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“Manufacturing” Community: Solidarity, Profit and the Bar Owner

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ABSTRACT

This study considers the potential of eight independently-run bars in a small Connecticut seaport city to “manufacture” community. It focuses on the marked tension faced by the seven owners (and one manager) of these establishments, who seek to attract regular “crowds” with whom they respectively identify while also sustaining profit margins. By examining bar activity and functionality, this study contributes to contemporary understandings of “community” within anthropology. Of particular interest are theoretical frameworks that account for the negotiation of identity and potential development of community as these occur *within specific localities*, especially small businesses. Based on interview and observational data collected over a six-month period, this study finds that the bar may, indeed, be said to “manufacture” community. Each of the establishments reviewed entices patrons to identify (both as individuals and as members of a “crowd”) with a highly personalized bar space and, by extension, to make regular bar visits. This process fosters continuous discourse between owners and patrons concerning various elements of bar environment. Because owners hold greater influence over the bar space

than patrons, and must often understand this influence in financial terms, bar-based community is best described as “manufactured.”

Introduction: The Social Importance of Bars in Thatcham

The city of Thatcham, Connecticut has experienced numerous transformations. First making a name for itself as a whaling hub in the 19th century, Thatcham bolstered its reputation during WWI and WWII, becoming an important site of submarine manufacturing and naval activity. Through the second half of the 20th century, however, industry declined, and the city gained a reputation for raucous nightlife fueled by sailors, prostitution and, as the stories go, innumerable bars. Although Thatcham continues to face considerable economic obstacles today, a recent revival in local art has prompted community leaders to pursue stronger relations with the three colleges located on the periphery of the city’s downtown. These revitalization efforts follow crackdowns from the navy as well as local politicians, which, over the past thirty years, have prompted a reduction in Thatcham bar activity. That said, many residents still describe Thatcham as a “bar town.”

Thatcham’s oldest bar, open for nearly a century, is the Nine Innings Tavern. A single-room establishment crowded with black-and-white photographs, baseball memorabilia and vintage beer advertisements, Nine Innings is, in the words of owner Gary McAllister, a “home” for its regular patrons. Among his clientele, Gary counts many close friends with whom he shares a general understanding of the values, aesthetics, and narratives represented by his establishment. The interactions that take place within Nine Innings facilitate continual reinterpretation and reproduction of identity on the level of the individual, of the group, and of the bar.

Activity such as that which occurs regularly in Nine Innings is a familiar scene to most Americans. In recent years, the success of television programs such as *Cheers* and *The Simpsons*

have brought to the forefront of American pop culture a notion long accepted by many frequent bar-goers: that bars are important sites of social interaction and, in certain cases, community. That “community” holds a notoriously ambiguous position in the social sciences, however, makes this a problematic suggestion. What is a community? Do relationships such as those developed in Nine Innings constitute community, or is this possibility nullified by the exchange of capital that transpires between Gary, his staff and his clientele? Certainly, Gary cares about his patrons, but he also cares about making a profit. How do these two loyalties coexist?

This study explores the processes through which for-profit businesses facilitate social interactions crucial to community development. By examining the tension that seven Thatcham bar owners and one bar manager face as they attempt to remain financially stable while also fostering feelings of solidarity among patrons, I argue that the activities and interactions of participants in the bar scene may “manufacture” community. In so doing, I contribute to contemporary interpretations of community within anthropology and the social sciences more broadly.

Literature Review: Conceptualizing Community, Drinking and the Bar

Although drinking practices and places have been analyzed extensively in relation to identity as well as to economic structures (Douglas 1987; Wilson 2005), the bar as a site of “community” does not neatly conform to either of these models. This is largely due to the ambiguity of “community” itself, which may refer to manifestations of solidarity formed in accordance with any number of factors, including geography, ideology, ethnicity or vocation. In order to study how community is developed, felt and expressed within bars, a productive theoretical approach to this term must first be outlined.

For many social scientists in the second half of the 20th century, the term “community” lost its salience as the binaries

developed by 19th century sociologists—premodern and modern, organic and mechanical solidarity, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (Durkheim 1893; Marx and Engels 1902; Tönnies 1957)—fell under increasing scrutiny. Functionalist anthropology, with its focus on the personal relationships and shared knowledge seen to characterize community in so-called “primitive” societies (Schröder 2007) was replaced by more reflexive approaches to fieldwork. With the rise of globalization in recent decades, however, certain scholars (Amit 2010; Amit and Rapport 2002, 2012; Anderson 1983) have begun to analyze the potential of “community” to describe collectives not necessarily delimited by geography. The term is increasingly understood as a symbolic ideal, rather than as a social entity (Anderson 1983; Cohen 1985).

How “community,” as an abstraction, articulates with actual social relations has, thus, become a question of renewed interest to anthropologists (Amit 2010; Amit and Rapport 2002, 2012; Creed 2006). Arguments that this term should be replaced with the more place-centric “locality” (Cooke 1990) must now account for the potential overlap of these two terms. With several exceptions (Cox 1997; Day and Murdoch 1993), however, such overlap has remained largely unaddressed. As Wilson (2005, 11) asserts, “anthropologists today...choose to avoid making linkages between respondents and their local actions and groups...and the larger social formations of which they are part, such as ethnic groups, classes and nations....As a result, anthropologists also increasingly avoid studies of ‘communities.’” By exploring the capacity of interactions and understandings embodied by “community” to emerge within a small business, this study aims to revisit this concept at the micro-local level.

Contemporary social scientists understand “community” to represent a “genus of concepts” (Amit 2010, 358), the study of which demands a shift in scholarly focus from meaning to *use* (Amit 2010; Amit and Rapport 2002, 2012; Cohen 1985; Creed 2006). As Creed (2006, 7) notes, this shift carries with it a

temptation to “[distinguish] different uses of [community], such as ‘geographical communities’ and ‘political communities,’ but since these dimensions often overlap, such distinctions could hardly be sustained.” In other words, a theoretically productive approach to the study of community should not simply interpret the variable use of “community” as grounds to develop multiple definitions for the term. Anthropologists must “retain the concept’s inherent obscurity...so that it does not automatically evoke any preconceived ideas but rather requires specification” (Creed 2006, 7). Because “the meaning of community can affect social relations, not just vice versa” (Creed 2006, 44), to study “community” is to analyze a highly versatile process of continuous reinterpretation.

According to Cohen (1985, 12), community “expresses a relational idea: the opposition of one community...to other social entities.” The “boundary” understood to facilitate this opposition is, in consequence symbolically dualistic. As Cohen (1985, 74) explains, “it is the sense [community members] have of its perception by people on the other side—the public face and ‘typical’ mode—and it is their sense of the community as refracted through all the complexities of their lives and experience—the private face and idiosyncratic mode.” These symbolic “faces,” Cohen (1985) argues, manifest when one social group is confronted, often through threats of invasion or displacement, by an “opposing” group.

Turner (1969), in contrast to Cohen (1985), develops the concept of “*communitas*,” an experience of intensive solidarity that manifests not as the result of boundary-based distinction, but *internally*, through intense feelings of solidarity and equality. Like Cohen (1985), however, Turner (1969, 96-98) understands “*communitas*” as arising during exceptional “moments out of time.” Addressing this theoretical parallel, Amit (2010, 360) asserts that, “[because] Cohen’s [and] Turner’s...versions of community

are dependent on the extraordinary and the polarized for eliciting communality...they are more likely to limit rather than open up this field of investigation.” Emphasizing the ambiguity of “community” as a productive basis for theorization, rather than as a semantic hurdle, Amit (2010) and Amit and Rapport (2012) focus on quotidian social relations and expressions, introducing three concepts previously unused in community studies: “consociation,” “joint-commitments,” and “affect-belonging.”

According to Amit and Rapport (2012, 25), “Consociate relationships do not inevitably or necessarily arise as an entailment either of readily available categories or the workings of existing structures.” Instead, consociation manifests itself through the “circulation of interpretive narratives” (Amit and Rapport 2012, 26) which inform the self- and group-identification of individuals. The tendency of parents to exchange anecdotes and understandings while watching their children compete in athletics (Dyck 2002), for example, can facilitate consociate relationships. Due to the multiplicity of circumstances that may give rise to consociation, many of which do not require consistent or prolonged interaction, this term is especially useful in problematizing the ambiguity of community. Consociation yields expressions of communality, but does not, necessarily, define forms of social organization.

Reappropriating Gilbert’s (1994) notion of the “joint-commitment” to inform theoretical understandings of community, Amit (2010) draws heavily from Burke’s (1955, xviii) notion of “titular” concepts: ideas illuminated by examining “terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise.” A joint-commitment, according to Gilbert (1994, 16) references the interdependence of specific individual commitments that “cannot exist apart.” Any agenda to which all members of a certain social group must contribute (governance, neighborhood safety, social activism, etc.) inevitably breeds

joint-commitments. While Gilbert (1994, 14) recognizes the joint-commitment as a “special unifying principle” capable of producing “true unity,” Amit (2010) notes that conflict can also arise between individuals forced to navigate their reliance on one another. By recognizing the versatility of the joint-commitment, which may emerge through any number of social relations and last for varying periods of time, Amit (2010, 359) defines the term as a “generative principle of community.” In order to analyze this principle as a “spot” of ambiguity, however, Amit (2010) references not only the multiplicity of circumstances through which it can manifest, but also the uneven individual commitments of which it is comprised. Members of a group who depend on each other to achieve a common goal will not, necessarily, assume equal degrees of responsibility toward their shared objective.

The concept of disproportion also applies to feelings of “affect-belonging.” Because these feelings are “unevenly and unequally...dispersed” (Amit 2010, 361), they must be examined in accordance with a “distributive model of culture” (Hannerz 1992 in Amit 2010). While joint-commitments develop out of shared responsibilities, however, affect is felt on a personal level, and is not necessarily tied to any collective obligations. While explaining her inclination to “feel ‘at home’” (i.e. experience affect) in her neighborhood as the partial product of “familiar faces, sites and memories,” Amit (2010, 361) highlights this contrast. “Beyond the reciprocity that I maintain with a couple of immediate next-door neighbors,” she reflects, “I would be hard pressed to identify a broader sense of joint commitment with this sense of connection.” Due to the fact that joint-commitments and affect remain distinct spots of ambiguity, despite holding the potential to inform one another, these elements of community may be explored across variable “forms of association” ranging from the consociate to the intimate (Amit 2010, 362).

In theorizing the production of community within drinking establishments, it is important to review the broad anthropological literature regarding alcohol consumption as a socially meaningful behavior. Over the past several decades, concern about the physiological effects of drinking stemming from research in the health sciences has been both challenged and complicated by studies (Robbins 1979; Douglas 1987) of the social interactions and cultural contexts that inform drinking behavior. Bearing in mind Douglas's (1987, 9) contention that "Sampling a drink is sampling what is happening to a whole category of social life," anthropologists have come to interpret the consumption of alcoholic beverages as an act "loaded with socially assumed meanings" (Turmo 2001, 131) and, by extension, "an extremely important feature in the production and reproduction of ethnic, national, class, gender and local community identities" (Wilson 2005, 3). Because drinking embodies an intimate relationship between substance and consumer, as well as an array of outwardly projected "meanings," the behavior must be understood as both an "individual act" and as a "social fact" (Turmo 2001, 131).

This duality is not the only source of ambivalence in perceptions of drinking. As Schivelbusch (1992, 171) comments, "Communal drinking...creates fraternity among drinkers... [but] this relationship is marked by mutual caution, obligation, and competitiveness." Ethnographers whose fieldwork concerns drinking behavior (Anderson 1979; Simmons 1959, 1960) have emphasized this ostensible paradox. Anderson (1979, 187), for example, notes that patrons of Jelly's, a bar and liquor-store in Chicago's South Side, "can easily close ranks and orient to an equality in a group that is otherwise stratified into particular crowd identities." Such orientation, facilitated by drinking behavior, aligns with Cohen's (1985) theory of "opposition." As Anderson (1979, 36) explains, "the extended group, *especially in times of group trouble or triumph* [emphasis added]...becomes characterized by an intimate 'we' feeling."

That both communality and "stratification" may arise through drinking behavior serves to underline identity negotiation as a highly versatile social act. Drinking behavior that informs individual and subgroup identity in social groupings is typically based on purposeful and frequently premeditated acts of antagonism, self-promotion, and support (Anderson 1979; Robbins 1979; Simmons 1959, 1960). All of these acts, even the most hostile, occur in response to shared understandings of individual identity as fluid; members of drinking groups are consistently afforded the opportunity to relocate themselves within existing social orders. Such orders are, themselves, continually reinterpreted and reproduced on the group level within bars, clubhouses, or other "arena[s] of social life" (Anderson 1979, 29). By developing communal understandings of identity negotiation, as well as of the overarching structure that gives this interaction meaning, drinking groups are able to summon expressions of solidarity and cohesion quite readily.

As meaningful as the act of drinking itself are the places in which this ritual transpires. For decades, anthropologists have argued that "the locales of regular and celebrated drinking...are places where meanings are made, shared, disputed and reproduced, where identities take shape, flourish and change" (Wilson 2005, 10). How such meanings and identities articulate with the world outside of drinking "arenas," however, is a less definite matter. Certain studies of drinking places (Anderson 1979, Schivelbusch 1992) stress the inapplicability of bar-based behavior and understandings to external environments. Anderson (1979), for instance, analyzes regular bar patrons as members of a "primary group" (Cooley 1909) whose identities *within* the bar cannot be "carried along to different social situations" (Anderson 1979, 31). Other studies (Mars 1987, 99), in contrast, emphasize the propensity of relationships formed between drinkers to "[articulate] the spheres of leisure, family, and work." Apparently attempting to acknowledge both sides of this ambivalence, (Wilson 2005, 15) asserts, "no matter how socially significant drinking arenas seem,

their importance also rests with their roles in the framing of actions, networks and other social relations beyond their own bounds.” What is important to this study, however, is not the magnitude of this “framing” – the extent to which meanings and identities negotiated in “drinking arenas” seep into social life outside of these sites – but, rather, the simple fact that such negotiation does, indeed, transpire within bars. The bar is a place of production and reproduction. Identities and meanings are formed *here*, regardless of their applicability to peripheral spaces of interaction.

Bar behavior is defined by various expressions of reciprocity which, like joint-commitments (Amit 2010), are individually understood and collectively produced (Anderson, 1979; Schivelbusch 1992). These expressions occur in response to a “range of imaginative materials” that drinking establishments “provide” for patrons, who are thus empowered to “engage in symbolic self-definition and the building of ‘imagined communities’” (O’Carroll 2005, 53). Such “materials” may be inspired by symbols of ethnicity, politics, or other structuring systems of social identity (Kasimir, 2005; O’Carroll 2005). Often overlooked in studies of bar-based reciprocity, however, are the figures who initiate this “provision,” namely, bar owners. These individuals are intimately involved in the production of identity and shared meanings, which, I argue, facilitates community solidarity within bars.

Along with opening (both literally and figuratively) places of “imaginative materials” to potential customers, bar owners, like their clientele, interpret the materials “provided” by their establishments and, moreover, relinquish partial control of these materials in response to patron input. These individuals, in other words, do not simply construct an environment and then sit back to watch patrons interpret this space; they are in continuous dialogue with clientele. Influence over imagined materials within the bar may be disproportionately distributed between owner and patrons, but it is, nonetheless, shared.

Methods

The ethnographic methods employed in this study combined participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Of the fifteen bars located in downtown Thatcham, eight were selected as field sites. These establishments were chosen due to differences in their décor and size, apparent distinctions between their regular crowds (according to age, gender and ethnicity, among other factors), as well as the length of time for which they had been open. Other points of contrast, such as planned events (concerts, karaoke, dancing), drink selection and menu (some bars served food, others did not) also informed this selection process. For the purpose of recording complete sets of field notes, each bar was visited during different days of the week/weekend and at varying times of day/night. Fieldnotes were recorded, using an iPod touch, during observation sessions conducted at each of the eight bars on which this study focuses. Note-taking proceeded in accordance with Fife’s (2005) two-stage strategy, which mandates that “general observations” be followed by “focused” fieldnotes designed to illuminate specific “patterns of behavior.”

The “general observation” notes recorded during field observation were highly-detailed “sketches” (Emerson et al. 1995, 85-99) that attempted to document the “micro-level context” (Fife 2005, 72) of interaction within bars. These “sketches” concerned both the behavior of individuals and more concrete elements of bar atmosphere such as music, television programming, and alcohol selection. Focused fieldnotes, conversely, were based on “specific pattern[s] of behavior” (Fife, 83). Both general observation and focused notes were coded using behavioral categories based on “repetitive themes” relevant to this study’s “theoretical orientation” and research goals (Fife 2005, 75). Categories ranged in content from *bartender engagement of non-regulars* to *personal artifacts as décor*, but all, in some capacity, related to the concept of “manufactured community.” In analyzing focused notes in particular, emphasis was placed on important “linkages” (Fife 2005) presented by the distribution of particular codes.

For the purpose of developing a more complete, vocally pluralistic understanding of the expressions of community documented in fieldnotes, two semi-structured interviews (Spradley 1979) were conducted with each of the eight informants interviewed for this study. The semi-structured format granted a level of openness to informant responses, while also inclining such responses to address predetermined topics. All interviews were digitally audio-recorded.

Due to the fact that Thatcham bars, competing for business in a weak economy, must operate on a knife's edge, the owners of these establishments are generally wary of requests for their time made by unfamiliar names and faces. Entrepreneurs and salesmen trying to make a quick dollar by promoting vague membership services and other spurious investment opportunities are, unfortunately, common in the city. As such, the social-scientific aims of this project, as well as the anonymity that would be granted to all individuals and businesses studied, were stressed during introductions with potential informants.

In order to develop rapport with informants as quickly as possible, requests for interviews were always made in person. Because most owners drop by their establishments on a regular but sporadic basis, there was no standard protocol for meeting these individuals. During field-observation sessions, bartenders were often approached with questions concerning the availability of owners for an interview. In several cases, informants only felt comfortable scheduling interviews after becoming well-acquainted with the interviewer, a process that occurred over the course of initial site visits.

First interviews with bar owners relied primarily on several types of "descriptive" questions (Spradley 1979, 86-91). Comprising the majority of these interviews were "typical grand tour questions" and "mini tour questions" (Spradley 1979, 86-87), which requested that informants "describe" standard bar protocol

and scheduling. More straightforward inquiries (*are you the original owner of this establishment?; how long has your bar been open?*) were also asked. To a lesser extent, first interviews relied on "experience questions" (Spradley 1979, 88-89), which asked informants to recount incidents in which certain circumstances arose (i.e. fights, beer shortages, well-attended events).

Following Spradley's (1979: 107-119) model for analysis, transcripts of initial interviews were scanned for "folk terms" that could function as "cover terms" or "included terms" with reference to a single "semantic relationship:" *X* (included term) is a type of *Y* (cover term). This process, called "domain analysis" (domain referring to the category of meaning signified by a cover term) was often complicated when *potential* subsets of semantic relation were uncovered (*A and B might be types of X, which is a type of Y*). In such cases, domains were deconstructed into tables accounting for multi-leveled semantic relationships. These tables were termed *provisional* "folk taxonomies" (Spradley 1979, 146-147). Within provisional folk taxonomies, *verified* semantic relationships were distinguished from those that required verification during second interviews. After these taxonomies had been completed, structural and contrast questions were developed to clarify remaining ambiguities. These questions were asked during second interviews.

"Structural questions" (Spradley 1979, 121-131) (*Are punks a type of hipster?; Is a neighborhood bar a type of dive bar?*) were used to verify the folk terms designed by informants during first interviews as cover terms or included terms, as well as to identify *new* folk terms and, by extension, new semantic relationships (Spradley 1979, 100-101). Similarly, "contrast questions" (Spradley 1979, 155-172) were used to define folk terms relative to one another. Rather than searching for a semantic relationship, however, contrast questions attempted to discover differences in the meanings of alike terms which, in many cases, shared a domain. Folk terms identified by virtue of contrast questions formed

a “contrast set”: a group of terms within a domain organized according to their differences (Spradley 1979, 159).

Second interview transcripts were also scanned for folk terms, all of which either fit into existing domain analysis worksheets or folk taxonomies, or uncovered new semantic relationships. Following this process, finalized folk taxonomies were reviewed in search of notably similar domains or “levels of contrast” (Spradley 1979, 191). This process aimed to identify “cultural themes,” described by Spradley (1979, 186) as “consist[ing] of a number of symbols linked into meaningful relationships.” “Organizing domains” (Spradley 1979, 197), which systematize relatively large quantities of information and, as a result, often include several smaller domains, were also identified in taxonomies and expanded into themes.

The scope of this study was limited to eight bars largely due to time constraints. To gain a more comprehensive perspective on the social relationships facilitated by bar owners in Thatcham, further research concerning the remaining seven establishments (along with restaurants which remain open into later hours of the night) could be conducted. That said, the theoretical conclusions reached by this study regarding the process of community “manufacturing” are, I argue, applicable to all bars in Thatcham.

Analysis: Negotiating Place

On October 31st, 2014, Thatcham’s only punk-rock club and bar, The Crashing Umbrella, permanently closed its doors. By late September already, however, owner Tomás Coupe could forecast the fate of his business. An expensive juice bar permit that enabled underage individuals (that is, under the legal drinking age of 21 years old) to enter the club, as well as the inability of these patrons to purchase alcoholic beverages, had left the Umbrella in substantial debt. In order to maintain his commitment to an all-ages music venue, Tomás realized, quite ironically, that he would have to shut down his business. “I would get rid of the bar before I’d get rid of the all-ages” he told me, chuckling, “which is basically what we’re doing.” Patrons of the Umbrella, Tomás explained, shared a

“common bond [to] youthful memories of [visiting the club] as underage for the music, as well as of growing into adulthood and [going there] to drink.” By continually “reinterpreting” this collective “narrative” (Amit and Rapport 2012), these individuals, among whom Tomás counted himself, negotiated individual and collective identities. In so doing, they formed consociate relationships with one another. To refuse underage patrons at the Umbrella would have been, for Tomás, to effectively remove his establishment’s basis for potential community formation.

While Tomás’s situation is especially striking, the tension between profit and patron solidarity that ultimately forced The Crashing Umbrella out of business is a dynamic with which all Thatcham bar owners must contend. Many of these individuals rely on tightly-knit groups of core clientele to fill their establishments on a daily basis. To change elements of the bar space with the aim of cutting costs or increasing revenue is to risk alienating regular “crowds” and, by extension, dissolving bar-based “community.” That said, there are drinking establishments in Thatcham that do manage to stay in business while facilitating the development of close personal bonds among patrons and owners. Not confronted by the uniquely difficult financial circumstances that ultimately compelled Tomás to close the Umbrella, the owners of these establishments conceptualize patron solidarity and profit as complementary objectives.

When Gary, for example, describes regular patrons at Nine Innings as being “like an extended family,” continuing on to explain, “we go to each other’s parties, we go to each other’s funerals,” he is not making reference to relationships that are, as the saying goes, “strictly business.” The same can be said for Conall, owner of the Irish Pub, Garryowen’s, who reveals, “We’ve actually had weddings here [at Garryowen’s]. We’ve had funerals here... and christenings.” It is patent that these owners conceptualize the bar space as something more than a business designed to yield revenue.

Conall, to this end, clarifies that he has always understood the Irish pub as a “meeting house...[in which] it’s not about getting drunk.” Gary, similarly, has emphasized his desire to “preserve” Nine Innings for the sake of maintaining a “home” for the establishment’s core clientele. That said, there are innumerable elements of bar activity and atmosphere (ranging from conversation between owners and patrons to choices concerning décor) which embody both personal and professional objectives. Establishments such as Nine Innings and Garryowen’s demonstrate that “meeting houses” and “homes” *can* turn a profit—that, by virtue of their dualistic and, frequently, convoluted agendas, a bar may, indeed, “manufacture” community.

The expressions of community described by Gary, who sees relationships formed within Nine Innings sustained in life outside the bar, and Conall, who sees events discrete from standard bar activity occurring within Garryowen’s, reveal a deeply personal connotation. These owners use “we” when referencing the understandings of community that have developed in their respective establishments because they not only *participate* in this development, but *experience* its manifestations as well.

Bar owners who connect with their patrons frequently do so through shared associations with “larger social formations” (Wilson 2005, 11). As such, these individuals often solicit certain patron “crowds” with whom they can, to some extent, identify. Paul Elston, manager of Waterfront Café and self-described “hipster,” for example, recalls targeting a “music scene and an arts scene that you didn’t really see out too much” shortly after he began to manage at Waterfront. Conall’s military background and Irish heritage (which informs his notion of the bar as a “meeting house”) have enabled him to become “very tight with the Coast Guard cadets” while also attracting a steady crowd primarily comprised of families and older men, most of whom are white. Perhaps most obviously, Tomás “come[s] out of the DIY punk hardcore community” for which his establish-

ment is “punk hardcore and metal community,” he noted, before more candidly reiterating “we try to cater to the crowd that we want in here.”

Each of the eight bars in this study in some way bears the stamp of its ownership (or management). To this end, the ability of these establishments to target specific crowds must be understood as more than a process of elimination—than a simple identification of the social groups that “you [don’t] see out” in Thatcham. It is, in fact, profoundly informed by the identities of owners, who project their personal tastes and personal histories onto their establishments. Bar identity and owner identity are not mutually exclusive entities, nor does one encapsulate the other. Instead, they overlap to differing degrees. The regular patron crowds that identify with each of these establishments implicitly identify with owners as well.

While it comes as no surprise that Conall is quick to assert, “I’m here [at Garryowen’s] all the time...I know them all, I know the patrons,” all bar owners in this study make a point to remain visible in their respective establishments. At The Crashing Umbrella, a live musical performance would frequently see broad-shouldered Tomás personally manning the door of his club. Sol Lachapelle, owner of rock’n’roll bar Harley’s, also maintains a physical presence at his establishment, checking up on his patrons most nights and bartending every Friday. Beth Holiday, whose establishment, Flossie’s, caters to a predominantly black and Latino crowd, bartends several nights a week and, like Sol, regularly stops by even when she isn’t working. Gary, too, spends considerable amounts of time at Nine Innings, bartending every afternoon, and socializing with his patrons most nights. By remaining present within their respective establishments, these owners develop personal ties to patrons while simultaneously reasserting their authority.

Paul is at Waterfront almost every night, bartending each Monday, setting up shows on weekends, and remaining at the bar on slower weeknights to converse with regulars and address any potential “issues” (which range from broken ice machines to patron disputes). Although much of Paul’s time at Waterfront is spent observing bar activity, there is one element of bar atmosphere to which he gives particular attention: music. Paul has long refused to install a jukebox in Waterfront, asserting “you want to keep...decent music that, like...hipsters or...cool people in general [who] like decent music are like, *alright, that’s cool.*” The regular crowds at Waterfront, however, have voiced musical suggestions with such persistence that Paul has recently developed a compromise. Today, patrons at Waterfront can select songs by way of a smart-phone application from a playlist of “decent music” that Paul has compiled. While keeping Paul’s largely music-based conception of hipster identity palpable within Waterfront, this arrangement also affords clientele greater control over bar atmosphere. As such, it provides a strikingly concrete example of how the symbolic “boundary” of a community may act as both a “public face” (which, in this case, signifies a general notion of “hipsterness”) and a “private, idiosyncratic face” (Cohen 1985). Paul understands all of the music featured on his playlist to be “hipster” and, by retaining a consistent and vocal presence in Waterfront, shares this understanding with his clientele. Because song selection from this playlist is in the hands of patrons, however, differential understandings of hipster identity are not only accepted but encouraged. In response to patron input, Paul continually updates his playlist, reinterpreting the “imaginative materials” that he has “provided” (O’Carroll 2005).

Through such patron-management discourse, which may manifest either explicitly or implicitly, affect and commitment are distributed across both sides of the bar counter. To this end, owners walk a fine line. Each must maintain control over the barroom to an extent that reaffirms the identity of this

space (i.e. hipster bar, Irish pub, neighborhood tavern, etc.), while also ensuring that patrons do not feel unappreciated or ignored. Gary, for example, reflects, “I just like keeping an eye on this place, and making sure that the music doesn’t get turned up too loud, or there’s not something stupid on TV.” When asked about his contention that, “after five, six o’clock, there’s no reason for a kid to be here,” the owner even goes as far as to admit, “I can see people being upset about that initially, but I think if they think about it... they’re gonna realize my side of it.” That said, the owner also makes sure to acknowledge patron input, especially when this feedback conforms to his own holistic understanding of the Nine Innings tradition. Seeing, for instance, that patrons were “disappointed” by his decision to replace one of the standard Nine Innings taps with Foster’s Lager, Gary quickly removed this new item (despite it being a personal favorite) and returned the beer selection of his establishment to its traditional iteration.

By managing concrete elements of bar atmosphere such as music or beer selection, bar owners ensure that, even when they are away from their establishments, these spaces will retain the “imaginative materials” (O’Carroll 2005) requisite for developing community. The walls of Garryowen’s, for example, are covered by what Conall claims to be only a fraction of his “personal shit,” most of which comprises Irish and naval artifacts. When asked about the concert posters and PBR memorabilia that meet the eyes of patrons from virtually every vantage point, Sol similarly explained, “Oh yeah man, all of this stuff, I brought it from home. This place is like my living room.” Especially candid in illustrating the importance held by décor, music and even food in promoting shared understandings of the barroom as an extension of owner identity was Ron Daniels, who, with his business partner Silvia, co-owns the sports bar, Vertigo. “Everything on here, everything on the walls, everything that we play, everything we cook,” Ron reflected, “it’s us.”

Certain bars, such as Flossie's, conversely, rely almost entirely on interpersonal interaction to foster a personalized bar experience. While Beth's own visibility has enabled her to develop a loyal following, she is also careful to hire bartenders who she feels will attract a regular crowd. Recounting her decision to hire a male bartender who had no prior experience, she asserted, "when the females come in, the men are gonna come in, so that's what you wanna hire.... I talked to a friend of mine yesterday...and she says, 'that was a good move, you hired a good looking man with big muscles who people like to look at!'" While this strategy for attracting regular patrons appears, at least foremost, designed to turn a profit, the relationships that Beth forms with her core clientele are by no means superficial. "There's a lot of guys that come in here at night that, if I say, hey [snaps her fingers], they'll have our back in a heartbeat," she revealed when asked about fights at Flossie's, adding, "a lot of them consider me like their mom." Despite describing her desire for patron regularity in terms of "bringing people in," a phrasing seemingly based in financial considerations, Beth clearly understands the *results* of such regularity in terms of the commitment and attachment to Flossie's that her regulars express by virtue of "having her back."

Regularity is, indeed, an important element of patron solidarity in Thatcham bars. While some of the relationships formed among bar crowds are close friendships or even familial ties, many more are consociate. Patrons who are encouraged to identify with one another by virtue of a continually reproduced "boundary" manifested as a unifying "public face" need not know one another intimately. They must simply visit a bar frequently enough to involve themselves in the "interpretation" of "narratives" (Amit and Rapport 2012) requisite for consociation and, by extension, to develop feelings of affect toward the establishment in question. By becoming part of a regular crowd, these individuals often understand their patronage as a form of "commitment" to the project of keeping their favorite bar in business.

Initiatives such as Paul's personalized jukebox facilitate consociation within bars by providing a platform for owners (or managers) and patrons to negotiate identity through the expressions of camaraderie and competition that so often accompany drinking behavior. Patrons of Waterfront, for example, frequently gauge one another's "hipsterdom" by virtue of their respective musical selections. But there exist a host of less obvious interactions that encourage consociate relationships to emerge within bars. By asserting, "I know ninety percent of the people's [patrons'] names, and what they're gonna have," for example, Gary reveals beer choice as an essential component of patron identity, and knowledge of this preference as grounds for personal relationships. Jenny Collingwood, owner of the newly-opened Barquentine, also feels that she has gotten to know some of her regular patrons well enough to predict their drinks, and views this familiarity as an important step toward consociation.

But is the model of a highly personalized bar in which members of a regular crowd may readily develop strong bonds with ownership *ideal*? Certainly, establishments such as Nine Innings or even Waterfront, which recently celebrated ten years in business, yield sufficient revenue to remain open. According to Paul, however, with a regular crowd delimited by a community "boundary" come serious drawbacks, both personal and financial.

Before managing at Waterfront, Paul booked bands at a gay bar called Longitude free of charge. At first glance, this role seems to embody the ultimate gesture of community—a financial sacrifice akin to that made by Tomás. Unfortunately, Paul explains, while bands which he brought to Longitude often enjoyed large audiences, it soon became apparent that "I was starting to really push [the owner's] gay crowd away by doing these shows... [they felt] a little ostracized." Rather than embracing the popularity of Paul's shows as good business for their place of congregation, the Longitude regulars perceived this trend as a direct threat to their community. Paul soon left Longitude to manage at Waterfront,

discomfited by the friction that he had unknowingly exacerbated. Comparable issues of crowd incompatibility and resultant exclusivity pervade Waterfront. “People take ownership of this bar because they love and they are passionate about it,” Paul reveals, “which is great, but it makes it very difficult for new people to come in and really feel comfortable because they come in and everyone’s like *oh, who’s that?*” As with the example of Longitude, the community “boundary” that both brings patrons of Waterfront together and distinguishes this group from perceived outsiders is informed by a “public face” (Cohen 1985) based on stereotypes and other generalized symbolism regarding “hipster” identity.

The expressions of exclusivity prompted by this boundary, like those at Longitude, place Paul in a difficult position. Insistently including patrons likely to resist the “hipster” label risks challenging the intense feelings of commitment and affect that Paul’s regular patrons have clearly developed. A wider clientele base, however, would also mean greater profit for Waterfront (if, in contrast with Longitude, this base could be sustained). Thus, while community and profit may be understood as complementary—insofar as the respective agendas driven by these objectives can coexist within drinking establishments—the continuous demand for *increased* revenue that Thatcham bars face often leads bar owners to interpret community “boundaries” as exclusive, rather than as insulating.

Because bar owners and managers are not socially isolated and, therefore, identify with the patron groups that visit their establishments (albeit to differing degrees), to attract a variety of crowds skillfully or even just successfully seems unfeasible. Perhaps wary of this limitation, certain owners resist suggestions that their establishments target certain patron groups, despite often implying that this is, indeed, the case when they are not directly questioned on the issue.

Tomás, for instance, was quick to assert, “I hope [The Umbrella] is known for a place where people of all walks of life can walk into, feel comfortable, have a better chance of making a friend than an enemy.” In response to this statement, it becomes important to consider Creed’s (2006, 44) contention that “When something is conceived of or labeled as a community, members’ expectations of what community relationships *should* be like are potentially consequential, leading them to sever, break, or seek alternate social relations.” While neither Tomás nor Paul rejected their regular crowds—a decision informed by both financial and personal considerations—each of these individuals does appear to understand a “diverse” crowd as indicative of the relationships that bar-based communities “*should*” embody.

Supporting this hypothesis are Paul’s nostalgic recollections of the first Thatcham establishment for which he booked shows, a decommissioned firehouse-turned-bar called Shangri-La. This establishment, as Paul remembers it, “captured lightning in a bottle” by managing to attract “every kind of crowd” without compromising “a camaraderie that everyone really felt when they went there.” Perhaps because Paul looks to Shangri-La as the gold standard against which all other bars should be judged, he seems to find it easier than Tomás to acknowledge expressions of exclusivity within his current establishment.

Especially intriguing is the example of Jenny, whose establishment, recently opened at the time of this study, had yet to attract a substantial regular patron base. “I like the fact that we have such a diverse crowd in here,” the owner reflected, continuing “That’s, personally... businesswise, I guess I would like to continue to have more Navy people come in. And more single females.” Here, Jenny conveys a wariness of seemingly homogeneous patron crowds similar to that expressed by Paul, but also insinuates that “diversity” is somehow *in conflict* with profit. This is largely due to the fact that, rather than attracting multiple crowds, a feat which Paul had attempted at Longitude, The Barquentine

was attracting individuals and small groups who, collectively, Jenny perceived as comprising a single “diverse crowd.” Most patrons entered the bar alone or, on occasion, with a date. The symbolic understandings requisite for a community “boundary” had yet to develop and, potentially, obscure the “diversity” valued by Jenny. The sort of generalized language and imagery associated with, for example, a “hipster bar” or an Irish pub could not be used to describe The Barquentine. Nevertheless, Jenny, like Paul and Tomás, understands patron “diversity,” a concept as semantically tenuous as community itself, to be ideal on a “personal” level.

Conclusion: Approaching “Manufactured” Community

This study addresses the capacity of eight bars in Thatcham, Connecticut to “manufacture” community. By exploring this potential, it is my intention to clarify how the bar owner, as an individual with disproportionate influence over the locus of community, figures into the manufacturing process. In so doing, I present a first step toward more holistic understandings of the relationship between local businesses and community identity in cities such as Thatcham. Future research on this topic could help clarify the extent to which communities formed within bars “frame” (Wilson 2005) external activity and, by extension, shape the distribution of social identity groupings on the urban landscape. From this angle, the issues of race and gender, discussed minimally here, could be more extensively addressed.

By presenting their establishments as highly personalized spaces and, in so doing, attracting crowds with whom they identify, the seven bar owners and one bar manager in this study encourage interpretations of community boundaries (Cohen 1985) based on stereotypes and other generalized imagery. It is important to recognize that, due to the calculated “provision” and reinterpretation of “imaginative materials” (O’Carroll 2005) by bar owners, recognition of these boundaries is *not* indicative of the extraordinary circumstances reviewed by Cohen (1985) and Turner (1969). Rather, such recognition consistently informs

collective narratives, which, in turn, promote consociation. Through consociation, patrons, owners and staff participate in joint-commitments and develop feelings of affect-belonging (Amit 2010) that facilitate interpretations and expressions of community.

The “productive ambiguity” of bar-based community emerges from the “unevenness” (Amit 2010) that constitutes both joint-commitments and affect-belonging. In most cases, bar owners will inevitably feel more “committed” to the collective project of remaining in business than even their most dedicated patrons. Exceptions to this trend are infrequent and generally confined to unusual conditions, such as owners looking to sell or downsize their businesses. (Tomás’s decision to close the Umbrella rather than alienate his underage patrons—a profound expression of commitment to the community formed in the club—is somewhat of an anomaly.) The distribution of joint-commitments among staff and patrons, however, is much more idiosyncratic. While staff members must inevitably recognize and express some form of commitment to the source of their income, they may not plan to remain at a certain establishment for more than a year or even a summer. Many patrons of bars such as Nine Innings, conversely, have been visiting their favorite watering holes for decades. Affect among owners, staff and patrons—the extent to which the bar enables these individuals to “feel at home” (Amit 2010)—depends on a number of factors, ranging from the amount of time spent within an establishment to music and décor. As seen in the case of Paul, reception to the input of patrons, especially new patrons, also factors into feelings of belonging. While this immense potential for variability results in a diverse array of social relations, the production of these relations through face-to-face interactions at the micro-local level of the bar produces strikingly similar expressions of camaraderie and security. That affect-belonging and joint-commitments can emerge both as Paul and his patrons debate musical selection and during weddings hosted at Garryowen’s demonstrates the analytical versatility of “community.”

The question of how bar-based community endures for striking lengths of time and among large groups of people, many of whom may only be casually acquainted, however, is where the “manufacturing” process comes in.

Far more concrete than the “uneven” solidarity that generates community within bars is the power structure that defines these establishments. Because bar owners wield disproportionate influence over bar activity—because it is these individuals who, ultimately, target certain crowds and strategize to promote feelings of both individuality and solidarity—community formed within their establishments must be understood as “manufactured.” While manifestations of community formed within bars do not always yield a profit (i.e. *The Crashing Umbrella*), the process of community *reproduction* is dependent on a consistent flow of revenue, and vice versa. “Community,” as Cohen (1985), Turner (1969), Amit (2010) and Amit and Rapport (2002, 2012) have acknowledged, is a frequently ephemeral expression produced by individual understandings of shared symbols, interactions and objectives. The power of “manufacturing” enables owners to ensure that, every night, renewed expressions of community will emerge within their establishments.

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ENDNOTES

1. In order to protect the privacy of those who participated in this study, all locations, businesses and business owners included in this article have been given pseudonyms. The city of "Thatcham" will not be found on a map of Connecticut.

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