposedly detached perspective are pursuing precisely the same desires as the GROs and customers that we critique: validating our views of human sexuality, earning money or other forms of capital through our 'expert' analyses and portrayals, or satisfying some expressive desire to support or challenge the legitimacy of this space and these relationships. We are all 'customers' in that we deploy the objectifying gaze to get what we want through the construction of others; we are all 'dancers' using the stage to (re)present our visions of gender, sexuality, and society through self-expression.

I walked into Papillon today, and noticed that Tina was more animated than usual. She showed me photos of someone she described as "the man I am going to marry" (he is a relatively young Dutchman she met while he was on vacation in the Philippines). Other waitresses and receptionists gathered around, and we went through the ritual of perusing the photos, discussing his physical appearance and commenting on Tina's 'good fortune' in acquiring someone who is so attractive. Never mind that he is lacking a couple of M's in the scale of customer desirability since he is neither *matanda* ('old') nor *mayaman* ('wealthy'); according to Tina, he is *mabait* ('kind'), which usually takes precedence in these conjugal considerations – especially after many fruitless years of attempting to find a marital prospect who is *mayaman*. She is traveling to the Netherlands in March to see if that is what she really wants, but she is tentative, uncertain of what lies ahead in the

future if she chooses to leave the comfort and the security of life in the Philippines. I then lapsed into my familiar role as *kuya* ('older brother'), attempting to allay her concerns and provide her with some practical information.

Ironically, Martin – a long-time (former) boyfriend of Tina's – was in town on business (he lives in Australia, coming to the Philippines twice a year). Their relationship over the years has been a tempestuous affair, and yet they remain close friends and doting parents of a two-year old daughter. We all went out for dinner and drinks at various bars, taking in the wide variety of entertainment options that have spring-up along P. Burgos in recent months. Several bars now have cabaret shows that exhibit a more artistic alternative to the standard subdued forms of dance that is presented in most venues. There are also new clubs that offer extensive light displays and other special effects to create an atmosphere that overwhelms the senses, attracting more customers and employees from other venues as entrepreneurs continue their new-and-improved approach to marketing sexual excess. We wandered from bar to bar, Martin enjoying the novel ambiance of new establishments while Tina was talking to her friends and gazing upon the surroundings with a critical and comparative eye that she would undoubtedly employ in her own approach to management.

I found our carousing a refreshing departure from what has become a tedious enterprise – the hardships of the Philippine economy constantly reflected in the attitudes and practices of women and men in this setting. Stories of privation circulate among women with greater frequency, leading to complaints among some regular customers who find such accounts "depressing." However, there was no evidence of melancholy or despair this evening as all the bars seemed to be crowded, and I happened upon several men and women I had not seen in many months (or, in some cases, years). Everybody in our group had an enjoyable experience this evening as we continued the convoluted 'dance' of consumption and storytelling, engaging in countless creative performances of 'sex' and 'self.' At the conclusion of the evening, we all reaffirmed our desire to "do this again" – to re-live our shared narratives of leisure, eroticism, and friendship – although we also realized that this would probably be the last time we would all be together. And

so we parted ways once again, not knowing how the story will conclude but looking forward to sharing new accounts when (and if) we meet again.

It is four o'clock in the morning, and even though my narrative ends here, the tales of 'entertainment' in the go-go bars of Makati and Angeles continue…

Glossary

AIDS – Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

balikbayan – 'one who returns home'; used to describe someone returning to the Philippines after an extended time away – may refer to a short-term visitor on vacation, or a Filipino who is returning to live in the Philippines after the completion of an overseas contract

barangay – 'village'; smallest geopolitical unit in the Philippine hierarchy of governance

barkada – 'peer group'; in the go-go bar, this term refers to a loose collection of co-workers who coordinate their performances (*barkada* in the *barangay* setting involves long-term relations through a more comprehensive practice of interaction and socialization)

barfine – payment for a go-go bar employee to leave work early; usually paid by the customer to the bar manager, the woman then receives approximately half of the amount as a commission (on occasion, women also pay their own barfine to go out before their shift is over)

bastos – 'rude'; common term used to describe customers and/or sexual activities within the go-go bar

'bold' – term used to describe the display of nudity or a woman who engages in such performances; in the context of local values it is often a stigmatizing label, but may also be interpreted in a positive light when connoting resistance to sexual mores

'dad' – part of the local vernacular used to describe government officials who assume a paternal / protective relationship regarding their constituents

GRO – guest relations officer; official occupational designation for women working as receptionists and hostesses in go-go bars and karaoke lounges (also generally applied to dancers in go-go bars)

japayuki – 'one who goes to Japan'; a euphemism for 'prostitute' since most Filipino migrants in Japan are female 'entertainers' working in the sex industry

lady's drink – beverage purchased by the customer for an employee in the go-go bar; employees receive a commission from each lady's drink they earn (approximately 40-50% of drink cost)

maganda – 'beautiful'; when describing a woman as *maganda*, it refers to physical appearance or bodily comportment according to notions of Philippine femininity

malambing – 'loving' or 'caring'; an essential quality of Filipino femininity, it represents the ideal means of relating to sexual partners or family members

malayo – 'far away'; as this term relates to physical distance from family, it has an ambiguous meaning: people long for the company of relatives, but also cherish the 'independence' they experience as a result of migration

mamasan – female bar manager

probinsya – 'province'; refers to a geographic designation as well as a conceptual distinction that positions rural people and spaces as 'traditional' or 'backward'

SHC – Social Hygiene Clinic; part of the municipal or city health structure, it ostensibly provides reproductive health care to the entire community, but is primarily associated with preventing the spread of sexually transmitted infections through the compulsory periodic examination of 'entertainers'

STI – sexually transmitted infection

shabu – methamphetamine hydrochloride

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