

## Location, location, location: selling sex in the suburbs

John Selwood, University of Winnipeg

Steven Kohm, University of Toronto

**Abstract:** Conventional understanding of the sex trade in cities has identified it as an inner city phenomenon. However, a broader interpretation of the topic suggests that the sale of sex involves more than street prostitution and it is more widespread than hitherto acknowledged. When sex is openly employed to sell other services or products, it is a moot point as to whether the sex is not an integral component of the product package. Marketing literature would certainly have us believe it to be so. When off-street sex is examined, it also becomes apparent that technology is permitting sex to be sold in a variety of forms and in a variety of locations. Evidence drawn from Winnipeg, western Canada, and Perth, Western Australia, suggests that, to an increasing degree, sex is not only being marketed to a suburban-based clientele, it is becoming more widely available for sale in the suburbs.

### Introduction

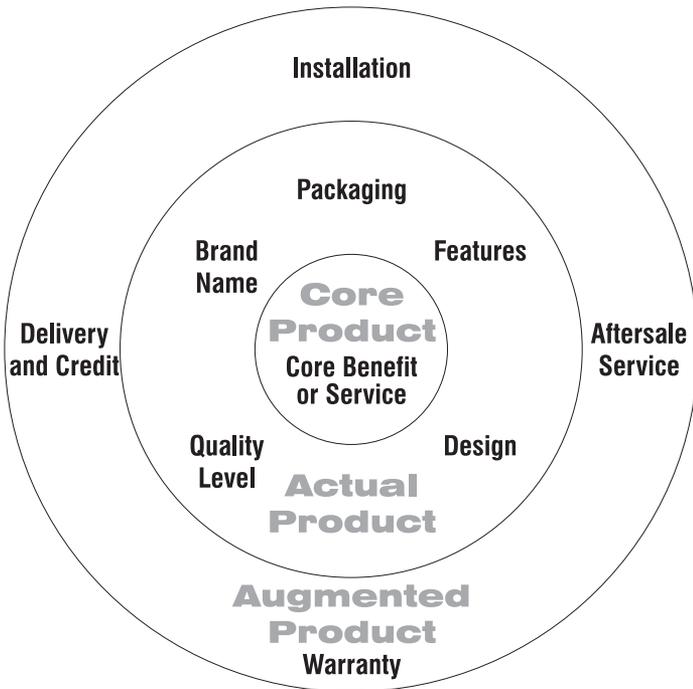
Just as population has moved to the suburbs, to be followed by industry and other forms of commerce, so have businesses that sell sex, or who use sex to sell other products and services. The extent to which the sex trade has penetrated the suburbs is very difficult to ascertain without more intensive research than permitted under current budgetary and other constraints. However, it is safe to say that both clients and the varied sex related benefits they seek are widely distributed through the city (Kohm 1997; Kohm and Selwood 1997; Selwood and Batzel 1988). The providers are quite evidently well aware of the basic principles of contemporary marketing and offer a wide range of products and services in

targeting a variety of market segments who are largely resident in suburbs.

The purveyors of sex appreciate that they are selling products that comprise, to quote from a basic marketing textbook: a “complex bundle of benefits that satisfy [consumers’] needs” (Kotler *et al* 1996, 291). Products thus boast a potentially wide range of attributes that can be conceived of as operating at three levels (Figure 1). These levels consist of the core product’s benefits as sought by the by the consumer, the actual product and the augmented product. The core product addresses what the consumer is *really buying*. That is, it can satisfy a variety of basic needs and wants. In the case of a bar or beverage room, that may include the slaking of a thirst, reinforcement of a macho image, soothing of a libido, a desire for company, or whatever. The product’s specific tangible and intangible features are referred to as the actual product. These will include the quality of the liquid, what it is contained in, and who is carrying it.. Finally, the augmented product would include the entertainment provided in the bar. However, the augmented component quickly becomes an important and expected part of the total product. In a beverage room featuring exotic dancers, the stripper’s sexy gyrations are just as much part of the purchase as is the drink itself. According to Kotler *et al* (1996, 291):

Today, most competition occurs at the product augmentation level. Successful companies add benefits to their offers that not only will *satisfy*, but will also *delight* the customer.

Massage parlours, escort services, strip bars and burlesque clubs, adult video and magazine outlets and adult sex shops are among the outlets that provide sex related products and services (Kohm and Selwood 1997). In this paper we will be focusing on one aspect of the “soft sex” trade: that is, the legally sanctioned provision of adult entertainment in drinking establishments, including strip clubs, bars and restaurants. Because these places are not always accepted without protest by segments of the wider community, they do not always have a highly visible impact on the townscape, but they nevertheless adhere to the basic rule for



*Figure 1: The attributes of a product (Source: Kotler, et al. 1996, p. 291).*

marketing consumer goods: location, location, location. Winnipeg, Canada, and Perth, Western Australia, provide the case study material for the paper.

### The Hooters Phenomenon

One of the more obvious manifestations of the sale of sex in the suburbs is the “Hooters” chain of restaurant, with the Hooters Girls being an integral part of the product concept. Although Hooters’ management insist that they are running a “neighbourhood restaurant.” According to their website promotion, the

. . . concept stresses great food, great service, reasonable prices, a relaxed atmosphere and, of course, the now famous

Hooters Girls. These elements combine to make Hooters the place to go for families, celebrities, sports figures, and anyone who enjoys food and FUN, FUN, FUN! (<http://www.hooters.com>)

That's not quite so. Gary Score, manager of Fargo's Hooters, says that the restaurant "is a blue-collar place that caters mostly to men aged 25 to 40. It's a place where they can eat and drink . . . and enjoy the scenery" (Owen 1997 16 February). Bruce Owen, staff reporter for the Winnipeg Free Press, notes that in Winnipeg, "most of the clients are men, from college guys to lone retirees." (*ibid*).

Winnipeg's Hooters is located in Madison Square, a parasitic shopping complex, almost adjacent to Polo Park, Winnipeg's first suburban, regional shopping centre. It is also located conveniently near Winnipeg's football stadium and arena, both venues being important sources of Hooters' customers. It might also be noted that St. James, the suburb containing Hooters, is commonly stereotyped as being the home of a lower middle class population, not renowned for its placing high stock on culture, but rather on the materialistic values of the mass market. Hooters' website would also be accessible to a high percentage of St. James dwellings.

Hooters' suburban Winnipeg location is no coincidence. Their other Canadian locations are also firmly planted in the suburbs. Toronto's Hooters is in North York and the Edmonton outlet is on Bourbon Street in the West Edmonton mega mall (<http://www.hooters.com>). Vancouver's Hooters is in Surrey, a suburb some forty minutes drive from downtown.

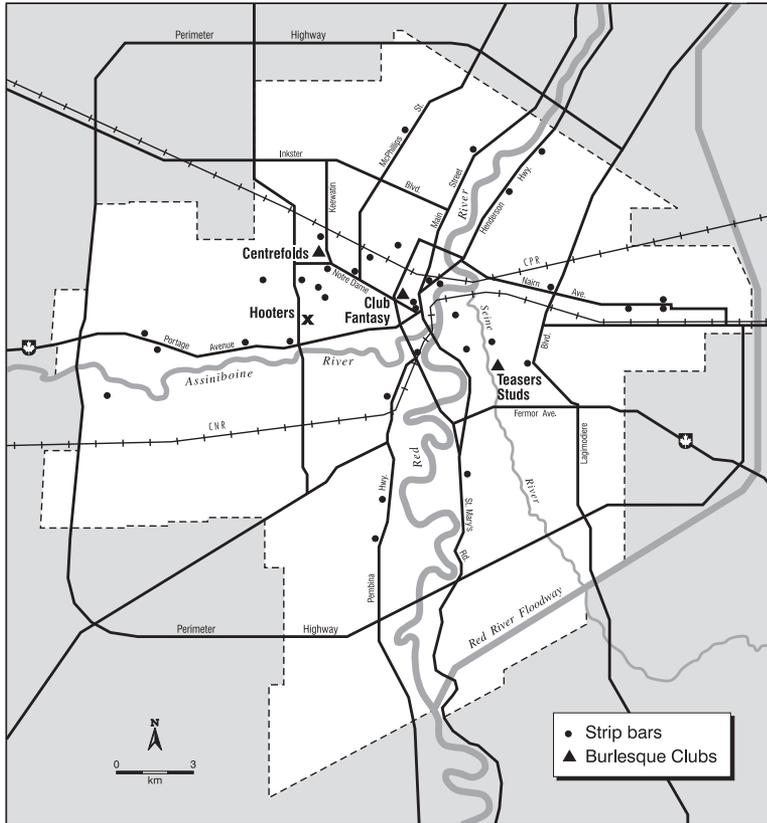
This obvious commodification of the female body has been the subject of repeated controversy, something on which the restaurant chain of course thrives. Only this week (September 22-28 1997) Vancouver's Hooters hit the pages of *The Winnipeg Sun* and the *Winnipeg Free Press* (Lakritz N. 1997; Joyce 1997 23 September), which reported the dethronement of one Gabriella Petivoky, Miss Canadian International, a Hooters Girl, because of her promotional work with the restaurant chain. The Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women, along with other women's rights groups, raised objections to Hooters' arrival in

Winnipeg even before the restaurant's opening (St. Germain 1996: Owen 1997) and the debate continues to feature in letters to the press (see, for example, Harris 1997). However, as Carl Matheson, a philosophy professor at the University of Manitoba, has observed: ". . . the Hooters chain is no better or worse than other aspects of Western culture . . . , so why pick on Hooters?" Hooters' blatant commercial use of women's bodies is perhaps controversial, but it exists, and it exists in the suburbs to service a largely suburban clientele.

### Strip Bars and Burlesque Clubs

Although there is a concentration of strip bars and self-styled burlesque clubs in the inner city, they are also found in more suburban locations. The more highly visible burlesque clubs tend to locate near blue collar, working class neighbourhoods and in association with industrial land. The Chalet Hotel, home to "Teasers" and "Studs" (the former featuring female dancers and the latter males), is located on the borders of a largely inactive industrial part of St. Boniface (see figure 2). The burlesque club and a large adult video store both make their home in close proximity to the abattoirs. On the other side of the city, "Centerfolds", a burlesque club catering to male patrons, is located in another working class suburb of the city, close to the CPR Weston Shops. "Club Fantasy", a recently revamped burlesque club in Winnipeg (*Winnipeg Sun*, 27 March, 1995), is located in an inner city area characterized by a diverse mix of retail, light industrial and working class to poor quality housing.

However, live nude entertainment is by no means confined to the burlesque clubs. The Liquor Control Act also permits licenced "Beverage Rooms" and in some cases "Banquet Halls," to provide exotic dancers as entertainment (*Manitoba Liquor Control Commission Licensee Field Manual*, 1990). Burlesque or nude entertainment is therefore associated almost exclusively with hotel beverage rooms, since bars not associated with hotels are generally classed as "Cabarets" where nude entertainment is not permitted under the Act's regulations. Where nude entertainment is permitted, the Liquor Control Act has set out strict rules of conduct. Among



**Figure 2:** Winnipeg's soft sex sales outlets.

other things, the regulations state that there may be “no audience participation” and that “only one exotic dancer is permitted to be in the stage area at any one time” (*ibid.*). The rules seem to be aimed at preventing any sort of sexual contact from occurring, whether it directly involves the audience or not. While there are occasions where there is some contact between the dancer and a patron, it is a far cry from the lap dancers of Ontario, or the “ten dollar” dancers of Montreal. However, the Liquor Control Act does not govern the location of bars providing exotic dancers.

This is controlled by Winnipeg's zoning regulations which generally treat hotels containing beverage rooms as permitted uses in commercial districts. Zoning does not discriminate between an ordinary beverage room with no burlesque entertainment and a bar which is offering strippers as a form of entertainment (pers. comm.). Commercial use zones are widely distributed throughout the city.

A survey of Winnipeg's hotels revealed that their representatives were often reluctant to acknowledge that strip shows were featured at the establishment. Whereas hotels that did not offer this type of service seemed to be more than happy to make this information public, those establishments that did offer the service were often quick to qualify their affirmative response. In one case, the hotel management refused to make this information available over the phone, fearing they might be exposed to "feminists." In many cases, it was pointed out that strippers were only offered as entertainment for the lunchtime and after work crowds. The management of one bar in particular, when asked why their bar had strippers in the afternoon but not the evening, offered this response: "We're a family-type bar."

It seems that there is a hierarchy among bars and hotels in the city. At the top of the pyramid are such "higher order" family oriented hotels and chains, such as the Holiday Inn or Quality Inn, which consider having strippers on the premises "substandard" (pers. comm.). Next, are those bars which do offer nude entertainment, but only as a sideline to the lunchtime business crowd, or on the weekends. Finally, there are those bars which offer burlesque entertainment exclusively, both in the day and in the evening hours. Of the eighty-nine hotels in Winnipeg that have some sort of nightclub or bar, just over forty-one per cent said they had strippers on at least a part-time basis. The spatial distribution of hotels with this type of service is widespread and extends into most districts in Winnipeg (see figure 2). Virtually all are located on arterial streets with a significant amount of commercial activity, and most are in the suburbs. Twelve such bars are located in the CBD or zone of transition, but the remaining twenty-five are in the suburbs. It is very apparent that the latter are serving up sex to a suburban clientele.

## Some Australian Comparisons

The sex trade is alive and well in Australia and provides some interesting parallels and contrasts with its Canadian counterpart. As in Canada, the industry is regulated by different levels of government, but in Australia the Commonwealth, or Federal government has less direct involvement. For example, whereas prostitution, although not in itself illegal, is effectively banned throughout Canada because of the national Criminal Code, it is legally sanctioned in various parts of Australia, including the Capital Territory and the two most populous states of New South Wales and Victoria. In this paper we will use examples of the sale of sex in restaurants, burlesque houses and bars of Perth, Western Australia in comparing the two systems.

### The Raunchy Restaurant

The Raunchy Restaurant in Fremantle, Perth's port city, is a far cry from Hooters. The present location is more central in that Fremantle has its own CBD. However, it was formerly located in North Perth, one of Perth's inner suburbs, until forced to move because of local opposition and political expediency (pers. comm. 1997). The name carries the message without innuendo employed by Hooters and the product package is far more explicitly sexual in content. At The Raunchy Restaurant, patrons are served by "semi-clad waitresses" (Duffy 1997) with such added delectables as:

A-La-Lap - Topless or Naked Hostess Perched on *your lap* feeding you fresh fruit and cream.

Slic-A-Chic - Essential warm *oil massage* topless or naked hostess of your choice.

Or, the *piece-de-resistance*:

Tutti-Frutti - The most *tantalising* dessert in the world! Choose your naked hostess, she will *lay* (sic) *naked* on your table covered only in fresh fruit and cream.

The patron is then invited to lick the platter clean down to the plastic wrap body covering. Touted as the “ideal venue” for “bucks shows, Birthdays and special Occasions, Social and Sporting Clubs, Private and Corporate Functions” (<http://www.wasex.com.au>). The Raunchy Restaurant is hardly the place for a family meal, but it continues to be associated with the suburbs by the local police (Duffy 1997).

### **Perth's Strip Bars and Burlesque Clubs**

Clearly, The Raunchy Restaurant fits more appropriately into the category of the burlesque house or strip joint than it merits being called a restaurant. Eating in this case is the augmented component of the sex product. Raunchy's current location is also more in line with that of Perth's other strip clubs or nightclubs holding a “Cabaret” licence permitting full nudity. The “Kit Kat” club, is located in Fremantle, designed no doubt to attract visiting sailors as well as local customers. Others, like “Gobbles,” “Submission” and “The Site” are on the fringes of Perth's principal night entertainment district. Again, such locations are designed as much to cater to the tourist as to the local clientele.

However, as in Winnipeg, Perth's suburban bars and pubs have also incorporated the sexual component into their sales of beer and liquor. Many outlets now feature “skimpy” barmaids, particularly at lunch and supper hours when there is strong competition for the customers' dollar. Starting in the 1980s, Perth's bars began to feature “see through” barmaids, then during the America's Cup challenge, barmaids went topless (Hall, Selwood and McKewon 1995), but more modest dress codes were imposed in the aftermath of the Cup loss. Nevertheless, there is considerable discretion used in the interpretation of the code as spelled out in the licencing conditions of the Liquor and Gaming Act and administered by the police Liquor and Gaming Branch. Although many have applied, only four pubs have been granted special licences permitting toplessness. These are all in distinctly working class, suburban, commercial districts, where local councils and nearby businesses raised no serious objections.

Elsewhere, the “skimpy” bars offer a variety of options. Some barmaids are dressed quite decorously, similarly to the Hooters Girls, but others, depending on the workplace, their employer, their personal inclination and the demands of the local inspector, will be dressed very skimpily indeed, wearing little more than a g-string and not much more on top. One criterion used by inspectors is whether “buns” are exposed - this being permitted by some, disallowed by others (pers. comm. 1997). A few of the larger pubs also employ exotic dancers, either as singles or in teams, who put on shows at peak times. Some dancers are male, managed by “Collars and Cuffs,” “Moving Violations,” or “Toyboys,” but the great majority are female associated with such operations as “Living Dolls,” “Teasers,” or “Sunset Strip.” According to one employer, the dancers are not supposed to bare themselves or to make contact with patrons, but will at times do so in the excitement of the dance (pers. comm. 1997). Time did not permit a systematic survey of Perth locations featuring skimpy barmaids and exotic dancers, but they are numerous and scattered through the suburbs, generally operating unobtrusively and, in the higher class suburbs, relying only on word of mouth for their publicity.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

In comparing the provision of “soft sex” in the two countries, it is readily apparent that there are some common threads. First, it is clear that both are selling sex as part of a more complex product, commodifying the human body and marketing bits of its anatomy along with other attributes of the product. Burlesque houses, strip clubs and pubs are involved in the business, including neighbourhood pubs located in the suburbs. In general, the more extreme forms are contained in working class districts. However, that is by no means universally the case. Sex is for sale in higher class suburbs too, albeit with less fanfare.

## References

- DUFFY, J. 1997 'Raunchy to sue police for \$1.2m.' *The West Australian* 26 July
- HALL, C.M., SELWOOD, J. and MCKEWON, E. 1995 'Hedonists, ladies and larrikins: crime, prostitution and the 1987 America's Cup' *Visions in Leisure and Business*, 14(3) 28-51
- HARRIS, D. 1997 'Hooters message is harmful' *Winnipeg Free Press* 3 September
- HOOTERS 1997 URL <<http://www.hooters.com>>
- JOYCE, G. 1997 'Another beauty queen bites the dust' *Winnipeg Free Press* 23 September
- KOHM, S. A. 1997 'The Geography of Winnipeg's sex trade' unpub. Hons. Thesis, Department of Geography, University of Winnipeg.
- KOHM, S. A. and SELWOOD, H. 1997 'Controlling the crimogenic place: the evolution of Winnipeg's sex trade' in *Regina Geographical Studies* No. 6 Regina: University of Regina Press
- KOTLER, P., ARMSTRONG, G., CUNNINGHAM, P. and WARREN, R. 1996 *Principles of Marketing* (3rd Canadian Ed.) Scarborough: Prentice Hall Canada
- LAKRITZ, N. 1997 'Busted beauty queen controversy is a real hoot' *The Winnipeg Sun* 23 September
- MANITOBA LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION 1990 *Licensee Field Manual*
- OWEN, B. 1997 'Where eyes dare to wander' *Winnipeg Free Press* 16 February
- Pers. Comm. 1997 proprietor of dancer agency
- ST. GERMAIN, P. 1996 'What's the best asset Hooters Girl can offer?' *The Winnipeg Sun* 3 December
- SELWOOD, J. and BATZEL, J. 1988 'The Geography of prostitution in Winnipeg' unpublished paper presented at the Canadian Association of Geographers, Prairie Division Meeting, Lake Diefenbaker
- THE RAUNCHY RESTAURANT 1997 <<http://www.wasex.com/Raunchy>>