

Male sexual tourism in Costa Rica: team spirit, peer dialogue and gender roles in a large sample of Internet forum posts

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ABSTRACT: There are few scientific studies about sexual tourism in Costa Rica. The most important study about male tourists, done by Megan Rivers-Moore, presented a series of hypotheses. Here I analyze all forum posts in the *InternationalSexGuide.info* from 2002 through 2015, and compare them with Rivers-Moore's hypotheses, the Intimacy Prism categories of Milrod and Weitzer and with female sex tourists (as reported in the literature). The 4409 reports show that men interact in peer dialogues in which they mostly advise each other about how to get a satisfactory visit to Costa Rica: a visit that includes paid sex but is not limited to it. While sex working women have little interaction among themselves, these men feel part of a group and exchange useful information. The desire for a Girl Friend Experience, though not predominant, is frequent and fits biological adaptations for mate interactions among humans. Male tourists mostly make short visits in which they try to meet a few women and then focus on those that make the best impression. A few evolve into complex relationships that include emotional commitment. Despite the financial disparity between men and women, traditional gender roles underlie the relationships of both male and female tourists, probably reflecting a complex combination biological and cultural factors.

Key words: Gender interactions in sex work, Latin American sexuality, prostitution, internet culture.

RESUMEN: Turismo sexual masculino en Costa Rica: espíritu de equipo, diálogo entre pares y papeles de género en una muestra grande de mensajes en un foro de Internet. Hay pocos estudios científicos sobre el turismo sexual en Costa Rica. El estudio más importante sobre los turistas masculinos lo hizo Megan Rivers-Moore, quien implícitamente propuso varias hipótesis. Aquí analizo la totalidad de los mensajes del foro *InternationalSexGuide.info* entre el 2002 y el 2015, comparándolos con las hipótesis de Rivers-Moore, las categorías del "Prisma de Intimidad" de Milrod y Weitzer y datos de la literatura sobre mujeres que visitan Costa Rica para hacer turismo sexual. El análisis de los 4409 mensajes muestra que los hombres dialogan, aconsejándose acerca de cómo obtener una visita satisfactoria a Costa Rica, visita que incluye sexo pagado pero no se limita a este objetivo únicamente. Las trabajadoras sexuales tienen poca interacción entre sí, pero los hombres se sienten parte de un grupo que intercambia información útil. El deseo de "Ser Tratado como Novio", aunque no es predominante, es frecuente y se ajusta a la adaptación biológica propia del *Homo sapiens* en lo que respecta a interacciones de pareja. La mayoría de turistas masculinos hacen visitas cortas en las que tratan de interactuar inicialmente con varias mujeres para luego centrarse en aquellas con las que se sintieron mejor. Unos pocos casos evolucionan hacia una relación compleja que incluye el compromiso emocional. A pesar de la diferencia de poder financiero entre clientes y proveedores de servicios sexuales, los papeles tradicionales de género subyacen las relaciones, sean los turistas hombres o mujeres, lo que probablemente refleja una compleja combinación de factores biológicos y culturales.

Palabras clave: interacciones de género en el trabajo sexual, la sexualidad de América Latina, la prostitución, la cultura de internet.

The study of sexual tourism has evolved rapidly in the last decades. Older authors tended to perceive sex tourism as a form of sexual deviance, but nearly 20 years ago Ryan and Kinder (1996) noted that sexual tourism, like any other form of tourism, satisfies four needs: social companionship, fantasy fulfilment, novelty and relaxation. A recent study about clients of escorts in the USA found that even though many men become clients without expecting emotional involvement, intimacy

develops when they become regular clients, leading to a range of negative and positive emotions (Milrod and Weitzer, 2012). This complex view has been shared by later authors such as Sánchez (2006), Jacobs (2009) and Williams (2012) but oversimplifications subsist, mainly in the form of the *Double Standard* view and the *Oppression Paradigm*.

The *Double Standard* is the view that when done by men, sexual tourism is basically sexual, but when done

by women, it is basically romantic (Pruitt and La Font, 1995); this view has later been rejected because both men and women participate in varied forms of sexual interactions that range from quick, nearly anonymous sex encounters, to prolonged relationships that can include friendship, emotional support, commitment and even love (Sánchez, 2006; Rojas et al., 2009; Milrod and Weitzer, 2012; Williams, 2012).

The *Oppression Paradigm* sees any form of sex work as inherently “exploitative”, as an activity that women desperately want to exit because they suffer violence and even slavery (Weitzer, 2010). Studies have found that most sex workers enter sex work voluntarily and choose to continue doing it, so the “paradigm” has mostly been discarded from the scientific literature (for a detailed analysis see Weitzer, 2009a,b). Nevertheless, the Oppression Paradigm view still dominates the media and the legal system (Milrod and Weitzer, 2012); unfortunately even the United Nations continues to hold an official view based on that unsupported “paradigm” (Sanchis, 2008; 2011).

There are few studies about sexual tourism in the city of San José, Costa Rica, where clients are mostly married men aged 35-45 years who pay for sex even if they establish an emotional relationship with sex workers (Monge-Nájera et al., 2009). Few sex workers in that city have education beyond primary school, and most are single mothers (Monge-Nájera et al., 2009).

Other studies found that these women prefer mature clients; that their rates are defined by *where* they work rather than by age; and that they have full decision on how they spend their earnings (Rojas et al., 2009). Even though sex work is legal in Costa Rica, the media present sex workers as being outside the law and spread myths about disease, “exploitation” and “child prostitution”, creating a hostile environment for the women and their clients (Monge-Nájera et al., 2013).

There are a few studies about female sexual tourists who travel to Costa Rica. In a Caribbean town, men with little education can become tourists themselves and enjoy expensive goods by keeping lasting relationships with female tourists (Frohlick, 2007). Hundreds of miles away, in the Puntarenas highlands, male waiters and tour guides establish extended relationships with female tourists who want to experience “Latin style romance” and sexual adventures; these adventures include lesbian experiences and group sex (Romero-Daza and Freidus, 2008).

Rivers-Moore (2012, 2013a, b) published the only study focussed on what male tourists have to say about their relationships with Costa Rican women: she interviewed

several tourists and also studied a random sample of their posts online. She concluded that the activity in the area around San José downtown hotels (“Gringo Gulch”) combines elements of both modern industrial and post-industrial paradigms, as well as factors specific to tourism that are not accounted for by those paradigms (Rivers-Moore, 2009). Until now, there were no follow-up studies to triangulate and check the general validity of her findings, or any comparison of her results with those of studies about female sex tourists or with other countries.

In this article I examine the totality of 12 years of forum posts by male sex tourists in a similar but larger website, InternationalSexGuide.info, and analyze similarities and differences with the results of Rivers-Moore (2009, 2010, 2013a,b) and other pertinent cases (Frohlick, 2007; Romero-Daza and Freidus, 2008; Milrod and Weitzer, 2012).

METHOD

I read all posts (4409 reports) in the World Sex Guide Forum (<http://www.InternationalSexGuide.info/forum/showthread.php?t=2218>) from April 2002 (when the site started its Costa Rica section) through March 2015 and analyzed them based on hypotheses inspired by Rivers-Moore (2009, 2010, 2013a,b) in her study of Costaricaticas.com. Both studies basically cover the same period of a few years before 2010 but the data from International Sex Guide also include older and newer posts. To make valid comparisons, I used the same qualitative method that Rivers-Moore (2009) used, and tested eight of the hypotheses implicit in her study:

1. Men do more than just read the posts: they establish a real dialogue.
2. They want to enjoy a “Girl-Friend Experience” with several women without fear of legal repression.
3. They believe that Costa Rican men are violent when compared with themselves.
4. They believe that other tourists are misguided by women about their feelings and real interest in clients.
5. They feel they treat women better than locals and than other tourists.
6. They feel wealthier and more powerful in Costa Rica than in their home country.
7. They feel that Costa Rican women fit the patriarchal view of passive femininity better than women in their own country.

8. They are afraid of being asked for a more formal relationship by the women they meet in Costa Rica.

I also compare the results with the Intimacy Prism categories of Milrod and Weitzer (2012) as well as with the reports of Fhrolick (2007) and Romero-Daza and Freidus (2008) about female sex tourists, a comparison that despite its interest has escaped previous researchers.

Ethics: This is an analysis of public information. Nevertheless, I changed all names and replaced hotel and bar names with random initials. All post quotes are in italics.

RESULTS

The WSG Forum is full of questions, answers and comments that represent a dialogue among the men who post in it. All posts are in English and were almost exclusively written by American men. The forum basically is off-limits to the women mentioned there because most of them do not speak English.

My results are organized in four sections: hypotheses frequently supported by posts; hypotheses for which there were few related posts; comparison with the Milrod & Weitzer categories, and comparison with male sex workers.

Hypotheses frequently supported by posts

Dialogue hypothesis: Overall, the forum fits the hypothesis of an active dialogue. Readers frequently comment on posts and long dialogues can be established in the case of controversial topics; for example, opinions about the beauty and behaviour of Costa Rican sex workers. One example of such a dialogue is when a man ranked their looks in a scale of one to ten and received answers rating American and European women higher than Costa Ricans women. Later posts agree or disagree with his view, as these examples of the established dialogue show:

Terrible looking girls. I would give Tania a 7.5 and Tatiana is only a 5.5. Even with the help of Photoshop software touch, they still don't look that good and I'm sure they look worse when you see them in person. [Forum Member]

I do know how to travel and rate girls. From my experience in CR, I had a much better time with girls who spoke no English. They were not hardened pros. The

European women look more like north Americans. In Russia, you can arrange at least several hours for \$50.00 not in CR. As far as looks I would have to say Russians 8-9, Costa Ricans 6-8. As far as performance Russians 8-9, Costa Ricans 6-8 (although I had some good sessions). [Forum Member]

My condolences to those mongers who weren't able to find a decent-looking woman to spend some time with and thus concluded San Jose is a lousy mongering destination. It sure ain't Rio or Buenos Aires or Bangkok, but you can have a hell of a good time there with some very attractive ladies. [Forum Member]

Even though the forum's anonymity makes it is impossible to know how many people really participate in the published dialogues, there is no obvious reason why these dialogues should be considered counterfeit. Some posts have no follow up or only have very short threads, while others have long series of replies in favour or against the original opinion. In any case, the dialogues could be interpreted sociologically as ways to reinforce masculinity or biologically as an expression of the complex and strong need for interaction and group acceptance that exists in all primates, as will be analyzed in the Discussion section.

They want to enjoy a "Girl-Friend Experience" with several women without any fear of legal repression:

The "Girl-Friend Experience" or GFE is mentioned often in posts and can include analyses of why it can develop as part of services, how important it can be for men, and how to obtain it. One man stated that women responded well to good treatment, chat, and food, and that this can lead a more satisfactory experience for both parts, adding that it is just part of human nature and a normal interaction between two people. He is defensive, expecting criticism for being gullible, because some men think that the GFE is just another service that can be counterfeited. Another member wrote that personality was, to him, more important than physical beauty, and that this had an important effect on the sexual experience. Also in relation to food, one man suggested practices that allow some real immersion into the local culture, eating at local restaurants and buying food that the woman could cook. Another post mentioned "a GFE to remember for years". Finally, some men mentioned cultural differences that made the Costa Rican experience superior to their experience in the USA (notice that the last member calls other members "brothers"):

OK, maybe I'm just a fool, but it sure seems to me that the girls start with some rules in their head, but if you play your cards right, you can get them to respond

despite themselves. In other words, play to the GFE, and you have a much better shot at getting the GFE. After all, they are only human... chat them up as much as possible, treat them well. [Forum Member]

Offer to pick up some groceries with them if they'll cook a tico meal for you. Just going to a grocery store in a foreign country is an enlightening experience, plus you'd get to meet her family and see how regular ticos live which would also be a worthwhile educational experience. [Forum Member]

My best experience was taking a gal from the B. She was a beauty. I still miss her and would think of her for years to come. [Forum Member]

Compared to the USA it's a dream. I think you need to have a few special girlfriends in CR if you want to see the best of a Costa Rican woman. I would recommend to my brothers here to romance a few [Forum Member]

Do men lie when they express interest in an intimate experience that goes beyond the purely mechanical aspects of sex? They would if they expected some benefit from lying about it, for example if they thought that this improved women's opinion about them, but they are aware that most cannot speak English and thus will never learn what they wrote in the forum. If GFE posts reflect a true preference, the belief that most men pay for sex to abuse women is unfounded. Rather, the search for a GFE may reflect behavioural mechanisms that helped our species adapt to long term relationships between sexual mates. One man summarizes that view in this post (the 6 and 10 refer to the woman's beauty):

We're all different and have different wants and needs, but for me the GFE is the most important thing. I'd rather have a GFE with a 6 than go with a 10 who acts bored, rushed, cold, and bitchy. There's much more to sexual arousal than physical appearance. [Forum Member]

Hypotheses for which there were few related posts

They believe that other men are deceived by the women: A few posts fit the hypothesis that members think Costa Rican female sex workers deceive their clients, and they even warn other members. They warn against falling in love or believing in love declarations. Furthermore, one member wrote about a woman who apparently "cheated" on a client and criticizes her, the gullible client and even some men who wrote in the forum, ending with the statement that these women care about the money, not the men. Finally, one who felt he was in a relationship, maybe worried after reading such

hostile comments, expressed his doubts about the woman's feelings:

Be careful to take time to develop a long-term, meaningful relationship and do not rush things. Girls in Costa Rica love money and make u think they care about u but they really care about your money. [Forum Member]

Men could use derogation of the women to discourage other men from visiting Costa Rica, because with less clients, prices could decrease. However, this does not seem to be the case because the great majority of posts do not mention this topic and on the contrary, provide information that *encourage* other men to visit. The derogatory comments can be interpreted in sociological terms as a form of misogyny, but considering the rarity of misogynous comments in the forum, they are more likely to be a case of "team spirit" among members of a group; again note the use of the term "brothers" in this quote:

[I do not like that in a] strange land filled with people looking to do one harm, a fellow monger would even think of setting up a brother in favour of some chick who probably cheats guys on the regular- where's the solidarity?

They feel they treat women better than other tourists and locals

There were a few posts in which men wrote about treating women kindly, in line with the hypothesis that forum members consider themselves better in this aspect than other tourists and Costa Rican men. One post tells of several encounters with the same woman, detailing money spent in her (despite not being asked to); another mentions that a woman remembered gifts given her years ago, and one man advised other members to pay attention to women's dreams and goals, comparing Costa Rican women favourably to American women:

I decided to help a friend out with her bills before I left the country. So there. I couldn't believe it, she took the money, looked at me & started crying. Giving is better than receiving. [Forum Member]

I had one chica jump up and down and come hug me when she saw me again this week. She reminded me how I had given her Christmas presents to take to her kids two and 1/2 years ago, and she went around telling the other chicas how I had been her "Santa." [Forum Member]

*Ask these girls about their sueños (dreams) metas (goals) and pensamientos (thoughts) about their life and it is amazing how excited they get that someone actually gives a sh** what they have to say and what's*

on their mind. The “hobby” is so much more fun when it includes more than just getting “horizontal!”. I dare you to compare any of them, even the worst of them, to most of the arrogant b****s back in the States ... I love these chicas with all my heart. [Forum Member]

It is normal for people to judge others more harshly than they judge themselves, so these posts are likely to reflect true feelings. This can be interpreted as a way of justifying their participation in a socially rejected activity (i.e. prostitution), a phenomenon that is known in sociology as well as in evolutionary psychology as a mechanism for group acceptance after a transgression.

Posts about violence, feeling rich, traditional female roles and fear of deeper relationships: The hypothesis that forum members consider Costa Rican men particularly violent lacks clear support in this forum. I found only one post that might apply. The writer suggests that female sex workers can be associated with violent men or even be violent themselves: “A lot of these chicas have a lot of drama going on their lives. Some are involved in drugs. Some have jealous and/or violent tico novios or esposos. And a few can be pretty violent themselves”. The same applies to the hypothesis that forum members feel richer and more powerful in Costa Rica than in their home country. I only found one post that might apply: “A man doesn’t even have to be rich to meet women; a \$1,500 to \$2,000 Social Security check translates to a millionaire’s pay in Costa Rica”, but tips about how to save money are far more common in this forum. A couple praised how well a woman he met played the traditional wife role, for example:

She made me a wonderful dinner that night, in the cutest little outfit. Some things blew my mind away. She brought me my shoes when we were going out. She cooked for me anytime I was hungry. She cleaned the house and kitchen and didn’t ask for help or expect me to do anything. [Forum Member]

I only found two posts that related with the hypothesis about formal relationships. One post tells a personal story and concludes reflecting that these women are like any other women who want love and a family:

The prostitutes who make the best sexual partners are the ones who are most emotionally needy and therefore potentially the most dangerous ... The participants have sex, certainly, but they also care for each other in sickness and in health, provide safe homes for children, and fulfil family responsibilities in caring for elders and less fortunate relatives. In other words, they are just like ordinary families ... In the end, perhaps, sex tourism is

just another way of meeting people and making friends. [Forum Member]

Considering that the total “population” was more than 4000 posts, most posts did not relate to the hypotheses tested in this study, with the exception of the dialogue hypothesis (posts that answered other posts were common). This does not mean that the hypotheses are wrong, just that the posts in InternationalSexGuide.info do not deal with the subjects developed by Rivers-Moore in her study of a different forum, Costaricaticas.com. Nevertheless, both forums deal with the same general subject and this difference in results should be taken into account by future researchers.

Comparison with the Milrod & Weitzer Categories: Milrod and Weitzer (2012) studied and categorized men who establish lasting relations with escorts in the USA. In order of psychological involvement, they range from those who see the relationship as counterfeit to those who develop an authentic romance with the women. The posts about Costa Rica have examples of all those cases.

Counterfeit intimacy: relationships in which clients feel that the women just provide an illusion of intimacy are feared, and some men warn others not to become victims: “Have you heard ‘papi you are the only one’, ... ‘te quiero mucho’, ‘te extraño’? I could go on all day with these Sir. My point is my money is their hustle”. [Forum Member].

Paid relationships: relationships in which women provide companionship, emotional support and sex, in exchange for a commitment of stability and financial support; these can be considered similar to a marriage but without the exclusivity, like in this example:

I told her I would pay for cab rides, groceries, dinner and drinks. Friday we went grocery shopping, and I bought her about \$50 worth of groceries. Then we spent the afternoon with more of the good stuff and watching cable TV in her apartment. I was there for 5 total days and spent a total of \$200 on groceries, movie, cabs and drinks. No regalos, she didn’t want one. She never asked for a dime. She only wanted to know when I could come back and see her. [Forum Member].

In the **Dazed and confused** category, the man doubts if the emotional part of the relationship is real and worries about it, feelings depend on whether he wants, or fears, a serious relationship:

What’s her angle? We both like each other. We are both attractive people, and have a lot of the same interests

(Music, boating, sex, etc). Granted she wants to come to the US, and I am a way to get here. After a couple of more visits like this, I may just try that. I want to see if this lasts, or if it is an act. [Forum Member].

The **Authentic mutual intimacy** category is characterized by suspension of time constraints, mutual gifts and even fantasies of marriage and children. Here, too, men can desire or fear this development depending on the circumstances:

She was an aggressive kisser, wanted to hold my hand all the time in public, got jealous if I looked at other women, but she only paid attention to me... On the ride back from the beach, I told her she was free to go. She asked if she could stay with me. She said I don't want your money, I just want you. ... Since then we have stayed in contact. She is totally hooked on me, and I could be on her. She told me that she is now my girlfriend and I can only spend time with her. When I come to visit again, I will stay at her apartment, no hotel. ... I quote from her, "You are not business, you are my boyfriend." [Forum Member].

To the old question "why do men pay for sex?", this post presents an interesting answer:

Yet here I am at age almost 55 having wonderful, wonderful sex with an array of gorgeous young women with smooth silky skin, beguiling eyes, and tight little pussies. The sex has never been better or more enjoyable [Forum Member].

The proportion of posts on each subject varies with time (Chi square = 25.49, $p = 0.0003$). In a random sample of 829 cases chosen at the beginning, middle and end of the study period, I found that, in the year 2002, post subjects focussed mainly on comments, questions and answers about hotels ($N = 99$), followed by those about the working women (58) and other subjects (31); only 11 posts in the period were about the mongers themselves. Five years later (207), the subject of women dominated (150 posts), followed by hotels (134), mongers (59) and other topics (45). And more recently (2012) the posts returned to the initial pattern, with hotels (101) and women (79) dominating, while other subjects (38) and posts about the mongers themselves (24 posts) were minority.

Comparison with male sex workers: Similarities and differences among male and female tourists and sex workers in Costa Rica are summarized in Table 1. A number of similarities relate to how the communities have adapted to sex work catering to tourists. The first community is San José, the capital, of which the port of Quepos can be considered a branch because the women

and the tourists move fluidly between both. The second is Monteverde, a highland farming community with vestiges of Quaker presence; and Puerto Viejo, a Caribbean coastal village with Rastafarian presence. Independently of their cultural differences, all have the same origin for sexual work: a change in the economy.

When the *Agricultural Exports Model* became insufficient in the 1970s, Costa Rica turned to ecotourism, and was successful thanks a combination of democratic stability and high investment in health and education. The tourists who started visiting in growing numbers asked for sexual services and, for reasons still not studied, the resulting sexual industries soon became highly specialized and geographically segregated. Nevertheless, traditional social attitudes and male and female roles persist under the apparent transgression of sex work (Table 1, left column). The most salient difference seems to be the existence of group sex in Monteverde, an even stronger transgression of social norms than sex work itself (Table 1, right column).

DISCUSSION

The analysis of 4409 reports in the World Sex Guide Forum shows that the men interact in dialogues in which they mostly advise each other about how to get a satisfactory visit to Costa Rica that includes sex, but is not limited to it. In most posts they make practical recommendations, while there are fewer posts sharing their personal experiences, and in few cases, they debate about the credibility of particular reports and reporters. Except for the relative importance of each topic, this results match the findings of Rivers-Moore (2009, 2013a,b) about dialogue, which she suggested could be interpreted as a form of male peer validation. Nevertheless, another interpretation is possible: that the men exchange information because they feel part of a group; in their own words, "brothers" who collaborate because of a team spirit (see Blevins and Holt, 2009). This view is supported by the fact that most posts are not about their sexual experiences, but rather about practical travel recommendations. Recent studies have shown that such cooperation among men who have a common goal –and do not compete among themselves– is normal and benefits participants (Silva et al., 2014). Male sexual tourists benefit by sharing what they learn and many posts are from new tourists asking for advice from experienced tourists. Furthermore, collaborating and sharing does not reduce the men's access to women, so their behaviour makes biological sense (see Diamond, 2007). On the contrary, posts show that they frequently exchange advice on how

TABLE 1
Similarities and differences among male and female
sex tourism in Costa Rica.

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities where sex work takes place see the tourists as a moral danger to youth, but tolerate them because of the money they add to the local economies. • Free from limitations in their home communities, tourists engage in sexual activities that they want but are scared to practice at home. • There is a strong geographic segregation in which sex work concentrates in a well defined area (i.e. San José and Quepos only service male tourists; Monteverde and Puerto Viejo only female tourists, and each offers its own kind of services). Safety from crime is always the man's duty, independently of whether he is a tourist or a sex worker. • Physical beauty, personality and education are valued both in male and female sex workers. • Most sex workers lack higher education but their line of work gives them access to luxury goods and expensive experiences that include travel abroad. • If the relationship becomes long-term, the woman relocates to the man's community and in some cases even tries to become pregnant from him (the other way around is extremely rare). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male tourists looking for sex are mostly middle aged or older college graduates, while female tourists are college graduates in their 20s and 30s. • Male tourists normally hire several women per trip, while women normally hire only one man. • Male tourists normally have intercourse with one woman at a time (a few threesomes have been reported), while some female tourists in Monteverde participate in orgies. Female tourists in Puerto Viejo are monogamous during their stay. • Male tourists look for pleasant sex with a variety of women; Monteverde female tourists look for sexual adventure (sex with "Latin lovers" they just met; lesbian and group sex) while female tourists in Puerto Viejo look for exotic romance with "roots" men. • In the three locations men see themselves as comrades and exchange useful information, while women tend to see each other as competitors and do not keep close ties or share information about clients.

Table summarized from Fhrolick, 2007; Romero-Daza and Freidus, 2008; Rivers-Moore, 2009 and this study.

to avoid an escalation of prices and to help the continuation of the sex work "industry".

The desire for a Girl Friend Experience, though not predominant, is frequent. Blevins and Holt (2009) reviewed the language in an American forum and found that the men there also tend to consider the Girl Friend Experience as an important part of their experiences. These authors do not analyze, though, how their findings affect their belief that sex work is "deviant", a common misconception in sex research (see Weitzer and Oselin, 2013, for a recent review). Using software that counted the frequency of words used by men in their reports about high level

(i.e. "escort") sex workers in Britain, Millward (2011) found that most reviews were not misogynistic (his original expectation). On the contrary, the majority of reports were complimentary and showed that men were looking for a rich experience involving both human interaction and sex (Millward, 2011). Again, these and earlier results (Rivers-Moore, 2013a) are similar to those in the Costa Rica forum, suggesting that despite the huge economic and cultural differences among the USA, the UK and Costa Rica, the basic relationships between sex workers and their clients are similar. This could be interpreted as a biological component of such interactions rather than a cultural one (Monge-Nájera et al., 2009).

Other authors have mentioned the Girl Friend Experience (e.g. Schifter, 1998; Millward, 2011; Milrod and Weitzer, 2012) but have not focused on *why* it exists. A possible cause is that female and male human minds are adapted to establish mating relationships that lead to successful reproduction, as known since the early work by Darwin (1859). When a client becomes "a regular" and spends increasing time with a sex worker, sharing comments, thoughts and experiences, as well as having intimate contact, the mind mechanisms associated with sexual partner relationships can be activated in both parts (see Diamond, 2007). This is a reasonable explanation considering that, as some posts mention, tourists tend to repeat and prolong interactions with the women they find more satisfactory.

Some topics analyzed by Rivers-More in the other forum (2009, 2010) were not frequent in this particular forum. Women exploiting their clients and the danger of violence are almost never mentioned. If they were important to these men, one would expect them to be frequent in posts because they could become victims themselves. A probable cause for this finding is that such problems are not more common in Costa Rica than in other countries with similar characteristics (Monge-Nájera and Vega, 2012).

Other topics that are not central to the Costa Rican section of the World Sex Guide Forum include traditional female roles; feeling kinder and wealthier; and fear of emotional demands. These are indeed subjects of sociological and psychological interest, but a possible reason for them to be absent from most posts is that they are not central to sexual tourism (Rivers-More, 2009). Most men do not visit Costa Rica to find a wife (this market is the focus of the so called "mail bride" companies), so wife roles and emotional involvement are not frequent in their minds. The fact that they almost never mention feeling superior to other tourists or to Costa Rican men also suggest that these are not key aspects of their

experience. On the contrary, after reading all those posts my impression is that sexual tourists mostly make short visits in which they try to meet a few women, focus on those that make the best impression and try to “stretch” their budgets, which is consistent with previous findings (e.g. Rivers-Moore, 2010).

These results also agree with the view presented by Ryan and Kinder (1996) that sexual tourism experiences can range from very brief sexual interactions to complex relationships that provide companionship, fantasy fulfilment, novelty and relaxation.

Possibly the most interesting result of the present analysis refers to traditional beliefs and attitudes underlying sexual tourism. While in all cases women have little if any interaction among themselves, men seem to feel part of a group and exchange useful information (this applies to male *clients* and also to male *workers*). Male sex workers do not suffer such a deep stigma as women who sell sexual services. After all, seducing several women is seen as a mark of manhood and success, and in the case of male sexual workers in Puerto Viejo they even meet in public places to exchange information about their clients (Frohlick, 2007). This is also expected biologically because humans, like other mammals, can benefit sexually from advertising their fitness, unselfishness and sexual success (Van Vugt and Iredale, 2012; Clutton-Brock and Huchard, 2013).

For female sex workers the situation is different; they live in a society that strongly controls their sexuality, so they avoid the public eye and often justify sex work by saying that they are single mothers with no options (Leigh, 1987). Again, this makes sociological and biological sense: in most societies female sexuality is contained by social taboos, while motherhood is deeply praised (Phoenix and Woollett, 1991); biologically, primate females are known to exchange sex for resources to raise their offspring, but sometimes they try to do so out of the group’s gaze (Diamond, 2007).

Other traditional beliefs surrounding sexual tourism refer to youth, security and group membership. Sexual tourism is seen as a danger because the young could get attracted to the off-marriage sexuality that it brings to communities, a “bad example” that must be avoided but is tolerated because it favours the local economy. For many years anthropology has found a general avoidance of public demonstrations of sexuality even in societies where nudity is the norm, but the topic of public sexuality and its influence on the young has received little if any biological study (Diamond, 2007). A salient comment of the women who hire male sexual workers is that they feel safe in their company, a key feeling for women in a foreign

environment, where they are targets for sexual violence (Katz and Mazur, 1979; Bart, 1981). Sociologically it can be interpreted as a case of social male violence (Archer, 1994) and biologically as a reflection of normal primate behaviour: females normally need support from others to prevent rape (Bart, 1981; Pinzone et al., 1998; Foubert, 2000).

Group membership is important to understand the dynamics of sexual tourism. The case of female tourists in Costa Rica shows that no matter how long a foreign woman lives in a community, how much she mixes with the locals, or how much money she has, the community will always see her as alien, and she will be rapidly reminded as soon as conflict starts (Frohlick, 2007). Sociology can consider this as an example of how “otherness” is implemented, while biology can explain it as just one among thousands of known cases of group behaviour that favours related DNA (Diamond, 2007).

All the categories mentioned by Milrod and Weitzer (2012) for the USA also occur in the forum about Costa Rica, and generally, the situation in Costa Rica parallels theirs as well as the cases analyzed by Sánchez (2006), Jacobs (2009) and Williams (2012). On the other hand, this large sample does not agree with either the Double Standard view of Pruitt and La Font (1995) or the Oppression Paradigm critically reviewed by Weitzer (2010, 2012). What these men write in their posts does not support the Oppression Paradigm at all. The Modern Industrial and Post-Industrial paradigms proposed by Rivers-Moore (2009; 2010) deserve further study in this case.

I hope my comparison of male and female sex tourists serves a baseline for a new line of research; it shows that despite the financial power of tourists as patrons, traditional roles still underlie their relationships, probably reflecting both biological and cultural characteristics. Until now, the panorama of sexual tourism is similar in the few countries that have been formally studied, but it is too early for generalizations: despite their differences, the USA, the UK and Costa Rica are Western, Christian capitalist democracies. Are trends different in dictatorships? Or in Buddhist countries? Hopefully this article will inspire others to study their own realities and, in due time, produce a reliable view of this taboo but most interesting subject worldwide.

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