

Deviant Places, Deviant Networks: An Ethnographic Understanding of Underground Criminality in Rural Kentucky

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ABSTRACT

Integral to a basic understanding of the criminal organization of illicit markets is the concept of social networks. Those networks are usually conceived of as interactions between people which form identifiable nodes. This research seeks to extend the conceptualization of criminal networks to include Rodney Stark called "kinds of places." For two years, this research involved extensive observation and informal interviewing of employees and customers at several businesses in a rural Kentucky community. It was found that those "places" created physical nodes for an intricate network of underground criminality, involving prostitution, drug trade, and gambling, in which the various actors aided and protected one another.

This research explores the operations of social networks in the organization of illicit entrepreneurship. The observations of crime networks took place over a period of nearly three years in a small city in the central United States. The observations were conducted at three separate locations and strongly suggest that the concept of place is a key variable that should be considered in analyzing social network activity in illicit markets. This paper focuses only on the primary and original location, a gentleman's club in a rural Kentucky community. Price-Glynn (2010) states the importance of studying a gentleman's club in her own ethnography, positing that a researcher must "examine how the space itself is organized socially and economically...how women and men negotiate interacts with each other and the club itself, as well as whose interest strip clubs serve, why it serves them, and how" (pp. 3). Baker (2009) discusses how gentlemen's clubs are hotbeds for criminal activity, namely prostitution and the drug trade. However, the public perception of organized crime in relation to the gentlemen's club is based on a few Mafia-related cases that have made major headlines in the United States, a stereotype that Baker debunked, although she did permit that strip clubs are often "fronts for or operated by persons associated with organize criminal activities" (pp. 82).

What is an Illicit Network?

Illicit enterprise and social networks

The organization of illicit entrepreneurship, such as provision of prostitution, gambling and loansharking services, as well, the provision of illicit commodities such as drugs, weapons, and stolen goods, whether undertaken by individuals, dyads or organized crime groups, occurs within the organizational context of social networks. For the past forty years the important of social networks to the operations of illicit market has been a central theme in empirical research on organized crime (Albini, 1971; Chambliss, 1971; Block, 1983; Potter, 1994; McIlwain, 2001; Griffin, 2003).

A social network is composed of the links between individuals. Those links can be of any kind. They can involve business, friendship, family, common interests, etc. They represent the linkages between and among several individual actors. Those links may be relatively informal, such as

Boissevain's idea of "friends of friends," or they may represent obligations resulting from association with a group. The important of these informal links is that they provided individual in the network with both privileged information and resources which might not be available to them elsewhere (Boissevain, 1974; Bourdieu, 1986).

Social networks in illicit enterprise are impacted by several key variables including social distance, the directional flow of exchanges between network participants, relative influence, centrality and group cohesiveness (Coles, 2001). These considerations are vital in determining what holds groups of criminals in drug trafficking, prostitution, gambling and the like together. The empirical research tells us that for the most part three key factors impact group cohesiveness in illicit enterprises (Adler, 1993; Arlacchi, 2001; McIlwain, 2001; Miller, 1986; Morselli, 2001; Paoli, 2001).

- Personal affiliations (childhood or prison friendships; locality relevance; extended family relations).
- The drive for profits.
- Organizational fit (skills, financing, political connections needed to conduct business).

Crime networks are defined by the illicit entrepreneurial activities of the individuals in the network. Those individuals may simply be entrepreneurs who serve as nodal points around which network participants perform their tasks. They may be a relatively stable group of core network members who bring others into the network as their skills, resources or talents are needed. Participants in crime networks may not regard themselves as being members of a criminal group, and may not be regarded as being a criminal group by outsiders. Nevertheless they coalesce around a series of criminal projects (Adler, 2003; Griffin, 2003; Chambliss, 1971; Williams, 2001.)

The skills, contacts or financial resources of network participants determine importance in organized crime networks. The actual forms of network interaction and the structure of the criminal enterprise are determined by the individual characteristics and skills of network participants. Rewards are negotiated and are commensurate with effort, investment, and job performance (Block 1983; Miller, 1986; McIlwain, 2001; Morselli, 2001).

Social networks operating in illicit markets are characterized by a flat, horizontal structure, rather than by a vertical hierarchy. Organizational coordination rests on trust, business relationships, and the reputations of participants. Internal disputes are resolved through communication, negotiation, and recognition of common interests. Networks consist of relatively manageable numbers of individuals, although in many cases different components of the network may not work closely with (or even know each other) but be connected through another individual or individuals (Paoli, 2001; Potter, 1994; Zabuldoff, 1997; Albin, 1971).

Personal loyalties, friendships and ongoing business relationships are more important than social or ethnic identities in determining participation in crime networks. Personal loyalties and ties are essential to the maintenance of the network and are key determinants of relationships. Connections between individuals in crime networks endure coalescing around a series of criminal projects. Crime networks are loosely organized, with the activities of the leading practitioners constantly interchanging and a broader network of individual criminal contacts being drawn upon in the case of specific criminal operations (Adler, 2003, Block, 1983; Paoli, 2001; Miller 1986).

Crime networks reform after the exit of a key individual(s). Network membership is extremely fluid. If a network participant retires, moves on to other entrepreneurial activities or is arrested the network simply reforms itself around new individuals and activities (Potter, 1994; Griffin, 2003; McIlwain, 2001; Albin, 1971).

, the empirical research has also shown that crime networks rely on links and exchanges with politicians, law enforcement officials and businessmen (Chambliss, 1971; Block, 1983; Potter, 1994; Potter and Jenkins, 1985). In his research on opium smugglers in San Diego, McIlwain (2001) sums these relationships by pointing out that opium smugglers depend on an extensive social network that

encompasses corrupt politicians, law enforcement agents, customs brokers, civil servants, and businessmen, as well as other professional criminals.

As McIlwain (1999) suggests the social network model transcends existing criminological paradigms in that it emphasizes that human relationships form the basis for illicit entrepreneurship and organized criminal activity.

Deviant places and the organization of crime networks

The scholarly literature on entrepreneurship in illicit markets and criminal organizations operating in those markets almost universally points to the key role of social networks in organizing illicit commerce. Social networks are vital to large, somewhat sophisticated transnational organized crime to networks, as well as the simplest patron-client interactions of an individual entrepreneur interacting with suppliers and clients. As discussed above, the social dynamics of crime networks are fairly clear. But, there has always seemed to something missing from descriptions of crime network interaction and organization. Alan Block (2004) touched on the multidimensional nature of space and time in the organizing of crime from an historical perspective. But other researchers looking at organized crime networks have failed to recognize the importance of factors transcending the actions of individuals. The missing piece is the importance of a deviant places in the activities of criminal networks populated by deviant actors.

The idea of place is difficult to define and sometimes difficult to conceptualize. Much of the criminological literature on “place” focuses on the idea of crime “hot spots.” What exactly a “hot spot” is more than a little fuzzy. For some researchers it is a specific address (Filbert, 2008; Livingston, 2008). For others it is an identifiable city block (Weisburd, et. al. 2004). And for still others it is a segment of a city or a cluster of blocks (Mason, et. al. 2004). To a large degree the relevance of the unit of analysis selected to designate a “hot spot” is dependent on the focus of the research. For example, if the research is focusing on assaults in or around bars, the “hot spot” becomes the specific address of the bar. On the other hand, if the research is focusing on drug trafficking the obvious focus becomes those places where street-level drug dealers and consumers congregate, which is more like a wider area.

In the case of social network entrepreneurship in illicit markets the definition of place can take the form of both a specific place, or a specific area, or sometimes both. For example, in Chambliss’ classic study of organized crime in Seattle, several types of specific businesses and locations were identified as nodes or “hot spots” for organized crime activity (Chambliss, 1971):

- Restaurants,
- Cardrooms,
- Businesses holding pinball machine licenses,
- Bingo parlors,
- Nightclubs,
- Hotels, and
- Pawnshops.

Interestingly these deviant places could be designated by specific address or by business-type.

Similarly, ethnographic research on organized in “Morrisburg,” a declining industrial town in the Northeast, noted a variety of specific locations and clusters of blocks as nodes for organized crime activity (Potter, 1994). Bars, porn stores, several restaurants, pawn shops, billiard parlors, and even a used-record store, all played key roles in drug dealing, gambling and prostitution. In addition, a four block long stretch of a downtown street housed street-level prostitution and open air drug dealing, as well as several of the specific business locations key to the organizing of crime.

Sean Griffin’s superb book (Griffin, 2004), *Philadelphia’s Black Mafia: A Social and Political History*, identifies a wide variety of places which were key to activities of one of Philadelphia’s most important

theft and drug trafficking crime networks. Once again specific addresses identifying bars, clothing stores, auto repair shops, and surprisingly religious organizations, as well identifiable North Philadelphia neighborhoods, such as 43rd and Diamond Streets, become vital in understanding the effectiveness of this social network.

Similarly, other research on organized crime in Philadelphia also turned up a plethora of deviant places related to the organizing of illicit markets (Potter and Jenkins, 1985). The K & A gang, originating in the Irish neighborhood bordered by Kensington and Allegheny Streets, socialized, networked, and planned some of the biggest burglaries in U.S. history at McGlinchey's Pub. Piggy's, a candy store with a distinct absence of candy, was a gathering place for North Philadelphia numbers bankers. The activities of alleged *cosa nostra* family could easily be observed at the Warfield Breakfast and Luncheon Express, in the early morning; at the Melrose Diner for lunch; and, at Cous' Little Italy, owned by florist, restaurateur and bookie. Frankie "Flowers" D'Alfonso. In the evening the Club Deco and the Vulpine Athletic Club usually hosted the illicit entrepreneurs of South Philadelphia.

Research on open-air drug markets and sex work at the street level also identifies the importance of place to the illicit market. While open-air drug markets may move locations with some frequency, they are established in specific geographical locations, usually several contiguous blocks, in every city (Mieczkowski, 1986). The same is true of "prostitution strolls." In her book *Street Woman* (1986), Eleanor Miller describes "deviant street networks" of sex workers, drug dealers, fraudsters, and purveyors of stolen property. The street networks facilitate a variety of criminal endeavors and depend on a high level of cooperation among deviant actors in definable segments of city streets. The geography of place is what compels the social networking of illicit entrepreneurs using that deviant place. These places are numerous, easily identifiable and key to the organizing of crime. For example in Louisville, KY deviant street networks operate at (Potter, 2005):

- Preston Street between Oak and Woodbine;
- Ormsby Street between Second and Preston;
- Fourth Street from Winkler Avenue South to Central Avenue;
- First Street from Oak to Magnolia;
- The corner of Second and Magnolia;
- Brook Street between Ormsby and St. Catherine;
- First Street between Breckenridge and Kentucky Avenues; and,
- Dixie Highway and Gallagher Street.

These "hot spots" or "strolls" define illicit market activity for both purveyors and consumers of sex, drugs, and stolen goods. While they are sometimes transient due factors ranging from road construction, to parades, to police activities, they always return to their original pristine state.

The point is that the interpersonal dynamics of social networks are vital to understanding illicit enterprise and what we often call organized crime. But, places create a venue which facilitates that networking. As Wilcox, Land and Hunt (2003) suggest, place can contribute to the creation of "opportunity contexts" for criminal activity. As Wilcox, et. al. (2003) point out a context for "criminal opportunities" exists at both the individual and environmental levels. A bounded locale, whether it's a bar, a strip club, a pawnshop or simply a city street allow for the convergence of individuals who are motivated to participate in illicit markets. Deviant places provide contexts in which motivated buyers and sellers can do business. They create contexts in which social networking between and among illicit entrepreneurs can occur on a predictable and regular basis. And, deviant places, frequently provide the additional "protection" of means of social control originating with business owners, employees, and property owners.

It is the contention of this research that "deviant places" enable and facilitate the activities of criminal networks. Borrowing from Wilcox et. al.(2003) this ethnographic study clearly demonstrates

that deviant places create “opportunity contexts” which help to define the operations of social networks engaging in illicit market activity. Through an examination of several bars and a strip club in a small city, this research will show that deviant actors operate in definable deviant places. The following research focuses solely on data collected in the strip club.

Gender and networking

As a researcher of organized crime, the primary investigator approached an investigation of exotic dancers, their coworkers, and their patrons neutrally, not subscribing to either side of “the sex wars” that currently rage in strip club research. Sex radical feminists feel that strip clubs empower women to capitalize on their sexuality and defy patriarchal boundaries, allowing women to be sexual, free, and uncontrolled. But other feminists point out that strip clubs are hardly primary locations of gender equality. Jeffreys (2009) points out, “the tradition of women dancing sexually to excite men” dates back to slaves in classical Greece and other ancient cultures who engaged in the sell and trade of women (pp. 86). In an ethnography of a different gentleman’s club, Price-Glynn noted that the exotic dancers she interviewed “were compelled to strip out of economic need rather than a means of liberation” (pp. 37). According to Jeffreys (2009), it is not necessarily the very act of striptease, but the actual social ecology of the strip club that encourages the gender inequality. Women perform at the commands of male customers and answer to primarily male management, ownership, bartenders, and bouncers. The male leaders in the social structure of the strip club, in Price-Glynn’s 2009 study, often referred to themselves as “babysitters” and referred “to adult women as ‘girls’ to foster compliance” (pp. 50).

Miller introduced her 1986 book, *Street Woman*, with a discussion of the rise of female criminality in America, debunking two causes of the increase which she called myths: one, that women were increasingly joining the job market in the 1980s and therefore had higher access to means to commit white collar crime, and two, that women’s behaviors were increasingly resembling that of men. According to Miller, in 1986, the average employed woman still had a stereotypically female job (i.e., secretary) and did not commit violent crimes like men. She wrote:

Historically, and especially at present, [the female criminal] is young and poor and belongs to a minority. She has limited education and kills, is the mother of several children, and has been involved in prostitution, a petty property crime, or a drug offense (pp. 6).

Miller stated that gender affected access to illegitimate means of income as it did legitimate employment. Much in the vein of Miller’s study, this paper will examine the claims previous academics have made in regard to gender under the framework of organized crime research, explaining specifically how gender does or does not affect illicit networks within the strip club environment.

Methodology

This study employed ethnographic fieldwork in order to obtain data. Most of the fieldwork was heavily concentrated in a five month period during 2009 (see “Interactional Shiftwork,” below) and was conducted by the primary investigator, a female graduate student. In their study of patrons at two gentlemen’s clubs, Erickson and Tewksbury (2000) considered themselves “peripheral-member-researchers.” Although patronizing the clubs, they were “avoiding interfering with setting activities and triggering a Hawthorne effect” (pp. 275). Borrowing from their technique, the primary investigator for this paper utilized participant observation to conduct her ethnography and was completely discreet about her intentions. Without ever letting anyone know she was a researcher, the primary investigator would patronize the club, engage in conversations with other patrons and the employees, and even purchase dances on occasion. Although she would sometimes come with a small group of friends, she mostly went alone to obtain a clearer focus. While patrons raised eyebrows at the sight of a young

woman visiting a strip club by herself, the male employees (bouncer, manager, DJs, and doorman) quickly began to recognize her. The male employees welcomed and even befriended her, usually assuming she was coming to the club just to relax and blow off steam after a day at work.

Importantly, observational fieldwork was the method of preference over in-depth qualitative interviews not only from fear that the research subjects would isolate the investigator, but also out of cost issues. It is expected at a strip club that if you are talking to a female performer for more than a moment, you should pay her for her time, either with a tip or at least by buying her a drink. On a graduate student's budget, that was not possible. Thus, observations and brief participant interactions became the primary modes of data collection in this study of almost three years' length.

Despite the real-life illustrations and experiences qualitative research yields, ethnography "often produces strong negative reactions in the mainstream academic community" and is often considered less credible than mixed methods or quantitative research endeavors (Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991, pp. 90). However, this paper contends that its data could only have been collected through ethnographic fieldwork. Not only was the studied population too miniscule for quantitative analysis, this population would be unlikely to respond to an instrument like a survey. The discreet cover was necessary, as a legitimate business owner who houses and permits illegitimate activity would be unlikely to trust an academic researcher. To anyone who is not a "regular" (habitual patron of the club), the organized crime occurring in the studied club may be undetectable. Thus, the researcher had to be careful how she interacted with other patrons and the employees, never asking direct or forward questions and never letting on just how much she had observed and noticed. It was also imperative that she never revealed information from one informant to another, always needing to appear ignorant and thus trustworthy to the actors of organized illicit activity.

Inherent in any ethnography of a gentleman's club, though, is inevitably a discussion of gender. While gentleman's club employment is obviously gendered, the focus of this research was always on the occurrence of illicit organized activity within the club without relation to gender. However, as Reinharz (1992) pointed out, "It is not ethnography per se...but ethnography in the hands of feminists that renders it feminist" (pp. 48). Reinharz and many other academics believe that qualitative fieldwork allows researchers to document the experiences of women more truthfully than quantitative methods, which they claim can overlook issues sensitive to gender (pp. 47); according to Reinharz, near-identical ethnographies may reveal starkly different accounts on the experiences of female activity, depending on the gender of the researcher. Ethnographic fieldwork does not have to study just women to be a feminist project, nor does it have to occur in a women's-only setting. In fact, Miller (1986) wrote that it is nearly impossible to study *only* women in criminal networking, since men control most illicit networks (pp. 36). She also posited that while criminal networks served as a source of income for the women she studied, they also served as the main source of victimization of the female hustlers she studied, again prompting the need for feminist thought (pp. 64). In particular, one must examine gender in a study like this because it involves the sex industry, within which race and sex "affect people's interactions" with one another (Barton, 2006, pp. 12). Price-Glynn (2010) discusses gendered employment in her ethnography of a strip club, citing that "women's jobs...had little, if any, influence" in the club (pp. 20). So while this research was never intended to be a study of gender, inevitably, feminist theory affected the way the researcher perceived her surroundings and structured her research.

Interactional shiftwork

As the fieldwork for the paper was done by a female graduate student, many notions about feminist fieldwork came into play during the research. While some dancers were uninterested in interacting with a young woman at the club, the researcher's age and gender was endearing to some patrons and the male employees. Some scholars have pointed out risk factors for women conducting

research alone in dangerous settings. Reinharz (1992) explained that “in a society that is ageist, sexist, and heterosexist, the researcher who is female and young may be defined as a sex object to be seduced by heterosexual males” (pp. 58). Certainly, as a young woman visiting a gentleman’s club, the researcher experienced what the sexism that Reinharz wrote about. Some female academics have stated feeling depressed and humiliated during field research in the sex industry. While this has encouraged previous field researchers to abandon their studies, the primary investigator for this paper utilized what Reinharz and other scholars call “interactional shiftwork.” Rather than, say, forcing herself to visit the club every Thursday and Friday from nine p.m. to closing time uninterrupted, the method of interactional shiftwork allowed the researcher to be free from a set schedule. If another patron harassed or intimidated her, she could leave and then return when she felt comfortable, whether it was a day or a week later. Because of interactional shiftwork, the frequency and length of the visits would vary; the visits would range from a mere thirty minutes all the way to the nearly the span of an entire shift (seven hours). The primary research period was from January through May 2009; during this time, the researcher visited the premises at least three times a week. From June 2009 to June 2011, the visits occurred approximately twice a month, and from July 2011 to October 2011, the researcher the premises visited at least four times a month. This allowed the primary investigator to obtain five months of heavy observation and two years of follow-up visits, limiting the emotional involvement with the employees and the establishment, and also reducing her risk or discomfort as a lone female researcher.

Setting

The town in which this study took place was said to have approximately 32,000 inhabitants, according to the U.S. Census in 2006. The Census also states that almost 90% of the city’s population is Caucasian, with about three fourths of the inhabitants having at least a high school education. The city, which gains the bulk of its population from having a public university within its limits, is surrounded by small, rural communities and farmland. The gentleman’s club studied is the only one in the county, and most of the surrounding counties do not have strip clubs. Therefore, sometimes the patrons would have traveled nearly two hours to visit a strip club. For the purpose of this study, we shall refer to the setting as “Club X.”

Club X is owned by a former dancer and her husband, but she lives about an hour away from the establishment and rarely present during hours of operation. In two years of observation, she was only detected by the researcher perhaps three times. Club X is open Monday through Saturday from 6 p.m. to 1 a.m.; obeying a city ordinance, they are closed on Sundays. City ordinances state that no nudity is allowed in any public setting, so by law the club should be a “pasties and G-string” club. However, Club X requires its dancers all perform topless onstage and give fully nude dances in the couch room. Managements gives the dancers the option of whether or not they want to perform fully nude onstage. During the observation hours, the primary investigator noted that not only did the local police and politicians overlook the club’s blatant breaking of city ordinances, they relished it; she often spotted local law enforcement in plain clothes, as patrons.

The bulk of the profit from the club is earned through the sale of drinks, which are priced higher than at any other bar in the county. The dancers’ drinks are even more expensive than the customers’. For every drink a dancer is bought, the cocktail waitress will bring her a ticket. At the end of her shift, if she does not have at least ten tickets, she must pay a \$1 per ticket until she has 10. This is not only to generate sales for the club, but also to encourage the dancers to drink. The management believes that the more intoxicated the girls are, the more comfortable they will feel on the job and will be able to earn more money for both themselves and the bar. The bartenders, bouncers, and DJs all typically drink on the job as well, but cocktail waitresses are not allowed to drink.

The dancers are introduced to the patrons through the stage and of course its dance pole, positioned in direct view of the bar and all the tables. Each woman dances to two songs in turn; the women go through a "rotation," so the number of sets they perform is dependent on how many dancers work that particular night. Some nights there would only be three or four dancers working; other nights there would be up to twenty dancers. A dancer may receive tips from patrons during their on-stage sets or while she is socializing in between sets. She tries to earn more money from procuring either table dances or lap dances. A topless table dance costs the patron \$10, and for one song, the woman will gyrate sexily on and around him on the floor, in full view of everyone in the club. For \$20, he may take the woman into the couch room for a slightly more private experience, and for \$40, she will dance fully nude for him in the couch room. However, the couch room is approximately twelve feet wide and U-shaped, so everyone else in the couch room is able to view other lap dances going on. Also, the bouncer is stationed in the doorway to "protect" the women, although his back is usually turned to the action in the couch room. As a rule, patrons are not allowed to touch the dancers in any way, shape, or form, so the primary role of the bouncer in that situation is to make sure there is no sexual activity (wanted or unwanted) occurring in the couch room.

The dancers are required to "tip out." Per topless dance, they must pay \$5 to the bouncer as gratitude for his protection, and for each fully nude dance, they must pay him \$10. At the end of their shift, the bouncer earns 5% of all tips the dancers have earned, and the DJ earns 10%. The manager, bartender, and cocktail waitresses are the only employees on payroll; the bouncers, DJs, shot girls, and dancers rely only on gratuity for their "legitimate" income from the club.

Actors

Miller (1986) discussed that illicit networks of female criminal actors are typically fronted by men, often just a single male. She discussed two stereotypes of the male head, the first being "the pimp," who manages a stable of criminal women, and the second being "the man," who typically manages the criminal career of just one woman. While both are obviously deviant actors, neither tends to commit the levels of offenses that their female workers do for them. The pimp provides leadership and safety, but "the man" can also additionally offer a lookout for the police and immediate security. Miller posited that rather than looking at male network figureheads in such binary terms, we should instead view male leadership on continuum between the distant, multitasking pimp and the up-and-close, monogamous man. In the ethnography of Club X, that role belonged to the manager, since the owner of the club was absent. And, as Miller suggested, the manager's role did not fit clearly into "pimp" or "the man." While he had more qualities of a "pimp," he was able to monitor the club and its activity from a much nearer standpoint than a stereotypical pimp. The manager's job included payroll, hiring, organizing special events and promotions, ordering inventory for the bar, and overseeing the day to day operations of the club.

The manager, who himself used to be a bouncer at Club X, is typically accompanied by his co-head, the bouncer, who, in the case of the current regime of Club X, also happens to be one of his lifelong friends. The bouncer's job is to break up any fights that occur (whether involving employees or patrons) and ensure that no customers are touching the female employees. He also makes sure the dancers are tipping out properly at the end of the night. Two of the current manager's other male friends serve as the primary bartenders, although over the span of observation, two former dancers occasionally aided in bartending. The bartenders prepare drinks and are directly in charge of the cocktail waitresses and shot girls. The cocktail waitresses deliver drinks to customers and dancers. Typically, the club employed no more than two waitresses at a time.

Like dancers, shot girls set their own schedules. They are given trays of premade shots from the bartender and have to circle the club, selling the shots. In order to increase sales, they are allowed to

dress sexily, flirt and spend time with the customers, and even briefly show nudity or dance (but never for a full song). They receive half of each sale (normally \$2 per shot) plus tips. Rather than tipping out the DJ or bouncer, they give the bartender 5% of their tips at the end of each shift.

There were two male DJs, who worked separate nights. In addition to encouraging sales of dances and liquor and playing music, the DJs also monitored the dancers' dressing room on a TV in the DJ booth. Watching the women undress and dress on camera, the DJs make sure that no fights or drug use occurs behind the stage, the only part of the club not immediately seeable to the bouncer or manager. A male doorman worked the weekend shifts, when the club had a higher volume of patronage and the bouncers and bartenders were too busy to be expected to keep up with collecting cover charge and checking IDs. Even these employees' names will be changed to protect the identity of the club and its actors in this article.

Results

Detecting the presence of an illicit network of criminal activity was gradual. The manager, from whom this point in the paper shall be referred to as "Will," had a strict "no drugs" policy at the club. While he rarely minded if a female employee was too intoxicated, he did not want the presence of drugs in his business, fearing that would be the one thing that would cause the club to be shut down. For that reason, the researcher had to piece together, over several weeks, how the drug trade in the club actually progressed under Will's nose—which was not exactly clean itself. Will fronted the club's underground gambling, participating in and running it. He also served, quite actively, as the pimp for a stable of prostitutes who worked in the club to solicit johns.

Also complicating the process of researching illicit networks at Club X was that many of the shot girls and even the dancers were sometimes only employed for a few weeks. Some would decide they couldn't handle the club anymore, some would prefer to go a "classier" establishment in a large city about forty-five minutes away, and some would be incarcerated. Rarely did someone leave the network, though, by force. There are few exceptions to this rule—one being "Danielle."

Danielle once drunkenly confessed to the researcher that she was only eighteen years old; to work in the club, the dancers were supposed to be at least 21 years old, the legal drinking age. She was not the only dancer, though, whom Will hired underage. Danielle was a mother but still had maintained an athletic-looking figure, and Club X was her first job dancing. Although her youth and build attracted many customers, she quickly learned that she could earn more money from her employment at Club X by prostituting, a venture which Will encouraged (see "Sex Trade," below). But Danielle's naiveté quickly blemished her employment at Club X. She procured the wrath of Will when she mistreated a regular who prepaid her \$250 to meet him at a hotel room for sex, with the promise of \$250 more to follow once she got there. Will allowed her to leave work early to make the date, in exchange for a cut of her earning. When she never showed up, the regular was infuriated and told the employees and other regulars what Danielle had done to him. Danielle's reputation was tarnished by the incident, with even the cocktail waitresses warning patrons not to trust her. The other dancers involved in prostitution were insulted; very rarely were one of the women who had been around for any length of time offered \$500 for a quick hotel tryst. On behalf of all the employees who felt offended by Danielle's mistreatment of the john, a dancer named "Nicole" confronted Danielle and struck her across the face in the dressing room. Following the assault, Danielle called the police, who arrested Nicole. Will immediately fired Danielle after the police left. Not only had she disrespected and cheated one of his best customers, but she had also done the worst thing a dancer could do—involve the police in the activity of the club. Will didn't want cops in the club unless they were there enjoying themselves, and he certainly didn't want the club's name in the police beat of the local newspaper. Thus, confidentiality and secrecy were two of the most valued traits at Club X.

Barton (2006) pointed out that alliances in strip clubs are “short lived, because dancers tend to change places of employment frequently” (pp. 139). While the dancers Barton interviewed spoke of camaraderie and friendship, Price-Glynn (2010) had a very different experience in her fieldwork. Working as a cocktail waitress at a strip club, she witnessed arguments and backstabbing between the employees on a daily basis, although she gained trust when she returned several hundred dollars of tips to a dancer who had dropped her money one night. While Nicole and Will exhibited loyalty to the club and the group of employees involved in illicit activity there, the alliance was usually more of an unspoken one. Most of the time, the dancers, waitresses, and shot girls were engaged in rivalries with one another, often resulting in physical violence far worse than Danielle and Nicole’s incident.

Drug Trade

Despite Will’s best efforts, the reputation of Club X in town is that the dancers would exchange sexual favors for drugs. While this was not universally true, the researcher certainly observed that many girls would do so. Danielle, for example, told the primary investigator that prior to working at the club, she had only tried a couple of illegal drugs, but within a couple of months of employment, she was regularly showing up at work already stoned and looking for another fix (in her case, Xanax). Danielle went from being one of the higher-tipped dancers to, by the end of her employment, an obvious addict, only talking to the customers who were known dealers and seeming unimpressed when someone offered her cash.

Sitting near the right table could provoke an interesting experience, as alcohol intoxication often provoked drug trades to be very loudly vocalized. However, most of the drug trade was always very discreet. “Collin,” a regular, fascinated the primary investigator for a long time. Around fifty years old, Collin visited the club at least three nights a week. He was known to tip the cocktail waitresses very well and would spend a couple of hours talking to only one dancer (or occasionally, shot girl) each visit. He was extremely unfriendly toward any dancers or shot girls who interrupted his time with whoever the girl of the night was. Collin would always leave at least an hour before closing time, and a couple of minutes later, “the girl of the night,” suddenly fully dressed in her street clothes and carrying her purse or duffel with her, would hastily leave the club after giving Will a small wad of cash, still an hour left to go in her shift. Through the glass front door of the club, a perceptive observer could see her get into the passenger seat of Collin’s truck and ride off. The researcher interpreted this to be an act of organized prostitution—the patron worked out an agreement with the dancer, who then gave Will a percentage of her earnings in order to carry out the act and leave work early. It wasn’t until one night when a cocktail waitress, who felt offended by something Collin had said, blurted out to me that those dancers wouldn’t leave with him for money, but cocaine. The women, in turn, returned to the club and sold the cocaine to the patrons.

Despite Club X’s reputation, the women working at the club were more than likely actively hustling drugs, rather than trying to receive any through a trade of sex. The most memorable example was Darla, a shot girl.

Darla was definitely different from the other females who worked at Club X in that she actively sought out employment with the intention of using her job to push pills. She had noticed, from coming in with friends a few times, that drug trade was slick and consistent between the dancers and the customers. Unlike the other shot girls, she did not dress provocatively, usually working in jeans and a T-shirt, and did not walk around from table to table, offering shots. Instead, she would focus on just a few customers a night and declined to dance or show nudity. After the first hour or so of her shift, she would either sit and mingle or pay Will a hefty tip out in order to leave early, usually alone. The researcher once happened to be sitting next to an old boyfriend of Darla’s, who encouraged the investigator to look closer at Darla when she worked. She would sit on a customer’s lap facing him, her

long brown hair shielding her face from others, locking eye contact with the patron—yet she would not grind her body on his lap the way the other shot girls would for tips. If one studied her close enough, you could see she was always quietly engaged in conversation while in that position. The shots were in plastic test tubes, and Darla, like most other shot girls, would slip the tube between the cups of her bra before allowing the customer to remove it with his hands or mouth. The researcher noticed, though, that Darla would reach into her shirt as if reaching for the tube, her fist clenched, and deposit something into the customer's hand discreetly before handing his other hand the tube. The motion was quick and discreet and went undetected by other patrons. As her boyfriend explained to the primary investigator, Darla would work at the club once or twice a month for the sole purpose of dealing Xanax and other pills. Will did not seem to mind Darla's infrequent work schedule or her casual clothes and unsexy routine, nor did he mind her leaving from her shifts early, if he was tipped out—which was curious, since shot girls were only supposed to tip the bartender. This is indicative that Will, despite his anti-drug stance, probably knew he was facilitating pill hustling and did not mind as long as it was kept discreet and he profited from Darla's work as well.

Sex Trade

The very heart of the network of illicit activity in the club was the trade of sexual favors from the female employees to the male patrons. It influenced the legitimate business and order of operations, and also other illegitimate businesses, such as the drug trade. Female employees who were adamantly against drugs were still active in prostitution. Will served, as explained by Miller (1986), somewhere on the continuum between “the pimp” and “the man.” He facilitated the sex trade by allowing the women to leave work with customers in exchange for a percentage of their earnings, and he would tip off patrons on average prices charged. The bouncer, “Josh,” would also partake in these pimping activities, often verbally arranging sexual encounters for shyer customers. There were rumors among the patrons about women actually having intercourse in the couch room during hours of operation, but the truth in these rumors is doubtful, as the couch room still left customers quite exposed to others' view.

Still, the women knew how to be discreet in the couch room. More than one male patron told the researcher that certain dancers took it as an unspoken understanding that if a man wearing sweatpants requested a couch room dance, he expected a hand job. The dancers were happy to oblige, sometimes not asking for more than the price of a regular couch dance in order to ensure a return customer. With the dancers having the ability to slip their hand down the patron's sweatpants without having to undress him or expose him, the sexual act could occur discreetly, without even Josh having to notice as he stood with his back turned to the couch room. Another patron told the investigator, with an air of fascination, that one dancer, “Sophia,” would take off her stilettos and discreetly perform a foot job under the guise of a normal couch dance. Sophia's price was quite a bit higher than the other dancers, he said, but he assured the researcher it was worth it, as she still swayed to the music and touched herself during the dance, so even the other dancers didn't suspect what her toes were busily up to in the darkened couch room.

It is extremely doubtful that Josh was unaware of what the dancers and patrons were doing in the couch room. He kept his back turned to the action and never bothered to check on their situation. He frequently allowed the dancers to “finish up”—stay in the couch room a minute or two after the song ended, still lingering near or on the customer—apparently without charging them or the patron for the extra time. Rather, it is likely that Josh understood his role in the situation—protect the women during the illicit act and receive payment for doing so afterward. And in the case of Club X, “protect” seldom meant defend from sexual assault—instead, it meant protect them from prying eyes or interruption.

Although it might be harsh to classify Club X as a brothel in disguise, a dancer who refused to prostitute herself at least a few times was not likely to last long in her employment. One example was

“Katie,” who was also hired underage by Will. Katie, who had never danced before and who only lasted a little over a month at Club X, quickly caught the eye of a wealthy older man, deemed a “sugar daddy.” The sugar daddy entertained her with a \$75 bottle of champagne and several other pricey drinks, then asked for a couch dance. After about ten songs in the couch room, Katie had still not crossed the “no sex” boundaries supposedly enforced by the club. Her customer left the couch room loudly complaining about the matter, much to the amusement of the other dancers, one of whom quickly capitalized on his dissatisfaction and shortly afterward left the club with him. The other dancers made jokes about how “dumb” Katie was to think a man wanted to stay in the couch room with her for almost an hour without receiving a sexual favor. Although an employee of Club X, Katie had never entered the network of criminal activity Club X harbored. When she didn’t meet the expectations of the illicit network that the club thrived on for profit, she realized she would be unable to turn a legitimate profit from working in the club around such a high level of illegitimate activity.

The prices of each woman differed. Some would offer hand jobs and similar acts for the price of a couch dance, and some refused to perform in the club at all, only doing sexual favors after work, when they would be less likely to be recognized or watched by someone outside the network. Although Will and Josh seemed to look the other way often for the couch room, they were very aware of when the dancers planned to leave with patrons. If a dancer was rumored to be going home with a customer, shortly after the rumor began floating around between employees and patrons, either Will or Josh could always be spotted conferring one-on-one with her and, usually, accepting cash from her. Sometimes, dancers were boastful. “Emma” drunkenly hollered loud enough for patrons to hear one night that she was going home with a man who had already prepaid her \$800 for her services; “Samantha” was once blunt enough to tell a patron who asked for a dance that she couldn’t perform for him because she was about to leave to leave with Collin, the infamous cocaine-dealing regular.

Sometimes the couch room was not even necessary in order for these acts to occur. The researcher saw “Abigail,” a shot girl, allow men to touch her privates out on the main floor of the bar many times. If it was busy enough, a customer could get away with brief touching, undetected by Josh. On the flip side, sometimes a slow night without a lot of customers allowed customers to touch the dancers in order to make sure there was some cash flow being generated in the club that night. On multiple occasions when business was slow, dancers or shot girls would go so far as to “neck,” or passionately kiss, customers for long periods of time on the main floor of the club. If business did not seem to be doing well that night but the girls were getting tipped well enough from the touching customers, Josh would look the other way. Explicit penetration was not always necessary in order for prostitution to occur, either. One patron told the researcher that for an extra five dollar tip, “Olivia” would allow him to briefly perform oral sex on her in the couch room, with him sitting on the couch and her standing on it. He described the experience as “heaven.”

Patrons who were not members of the network could become actors within it, not just by asking the dancers for prostitution, but by picking up on subtle hints (such as a dancer putting her mouth on a man’s crotch during a lap dance). However, Club X widely advertised not-so-subtle hints that the women working there were unopposed to breaking the rules. Girl-on-girl action in the form of the dancers sexily accepting tips from one another was frequent, but rarely did it last longer than a few seconds—unless a customer offered the right price, as was the case when a patron once gave three dancers \$50 each to take turns performing oral sex on each other onstage. Two other dancers were once paid to engage in an S&M bout with one another onstage, where one dancer was handcuffed to the pole and spanked by the other. A customer who paid the dancers—and most importantly, Will—enough could also be brought up onstage to join in on the action, getting kissed, spanked, and danced on in front of all the other patrons. When a customer was interested in such a flamboyant sexual display on stage, he usually communicated his desire to the cocktail waitress, who would inform Will,

who then would recruit the dancers best suited for the stage show. This sent a very blatant message to the patrons that for the price, they could ask for whatever they wanted in Club X.

The sex trade at Club X was not exclusive to dancer-patron relationships; indeed, it occurred between the male and female employees of the club. While one of the DJs was involved with a dancer at Club X, and therefore “off limits” to the other female employees, a young DJ, “Jacob,” was single and had a reputation for taking a different dancer home each time he worked—a dancer who needed money so desperately she didn’t feel she could surrender 10% of her earnings to him at the end of the night. Doug was also different from the other DJ in that he spent little time in the DJ booth, choosing to circulate through the club and interact with the patrons. One time when he stopped to talk to the researcher, he mentioned that he had indeed earned his reputation for sleeping with the dancers, but he never elaborated on the reasons for the frequent sexual trysts. It was actually the dancers who, especially while intoxicated, would let the secrets of the club slip when talking to the researcher. Once, the doorman, “Dan,” laughingly recounted an incident in which Will and Josh paid one of the dancers to perform oral sex on him during hours of operation, at the actual front desk of the club, with customers passing by. The male employees laughed hysterically at the memory; to them, purchased sexual favors were an acceptable, enjoyable norm.

Will and Josh both were rumored to have slept with the majority of their female employees. It was noted that at the end of each night when the dancers were leaving, one or two would usually linger around, claiming to be waiting on a ride, but would not tip out the bouncer like the other dancers would. Two of the dancers occasionally would pick up bartending shifts, and one confessed to the researcher that she had had a sexual relationship with her married boss. She explained the benefits of doing so, stating that when she was “Will’s girl,” she had gotten to pocket all the money she earned without ever tipping out, and that eventually, he had let her start bartending, a job normally assigned to males. She indicated that the other female who occasionally bartended had earned her job the same way.

Most of the female employees were quite dismissive about Will and Josh’s sexual involvement with the dancers and shot girls, making remarks like, “Oh, we’ve all been with at least one, maybe both of them,” or “Who hasn’t slept with them?” Sometimes the researcher would observe actual public displays of affection between the men and their employees, such as a dancer leaving the couch room and hugging or quickly kissing Josh instead of tipping him out. It seemed many of the females at the club felt more comfortable being sexually active with their male supervisors, rather than just paying tip-out. Dancers also often hinted that some of the women may have sought sexual attention from their boss or bouncer in order to ensure extra protection, such as new employees being bullied by the older dancers.

The only incident where a dancer’s involvement with the manager seemed to cause friction in the network was when Will adopted a new dancer, Katie, as his sole mistress. As discussed above, Katie worked at the club but remained outside the network of illicit activity, not participating in the drug or sex trade with patrons that occurred in Club X. As the affair continued week after week, dancers increasingly seethed to patrons about their disdain for Katie, whose tip-outs were waived due to the sexual favors she did for her boss and who constantly had Will protecting her from the wrath of other dancers or touchy customers. What seemed to both the other dancers the most, though, was that Will monitored Katie more than the other women in the club. In three years of research, Katie was the only dancer who, during a couch dance, would actually be watched by the bouncer. Several times, Will or Josh would interfere with Katie’s lap dances, warning her customer not to touch her, and twice Will physically removed a patron who offended him when interacting with Katie. Will’s very public jealousy seemed to embarrass and annoy the other dancers, who felt his affair was disrupting the night-to-night operations of Club X and made other patrons hesitant to ask for couch dances. In turn, the dancers began warning patrons not to get a lapdance or table dance from Katie, to avoid incurring the wrath of

Will. Their intentions, though, were more than likely to simply protect the sex trade they all actively participated in, but which was threatened by a suddenly overprotective “pimp” figure.

Gambling

Gambling was an unexpected part of the network criminality occurring in Club X. Will served as the head of this activity as well. Despite the presence of dancing nude girls, the interest of several regulars could be recruited to illegal gambling during major sports events, which would be broadcast on a big-screen TV across from the bar and on several other flat-screen TVs located throughout the club. Will himself would run a pool for major football games or boxing matches, which he always ordered for Club X. He profited enormously from UFC Pay-Per-View fights, charging a \$15 cover charge on fight nights and accepting a percentage of each bet placed.

However, Will would not actively run the gambling going on at Club X day-to-day himself. He instead assigned that task to a bookie, “Rick,” who would visit the club infrequently, just to meet potential or unsure clients. Rick chose not to do much of his business in the club, rather than just talking about odds and encouraging new gamblers to contact him; if he accepted bets, it would be informal and seldom was money exchanged in the bar. When at the club, Rick wouldn’t drink or speak to any of the female employees; he was intently focused on the gambling network. Patrons explained to the researcher that Rick was quite efficient; every morning, he would send a text message to all of his frequently gambling clients, letting them know their “balance” with him, whether negative or winning. At Will’s request, Rick rarely accepted or pay money out for gambling inside of Club X; he always had his clients meet him in random places, such as grocery store parking lots, once a week to settle their debts or be paid. Despite his limited involvement with Club X, not paying a debt with Rick was damaging; a customer would not be welcomed into the club if he had an ongoing balance to pay with Rick. Rick and Will looked out for each other; Will told Rick which customers were trustworthy and which were not, and in turn, Rick became Will’s personal adviser in placing sports bets, often helping him draw in large profits from gambling.

The bets placed at Club X were seldom less than three digits and at times passed over \$1,000. While Will, Josh, the bartenders and the DJs all participated in gambling and facilitated bets for their trusted patrons, they also took pains to exclude the female employees from this activity. It was not uncommon for a dancer or shot girl to approach a meeting of gamblers only to have all the men fall silent and stare at her, making her feel unwelcomed. This sector of the crime network at Club X is so gender-specific and secretive that a lone female researcher could have easily not detected its presence, had a few patrons not mentioned it to her.

Discussion and Conclusion

Within Club X exists an intricate network of deviant activity, involving many deviant actors. Constructed through laid-back business relationships—patrons, coworkers, and so on—the network existed completely for profit, a profit which could be assumed to far greater than any legitimate means of income at this gentlemen’s club. There were no formal inductions; it was a fluid, ongoing process, and the network was altered and adapted based on its human capital. As dancers and shot girls quit Club X or went to jail, their involvement in the network would end, but shortly after new women would fulfill their roles. It can be assumed, though, that the only reason the network of deviance at Club X had any permanent staying power was because it took place inside of a structured business. If these actors had tried to operate for drug or sex trade or gambling outside of the club, it could be assumed those illegitimate relationships would have eventually fallen apart.

Protecting the network was seen as an utmost priority; the members had to trust one another and ensure that their patrons felt comfortable and trusting of the network. This is why Danielle’s

betrayal of one customer served as a betrayal of the entire network, and the reason why she was ultimately forced out of the club and the interplay of illegality it contained. This is also why Will's public jealousy and protectiveness over Katie upset and worried the other employees, who felt it might drive away potential johns for the other dancers.

The illegitimate activity of Club X was dependent on a positive working relationship with local law enforcement. As mentioned, off-duty police officers were frequently spotted as patrons of the club, as were other prominent public figures, including high school principals, lawyers, and local business owners. However, when Danielle involved the police into the operations of the network and cast a negative light on Club X, she was immediately fired for doing so.

Club X differed from traditionally defined networks in that all the individuals involved were well-acquainted with one another and interacted almost daily. Although occasional outsiders, such as Rick the bookie, were involved, their identities were still known to the patrons and employees. To the researcher's knowledge, sex was rarely, if ever, purchased for someone who wasn't present in the club—even out-of-town visitors went to the club and met the girls prior to arranging sex for money. Primary suppliers and purchasers of drugs were both patrons and employees; while they may have had to reach outside the realm of Club X in order to buy or sell the substances, the main actors were always present in the heart of the network, the club. This makes Club X fit into what Chambliss (1971) categorized as "hot spots," an identifiable location that harbored an illegal network of criminal activity. In this sense, we see that hot spots enable and facilitate the activities of criminal networks. A strip club, by nature, is deviant a taboo, and it served as the perfect location for an easily masked route to prostitution, drug trade, and gambling. The opportunities for illegitimate means of income at Club X proved to be greater than the opportunities for legitimate income.

An integral part to studying illicit networks is the topic of recruitment. As discussed earlier, leaving the criminal network was rarely done by force. The male figures in the network stayed rooted firmly in their roles, but the illicit female actors came and went. However, one of the central matters in examining organized criminal activity is not just escaping the activity, but, importantly, entry into the network. In her qualitative research on exotic dancers, Barton (2006) stated that many of the women she interviewed were persuaded into dancing after becoming cocktail waitresses at strip clubs (pp. 29). At Club X, a similar pattern occurred. Many women would respond to Club X's billboard, which constantly advertised "Now Hiring: All Positions" or a similar lure. Once in an interview with Will, though, the women would find out that the club did not need cocktail waitresses, bartenders, or DJs—just dancers. The manager would offer them a job as a shot girl if they seemed reluctant to dance. Very quickly, the women learned they could do less work being a dancer but make twice the money, which parallels what Barton discovered about the cocktail waitresses she interviewed.

Miller (1986) stated that the women involved in criminal networks whom she studied were recruited into the network via a related social network (i.e., family), from being vulnerable runaways, or from drug use. However, she also noted that most of the women she interviewed did not develop serious drug problems until "they were already immersed in the fast life" of networked hustling (pp. 109). Most of the employees who admitted to drug use had at least dabbled in illegal drugs before they worked at Club X, but the club certainly heightened their usage and involvement in drugs as it served as the place where they would purchase and sell drugs. Darla was the primary exception of someone who sought out employment at Club X for the sole purpose of escalating her career as a drug pusher.

Most social networks of illicit activity do not have a hierarchy, as is typical of public perceptions about organized crime (for example, the Mafia). However, Club X was a legitimate business with an established hierarchy of management and employees, so while very small, a hierarchy did exist in its illegal network as well. Will filled the head role, acting somewhere in the middle on Miller's continuum of "the man" and "the pimp." Below him was Josh; then the bartenders, doorman, and DJ; and lastly, the cocktail waitresses, dancers, and shot girls gathered at the bottom of the pyramid of power in the

illicit network. This is interesting because one may see how extremely gendered the hierarchy was. Although Club X is owned by a female, she left the management duties solely to Will and rarely interfered with or even attended business operations.

For this reason, it is difficult for this research to support an idea of strip clubs or prostitution empowering women. While the women experienced minimal monetary profits from their actions, they were left at the mercy of Will and even Josh. As mentioned earlier in the paper, the men working at the club are lifelong friends and strongly bonded. Standing up to any male in the club, even the bartender or the DJ, was a quick way for a shot girl or dancer to be fired. The way to provoke sympathy or support from the males at the top of the hierarchy was through sexual favors or extreme monetary profit—although even after doing so, the women in the network still performed at the command of male “pimps” for male “johns,” and not doing so would result in unsatisfactory profits (as Katie, who refused to solicit to the patrons, realized). Twenty-five years after *Street Woman’s* publication, this research affirms Miller’s discussion that gender affects both legitimate and illegitimate employment. Gaining power in the network and becoming a figurehead was entirely based on gender; the two dancers who did sexual favors to gain bartending shifts were soon afterward fired from the club, and the bartending resumed its tradition as a male job in the club. Repeatedly, the investigator watched qualified women apply for bartending or DJ jobs and be pressured instead into working as shot girls, who are more easily controlled by the “pimp” figurehead. Thus, the social network of Club X was entirely gendered.

While gender was certainly an integral part of examining the social network (both illicit and legitimate) in Club X, further research is needed to make any stout academic conclusions targeted at the feminist debates about the sex industry. This research was unable to avoid a discussion of gender but was primarily focused on uncovering the illicit activity occurring within a legitimate business. It is the hypothesis of the researchers that this activity occurs in other strip clubs and bars and begs for more investigation, to better understand not only the organization of criminal activity, but the important social and gender roles within it.

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