BEYOND THE THONG:
CONTEXTS, REPRESENTATIONS, AND THE PERFORMANCES OF EROTIC
MASCULINITIES IN MALE STRIP SHOW(S)

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Male stripping has been a cultural performance of growing interest for scholars and the wider US population for decades. In the 1980s the male stripping industry developed as numerous clubs, groups, and agencies materialized, offering various erotic masculine strip performances. As the industry emerged, a pathway developed for the narrative of the male stripper to become a common constituent of today's popular storylines as seen in numerous types of media and entertainment. Over the past few decades, the investigation of sex work has also been a growing area of focus in academic research, particularly the body of scholarship associated with exotic dance. However, research on erotic dance commonly focuses on the female segment of the industry and the issues women confront regarding the industry. Very little has been written about the male stripping industry in relationship to the performance of masculinity, and how the performance of masculinity is constituted beyond a heteronormative and white context.

Male strip shows are cultural performances that vary in purpose and meaning, and are best understood as a cultural display that presents the body as a socially interactive text, where performer and spectator have (or develop) an understanding of the interactions and expectations of the show. The erotic theatre of male stripping is highly stylized based on the continuous negotiation of the performers identity as he dances the line located on the continuum between work and play. The work/play engagement of the male stripper takes place in a kind of erotic type of playground, where rules and behaviors are sometimes predetermined and other times fluid and impromptu. In this study, I examine the construction and performance of masculinity in the male
strip show by exploring variations of masculinity and the ways masculinity is constituted and performed in various contexts. Building on the current discourse about male stripping and gender performance, juxtaposed with close readings of erotic performances on film and television, plus thick descriptions from interviews and personal experience, I explore various constructions of erotic masculine identity, and move toward a critical understanding about the industry as a whole.
I dedicate my dissertation to my wife and son:

Erin Paun Staszel

Emory Quinn Staszel

My previous life of adventure and craziness pales in comparison to the adventures your love, support, comfort and chaos provide.

With all my love - Pumpkin and Daddy!
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INTRODUCTION. STRIPPING, TONIGHT, THE INDUSTRY

“What you see on stage is not what you see behind the scenes, in the dressing rooms, or in the bedrooms at home” (R. Danielle Engan, Katherine Frank, Merri Lisa Johnson, *Flesh for Fantasy: Producing and Consuming Erotic Dance* xiii).

*****

A long night of work is finally winding down. I can’t wait to put it behind me. I enter the house, drop my overflowing box of costumes, and sigh and an exhausted breath of relief. Over eight hours of travel and performances in four locations, it’s time to unwind and relax—release the tensions, thoughts, and understanding of the night.

I pour a glass of wine, undress, and stare into the mirror, shirtless. Specks of glitter sparkle on my chest and shoulders. This is not an element of spectacle I utilize with my costume or identity construction. Rather, it is remnants of a cosmetic choice of someone else; a temporary body enhancement they have engaged with to alter and improve their physical appearance. I must have acquired these shimmering specks during some intense contact throughout the night. The glitter is accompanied by a newly acquired swelling and painful scratch down the back of my left arm. A result from an interaction, I’m sure I don’t remember.

I ignore the pain and my apparent sparkle, and continue my evening ritual; a process we all engage with in some fashion after a long day of work. My wine is refilled, my body has partially been assessed, and I persist as the cut on my arm, now covered with dried blood, continues to throb. I look beat. My hair is messed and I emit a souring odor of sweat and overused cologne that has collided with a mixture of fragrances from others who attached themselves to me at some point during the night. This stale state is a common aroma and by-product of the job, and is a smell that I have become accustomed to after an evening of shows. Strangers touched my body, marked it, and left trace evidence. Temporary evidence that will be
washed away or heal with time, but may never escape the crevasses deep within my memory.

Even though I’ve become accustom to being pinched, slapped, bit or licked, due to the
carnivalesque1 nature of my trade, it doesn’t mean I don’t get sick of it.

I remove my pants and am left with only a garment that announces the identity of who I
was tonight. A bright, sparkle infused, purple thong conceals my total nudity from the reflective
scrutiny of my critical eye. I’m tired and exhausted, and I ask myself, "Man, was it worth it?"
For the time being I end my stare in the mirror and the physical evaluation of my aging structure.
Thank god my body could get me through another night. I sit and try to relax at my computer.
My release will only come from the reflective thoughts I can capture on the page before the
mental fatigue sets in and I’m forced to sleep.

The keyboard beacons my page soaking strokes, but first I turn to my final evening ritual.
I slip off the thong to cleanse and reenergize before furthering my textual release. Memories of a
naïve nineteen-year-old new to the industry, and memories of a testosterone enhanced twenty-
something muscle-head slip back into their compartments for a later reflexive moment. I step
into the shower to wash away the erotic taints and touches the night has supplied. I rinse,
furiously lather, and scrub away the layers of sweat, grime, and erotic fragrance the night has
produced. Twenty minutes later, a blistering shower disposed the night’s filth down the drain.

---

1 It was literary critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin that used the terms "carnival" and "grotesque style" in
describing the exaggerations and excessiveness of the material bodily changes through eating, drinking, sex and
defecating. When discussing carnival, Bakhtin suggests a temporary reversal of regular life in a "second life" type of
experience. "[W]e find here," he writes, "a characteristic logic, the particular logic of the 'inside out' (a l'envers), of
the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to bottom [...]" (Bakhtin 11). The idea of inner urgings of those who
witness these types of performances border the cultural lines of the taboo and grotesque. For Bakhtin, the grotesque
body, "is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created and
builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world [...]"
(317). Bakhtin's idea of the grotesque and carnivalesque body "becoming" is reflected in the male strip show where
the erotic body is exhibited and social decorum is radically shifted toward the erotic nature of sexual excess.
Like a phoenix rising out of the ashes, I step out, steamy and rejuvenated, with a new sense of energy and purity. I dry and slip into some old sweatpants, and a cutoff shirt — no thong! I feel whole as the various elements of my identity begin to merge into one sense of self. I return and stare into the screen prepared to mine the fissures and fractures of my identities, wanting to find the material and the resources that will allow me to better understand the work that I do, and how that work functions in the male stripping industry.

--I am 31

*****

I begin with the above quote and reflective passage as my way to frame thoughts about self, other, and the transformational state I engage when performing numerous roles daily. I often identify as a male stripper. I am an erotic sex worker, who constructs an image, produces a fantasy, and creates a performance to sell as an entertainment service for both celebration and jest. My body and its erotic display is my business. In addition to this erotic occupational performance identity, I am a booking agent, producer, promoter, sound technician, and costumer. I am also a son, brother, nephew, cousin, Godfather, friend, fiancé, co-worker, colleague, educator, researcher, and student. For this document, the first title (stripper) and last two (researcher, and student) hold the most significance.

Stripping is simply a job with specific gendered practices that somewhat vary depending on the context for which the task is performed. The work requires an open understanding of sexual expectations, behaviors, boundaries, performance tools and contextual borders. I perform this occupation, not because I am in an economic bind, forced to pursue work that is stigmatized as dirty, disrespectful, unethical and more traditionally associate with women. Rather, my choice of trade is an economic strategy based on my efficient use of resources and skills, my abilities
with multi-tasking and time management, and my long-terms goals. Unfortunately, not all strangers, acquaintances, friends, or family understand this about my choice. For many, stripping is not a job, it is a way of life surrounded by sex, drugs, disease, and illegal practices. But any job—bar, club, restaurant, school, hospital, or daycare—can potentially have co-workers surrounding themselves with sex, drugs, disease, and illegal practices; sex workers are just more likely to be exposed to it due to the nature of their business.

In the following study, I offer an understanding of the male stripping industry that follows my journey, collaged with moments and experiences of others. I write as a "method of inquiry," a method sociologist Laurel Richardson explains as, "A way of finding out about yourself and your topic," (Richardson 345) wherein I can engage my identity with the scholarly and popular discourse on sex work, sex workers, and the erotic industry. I do so in order to examine masculinity and occupational identity in relation to the physical and psychological negotiations that occur when performing the role of a male stripper. I employ performative forms of writing in order to examine how memory and performance are embodied, and how the body can be developed and brought into a text in order to explore writing conventions and the polarities of self/other and subject/object. The chapters, sections and passages, are constructed from a multiplicity of thoughts and understandings in order to make sense of an erotic labor practice and the negotiations that are necessary for maintaining a position within the industry.

As I write, I go in and out of reflective voices bringing in critical thoughts from other scholars, popular culture and interviewees. Using my experiences, scholarly critiques, content generated from ten formal interviews, and content from films and Internet clips I show the variations that performances of erotic masculinity undergo as they cross borders into various cultural demographics. I vary the approaches to writing as a way to identify shifts in thought and
emotional reflexivity. Although the voices are sometimes fractured, I strive to unite them into a clear understanding. At times, I use asterisk breaks to denote a spatial and attitudinal shift through time, space and thought.
CHAPTER I. THE FOUNDATION AND BACKGROUND

I'll never forget my first year performing in the sex industry as a male stripper. There were so many different and unique experiences, that, had I not experienced it for myself, I never could have imagined how the work of an erotic male entertainer could vary to such degrees. Since my initial experience in a dingy gay bar, one random summer night in 1999, I have studied the industry, the participants, the scholarly discourse on the topic, and various cinematic representations to try to make sense of the business, the labor that I perform, and identity/persona that I project as a working member of the sex trade. Through this examination, I have found several conflicting ideas, stereotypes, and conclusion about the work, the workers and the industry at large.

Male stripping has been a cultural performance of growing interest over the past thirty years. In her article, “Shiny Chests and Heaving G-Strings: A Night Out with the Chippendales,” Cultural studies scholar Clarissa Smith analyzes the Chippendales franchise and the origin of the Chippendales brand as one of the most historical moments of the emerging male stripping industry. The Chippendales brand emerged in the late 1970s in a small club in Los Angeles and has grown into its now iconic cuffs and collars image with world tours and a permanent show located on the Las Vegas Strip. Smith credits the success of the male stripping industry and the Chippendales, "to shifts in women's political, economic and social status during the 1960s and 1970s, and to trends within other media forms which have made the male body increasingly visible and thereby available to women viewers" (70). In the 1980s numerous clubs, groups, and agencies materialized, offering more access to similar performances of erotic masculinity, ultimately facilitating the narrative of the male stripper to become a common constituent of
today's storylines as seen in numerous movies, television series and musicals. Generalizing on the topic, performance studies scholar Katherine Liepe-Levinson in *Strip Show: Performances of Gender and Desire* suggests, "The strip show continues to be one of the most persistent and controversial forms of indigenous American entertainment" (2). While what constitutes the native state of the modern commercial strip show may be debatable in terms of form and cultural origin, scholars variously continue to examine erotic performances and the narratives that surround them.

Like any other cultural performance, as cultural critics R. Danielle Egan *et al* posit in *Flesh for Fantasy*, "exotic dance changes over time" (xviii). Contemporary erotic dance roots have evolved from the days of belly dancing and the famous Little Egypt's *Hoochee-Coochee*, as well as the more popular work of Gypsy Rose Lee and female burlesque and vaudevillian strong men such as Sandown the Magnificent who would prance and pose his displays of strength with finesse and erotic intent. The varied history of such erotic gender performances suggests they are better situated as part of a broadly defined gendered service industry.

When I began performing the everyday act of removing my clothing as a form of erotic labor, I never anticipated remaining in the industry for over fifteen years. I equally never expected I would spend much of that time self-analyzing in an attempt to make sense of who I was, what I did, and how the act of erotic male stripping functioned in society at large. Every

---


3To clarify, I prefer to use the term erotic dance when discussing male dancers and do so throughout the study. I believe the terms exotic and erotic are sometime used interchangeably when discussing the stripping industry. I also believe it is more common to hear female dancers referred to as exotic dancers and male dancers referred to as erotic male entertainers. I cannot speak to the origin or rationale for this difference. However, I am choosing to clarify how I address the terms and justify my choice as a learned preference.
crinkled dollar stuffed down my pants from an adoring spectator has more intrinsic and embodied worth than just its face value. Every drip of sweat off of my body, every ache and pain from hours of training and engaging an audience, every erotic gaze projected upon my body, every long night, every empowering moment, degrading encounter or erotic interaction that I have experienced from the performative act of selling a stylized construction of masculinity has not only made me who I am, but has informed and re-enforced how I understand the work, the structure of the business, and how masculinity is valued and performed throughout the industry.

I was introduced to the business by chance and turned away by fear and lack of confidence. Later, I was reintroduced to the position, and entered the business through acts of brotherhood and mentorship. As a naive, testosterone-filled teenager, full of sexual eagerness, I found my way into a business filled with heterosexual debauchery, homoeroticism, and a queered sense of sexual reality. I quickly learned the ropes of the industry by developing relationships with various dancers in every male stripping environment I found. After acquiring and maintaining a position within the business by becoming a member of a variety of communities where performances of erotic masculine displays were valued, I learned how to make physical and psychological adjustments as needed in order to better serve the audience and contextual makeup of the venue.

The erotic theatre of male stripping is an adult form of entertainment that blurs the situated location on the continuum between work and play. Play, as performance studies scholar Richard Schechner argues, can be best organized around six templates including structure, process, experience, function, ideology and frame (Schechner, "Playing," 1988). To separate the genres of play from playing, Schechner realizes that the possibilities of interplay that these categories yield are many. As for the understanding of a performance such as male stripping,
play is subjective considering that Schechner's templates of play have different meanings between both performers and spectators. For the spectator, a strip show is a type of entertainment that they can choose to experience and witness as a form of release, possibly from work (that which is not play), or as an element of a celebration (which then is a form of play within play). For the performer, the act is a process, which is actual work where certain criteria and expectations must be met in order to satisfy the customer, but at times, the work can also be experienced as play.

The performance creates an experience for the audience, where sometimes the experience functions within the context as it is intended, and sometimes it does not. For example, when a group of women celebrating the ritual of a bachelorette party, are excited for the experience of attending and are willing participants in the interactive antics of the male strip show, the position of work and play can blend and blur the performances as it might be placed on the work/play continuum for the stripper. However, if a stripper was ordered as a gag-gift and ultimately rejected by the participants—as it sometimes is-- then the erotic labor can specifically be classified as work, or a failed attempt at play on the work/play continuum. For instance, such a failure occurs if a stripper is ordered to surprise a private family affair celebrating the matriarch's seventieth birthday and she rejects the idea due to her being offended by the idea of a stripper and the inappropriateness of a nearly naked stranger dancing around her grandchildren. Since the nature and purpose of the performance can fluctuate so greatly, the interpretation of the act of male stripping becomes very individualized based on one’s ideology and ideas of play, imagination, fantasy, and imitation.

Once I became a part of this business, it didn't take long to realize how the male strip show is a highly stylized form of cultural performance based on the continuous negotiation
between erotic work and play. Culture, as performance theorists Dwight Conquergood argues, is an "unfolding performative invention instead of reified system, structure, or variable" which can be resituated at the center of knowing a lived experience ("Rethinking," 190). In *Performing Black Masculinity*, Bryant Keith Alexander argues, cultural performances are the "practical behaviors, signifiers of social membership, and the markers of familiarity that are negotiated as bonds of affiliation and recognition in a particular social, cultural, and racial communities" (34). Because culture is a "socialized practice," and as an "interpretative framework" (Alexander xvi), it can always be contested when juxtaposed with other competing frameworks; the male strip show takes on meaning based on the context of the location. One night I may be in a public location for a large show with a group of male performers I consider to be like family. The next night I may be the only dancer in a hotel room for a small group of women celebrating a special occasion. Another night I may be the new dancer among an established group where I am not sure if I'm wanted, valued or appreciated as a member of the show. In each of these scenarios, the contextual makeup of the venue and the audience may be completely different from the previous night, requiring me to analyze the social scenario, create an erotic identity that I assume will best serve the moment, and occasion. In almost every case, I must negotiate practical erotic behaviors and signifiers of the business to fulfill audience’s wants and expectations of the affiliation and recognition of an erotic performance.

The work/play engagement of the male stripper takes place in a kind of erotic type of playground, where rules and behaviors are sometimes predetermined and other times fluid and impromptu. In some cases, the rules are established by the venue, the dancer, or the spectator, while in other cases the rules are established collectively, and may be continuously changing. In a public performance, dancers are recognized by the routines they present, which are often
identified by thematic signifiers. Dancers are also recognized by their physical appearance, and the manners in which they erotically display their body. The audience is established by those in attendance that engage the act of witnessing along with various other forms of response and participation. I call these types of performances, a hyper-theatrical, improvisational, and interactive sexual drama where the markers of familiarity are found in the negotiation of performed behaviors between the dancer and the spectator.

The male stripper presents an interactive sexualized performance, often (but not always) structured around short dramatic/themed routines, which may be characterized by ideological masculine archetypes such as a hero, a bad boy, or a submissive depending on contextual tastes. Most commonly these themes include the public servant (police officer, fireman, or doctor as well as uniformed officer in the armed services), sharp dressed man, bad boy [biker/leather attire], or cowboy. While these are more common, there are also various approaches beyond this list for developing a successful thematic identity. The audience then engages the performance with the expected behaviors prescribed by the context of each performance venue.

"Context matters" in strip shows as sociologist Kim Price posits in, "Keeping the Dancers in Check" (385). The realities and social contexts of venues produce their own outcomes, behaviors and performative expectations based on a gendered organization. As such, a male stripper's performative construction is determined by the context of the performance venue. Various contexts of performance settings create multiple types of venues (or playgrounds) and a male dancing industry separated by segments based on the context. Segment as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) is, "each of the parts into which something is or may be divided" (1297). The stripping industry is divided into the female and male segments. My experiences within the industry have led me to see the male business as divided by presumptive
heterosexual and queer sexualities. Male strippers usually dance for an all-female audience where all members in attendance (performer and audience) are assumed heterosexual, or male dancers perform for an audience that is queer made up of gay men, or queer4 men and women.

The heterosexual and gay segments of the industry are filled with levels and layers based on the context of a performance location as well as the population that makes up the audience. In *Naked Lives: The Worlds of Erotic Dance*, sociologist, Mindy Bradley-Engen, address a similar idea and how female erotic performers' work experiences are shaped by the venues in which they dance. For Bradley-Engen the industry functions as a "processual-order" that stresses "interactions between identities and organizational context" (14). She argues, "These social worlds are defined by lines of communication and participation and encompass various subworlds, subcomponents segmented by allegiances, access to resources, professional identities, ideology, and so on" (14-15). Quickly I learned this for myself. Different segments of the business require alternative approaches to the performance, interactions with the audience, and the industry as a whole.

Unlike Bradely-Engen whose work focuses on women’s erotic dancing in specific types of permanent venues and the norms and practices of each specific type of social world within those venues, the male dancing industry doesn't fit into the same types of organizational alignments. She, like many other scholars, focuses on examining the nature of erotic work in permanent locations where dancers, when hired, become a member of the club until they either quit the business or move to a new establishment. Less attention has been paid to independent venues in the industry, and how most dancers (both male and female) contract their services to a

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4 Since the term queer is mired in controversy, as some individuals identify as gay and others as queer but not necessarily as both, I am using it as a shorthand for all non-normative sexualities.
variety of performance contexts. In this study, I examine these independent employment opportunities and the effect these opportunities have on a stripping performance. As a dancer moves from performance to performance and the context of a performance shifts, so does the nature and purpose of the work. While the end goal of the performance usually remains the same (the removal of clothing in order to excite, entertain, and please the audience while the dancer maximizes his or her earning potential), the approach and understanding of the performance may vary significantly. While some permanent locations require dancer loyalty, which restrict dancers from performing in any other location that may be viewed as competition, not every dancer chooses to work in such locations and follow these restrictions. Some dancers may not have the ability to work at these permanent locations if they are not cast as a member of the group, or accepted into the group, based on age, height, and body type including specific elements such as leanness, muscularity, size of breast or penis, and race. Other dancers simply choose to be more flexible by contracting work through various means and in various locations for greater exposure and income potential. It is important to understand that not every strip show happens in a predetermined strip club, an exigency that results in these erotic performances being more variable than what occurs in the permanent club locations.

While I have been a regular in some clubs at different points in my career, I've always viewed the work that I do as independent to any specific location or criteria. For me the work has always been about time management and scheduling logistics. My experiences with networking throughout the business have resulted in relationships and allegiances with various clubs, groups, and agencies making the erotic work I perform more independent and based on a case-by-case basis. For my region of the country (the Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Maryland area), permanent venues open five to seven days a week are not widely available.
While the female dancing industry has numerous venues where women can work 5-7 nights a week in the same location, a male dancer cannot work full time in the same location, as most venues only host male dancers 1-2 nights a week. To be fully employed, a dancer must freelance with multiple venues or agencies, or find additional forms of employment.

My work experiences and travel within the business have influenced my understanding of the male strip show and performances of erotic masculinity. Since I have separated the industry into two distinct segments (queer and straight), I have further categorized the male segment into domain, brand, and style in order to establish a working organizational structure that allows for a more specific understanding of the varying types of performances that occur depending on the context. Through fifteen years of active participation, I’ve come to view the industry structure and how the work is valued based on culturally prescribed audience expectations. These expectations vary based on the social context of each venue. Some nights I perform to hundreds of screaming women in large venues ready and wanting a night to remember. Other nights I entertain on a smaller scale for a handful of shy women, in a private location where they may or may not want to participate in the experience. These are usually liminal celebrations marking events such as a birthday, bachelorette party, or divorce. There are also those nights where I share the stage with fellow dancers and drag queens, offering an erotic variety show to a heterogeneous audience of gay and straight men and women waiting to enjoy and participate in portions of the show that they value. My most dreaded nights are when I’m stuck on a block, a bar, or a small raised stage go-go dancing for an all-male audience in smaller public venues. Here, I not only absorb the homoerotic gaze, but I am also required to acknowledge some patrons most extreme fantasies, as the tipping ritual can become a more intimate, conversational type of work. Then

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5 I make definitional moves below in the section titled “Industry Organization Based on Context” to clarify how I understand and use the terms brand and style.
there are nights when I have multiple bookings in various locations, or other nights when my only show is a complete bust with no audience in attendance. On any given night, I might experience the hetero and homoerotic gaze upon my body, and while some nights it is one or the other, other nights, it is both.

Over the years, I have learned how to eroticize my body for various (often alcohol influenced) audiences. However, I have also experienced how the interactive nature of each show can be problematic in that it shares borders with acts of sexual assault, solicitation and prostitution, all under the veil of erotic cultural performance. Any number of things can happen when a performance is based on the exposure and gyration of a nude or nearly nude body, and responses from interactive participants. Every performance can be extremely different based on its setting, and every interaction and reaction can potentially produce any number of responses of acceptance or rejection. While it has been a continual process of adjustment, I have worked hard to hone my erotic craft in an attempt to better satisfy the wants and expectations of different demographics, all while hoping to not be booed off stage, or arrested for either indecent exposure or assault on unwilling participants.

My purpose in this study is to examine male strip shows and the ways in which masculinity is constructed and performed in various contexts and performances. I use ethnographic methods as well as close readings of critical discourse and various cinematic, stage and Internet examples to compare variations in the ways in which masculinity is constructed and performed in the male strip show when performance contexts shift from performance to

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6 A prime example (which may be viewed as both grotesque and/or humorous) is the April 2014 CNN Steve Almasy report on the lawsuit brought against a Long Island, NY nursing home for having a male stripper as a form of community entertainment. While it appears that no action is being brought against the performer, based on the reported claims and publicized photos, it would not be hard to make the legal jump to claims of lewd and lascivious acts or sexual assault and battery toward some of the unsuspecting elderly audience. [http://www.cnn.com/2014/04/08/us/nursing-home-stripper-lawsuit/](http://www.cnn.com/2014/04/08/us/nursing-home-stripper-lawsuit/)
performance. Unfortunately, most popular cinematic examples and performances examined in the majority of scholarly discourse focus on glorified examples of heterosexual white venues filled with a hyper-erotic audience ready to explode with sexual excitement. However, not all male strip shows play out in this manner, a fact that leaves a gap in the way we understand the performances of gender in these moments of erotic display.

Male strip shows are social performances that vary in purpose and meaning, and are best understood as a cultural display that presents the body as a socially interactive text, where performer and spectator have (or develop) an understanding of the interactions and expectations of the show. Therefore, the body of both the performer and spectator are valued and the interactions of the two create the totality of the experience. Each show is based on the context of the performance venue, and the expectations of that particular audience. The slippery and intricate term "context" is, as performance and cultural studies scholar Kristen M. Langellier posits in "From Text to Social Context," "applicable to performance in several ways" (62). Building on Fine and Speer's work in, "A New Look at Performance" where they argue for a deeper focus on performance and a shift away from solely focusing on a text-centered analysis when discussing oral interpretation, Langellier sees context as both conditions for performance and fundamental to performance events. For Langellier the list of conditions includes the performance setting as context, audience as context, performer as context, and performance event as context. Following Langellier's understanding of context, I examine these avenues to expand the view of how erotic masculinity is performed and functions in different social venues.

To offer a broad definition for a male strip show I would explain it as an exhibition of a male dancer removing his clothing or costume in an attempt to excite, entertain and engage his audience. These performances are based on industry standards and expectations established by
the industry and preferences of the audience. Comparable differences in standards and expectations are often overlooked in both scholarly and popular discourse because performances are predominately understood through taken-for-granted assumptions undergirding heteronormativity. Discussions and examples made available in movies, television, and on stage tend to focus on shows where men dance for women. The actual construction and performance of masculinity in these performances tend to be simply categorized as a male stripping act, without considering the various systems at work and how meaning is altered when the audience context and the purpose of the show are different. These systems produce different expectations in the displays of erotic masculinity, which result in different experiences and understandings.

For Bradley-Engen, permanent clubs in the female sector of the erotic dance industry display organizational features that characterize certain types of female strip clubs, such as "hustle," "social," or "show" club (15). The expected behaviors of both performer and audience are established by these organizational features including the size of the club, the number of dancers, earning method, and set characteristics (87). In some ways, the male segment of the industry operates in a similar manner in that its structure is organized by norms and values based on expectations and commercialism, but also on the separation of gender, race and sexuality. While the act of removing articles of clothing is the basis of a strip routine and similar for both male and female performances, the performances of erotic masculinity in a male strip show are better described based on the norms and expectations that are valued by the audience in a particular context. These norms and values often vary from show to show. As contextual playgrounds shift, the performer must be informed and prepared to meet varying expectations. The expectations, based on the norms and values of a particular context, ultimately influence how masculinity is constructed and performed.
Central Research Questions and Objectives

While a great deal of research about the stripping industry exists, a large majority focuses on the female sector of the industry and the issues female performers confront regarding the industry in general. Very little has been written about the male stripping industry in relationship to the performance of masculinity and how the performance of masculinity is constituted beyond a heteronormative white context. As I am studying masculinity in the male strip show with an academic eye on how various contexts alter the performance of masculinity, I intend to offer ground-up descriptions of contexts and venues, which have not been given previous scholarly attention. My research explores the way masculinity is constituted in the male strip show and examines the performance of masculinity from the initial entrance into the business through variations in performance expectations based on the context of the dancers and the contextual makeup of different performance venues. After examining the initiation and entrance process, I explore how differences in types, approaches and styles of erotic performance have an impact upon the performance of erotic masculinity. I explore three main questions, each of which is independent but influenced and informed by the others:

1. How is masculinity performed during the entrance and initiation period when men begin in the business?
2. How is the performance of masculinity affected when the context of a performance venue changes?
3. How are masculinity and power negotiated and performed as the labor practices and context differ in a performance?

Several studies inside the female strip industry relate first person accounts of working the industry and “becoming the phenomenon” (Ronai 121), however there has yet to be a first-
person perspective of a male dancer/researcher examining the lived experience of being an active erotic male entertainer. Since there are minimal scholarly conversations generated from active male participants, I began with initial questions about being a dancer geared toward personal and professional identity, as well as entrance experiences, sexuality, and the relationships between the performed identity and the audience. As the interview conversations I conducted began to turn more toward contextual differences regarding the performance of erotic masculinity, I became more interested with the differences in the performance of a male strip show, and started searching for answers to questions such as: How (if at all) does race and sexuality have an impact upon the structure of performance? Are there similarities and differences in performance expectations when the performance contexts are different? How does a dancer create his erotic identity to meet the presumed wants and desires of an audience, and does this practice change based on the context or expectations of the audience? Do performances in different contexts function in the same manner with the same rules and practices?

While reflecting on these questions and engaging them with interview participants, I was constantly reminded about the differences regarding the nature of the work, and how some dancers willingly accept all forms of erotic dance work, while other dancers may reject or be dismissed from different types and approaches to male exotic dance work. This realization prompted me to focus on the differences within the business. I began to make sense of how the industry was structured and the ways masculinity was constituted and performed based on a particular expectation of a context. This led me to examine the nature of erotic male dancing and how performances were altered due to location, duration, and audience context. This examination led to the development of an unofficial organizational structure of the male stripping industry and a crude separation between sexualities to establish foundational similarities and difference in
performance expectations, rules, and practices in order to examine how masculinity is constituted differently throughout the industry.

Industry Organization Based on Context

The notion of separating the male stripping industry into categories such as segment, style, and brand is a new concept when examining performances of masculinity. For this study, I use these terms to develop the discussion of how masculinity is constituted in the male strip industry. I have defined segment in an above section and how I see the business as divided by presumptive heterosexual and queer sexualities. Brand and style are useful terms that can help clarify and discuss the organizational structure of the business. Brand as defined in the OED is, "a particular type of something" (169), while style is defined as "a manner of doing something; a distinctive appearance, design, or arrangement" (1425). Brand is best identified by the example of the Chippendales, a company as well as a stage performance that has a particular image and symbol associated with its name. There are various lesser-known brands consisting of companies that produce tour productions or promote an online identity that book dancers for more private affairs. Style is contingent on several elements that vary based on segment, brand and, sometimes, even race. While these terms are intended to establish difference and a categorical placement for types of erotic male performance, at times, the terminology and ideas may blend and bleed into each other. As I develop this discussion regarding these orders of separation, it is important, as I noted above, to understand that cultural wants and expectations in different areas influence the way masculinity is valued and represented in different contexts. In situations when context and audience demographic blend, so too may segment, brand, and style and the resultant representations of masculinity.
As sociologist R.W. Connell posits, there is not a single masculinity, but multiple. Masculinity is socially constructed and associated with different positions of power, focusing on the relationships through which men conduct their lives. According to Connell, masculinity can be defined as a place in gender relations: “the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experiences, personality and culture” (Masculinities 71). Gender is an ordered social practice, "that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do" (Connell 71). It is the bodily experiences of erotic male strippers within different context and cultures that help establish the divisions in the male stripping industry: gay/straight, black/white, public/private, commercial/ independent. It is equally the space of the performance and bodily experiences of the spectators that establish expectations that help solidify these categories. The cultural wants and expectations in different contexts set the stage for what audience’s value for a performance of erotic masculinity.

Representation, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall discusses in Representation and the Media, "is the idea of giving meaning" (6). Thus, representation is the way meaning is given to things depicted through images, which stand for the ideas of the things being discussed. Hall posits that representation is completed through a circle of communication and language. Representation doesn't possess meaning until it has been represented and entered into an event to then be given meaning. Representation, as Hall argues, "is constitutive of the event" (7). To understand how masculinity is constituted in the male strip show, one must understand the context and the conditions for the possibility of the event itself. When the male strip show has been critically engaged, and captured on film, the images and ideas often present a glorified representation of male strip performances, which happens within large public venues for what appears to be predominately heterosexual audiences. The discussion and ideas seem to circulate
around the power negotiation in specific contextual situations without considering the vastness of the industry and variations of contexts, performances, and images that exist throughout the business. Therefore, one aim I have in critically examining other context and representations of erotic male stripping is to expand how performances of masculinity are discussed and understood both in scholarly and popular discourse.

In organizing the framework for my study, wherein I establish the borders and boundaries of the business, I follow a similar approach to Bradley-Engen's study of the female strip industry by distinguishing the distinct normative orders of different types of male strip events. Masculinity is often constituted based on the representation of the event. As context of events shift, so do the expectations and performance, thus, not every dancer would fit the expected representation, or some dancers may not be comfortable performing within a particular context.

To better clarify what I mean by different types of male strip events I provide organizational charts in Appendix A to address the various contexts of performance environments that I have found to exist, and I highlight how variations among structural contexts influence the normative order operating within those respective contexts. I separate the industry into two segments by sexuality and I address the idea of brand/style based on type of show/event.

Shows can be further distinguished by domain (public/private) as well as racial and geographic criteria as a comparative study between specific locations may exhibit. I specifically address the public/private domain and race in later chapters and blend the discussions of location and class throughout the study. However, it is not my intention to fully distinguish site-specific criteria. Instead, I acknowledge various criteria without an exhaustive exploration of them in

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7 Class and economic status is sometimes implied in some examples throughout the study but never fully discussed. I weave in an economic critique when it is necessary, but later, clarify why examining ideas of class was a limitation of the study.
order to place focus primarily on the performance of masculinity based on the expectations in certain types of contexts. I developed this organizational system based on personal experiences and the experiences of various male strippers I interviewed (which I discuss below in my methodology section). These ideas of segment, domain, race and brand/style are not meant to be understood as fixed concepts regarding erotic masculine identity. Rather they provide a typological structure to aid my analysis.

As is organized in Appendix A, I have found that industry segments are based on sexuality, separated by the presumptive heterosexuality or homosexuality of the audience and presumptive sexuality of the dancers. To put it simply, the segments of the industry are divided into the straight and gay clubs. The straight segment is more fixed where men strip for women, while in the gay segment, the relationship is queered as men strip for audiences that may consist of gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered patrons. The segments are not fully based on the sexuality of the actual dancers or the audience, rather the perceived notions of relationship between performer and audience. Male strippers that perform for female audiences are typically heterosexual, while male strippers that perform for predominately gay and queer audiences are commonly gay or bisexual. However, straight men often perform for both straight and gay audiences, and while it is less common, gay or bisexual men, may also perform for an audience that seemingly consists of straight women. The segments can then be further broken down into more specific categories of work and performance. I address these areas as I examine the different domains, specific performance examples and locations, and ideas of brands/ styles. I base the idea of brand/ style on the most common context of work experiences. The gay segment

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8 For works that address the sexuality of male dancers in relation to audience context see the articles, "The World of Gay Strippers," and "Power and Control in Gay Strip Clubs" by Joseph R. G. DeMarco, and "Men Objectifying Men" by Richard Tewksbury.
consists of three forms of male strip shows including the go-go dancing club, drag/variety show club, and the combo club, which combine elements of the go-go and show clubs. The straight segment consists of three different forms including permanent public club venues, public show tours, and private parties.9

Brand/style becomes harder to classify because they are established based on differences in audience expectations, interactions and performances in different contexts and cultures. While the term brand suggests a worth or value system, the term style suggests an approach or performance techniques. At times, I will address a value system or performance technique separately, and at times, I will address them collectively as it becomes necessary to address distinctions of context regarding domain, race, sexuality and location. As I noted earlier, the brands/styles that I offer are not meant to be understood as fixed categories, rather they are organized in an attempt to establish how race, place, and geographic location can have an impact upon the structure of a male strip show and the way masculinity is constructed in different contexts. My terms and categories are derived from the language of the industry and how dancers describe various context and work environments. I present this language to ground the scholarly conversation about the male stripping industry in the language found in the field; however, offensive, inaccurate, or in need of further evaluation such language may be. Notwithstanding the potential to offend, I hope, nevertheless, to identify how members of the industry articulate their experiences and to thereby draw distinctions around how masculinity is constructed and performed variously throughout the industry.

I highlight the divisions among heterosexual shows and establish how they are often separated by race where groups of predominantly white performers tend to perform for
predominantly white audiences and groups of predominantly black performers tend to perform for predominantly black audience. This is not always true for more commercial shows such as the Chippendales or the Thunder from Down Under, which are located on the Vegas Strip. Due to the commercial and touristic nature of that city, audiences are usually racially varied. However, Thunder from Down Under, for instance, usually presents all white casts of performers in their promotions; this appears to be based on the racial demographic of an Australian nationalism.

Racially separated shows are in more evidence in smaller cities and areas that are more rural. Racial lines appear to be drawn based on both audience wants and desires, as well as the prescribed style of erotic masculinity the show offers. Racial lines seem to be less in evidence in settings where the contextual makeup of the audience is more predominantly homosexual or queer. However, it has been my experience that it is still not uncommon to find gay settings where the population is predominantly one racial demographic. Furthermore, the geographic location, population density, and economic health of the area can affect the population of any given show or location. In other words, men perform differently in shows for women than they do for men, male and female audiences respond differently based on an established interactive etiquette, and race can also play a role based on the expectations and expected etiquette of a show. Cultural expectations may vary, therefore the style and representation of erotic masculinity presented in any given show is often defined by the practices in which the performers and audience agree to engage in and the bodily experiences produced by those interactions.

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10 The depiction of the male strip show in the 2012 Steven Soderbergh film Magic Mike provides a good example of a racially varied audience. While clips of audience interaction exhibit a racially heterogeneous audience, the male dancers only present notions of white, or light skinned heteronormativity.
11 This statement is based on a review of promotional images of both Chippendales and the Thunder from Down Under on their websites. While Chippendales offer racial variety in their current promotional material, the Thunder from Down Under usually provide only tan white bodies in their promotional material. It is worth noting that expanded searches of promotional images of the Chippendales in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s tend to produce images of predominantly white masculinity with little racial variation.
I do not spend much time addressing more popular examples of male strip shows such as Chippendales and the Thunder from Down Under due to their highly commercial, theatrical, and refined nature. It is important to point out that the brand of these shows is more high end or "top shelf"; they are by definition, "brand name" shows. Whereas the shows and performances of erotic masculinity I address are the antithesis of the polished Chippendales’ brand; they are less refined, often independent and non-commercial, and sometimes possess the most minimal theatricality. Chippendales and the Thunder from Down Under are highly organized, big budget, fixed performances with large administrative staffs and production teams. While I occasionally address these examples as comparative benchmarks, my focus is more on the organizational structure and masculine performances outside of these elite branded shows.

Smith's analysis in, “Shiny Chests and Heaving G-Strings: A Night Out with the Chippendales,” acknowledges a classist mentality in the industry by comparing the Chippendales’ as a high-end brand tailored to audiences looking for a more well-known and respectable experience, rather than a "sleazy," sexualized performance of a presumably lesser quality. Smith explains how the Chippendales' show structure and theatricality, modeled from Broadway variety format, inclusive of a strategic approach to merchandising and marketing, have established the name as a reputable franchise. This show or a show similar in caliber--such as the one displayed in the Steven Soderbergh original Magic Mike film--can be considered to represent more of a high-end brand of performative erotic masculinity. The erotic male performers, to use a cliché, are tall, dark and handsome, with chiseled cheekbones, and lean, dense muscular bodies. They perform choreographed acts with predetermined music, light cues, and special effects, as a way to re-inscribe heteronormative female fantasies around archetypal characters such as a police officer, firefighter, cowboy, doctor, etc.
While Smith does not address precisely what “sleaze” may entail, she does analyze erotic male strip shows other than the Chippendales and refers to anything else as simply sleazy and sexualized "floor shows" (70). For her any other type of male revue that does not possess a similar production value as the Chippendales is by definition, sleazy. In a similar manner, a former Chippendale in a personal interview addresses this elitism by distinguishing, "there are Chippendales" and then there are simply "dick dancers" (West, Personal interview). West, in my view, arrogantly implies that a dancer is either one of the best, or a dancer is something less, something other than the elite. While West neglects to address how he once started as a "dick dancer," a derogatory term suggesting men of minimal worth or value, he clearly delineates a presumptive hierarchy within the business, and he points how the non-elite floor shows are the foundation of the industry, a foundation that is made up of the categories addressed above and codified in Appendix A.

When I discuss brand and style, I aim to distinguish them based on culture and context of the performance venue. These differences help clarify how social norms and practices, as well as the representations of masculinity that appear to be valued, function. The charts in Appendix A help establish the contextual criteria of different segments, brands and styles. These are meant to provide a general understanding of the organizational moves I make in order to distinguish contextual differences in various types of performance. As I move through the study, the terms segments, domain, brands, and styles will be further developed based on specific instances and locations when relevant.

The straight segment is made up of strip clubs, road tour shows, and private parties. Strip clubs are permanent locations that are open on a regular basis. Clubs usually have their own set of rules and expected behaviors often based on sexuality. Shows normally run the duration of
club operating hours, and the performance expectations are based on the context of the club, structural elements, and the operating budget. Road tour shows occur when a group of male dancer’s contract with a bar, restaurant, or similar venue for producing a male revue as a one night event. Tour shows are usually structured based on a Chippendale's model where the show lasts between two to three hours. Tour shows, however, often operate on a minimal budget and may offer very few sets, costumes or special effects. Private parties are individual gigs in which dancers are booked for a short performance at a specific location, and are usually for smaller groups celebrating a special occasion. While dancers may contract agreements for private parties independently, often from previous work at another location, there are also various agencies throughout the industry that also book male dancers. While some of the agencies offer a diverse menu of men, others are very specific about the representations of masculinity they offer. Most agencies, however, prescribe notions of heteronormativity and are usually contracting for performances where men dance for women.

The gay segment is made up of go-go bars, drag/variety shows, and the combo show. Male go-go dancing is a common style of erotic entertainment in gay establishments. The establishments are usually bars first and foremost that have dancers on a regular, predetermined schedule. There is little, if any, theatricality expected. Dancers usually perform with limited space and dance on either a small stage, platform, or the bar. Duration of the show may last from three to six hours. Elaborate routines are not required, as the expectations suggest the audience is more interested in the display of the exposed body and less interested with entertainment based on a thematic performance. Drag/variety shows function in a similar manner as do tour shows in the straight segment. They last for a predetermined time, and are only an element of the evening's event. Performers range from drag queens and kings, strippers, or special routines that may
consist of a singer, dancer, or magician. Combo shows are structured around both go-go dancing and thematic stage performances.

My summary of the organizational features of the business is based on expectations and differences a dancer encounters as he moves across borders and boundaries among and between venues or gigs. In a similar fashion, sociologist Richard Tewksbury examines dancer expectations and organizational features of the business in his article, "Male Stripper: Men Objectifying Men." Tewksbury specifically looks at the gay segment by studying troupes that travel extensively to numerous clubs. While he doesn't acknowledge the borders and boundaries of the business, he does elaborate on the dramaturgical roles of "stripper, playwright, director, producer, and audience" to examine how these roles reshape and reconstitute the performance of stripping (169). For Tewksbury, definitions of masculinity are made clear through his analysis of these roles. He explains, "through interactions individuals construct and reconstruct meanings, creating their social context" (169). I, however, attempt to make more distinctions than he does regarding the performance of masculinity as the chapters progress. I do so by acknowledging the separation of borders and boundaries within the business, and I establish the divisions based on sexuality and type of show to later explain the manners in which expectations, process, and interactions have an impact upon representations.

Literature Review and Contextualization of the Topic

Over the past few decades the investigation of sex work has been a growing area of focus in academic research, particularly the body of scholarship associated with exotic dance. Sociologists Laura Agustin and Katherine Frank note that the focus on sex work is almost
exclusively on the women who sell it and the men who buy it (Agustin 621; Frank 511). The female strip show and the female exotic dance industry, a culture where women perform erotically for financial gain while entertaining predominately-male audiences, is the area of sex work research that has been addressed the most from various disciplines and perspectives. Feminist social science scholars, and former erotic dancers, R.D. Egan and Katherine Frank acknowledge the large body of female strip show research, which focuses on the dancers and performance contexts (Egan et al. 2006; Frank, “Thinking”). Hundreds of academic books and articles have been published on the topic critically examining gender, identity, and power relations. The places that house these erotic female acts produce rich context to explore performed sexuality and controlled behavior where nude or nearly nude women exhibit their body for pleasure and scrutiny of the male gaze.

While research on the female exotic dance industry continues to grow, academic attention to the male strip show and the male segment of the industry is significantly less. Although the existing scholarship on the male stripping industry has been detailed, interesting, and insightful, like all forms of representation, it is “partial, partisan, and problematic” (Goodall, Writing 86). The conversation has been limited with regards to representing the diversity of cultural elements that make up the wide array of performances in this particular genre of erotic entertainment. Much of this research has largely focused on the negotiations of gender and power in a specific type of context. This has produced a one-sided view because of the focus on a particular type of club setting and a particular style of performance. Much of the discourse is accurate and has a

12 Katherine Frank’s essay, “Thinking Critically about Strip Club Research,” reviews a large portion of the body of literature on exotic dance to dispel the claim that research on the subject is sparse and not taken seriously in academia. Although the essay is not exhaustive, Frank does dispel the erroneous assumption that there is limited literature on exotic dance by critically assessing nearly one hundred different studies on the topic ranging from the 1960s to 2006.
solid grasp on erotic masculine performances within a heterosexual white setting where the
performers and audience are predominately Caucasian and of the opposite sex. However, the
way the shows and interactions are written about is sometimes sensationalized. Those writing on
the subject seem to have only focused on a particular style of performance, and equally as
important, only on shows that contain large, receptive, energetic audiences. One possible reason
for some of the limited research could be lack of accessibility due to a much smaller market.
Compared to the female strip show/club, erotic displays of male sexuality have a more limited
cultural production. Male strip clubs are less common and male strip shows often emerge as a
one-night-only event.

Commonly, female strip clubs are open seven days a week, some even 24 hours. The
paying public, both men and women, have relative easy access to a place to view, experience,
and appreciate the erotic female body, as well as the workers a venue for economic gain from
sexualized performance. Comparably, however, erotic displays of male sexuality have a limited
cultural production, are less common, and often created for specific audiences making the male
industry less accessible.

The closest accessible city during my graduate studies, Toledo, Ohio, for example, has
nearly ten female strip clubs within a ten-mile radius, and only one venue that offers a male strip
show on a semi-regular basis. This venue was a gay bar that regularly hosted a combination
drag/male stripper show. Comparatively my hometown of Pittsburgh, PA, where I worked the
area at the turn of the millennium, had eight locations that provided erotic male entertainment on
a regular basis. At the time, two venues were permanent clubs that hosted heterosexual male strip
shows two nights a week. The other six locations were gay bars, which hosted a variety of

13 For studies that address this area see the following titles in the works cited, Dressel and Petersen 1982; Liepe-
different types of shows that often provided male strippers. By 2014, Pittsburgh only had four locations remaining that regularly hosted male strip. However, the city still has a substantial network of dancers and agencies that generate work for male dancers. Toledo, on the other hand, had fewer dancers and agencies, which for me, resulted in a smaller network of opportunity. When I moved away from my original network and my eight-year tenure in the Pittsburgh market, I gained a different perspective on the business and how performances of erotic masculinity are valued. At an earlier point in my career, I viewed the work as just that, work. I wasn't concerned about how I categorized or classified the labor that I performed. At that point I simply understood each performance as basically the same act (playfully and erotically taking my clothes off), with the same result (income).

On Friday and Saturday, I would dance at clubs for women. On Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday I would dance at clubs whose audience was predominately-gay men. Thursday was a swing day in which I would either have off, or if I were lucky, I would book a party at a private location. Sometimes I would book short tours with area groups, and work in a variety of states over a few-day period. Each gig had the same end game; try to make the most money for the least amount of work. The goal was always to stay positive and focus on the more enjoyable qualities of the work, while suppressing the emotions on nights when I felt belittled, objectified, or undervalued. While I understood how venue and audience expectation could have an impact upon a performance, I was less interested in how the social and cultural context of a setting influenced the work that I performed. Dancing for men or woman didn't matter if I felt valued in a way that financially made sense for the time and the amount of physical and emotional work I
performed. However, the time and distance of performing in a different market for my last eight years in the business has expanded my perspectives. I have a better understanding and appreciation for how the social and cultural context of a setting affect the behaviors and expectation of a performance, how a performance is co-constructed by both the performer and spectator and how consumption practices, identity, and gender performativity function differently throughout the industry.

When the male strip show became an emerging form of adult entertainment in the early 1980s and 90s, the topics most scholars addressed were women having the same types of sexualized spaces and forms of entertainments as men. Also, the male strip show being a liberating example of gender role transcendence was and still is a popular topic. To that regard, most male strip show scholarship focuses primarily on what sociologists David M. Petersen and Paula L. Dressel acknowledge as the “heterosexual and homosocial” club setting (192). This style of show functions within a cultural space where heterosexual white men dance for predominantly heterosexual white woman. The main contributors to the analysis of these performances have followed Dressel and Petersen’s path, writing on performances and locations where white dancers perform for predominately-white woman.

Various studies have provided a generative analysis based on content collected from a single location; these studies have focused on predominantly heterosexual white spaces, where experiences are comparable. In general, however, these authors attempt to explicate erotic white heterosexuality and how it functions in this genre of performance. Studies have failed to address

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14 Elizabeth Anne Wood in "Working in the Fantasy Factory," further examines the management and commercialization of feelings as well as the manipulation and transmutations erotic laborers experience with their emotional systems.
15 Again, for studies that address this area see the list of sources cited in footnote 13.
the structure of the industry and address how industry standards are altered based on location, context, and audience expectation. Focusing on heterosexual white-on-white male strip shows has resulted in the omission of various settings and forms of this type of adult entertainment. Research has yet to investigate or compare all of the different demographics (e.g. race, gender, sexuality, class and age) of male strip shows that can inform gender performance scholarship as I noted above. This limited focus, in many ways, has re-enforced white heterosexuality as an organizing system and has thereby marginalized non-white and non-heteronormative sexualities from scholarly conversations.

Critics of the white-on-white style of heterosexual performances debate how the male strip show both upholds and breaks gender norms. Many studies question whether a male strip performance is a mirror image of the female strip show with a mere inversion of the sex of the audience and the performers. Much of the research as Montemurro et al. explains, “treats female patrons/audience members as similar, focusing on acts of aggression, which may not be typical of all patrons” (335). Similar one-sided analysis mainly focus on power and gender relationships between performer and spectator in the heterosexual male strip show, as well as the possibility of the role-reversal of the erotic gaze. Some arguments support the idea that the tables are turned, that power roles are reversed in the male strip show and women hold the financial power to purchase the male body as a sexual commodity (Dressel and Petersen, “Gender Roles” 156). Other viewpoints argue that the purported role reversal in the male strip show is illusory, and the widely-touted interpretation of the male strip show as a symbol of women’s liberation is false (Margolis and Arnold, "Turning the Tables"). Additional research has described these performances of gender and desire as a, “manifesto of pro-sex feminism, an inadequate female

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16 In addition to Margolis and Arnold, also see Dolan 1989; in the works cited.
imitation of male lust and the male gaze,” as well as a “joke” (Liepe-Levinson, *Strip* 1). While these studies analyze the relationships between the performance, performers, and interactive behaviors in a specific context and performance setting, they omit consideration of how different settings call for different performance conventions, behaviors, and relationships. The various possible performances of gendered and sexual identities based on cultural expectations of a specific demographic setting are therefore largely ignored.

An example of how various performances of gendered and sexual identities are ignored is best illustrated by cultural anthropologists Katherine Frank and Michelle Carnes in “Gender and Space in Strip Clubs.” Frank and Carnes take up issue with gender, race, and privilege, and argue that the meaning and influence of stripping is best understood by exploring the specific configurations of privilege that have an impact upon different types of strip sites. They focus specifically on a female erotic performance space designated by a female dancing for female context, and described as a "BBSDW" space (black women dancing for black women) (116). While the act of commercial stripping may have some similarities across demographics and context, Frank and Carnes exhibit how particularities in practices and meanings must also be considered when drawing conclusions about stripping. By examining a niche strip atmosphere, they reveal how interactions within strip shows reflect unique cultural and historical positions of both the customers and performers, as well as how the specific needs of those customers shape the use and interpretations of strip performances.

Subsequently, by examining such a niche strip context Frank and Carnes exhibit just how unique social worlds of erotic dance can be, and how not all clubs and strip shows are uniquely classified into a typology. They explain how the promotional visibility for strip events for lesbian audiences is less visible than that of other forms of strip shows, and that shows catering to black
lesbians specifically are even less visible. There are no permanent locations for such performance in the geographic area they studied; rather they occur in found places that must be leased for one night to hold the event. For Frank and Carnes different performance contexts exhibit different needs and expectations, and these arise out of unique social positionings and historical exigencies.

As performances occur in specific contexts, they generate specific performances of gendered desire, and thus constitute various displays of masculine and feminine sexuality. The cultural and contextual variations of these performances support Agustin’s directive to expand sex work research to include the male strip show. Agustin urges considerations of commercial sex as "tangled up in culture" (618) and to view these performances as rooted in everyday practices. She argues for a cultural-studies approach to commercial sex practices and performances and for examining its intersections with art, ethics, consumption, entertainment, economics, urban space, and sexuality, as well as race, class, gender, and identity (619). My project answers Agustin’s call by investigating a range of contexts of the male stripping industry. Through research and reflexive analysis of my experience as a long-term male stripper, and through close readings of narratives proffered by movies, television, and other forms of media, I offer an insider perspective as I explore how demographic and socially constructed behaviors illuminate what is at work in the performances of both performer and spectator.

Bodies carry value differently in various spaces, as gender, race and sexuality affect the behaviors and expectations of a male erotic performance. Building on the current discourse about the topic and the thick descriptions about the performances, which are already in place, I show various sides of the construction of an erotic masculine identity. I move toward a critical understanding about the industry by focusing specifically on how erotic masculinity is
constituted within given contexts. Using my experiences and additional content generated from ten formal interviews of current and previously active male erotic dancers, I show the variations that performances of erotic masculinity undergo as they cross borders into cultural demographics other than those that are heterosexual and white. I do so by focusing on three emergent themes and how they vary across segments. I first examine how masculinity is performed in the initiation and continuation period when entering the business and how practices of community, mentorship and grooming have an impact upon the experience. I then focus on how performances are constructed and ordered based on the context of the performance venue and the expectations of the audience. Finally, I evaluate how power is established and negotiated in different performance contexts and how practices of erotic masculinity are written and re-written to meet the wants and desires of various audiences situated within specific contexts.

Methodology

The content analyzed for this project is based on fifteen years of experience as a male dancer in two specific geographic locations in addition to numerous tours across the Eastern part of this country. I engaged four years of critical ethnographic research focused on the types of contexts in which I have been granted access, and where various forms of male strip shows are performed. These experiences are augmented by information generated from ten formal interviews with male dancers that have been active in the business for several years, and by a variety of informal conversations from dancers that I have interacted with in the business. Additional content comes from films, Internet clips, and other media.

I analyze various examples of the male strip show provided on film, television and the Internet to provide prime examples of how often the performances of erotic masculinity are
sensationalized and thereby inform cultural assumptions about the erotic labor that is performed in a male strip club. I first examine film examples to analyze their representation of the entrance process and critique their limited perspective on the entrance and initiation process. Most films suggest an entrance process with little strife and with sensationalized performance conditions. However, these sensationalized representations of how the audience or other dancers react to the novice dancer are not representative of what occurs in real life situations and are not universal across the various contexts.

The scholarly discourse on male stripping and subsequently many of the films that highlight the topic focus on the context of public club settings, which seem to propose that the performances, reactions, and interactions in these conditions are accurate for all strip show scenarios and contexts. I examine video performances, my fieldwork and the experiences of my interviewees to situate the politics of performance and the relationship between performance and power to better understand how performance can, as Conquergood questions, "reproduce, enable, sustain, challenge, subvert, critique, and naturalize ideology" ("Rethinking," 190). By combining a critical analysis of examples of male strippers and performances of erotic masculinity from various forms of media juxtaposed with my personal experience and the experiences of those I interviewed, I clarify how media influences the social construction of and social expectations for erotic masculine performance; moreover, I consider our understanding is limited when these constitutive expectations consistently glorify only certain types of performances. I weave these ideas throughout the chapters to illuminate how media and critical studies on the types of shows most often covered provide an incomplete view of the industry and the performances of masculinity.
In their article, "Dancing with Identity: Narrative Resistance Strategies of Male and Female Stripteasers," sociologists Carol Rambo Ronai and Rebecca Cross explain that, "when an interviewer asks a subject to narrate a biography, the subject and the interviewer jointly negotiate the subject's identity" (105). In *Constructing the Life Course*, sociologists Gubrium, Holstein, and Buckhold explain, this type of biographical work is an "ongoing effort to integrate accounts of a person's life," which is, "continually subject to reinterpretations because it is always the biography-at-hand" (156). A subject highlights aspects of the past in an attempt to make sense of life experiences. However, "the elements of biography change because of time passage and the context of the social institution in which the account is told" (Ronai and Cross 105). Prior to engaging in the formal interviews, as required by the Bowling Green State University (BGSU) human subjects review board (HSRB), my study, including all recruitment procedures and materials, interview questions, and consent documents, was approved by the BGSU HSRB before formal research subjects were recruited.

Each interview began with a briefing that addressed goals and objectives of the study, as well as a formal consent form documenting the project's terms and procedures. All participants agreed to use their stage names in documenting their responses to questions. Upon their review and signature on the consent form, the interviews were recorded and transcribed in order that they be accurately cited. Each interview began with a series of prepared questions and were then expanded for clarification or elaboration whenever necessary.

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17 Appendix B provides a copy of the approved HSRB application letter including the approved informed consent request, and the list of approved questions to ask the dancers being interviewed. The project has received ongoing approval since the original approval date as required by HSRB standards.

18 Just prior to the completion of this project the BGSU Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) and the Office of Research Compliance has been changed to Institutional Review Board (IRB), in order to align with the language in the Department of Health and Human Services regulations for the protection of human subjects in research studies (45 CFR part 46). Since my project was originally approved under the title of HSRB, as my approval letter in the Appendix reflect, I have chosen to keep the language in the document consistent by using HSRB, but have provided this foot note for the updated IRB clarification.
All of the men in the formal interviews took the process and questions very seriously, while allowing for humor and amusing discussion to emerge as well. Formal interviews lasted between two to three hours at a predetermined location. Some interview locations took place at my residence, the residence of the interviewee, or in a hotel room. Formal interviews were often over drinks at the request of the subject, and some interviews had videos of work related performances playing in the background for reflective reaction and commentary. Informal interviews usually occurred back stage before or after shows, over an early morning meal after a late-night performance, in a vehicle while traveling to or from another gig, or a hotel room before bedtime after a long night of performance.

The language used throughout the study is technical and heightened at times to establish a professional standard whereby I can discuss performance and gender theory as well as topics dealing with race and sexuality. The language is also crude and colloquial at times in order that I could engage the language, expression, and manner of communication used by the men that work in this business. For instance, the term performance may also be interchanged with the terms gig, show, routine, act, or work.

Regarding the formal interviews, seven of the men were white, two were African American, and one was bi-racial. At the time of the interviews all participants were under the age of 40; those that addressed their sexuality did so as heterosexual. Some of the men were in a long-term monogamous relationship, some were married with children, some were divorced with children, and some were single with and without children. The participants ranged in age from their late teens to mid-forties and were of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, sexual interest, and family status. I asked questions designed to expand and clarify my understanding of the work and lifestyle we subject ourselves to when working in the business. I asked other
questions about personal information and their entrance into the business, their understanding of
how the business is structured and functions, and how their performances vary based on location,
audience, and social expectations. Some answers verified my experiences, while others expanded
my insight, or challenged my previous beliefs.

Due to the variable nature of the work, the amount of everyone’s experiences, and the
geographic locations my participants had experience with, we rarely discussed performances in
terms of actual specific locations. I have had a personal and professional relationship with most
of the men I formally interviewed for over ten years, while the remainder of the men I only knew
for one night, a couple of gigs, or a few short months. Many of the men in the formal interviews
share experiences with other participants as they worked together at specific clubs or with
specific groups. These shared experiences developed a sense of community among some of the
men due to the people we know and the networks we share. Being a member of various work
communities has provided me access to several areas within the industry, and thus provided a
varied pool of participants. While my personal experiences have been predominately in the
Pittsburgh and Toledo markets, I have also toured and performed in ten states; most of that work
was generated from my experiences in my primary markets. Although I reflect on the markets
that I know best, my findings are supported by the experiences of other dancers who have
performed throughout North America.

The moments when I do address work behaviors and practices based on specific venues,
the location will be introduced, defined based on nature and context of the location, and
described in necessary detail. However, most of the time my descriptions of performance
locations will be more generalized as the responses the interviewees made derive from their
collective experiences across all fifty states, numerous countries, in various ways, and at various
locations. In this study, I am not interested in specific locations or experiences at these locations, rather the variations in locations and experiences. With this focus I clarify how variations can alter (redefine/ adjust/ inform) the manners in which masculinity is performed.

I introduce interview participants throughout the study when they are cited directly. The knowledge I gained from the informal interviews is interwoven with my reflections and often inform my narrative, reflective vignettes, and poetic verse that are dispersed throughout the document. I have generated as much formal observational content as I could over a four-year period while actively maintaining a part time lifestyle as a participant of the industry. My formal interviews include over thirty hours of recorded content and equally as much video of show footage at various venues. In addition, I have numerous journal entries that span this four-year period, as well as an ongoing experience with the industry that until recently continued to provide occasional work.

I go beyond most of the previous research on male strip shows as I focus on the scope of the industry and the variations in performance and masculinity rather than focusing on a case study of a particular location. While I focused on the male stripping industry and the performances of erotic masculinity at large, my interviews engaged men that I viewed as more than just male strippers because of our personal relationship, their home and family life, and career pursuits beyond the industry. Egos and attitudes of dancers, as well as geographic accessibility had an impact on who I selected for the formal interviews. I interviewed dancers that I have developed a stronger relationship with over the years and because they were accessible and willing to donate a substantial period of personal time to being interviewed for my project. I also considered most of the interviewees as fairly humble and grounded individuals even though we thrived in an industry where a heightened ego and sexual attitude is a basic job
requirement. Most of us have an appreciation and understanding for the love, attention, and money we are awarded for our performances and sexualized identity constructions, and equally, we have an appreciation for the privileges and opportunities we are granted when assuming our erotic roles.

Most of these men viewed the work as part time employment and understood the fleeting privileges that came from a successful construction of an erotic identity. I chose not to deal with the dancers who egotistically viewed each other as competition, and I rarely attempted to develop a relationship with them beyond that which existed while dancing. These men that I categorize as having egos were hard to connect with and rarely, if ever, expressed interest in my project. Admittedly, my attitude and ego equally affected who was willing and interested in supporting my study. I eventually concluded my best and most accessible informational sources were the men with the most experience and those with whom I had the best relationships. With that said, the attitudes reflected in this study are not short on ego in any way for it is a propelling characteristic in many men's construction of masculinity, especially for male erotic dancers in their stage performances.

I utilize multiple methods to examine the cultural performances of male strip shows, my experiences, and the erotic gender performances that are staged within the industry. I employ autoethnography and performance methodologies to enhance the ethnographic content and to explore a particular life. My aim is to bring the reader into an intimate space to, as communications scholar Carolyn Ellis explains, “understand the way of life,” (Ethnographic I xvii) and bring attention to the complexities of lived experiences.

Performative autoethnographic writing, as performance studies scholar Tami Spry explains, “Is about the continual questioning, the naming and renaming and unnaming of
experiences through craft, through heart, through the textualizing body” (113). My aim is to bring attention to the complexities of my lived experience, not as a means to assess a singular truth, but in order to provide stories and reflective analysis that allows the reader to understand the shifts and differences of masculinity performance in various contexts. I explore my lived experience and the relationships I have developed within the industry in order to interrogate my performed identity, as well as the performances of masculinity of others constituted during this gendered cultural performance. I do so by juxtaposing my understandings with the experiences of other dancers whom I’ve interviewed. I strive to offer, as Ellis and Bochner suggest, “lessons for further conversation, rather than undebatable conclusions” (“Autoethnography” 744). I employ narrative vignettes and expressive poetics at various moments to invite the reader into what communication scholar H.L. Goodall Jr., in support of Arthur Frank, refers to as the “ride” of my “story” (Frank, “Between” 2002; Goodall, “Narrative Heat”). I reflect on the “reality producing machine,” (those moments that “alter our consciousness in the direction of a nonreflexive state”) (Goodall, “Narrative Heat” 385) that has been my "ride" through the erotic dance industry. I do this hoping to “have a conversation based in a mutual recognition of identity,” (Frank, “Between” 365) and create an “experience of an experience” (Ellis and Bochner, “Telling and Performing” 98) as a way to inquire about the meanings and values within this business without fixing them.

Through interrogating experiences from multiple performance sites, engaging qualitative interviews, and through self-reflexivity, I paint an account of the culture, performances, and the interactions common with male stripping. I discuss how stripper’s bodies bear the marks of a cultural preoccupation with sexual boundary setting, and the transgressions beyond these boundaries in relation to how bodies are valued within the industry. I employ performative forms
of writing as a "method of inquiry" and "a method of discovery" (Richardson 347) to examine how memory is embodied, and how the body can be developed and brought into a text as a means to explore writing conventions and the polarities of self/other and subject/object.

The space of the body, as performance studies scholars Jeanine Mingé and Amber Lyn Zimmerman posit, "can be navigated, moved with and through from a distant perspective" (89). The body does not just bear meaning for others but enacts meaning as well. In “Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics,” ethnographer Dwight Conquergood acknowledges, "the body as a site of knowing” (180); the body is a powerful form of educational architecture that becomes a site of knowledge, power, and experience. Equally, D. Soyini Madison explains in the act of performative writing, “we recognize that the body writes” (195). The body becomes a vessel and instrument for information and understanding; in writing through the body, “the act of writing becomes the enactment of an embodied voice” (Madison 196). While feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz argues how the body can become, “a text, a system of signs to be deciphered, read, and read into” (198). For Grosz, the body can be a kind of hinge or threshold; it can be a place between a psychic or lived interiority and a more sociopolitical exteriority that produces interiority through the inscription of the body’s outer surface. The inscriptions on the body’s outer surface is concerned with the process by which the body is marked, written upon, or constructed by the various regimens of institutional, discursive, and non-discursive power as a particular kind of body.

Examining eroticized bodies and the reactions they create and produce establish how space and context can influence the performance of masculinity. Space, as Mingé and Zimmerman describe, "is a performed process" constructed on, "movement, rhythm, and patterns of energy" (86), and the body, as performance studies scholar Richard Schechner argues, is a
source of theatrical design that provides “data for space-senses” (Environmental 19) allowing the two to create meaning. The bodies of the performers and spectators inform and have an impact upon a performance. My body in erotic performance venues has become both an object of power, objectification and a site of social inscription that has continuously been in the process of developing different understandings of performance, sexuality, and culture due to shifting context and locations.

By investigating physical, emotional and cognitive details of my encounters as a stripper, I offer the reader my experiences to humanize the experience and encourage identification with community membership, identity, and power relations between performer and spectator. I emphasize “descriptions” (Geertz 10; Goodall, Writing 2001) to ground knowledge in practical, personal, and participatory experience in the field and evoke an “emergent experience” (Ronai, “Reflexive Self” 123) for the reader. This focus allows me to answer questions about self and the human experience through systematic observation, textual construction and expressive insight.

I reflect to create “meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience” that will both sensitize these experiences that have been shrouded in silence, and engage issues of representation and identity politics (Ellis and Bochner, "Autoethnography" 2002; Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011). In certain moments I strive to create what H.L. Goodall calls the new ethnography; "creative narratives" of a self-examining narrator shaped from "personal experiences within a culture" (Writing 9). I strive to write narratives that will, “engage my readers through visceral connections to the experiences I describe” (Lockford x), in a method that shifts, “forward, backward and sideways through time, space and various attitudes in a narrative format” (Rambo Ronai, “Reflexive Self” 103). I apply this approach throughout my
study to make sense of self and the industry, masculinity, commercialism, as well as the constitution of culture and erotic desire.

As Goodall notes, the “new ethnography is a story based on the represented, or evoked experiences of a self, with others, within a context. Its theme is the persuasive expression of interpreted cultural performances” (Writing 83). It is “a cultural way of coding academic attempts to author self within a context of others” and as a way of writing “to get to the truth of our experiences” (Writing 191). New ethnographic styles of writing combine the personal and the professional, as well as work that may be rendered as story, and accounts that derive from the blurring and blending of literary genres. It is a method of inquiry that privileges the exploration of personal experiences as a way to answer questions about self and the human experience through textual construction and reflection about personal lived experience. My mix of narrative forms (performative writing, personal narrative and autoethnography) intermix with close readings of film, television and Internet examples in order to render a complex view of the life world of male erotic dance.

Chapter Breakdown

In chapter 2, "Rules of Compliance: Initiation and Grooming of a Male Stripper," I focus on the initiation process a dancer undergoes as he enters the male stripping industry. I specifically address entering the business through a cold audition or through an invitation, and the unwritten rules of compliance a dancer may experience and have to learn in order to advance his acceptance into a group or club. Unlike previous studies on the topic, I focus less on the situational factors surrounding a dancer’s decision to enter the occupation, and focus more on the experiences and the contingencies of the entrance and initiation process. I intertwine my initial
encounters in the business with entrance stories collected from my interview participants, as well as how the initiation process has been represented in popular narratives on stage and film. Throughout the chapter I write in a way that I can acknowledge shifts in thought, emotion, and experience while providing reflections on the entrance process and how the construction of erotic masculinity for performance in this business is learned and developed.

Chapter 3, "Erotic Masculinity Beyond the Strip Club: Context, Power, and Performance Materials in the Private Sector Strip Industry," moves beyond the initiation and grooming process of entering the male stripper business, and examines how masculinity is constructed, performed and adjusted based on the context and impromptu circumstances at private performances. I address how public and private context for male strip shows can offer contradictory performance circumstances, and how the erotic performances of gender in private settings do not always have the same performance prescriptions as public context. While some of the norms and behaviors in a public show may be mirrored in a private performance, expectations are not always consistent when the dancer leaves the public sector; the context and the circumstances of a private event can significantly influence the dancer's performance of masculinity. Throughout the chapter I focus on the performer's engagement with the spectator and event, and the way costumes, performance materials, location, power relations, and expectations have an impact on the gender performance in the fluctuating environment of private bookings. I combine personal experience, examples from media, and responses from my interview participants to explain how performances of masculinity in private settings are dependent upon the context, and the dancer's ability to performatively negotiate the circumstances. I clarify how examples in the media of sensationalized portrayals of erotic masculinity based on stereotypical beliefs in certain circumstances do not fully construct an
accurate portrayal of the labor practices that are exercised both in the business and in the construction of erotic masculinity. I address how the power that varied contextual conditions have in altering a performance can (re)articulate how a dancer's identity is constructed and performed, challenge existing hierarchies, and establish a broader continuum of dancer expectations and constructions of masculinity.

Chapter 4, "Border Crossing and Erotic Masculinity: Race, Representation and Expectation in the Male Strip Show," moves away from the public/private comparative analysis of the first two chapters, and examines the racial divisions in the industry. While the act of commercial stripping has similarities across demographics, the industry is also racially, culturally and economically structured where performance practices and expectations in different settings generate specific performances of gendered desire, and various displays of masculine and feminine sexuality. The film and television examples I discuss in previous chapters ignore racial identity politics or how racially specific practices can, at times, affect the nature of the male strip show or gender performances. The norms of different racialized contexts determine how performances are structured through diverse rules, expectations and interactive boundaries. Different racial contexts can shape the ways labor practices and masculinity is performed, how power is negotiated, and how boundaries between performer and spectator are informally drawn. I first examine the racial representations in male strip shows in film, television and the Internet. I then continue with my "night in the life" of a male stripper reflection and the responses from the interviews while simultaneously weaving in scholarly assessments of race, representation and male stripping performances. Through the investigation of race, space and erotic representation, I exhibit how particularities in practices and expectations influence how the performance of erotic masculinity is conditioned
Limitations

I specifically focus on how masculinity is performed in three specific situations. I first examine the performance of masculinity in the entrance scenario and variations men experience when the context shifts from public club settings and tour shows. I examine personal experiences of entering heterosexual white club and queer club contexts, as well as entrance stories from various dancers as they prepare to start in the business. While I do acknowledge the differences between the gay and straight segment of the business, I do not do a comparative analysis, nor do I address racial boundaries within the business or if other racially specific contexts have similar or contrasting requirements when men attempt to enter the business. Additionally, I do not examine the entrance experiences for men that choose to begin in the business by working for Internet companies and the private sector.

When I do address the private sector, I specifically discuss how the context of the performance can sway the way the dancer engages the party. I focus on how public and private context for male strip shows can offer contradictory performance circumstances, and how masculinity can be constructed, performed and adjusted based on the context and impromptu conditions at private performances. I examine the public/private dichotomy without addressing if race or sexuality may produce different readings or understandings of how masculinity is constructed and performed in the private sector. While the interview participants were multi-racial with various sexual preferences, further research will need to be done in order to better examine the implication that race or sexuality may have in the construction and performance of erotic masculinity in the private party.

Finally, when I specifically address issues of race, I focus mainly on expectations and the execution of specific racial representations of erotic masculinity in the public black and white
male strip show. Addressing how niche some erotic male strip performances are help me to establish just how divided and distinct the industry is and how practices and expectations in different contexts generate specific performances of gendered desire. However, I do not examine if there are significant racial differences between the public and private sector, or if race plays an important factor in how we understand the performance of erotic masculinity in gay and queer contexts, or different racially specific demographics other than in the black and white context.

Class and economic status are important and complex topics. While I mention issues of class and status throughout, I never fully discuss them as their complexity requires greater attention than I can give it here and hold promise for future considerations. I never specifically address my class position, or assess how I understand class and status as I enter various contextual venues. Men strip for various reasons; some because they need the money, others because they thrive on receiving affirmation for their appearance or performance, and others because of the fringe benefit of sex that is often available. Additionally, any venue can be (un)profitable. The perceived socioeconomic status of the location for a performance does not always result in the expected outcome. For this reason, I have limited my comments regarding matters of class and status, to focus more of my attention on shifting performances of masculinity and to providing thick descriptions of experiences and venues to better clarify the contextual makeup of a performance.

While I address specific locations at times, I focus mainly on the variations of context in the industry, and I do not provide extensive case studies in any one setting. I do not provide any concrete understanding of class, economic status, age, or various degrees of professionalism, and I do not examine online stripping or the boundary between stripping and prostitution. I make value statements at times to provide more clarity to the discussion regarding these areas when
necessary, but I do not engage in a critical analysis of male stripping. As my argument clarifies, the male stripping industry is a niche business with various layers that offer insight into how masculinity is performed in various circumstances. I mainly focus on the entrance experience, differences in approach to public and private shows, and the racial boundaries between black and white male strip shows. The additional topics I have addressed here are areas for future study that could further the scholarly engagement with the performance of masculinity in the strip industry.
CHAPTER II. RULES OF COMPLIANCE: INITIATION AND GROOMING OF A MALE STRIPPER

Initiation and continuation in the male stripping industry has been a fascinating topic for me to examine in relation to my personal journey, the research of other scholars, and similar narratives made popular on stage and film. Many scholars cite sociologists James K. Skipper and Charles M. McCaghy's "Stripteasers: The Anatomy and Career Contingencies of a Deviant Occupation" as the foundational source on entrance narratives of female dancers that explores "situational factors surrounding their decision to enter the occupation," and the contingencies of the profession (391). In "A Deviant Process: The Sojourn of the Stripper," Sociologists Craig J. Forsyth and Tina H. Deshotels build on Skipper and McCaghy's work to examine the "process" of entrance, and the "sojourn of the stripper," by equally focusing on the female industry and the occupational elements that make the work attractive (77). Sociologists Paula A. Dressel and David M. Petersen, two of the first to examine the recruitment strategies of male dancers, focus on the situational contingencies of the entrance process, while Rambo Ronai and Cross examine both genders to contradict past studies that imply entrance into the business as "an occupational curiosity for men and as deviant for women" ("Dancing with Identity" 99). My initiation and entrance story is unique, as all stories are, and while it shares similarities with some of those in the previously mentioned studies, it is much different than most. Entering the business at age nineteen, I understood the nature of the work that I was agreeing to perform was all about sex, money and occasional drugs. More than fifteen years later, I understand the occupation and labor differently now that I have distanced myself from the business and I am better able to reflect on my journey and how it has shaped who I have become.

In this chapter, I explore the initiation experiences of male exotic dancers as a way to examine entrance practices and how masculinity is performed during that process. Most of the dancers I interviewed believe everybody enters the business for a different reason related to some
underlying issues or desires. Some men start for economic reasons, while other men begin because they’ve accomplished a goal in developing their body and want to experience the fear, excitement, and confidence stripping may produce. Others may come in focused on the sexual exhibitionism and potential erotic release. Building on what sociologist Michael Messner calls the "politics" and "terrain" of masculinities in groups, I find, "the costs attached to adherence to narrow conceptions of masculinity" (Introduction xi) during the initiation process of entering the male stripping business can, at one extreme, be an intimidating, lonely, cold experience, or be filled with support and friendship at the other extreme. The terrain of masculinity in the initiation process can be ruthless, filled with rejection and fabricated notions of bonding, where a new dancer can be both mentored and exploited at the same time. These extremes are based on the situational contexts for each dancer's entrance story.

Context is a central concept for understanding performance as a social phenomenon, for the social context informs the conditions of the performance and relationships. For performance studies scholar Kristin Langellier the performance setting, audience, performer and event make up the context of a performance; "A performer's expectations, competence, personal/social/cultural history, and status within the performing situation," and the "framing, rules, (and) the sequencing of acts" (63) of the event, culturally situate the performance for interpretation to occur. In "Telling the Convict Code," sociologist D. Lawrence Wieder explains that the code of his community of paroled halfway house residents is established based on the situational context of the location and each member's position. The code is performed by members as an oral tradition and is, "a formulation of the organized character of resident life," which members provide as an associative narrative with membership and their day-to-day living conditions (85). For Wieder the codes of his convicts are contextually determined in social
conditions regulated by bureaucratic rules, and performed as a code of belonging against the system of control. Unlike the oral code of Wieder's paroled convicts, the dancer's code is more like rules of conduct, dependent on their entrance experience and becomes collectively apparent across a range of entrance scenarios. Like Wieder's convicts’ code, male dancers’ entrance code entails "regular patterns of action which are produced by compliance to a normative order" (85). However, a dancer’s entrance experience is a social process contingent on the rules and culture of a given setting. Entrance is often based on rules of compliance, and manifests from a range of experiences that dancers endure when entering the business.

Adding to Dressel and Petersen’s finding that suggests the typical channels of recruitment into the male stripping industry are through a recommendation, or a dare, or by drifting into the work by chance, I specifically focus on the entrance through a cold audition or through an invitation. There are various unwritten rules for the masculinities a dancer may learn when entering the industry that can either advance or obstruct his acceptance into a group or club. Expect resistance, be resilience, adapt, establish loyalty, and seek/accept mentorship are common guidelines found across various examples of entrance scenarios.

Unlike the previously mentioned studies, I am less concerned about the situational factors surrounding a dancer’s decision to enter the occupation, and am more interested in the experiences and the contingencies of the entrance and initiation process. I examine the idea of entrance by chance, the cold audition process, and by invitation, to reveal ways these maxims expose how masculinity is performed in a male dancer’s initiation experience. I begin by introducing the importance of community in the male erotic dancing industry. I first describe my initial encounter, and then how the initiation process has been represented in popular narratives, mainly the 2012 Steven Soderbergh film *Magic Mike*, and the shared plot in the stage and film
version of The *Full Monty*. I use these popular representations, among others, as points for cultural access, and not as a one-to-one stand-in for what consistently happens in the actual world of a male exotic dancer. However, the fictional narratives allow me to easily mark commonalities with reality and thereby highlight useful themes dancers initially engage.

All of the dancers I interviewed discussed the development of a grooming and continuation strategy learned from various sorts of mentoring and participatory experiences. These experiences vary considerably with individuals; I discuss them in more general terms instead of exploring them for their situational differences regarding entrance location, and contextual differences with primary audience, and labor practices. I specifically focus on the experience of entering the business in a club or tour context. I do not address the possibility of entering the business through an independent agency\(^\text{19}\) whose business is to provide private parties. Additionally, I do not spend substantial time focusing on body image, thematic routines, or differences in audience context. While these elements may be mentioned or alluded to, they will be addressed in later chapters.

Throughout the chapter, I offer a personal narrative of entering the male stripping business as I intertwine both criticism toward cinematic portrayals of male strippers and intertextual exchanges between the reflections of several other male dancers whom I interviewed. I experiment with my discursive form so as to engage the various maxims commonly employed by a dancer wishing to become established in the business. Aside from my personal narrative and the interwoven responses of my interview subjects, I use poetic verse to acknowledge shifts in thought as I provide reflections of the entrance process.

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\(^{19}\) I address independent agencies and work orders for private parties in chapter 3. All of the men I interviewed explained that any substantial private party work coming from agencies usually happens later in a career after a dancer has developed his own network of clubs, tours and other dancers from which to gain private work.
My Sexuality

I didn't know I had you,
Or that you were there.
You snuck from under layers of insecurity.
Walking through the threshold of my strip audition,
You opened my erotic imagination and,
I realized what we could do.

My Initial Beginning: Fear and/of Humiliation

My original inspiration for being a male stripper came from recommendations and dares, in addition to a lingering drive and hunger to be desired for the display of my body. While my motivations were probably brought on by a lack of self-confidence and relationship issues in my late teenage years, my eventual channel of recruitment was an unexpected mentor that developed my understanding of brotherhood and community. I narrate those stories below, but first I relate my initial inspiration and experience with the business.

I was introduced to the idea of male stripping in high school. In the mid-1990s, a friend offered a VHS recording of a male stripper's performance at a bachelorette party as a form of encouragement for a possible future occupation. Entertained by the idea I began to fantasize about the possibility of being validated simply for my physique and the way I erotically move. This fantasy symbolized a personal milestone. As an overweight adolescent, I struggled with issues of self-confidence, bullying, and acceptance. My chubby build did nothing for my self-confidence or social life, and for a time, looking in the mirror was more of a self-induced nightmare than an aesthetic practice. However, I was determined to build confidence and physically enhance my appearance. Over time, with dedication and unwavering physical training, I became muscular and athletic by my high school graduation.
At that point, I began to fantasize that the performance on the videotape could become my reality. Anxiously filled with excitement, I tucked myself away in the cramped confines of my parent's musty basement to study the video religiously. I feared being caught and having to explain the content of the video and my silly and awkward erotic actions of mimicry. However, I equally anticipated repeatedly watching every second of the video like a child continuing to play with his favorite Christmas gift repeatedly. The video was nothing like the hilarious *Saturday Night Live* parody of the Chippendales audition skit featuring Patrick Swayze and Chris Farley\(^\text{20}\) that I was familiar with, or the glamorized reactions popular male music groups received from crowds of screaming women I so often witnessed on *MTV*. I may have suffered from some unattainable delusions of grandeur and future hopes of pop stardom, but I certainly believed the performance of the man on the bootlegged bachelorette party video was something achievable. In performance theory terms, Richard Schechner would explain the strippers act as a "restored behavior" or a "twice-behaved behavior" (*Performance* 29). The stripping act by the dancer on the video was not an event happening for the first time. I was watching a rehearsed behavior commonly performed as a popular celebratory ritual during the liminal period before marriage; it was a behavior that I wanted to learn and to likewise repeat.

The venue in the video was a small, dim living room. The male stripper merely maneuvered around the obstacles of the confined room, semi-rhythmically removing his tacky police uniform. I imitated the actions in my basement striving to be as smooth and fluid as

\(^{20}\)As a young overweight adolescent, this, now famous, SNL clip was a point of inspiration. When the skit first aired in the early 1990s, I giggled at the mockery Farley made of himself, but as I aged, the performance Swayze displayed in this skit remained a benchmark of masculinity that I valued and fantasized I could one day achieve. I provide the YouTube clip for the reader to access the sketch and assess the humorous yet inspiring example, which parodies the audition process for the Chippendales. [http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/chippendales/n41045](http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/chippendales/n41045)
Swayze and not as awkward as Farley or the male dancer on the video. The stripper simply swirled his hips and thrust his pelvis while he removed layer after layer of his outfit, grinding on woman after woman as he circulated the room to collect tips. The performance appeared simple; after watching the celebratory nature of the women and their reaction toward so little effort, I was certain that his routine was something I could mimic.

In my mind, the process appeared easy and straightforward. I needed a comparatively muscular build, which I thought I did based on the Swayze sketch and the standard prescribed by the dancer in the video. I needed a costume and character, which is something I could buy or create. Finally, I needed the confidence to bounce around half-naked in an attempt to entertain a room full of women; this was something I knew I could work toward. Undetected in the wee-hours of the morning I thrust, swirled, dipped and shimmied throughout my parent's basement. After weeks of rehearsal, I was ready to replicate the man on the video and enter the industry. However, my hopes fell short. My maturing physique and growing confidence was not enough for me to be granted entrance into the business on my first audition attempt.

My initial audition at the local club, Gloria's,21 where I would eventually become the enforcer,22 resulted in a critical assessment by club dancers, with few compliments. The club had the essential characteristic of what Bradley-Engen categorizes as "hustle clubs," where negative attitudes toward new dancers were the norm. As Bradley-Engen explains, a high volume of dancers can increase tensions and, "create a hostile, competitive and isolating environment" (40) between dancers where space, boundaries and attitudes are challenged and protected. Rejection toward dancers can be viewed as a common primal act; it is a cut throat, competitive business

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21 Figure 1 below displays an image of the sign that marked the physical location of the public club (Gloria's) that drew me into the business.
22 I clarify the meaning of the phrase the enforcer below in a later section.
where it's eat or be eaten, and only the strongest, sexiest, most aggressive survive. I had potential but was told that my routine needed work and refinement before I would be comparable to the current dancers. Then I was graciously given the chance to watch the experienced dancers perform throughout the night. I don't quite remember any severe negativity pressed upon me because I was completely ignored after my audition. Given my age at the time, I'm sure none of the dancers took me seriously. I was probably viewed more as an eighteen-year-old unprepared joke and not a threat. It was at that moment I began to understand the difference of the expected standard. The performances in the club were not what was on the video or what I had prepared. These men had more than confidence; they had stage presence and well-structured routines. An immediate fear of inadequacy quickly drove me away from the humiliating experience.

The video that was my inspiration simply showed a small group of women in a cramped room with a dancer performing according to situation of that moment. The stakes seemed low. The Swayze/Farley skit displayed a reduced pressure, audience-less audition. The club, however, posed a reality check. There were groups of women throughout the venue and an actual stage,
along with a menu of men with sculpted bodies and refined erotic routines. The room overflowed with energy unlike anything I could have imagined from my video inspiration. The men did more than just bounce and shimmy. They exuded a hyper-masculine virility through simulated sexual gestures while using props and engaging willing participants by lifting, spinning, and flipping their bodies. Whips, dildos, fire, whipped cream, oils and lotions were used with erotic and humorous precision. The cowboy gently teased patrons by smoothly caressing their body with his whip. The fireman swallowed fire and manipulated the flame about the stage. The ice cream man hilariously made a banana split with a dildo, whip cream and berries, while the doctor sensually prescribed a massage and proceeded to administer a full body rub on a female patron with oils and lotions. Nothing on my fuzzy stripper video prepared me to mimic such prepared and refined performances.23

The club erupted with screams of exhilaration and laughter with each new move, trick, or new prop. As the dancers performed their repertoire of erotic tricks, their engagement and strong sense of stage presence continually occupied every second of the audience's attention. I wanted nothing more than to be like them, but I was not prepared for what I witnessed, and I knew I did not have the ability or confidence to engage such a large audience or mimic what I had just observed. As I snuck out the back door, a crippling sense of intimidation and embarrassment pulled the idea of being a male stripper from my imagination. The further away I ran, the more I wanted to return, but the harder I stomped the idea from my desires.

23 As a point of reference, this was in the late 1990s before the Internet was as accessible as it is today, and reference clips of male strippers and erotic performances were not openly available thought sites such as YouTube.
The narratives that come from men who have worked in the business often echo ideas of mentorship, community and fraternity. While most of my stripping communities have faded due to my age and my having moved on to more stable and socially accepted work, many of the relationships that I once relied on as a male stripper, are as strong as ever. Although the idea of community can be a "contested term" as performance studies scholar Bryant Keith Alexander posits, where, "cultural performances are always determined, regulated, and assessed through the interpretive process of those who vie for membership," (performing 37) the narratives of male strippers consistently highlight a sense of finding a belonging and acceptance. However, the feeling of belonging and acceptance comes after distinct periods of initiation where dancers learn about themselves and the business they are entering. Expanding on Stanly Fish's understanding of interpretive communities to go beyond literary texts, Alexander, foregrounds the way community is, "determined through the interpretive process of those who claim membership and who will then validate or critique the performance of member/membership of others" (performing 197). Even though many of the dancers interviewed for this project stress the highly independent nature of the business regarding routine and costume creation, many also addressed the process of becoming a member of a club or touring group, and thereby gaining a sense of belonging before they could acquire the tools and connections for developing an independent network for accessing work.

Although not discussed in terms of formal training, Forsyth and Deshotels explain, "some researchers describe periods of apprenticeship in which a novice stripper learned from a more..."
experienced dancer" (79). As sociologist and sexuality and relationships scholar Beth Montemurro addresses in "Strippers and Screamers: The Emergence of Social Control in a Noninstitutionalized Setting," "a team mentality" may develop where "peer-monitoring" is common if dancers work together for extended periods of time ("Strippers" 301). Men that work together in clubs or go on tour often discuss the work in terms of an erotic fraternity of sorts, where a group of unlikely men find each other and become a sort of band of merry strippers. While the rhetoric surrounding the idea of fraternity addresses the serious and high-minded goal of the term, the real concern of each fraternity, as historian Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz points out about collegiate organizations, was to create, "a small group of compatible fellows for friendship, mutual protection, and good times" (29). This sense of camaraderie is common and frequently occurs in male stripper narratives.

One such erotic fraternity narrative is explored in the 1997 Peter Cattaneo film The Full Monty, and the subsequent stage adaptation of the same name. Here the narrative presents masculinity in crisis as an unemployed group of men connect unexpectedly through the idea of forming a male stripping troupe as a way to financially support themselves and their families. While the story focuses on the relationships of father and son, husband and wife, boss and subordinate, best friends, and gay lovers, the narrative arc highlights the process of organizing a troupe, producing a strip show, and the bond of brotherhood that emerges in the process. As the story develops around creating a male strip show, themes of unemployment, economic hardship, self-confidence and friendship complete the story. Ironically, the inciting incident is a chance meeting between Gary, the unemployed protagonist, and a male stripper in the bathroom.

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After bumping into the male stripper while spying on the women at this ladies only event, Gary gets inspired to create his own group and version of a male strip show. Ultimately, an unlikely group from different social, racial and economic backgrounds come together, and learn to support each other's struggle as they wrestle with understanding how to be sexy and erotic in the role of a male stripper. In the end, the relationships between the men move beyond their original biases and prejudices and display a bond of deep honor, support, and allegiance.

The film *Magic Mike*, however, tells a different account of the initiation process of a male stripper, combining a "chance happening," with an invitation in the entrance narrative. In this film masculinity is not in crisis, rather it is in triumph as the male strip show is depicted as a sensationalized event where muscular men with refined routines and erotic performances exhibit their gyrating bodies to a club full of ecstatic women on a weekly basis. A male stripper community is already established at the *Xquisite Strip Club* and the film’s narrative focuses on the initiation process of Adam (aka stage name "The Kid"), and the exit strategy of the lead dancer Mike. We see how Adam unexpectedly meets Mike outside of a club, and after some serious consideration, Mike invites Adam to the show. Adam enters the business via Mike's referral and is mentored by the other men of the club. Unlike *The Full Monty*, the *Magic Mike* narrative focuses on sensationalizing the hetero-eroticism of the business by exhibiting well-built, confident male dancers who hold other forms of employment. The men portrayed at the *Xquisite Strip Club* are an elite group who choose to strip for extra cash and easy access to the groups of women interested in these erotic displays.

The narratives offered in these two examples put on display a process described by Dressel and Petersen’s examination of real strip clubs where, "the decision for males to enter a nontraditional occupation [is] prompted and supported by significant persons who had some
form of contact with or knowledge about the show already" ("Becoming" 391). Dressel and Petersen’s analysis from a socially constructed establishment set the parameters for a similar initiation experience "by referral" constructed in the Magic Mike narrative as "The Kid" is introduced to the business by an industry veteran. The film models a quick and simple entry experience to push the narrative forward, by displaying "The Kid" achieving immediate acceptance. Due to his introduction by the veteran Mike, "The Kid" is welcomed by the other male dancers and quickly given an opportunity to perform. The entrance into the business by chance is also displayed in The Full Monty narrative where a random encounter with a male stripper sparks an idea for the unemployed and financially struggling lead character. Inspired by the potential for a better future he decides to create his own group in order to help his financial condition. In both instances, the formation of community and brotherhood develop as the narratives evolve exhibiting friendship, connection and support.

Unlike the ease of entrance into the business for "The Kid," the narrative in The Full Monty displays the effort, and determination needed to establish one's self as a dancer. The men in The Full Monty establish a group that, over time, supports each other in moments of fear, strife and uncertainty. They support each other's intimacy and confidence issues based on body and identity concerns, and they protect and comfort each other in times of loss and mourning. In the end, we come to understand how this group of strangers has evolved into something more than just individual members of a stripping troupe. They have a deep sense of compassion and concern for each other, and their experience with the erotic dance industry becomes as much about the money as it is about the relationships that developed in the rehearsal process. We witness a community of men willing to suffer or succeed together in support of each other's hopes and dreams of a more secure future. The Magic Mike narrative, however, provides a
deeper perspective of being a male dancer than that in *The Full Monty* by offering focusing on the business as the group prepares to move their established group from a Tampa club to a bigger market in Miami. The film exhibits various scenarios and the types of relationships that develop as the men remain active in the business. While still evident in *Magic Mike*, ideas of brotherhood and community are highlighted differently from *The Full Monty* as the narrative focuses more on sensationalizing the exhibitionism and eroticism of the business, both during and after the work.

These narratives offer varying displays of open acceptance and supportive masculinity when welcoming new members into a specific community. The idea of community, as cultural critic Raymond Williams argues, is based on two major interpretations, those being the idea of service and the idea of solidarity. It is the idea of solidarity that is exhibited in these narratives of masculine community. For Williams, solidarity is dependent on "the identity of conditions and experience" (172). Solidarity, "is the only conceivable element of stabilization" in the organization of a community, but it is an issue that is "continually redefined" (Williams 172). The *Full Monty* and *Magic Mike* narratives exhibit communities based on solidarity, established by personal relationships, economic need and work conditions. However, in order to keep the narratives interesting and moving forward, each quickly moves beyond the entrance experience in order to focus on the conflict and developing relationships. Little time is spent on exhibiting the way entrance and acceptance is regulated, assessed, and validated through the interpretive process of current members toward those vying for membership.

While *The Full Monty* narrative does exhibit personal and emotional connections that the characters experience in solidifying their community, both narratives are unable to show the struggles of men trying to enter the business or the physical and psychological rejection and hazing that is common for new dancers before they are accepted into a community. Rather these
examples suggest the entrance process into the business is relatively simple; that the construction and development of an erotic identity is quick, easy and effortless, and is openly welcomed and considered acceptable from all sides of a community (both the dancers and audience). Equally, Dressel and Petersen ignore the trials and tribulations a new dancer can endure when attempting to enter the business and develop an erotic identity. In their analysis of the male stripping industry, they simplify entrance struggles by suggesting training usually occurs on the job and that the socialization among dancers "ranges from the acquisition of work skills to the development of a code of ethics guiding work-related behaviors" (396). Their analysis implies that once a man decides to enter the business, that work can easily be attained and other dancers will be willing to provide helpful hints and useful ideas to aid their development. The entrance process is rarely as easy as they seem to suggest, but sometimes it happens, as was the case when I met Tommy G in my chance happening and second attempt at entering the business.

Tommy G:

My promoter, my agent, my mentor my friend.
You took me in as I was, and began to show me who I could be.
You opened my eyes to the understanding and acceptance of sexualities.
My homophobic fears dwindled in your company and my ignorant upbringing was expanded.
You influenced my heart as I evolved in the acceptance of self and other.

I came to view you as an asset and then as an exploiter.
You vowed to protect me from the dubiousness of the business.
I read that as your selfish attempt to monopolize and exploit my potential.
As I matured and evolved, I rejected our relationship.
Now in your death, I honor your influence.

I was once too naive to better negotiate our personal and professional relationship.
I now understand the struggles of the business and the safe opportunities you once offered.

You are now my erotic angel.
You opened the door of opportunity and forever influenced my journey.
My Chance Happening/ Re-starting with an Invitation

My first official time working as a stripper is very much like a bad first intercourse story. Even if it is a horrible experience, we eventually go back and try it again. For more than a year after my traumatic experience at the "hustle club" Gloria's, where I ran away from the fear of physical and sexual inadequacy, the idea of stripping remained tucked away, until chance, or maybe fate, produced another opportunity. After joining a social collegiate fraternity my freshman year, I became both friends and brothers with CJ, a man who happened to be working at Gloria's. Our fraternal brotherhood, shaped from the training and hazing we endured during our initiation, created a bond that ultimately resulted in an unexpected promise. If I were still interested, CJ would reintroduce me to the business and mentor my initiation at Gloria's and other venues.

I now understand the significance of the offer. Stripping was and still is commonly viewed as a deviant and stigmatized form of work.26 It is not an occupation that one can easily announce or discuss openly without the possibility of negative reactions and opinions. While most of our fraternal brothers knew about CJ's job, most of my memories recall that they focused on the money and sex the business provided. Rarely did people think about the occupation in terms of job requirements and expectations one must fulfill before being rewarded the fringe benefits of quick, easy cash or potential post show intimate encounters. CJ was offering me both insight as well as opportunity, and his reference ultimately vouched for my potential, thus reassuring others in the business that I was cool [a good fit] and reliable.

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26 Maxine Margolis and Marigene Arnold's article “Turning the Tables? Male Strippers and the Gender Hierarchy,” highlight several studies that focus on "stripping as a deviant profession," (155) from the 1970s and 80s. Equally, Bernadette Barton's essay "Managing the Toll of Stripping: Boundary Setting Among Exotic Dancers" addresses views of erotic dance as a deviant occupation, and engages how dancers "manage the stigma of their work" (571) and their practices of resistance against negative beliefs associated with erotic professions.
However, the first step he offered was not the step I was expecting. While my initial intentions focused on the glory at Gloria's with fringe benefits of quick money and women, that first assignment was nothing of the sort. My first gig took a hard left away from the heterosexual glory I was wanting, and placed me at a gay bar, downtown in the city of Pittsburgh, dancing for men. Dancing for men was not the opportunity that I wanted, or the request I was expecting, but it was the option with which I was provided. His explanation was something like, *dance for dudes and make money or don't.* This statement was followed by a brief persuasive explanation that "all" straight male dancers dance for both men and women; that the job was about the money not the gender of the person from whom it is provided. If I wanted to get started, I had to follow the same path he did before he would offer me the opportunity to dance for women. These were terms and conditions I had to willingly accept for further assistance.

As a sexually inexperienced heterosexual young man, I had immediate self-doubt and experienced inner turmoil about the opportunity. However, my homophobic concerns and fears of queering my sexuality were momentary. Unemployed and looking for an easy way to make quick money, I didn't need much convincing. CJ's coaching explained the assignment in terms of the cost and benefit of possible future bookings, in addition to the performance experience that I would gain regardless of the audience demographic. Maybe he didn't say it in those terms, but at the time his rationale was justified and I was sold.
My first time wasn't at all what I imagined it would be. I entered *Images*, my first gay bar, at age nineteen on a hot June night. Even though state law prohibited those under the age of twenty-one to enter, my status as entertainer apparently trumped this restriction. Figure 2 highlights the dingy, rusting, unlit sign, half covered by an overgrown tree on a dark, deserted city street that marked my destination over a decade before. As I entered, the air conditioner circulated warm musty air, stained with the scent of fermentation and stale smoke. Sweat immediately began to drip as my nerves and the heat of the poorly ventilated bar enhanced my anxiety about the evening. I was fresh meat, and in every direction that I turned, groups of men were assertively waiting for me to take off my clothes. Their sexual gaze stalked my every move like a predator to its prey. My instinct told me to run but my curiosity and desire to experience the unknown propelled me forward. I shrugged off the building fear and anxiety, and gathered enough courage to test the waters by go-go dancing on a small corner stage and on top of the bar for the entire evening.

This experience was nothing like the video I watched or my horrifying audition at Gloria's a year earlier. Instead it was a surprisingly warm and welcoming experience where I felt little judgment or scrutiny about my appearance, confidence, or sexuality. There were no
egotistical dancers prejudging my appearance and abilities, and there were most definitely not hordes of screaming woman wanting erotic physical engagement. Rather there were various dancers shimmying on platforms while others strutted and meandered around meeting patrons who quietly watched or socialized with other guests. Plus, there were plenty of dancer-hungry men excitedly waiting to talk, touch, and tip the roaming temptations. To evoke Bradley-Engen's club typology again, *Images* was very much a "social club," where the requirements of performance were less significant, including "lenient standards of attractiveness" for dancers (88). Various body shapes and sizes were valued and accepted; dancers were short and tall, skinny and chunky, lean and muscular. There, tall, dark and handsome was no longer the only desired physical qualification of a male stripper.

Despite my apparent nerves and apprehensions, I was graciously welcomed into the club by the promoter Tommy G where I was thanked for covering CJ's shift. Tommy's strong barreling embrace was startling at first, as I was not used to receiving such a warm friendly welcoming from a man. Tommy quickly demystified any unjust notions and fears I had about gay men. He was all business, offering me plenty of compliments, encouragement, and witty sexual banter to motivate my first steps into the world of gay men and the world of male stripping. He took both pity and amusement at my condition. He knew I was straight and very nervous, and that any coaching he could offer would increase my likelihood of staying to complete the shift. No initial audition was required. After a quick visual assessment, CJ's referral, and my willingness to show up, Tommy was ready to put me to work, thereby marking my first night as the official trial period.

His instructions were simple; have fun and enjoy the experience. If patrons requested to "touch it," referring to my penis, I was to counter with, "$20 an inch," and if they asked if I was
straight, I was to be *honest* and respond with, "Yes, straight to bed." He explained that I needed to be playful but keep physical interaction and touching to a minimum, as it was not permitted by state standards for establishments that held a liquor licenses and sold alcoholic beverages.

Our introduction and his amusing encouragements were handled with sincerity and humor. It was evident how awkward I felt standing so far outside of my heteronormative comfort zone, but Tommy knew that I had chosen to be there and had faith that I would complete the gig. From that point, I received minimal instructions and was simply encouraged to do my best. While it took some time to get calm and relaxed, I soon embraced the experience. I worked up a sweat on the platforms, became social in the crowd of men and let the night develop on its own. The first moments were surreal as my previous reality began to melt. When I woke that morning, I did not expect to be groped, caressed, and fondled by men later that night. However, my strict *hetero* walls quickly dissolved upon learning that the bar’s touching policies were loosely enforced. "Friendly" and "appreciative" hands were the welcomed behaviors set forth by the other dancers. To earn tips, I quickly had to accept the circumstances and not only learn how to flirt with men but also appear comfortable with physical advances. Despite my uneasiness, something clicked. Instead of dwelling on my uneasiness, I became comfortable with the conditions and embraced what the night offered.

Tommy's abridged lesson into the business was not necessarily the most descriptive and instructive advice, but he broke the ice and helped convince me to engage the experience. No costume was needed. Boxers were fine, but I was provided with a thong as a first night gift. I completed three hours of continuous rotations: go-go dancing on a 4X4X4 platform and on the bar, roaming the crowd, talking to the patrons, and collecting tips. In addition to the continuous physical labor of dancing, the night required a heavy amount of emotional and psychological
labor when talking with and physically engaging the male audience. Due to the nature of the setting of an all-male audience and the expected behaviors of dancers in the club, my body and interactions were automatically more feminized, and I had to learn the intimate ropes of customer interactions, persuasion, and relationship building. Hands on my ass, my nipples being pinched or licked unexpectedly, and the more than occasional scrotum fondle were typical interactions before a tip would be offered. I would not have been all right with this type of touch before any previous point in my life. However, the circumstances of the opportunity and the performance of willingness and acceptance by the other dancers provided me with a model to mimic as I learned how to negotiate personal boundaries and my fears about the experience. Several my comfort zones were breached, but my resilient attitude allowed me to view the circumstances optimistically and accept the opportunity as a personal, professional and social learning experience. By the shift’s end, Tommy was pleased with my work. I had secured an additional booking and an offer to perform at a sister club that he managed in the city.

The work wasn't comfortable at first but it turned fun. The initial hands and fingers that caressed my body nauseated my stomach with the thought of being gay, but by the night's end I was fascinated with the things that were said, enthralled by compliments that were given, and absorbed by the generous tips that were flowing. Somewhere between being told "I was a beautiful masculine specimen," and being asked if someone could, "suck the sweat from my thong and lick my asshole," I found both enjoyment and comfort in the hilarity and absurdity of the business I was entering and the eroticism that it embraced. I couldn't believe what I was doing and the things that were happening, and I knew I had no idea what else I might experience. My homophobia vanished as my perspectives changed. My comfort that night was not in finding homoeroticism enchanting; rather it was found in the comfort patrons displayed with blatant
vulgarity and open eroticism. The atmosphere had an openness I had never experienced before, and an expressiveness that I didn't know that I would enjoy. Those moments of animalistic crudeness fed my virgin ears, and became keys to unlock the erotic door hidden somewhere deep inside my young, inexperienced subconscious.

I continued to work for Tommy for three years. Go-go dancing was an experience I never expected to know let alone engage, but I continued to learn from watching the openly gay dancers negotiate their interactions, as well as from how other straight boys queered their sexuality and posed as bi or gay by openly flirting with patrons to increase their earning potential. I did not want to be a poser, or to challenge how I understood my sexuality, but I did want to profit. That first night was filled with continuous intrapersonal negotiation each time I encountered a patron or group. I had to quickly make sense of whether the patrons wanted to touch me, talk to me, ignore me, or simply tip me and continue their discussion with another patron. The atmosphere was both erotic and social and the homoerotic nature was both confusing and scary for a straight boy's first time stripping. I mimicked the styles of dance and approaches to customer interactions of every dancer I encountered, and accepted that I had to be exposed in an unusual situation. By night's end of go-going and flirting, I completely understood just how different the style of performances and interactions in this club were compared to the heterosexual space from which I previously ran. The gay bar “Images” was not a training ground for what I wanted, but it was a step into the business that provided immediate financial compensation, future opportunities and a new understanding about my identity.

That first experience working for Tommy forever changed my life. He provided that initial experience that opened my eyes to what it means to negotiate my sexuality and ultimately helped me to understand something of what it means to be queer. Tommy became a mentor and a
big brother. He taught me how to style my hair; he took me to nice restaurants and cool clubs, and even cooked dinners for my girlfriends. While I initially had a very limited understanding of hetero and homosexuality when I first had the desire to strip, the structure of the business quickly informed my awareness. Although I identify as heterosexual, my work and relationship with Tommy revealed my queerness. Considering the broad hetero/homo continuum between normative and non-normative behaviors, queer theory and the ambiguity that the term queer suggests there is, as queer studies scholar Alexander Doty explains, "a wide range of impulses and cultural expressions, including space for describing and expressing bisexual, transsexual, and straight queerness” (Doty 611). Queer Theory acknowledges those sexualities that have been systematically marginalized. In her book, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, social activist bell hooks posits that being "located in the margin," can be a, "site of resistance," allowing for, "location of radical openness and possibility" (hooks 153). Although a queer sensibility may still be culturally marginalized, for Doty queer erotic's are already a location of radical openness, and part of our cultures' erotic center, “occupied in various ways by otherwise heterosexual and straight identifying people” (Doty 611). While my initial drive for entering the industry was motivated by heterosexual reasoning, I quickly learned that the nature of erotic male dancing is a non-normative queer act. Whether dancing erotically for men or with men in the presence of women, the premise of male stripping is based in homoeroticism from the nudity and male bonding that occurs as a foundational tenet of the business.

Tommy offered a safe and secure place to work where I could learn about myself as I stabilized my financial situation. He was supportive as was his community, offering various men the chance to dance. Opportunities were based on your personality and availability more so than on physical appearance. We were offered flexibility in our scheduling if we were loyal and
reliable. Dancers were constantly cycling through his network of clubs, so there was always a place to work with some advanced notice. Our only restriction was that we could only dance in the gay bars that Tommy was affiliated. The rotational fluidity of his schedule never allowed egos or harsh negative exteriors to form on his dancers, because a dancer culture based on status and superiority never had a chance to develop. While a dancer might work with some guys more regularly, the continual schedule fluctuation between clubs never allowed for competition. By the time I accessed the heterosexual side of the business, my hyper masculine heteronormative belief system was reorganized. From CJ's initial offer and Tommy G's insight, I began to see the work as an opportunity of radical openness and possibility where I could learn and become comfortable with a wide range of sexual impulses and expressions.

*Dude-You Suck! Go Home, You Don't Belong!*

*Dude-You suck!*
*You didn't make it; you don't belong here!*
*What made you think you could be one of us?*
*Who told you that you should try this?*
*They were lying!*

*Go stand in the back.*
*Watch and learn- see how it's done.*
*It really doesn't matter, the roster's full.*
*Plus, you'll never be or look as good as us.*

Rejection and Resistance: Egotism and Cruelty in the Audition Process

The above aggressive poetic rant is an example of the language used in acts of rejection by dancers to intimidate and emasculate potential new male dancers to a preexisting club community. These acts of rejection are an arrogant and narcissistic display that establishes a negative tone new dancer's may experience when auditioning to work in a club or with a group
of other dancers. As with most auditions, as any actor can attest to, rejection is common. It is the same for male strippers auditioning in club contexts, but more often with immediate dismissive feedback full of rejection and painful criticism. Rarely is it common, unlike as shown in *The Full Monty, Magic Mike,* and in those contexts discussed by the research of Dressel and Petersen, for new dancers to enter into the business with ease.\(^2\)

Common to what Dressel and Petersen report, most men auditioning would be unprepared and only have, "vague expectations about what the stripper role entails" ("Becoming" 396), and that, "a great number performed for no more than a single night" ("Becoming" 388).

The 2014 Joe Manganiello documentary *La Bare,* focusing on the male dancers working at the titular Dallas male strip club, provides an amateur night audition segment that highlights these findings. Once a month La Bare has an audition night where men compete in an amateur night in front of a room full of eager women in order to become a club dancer. In this segment, the film displays inexperienced men awkwardly gyrating and gracelessly removing their street cloths as the remaining participants in the background project uncertainty. After management provides the rules and regulations for the event, the participants are herded on stage to be critiqued and judged by the audience. As most of the men finish exhibiting their inexperience and inability to present

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\(^2\) As a point of clarification, physical looks and appearance are not necessarily the most important and valued requirement to be a male stripper. Physical beauty is subject to the viewer. Despite popular beliefs and the hypermasculine images prescribed by the likes of the Chippendales, various body types are valued throughout the industry. Although the industry body standard may slope toward exaggerated notions of masculinity, and physical perceptions of beauty based on a lean muscular body resembling a Greek statue, other body types as seen in the stocky, thick, character Dave, and the older character Horse in *The Full Monty* exhibit qualities that an audience values other than lean muscularity. As Tewksbury points out in "Male Strippers: Men Objectifying Men," it's not only a dancer's appearance that audience members appreciate, but personality is also highly valued. I expand more on body and appearance in following chapters. Unfortunately, since personality is a very subjective attribute, I will not spend time addressing personality traits that an audience values and finds attractive. I would, however, suggest that dancers that display a genuine smile, confidence and exhibit a kind and gentle attitude will be well received by some portion of any audience regardless of their physical appearance.
an engaging erotic display, they are ushered off stage in accordance to the audiences’
disapproval, never to be acknowledged again.

At Gloria's, my initial heterosexual hustle club, inexperienced men often came to
audition. It was common practice for established dancers to call these men "peanuts." I know this
well from being a peanut that shameful night I ran from the club after my first intimidating
experience. Once I became a member of this community more than a year later, I began to
understand the requirements of entrance and the usage of the negative appellation toward
others. The term peanut was a playful yet derogatory term we used toward demonstratively
unprepared men, and those guys we simply did not want as a part of the community. Most new
dancers that attempted to enter our club were categorized with this term of rejection as we
attempted to keep their stay as short as possible with helpful suggestions toward a hasty exit.

Gloria’s was nothing like the above-mentioned La Bare. Gloria's had no standard audition
routine, so there was no shared ritual for the men that eventually worked their way into the
group. The audition could be alone, in front of the owner, or sometimes it was in front of a group
of arrogant and dismissive peers. Other times the audition was framed as a one-time chance,
requiring a would-be dancer to perform as a warm-up routine before the official start of the show.
Club dancers would gather in the back of the club to judge the audition and laugh at any
awkwardness of an unprepared dancer. A similar scenario is exhibited in La Bare. During the
amateur night competition, crosscuts display club dancers observing the "talent" while
humorously critiquing many of the clumsy attempts.

I remember this sense of hyper-camaraderie that lone night I auditioned at Gloria's. I
stood in the corner, hidden among the shadows as I watched the men conquer the crowd with

28 I address my reentrance with the club below in the “Invitation” section.
their hyper-sexualized performances. Any hope I had of feeling a sense of accomplishment and gratification for my audition that night was quickly shattered as I realized no one was going to compliment my efforts let alone acknowledge my existence. The dancers talked and laughed with each other while ignoring my presence and earlier efforts. Realizing my insignificance to the dancers, I exited unnoticed, before receiving any additional confidence crushing criticism.

At Gloria's, dancers would often over-perform unity among each other through friendly interactions and visible support of each other's stage routines in order to enhance feelings of exclusion to newcomers. If the man auditioning would stick around to "watch and learn," each member would hyper-perform their stage routines to further intimidate the newcomer. While it was common practice for club dancers to view each other as competition during the nightly ritual of collecting tips, our unity and support of each other's hyper-erotic displays on stage were intended to establish our masculine dominance while producing feelings of inequality and rejection in the newcomer. You're not good enough was the common tone of our responses.

The Dude-You Suck poem displays the intention to belittle a potential new dancer common to the initiation experience. Such displays establish the superior attitude of current members by expressing how newcomers do not belong and do not possess the qualities or potential to be a member of the group. This is not to say that every performance context or group has this form of resistance in the entrance process, but it is commonplace, as many dancers have reported. One dancer, whose stage is name Caesar, recounts experiencing a similar attitude projected toward him on his audition night:

I proceeded to go up there my first weekend and I was shunned by all of the guys. It was more or less, "Fuck You"! Either just stand in the back and watch and do
what we say, or you're not a part of the group. So I did that for about a month or so, until I got myself together. (Caesar, *Personal interview*)

Rejecting new members to a dancer community is a process I know well. I was eventually deemed as an enforcer of sorts at Gloria's. After being invited by CJ, I worked my way into the rotation by standing my ground and displaying an aggressive attitude toward the nature of the work and the financial potential.29 I eventually earned the respect of the veteran members and was urged to be responsible for leading the assault in rejecting auditionees. I didn't disagree, and I viewed this as a necessary tactic to protect my position among the members of the group. As the newest member, I didn't want to lose "my spot" or the respect of the other guys to someone new. At that time, I didn't think of the egotism and arrogance this role was projecting. My only concern was exhibiting an attitude of rejection as a maneuver to intimidate new potential members, and to better establish my belonging in the group. It was a simple bullying tactic that all of us veteran club dancers performed at one point or another without regard to the other party.

A notable initiation narrative where a new male stripper struggles for acceptance into the group plays out in the 2014 E! Channel 90-minute documentary titled *Men of the Strip*. This documentary chronicles the making of Las Vegas's newest male revue as it follows the preparation of the production team and strip troupe as they attempt to find permanent residency at a promising Las Vegas venue. The narrative arc of the film develops as the production staff decides to hold auditions to find additional talent to enhance and expand the show. The producers inform the current egotistical crew of dancers that their jobs are not secure if they do not shape up and respect the production team, take the work seriously, and follow the instructions of the

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29 I address the invitation at length in the sections below. Invitations are a privilege. Few men are fortunate to receive an opportunity for a relatively welcoming experience into an established community of dancers. For that reason, I address the tactics and strategies used by veteran dancers to deter newcomers to keep the community more isolated and less competitive first, before addressing welcoming tactics of a community.
producers. Once Derek, aka "The Rookie," is cast, we see his process of learning the structure and choreography of the show as well as his interpersonal negotiations with the members of the troupe. Derek must remain positive and optimistic while dealing with the attitudes and pessimism of the current dancers before they begin to respect his ability to deal with their harassment and view him as a contributing member of the group.

Although the film is predominately focused on the success of the group and the process of breaking onto the Vegas scene, the trials and tribulations of Derek's initiation play a significant part. While the film is constructed to dramatize the dancer's experiences of a high-end theatrical Vegas stage show, this element with Derek highlights what an outsider commonly experiences when entering a new group or community. While some elements of the film are not necessarily a trustworthy representation of the real-life experiences of all male strippers, the struggles addressed in Derek's entrance and initiation more closely mirror the reality of strip clubs and organizations where new members must earn respect and develop bonds with current members. Immediate disapproval from veteran dancers is shown in the film when dancers are told they must welcome a new addition to the group. The disapproval is followed by extended uncertainty and hesitation before fully accepting Derek as an unrefined yet developing contributor to the group.

Gloria's, a predominantly straight white context located in the Pittsburgh market, closely mirrored the Xquisite Strip Club and its audience represented in the film Magic Mike, and the traveling show displayed in Men of the Strip. Unlike the dancers for Men of the Strip who had no say in casting choices and production decisions, the dancers at Gloria's ran the show and handled most show decisions for the owner. Granted this club was much less refined with a lesser quality of show compared to the heightened, highly financed professional show of The Men of the Strip;
however, the veteran dancers determined who was permitted to work and who was accepted into the community. Men that auditioned were viewed by other dancers as competition, as well as an increased risk of the club having an over population of performers. This aggressive/competitive tenet is common in Bradley-Engen categorization of hustle clubs where more dancers equates to more competition for earning tips and receiving fringe benefits such as sex and gifts. Men that came to the club to audition were often met with dismissive attitudes and extreme rejection by the other dancers. Regardless of the quality of their audition, new dancers were given a similar response because they were viewed as a potential threat toward veteran dancers’ earning potential and post show sexual encounters with audience members. Whether the audition was good or bad, or they had a well-developed muscular build or not, they were given some version of the "Dude You suck" poem.

Although dancers essentially work as individuals, group membership and a sense of group identity is still important for those that can access a club or touring group, as it increases the potential to connect with other dancing networks and future opportunities. Group membership at a club also provides a home base. If a dancer is accepted into a group or club, he is then granted privilege to return unquestioned if he leaves membership for any period. Brotherhood, in this instance, allows dancers some freedom regarding consistent membership. If a dancer is open and honest about their reasons for absence, and accountable for their responsibilities when they are available, the collective group is usually understanding and willing to accept the dancer back into the group. For instance, since the dancers at Gloria's ran the show and handled most show decisions, members were rarely upset if dancers were not available for a few nights or shows.30 While an absence means that other dancers must pick up the slack for

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30 This is not to say that owners or managers of a club or group may not be upset. However, the industry does not function as most occupations, as the hiring and retention process can be much more exhausting and problematic.
being short a dancer, it also means that there is once less dancer to compete with over tips and fringe benefits. While there is always a sense of competition, all of the dancers have a stake in making sure that the overall show at the club is of a high standard in order to please the audience and entice them to return. Accepting new dancers is not a matter of accepting "the best" to make the club better, or accepting the worst dancer to reduce the competition among the dancers. The goal is to accept new dancers, if they understand the unwritten system of seniority, respect, and flexibility, and have the potential to grow and develop into a strong member of the group.

A dancer, whose stage is name Cisco, recounts his audition for the club where we first met and addresses how ruthless and unhelpful other dancers were:

I remember CJ saying, "Dude you gotta go out there." So they threw me out there for the first time. Everyone was mean to me so I felt extremely uncomfortable. No advice, no guidance. It was like, "you’ve got to go first." I was like, "what do you mean I’ve got to go first?" "Yea! You’ve got to go first." I thought, wouldn’t you want to put me on last because I don’t know what the fuck I’m doing. “No, you gotta go on first!” So, I guess it was a way to initiate/embarrass somebody. I think I danced for two songs, and I didn’t have a routine. I just came with jeans and a shirt. I think within 42 seconds all of my clothes were off. And I’m just kinda meandering about aimlessly trying to fake grind on somebody, trying to get a dollar. And I think girls were more interested in getting away from me because I didn’t know what the fuck I was doing. I made like seven bucks. It was just super

Since retention and reliability can be consistent issues, sometimes the owners/managers must trust the brotherhood mentality. The dancers that earn membership into a group look out for and pick up the slack for fellow members when needed.
embarrassing. I really considered never coming back. It was just an awful experience. You know? Nobody was friendly, and I wasn’t really good at it.

(Cisco, Personal interview)

Cisco's recollection highlights how intimidating and embarrassing it was when he was thrown on stage first without being prepared or fully knowing what to expect. It was an intimidation tactic that we, as veteran dancers of the club, enforced to weed out new want-to-be dancers. The idea was to send them out to fail and suffer, before the “real talent” started the show and exhibited how a routine was supposed to look. Our goal was to instill a sense of inferiority in new dancers. We, as veterans, embodied the mentality that you had to hang with the big boys before you could be considered one of us, and in order to do that, you had to prove yourself to us, not the audience or the management. However, our intention was to never fully give anyone a fair chance, but to create a feeling of rejection and inadequacy to make new dancers leave and not return. If they continued to return, endured the rejection, and worked hard to develop relationships, they could earn a spot in the rotation by earning our respect by accepting our entrance protocol, dealing with all of our ego-inflated bullshit, and understanding our system of seniority, respect, and flexibility.

Cisco later addresses his feelings of accomplishment after enduring continual rejection each time he returned. He joked about the awful experience he had in his initiation period, saying that he was, "the low man on the totem. I don’t think I was on the totem pole at that time. I wasn’t even near the totem. I think I was just looking at the totem." His acceptance into the group of men that ran the club came only after a continuous onslaught of negative feedback until we eventually began to see his determination as an act of commitment to be a member of the community, as well as a sign of strength to endure the hyper-masculine bullying from our immature antics. His initiation wasn’t about his skill or ability, it was about his willingness to
submit to and tolerate the egos of the men of Gloria's. He slowly developed his skills over time, as well as relationships and support from existing dancers. As he continued to return week after week, he became viewed less and less as a threat and more as a budding rookie slowly learning the ropes. He continued to develop hard-knock friendships and his way into the business through hard work, thick skin, and psychological fortitude.

Needing to have a thick skin and strong psychological fortitude where elements commonly address by dancers. A dancer, whose stage name is Lightning, stressed the mentality a new dancer needs to possess in order to make it past the audition experience and have any hope of being welcomed into the group. Lightning clarifies that:

Everyone was horrible at it at first... I mean, you’re going to feel like you are humiliating yourself, but the more you do it, the better you become at it. So, you just have to have the courage to get out there and do it. So, I guess you have to have a lot of resilience, and a healthy respect for yourself. You are putting yourself out there to be vulnerable, putting yourself out there to be criticized.

(Lightning, Personal interview)

Cisco best expresses the rejection he experienced when he attempted to audition and enter the community, and his persistence to grow, learn and become accepted. He clarifies how intimidating it was at first to see the other dancers do "their thing." He comically expounds on how unfavorable his audition was, as were many of the reactions of other dancers. He particularly addresses my behavior on our first meeting, and how negative and dismissive I was toward his attempt to enter the group. Cisco clarifies that:

...everyone was ignorant as hell, especially you! You were real mean! Super mean!...I kinda thought that I would be a welcome addition to the squadron. Oh
NO- NO, NO, NO, I was viewed as the outsider. I might as well had been purple with three heads, shooting fire out of my butthole. You know? I was kinda like the outcast. And I just kinda watched and kept my mouth shut. And you know, it got progressively better. (Cisco, Personal interview)

Cisco explains how negativity toward him eventually got better over time; by meeting, watching and complimenting everyone, attitudes progressively got more positive. Making an unexpected connection, Cisco reflects on the agreement he eventually made with Lightning. Realizing that they both were parents with similar struggles, Lightning agreed to help Cisco become a better performer and support his initiation into the club if Cisco would help develop his fathering skills. While this connection is potentially worthy of an extensive discussion regarding masculine relationships, identity, and status—something that is beyond the scope of my work here—it also provides a simple yet powerful example of homosocial bonding and mentorship that can be forged in the highly competitive, hyper masculine site of a male strip club.

The men I interviewed went on to address how their acceptance in the club got better as time progressed. They were able to display their determination to improve while maintaining a thick skin that could deflect negativity. My dismissive attitude was based on a group mentality that outsiders were unwelcomed. Cisco describes his understanding of the current dancers at the time as a group of alpha dogs trying to coexist. He is right in this analogy, as dancers would fight over money and women as aggressively as dogs would for a bone. New dancers could be a disruption to the order and the power dynamics within the group.

I experienced a different sense of rejection more recently at another club with a different contextual makeup. Even though I have been an active, and, arguably, a successful member of the industry for several years, I did not encounter a welcoming experience at another club while
researching for this project. This particular club, Gigi's, was a public gay, combo show club (featuring drag shows, go-go dancing and thematic stage performances) located in the suburbs of Detroit, a region with which I was unfamiliar. The location of the club extended beyond the radius I was willing to travel earlier in my career when I was active, so I rarely if ever encountered dancers from that area. I entered first as a spectator and later as an auditioning dancer. Gigi's was a queer club with men and women varying in age from eighteen to seventy, and the performance expectations were very similar to my experiences the first time I danced at Images. The club's main attraction was multiple drag shows throughout the week with two nights featuring a slate of male dancers. Most of the dancers were part of the bar community and assumed various positions in the culture including dancer, bartender, server and patron. The club was more of a social setting where male dancing was only one element of the evening. Much of the time was dedicated to patrons mingling and enjoying an open dance floor.31

Show segments never lasted more than an hour and there were two shows per night. The six to twelve dancers in a night's rotation were permitted to perform one or two songs for the audience. Thematic costumes were uncommon, as were theatrical routines. Stripping out of street clothes was common, but some dancers experimented with stylistic elements to heighten the persona and attitude they presented. A main difference from what I was accustomed to was

31To clarify, the idea of success in the industry is subjective to each dancer. During the interviews this was a topic of discussion on several fronts. A simple understanding of success that became common among the dancers I interviewed focused on the number of times a dancer worked per week. Success wasn't based on the amount of money earned on a given night. The amount earned each night, week, or month is always variable. Understandings of success were based on how a dancer developed a network that would permit him to work as often as he wanted to earn as much as he could. As I clarify below my personal network was developed from persistence and professionalism. My reliability and ability to adjust to different norms, performance etiquettes and expected behaviors each time I entered a new location ultimately has advanced my industry relationships and produced continuous work.
dancers’ willingness to perform for free. Payment was collected in the form of tips received while on stage, from customer interactions during the night, and from the sale of shots and other alcohol. It was a combination of Bradley-Engen's hustle and social club in terms of dancers being seen as both sex objects as well as the "[boy] next door; barmates" (88). It was a context that I was more familiar with at a much earlier point in my career when I was dancing for Tommy G and bars like Images. However, the structural and financial situation of Gigi’s was one that I had chosen to omit from my work scenarios as I matured later in my career.

Although I was initially there for participant observation, the loud intoxicated atmosphere made it impossible to develop any kind of relationship with the dancers unless I were to engage in extended visits to the club and expend a substantial investment including travel expense, entrance fees, and appropriate tipping. Following my initial observation, I concluded the best way to add to my participant pool was by entering as a new dancer and not as a researcher. After discussing my project and my history in the business with the club’s management, I returned a few weeks later to weave my way into this community with the desire to expand my participant pool. I assumed gaining entrance as a new dancer would be easy considering my previous experience and physical appearance. However, my attempt at entering as a new dancer did not work as I had hoped.

I entered excited and confident not only to perform in a new venue but also to research a new community. Changing among the dancers in the open kitchen area in the back of the club quickly put my relationship with everybody and my relationship to the business in perspective. Everyone appeared to be friends as they talked about patrons in the audience, what happened last night, and their plans for after the show. The dancers were a developed community, similar to communities I was a part of in other areas. No one shunned me immediately, but it was apparent
that I was not only new to the club, but that I was new to the area and unfamiliar with the friendly and physical relationships among the entire staff. Playful and friendly hugs, kisses, pinches, and slaps were continuously shared among a constant flow of people in and out of the dressing area. As a theatre artist, I'm not unaccustomed to such open behavior with friends and colleagues, but as a male stripper accustomed to more controlled dressing room conditions and behaviors it was hard to convey a sense of comfort in my new surroundings. The openness spilled over into my area as many of those that came in and out of the kitchen/dressing area were openly interested in seeing my package, knowing what I was packing, and curious if they could get a lick of my penis before I would go out on stage. I can only imagine how my unease with the circumstances, in addition to my nerves and the uncertainty about the night, projected a complex barrier of isolation.

Even though I had been in the business for over twelve years at this point, and had performed in nicer establishments with better conditions most the time, I was still excited and appreciative for the opportunity. However, maybe my appreciation wasn't apparent to the current community members in those initial moments. Maybe I had the wrong approach when I entered. Maybe I displayed a sense of privilege or entitlement. Maybe my dancer attitude preceded my academic intent. Maybe the combination of my dancer attitude and what could have been seen as an arrogant intellect disrupted my ability to be real and initiate more accessible interpersonal relationships with current dancers. Maybe it was a failed attempt to mask my more dominant heterosexuality and be more openly queer around a group of strangers. Maybe I was more business than pleasure, focused on my academic intention and not enjoying the playful camaraderie that circulated around me from this established community. Even though I willingly and truthfully answered any inquisitive questions about my sexuality and sexual preference, and
openly accepted flirtatious complements when they were given, I can only imagine that my erotic disinterest toward anything other than the work at hand clearly established my unwillingness to invest additional time into the club culture and build relationships beyond my intentions. My physical presence could have also influenced initial reactions from other dancers. Many of the dancers had a smaller physical stature and were less musculely developed. I was also noticeably much older than all of the dancers. I was approaching my mid-thirties while most of the dancers were under twenty-five. Simply put, I was noticeably different than the stock of house dancers and was potentially viewed as an outsider and unwanted competition in a club where I did not belong.

The only connections I achieved that night were fleeting moments just before performances. Although I was not completely ignored and rejected, I was rarely acknowledged by the other dancers once the night began and they assumed their fast-paced interactive roles as social entertainers. I struggled to be personal with just a few short moments back stage. Nothing about the performance etiquette appeared overly formal, and I just didn't know how to be a veteran dancer, in an initiation role, while "hanging" with the guys, and being as formal as I felt my professional research identity should be. I struggled to know when to be a participant and when to be an observer, as the role of the dancer as performer, shot boy, and liaison between club and patron became overwhelming as I tried to focus on my primary responsibility as a researcher. The noise, intoxication, and feverish momentum of this new environment made it impossible for me to achieve any sense of accomplishment. I was failing as both a dancer and as a researcher, and as the night progressed, an overwhelming sense of despair shadowed the experience.

Unfortunately, my time in the business has made me lazy to an extent. The real problem that evening was me, and my ability to accept the amount of labor that was needed to achieve
any sense of financial or research success. It wasn't the noise, the dancers, patrons, the work or anything else in the club. After an eight-hour work day, an extensive physical workout in the gym to prepare my body for my big night, and a ninety plus minute commute before the work at the club was to really begin, my physical and mental tanks were empty. I did not have the stamina to push myself to put on the best performance of dancer/researcher/queer self that I could. Knowing that no matter what, the result of the night was going to be a maximum of four hours of sleep, followed by another long day of work, I probably exhibited as much ambition to fully engage the night as a zebra would have with swimming across a river full of crocodiles.

When stripping, I thrive on efficiency in regards to maximum income for the least amount of effort. My developed network allows me to maximize efforts so I can balance my academic/professional identity outside of the stripping industry. My attempt at entering Gigi's community as a dancer was beyond my ability at this point in my career, and I was too ambitious with my research goals to acknowledge that personal limitation. The structure of the show, the nature of the venue, the audiences wants, and the interpersonal investment needed to hustle tips was not how I worked anymore. As the adage goes, *you can't teach an old dog new tricks*. Even though this old dog was once familiar and effective with these tricks, maturity and comfort trumped my ability to convert back to old ways from younger days and attempt to maximize my time and reasons for being there.

I ended the night knowing that dancing there was a onetime experience. I never felt a welcoming sense of acceptance. No one was openly as mean as the voices captured in the "Dude You Suck Poem," but I never felt that I was able to make anything more than momentary connections with other dancers. They were performing their normal routines based on established friendships and ongoing patron conversations while fulfilling the behaviors and expectations of
the club. I was lost somewhere in the middle of trying to adhere to the expectations, meet and engage the dancers, and my desire to earn enough money to cover my travel expenses. In retrospect, I failed at all three of those objectives that night, and I couldn't find a personal or professional justification to return to a club where I didn't feel like I could establish a sense of belonging. At that time, I just did not feel as if I fit into that community, and more importantly, I couldn't afford continuous trips that did not yield any more participants or add to my knowledge of the field of inquiry.

While the Gloria's and Gigi's examples offer different contextual perspectives, they establish a sense of dismissal that current members of a dancer community may project on newcomers. A sense of rejection by current members is often the reaction newcomer's experience, as was addressed above in the participant’s comments about dancers’ audition experiences. Acceptance and belonging to a dancer community seem to develop after a new dancer has sustained a continual regiment of disapproval over a period. Developing an understanding of how a club or community of dancer’s function is often the only way for newcomers to earn acceptance into a group. Masculinity is performed in a very Darwinian nature where only the strong survive/thrive. Each dancer is out to capitalize for himself. While each dancer wants to make the most money, they are more willing to support fellow group members and keep the money within the pack before letting an unknown outsider cut into their financial nourishment. Before a new member is willingly accepted, they must learn their role as low man

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32 For a new dancer, belonging may be a feeling that he earns over time, but for a veteran dancer, like myself, belonging is something I have feel has already been “given” or that I have already earned. However, I, or many dancers for that matter, do not belong in every club where there are male dancers. In certain instances, proving/earning a sense of belonging may be highly improbable due to the nature and circumstances of the already established community and the dancer’s willingness to earn acceptance.
in the group and continually earn the respect of veteran dancers through submission, growth, and relational development.

The performance of masculinity in the actual routines of male strip shows is often based on sexual displays and erotic interpretations of popular cultural themes. However, the masculine engagements and relationship in the initial periods of entrance for a dancer may provide various representations of masculinity exhibiting R. W. Connell's view of masculinities as multiple configurations of gender practices. For Connell, subordination and complicity are key patterns in the "relation among masculinities" (76). Connell explains that, "a relational approach makes it easier to recognize the hard compulsions under which gender configurations are formed, the bitterness as well as the pleasure in the gender experience" (*Masculinities* 76). The relational differentiation with groups of male dancers is evident with the performance of erotic masculinity between refined and unrefined dancers, veteran and rookie, or old and new members of an erotic community. Through the examples above, we see performances of masculinity in the initiation process as varied, as ranging from aggressive and psychologically harmful with arrogant and dismissive responses, to nurturing and caring with moments of mentorship. The sexuality of the performer appears less relevant to how masculinity is negotiated, as the entrance process can be unreceptive for any dancer whether he is straight or gay. Dominance and subordination is based on belonging and the desire to belong to a particular group, while the relationships of complicity displayed with new and existing members vary in the auditioning and acceptance periods.

The "Dude-You Suck!" rant above is meant to evoke the common dismissive and aggressive attitude in the display of a superior masculinity of existing members toward an unwelcomed beginner. Masculinity is not just addressed in terms of physical gesture and attitude, but also in tonality and the evocation of a socially sanctioned position of power. The dismissive
rant exhibits one practice of what Michael Messner refers to as, "contemporary 'politics of masculinities' within the larger terrain of gender practices" (*Politics* 13). The politics here are based on seniority and position within the group, and the dismissive acts of rejection are a deterrent to competition and the potential threat of the unknown capabilities of new members.

*CJ*

*My brother, my initiator, my mentor, my friend.*
*We met by chance, or was it by fate?*
*We have stayed connected ever since.*
*You shared your secrets and offered a similar path.*
*Your strategic introductions sparked my erotic education.*

*You mentored my erotic development.*
*Your introduction to key players established my belonging.*
*You were the first to teach me the ropes and fundamentals of the business.*
*You supported my advances, and urged my pursuits as our paths diverged.*
*While our relationship has distanced,*
*You have always supported my growth and maturity in all my journeys.*

An Invitation Provides Privilege

Regarding the grooming and training of a new dancer, Dressel and Petersen focus on what they call the socialization process; a process based on informal training or advice from dancers in casual conversations. They state, "A major form of socialization is simply watching other dancers and learning from them. The other means of on-the-job socialization is that of direct advice from other dancers" (397). This type of informal training is not a given experience that all men encounter upon entrance. However, as I have addressed elsewhere, it is a common practice for new recruits to be brought into the industry by a friend who is already a member of

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33 This is a statement I address in more detail in the article "The Stripping Cowboy: Music, Medium, and Movement in the Male Strip Show(s)" located in a 2014 special issue of *Cultural Studies - Critical Methodologies (CSCM)*. 14.3 (2014): 286-290. Some of this material is a reiteration on the topic of routine sharing and mentorship.
an established club or troupe. If friendships are established among dancers, the practice of sharing routines including costume pieces, prearranged music, and simple choreography may be common. If a dancer is viewed as competition, or there is a major conflict of interests and attitudes between dancers, there is a limited amount of sharing that happens and further hazing practices are likely to continue or relationships will simply cease to evolve.

A week after my introduction to Tommy G, CJ followed through with his promise and reintroduced me to Gloria’s. CJ’s introduction eased my entrance with the current dancers as his friendship quickly helped me develop relationships. In many ways, my story mirrors the character "The kid" in Magic Mike. Like Mike to "the Kid," CJ provided the appropriate introductions with the current dancers to help the development of my "socialization process." From the initial looks of dismissal by the dancers, it was still evident that, like before, Gloria’s was not a setting where new dancers were easily welcomed. However, this time, CJ’s counsel about how the club functioned on a system of respect based on seniority and skill, along with his introduction validated my potential as a good fit to the current group.

When I returned to Gloria’s, it was nice to be acknowledged and spoken to this time. The place didn't look as scary as it once had and the men didn't seem as intimidating. Many displayed interest in my story asking, "how I knew CJ," "if I was nervous," "if was I prepared to bomb and be made fun of" and numerous other anxiety increasing questions. As they spoke, all of the best horror stories of the worst "first time" experiences were highlighted in graphic detail. The time the guy fell off the table while trying to remove his pants. The time another guy had a horrible shit stain in his underwear. The time a sock dropped from a guy's thong. The time a guy wore a pair of lady’s thongs, and his embarrassment when his junk slipped out in front of the audience.
Although CJ advanced my introduction beyond my initial experience at the club, I still had to earn the group’s respect and display my value to the current rotation. I still experienced the “go first or go home” attitude described by Cisco. However, unlike with Cisco and Creaser's initial experience, the other dancers were less aggressive. They provided friendly scare tactics with first time horror stories while getting to know my character and considering my presence in the rotation. Entering with CJ offered this privilege of immediate acceptance over entering alone. From that point on a maturing and mentoring process continued. I struggled at first in developing my confidence, routines, and erotic persona but with the helpful critiques and suggestions from the other dancers I slowly refined my performance, and became comfortable with my act of erotic entertainment.

As the new guy, I was required to be the opening act, to warm up the audience, and to prepare them for the more experienced dancers, just like Cisco's initial experience. Although being first produced a lot of anxiety, it also provided ample time after to watch the remainder of the show from the back of the house where I could study how the other dancers constructed their performances regarding costume, music cues, and props with which to maximize audience response. I was no longer intimidated by all of the erotic feats as I once was, or the hyper masculine egos, rather I was a student of the show that felt comfortable to me as I asked questions and advice from my peers. Each routine was a short tutorial as each dancer executed the do's and don'ts of performance for assessment and analysis.

Watching each other's performance was common practice at Gloria's, which provided me time to build relationships with other dancers. The ritual of watching each other was to support dancers that are considered friends from the back of the house until it was your turn in the performance rotation. The back of the house was also where all of the gossip and "shit talking"
happened. Compliments were paid on occasion, because all of the dancers were generally friends. However, watching somebody perform was the perfect time to tell the new guy all of the dirt about other dancers: *That dude is bald and has hair plugs. That guy is old. That guy is full of steroids, and has a small dick that doesn't work. That guy smells; he never washes his costumes. That guy is a possessive toddler; he never learned how to share growing up. That guy is a moron; he caught himself on fire during his show and went to the hospital in his thong.* Plus, there are the stories of pranks dancers play on each other: *That guy got pissed off one night and stomped on the new guy's cowboy hat. Somebody threw the new guy's stuff outside in the rain. That guy pissed in that dude's drink backstage one night because that dude was hitting on the girl that guy was fucking. If you like a girl in the audience that likes another dancer, just tell her that he is either married, gay, or has a disease.*

Those moments of gossip and performance critique aided my training in that it helped me develop friendships, and a stronger sense of confidence when engaging the audience. The conversations also gave me the private information that circulated in the world of Gloria's. The critiques of the dancers and the stories of Gloria's were private knowledge, and a sign that I was being accepted into the community. Stories were shared because I was trusted not to repeat certain *dirt* to the wrong people. Over time friendships formed. I was no longer the new guy learning in the back; I was simply one of the dancers in the back.

Dancer Lightning addresses the significance of friendship in the initiation process and draws attention to the entrance scenario that leads to additional opportunities. Lightning explains that it is about the people you know, the connections you make, and the friends you choose to bring into the lifestyle that helps others enter an established community. He explains:
When you start in it and you start locally, you think there are a lot of male strippers, but there really are not. We’re like our own little community. It's a very lonely job. It's lonely and fun at the same time. So normally, if one of your buddies is hooked up with a group, he wants his friends to be with him. So, whenever there is an opening in the group he tells the boss and the boss contacts you, and invites you to come with them. Then you meet the boss and that's how it happens. Essentially, the whole idea is, you have a bunch of guys out there stripping who eventually want to be with their friends. So, you end up being with your friends having a great time. That’s how you get hooked up with the groups. By starting, and self-networking within the stripping community, then you will eventually get a phone call. (Lightning, Personal interview)

Lightning's explanation is basically a reiteration of how my entrance occurred.

The introductions to Tommy G and Gloria's which CJ offered were my invitation into the business. Within the first two months of CJ’s invitation I juggled my availability, networked every chance I got and began to dance whenever and wherever I could. I got bookings from Tommy and CJ and I also began to develop my own connections. While CJ and Tommy offered advice when requested, the path I developed was ultimately my own. Their mentorship predominately ceased outside their respective communities as our interests and paths diverged in different directions over time. While they remained in the comfort zones of their respected communities, I continued to explore the opportunities the business offered. I developed my skills and abilities by mimicking different attitudes and gestures of other dancers to become better suited to fulfill the desires and expectations of various audiences. Within a year, I had developed a network that allowed me to work multiple nights a week. If I couldn't work at Gloria's dancing
for women with CJ, I could go-go dance for men through Tommy at various locations where managed dancers. As my reputation grew, work at alternative clubs with variety shows featuring drag queens and strippers became common. I began to be invited to other clubs and shows by other dancers and patrons. As Lightning described above, growing relationships in the business eventually led to my introduction to traveling tour groups as well as organizations that booked private parties like the one from my introductory VHS video.

As Bradley-Engen posits, dancers "adjust to their situational circumstances," and develop strategies, attitudes and feelings about the work and the people involved with the work (86). My entrance experience and initiation period was anything but easy, as was the case for many of the dancers I interviewed. Ultimately, it is resilience and determination that helps a dancer achieve his goals of entering the business. My initiation into the business resonates with similar channels of recruitment that Dressel and Petersen discuss (supported by persons with influence in the business), but it also suggests that entering the erotic dance industry is subject to the opportunities available. Each new location I entered was in some sense a first experience. Until I developed a network of locations where I could regularly perform, I was constantly learning the norms, performance etiquette and the expected behaviors each time I entered a new location. It was my persistence of looking for additional work and my willingness to develop new relationships with clubs, promoters, and groups that kept the work continuous. However, each new experience had its own set of nuanced requirements for entrance and acceptance.

Grooming and Sharing with the New Dancer: Bonding or Business?

Of the men I interviewed, many of us share elements in our entrance and initiation stories. While initial rejection was a frequent theme, the one thing that appeared in all
discussions was an understanding of community once we were accepted and remained active in the business. Although the work is often independent, all interviewees had worked for a club or group of men that traveled and toured at some point in their career. They all explained that once acceptance was earned, a more developed grooming process was common that often lead to costume sharing and information about other work scenarios.

During my career, I have created several personalized routines but have had an equal amount shared with me as a friendly gesture in order to expand my repertoire and enhance my appeal and marketability. Developing an original costume or erotic gimmick and then organizing the content of a routine including music, props and choreography can be a daunting and intimidating process. However, if a new dancer is seen as an asset or a potential benefit that will better a group, this sharing of routines then becomes more relaxed. We see this open sharing in the film *Magic Mike*, as "the kid" is quickly worked into the club’s rotation. He is given costumes, taught choreography, and taken to private parties so he can learn the ins-and-outs of the business. The idea is that the quicker he learns his role and refines his performance the better the entire troupe will be from his contribution.

When I first began in the business, I struggled to find a thematic routine and erotic persona that I felt was a good fit. I experimented with costumes, music, and props and refined the routines based on audience reactions and helpful suggestion from other dancers. For over a decade, my primary routine was the stripping cowboy; offering my body up in various settings for sexual gaze and consumption of both men and women craving an over-animated sexualized Western fantasy. I emerged as "The Cowboy" through a rite of passage as Marcus, a later mentor, shared his routine. Following his example, I borrowed his black leather costume of “cheekless” chaps, vest, cowboy hat, stainless steel fire cauldron, and, most importantly, his copy of Bon
Jovi’s (1986) *Wanted Dead or Alive*. I nervously prepared to imitate his sexual gestures into my own construction of this symbol of Western fantasy and desire. Apprehensively entering a darkened stage, I emptied a bottle of rubbing alcohol into the cauldron that secured the flammable substances that I was about to ignite in order to illuminate the venue and my muscular body. I dropped in a struck match, and stripped by the light of the fire.

In his song “Wanted Dead or Alive,” Bon Jovi sings, “It's all the same, only the names will change,” suggesting that the modern cowboy makes his way through the world with the steel thunder of a Harley Davison roaring beneath him. The audience immediately knew that, like Bon Jovi and as the lyrics say, “I’m a cowboy on a steel horse I ride” and that I was “going out in a blaze of glory!” The lyrics as well as the masculine imagery of long haired, sweaty, bare-chested musicians in leather and cowboy hats, evidenced in the original music video, produce erotic imagery of today’s rock-n-roll cowboy, traveling the world and across generations for the millions of fans that hang on to every note and lyric. Within seconds of my performance, I felt the passion of the song along with the reaction of the crowd encouraging my inner cowboy to burst forth. Marcus had done me a great service by sharing his time-tested routine, and I knew at that moment, the cowboy would live long and strong as part of my alternative identity. As the audience sang with the powerful vocals and guitar chords of Jon Bon Jovi and Richie Sambora, the music coursed through my veins morphing me into a badass cowboy. The sound and energy rang through my bones while erupting through my thong. The outburst from the women as I offered my body for their sexual entertainment immediately hooked me on my mentor's routine and being the cowboy.

Offering me his routine was a strategic gesture that not only helped expand my repertoire, but also benefited his cause. The night that Marcus shared his routine, he was not concerned with
ownership of the Western identity. Although he normally performed as the cowboy, that night he simply wanted to have some fun and give the show more variety. He wasn't concerned that I would rely on doing a routine that he often used. He knew I had my own repertoire and was simply allowing me to copy and adjust one of his routines to add range to my craft. I had been traveling with him for over a year, and I had earned his trust as a reliable performer. Knowing that I had witnessed his routine numerous times, and that I was a quick study, he believed that I had the ability to recreate his performance and do it performative justice.

Many of the dancers I interviewed also provided similar stories of routine and performance sharing. Cisco, however, specifically stressed the importance of knowing and respecting boundaries among the dancers who were protective of their routines and thematic identity. There are rules of engagement when working with more established and veteran dancers. New dancers must be aware of everyone's routines and not copy their themes or use the same music. Dressel and Petersen also address a similar idea. If a dancer copies themes or the music of another dancer, there will be conflict with those territorial dancers that claim ownership over music as part of their identity. Dressel and Petersen clarify that, "certain songs 'belong' to particular dancers and that another dancer could not use the same song for his routine without permission from the original user" ("Becoming" 399). Copying another dancer's act without permission is one of the biggest signs of disrespect and becomes a justification for immediate conflict. However, if a dancer follows the overall rules of a group, and respects each dancer's individual rules and identity, he has a better chance to be accepted into the group. Once a dancer establishes that he can create his own routines, thus showing that he respects the status and identity of veteran dancers, then the likelihood of sharing costumes becomes more common.
Another dancer, stage name Jay Rock, discusses what happened when a veteran dancer offered up his less popular doctor routine to him. The veteran provided little instruction, but he provided the thematic music along with a list of props and possible approaches to developing the most engaging performance. Jay Rock explains that, "He had the routine. He said, 'I think this will be better for you. It's slower; this is what I've seen guys do with it. Take it and listen to it. Play with it and make up a routine for it. So, I played it over and over and over again. Went and bought the lab coat and tie, and I started playing with it" (Jay Rock, Personal interview). For Jay Rock, this instance of sharing was more suggestive than instructive, and, like my cowboy example, the sharing Jay Rock experienced was prompted on an assessment the veteran made of Jay Rock’s ability and potential.

Not all sharing, however, is a sign of acceptance into a group. Touring groups commonly need additional dancers to fulfill contracts if regular group dancers are not available, or if contract stipulates a larger number of performers. Tour promoters or managers will frantically search for guys and aggressively recruit for a limited trial period, as long as they physically look the part, have the availability, and appear to have some confidence. The stakes are low for the recruit, as they often have no prior interest or knowledge of the business, and are unexpectedly brought into the work based on a touring company's need. It is common for group managers to have a series of simple costume pieces related to certain music choices that can be easily adorned and performed by a new recruit after some minor coaching and direction.

A dancer, whose stage name is Ricky D, comments on a similar scenario. He had been unexpectedly recruited by a promoter who trains at his gym and he remained with the tour group for a little under two years. When he accepted the offer to join the troupe, the manager provided a construction helmet, a hammer, and a tool belt along with some general instructions for how to
perform to an older country song he had never heard. Ricky D explains, "He gave me it. I didn’t have a choice. I’ve been trying to do something new but I have nothing yet" (Ricky D, Personal interview). Ricky D expresses frustration for getting compliments from audience members for the role he plays in other dancers’ skits, and not getting recognition for the remedial construction routine he has had to continually perform. He stresses that he had the desire to create a routine that he felt better expressed his sexuality. He states, "I want to make my own identity when I dance because I don’t feel like I’m myself when I’m the construction worker" (Ricky D, Personal interview).

In this example, Ricky D is not given the opportunity to evolve and explore his potential in creating an identity that may better suit him as a stage persona. Due to the nature of the touring show of which he is a member, the tour is expected to have a certain level of refinement and professionalism. Since Ricky D did not have the level of refinement and professionalism as the veteran dancers of the tour, the routine he was given was remedial with background dancers added for flare to enhance the overall performance and to mask his inexperience. Based on Ricky D’s discussion it appears that the manager is not interested in Ricky’s desire for a more expressive personalized routine, as stage time on tour is not viewed as time for experimentation or training time for unseasoned dancers. Routine sharing in this instance is done for the betterment of the tour, and Ricky D is forced to follow the direction of the manager. Sharing, in this case, is not necessarily a sign of willing acceptance into the group. It is more of an ongoing audition for the tour, a test to see if Ricky D has the interest and skill to develop his own routine.

Sharing becomes a tricky practice to fully understand. On one hand, it displays a friendly gesture some dancers do for each other for fun and a sign of trust and equality. In my example and that of Jay Rock, we already had our own repertoire of routines, so we were given
permission by other dancers to refine and alter their routines if we wanted. In Ricky D's example, he was given a routine as a strategy. Ricky D was inexperienced without a routine of his own. For him to fulfill the role the touring troupe needed, he had to learn and perform a thematic character that was not a good fit for his personality. His internal struggle with embodying the routine, but his willingness to continue to perform it, displays another sign of conformity that a new dancer may perform in order to meet a group's requirements and remain a member.

Chapter II Summary

As I move through these memories and experiences, it is impossible for me not to reminisce about the times and friendships that developed from such mean initial encounters and subsequent unexpected experiences. While I was not always a good fit for every group or club community I entered, those that did feel as if I belonged created moments and friendships that surpass the business of erotic dancing. I gaze at a photo on my desk of six men in their mid to late thirties at a Memorial Day picnic as exhibited in figure 3. I'm as cool as ever, of course,
displaying the shades without the bandana, and Cisco sportingly displays his shoulder tattoo in a sleeveless shirt. CJ sports the hat while Lightning wears the white tank top. Our families sit off to the side as we capture this moment of friendship sustained through years of shared experiences and developed through our constructed erotic stage identities. This moment captured in time represents a connection to each other beyond who we once were, or at least who we pretended to be; it is a lasting connection based on experiences and stories, relationships of love and hate, and memories of help and harm during our evolution and maturity in an industry based on sex, silliness and unadulterated eroticism.

Figure 4: Male dancers at an earlier age. Permission granted by Heather Mull Photography

At an earlier age, and at different moments in life, we were part of a unique boy’s club; our own erotic fraternity at Gloria’s as displayed in figure 4.34 Here, Cisco and I both wear black hats: this photo was taken shortly after he was accepted into our community, nearly ten years

34 Appendix C provides image/photo usage letters of approval from the rightful owners of any image not originally taken by the author.
prior to figure 3. Comparatively these photos mark transformations in our identities in response to personal and physical transitions. While our bodies continue to age, our interests’ shift, and our looks move beyond a popular ideal of youthful and muscular masculine beauty, the relationships we maintain perpetuate our friendship and our history with the industry.

Our initiation stories that got us into stripping are oddly like the experience I had once-upon-a-time pledging my collegiate social fraternity. For me the idea of fraternal brotherhood developed though our shared ritual experience and through the memories and relationships that emerged after completing the pledging process. This was a time before hazing was completely banned or outlawed from the collegiate system. The fraternal initiation was a grueling system of weekly "encouragements," where brothers attempted to physically and mentally breakdown pledges, forcing them to quit the pledge process. In order for a pledge to earn the right to be a brother and wear the Greek letters that symbolized the organizations order, he had to earn the respect of the others by completing the same process those before him endured. In addition to learning the history of the organization and participation in philanthropic events with the university, acceptance was based on performing resilient masculinity and the ability to endure various torments. The pledge process was a hyper masculine ritual done to exhibit dominance over those that sought acceptance and belonging into the group. If an individual endured the process and was accepted as a brother, he was never subjected to those forms of scrutiny or treatment again. Acceptance meant solidarity; you earned membership into the brotherhood because you completed the journey that each brother had experienced. The bond of exhibiting strength, resilience, and endurance to the process established a unique membership to our group. To be a member meant owning the same experiences and the memories created in the process.35

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35 I could equally argue that we shared the bond of masculine stupidity for willingly subjecting ourselves to abusive physical and psychological types of treatments, but that’s not the point of discussion. The point is the willingness
Although physical hazing practices were not addressed by any male dancers I interviewed, many of their initiation experiences mirrored each other and resembled familiar acts of psychological hazing I experienced during my days of Greek brotherhood. These stories and examples reveal strategies and learned behaviors for survival that occurs when entering the business and that requires the dancer to engage certain behaviors as proof of compliance to a normative order. Being resilient, overcoming resistance, adapting to circumstances, and developing relationships are key elements to surviving the initial period.

Most of the men I interviewed that I have known who have worked at my initial "hustle club," Gloria's, expressed how they were unwelcome and dismissed by the then current dancers during their initiation, which can be described as part of the hazing process we incurred in our initiation period. Entering this club meant the dancers must repeatedly accept rejection and work their way into the environment by showing persistence, resilience, and growth, all while slowly building relationships with the current dancers, and learning the social norms of the club and the business along the way. Acceptance into the community only happened after a new dancer understood his role and how the system of seniority and status existed among senior dancers. However, in the case of Tommy G and his clubs, acceptance into his community was based on availability, loyalty, and the willingness to dance in a gay context; a completely opposite mentality compared to the heterosexual conflicts of Gloria's

one may subject oneself in order to earn acceptance into a group. Recruitment and initiation is still a normal practice of many organizations where membership is regulated and assessed through an interpretive process. Even though demeaning and degrading rituals are illegal, and poorly favored, that's not to say they don't still exist in some regard. Membership represents recognition and public achievement of belonging. For some there are no limits to what they might do to belong and associate with the groups they desire.
To reiterate Price's argument, “context matters” in strip shows (385). As I have outlined, the realities and social context of spaces and experiences produce different outcomes, behaviors, and performative expectations in the entrance and initiation period of a new dancer. The initiation experience is not a systematic process; rather as the various narratives suggest, it is a fluctuating but consistently antagonistic procedure. Gaining entrance into the business is often riddled with rejection and negativity. While perhaps some men experience a welcoming and nurturing initiation period, as is often suggested in the above-mentioned film and stage examples, full acceptance into a male dancer community requires time and patience, but more importantly resilience and a thick skin.

In discussing the "Terrain of Politics of Masculinity" Messner addresses the "costs of masculinity" (Politics 12). For Messner, men tend to pay heavily, "for conformity with the narrow definitions of masculinity that promise to bring them status and privilege" (6). The weight of the price a dancer may pay for entrance and development into the male dancing industry is subject to each account, but fear, rejection, embarrassment and potential humiliation were common costs addressed by my interviewees. To evoke Connell, masculinity and the gender relations in the initiation practices for new male dancers is defined by submission and conformity, which establishes the status and power between veteran dancers and those attempting to enter.

As many of the remarks from the dancers I interviewed clarify above, a new dancer is a low man on the totem pole who usually must prove his worth and earn the respect of veteran dancers before a group will openly accept and assist him, and offer him equality in the earning process. Respect is earned by enduring rejection and criticism, following orders, valuing veteran performance identities, and accepting less desirable work situations. Respect, as Messner
explains, is "a crystallization of the masculine quest for recognition through public achievement" (Power 56). While attitude and egos may still exist among members, once a new dancer is fully accepted into a community, a mutual bond is shared based on the achievement of acceptance as well as through similar moral and erotic interests. Once a dancer displays psychological endurance from the continuous verbal battery from other dancers, he can eventually earn recognition from the other dancers and a spot in the rotation. Additionally, the occupational compatibility and good times each member shares through the display and performance of their erotic identity creates a connection based on shared experiences and memories. These shared connections further endorse the dancers belonging in the group.

The politics of initiation are that a new member must earn his way into a group by building relationships and developing the qualities deemed needed as a group member. While the qualities vary for each dancer, the terrain of entrance is typically rough and irritating. Although I was eventually ushered into the business by friends and had less of an initiation process than other dancers I have interviewed, once I began working at my first club(s), my initial experience was filled with rejection. Even my first gig meeting Tommy G had elements of hazing. CJ offered the chance to enter the business but only by following the same path that he had followed. It was never my intention to dance for men when I first thought of being a male dancer. However, that was the requirement I had to fulfill to fully earn CJ's respect and prove I was willing to meet his criteria of initiation. Starting out by dancing for men was his form of hazing to prove I was willing to do anything to get started. He viewed dancing for women as a privilege, and it was a privilege he would not extend until I proved myself by completing the challenge of a straight boy dancing for men. Completing that initial gig at Images proved my determination,
which ultimately led to more opportunities, quicker acceptance into other groups, and a better understanding of the business at large.

Other dancers addressed the length of time it took before they found themselves having a variety of opportunities from which to choose. As relationships over the initiation period developed, they found that more work became accessible. The attitude of the dancers was not to openly share work opportunities with just anybody. A dancer had to prove his loyalty to the job and the other dancers that had a deeper network of work opportunities before others would refer him for other work. In my time in the industry, I have brought several men into the business. Most of the time it was first for my benefit and not just for supporting their interest. If I didn't know, like, or trust somebody, I was not going to openly offer them a chance to make money and prosper from my knowledge and reputation. I ran the risk of finding myself with less work opportunities in the future if he was more attractive or a better performer. Self-interest is a common mentality of veteran dancers; there was an unwillingness to give a new dancer the opportunity to do gigs and make money that we could do ourselves. However, once a new dancer has established that he is willing to follow the rules of the group and is eventually validated by other dancers, he would get more work because he was trusted, thought to be reliable, and willing to fulfill work others could not or did not want to complete. The expectation in the formation of trust was that a new dancer would not step on the toes and territories of veterans that provide the opportunities, and that the dancer might return the favor in the future. Veteran dancers worked under a system where new dancers follow what might be best described as the unwritten rules; they would learn their role, know their status, and work to develop a relationship with the dancers who have more status and a better developed network.
In the remaining chapters, I move beyond the process of initiation and the requirements of entering a dancer community in order to focus on independent work scenarios not associated with a club or touring community. In doing so I establish how the performance of erotic masculinity is often contingent on the context of the location, the audience, and the circumstances of the performance. I connect each chapter through a critical reflection of a night in the life of a male stripper in order to access various situations made available to me due to my established networks. In each chapter I examine examples of performances other than heterosexual homosocial predominantly white strip clubs in order to establish how the prescription of erotic masculinity can vary when the context of the performance changes. I address the variations in the structure of the male stripping business and how performances of masculinity are situated based on the context and expectation of various particular scenarios.
CHAPTER III. EROTIC MASCULINITY BEYOND THE STRIP CLUB: CONTEXT, POWER, AND PERFORMANCE MATERIALS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR STRIP INDUSTRY

Each night is a rollercoaster.  
Audience's lust and despise,  
Desire and ridicule,  
Envy and scrutinize.  
With each individual gaze  
I am valued and cheapened.

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I start with this short personal poem to summarize my experience of dancing in the private sector. As often as I acquire private gigs like the sensationalized experiences commonly displayed in films to reinforce cultural assumptions, I have as many experiences that are anything but a glorified erotic event. Each performance is work as well as a gamble. As much as I hope for erotic masculine glory from an interested and excited audience, I equally pray for an experience that contains little scrutiny or turmoil.

Public and private contexts for male strip shows offer quite contradictory performance circumstances; however, little scholarly attention has been given to the differences. While performances of gender in public settings have certain performance prescriptions based on the location, erotic performances of gender in private settings have no standard norm and vary upon the context of the party. The way a dancer negotiates his behaviors with the audience, and his ability to be flexible with what the audience desires and finds acceptable can change with each instance. While some of the norms and behaviors in a public show may be mirrored in a private performance, audience expectations are not always consistent when the dancer leaves the public
club to fill a private work order.\textsuperscript{36} The location and the circumstances of the event necessarily influence the dancer's performance of masculinity.

Scholarship on the male strip show primarily focuses on performances in the public club setting where the audience and venue have established norms and expectations based on the legal and prescribed behaviors of the club.\textsuperscript{37} Performance expectations vary wildly when a dancer performs privately. In the private sector, the performer must heighten his awareness toward the needs of varied audiences, often in impromptu spaces, with unknown obstacles. Depending on the circumstances of the private engagement, a dancer may have to drastically alter his performance and his erotic persona to meet the expectations of the event. Sometimes impromptu shifts in attitude or a reevaluation of how the dancer implements his costumes and performance materials can be the difference in the success of his performance and how well he pleases his audience.

In this chapter, I focus on the performer's engagement with the spectator and event, and the way costumes, performance materials, location, power relations, and performance expectations have an impact upon the performance of masculinity in the fluctuating environment of private bookings. I again combine personal experience with film and television examples along with responses from my interview participants to explain how performances of masculinity in private settings are dependent upon the context of the atmosphere and the dancer's ability to negotiate the circumstances. Performance materials and props can both hinder and enhance a dancer's performance, thereby causing the power relationships within the private sphere to vary.

\textsuperscript{36}Private work orders are more commonly known as private parties or gigs.

\textsuperscript{37} For a detailed example, Bradley-Engen's typology in \textit{Naked Lives: Inside the Worlds of Erotic Dance} establishes how performance expectations for female strippers are dependent on the type of club that they work. Rules, norms, and behaviors among performers and audience are contingent on the established expectations of the space they are in, including the show bar, hustle club, and social bar.
utilize popular narratives and examples about the public and private show in order to address the
sharp contrasts between preconceived expectations and the performance realities of male
stripping outside of a club setting.

I implement examples from media to augment my argument and clarify how examples
from film, television and the Internet often set up cultural assumptions about the erotic actions
and behaviors that occur in strip clubs, and therefore condition how the audience reacts and how
the dancer expects the audience to react. However, the social and cultural assumptions projected
about strip clubs in general, specifically for male strippers, focus on sensationalized moments of
performance. These examples do not consider equally common conditions and circumstances
that occur in similar performances that leave the public sphere and unfold in the private sector. In
such examples, media influence on the social construction of masculine erotic performance are
one sided and ignore several unknown variables and the amount of improvisation that can go into
the construction of erotic masculinity.

Examples of private party scenarios in film and television tend to highlight the scenarios
that mirror the carnivalesque nature usually found in public show settings. While there is some
truth in such mediated scenarios when the context of the gig is celebratory, these examples
stereotype and sensationalize the work of a male stripper. Such examples discard other
circumstances that occur in private settings where the atmosphere is less agreeable to the
interactive nature of the performance. Most film, television and Internet examples embellish the
private settings, thereby suggesting that private male strip shows always mirror the actions and
interactions that occur in a public club where a wanting audience engages an over-confident
performer resulting in erotic delight and elation. While this is the ideal result for an eager
audience to be given what it wants, television and film have neglected to depict situations where
audience circumstances differ from the public settings and where labor practices must adjust to
diverse contextual conditions. Media shapes, constructs, and reflects dominant articulations of
masculinity and audience membership, often using only the cultural stereotypes without
considering how alternative conditions shift human interaction and expressions of identity.
Understanding the power that varied contextual conditions have in altering a performance can
(re)articulate how a dancer's identity is constructed and performed, challenge existing
hierarchies, and establish a broader continuum of dancer expectations and expressions of self.

Throughout this chapter, I examine how performances of erotic masculinity are
dependent upon the context of the location, and the manners in which a dancer evaluates and
implements his erotic tools to create and execute his erotic act. I continue to follow the model
established in the previous chapter; I evaluate portrayals of male strippers from film, television,
and the Internet and combine first-hand experience with responses from my interview
participants. I critique stereotypical media portrayals of male dancers in private party scenarios
before I engage in a "thick description" (Geertz 10) of a night on the job as a male stripper in
order to analyze experiences from multiple settings. I examine contextual relationships between
power and identity, and reflect on the performance context as well as the tools, props, and labor
practices involved in constructing an erotic masculine persona in varying contextual scenarios. I
clarify how sensationalized portrayals of erotic masculinity based on stereotypical beliefs in
certain circumstances do not fully construct an accurate portrayal of the labor practices that are
exercised both in the business and in the construction of erotic masculinity. The public and
private sector can vary greatly, requiring fluctuating tactics of performance tools and materials to
best negotiate the context and gendered power relations of private events.
My Costume Chest

My 32-gallon gray storage tote, a simple seven dollar Wal-Mart bargain, derogatorily nicknamed “the HO Box” by fellow colleagues, functions much like a book bag or purse, holding essential personal and work-related items that make the job more efficient, effective, and imaginative. The unflattering name reflects the stigma of the occupation, and feeds into salacious stereotypes. For me, however, “the HO Box” is a costume chest filled with the tools and technologies of my vocational personas. Fortunately, the tools and practices I use to create my erotic identity allow me to improvise approaches to my performance.

![Figure 5: My Costume Chest. Picture provided by the author](image.png)

The numerous items within my chest are the theatrical elements that help authorize my entrance into the business and assist my movements across the varying circumstances of my gigs. A variety of props, including oils, lotions, paints, whips, chains, and handcuffs, along with a collection of additional garments, complement the costumes while they may also be used to add spontaneity and creativity. Such tools of craftsmanship, items sociologist Jennifer Wesely's
would categorize as “body technologies,” are the, "techniques we engage to change or alter our physical appearance" (644). "[The] continuum of body technologies might range from temporary alterations like makeup or attire on one end to more permanent or invasive changes like cosmetic surgery or drugs on the other end," (Wesely 644) and allow dancers to re-create different meanings with their bodies while both hindering and helping to manage identity complications. I arm myself with this weaponry, my erotic artillery, to assist my negotiation through both familiar and unfamiliar places. My erotic inventory, displayed above in figure 5, enhances the construction of my stripper performance and helps build my erotic identity. The theatrical elements, as performance studies scholar Liepe-Levinson describes, aid in the construction of "conventional action roles of masculinity" that permit me to strut my eroticism onstage, "in performance of physical strength and social authority" ("Strip tease" 10). These materials decorate my body and create a manufactured fantasy for those willing to buy into the erotic entertainment I provide.

The Public Versus the Private Sector: Negotiations of the Expectations

In her study on dancers in North American strip clubs, Liepe-Levinson explains that erotic performers employ simple and complex costumes when creating "drama and interest,” with their performance both functioning as, "an obstacle to the story's transgressive outcome -- public nudity" (Strip Show 76). For Liepe-Levinson the "theatrical dynamics and conventions" of the stage performance fashion the experience of "visual sexual stimulation" which produce desires and fantasies, and create an "erotic awareness of the body for the spectator" (Strip Show 77). The theatricality of the entire the venue, as well as the costumes and stage performance, have an impact upon the sexual stimulation of the audience’s experience. She explains, "The
representations of desire, through acts in which patrons play at or experience being 'taken,' 'pleasured-pained,' or 'suckered' suggests yet another set of spectators' fantasies about their own sexual surrender" (*Strip Show* 154). This is to say that the performance antics and interactions create an awareness of both the spectators' bodies and that of the dancer. This awareness of how bodily interactions have an impact upon and enhance the experience feeds into the development and the overall atmosphere of the show.38

In the male strip show, masculinity is constructed and performed with the goal of fantasy fulfillment according to the rules and behaviors of desire that are socially agreed upon for the duration of the event. Ultimately, the performance is based on the assumed acceptance and agreement with the norms and actions in this type of show. However, interactive rules are rarely pre-established and agreed upon in a formal manner, unless they are preexisting as a state or local law such as no nudity in facilities that serve food and alcohol. Usually the "rules" are addressed, with a humorous tone of uncertainty, right before a show by an announcer, such as an MC or DJ, to excite an audience and get them prepared for the unexpected. The announcer's job is not necessarily to introduce a template of expectations; rather he/she focuses on building anticipation while establishing that the acts, interactions, and activities of the show will follow a carnivalesque form full of humor, eroticism and chaos.39 Other times, a formal announcement may be omitted for various reasons, and the rules and expectations remain fluid. In this case,

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38This is not to say that every spectator in attendance reacts the same way, has a similar stimulating experience, and is willing to engage with the interactive nature on the show. Many do, but plenty of spectators only attend a male strip show to accompany a group of friends for a special occasion, or attend once just to be able to say they have had the experience. Just as these spectators may not experience sexual stimulation, spectators that enjoy attending these shows may not be sexually aroused but simply enjoy the entertainment and the environment created during these performances in club settings. Chapter six "Performing Spectators: The Pleasure of Mimetic Jeopardy" in Liepe-Levinson's *Strip Show* details how the rules, expectations, and spectator behavior often varies from club to club.

interactive understandings become established from impromptu interactions where dancers read
the audience’s interest and willingness to physically participate and to set precedents for future
dancer/spectator exchanges.

To succeed, a dancer has not only "Gotta have a Gimmick," to quote the famous
Broadway tune from the musical *Gypsy*, but be able to negotiate the environment that unfolds
once a performance begins. In addition to dancer gimmicks, the ever-changing combinations of
sexual banter from the announcer, games and activities, or "hunky-man taxi rides," where
dancers carry spectators throughout the club, (Liepe-Levinson, "Striptease" 30) enhance the
interactive theatricality of the experience. Collectively these elements intensify the hyper-
eroticism of the interactive on-and-off stage experience.40

The male striptease is often, as cultural critics Margaret Dragu and A.S.A. Harris posit,
"styled on traditional male aggression” (82). In public shows, cultural anthropologists Maxine
Margolis and Marigene Arnold explain, "An aura of romance and chivalry is created which will
be mixed throughout the evening with more overt sexuality and male aggressiveness" (154). The
role of the MC, who directs the audience behaviors, and the costumes of the dancers are
fundamental elements of the performance and the interactive erotic drama that develops. As
Margolis and Arnold point out, the MC encourages the audience to scream for their favorite
costumes and dancers and, to "behave in a certain way in order to get the desired results" (154).
While behaviors vary between performers and spectators, they include kissing, licking, biting,
scratching, and ripping off articles of clothing. Dragu and Harris suggest that performances that

40For more descriptive accounts of the kinds of carnivalesque behaviors and interactions that unfold in male strip
clubs look to Alicia Hurley's thesis “Bitten and Spanked: The Male Revue as a Liminal Setting,” Liepe-Levinson's
work previously cited, Margolis and Arnold's essay “Turning the Tables? Male Strippers and the Gender Hierarchy,”
Montemurro, Bloom and Mandell’s essay “Ladies Night Out: A Typology of Women Patrons of a Male Strip Club”
and the autobiographies of Troy Kline and David Henry Sterry.
produce such behaviors are a "welcome inversion of traditional roles" where women can be the aggressor and men can capitalize on their erotic appeal (82). However, when the performance moves away from a club setting to a private party, the circumstances can change without warning. Circumstances can change from gig to gig or suddenly shift in the middle of a performance, requiring the dancer's approach to decorum be adjusted.

In private contexts, removed from the theatrical elements of a traditional theatre-like experience of a club (such as an announcer, defined stage, lighting and effects, state of the art sound system, etc.), a dancer can never be certain the same decorum and interactive practices established in a public show will be recognized, or the same rules and behaviors will be as accepted as they are in a public club setting. For example, if a dancer is a surprise at a party in a hotel room, someone's basement, another type of venue, or possibly somebody's backyard, it does not mean that all members in attendance are in favor of the dancers' presence or willing to participate in the performance. Circumstances are situational. Costumes, regardless of simplicity or complexity, and a spectator's awareness of the dancer's bodily presence do not always have a positive impact upon the sexual stimulation of the experience. Therefore, the gender performance of a dancer in a private show can be a spontaneous reaction to the circumstances, where the dancer adjusts the performance to the wants and willingness of a particular audience. This scenario, however, is rarely represented in film or television. Rather, the stereotypical scenario with excited, willing, intoxicated participants, and an interactive performance without spectators' rejection of the performer or performance is typically staged.

Critical descriptions and representations in the media and scholarly descriptions highlight the aggressive sexual nature between performer and spectator and the erotic behaviors that are
the cultural expectation for these performances. Filmic considerations of how gender is constructed for a male strip performance never display dancer/spectator relationships other than as willing public displays of erotic aggressive excitement toward the event. Examples of stereotypical scenarios with carnivalesque behavior are evident in the 2012 *Magic Mike* film and in the various documentaries I address below. The gender performance of a male stripper is not always a repeated series of acts. While a hyper-aggressive sexuality is the common description of how masculinity is performed in the male strip shows, such a performance is only embraced by audiences who are willing and want that kind of masculinity. A dancer may approach his performance as a pre-scripted representation of heterosexual eroticism developed by shared cultural norms and passed down as convention, but he must be prepared to adapt his gender performance to the circumstances of the event.

Gender, as gender theorist Judith Butler maintains, is instituted through the stylization of the body and best understood in ways in which bodily gestures, movements and enactments create the illusion of an abiding gendered self (154). For Butler, gender is not a given one is born with, rather gender is constructed; it is an abstracted, socially constructed perception, which is rendered concrete through acts, conventions, and performative accomplishments historically accepted over time. Butler states that, “the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time” (157). The body comes to bear cultural meanings, and is understood to be an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities.

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41 Many of the previous listed critiques on the male strip show highlight the aggressive sexual nature between performer and spectator, including Petersen and Dressel “Equal Time for Women: Social Notes on the Male Strip Show,” Margolis and Arnold “Turning the Tables? Male Strippers and the Gender Hierarchy,” and David Henry Sterry’s book *Master of Ceremonies*, plus a variety of film examples that will be addressed below.
Within each gender performance, societal roles and behaviors are associated, thus these roles help to realize and justify the actions of an individual. When I approach my strip performance, I understand my goal is to provide a similar version of the improvisational and interactive antics written about or displayed in popular films. I know I am expected to perform my gender according to acts, conventions, and performative accomplishments the industry and culturally circulating media representations have established as socially expected practices. A hyper masculine stylized act from a muscular heterosexual male that aggressively and erotically engages the audience is what I assume is the expectation. The erotic aggression of the performance is, to use Richard Schechner’s definition of performance, a “restored behavior” ([Performance Studies 29](Performance Studies 29)). I repeat and follow these expectations because I understand that they are expected. While I know that erotic aggression is not the only approach, I perform this persona even though I may not necessarily always agree with it, because it is the style that is typically expected by the audience; it is the cultural norm for this kind of performance.

My performance is learned from mimicry and shared cultural norms that have survived, and have been passed down from other dancers and in time have become conventions. I enter each performance with a predetermined attitude to support the erotic persona I display in my process of imitation. I work under the assumption that the audience has preconceived expectations of my performance from previous experience or witnessing similar examples from the media. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. The ideal reaction to my hyper-masculine thematic representation is sometimes not realized and, in fact, it can result in the exact opposite response. Sometimes no matter how hard I strive to embody the physical and social expectations suggested by the industry and the media, my performances feel inadequate, inappropriate, or
unwanted, because my relationship with the audience or our expectations are not mutual. Examples of such experiences are illustrated below.


Magic Mike: Mirroring the Private Party and the Public Show

As I have noted above, the differences between public and private strip shows regarding the circumstances of the events and the context inhabited by the spectators influence a dancer's performance and the way he chooses to engage his audience. Unfortunately, as I noted above, examples in the media that juxtapose public and private settings often exhibit performances and expectations that mirror each other. The film *Magic Mike* provides examples of strip performances in both public and private venues where circumstances between performance relationships and expectations differ regarding performance venue and general purpose, but the interactions and outcome remain consistent. The interactive performances between dancer and spectator visually reiterated in each scenario display the same physical interactions, which are often critiqued for being aggressive and hyper-erotic. The clips situate the dancer's implied social authority and dominance over a female audience, displayed by his cocky attitude and aggressive interactive acts of strength and power. These representations, which fund an implied social expectation in the real world of male erotic dancing, are commonly found in cinematic portrayals with equally aggressive women going wild over costumed, cocky, aggressive men.

Most of the erotic male performances exhibited in *Magic Mike* are in the club setting where a distinct audience/stage separation is apparent and the MC verbally engages the audience to establish the rules, boundaries (or lack thereof), and expectations for the performance. Similar club settings are commonly examined in academic critiques on erotic male dancing, and as
Petersen and Dressel explain, "The announcer has major responsibility for creating the club atmosphere and for sustaining it throughout the show" ("Equal Time" 191).42 In the film, the troupe leader, Dallas, serves as the show MC and plays a pivotal role in establishing the carnivalesque decorum within the club. He orchestrates overflowing excitement and enthusiasm from the female patrons with witty banter, adult humor, and erotic gesture. He jokingly addresses the interactive behaviors that the law forbids before declaring that his audience appears to be full of lawbreakers ready for a wild, interactive show.

The MC functions as an energetic promoter helping the audience to become comfortable with the erotic and interactive nature of the show. The audience, as Margolis and Arnold explain, "Is kept in check by constantly being told how to behave through the patronizing and infantilizing prattle..." of the MC (160). Dancer and MC Cisco also confirms the vital role the MC plays in creating and sustaining a heightened atmosphere in a strip club. He states:

The MC gets the party started. Much like an opening line to a paragraph, you tell the audience, (you tell the reader), what they are going to read or see. You go into it a little, but then when it's all done, you tell them what they saw. So, you explain to them, for all of those that have not seen this before what you're about to see: the etiquette, the tipping, what's expected of them as the audience, what to expect from the dancers, how to interact with them. I want them to feel comfortable, I want them to have fun, and know it's for them, for their entertainment. (Cisco, Personal interview)

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42 As noted in the introduction, the heterosexual club setting is the context most examined in academic critiques. For descriptions on show structure, audience interaction, and expectation see those studies cited in the introduction as well as the list provided in the previous footnote of this chapter.
Cisco jokingly compares the role of the MC to that of a "sexual ambassador," explaining how the MC can coordinate audience wants with dancer efforts to help produce the best possible experience for those in attendance and to help line the thong of the dancers with tips. Providing commentary and giving voice to the visual experiences within the club, the MC facilitates power and control between the dancers and spectators as their interactions occur.

Beyond the often wild and physical interactions, the club setting is an atmosphere relatively controlled with regard to the fact that the paying audience has chosen to attend the event, and by doing so willingly acknowledges that they are entering a place where the usual rules of social decorum radically shift toward the erotic nature of sexual excess. Patrons pay the price of admission and expect quality service from bar staff and performers, as well as a professionally structured show with various routines, playful erotic games, and interactive experiences. The club atmosphere *Magic Mike* displays is a good example of an eager audience expecting an entertaining show structure from dancers who perform prearranged choreographed group routines and individual acts in a variety show format. The show operates with a theatrical decorum of rules and behaviors based on the expectations and abilities of each dancer, and his willingness to freely interact with the crowd at various stages of undress. At the request of the MC, the audience's interactions and responses increase as more of the dancer's costume is removed, suggesting that fewer restrictions and rules of decorum are upheld as costumes are discarded, and more impromptu physical interactions are expected.

However, private parties, or what Liepe-Levinson calls "strip-o-gram(s)" (*Strip Show* 210), do not have the advantage of a built-in mediator regulating polices and establishing expectations. Private parties operate situationally, and are therefore highly improvisational with far fewer built-in expectations than a club setting. For instance, a stripper might arrive to perform
for a mid-afternoon birthday surprise to find that he is to dance in the backyard for someone turning sixty, as her two German shepherds run freely and her grandchildren play nearby on the swing set. The physical expectations and erotic decorum become an immediate negotiation, as the dancer determines if: (1) the surprised participant is willing; (2) if the dogs will be overly protective and possibly bite and nip at the dancer and his materials; (3) what content, if any, of the performance is appropriate for underage children in the nearby vicinity.

Private shows are normally independent solo gigs with less structure or theatrical enhancement and less established control due to limited time, unknown circumstances, and uncertainties of varying locations. When a dancer moves away from the structure and organization of a public performance space in a club to a solo assignment at an independent location, he is presented with unique situations. While some parties may react similarly to club performances, no two contexts are ever alike. The dancer's experience with a party can be lonely and full of rejection where the majority of the audience ignores his presence and denies any of his interactive advances, as often as it may be full of ego-boosting female admiration and willingness to participate with his gimmick and erotic actions.

The private party, "strip-o-gram" scene in Magic Mike where dancers Mike and Adam perform at a sorority house, exhibits how performance context regarding venue and expectation can vary and have uncertainties that a performer may encounter when the work shifts from a public to private setting. As with most every private party, there is no MC, no predetermined stage, and no additional theatrical enhancement other than their costumes and the radio they carry. This scene does, however, establish the nature of what an ideal party would look like with a best-case scenario from the performer/audience relationship. The dancers arrive as a surprise,
the women at the party respond with excitement and enthusiasm, and the two dancers quickly engage in a sexually simulated interactive romp throughout the room.

In the film, the dancers enter the house in what appears to be authentic police uniforms, reporting complaints about noise and underage drinking. Upon entering the living room and requesting identification for proof of legal drinking age, Mike identifies a "suspect" believes to be falsifying her age. He requests other party members to be seated as he places the suspect against the wall, spreading her legs in a frisking position. After inquiring if the suspect has any sharp objects or weapons that could be harmful, the music starts and he rips off his pants, informing her, that he, in fact, has something pointy and dangerous in his pants. Screams and laughter immediately erupt from the women as the dancers quickly remove their costumes and engage the enthusiastic women by lifting and grinding with them on the floor, chairs, and tables.

Notwithstanding the narrative conflict that unfolds concerning the drugs and altercation with male guest in the next room, the private party scene with dancers and female audience displays a considerably informal, extemporaneous performance where the relationships and expectations between the performers and spectators are noticeably altered from the club setting. Instead of a structured performance, we immediately see how the physical setting has an impact upon audience expectations. The show begins instantly upon the dancers’ arrival and there is an immediate free-for-all carnivalesque romp; the audience/stage separation is non-existent as the stage is any open space between the audience, and rules and boundaries are not discussed before beginning the performance. In approximately three minutes, the film displays the general essence of how a private party can play out: a costumed entrance and establishment of presence, a quick costume removal, consensual physical engagement with the guests, and a quick exit.
Another notable example of a private male stripper party is exhibited on the Border2Border Entertainment documentary *I'm a Stripper* directed by Charlie David. By following three male strippers that perform in different contextual settings in three different geographical locations, David acknowledges the professional hierarchy within the business, the status that comes along with each level, and some of the extreme variations of performance and audience expectations that exist in different settings. One moment in the film exhibits Jeremy, a dancer in the Niagara Falls region, as he negotiates his entrance into private settings and executes his police and fireman routines during various gigs before going to work at a public strip club. The film provides momentary glimpses of Jeremy entering the residences of two different parties and physically grinding on the attendees as he strips. Like the private scenario in *Magic Mike*, this clip also suggests less structure and theatrical professionalism due to the impromptu nature of the setting and uncontrollable circumstances. The moment mainly highlights the quick costume removal and consensual interactions between the dancer and his audience similar to what is provided in the *Magic Mike* narrative.

While the segment of Jeremy's private party unfolds, an interview from Penny Levin, the publicist for the Las Vegas show *Thunder from Down Under*, cross cuts providing value statements about the quality of performance one can expect from a *Thunder* show and your average "party stripper." As Jeremy is seen bending one female spectator over a chair and aggressively rubbing his billy-club between her legs, Levin's voice over remarks:

> We are a non-tipping show because we believe that if you buy a ticket everyone is equal. Have a good time with it. We don't want dollar bills thrown in the faces or the crotches of the guys. It elevates us to a very different level than (this isn't a
put down) a guy that is working birthday parties or bridal showers or whatever and is knocking on the hotel door and is coming in in his policeman outfit and stripping and working for tips and stuff. God Bless, if you are really good at what you do that's fine but we are a show. We're not just strippers. (Levin, I'm a Stripper)

While it may not be Levin's intention to "put down" men that strip in a manner other than for the more notable Thunder show, the value claims embedded in her statement nevertheless critiques the quality of performance a spectator gets from one type of performance over another. Due to the geographical location, significant budget, and heightened theatricality, she argues that her Thunder show is elevated to a "very different level," thereby suggesting the performance the audience receives from a guy working the private party circuit is of a lesser quality, and the dancer is of a lower caliber than the men in her more notable Thunder stage show. Although there is some accuracy to her value sentiments given the differences in budget, location, and theatrical expectation between the Thunder show and a private party, the bare essence of each performance is the physically erotic act of removing a costume in a teasing, entertaining manner. Regardless of the status of the event and its location, the end game is the same in both instances: a well-sculpted, unclothed, male doing erotic physical movements, and an excited audience.

I'm a Stripper invites the viewer into various male stripper scenarios allowing the viewer to make certain value judgments. Jeremy not only does private parties, he is also a premier dancer at his local club. In Magic Mike, as the film follows the dancer’s work in both public and private settings, we observe similar circumstances portrayed. While Levin argues her case for difference and status between shows like Thunder and private parties, I'm a Stripper does a great job at comparing franchised Vegas shows, regional clubs, and the private gig. The show elements
that are continuously exhibited in both films are the eager and willing spectators and confident
dancers who exude strength and eroticism, thereby suggesting similar audience reaction for
every performance. However, what is excluded in these films are scenarios where a dancer enters
a private space, uncertain of the interest and willingness of the attending audience, and any
immediate adjustments that the dancer must make to best serve his audience.

Status and Strategies of Performance

The examples in both films suggest that, regardless of circumstances, there is minimal
difference from the essential performance of a male dancer in the public or private setting; the
audience is always thrilled when the dancer removes his costume and is willing to engage in
aggressive and erotic interactions. Critiques in relation to positions of power and control
regarding these scenarios vary as scholars evaluate gender role inversion and the gender
hierarchy in the male strip show. Most studies have been based on circumstances in a
heterosexual homosocial club environment where both the dancers and spectators are
predominantly heterosexual and white, as seen in the private and club scenes of both films.
While Dressel and Petersen argue that a male strip show is a liberating “equal rights”
environment where the women rule and have a secure atmosphere to experience camaraderie and
can “act themselves without restrictions” (“Gender Roles” 156), Margolis and Arnold see the
purported role reversal in the male strip show as illusory and the widely-touted interpretation of
the male strip show as a symbol of women’s liberation as false (157). With these filmic
examples, we see how both views are substantiated. Both in the clubs and in the private party
eamples the women seemingly act wild without social restrictions, while the dancers physically
demonstrate power and force by manhandling them throughout the space.
Extreme physicality is the commonly accepted practice as Dragu and Harris posit from their viewing experiences in Canadian male strip clubs. Their descriptive experiences support cultural critic Jill Dolan's assertion that, “the male strip tease is often styled on traditional male aggression” (82). Dolan argues that such interactions and extreme displays of aggression exhibit how the traditional paradigm is not reversed, and that male sexuality is still active, privileged, and displayed. She explains that, “simply trading gender positions isn’t as easy as it sounds… Women cannot simply express their subjectivity by objectifying men. A nude male in an objectified position remains an individual man, not necessarily a representative of the gender class” (61). Dragu and Harris, however, believe issues of power in the strip show are really, “a matter of seeing what you believe” (82), based on individual perceptions and willingness to participate. They argue issues of power and control are irrelevant in the case of erotic strip performances as, "questions of power reduce to questions of status...” (82). For Dragu and Harris, different levels of status along with the given circumstances of an event influence the performance allowing the ways in which power and control are handled to vary due to the show context and the overall reactions of the audience.

From my experiences, both arguments are relevant. There can be an inversion of power in situations when women are not willing to physically participate. Some women may refuse to participate, tip, or give into the carnivalesque nature of some strip shows as they only want to witness and not experience any of the interactive antics. Some may refuse, unless they are persuaded by their friends or a specific performer. In either situation, the participant establishes power by determining if, when or how she will engage the event. I have witnessed women refuse any of the interactive elements of a show, and I have equally experienced women only willing to interact with specific dancers. When participants openly exercise their right of choice
in any situation, they are establishing their position of power. However, much of the show content in most scenarios exhibit a reaffirmation of men’s dominance. When the audience openly submits to the interactive antics of any performance, and is used as a prop or erotic stimulus for certain moments, they relinquish any power they may have had. I suppose I feel powerful in these moments, However, I do not believe that it is power over women that I experience, but the power to control a moment and the audience's (or individual's) attention.

My perspective supports Dragu and Harris's urge to look beyond the cultural assumptions of stripping and view the act of stripping as simply entertainment involving, "the creation of a sexual commodity or an object of desire” (82). Power fluctuates based on the context and location. Understanding public and private shows as both a service, as well as a sexual commodity, have an impact upon the comparison between public shows in club settings and private strip-o-grams. Public club shows generate a theatrical decorum where a formal setting and structure produce a certain valued entertainment in relation to the financial investment patron's supply for the overall experience within the club. Private shows are more often a made-to-order erotic commodity with informal expectations and procedures. All in attendance may not be aware of the surprise performance or be willing to participate. When a dancer is ordered for a private engagement, the focus becomes more on how the dancer negotiates the events of the performance. Without the help of an MC to set the mood and prepare the crowd for the traditionally aggressive and erotic encounter, the dancer must quickly establish a relationship on his own while assessing how best to fulfill the order. This does not mean the dancer must abandon an aggressive persona; he simply needs to adjust his aggressive actions and interactions.

Club shows are events in which patrons expect to be submerged into an erotic environment surrounded by sensual entertainment for the length of the show. In these settings
Dragu and Harris argue, "the abusive attitudes that sometimes accompany desires are not inherent in desire itself and should not be allowed to taint our views of human lust" (83). Desire, lust, and over exaggerated eroticism are common traits in public show settings, and are the elements that help to fuel conversations about power relations and interactive behaviors in these events. However, private party scenarios do not always turn out like the scenes in films as desire, lust, and consensual engagement with the performer/spectator relationship are conditions more commonly met in the public club setting than in private parties. The differences, as I describe below, concern the willing and consensual interactions and the differences between public and private settings.

As I have noted, the private party scenes in *Magic Mike* and *I'm a Stripper* are similar to the club scenes in that they exhibit desirous and lusty interactions produced from what Dressel and Petersen call “anticipatory socialization” ("Equal Time" 196). These willing and consensual interactions result from encounters of "limited duration" with unclothed dancers and excited women creating feelings of unaccountability, invulnerability and increased openness to the experience ("Equal Time" 196). While erotic and hyper-masculine costumes along with displays of cocky and aggressive masculine strength, power, and dominance over a female audience are established expectations within a public show setting, this type of masculine performance is not always what is wanted or expected to satisfy a private audience. When this is the case, a disconnect between the dancer/audience expectations can result in conflict, unless circumstances are addressed and on-the-spot adjustments are made in an attempt to satisfy the unexpected circumstances. Later in this chapter I explore different examples of circumstances in which adjustments were required in order to best serve the audience and conditions of the moment.
Castle and Booking Agencies: Generalities and Uncertainties of the Work Order

My final example of mediated narratives sensationalizing gender performances in private party stripper scenarios comes from ABC's award-winning detective series Castle. While this example further clarifies how representations of male strippers are stereotypically created in film and television, it also brings focus to booking agency practices and representations of male dancers promoted on Internet websites. Castle's season three, episode seven, "Almost Famous" uses a private bachelorette party with a male stripper as the inciting incident to the episode's murder mystery plot. In this episode, reports of an officer down quickly shift to a confirmed stripper dead, when the body, in a police uniform, is accompanied by some questionable gear. "Officer McNaughty's" tear-away pants, outdated badge, and water gun filled with tequila confirm the investigation team's suspicions, and lead the team to a bachelorette party, a male stripping agency, and a male strip club in search of a killer.

The guests from the bachelorette party are taken to the police station for questioning where their phones are confiscated as evidence. Photos confirm McNaughty's performance, as numerous images in various stages of undress flash across the screen. Although the party only unfolds via photos, the visual collage establishes the same contextual scenarios as presented in Magic Mike and I am a Stripper; that is, it reveals a group of young women, drinking, celebrating, and having a wild night with an erotic “officer.” However, the element that is most salient in this episode to the purpose of this project is the initial suspect's mention of the ordering process from an online agency, and the investigator's follow-up questioning of the agency manager. The suspect compares hiring a male stripper to ordering take-out. When asked how the party was set up she states, "The same way you would order a pizza. I called this place that I
found online, Macho Men, and gave them my credit card; $300/hour to send my best friend off in style" (Castle "Almost Famous").

The episode progresses with the agency manager at Macho Men confirming the gig of the murdered dancer before demonstrating the disingenuous hiring process common to the industry. Without inquiring if they have dancing skills, performance experience, or interest, the manager offers the detectives, who pose as would-be dancers, to work with his company because they have a popular look. While these initial scenes are filmed with a flair for comic staging and timing, they are a good example, albeit an encapsulated representation, of the male dancing industry private party segment that does not have established requirements, regulations, or sanctions for individuals to become "talent" and be considered qualified entertainers. This scenario reinforces Ricky D's initiation story in the last chapter, as well as my own experience entering the industry, of being in the right place at the right time without having any real skills or experience of being a dancer.

When asked to address the way a dancer books a private party, most dancers whom I interviewed agreed that the work was either self-generated from meeting clients in club settings and by word of mouth, or by working for online entertainment agencies. Several dancers I interviewed addressed working for various companies, thereby implying their allegiance to quick money and not to any one agency. Dancer Caesar explains:

I work for a company called Pittsburgh Strippers in this city; actually, I work for any company that is willing to offer me money. I also work for a company based out of Chicago and a company based out of New York. They contact me and ask me to do private parties they get that are local around here. (Caesar, Personal interview)
Depending on availability and location, most dancers contract through third-party agencies whenever they are not touring with troupes or dancing at an established club. Due to the limited duration of a private party and situational circumstances, dancers commonly book work before and after tour and club shows to increase the profit margin for any given night. We refer to this practice as the "hustle," a term meaning an attempt to maximize work opportunities in any given night. The goal is to accept as many gigs that can logistically fit into a night's schedule, and effectively complete the work orders without causing conflict between bookings. Due to the ease for customers to access online agencies and book a dancer, as suggested in Castle, many of the private parties a dancer receives come from Internet agencies. However, elements regarding agency-booking practices can be problematic for both the dancer and the audience. The language many sites use remains broad in order to permit a very open interpretation of the work that is actually being contracted.

The work that I contract from agencies is often inconsistent and unreliable. I may be booked frequently for parties at times with multiple gigs a week coming my way, and then I will go extended periods with no work. While I have a personal relationship with some agency owners from previous engagements over the years, other agencies have received my information from referrals and only contact me when they need coverage in my geographical region. Some of these agencies, even ones I have worked for numerous times, have never seen me perform, met me in person, or know how I handle myself in situations where I fulfill work agreements as a representation of their company. However, as long as they do not receive any negative feedback and I make my required commission deposits, they continue to provide bookings. As long as the job is complete, I am never required to explain or justify my approach to completing a gig.43

43As examples, here I reference three agencies and their websites that I have contracted work through in different areas of the country over the past fifteen years. I have worked for others, but these are the ones still prompting their
The company, *Pittsburgh Male Strippers (Wild-Thingz)*, is one example of a company that posts vague descriptions for customer inquiries about expectations. Their response about process and expectations in their frequently asked questions section explains, "There's not much to it. The entertainer will arrive with all the equipment they need. You'll pay their show-up fee, ask any questions you have, make special requests. Once they're ready, the party will begin*" (*Pittsburgh Male Strippers*, http://www.pittsburghmalestrippers.com/guyz.html).

A different agency, originally named *Ohio Strippers*, has changed its name and edited the site since my initial time of it being accessed, but is still valuable to acknowledge. Now, *The Original Male Strippers* has streamlined much of its content but still connects from its previous web address. The site once explained:

... our exotic dancers will come to your party and perform a show that lasts on average from thirty minutes to an hour. Exact show length is based on audience participation and size of the audience. Your entertainer will dance for the girl of honor for a couple songs, then get everyone else involved in the act with some audience participation. Lastly, he will perform any special talents and fulfill any special requests. Remember, the more fun and outgoing your group is, the longer the dancer will stay! (http://ohio-strippers.com/ohio-bachelorette-parties/)

While the above hyperlink will transport you to the company's new page, the updated site has various new links to frequently asked questions that provide more condensed answers. The question, "It says 30-60 minutes per dancer, how long do they really stay?" clarifies that:

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services online. In Pittsburgh, PA *Pittsburgh Male Strippers* at http://www.pittsburghmalestrippers.com/guyz.html. In Toledo, OH *Skin Deep* at http://limotoledo.com/skindeep/. In the Midwest serving the area from Cleveland, OH to Chicago, IL *Ohio Strippers* at http://ohio-strippers.com/ohio-bachelorette-parties/. While each site is unique with aesthetic and functional design, a thorough Internet agency search reveals similarities with content regarding expectations and purpose.
The length of time each entertainer stays is approximate and not guaranteed. Times could be more or less depending on crowd size and participation. You could always get a stripper to stay longer by tipping them. You can go to the bank and get enough singles for everyone. This allows your guests to exchange their larger bills for your singles. (*The Original Male Strippers*, [https://malestrippers.com/faq](https://malestrippers.com/faq))

Although the clips from the cited films do not provide extended examples of private parties, the descriptions from these sites establish how expectation is promoted and how execution is subject to the behavior of the party.

These agencies are attempting to explicitly promote a stylized performance with a specific representation of hetero-erotic masculinity by glamorizing lean, macho, muscular men. Profile pictures of agency talent available on most sites exhibit representations of hyper masculinity; strong developed bodies positioned in eroticized poses to accentuate masculinity as a way to entice fantasy and presumably excite heterosexual women who are looking for the perfect way to celebrate and spice up a special occasion. Many of these images provide exaggerated notions of muscular masculinity by displaying men with bodies developed to a point of plasticity where, like action figurines, their muscle appears ready to burst through the skin. The language on these sites highlights heterosexuality and gender relations based on heightened masculine eroticism along with physical strength displays and submissive scenarios as exhibited in the above-mentioned films.

A very specific definition of erotic masculinity is suggested for male strip shows in both club and private party settings. As demonstrated in the films, male dominance and interactive participation are the implied expectations for private performances. However, even though
websites provide customers with pages of information and options, the information is openly vague about specifications for a reason. The images and language are attempting to aid in the production of a fantasy. However, the reality is, the agency is more concerned with the purchase and payment of the idea more than how, or if, the fantasy is fulfilled as expected.

The *Skin Deep* agency provides a promotional caution that other agencies use fake pictures and lie about the talent they send just to get your business. They warn, "Chances are the models on their site are fake. When your dancer arrives, they will give you a bogus reason as to why your requested performer didn't show," and these companies will send anyone just to make money (*Skin Deep*, http://limotoledo.com/skindeep/ ). In a different approach, *Pittsburgh Male Strippers* more openly acknowledges that not all dancers are featured on the website as some of the entertainers wish not to have their image and current occupation publicized online. The company promises that all entertainers meet the company's highest standard and are "hand-picked and well-trained," and that the company will do everything they can to send the dancer of choice. They warn however:

- dancers are independent contractors and are free to opt out of any work we assign them. To increase your chances of getting the entertainers you choose, be sure to book as early as possible, and it also helps to have flexibility with your start time. Also, don't forget to give us a long list of dancers you would enjoy. This way, when your top choices are unavailable, we'll be able to send you your backup picks. We'll make sure your back-up dancers fit the general profiles of the ones you picked. (*Pittsburgh Male Strippers*, http://www.pittsburghmalestrippers.com/guyz.html)
Pittsburgh Male Strippers' underlying implication addresses Skin Deep's warning that the customer is purchasing a service, and while they may prefer a particular dancer, they are not purchasing a dancer, only the service that the agency is offering to help facilitate. To clarify this point, when I left the Pittsburgh region for graduate study in 2007, I remained posted on the Pittsburgh Male Strippers site for nearly seven years before they updated their content and removed my image. Upon contracting with Skin Deep, in the Toledo region, I became the main dancer and was posted on their site for nearly five years before I left the area. The site still promotes strippers; however, all images have been removed, as the company tries to remain true to its warning as detailed above. The owner has since aged out of the business and no longer has a reliable network of dancers. He tries to fill work orders but does not promise any specific dancer. Finally, as of November 2016, The Original Male Strippers highlights my image on its site for the entire state of Ohio as well as portions of Michigan and Pennsylvania. Ironically, when I first started contacting with this company, my image was not associated with their site. Now, as I write this, I no longer contract with them, but I remain as an active option for interested customers. Ultimately, many agencies provide images and describe expectations with general sweeping claims, because, as a third-party intermediary, they are more interested in the booking fee than how each dancer fulfills a work order. The implications with much of the language of the websites imply that each dancer's procedure is subject to personal nuances and their understanding of professionalism and party expectation.

As vague as some companies are in their advertisements and warnings to customers, the information they send in booking agreements is equally vague; what an audience can expect for a performance is never fully addressed. The reason for keeping language broad and ambiguous is due to the inability for a specific standardization for these types of performances to be
established. Agencies do not attempt to describe specifics with any private party, rather, they allow the imagery of the site and the personal assumptions a customer will make to excite and develop their fantasies and expectation about the experience with a private male stripping party. The implication is that while there may be unstated expectations for the performance, for both performer and spectator, the relationships for each booking are developed and defined on an individual basis, shortly after the dancer arrives and begins his performance.

Due to the practices of many booking agencies, it's hard to clarify how a party may experience a male strip performance and exactly how masculinity is performed on a show-by-show basis. I provide an example work order in Appendix D. The order exhibits how the content of the work detail can be vague, as is the case with most companies. While customers may call and order a favored dancer, the company is providing a service not a particular dancer. A public show setting provides dancer variety and a show modeled from preexisting ideas of a male strip show. Audiences have a good expectation of what a show will include. However, a party booked through an agency lacks dancer variety, and may more easily result in a performance that is displeasing to the audience (for any number of reason). Since there can be some shadiness to the online agency booking practices, displeasing experiences for audiences, or discussions from audiences that reinforce negative stereotypes about performances of erotic masculinity must be scrutinized for specific clarity. The critique of performance of masculinity in a private setting must be based on the context and the actual dancer that performs and not from assumptions made about the work concluded from pictures or videos posted on a company's website.

Negotiating relationships and expectations of a party upon arrival is commonly the case with private parties. My experiences described below in two back-to-back parties are prime

44 An example of a past work order is provided in the Appendix D. The content and details are very basic, and even though the party provided two preferred dancers, they received someone different- (me).
examples of these negotiations. In each case, I found that the level of male privilege and power that normally accompanies my stripper performance in a public show was trumped by the context and given circumstances of the occasion. The age and in some ways the class of the clients (especially the first party) ordering the service influenced the amount of aggressive ego and masculine dominance I implemented in my performance as I found desires for comic spectacle and humiliation for certain members of the party were the key factors for ordering the erotic performance, instead of a desire for a physically aggressive hyper-erotic interactive show.

Power: Privilege and Authority in Search of Profit in the Private Sector

Power relations within the stripping industry between performer and audience as well as issues of control, violence, domination, explicit behavior, and physical interaction are complex and controversial topics that continue to be points of debate in scholarly analysis. As Katherine Frank posits, "Perhaps the most ubiquitous question in the strip club literature to date concerns gendered power—whether dancers are exploited or exploiters, subjects or objects, agentic or oppressed" ("Thinking critically" 504). Specifically, she argues that attending a strip club is very much like a "touristic practice," where power operates fluidly through interactions, ideas and symbols, and neither the performer or patron have, "more power naturally, physically, financially, or emotionally (G-Strings 154). Scholarly arguments on power that position power negotiations as fluid, highlight how questioning the position of the exploited and exploiter in the sex industry continue to be complex as the interplay between power and powerlessness require a nuanced examination of relations in various contexts and locations, and the struggles from each side.
Power can be defined as the capacity of an individual or a group to realize their will or ability in the opposition of others. In "The Subject of Power," Philosopher Michel Foucault argues that, "power relations have a specific nature," that the analysis of power relations demand that various points be established (135). His second point is specifically important to the analysis of this chapter. He focuses on, "The types of objectives pursued by those who act upon the actions of others," where power becomes defined by the "maintenance of privileges," "accumulation of profits," and, "the exercise of statutory authority," among others (140). An analysis of Foucault's second point, focusing on the above-mentioned ideas, helps me establish how unstable power relations can be understood when a dancer leaves the public sphere and is forced to manage his identity and his performance materials in various impromptu private situations. While most scenarios provided in the media focus on stereotypical and sensationalized examples of erotic masculinity that reinforce cultural assumptions of masculine dominance in both public and private erotic dance, examples of power struggles and negotiations in the private sphere, and power inversions including increased spectator rebellion, dancer confusion, and overall tension are never highlighted. In her article "Working the Fantasy Factory," sociologist, Elizabeth Ann Wood argues, "power is understood to be a contested, negotiated social resource that is constantly being enacted during interpersonal encounters" (7). Below I provide personal examples along with first-hand experience from my interview participants, which highlights Wood's notion of power negotiations during private interpersonal encounters. I emphasize how privilege and accumulation of profits in a private venue, or a dancer's ability to exercise erotic authority is never a guarantee. The negotiation of the dancer’s materials and constructed identity along with his analysis of the occasion and his audience establish how power is constructed and executed in private settings.
On the Road Again: My Position and Authority in the Private Sphere

It is Saturday night and I have four gigs on my schedule. It's been a slow week so far; a go-go dancing shift at a gay bar on Wednesday, and a shift at the female strip club last night. Usually I only work at one location per night; however, my gigs for tonight are a fast-paced ordeal, scheduled without a moment to spare. Four performances, at different locations, all in one night, is an ambitious hustle requiring substantial travel, strategic planning, organization, and time management. Each performance presents a new topography with its own set of rules of engagement. My first two shows are private parties booked with the online entertainment agency currently offering me gigs. Party one is a birthday celebration at a private residence, and party two is a 40th wedding anniversary at a banquet facility. My goal for tonight remains the same; enter each location with a fun and engaging performance without appearing to be in a rush or concerned about future responsibilities, put on a good show, and exit efficiently with as much money as possible. This goal, unfortunately, is not always achieved.

With hundreds of private parties under my belt, I know that each gig has experiences, interactions, and surprises that must be handled with a delicate balance of preparation, luck and improvisation. I understand that I cannot please everyone in every event, but with the right approach, I have a better chance of pleasing the majority. To improve my chances to please my audience, I must be able to alter and adapt to variable desires.
Tonight's first party requested a cop routine. While my costume may not have quite the same authenticity as those presented in the *Magic Mike* private party, it continues to be effective. The materials I use for most of my performances are simple and straightforward. For instance, the materials for my police officer identity (displayed in figure 6) consist of a mock police uniform made from a seven-dollar-bargain black shirt decorated with a fake badge and patches, a pair of overused black tear away jeans, and an old police jacket donated many years ago from a friend on the force. My police belt and wooden baton were stolen from me long ago during a private party; so, a whistle, broken pair of h and cuffs, five-dollar aviator shades, and my improvised replacement for the billyclub, which is a double-sided dildo, complete the props I use to create my erotic authority. The accompanying promotional shot below in figure 7, of dancer Jay Rock sporting his cop attire, exhibits another example of a simple costumed approach for an erotic officer—blue jeans, mock police shirt and badge, Mag-light, and a water gun.
Although I have ample props and accessories to accentuate all of my costumes, I have grown jaded toward the quality of my performance materials. Over the years, numerous costumes and props have been misplaced and stolen in hectic performance situations. While I always strive to entertain and hope that I look visually appealing, my efforts have stalled with regards to upgrading and replacing lost materials. I have long since peaked in this business, and at this point in my career, I have acquired all of the costumes and props that I am willing to collect. My main objective as I begin this night of four gigs in a row is to capitalize on my investments, and maximize my return for the remainder of my time in the business. If performance items come up missing, I improvise and make do with other stock materials. Up until this point, I have never received a complaint regarding the way I construct my erotic personas. Most of the settings I perform in have dim lighting with intoxicated patrons, and my cynical mindset understands how these visual obstructions benefit my outward appearance.

Entering a private party in costume helps to establish the mood, create anticipation, and develop the decorum for the performance. My hope for any party is a fun energetic audience that
is willing to participate, experience the moment, let down any conservative barriers they may hold, and graciously tip. At 6 PM, I explode into my first party with my usual ego-filled entrance line, “Ladies, I’m not here to protect and serve, I’m here to undress and service.” Unfortunately, this night, my customary entrance does not break the ice as I hope. My erotic ego was an epic failure. The wailing sounds of my whistle combined with my over confident smile framing my presentational erotic authority produce glares and silence and not the giggles and screams that I anticipate. Looks of uncertainty and annoyance shrink my inflated ego and crush the foundational character traits I attempt to implement.

Upon arriving, music and celebratory energy fills the dreary October air, piquing my anticipation as I make my way around the house to meet my contact. Just like the example provided in Magic Mike, I am requested to surprise the group and the guest of honor by addressing complaints of excessive noise in my entrance. However, the host's excitement for my arrival abruptly shifts to agitation and annoyance. My technical needs and set up time seem to hassle and frustrate the host as if the whole plan to surprise the group is ruined. Within seconds of my turning the corner to the backyard patio, the circumstances become clear. Their scheduled timing for my arrival is horrible and I am requested to perform outside. I am in a transitional moment of the night just before dinner when the group is waiting for their limousine. The ladies huddle around the tiki torches and heaters surrounding the patio. The guests are more interested in staying warm while they smoke and sip their drinks than in going back inside for a better location for my performance and purpose.

By the end of the gig, I come to find out that I was a complete surprise intended as a prank on the guest of honor. Why the host believed it was be a good idea to order a stripper when no one was expecting it, nor in support of it, and then ask the stripper to perform outside in the
cold was dumbfounding. Granted, I could have asked to move the party inside to better suit my needs. However, it was equally not my place to tell the party how to handle their space or judge their hospitality and etiquette. I have a tight schedule and every second counts. I accept the circumstances, plug in my radio, and try to make the most of the situation. Unfortunately, my entire performance, right from the entrance, is a complete and awkward bust.

The police-themed entrance music, which I utilize to set the tone, establish character, and enhance the mood, results in stares and unpleasant responses. It is quite evident that no one is expecting this kind of performance. My confidence is crushed after overhearing, "Who does this guy think he is," "this has gotta be a joke," and "he better stay away from me," in those brief moments of silence as I plug in the radio. Unlike the *Magic Mike* party, the form fitting costume accentuating the size and definition of my arms does not help authenticate my erotic presence or entice this group to willingly accept a total stranger into their celebration. At that moment, I knew this was not going to be fun.

The usual protocol was not going to work. Portraying a hyper-erotic ego along with physical force and erotic interactions would not win this crowd over or make my job any easier. With most parties, I anticipate a group ready to cut loose and drop their standard social formality for a short period in order to engage in the erotic festivities and comic repartee. However, once I realized this party was not going to provide the desired response and reaction, I quickly reassess my protocol and the circumstances with which I am working. I have no desire to be there anymore than they want me there. The gig quickly becomes an emotionally painful job. It is not my desire to be belittled, to dance in the cold, and be ignored any more than it is the group's desire to have an unwanted surprise forced upon them.
The group is clearly disinterested with my presence and purpose. Facial expressions and reactions of objection make me even more skeptical that my simulated use of a "double-dong" dildo billyclub would play on phallic humor and stimulate the audience's approval for physical interaction and erotic engagement. In my usual performance of the cop routine, I follow along with prerecorded dialogue. I position the guest of honor in the center of the group, and bend her over a chair facing her audience, before I slam my crotch into her from behind to the prerecorded vocals that jokingly state, "I'm assuming she has been in this position before." After a simulated frisk and pat down where I place my "double-dong" billyclub between her legs, I normally instruct the guest of honor to "grab my club!" as I squirt oil in her hand and request her to, "show everyone exactly how to lube up a dong." The common response to these sexually heated interactions usually mirrors the reactions from the women in the *Magic Mike* party scene. Outburst of cheers and laughter confirm a group is on board with this type of erotic exchange to embarrass the guest of honor. However, this is not the case with the party's clear lack of interest and the birthday girl's blatant refusal to participate. Severely downplaying the hyper-erotic character I usually present is my only option. As the group unresponsively scrutinizes me, I decide to eliminate all physical interactions and to end the gig the first moment I can.

Even though entering a private party in costume usually helps establish both the moment and the activities that are about to unfold, the performance ultimately operates on an unaddressed level of mutual consent. Normally, the act of ordering a stripper for a private party means the individual making the purchase is acknowledging that this is a wanted type of a performance, that those in attendance are on board with the idea, and that there is support for the erotic nature of the entertainment. However, as this party makes clear, this is not always the case. Therefore, in addition to making a memorable entrance, and establishing the nature of my erotic character,
my immediate task is to evaluate the level of interest and assess the willingness of the group in order to better negotiate how I proceed with each spectator. The entire performance is an ongoing negotiation of the rules of engagement. Although my act is based on play and impromptu rules developed on an erotic parody of a themed character, each member of the audience may have a different expectation for my show and diverse willingness to participate. With this group, on this night, it is clear there is not going to be mutual consent with the usual carnivalesque interactions. While I always enter a party with the hope that a group is open and excited about my presence, this is not the first time performing for a group that is less than interested in my performance. I am prepared to adjust and alter my performance to something that I hope will fulfill their expectations of the job and lead to a quick exit.

Although I have a general structure to all of my routines, my performances remain largely based on play and improvisation. Play, as Dutch historian and play theorists Johan Huizinga explains, "contains its own course and meaning," and unfolds within certain limits and time (53). When parties anticipate my performance, and engage the interactive elements with mutual consent, I am granted certain privileges and permissions for the duration of my performance. Play, "casts a spell over” the participants (Huizinga, 53) within the limits of the time and space of the party; the party becomes an adult playground and lasts until the group has reached its limit. However, when a group is uninterested in the entertainment, my ideal routine is substantially affected. When interactive play is not agreed upon due to different limits and expectations, interactive play then contains a different course and meaning, or does not exist at all, because a spell is not cast over the space and its inhabitants. In these scenarios, my approach to negotiating the rules of play must heighten and take a different course of action to determine acceptable levels (if any) of eroticism, vulgarity, and physicality the audience may be willing to engage.
Taking into consideration the disapproval and disinterest of the first party, the frigid outdoor conditions, and the transitional state of the party moving on to a new location, I decide to ignore my props and erotic accessories, and eliminate all of the physically interactive elements of the performance. I remove my usual tools of play that add both comedy and heightened eroticism in order to reduce the chance of any further negative reactions. I assume that the dildo and handcuffs will not carry an acceptable and agreeable limit of usage with this audience, and that the props might take on unwanted meaning.

The blaring music pours from the boom box, as I politely hold the guest of honor's hand and whisper my intentions into her ear. I assure her that I understand she is not happy about the gag being played on her, and it is not my intention to ruin her night or make my obligations any more painful. Instead of the full-blown interactive show, I simply place her in a chair and give her a basic lap dance at an appropriate distance, minus all of the kinky props and erotic interactions. Less was more in this case.

The group is still not interested, no one is tipping, and I am outside dancing unclothed in the cold for what feels like solely for my benefit. Women shake their heads in disapproval as I advance; they back away as if I am too close, and ignore most of my performance. I feel as if I am a starving leper forced to approach and discomfort people on purpose. My goal for this party quickly becomes to finish with an ounce of dignity and move on to the next party where I hope to be more valued and appreciated. The kinds of interactive play and physical improvisations displayed in *Magic Mike* and *I'm a Stripper* demonstrate what Schechner would consider "dark play" in that it involves fantasy, risk, daring, deception, subverted orders, and excess (*Performance Studies* 119). As exhibited in the films, there is usually a shared balance of dark play between the performer and spectator where risk and daring meet excess in various erotic
interactions. However, my party's unwillingness to engage in my performance limits their engagement in dark play, which thereby places most of the risk, daring, and excess on myself causing me to assess the physical rules and expectation they are willing to accept.

Liepe-Levinson addresses this disparity of expectation that occurs in performances with multiple players. She cites Erving Goffman's notion of “ceremonial order” to point out how the morality and values that play generates, reinforces the observance of the rules in order for play to continue (qtd. in Liepe-Levinson, "Striptease" 25). She notes that, "the consent of all the parties is implied through their continued presence," ("Striptease" 25) and that attendance suggests an "expected and agreed upon exchange whereby the participants of an event 'render themselves accessible and usable for a particular type of communication or activity'" (Goffman qtd. in Liepe-Levinson, "Striptease" 25). This felicitous result, however, was not the case with the circumstance of my first party. The order was subverted and the roles were reversed as the group established power and control over the situation and my performance through their unwillingness to participate. Even though the group remained near the impromptu staging area and witnessed my performance, consent was not implied through their continued presence. Their presence alone did not signify nor could I expect their willing interaction.

In shows at public venues, spectators willingly attend and pay the price of admission for the content of the performance including daring interactions and the excessive nature that play generates in the public sphere. The show builds on the willingness of the participants to remain, witness, and experience the event. This is often the case for a large percentage of private parties where the male stripper is an expected element of the night's festivities. Willingness to reciprocate play can enhance the overall experience of those watching as well as those participating. However, this convention is rendered void when a dancer is an unwanted surprise,
and the audience is both unwilling to engage in the interactions and equally disinterested in witnessing the event.

In situations like my first party, any type of interaction can become aggressively problematic. I understand that my physical encounters with a spectator while I simulate the use of a double-sided dildo reinscribes patriarchal dominance over women and potentially reinscribes notions of sexual violence, yet the gesture and act plays on socially understood use of phallic humor, generally acceptable within the frame of a striptease. When the crowd displays enjoyment through cheers and giggles, my actions are validated, thereby suggesting the exploits are not viewed as violent. They are acceptable within that context due to the nature of play for the performance and the rules accepted for that "playground." Although my intentions are meant to be comical and humorous, they still simulate force and aggression. However, crowd outbursts of cheering and laughter accord with it as an act of play despite the actions' meaning outside of this context. 45

It remains a mystery to me why aggressive behavior and forms of role play, where the dancer forces his erotic form upon a semi-intoxicated spectator, like those presented in the cinematic examples, result in positive reactions of laughter and increased tips from her friends. I repeat these actions in my routine as they are learned behaviors acquired from watching other male strippers over the years. Aggressive physical scenarios are the socially accepted expectation in erotic performances, concomitantly reinforced through media portrayals. "However politically and socially imperfect," as Liepe-Levinson posits, the mutual consent between the participants is, "an integral part of their sexual-erotic games and pleasures" ("Striptease" 30). Even though my

45 While the intention here is to make a spectacle of the guest of honor or other spectators and produce comic outbursts from the interactions between the performer, participant and props, it is not hard to see how implied rape and sexual torture is exhibited by restricting the participant and forcing myself and other objects upon her body.
usual approach simulates a horrific encounter of public sexual assault and violence, within the frame of play, the gestures appear to please most crowds and produce the desired reactions of delight and amusement. The comic/erotic enjoyment that I perceive an audience experiences from witnessing these encounters suggests that such acts and behaviors are veiled by theatrical erotic humor, and become socially acceptable within this contextual frame. However, in situations like my first party, when audience interest and enjoyment is nonexistent, an immediate reassessment and adjustment of tactical procedures is necessary or I run the risk of my actions being understood as blatant sexual assault and battery.

There is undoubtedly a blurred negotiation between gender objectification and sexual assault in these situations that create a very volatile understanding of power. The women at my first party are in both financial and physical control as they dictate the value of my presence and the expectations they are willing to accept. I am usually able to interpret an audience's desire, (in both the club and private settings) for an interactive experience with my show from the transactional communication and symbolic act of having dollars in their hands and their physical interactions of tipping for bodily interactions. These participatory gestures suggest they are effectively providing their consent to proceed by their willingness to engage in interactive tricks that simulate sexual acts or erotic encounters. In environments with celebratory atmospheres where mutual consent is in evidence, the balance of power is in favor of the dancer as he establishes his physical dominance and sexual authority through displays of strength and the spectator's submission into erotic positions. Although the spectators have the financial control when choosing to order and pay for the erotic performance, the act of providing additional funds for their enjoyment of the experience, coupled with cheers and positive reactions, provide ego boosting energy that urges the dancer to overtly perform erotic masculine power. However, the
act of ignoring the entertainer and refusing to participate in the performance eliminates the necessary elements to build a positive rapport with an audience thereby removing any performance power the dancer may possess.

Issues of power and balance challenge how we understand positions of control during the performance of a male stripper, as many of the interactions simulate public eroticism and pornography. Critiquing acts of pornography, feminist poet and cultural critic Adrienne Rich argues that, "The most pernicious message relayed by pornography is that women are natural sexual prey to men and love it; that sexuality and violence are congruent; and that for women sex is essentially masochistic, humiliation pleasurable, physical abuse erotic" (127). Heterosexual male stripping acts often re-inscribe these notions of masochism, pleasurable humiliation, and erotic abuse by linking simulated aggression and violence with normative heterosexual encounters. While many of the physical tricks a dancer may perform on a spectator simulate mutual transcendent sex acts displayed for example in the Kama Sutra and are therefore frequently considered pleasurable, other tricks are considered more hostile and forceful.

The documentary I am a Stripper provides supportive evidence of the aggressive and violent desires of some female patrons. One scene highlights how certain patrons that find the act of choking an erotic element of their sexual fantasy. One of the dancers from the film, King, clarifies, "I actually grab girls by the throat and push them up against the pillar on a regular basis and the entire place whimpers and freaks out, and girls actually want me to do that to them. It's insane" (I am a Stripper). As he comments, a montage of clips from a club performance display his aggressive tactics and the pleasurable response of the crowd. Such aggressive interactive acts are common, and some patrons commonly return to witness and participate in similar moments of heightened erotic play. Whether it is an erotic rush to be the center of attention in such
moments, or the need for physical erotic play for personal fantasy fulfillment, aggressive interactions are common, and when staged right, they often receive a large amount of crowd support. Even though tricks and interactions can be construed as cruel and sadistic due to the physical humiliation projected on participants through extreme thrusting and humping actions, and erotic body manipulation where dancers lift, flip, and spin participants, Rich’s point is not universal if applied to all male strip shows. Equal amounts of violence and aggression can come from audience members that want the physicality, and even want to push the boundaries that a dancer tries to establish.

Anti-pornography and anti-sex positive feminist arguments such as Rich’s posit that women-identification is a source of female empowerment, which can change the social relations of the sexes, and “undo the power men everywhere wield over women, power which has become a model for every other form of exploitation and illegitimate control” (144). Aggressive and violent erotic interactions continue to keep this kind of “play” circulating as not only acceptable, but also expected. As violent and aggressive behaviors and debasing images circulate, they continue to validate their existent. However, more sex-positive scholars take a different view by rejecting the idea that sexual objectification in sexual fantasy is oppressive. To reiterate Dragu and Harrison's point I made earlier, it is a matter of seeing what you want to see in scenarios of pornography and strip shows. Desires of submission and domination are a part of human sexuality. Aggressive pornography or interactions in entertainments like stripping (which play on the pornographic) challenge these notions in support of a more sex-positive attitude where sexual expression is more open to interpretation.

46 In the next chapter I examine one specific example of aggressive play where I watch in astonishment as a dancer forcefully mounts a patron on the floor before pulling out her weave and simulating sex with her hairpiece. The audience erupted with approval by rushing the stage and covering the dancer's body with money as a sign of support, as the assaulted patron remained on the floor smiling and laughing at the aggressive erotic act.
Issues concerning the acceptability of power and control based in male strip shows remain a challenging topic to assess due to the sexually aggressive behavior and interactions that are, within the context of the performance, often considered acceptable expectations. The context of the situation and the manners in which rules of play and engagement unfold determine how power and control is established and upheld. In the case of my first party, the erotic masculine identity I chose to present was initially based on a representation of erotic masculine character identified by the symbolic costume pieces covering my body. The context of the party and the manners in which the audience and I engaged each other determined how power and control were established throughout the performance, and ultimately how I performed my masculinity.

Performing outside in the cold, along with the uninterested audience and my inability to negotiate willing physical interactions, completely altered my ego-centered, confident, erotic display. Most parties laugh and chatter throughout the performance while taking numerous photos of the event, which I interpret as a party that is happy and satisfied by the experience I am providing. I highly doubt the work I did in the first party was satisfactory and met the expectations of my audience, as there were few if any photos and minimal laughter. There may not have been any preconceived expectations because I was a surprise element that no one was expecting. Alternatively, maybe I completely came up short on meeting the group's physical expectations because unbeknownst to me they had requested a specific dancer and that information was omitted from the agency. Maybe they were disappointed that I was not the requested dancer but chose not to complain and unhappily accepted my presence by ignoring the work I attempted. Regardless of the reasons, the party's unwillingness to participate with the interactive nature of my performance established their power over the situation, thereby altering how I approached my performance.
It is also possible that the reasons that this party did not provide the more common reaction stemmed from my status and competence. While I assume my costume and accessories are satisfactory, maybe this group viewed me as un-authentic. Maybe I read my audience wrong, and using my props and tools would have created a better comic/erotic rapport. Alternatively, maybe the problem with the missed connection between the performer and spectator was the event itself. Having to perform outside in unfavorable conditions may also have been a detrimental factor to a more receptive reaction. It is also possible that scheduling my arrival so early in the evening influenced their reaction, and had the party been later, after a few more drinks, the response and result may have been quite different. Sometimes, even though the idea of having erotic entertainment at an event seems like a good idea, an appropriate connection between the performer and audience never materializes.

Gig # 2- 7:30 PM/ 40th wedding anniversary/ Location- banquet facility / The request- a Cowboy

A thirty-minute commute across town after the first party places me at the banquet hall holding tonight's 40th wedding anniversary. Stripping at a wedding anniversary is a rare scenario for a private gig, but with all private bookings, anything is possible, and some requests are, at times, strange and unexpected. With strip shows, as Liepe-Levinson points out, "there is never an exact reason or accounting for a person's fetish or costume choice in terms of sexual play" (Strip Show 82). I'm no stranger to peculiar requests as, for example, I have stripped out of an Elvis Presley outfit, a Santa suit, and a chicken costume. The costume, as Liepe-Levinson posits, "provides a particular trigger or entry point into the whirlwind and 'scene' of sexual desire" (82). My hope is that my trigger provides a more favorable reaction from this party. Dealing with rejection in two consecutive parties would almost be unbearable.
I call ahead to confirm the party. The husband explains that I am a surprise to "repay" his wife for making him the spectacle at his last birthday party with a female stripper. He provides no further details except his request for a more rustic form of masculinity with a cowboy costume. Upon arrival, I retire my police outfit for the night. I make the quick costume change and transitional maneuvers into the next persona in the parking lot before heading into the building. I replace the cop costume and props with a tattered pair of tear away blue jeans, black leather vest and cowboy hat to finalize my character construction; the costume is simple but effective as displayed above in Figure 8 and below in figure 9.47

Figure 8: Cowboy outfit and materials. Picture provided by the author

47 Again, I provide a promotional shot of dance Jay Rock as a display of the effective simplicity of the costume. As exhibited above, his costume is minimal yet effective. The cowboy is one of his defining character identities, supporting the notion of popularity for this character.
My expectations are lowered upon understanding the venue, celebration, and the reasons for ordering my service. I am a reactionary gift to what the husband was previously subjected to, meant to humiliate his wife in front of friends and family. The positive side of this scenario is that at least the awkwardness of this engagement is somewhat expected. I will not be blind-sided by any disinterest and unresponsiveness similar to my last party. Being informed about the surprise factor and the diversity of ages in attendance allows me to alter my tactical approach. I will not make the same mistake as I did at the previous party and expect an anxious group in an intoxicated frenzy wanting my interactive antics and heightened masculine eroticism. I now expect my role to be more of an erotic clown, one who can negotiate appropriate behaviors with more of a cartoon-style sexual humor suitable for all ages.

My costume remains the same as it would for any cowboy request. However, understanding that I am intended as a gag gift for embarrassment, and not as an erotic stimulus to jump-start a ladies-only celebration, I make some minor adjustments to my performance prior to
entering the building. First, stripping to a thong is out of the question. No matter how open- 
minded this party might be, the thong and its contents are holstered under a tight pair of go-go 
b Briefs, as I highly doubt any insinuating phallic play, either silly or serious, is appropriate for 
everyone in the audience. As a precautionary strategy to avoid immediately offending anyone, 
especially this family’s matriarch, I also eliminate my usual brash introduction by cutting my 
more vulgar and insinuating entrance line: “All right ma’am! Just as a true cowboy does to all his 
fillies, I’m here to ride you hard and put you away wet.” I leave the lasso in the trunk as I 
question if it would be appropriate to tie up or insinuate any erotic whip play with the matriarch. 
Also, to be on the safe side, I eliminate most of my vulgar and erotic gestures that exhibit 
excessive crotch-grabbing and aggressive sexual thrusting.

Clearly, this is not my ordinary target audience, as it is full of men, women and children 
of all ages. Other than the husband, no one else is aware of the prank he has arranged as part of 
the night’s festivities; parents quickly scatter with their youngsters, and other uninterested guests 
flee the dance floor, as I start hootin’ and hollerin’, at the start of my music. While I am semi-
informed of the husband’s intentions, I am not completely sure whether his goal was sexual 
embarrassment from an R-rated, erotically loaded weapon, or something a little less risky. Still 
feeling modest about levels of acceptability, I have no desire to explore my interactive 
boundaries, or be any more socially uncomfortable as their court jester. As expected, my erotic 
value and privilege is diminished with reactions of disinterest similar to the first party. However, 
I am more prepared to situate myself in this context and to overcome any unresponsiveness by 
radically reducing my typical amount of physical interaction and sexual simulation. I perform an 
abridged version of my routine consisting of three songs while creating an arts and crafts project 
with the guest of honor.
Understanding the delicate nature of the situation, and the fact that this type of celebration is not the common atmosphere in which to have a stripper, I tactically choose what I assume to be a more suitable approach to the party. I attempt to implement a more cute, silly, and harmless eroticism rather than being aggressive, dominant and egotistically naughty. I playfully dance around the matriarch prodding her to engage in my silly antics and rodeo gestures. I whisper in her ear promising her that I'll behave if she just plays along and follows my lead. I request her permission and assistance to remove the layers of my costume in preparation of a "special talent," climaxing my routine with a body paint segment. This is my tactical maneuver to keep the physical interaction to a minimum while simultaneously creating an artistic souvenir.

![Figure 10: Multiple image slide. Pictures provided by the author](image)

The arranged slides above labeled as figure 10 display my erotic artistry as a simple press/copy procedure, which combines a childish art process within an adult context. Poster paint, a brush, a cup, a T-shirt, along with baby oil and a cleansing rag are the needed tools. This is one of my specialty routines that I usually reserve for public show settings as a strategy to set myself apart from other dancers. I typically exclude this specialty practice from private gigs because it is an inefficient and messy process requiring additional props and tools, and additional time and energy for proper cleanup. However, in party two's scenario, the added tools, time, and sequence are a better approach to situate my character for this audience. My performance of masculinity isn't about strong, aggressive Western eroticism; rather it's about childish tomfoolery and playful engagements with a reduced sexual tone.
To the predetermined song, R- Kelly's 1994 number-one hit "Bump-and-Grind," I display my tools and creative supplies in front of my audience before engaging my body as an erotic canvas. I ask the matriarch to help paint a red heart with a smiley face on my chest before placing a white shirt upon my body in order to create a print of the body art. The shirt becomes her cute souvenir of the event, and I am able to utilize the reveal of the memento as the climax of my routine and the cue to my exit.

Due to the nature of this celebration, the array of ages in attendance, and the heightened possibility of offending members of the party, or breaking indecent exposure laws in the presence of children, I implement this approach as the best alternative to a more rowdy, rough, and raunchy erotic cowboy. My masculinity is portrayed more as silly, soft, and sensual than it would be if I were dancing for an aggressive, rowdy, intoxicated private party. I consider the playful print as a more suitable climax to my routine instead of the more common ending, which is likewise exhibited in the above-mentioned films, that is, by removing my pants and grinding on individuals in the crowd. Thankfully, the guest of honor willingly plays along with my antics, and happily accepts her husband's act of marital retaliation. She accepts her role as the spectacle in an act of comic revenge in front of her friends and family. Everyone that stays to watch laughs with her as she plays along. She seems embarrassed yet amused, and the husband appears pleased. My exit is abrupt, as I do not want to extend my stay or the uncomfortable feelings of other guests. I quickly pack my materials, accept payment, and move on to my next hustle eighty miles in the opposite direction. Although there is no tipping during the performance, as it appears

48Below I provide the link to the music video created for R- Kelly's "Bump-and-Grind" song I mention above to allow the reader access to the musical material as well as the images and content associated with the song to better experience and imagine the erotic nature juxtaposed with the silliness of my artistic approach.

• https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Amhj_dujiU
that no one is aware, prepared, or willing to place themselves in the mix of my hootin' and hollerin' antics, I am surprised at the husband's generosity when he nearly doubles my expected payout. I could not have asked for a better way to offset the previous party. The first two parties are complete and the night presses forward.

My experiences with these two parties were similar yet the outcomes were vastly different. My presence for both was a surprise to most spectators in attendance, and an ego-driven, aggressive erotic character was not ideal for either scenario. I entered in character and completed the performances with various forms of eroticism and interactions while negotiating what I perceived was wanted and acceptable for that moment. While I am uncertain how my use of props would have influenced my first gig, I feel comfortable in my choice to exclude phallic props and reduce the physical interactions I usually utilize. I'm more certain that the creativity of my approach in the second party made for a more suitable performance considering the diverse ages and interest levels. In both cases, I significantly reduced the egotism and aggressiveness that usually accompany my erotic characters in an attempt to provide each party with what seemed to be a more appropriate attitude and passive approach.

The context of each party ultimately influenced the performance of erotic masculinity that I provided. Both of the performance events and settings required a more improvisational approach removed from stringent performance expectations. While the settings were impromptu locations, suitable for my one-man show, my usual erotic performance was not the most suitable form of entertainment for either event. It is for this reason, that in similar scenarios, the adaptability of a dancer is crucial, as not every context is expecting the same types of engagements that are displayed in the above-mentioned films.
While my erotic masculinity may be the rehearsed and stylized acts of a gendered self, not all of the shared cultural norms and sanctions that have been passed down as conventions and expectations of male strip shows are appropriate for all occasions. The moment of the performance as well as the context must be considered as part of the active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities. A strong, ego-driven, aggressive, physical masculinity is not the only masculinity that is performed in the role of male stripper. The manners in which status, societal roles and behaviors shift depending on audience wants and expectations justify altered actions of an individual constructing a gendered image for the performance of an erotic identity. In tonight's party, I was able to adjust certain attitudinal elements that normally accompany my characters, in an attempt to better serve the situation and produce a gendered identity more suitable for each setting. Ultimately, my performances became a performance text unique to each party.49

In each example, I initially prepared to engage a work order for an erotic performance based on a restored behavior and cultural memory of how "male stripper" is performed. However, the circumstances of each party warranted a reevaluation of the typical performance and necessitated presentational shifts with regard to how I performed erotic masculinity. While the elements I pulled from my costume chest constructed my identity as "stripper," my personal ability to modify the delivery and execution in each context supplied a masculine representation based on my ongoing analysis of each location. The materials, or to return to Wesely's term, the "body technologies," that I both implemented and omitted played an important role in the construction of my character and the unfolding performance. The choice to omit interactions with handcuffs and a dildo in party one resulted in a much less offensive and aggressive

49Below in the section Dancers Respond I support these claims with reactions from other dancers who alter their performances based upon contexts.
masculine representation when compared to the previous cinematic examples and compared to my typical portrayals of the “cop.” Equally, my choice to include crafts in party two created a less erotic performance that was more socially acceptable among the diversity of ages.

My approach to each party was by no means standardized. I performed what I perceived to be the more desired representation for each context. While the initial stylized performance of any dancer may remain consistent in most public or private settings, the way a dancer approaches public and private engagements requires adjustment and adaptability. Public shows have a set of expectation and decorum associated with an interactive, variety-style, theatrical model. The model is contingent on the audience accepting the terms and conditions of the fantasy-driven interactive behaviors that are implied when purchasing admission and entering the venue. Due to the uncertainty that comes with private parties, dancers must be prepared to alter and adapt their performance to better accommodate any circumstance. The ways in which a dancer utilizes his materials to accentuate his erotic characters can be the difference between a dancer satisfying the expectations of the audience, or completely misreading the circumstances, resulting in an uncomfortable situation for all.

Dancers Respond: Costumes, Props and Adaptability

The uncertainty of circumstances at private parties was a topic many of the dancers addressed in their interviews. A specific discussion regarding similarities and differences between public and private shows was never a focus of the interviews; however, it was a recurring topic. The dancers all agreed that private parties were a great way to earn fast cash, but they addressed how the uncertainty of some bookings challenge preconceived notions of the job requirements and what is expected in the performance. The differences between props and
costumes used for public and private performances were also a recurring topic. While all of the dancers expressed having many of the same performance tactics and expectations for most of the public shows and private parties where they performed, they all addressed the need to adjust to the given circumstances of the event. They addressed how having a fixed performance structure and character persona could be problematic. As I have noted above, each occasion requires a negotiation with the circumstances of the party in order for the dancer to have the best chance at pleasing his audience and successfully completing the job.

Dancer Jay Rock comments on the uncertainty of each performance and how every setting fluctuates, stating, "Some girls don’t want it, some girls do. Your space may not be enough for what you need to do/ what you want to do. So, you have to adapt to every single thing every single time. Hell, two weekends ago I did a party on a trolley" (Jay Rock, Personal interview). He continues to address the issues with confinement and visibility while (in this case) performing in a moving, crowded vehicle. Spatial limitations constricted his movement and the way he physically engaged the audience. Being visible, as opposed to being behind closed doors of a residence, also restricted the interactions he felt comfortable with. He explains:

Each venue, each party changes and you have to adapt to it and some venues like that one [the trolley]; everyone can see into that. So I couldn’t go too far. I couldn’t do certain things because people could see. As to where if I’m in a house and all of the windows are closed, all the blinds and doors are shut – you do a little bit more. You flirt a little bit more. You grab them some. You don’t do that when people can see into the windows because people are going to be like- "what the hell is going on in there?". (Jay Rock, Personal interview)
For Jay Rock, not only does restricted space affect his performance, he also felt uncomfortable performing some of the more erotic simulations due to the visibility in the vehicle.

Cisco's understanding of the presentation of erotic masculinity at a private party furthers the idea of variable labor practices, which Jay Rock was implying, and how the execution of a performance shifts according to perceived and actual expectations of customers. He comments on an occasion that replicates the reactions described in my first party discussed above, and the realization that he was an unwanted surprise element at a particular celebration. Cisco explains:

At that point you’re like, I just want to get paid. You just want to figure out what their deal is. Like, "what do you want? Why am I here? Are you here to watch me dance? To say you had a stripper?" Some people want to go through the rite of passage and open the door, “Okay I had a stripper,” and close the door. I’ll be that guy; pay me! I’ll come in, dance for like ten minutes. I’ve done that and actually sat and talked to them for like a half hour afterwards because that’s what they were comfortable with. It happens. (Cisco, Personal interview)

Cisco's reflections address shifts in his approach to performance after realizing that the audience was more interested in the idea and the symbolic meaning attached to having a stripper, than in engaging with the performance and performed persona. He specifically addresses adjusting to the crowd based on monitoring the audience reactions to his interactive tricks:

If I’m going to do some tricks that are more sexually charged, and I get a nice reaction out of the PG-13 ones, then it just encourages me to go to rated R [tricks]. If they (the tricks) do not get encouraged, then I bring it back down to a PG or a G. I’ll smile more, or I’ll become more aggressive and cockier.

Sometimes they like me to be harder like the Marlboro man. Sometimes they like
me to be the happy cowboy, so sometimes I’ll smile more. It depends on who they are; if they are a group of older women, then I’ll probably be more smiley and sweet, depending on what the crowd wants. (Cisco, Personal interview)

Unintentionally he addresses age as one possible status factor, along with his own preconceived notions of how to engage audiences differently. His analysis implies that every audience has its own limits and expectations, and it is the dancer's responsibility to determine the best performance practices in each scenario. He also explains how variations to his cowboy performance change in his performative representation. Fluctuations between his "happy and smiley" cowboy to a more aggressive and rough representation are common depending on the audience reaction. He states:

You have to be able to spin it and think on your feet. You have to have several tricks. I have different variations of my performance, and different variations of my tricks. If they [the audience] are not going to cooperate then sometimes you have to fold that trick and move on to another one. You gotta have something else in your tool belt to pull out and be like, "OK you want to be the center of attention, then I’m going to embarrass you thoroughly and spank you on the ass, drop your drawers or do something completely ridiculous to you, sit you down on the ground and ride you like a bull, because I’m a cowboy. I bull ride. (Cisco, Personal interview)

Cisco's variations identify different versions of the same performance based on the perceived wants and actual reactions of the audience. These differences exhibit variation in the performance of masculinity as a dancer decides how to best perform his character based on expected audience desires. In this example, he trades in his smiley, happy cowboy persona
presented for one audience for a more aggressive persona that forcefully engages rowdy spectators that display desires of being, "taken, pleasure-pained, or suckered" (Liepe-Levinson, *Strip Show* 154), by de-pantsing, and spanking them, and making a spectacle of their rowdiness.

Adjustments to a dancer's routine may occur for any number of reasons due to spatial restrictions, audience restrictions, or unexpected feelings of uneasiness for the dancer. Jay Rock offers a story detailing initial fears that a gig would turn out to be disastrous, when in actuality it turned out to be one of his best memories of working in the business. I offer the story at length to provide both an extensive reflection from the source, and a strong example of how adjusting to the context of a party can be immediate reactions to the circumstances. Jay Rock recounts:

I was sent to Cleveland to do a party. When I got there, I called the party. It was for a girl in a wheelchair with cerebral palsy. Her cousin said, "I want to meet you outside real quick," then she told me all of this. She explained the things to be aware of and asked if that was all right, and I said that was fine. She said, "I'm just being cautious because you can't pick her up and do stuff." So, I say, ok well I'll do my spiel for her then; I'll pick some of the other girls up and play around. I said that I'd adapt to it and it's not a big deal. So, I went in there and this girl was just all happy and giddy. She was just a barrel of fun, having the best time in the world. She had just turned 21, she was drinking a little bit and she was having a blast. When I got done with my normal stuff, my first song or two, dancing for her all the way down to my thong, I started working the crowd. I basically let her tell me who she wanted me to pick on. She would say, "her next, then her next," and I'd go and pick them up and dance for them, and she would laugh and get a kick out of it. It felt really great because I was a part of something she had never
experienced before. It was fun. It was one of my best memories. (Jay Rock, 
*Personal interview*)

Jay Rock’s account summarizes the argument of the chapter: performances of erotic masculinity are contingent on the context of the location and the circumstances of the scenarios. Although he does not provide specific details about performance choices such as costume or props, his account addresses the importance of taking the circumstances into consideration and adjusting both his physical performance and character accordingly.

More than a year after our initial interview, Jay Rock alerted me via a Facebook post of a more recent party that was added to his best memories list. On his promotional page, he highlights a memorable night surprising an unexpected guest of honor. His post comments, "This

Figure 11: Jay Rock with the “lil lady” turning 90. Picture provided by dancer Jay Rock

lil lady turned 90 Sunday. Her granddaughter thought since she is so wild, she needed a stripper for her birthday. . . Let me tell you she was sassy and full of pep it was the funniest thing to see this lil lady crack jokes and smartass comments to everyone as she had a blast." This example further highlights the importance of addressing contextual circumstances for each gig. Even
though Jay Rock does not fully address the way he interacted with the guest of honor, it's safe to assume, that from the smiles in the picture in figure11 above, it was in an acceptable fashion that did not cause physical harm or psychological stress. While the trolley gig may have been less than ideal due to physical limitations of the space, the physical limitations of the guests of honor in his last two examples exhibit how other physical restrictions can influence the performance and overall experience.

Prop usage is a topic the dancers address for general persona construction, and as is the case when discussing costumes. Dancers generally do not address situational differences between prop use in public and private performances. The implication is the dancer makes the call of what is "needed" or "worth using" depending on the circumstances of the event. In the above-mentioned film examples, each dancer portrayed a cop in his respective party; however, different props were highlighted in each performance. The first example from the film *Magic Mike* featured a long-handled flashlight to shine in the eyes of party members, the second instance from the documentary *I am a stripper* featured the dancer using a baton to frisk his audience, while the third scenario from the episode of *Castle* featured a water pistol filled with tequila to enhance his audience's excitement and intoxicated reaction.

The subjective variation in props usage is supported in the dancers' interview responses. For instance, when questioned about the use of props, dancer Temptation's answer summarizes the thoughts and responses of many of the interviewees: He states, "You gotta have props," as he details some of the more memorable items he has seen used in various acts. "I’ve seen people come out with watermelon, cantaloupe, lettuce, tomatoes; you gotta have your props, even fire. I’ve seen it all. But you gotta have them. They keep people excited, keep the excitement going."

He describes his gimmick as an erotic chef and his play with the theme of food eroticism. He
explains, "I bring a pillow, a little quilted blanket to lay down, I have my towels, I have oils, maybe some whipped cream and strawberries and some chocolate syrup, and I can’t forget my cooking shirt and hat" (Temptation, Personal interview). For Temptation, food as a gimmick is a way to sensualize his performance without employing more aggressive interactive tactics. He takes his time to perform interactive food play and engage the idea of seduction through taste by feeding various participants during his routine.

Dancer Lightning also comments on food usage as props, describing how he squeezes juice over his body from fresh cut fruit, and cleanses his body with a sponge and soapy water from a small bucket. While Lightning often approaches his performance in a sensual manner similar to that described by Temptation, he also combines comedy and humor with his erotic food play by adding cans of whipped cream or silly string to enhance his climactic masturbatory simulation; a surprise explosion shooting from his crotch to titillate his audience. Additionally, dancer Caesar supports Temptation's statement about the need for a variety of props by detailing the outrageous list of items he implements in his fireman and "dirty janitor" routine. He explains, "I use a broom. I use a mop, a Windex bottle, rags. I use whipped cream. I use dildos sometimes; a banana, a fire hose, an ax, bucket, a chair. I use everything. Anything around us that is not glued down, we can use because we are trying to simulate sexual innuendoes in some manner" (Caesar, Personal interview). While Caesar's answer suggests he is a little less tactical than other dancers, his goal is to sexualize any item he brings to the performance to supplement his routine and enhance his audience's reaction.

Several dancers also address fire play as a main prop used in the construction of their performance. Some dancers swallow, spit, and twirl fire as part of their routine to enhance the active element of danger. Other dancers manipulate fire in less dynamic ways, and use it more of
a visual stimulus. Lightning is one such dancer who swallows, spits, and twirls fire as part of his routine. He expresses the importance of fire control as an erotic symbol in his act, as both a form of artistic self-expression, as well as a tactical tool to win audience's interest over other dancers. Lightning believes that fire play helps him to gain an economic advantage over other dancers due to increased audience intrigue and desire. He comments on the danger of fire being "a sort of aphrodisiac," (Lightning, Personal interview) where the heat and curvature of the flame have the power to visually and tactilely stimulate the audience, psychologically feeding into their erotic fantasies. The radiant heat plus the power to control and manipulate the fire can entice the audience to romanticize the dancer as sexually controlling them as he does the flame.

Dancer Cisco addresses how there is a time and place for certain acts, actions and props, and a dancer needs to be aware of the potential outcomes due to his choices. He explains, "You have to be aware of the smoke detectors when you’re spinning the fire around, and know where the fire extinguisher is" (Cisco, Personal interview). After going through a checklist of items to be aware of if using fire in a public show, such as the direction fans might be blowing, to type of flooring, he jokes about a fellow dancer using fire at a private party and accidently burning the rug. We laughed about the absurdity of the accident, and the rookie mistake of thinking that taking fire into someone's home was appropriate. However, this story points to the significance of a dancer's choice in constructing a character and performance, and the importance of awareness of the potential outcome due to contextual circumstances.

Regardless of the context, whether public or private, a dancer must assess the environment, determine the circumstance of the moment, and present a performance that is appropriate to that situation. Public shows often permit more sensational approaches to performance since the decorum is predetermined by the public nature and social knowledge of
strip performances, and pre-established rules and expectations. Therefore, erotic masculinity in public venues is often constructed based on aggressive, physical behaviors in order to sensationalize ideal notions and fantasies of strong, virile, dominant men. Costumes and props aid in fulfilling the public social expectation of an exaggerated masculinity based on the public memory of performances established by popular high-end stage shows like Chippendales. However, since the circumstances in private parties can be so indeterminate dancers must be prepared to perform in the circumstances of the event. Any number of factors can require dancers to reevaluate how they present their characters, and ultimately how they perform their gender. While costumes and props aid in the gender performance by enhancing the presentation of an erotic persona, it is the manner in which a dancer implements his tools and attire that ultimately determines how he is perceived. Therefore, masculinity is performed according to how the dancer interprets the contextual situation and implements his technologies.

Chapter III Summary

Power relations in stripping are, as Frank argues, "complex and require careful analysis" (Frank, "Thinking Critically" 506). Gender power and identity within the performative culture of stripping cannot be generalized based on commonalities found in similar contextual environments. Doing so ignores the possibilities of how power shifts, especially when embodied identities are shaped through the creative choice and performative implementations of tools and accessories for any audience. Gender may be a performance constituted through the repetition of stylized bodily gestures, movements and enactments that create the illusion of a gendered self as Butler argues. In many cases, especially with several of the men that I have stripped with, the performance of erotic masculinity is constructed from the stereotypes of stripper and the learned
behaviors from working in the business. The identity is created as an erotic illusion able to exist within the domain of the strip show setting. These performances are adaptations with shifts in gesture and enactments to fit the needs of a performance in a particular context. Once the performer exits the performance venue and steps away from the performed identity of the strip show, the power and control that may have once existed with his erotic persona is removed as he returns to enacting his identity based on more normalized and expected social behaviors and interactions.

Adaptations and shifts in the execution of tools and technologies in a particular performance can have an impact upon the expectation for both the performer and spectator. As Wesley argues, "body technologies have the potential to destabilize or challenge constructions of gendered bodies and related identities" (665). Performance theorist Dwight Conquergood first clarified how performance is a kinesis (a sort of breaking), where, performance is a, "decentering agency of movement, struggle, disruption, and centrifugal force" ("Beyond the Text," 57). Performance and performance technologies (materials) have productive capacities in the constructions of our gendered identities, as per Judith Butler, to subvert social conventions and aid in the manners in which gender is performed against those expectations so as to break the norms. Therefore, when body technologies have an impact upon or influence gender constructions for a particular scenario, power becomes contingent on the situational circumstances; an increased attention to the nuances of power relations is required for a fair assessment of gender order to occur.

Arguing in favor of Foucault's technologies of self, Wesley believes the "assessment of body technologies must leave space for how they lend themselves to more complex meanings" (645). Examining the implementation of body technologies, such as props and performance
materials, on a situational basis can affect the negotiation and meanings of identity, and consequently, power is accordingly situational based on the relationship between performer and spectator. Scholarship regarding the female strip show posits that there is a complex interplay between power and powerlessness, and gender order where tension and confusion easily arise from volatile complex relations. Power, resistance and submission are each negotiated in different manners. To return to Wood's claim cited earlier, power is not, "a monolithic social force oppressing women," but a, "contested, negotiated social resource that is constantly being enacted during social encounters . . . ")(2). While certain perspectives situate the sex industry and the strip show as an example of male domination,50 where all sex work is violence against women, and where men wield power in any sexual exchange, sociologists Erikson and Tweksbury challenge this notion, arguing in the article, "The gentlemen in the Club: A Typology of Strip Club Patrons," that female strippers, "hold the power to establish and enforce the norms of micro-aspects of their interactions with patrons" (292). Power and resistance, as well as gender identity, come in different forms, all of which can be situational.51

Examining gender order and power relations in the heterosexual public male strip show permits more generalizable analyses as extant scholarship has evinced given that the shows are generally structured similarly in that they maintain established norms based on generally accepted behaviors. In the heterosexual public show gender construction and relations follow an interactive variety show model where interactive behaviors have historically been established as

51 This is not to overlook male privilege considering the content of this study, especially white male privilege and how that is an element of my identity that I constantly carry. While, it is true that in some contexts my white power is less, it is not always more than others by virtue of my position. In most cases, white privilege is undeniable. However, the power of white privilege in the sex industry can be situational based on time, place and duration. White privilege carries less value in certain spaces for predetermined periods, specifically, in racially specific contexts (a discussion addressed in the next chapter) as well as queer contexts, where racial privilege is often trumped by the humanistic need for sex and open expressions of sexuality.
a standard, and are continuously policed by the MC. As Liepe-Levinson's study of male and female shows establishes, within the public sphere, performance structures are comparable, similar costume dramas are common, and interactive participation in many forms is the expected norm. However, because there are any number of variables that can change once a performer leaves the conditioned public sphere and enters the private sector, the established expectations of the public sphere are upheld, if and only if, the audience is informed and willing to accept and engage in the practices of the public show and if the other contextual elements of the audience (audience age, physical contours/limitations of the space, etc.) permit.

Two topics start to emerge from analyzing situational differences between public and private performances. First, erotic masculine gender performances and power relations vary based on the circumstances on the event, regarding audience status and interest. Secondly, divisionary lines dealing with the perception of professionalism between industry segments become evident. These ideas emerge in the comments from the Thunder from Down Under publicist, Penny Levin, as she provides value statements based not only on how the audience is viewed but how talent is viewed between her show and party strippers. Levin values all paying members to her show as equal because they pay the price of admission and therefore in her view, they have the right to the same experience as everyone else. Since her show is a non-tipping, non-interactive show, dancers are expected to value all spectators equally. However, in other shows, both public and private, where tipping and performer-spectator interactions are the norm, an equality value is immaterial. For instance, while I strive for my audience to have a positive, fun experience with viewing my performance, I first focus my attention on spectators that have tipping money readily visible and accessible, and those participants who appear to want more interaction. This is not an uncommon approach for dancers. Pay structures vary substantially
between independent dancers and dancers employed by professional franchised productions; therefore, the audience is valued differently based on the dancer's immediate assessment of the show. Some places are nicer, cleaner, and more accessible than others, which may have an impact upon a performance; plus, the reactive mentality of the audience is not always open and accepting, which equally affects the performatve outcome.

Agency language on website promotions tend to imply that the more fun and outgoing a group is, the longer the dancer is likely to stay. The implication here is that the more the audience tips and participates, the more likely the dancer is to cater to the party's wants and needs. This monetary incentive, however, does not mean that just because a party may be privileged with wealth and an elegant location that that party would get a better quality performance compared to a less privileged party. The dancer services the reaction of an individual and the party, as long as the party responds with appreciation and tips. The economic status of a location and a group upon arrival is not always relevant; wealthy groups do not always tip and respond positively, and less economically flourishing groups may show an unexpected amount of financial appreciation. In each case excitement as well as economic reaction to a dancer's performance has an impact upon his performative engagement. It is at the dancer’s discretion to stay as long as he wants/can based on the reaction and support he receives. While variations of performance may occur due to other circumstances, highly energetic and economic responses have an influence on the performance a dancer creates, regardless of how he chooses to present his persona.

Age of the spectators may also be a factor that has an impact upon a performance as addressed in my second party and the ninety-year-old birthday party described by Jay Rock. I chose to be concerned with the diversity of the audience and the children present as well as how best to respectfully engage the guest of honor. I made alterations based on my concerns. Along
with the physical alterations Jay Rock made in his approach to the party with the young woman with cerebral palsy, I cannot imagine he aggressively engaged a ninety-year-old grandmother with stunts that could cause injury or permanent damage. These circumstantial issues become more relevant in the private sector because they are nuanced to finer, more specific individual details, than those acknowledgeable in a club with a larger body of spectators.52

The idea of brand emerges in the acknowledgment of difference between public and private sector shows. Levin's value statement establishes the troupe’s positionality within the industry, suggesting that her high-end Vegas show is at the top of the industry and therefore represents the ideal representation of erotic masculinity and a top-notch, high-end brand. From her perspective, any strip club or touring show where interactive engagements and tipping is an expected norm is positioned beneath her Thunder and similar shows. Any dancers who work the private circuit are positioned at the bottom of her list. Her categorization is based on location, ticket price, and the quality of show and its structure, while choosing to ignore the similarities of the gender performance that her brand of dancer produces in servicing the same kinds of audiences. Acknowledging Levin's value system suggests an industry structure where erotic masculine performances are categorized based on value and expectation, and that the performances are expected to be contingent on the circumstances of the event. The structure of Levin's Thunder would suggest very little improvisation or deviation between performances from night to night. This is never the case in the private sector.

In the remaining chapter, I continue to examine how the performance of erotic masculinity is contingent on the circumstances of the event to further address how gender is performed differently in the male strip shows, and how the context of the shows situate different

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52It is relevant to acknowledge, however, that the probability of a 90-year old woman attending a strip club is unlikely. Additionally, any person under 18 years of age is not permitted into a club.
performative expectations. In chapter four I examine erotic masculinity across racial borders to address situational differences with style and execution to further expand the notion of gender contingency and brands of erotic masculinity. Race can alter the way masculinity is performed according to labor practices and expectations of different segments of the industry, thereby establishing power negotiations that are based on accepted labor practices for certain contexts.
CHAPTER IV. BORDER CROSSING AND EROTIC MASCULINITY: RACE, REPRESENTATION AND EXPECTATION IN THE MALE STRIP SHOW

While gender and power issues have been resourceful topics for some scholars to examine in the male strip show, issues concerning racial identity politics and how the performance of masculinity is constituted beyond a hetero-normative white context have been modestly addressed. The examples from film and television I discussed in previous chapters suggest most heterosexual strip shows function in the same manner, and that racial identity politics do not affect the nature of the show or gender performances. However, the reality of the heterosexual male dancing industry is that it is a divisionary business, organized toward fulfilling culturally specific sexual wants and desires based on sexuality, race and location.

In this chapter, I examine the racial partition in the industry, the transitional differences that fund the audience’s and dancer’s expectations in racially specific venues, and the cultural differences at play between racial borders in what I delineate as white and black heterosexual male strip shows.53 Through the investigation of race, space and erotic representation, both real and in the media, I exhibit how particularities in practices and expectations influence the understanding of stripping and the performance of erotic masculinity. Throughout the chapter, I address divisions based on promotional identity of racially specific companies, as well as how show and general performance etiquette often differ in the ways dancers handle introductions, costume, theme, and interactive behavior.

53These racially specific categories bleed. Not all people at these clubs are black or white. There might be biracial individuals who present as black who are there in the audience or performing and likewise at the “white” shows. The significance is that there is a majority of these races present at these respective venues and the performances and audience reactions/expectations accord with this racial definition.
While the act of commercial stripping has similarities across demographics, in certain ways the industry is racially, culturally and economically structured where performance practices and expectations generate specific performances of gendered desire, and targeted displays of masculine and feminine sexuality. As I discuss in this chapter, the norms of different racialized contexts determine how performances are structured through diverse rules, expectations and interactive boundaries. Different racial contexts can shape the ways labor practices and masculinity are performed and, ultimately, how power is negotiated. The racial demographic of a venue can determine performance behaviors, how boundaries between performer and spectator are informally drawn, and how the contact and intermingling of the two groups are determined.

I first examine the racial divide in representations of male strip shows on film, television and the Internet54 before I continue with my "night in the life" of a male stripper reflection, wherein I move away from the private sector addressed in the previous chapter and back to the public arena found, in this instance, in a predominately African American setting. I recount my experience of inferiority and feelings of being different while performing for a new audience who possesses some noticeable variations of expectations from my previous experiences. While I once believed most physical expectations and boundaries were similar across all venues in the male strip show, I now establish how physical aggressiveness, thematic style, and phallic eroticism can be executed in various approaches, which depend upon the racial demographics of the circumstances.

54By “the racial divide,” I mean racially specific venues for predominantly whites, blacks and Latinos, and the cultural assumptions that create a division between how people understand the racialized body. Specifically, I focus on the white/ black divide, as these are the experiences that have been most accessible by myself and the interview participants. However, it appears that a general Internet search for "Latino and Hispanic male strippers" provides results for companies across the country that focus on that particular market.
Additionally, I use current scholarly assessments of male stripping performances plus film, television, and Internet examples that address issues of race and male stripping, along with my reflective experiences to explore the shifting racial variables of the exotic dancing industry. As I addressed in previous chapters, each context operates under specific social norms governing each performance. I further this assessment by examining how some norms are socially acknowledged and others are continually negotiated. I believe that stereotypical stage scenarios condition cultural assumptions about the acts and actions within the strip show; however, most of the examples do not represent how the industry is often racially structured to serve particular audiences. Most of the examples I provide from media frame the acts, actions, and interactions between dancers and audience in a manner that is less sexual, interactive, and aggressive. Much of the vulgarity and physical interactions between dancers and audience are proscribed perhaps to reduce issues with ratings, viewership, and circulation. Nevertheless, these fleeting moments staged for film and TV provide insight into what happens in the clubs but they do not represent a complete picture of what truly occurs in these interactive performances. Even though media influences the social construction of the expectations for masculine erotic performance, each show and experience is ephemeral and moreover, many of the shows are influenced by racial demographics of the audience and performers, the liveness of the moment, the dancer, the spectator, and the venue of the performance.

Representation and Division: Racial Imbalance in the Male Strip Show

Cultural theorists Stuart Hall argues that identity is best thought of as a production "which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation" ("Cultural Identity" 222). Hall implies that representation gives meaning;
however, if certain factors are omitted in the representation and resulting creation of that meaning, then a complete understanding of that identity is challenged. This is often the case with representations of erotic masculine performance identity. In my early stages of working in the industry, I defined my occupational identity as simply a "stripper." As I continued to expand my performance opportunities, I realized I was constantly redefining my identity based on the venue and audience for which I performed. To my ignorant self, I was simply a stripper when dancing for a predominately white audience. However, when performing in venues where the audience was predominately men, I immaturely labeled myself as a "gay stripper" as a justification to distinguish the performance differences I was willing to do for a night's work in what I nevertheless believed was a less preferred venue. Equally, when performing in venues where the audience was predominately black, I irresponsibly labeled myself as a "white stripper" as a way to, again, justify and distinguish the performance differences I was willing to accept for a night's work in a what for me was a less common and, if I am honest, a less valued venue.

The fact that borders based on race and sexuality exist in the sex industry, especially the strip industry, yet are rarely visible in popular mediated depictions, collectively makes categorized erotic gender representations challenging. Racial and sexual identity has significant bearing on the meanings, expectations, and representation of the male stripping business. When elements of production and erotic identity are not examined across these borders, the significant racial and sexual identities in an erotic performance are occluded from scholarly or mediated

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55 To clarify this admission, I valued black shows less for two reasons. First, I receive less/no privilege when performing in these venues in comparison to when I performed in heterosexual white or gay venues. Second, as dancer Lorenz clarifies later in this chapter, dancing for black women requires more work.

56 To clarify this statement, there are some scholarly studies that examine the male strip industry and gay venues as cited in the introduction. However, there are far fewer studies that specifically address racially specific male strip show venues regardless of sexuality. cf "The World of Gay Strippers," and "Power and Control in Gay Strip Clubs" by Joseph R. G. DeMarco, and "Men Objectifying Men" by Richard Tewksbury.
attention. As I continue, I focus on how the influence of race, more so than sexuality, is often overlooked in scholarly discussions of performance and gender in the male strip industry.

Sociologists Katherine Frank and Michelle Carnes essay, "Gender and Space in Strip Clubs," addresses how race, gender and sexuality have an impact upon the expectations and identity politics in the strip club. As mentioned in the introductory section at the beginning of this dissertation, their work is one of the only scholarly efforts to examine issues of race and sexuality in the strip industry, thus illustrating, that while the act of commercial stripping may have some similarities across demographics, there are important particularities in practices and meanings that must be considered when drawing conclusions about the performances that occur in different venues. By comparatively examining the differences between male and female strip clubs for heterosexual male customers and that which occur for black same-sex desiring women (BSSDW), Frank and Carnes establish how some strip shows are a limited niche event with their own set of social rules and boundaries. Frank and Carnes argue that specific stripping contexts (in their case black women dancing for black women) fulfill different social needs for customers, and that these needs arise out of a unique social and historical positioning.

Frank and Carnes establish how specific context and configurations of privilege alter different adult entertainment sites, and that each configuration shapes, "the meanings of the transactions that unfold within them" (116). Transactions between men and women, men and men, and women and women vary greatly based on sexual desires, and more importantly, the rules and expectations established vary in each venue. The rules and expectations for each event can vary based on customer demographics, dancer comfort and willingness, venue regulations, as well as local and national laws. Specifically, Frank and Carnes point out that the way female dancers react and interact with male customers in a seemingly heterosexual environment are not
a mirror image of how black female dancers react and interact with BSSDW in their venue of study. Considering their argument, racial issues in the male stripping industry become more apparent and clarify why the topic of erotic racial identity and representations on the stage and in popular film/television needs further attention in both scholarship and popular representations. A cursory analysis of the strip show examples and research I have discussed in previous chapters exhibit an imbalance of representations of the racialized contexts and an evident racial divide within the industry. Most of the media examples portray predominately white male dancers performing for predominately white females, and imply that the women are there for similar reasons (most often a ladies’ night out or a rite-of-passage celebration) and that the dancers always fulfill the audience’s expectations in a certain prescribed way. However, few examples exhibit the racial divide and how a lack of diversity often exists throughout the industry.

While there appears to be some racial diversity among the audience in a few of the film examples, the prevailing racial makeup in most cinematic examples of groups is usually Caucasian. The tendency for these representations to generally exhibit a similar racial composition in male stripping groups and audiences leads to inaccurate cultural assumptions: that live dancers often look and perform in the manner as prescribed in these representations. For example, predominantly white dancers are acknowledged as the main characters in the musical and film *The Full Monty*, a cast that requires five white men and one black man in the group's arrangement. Implicitly, this fictional narrative inscribes the idea that male stripping is a white man's trade by only having one male actor of color (Horse) as a member of the story line. Racial jokes and songs about Horse's main contributing characteristic (the size of his penis) also fuel stereotypes and cultural assumptions about race, the black penis, and performance.
*The Full Monty* makes a distinct play on racial stereotypes and the black man as penis idiom, which are particularly evident in the jokes about Horse's physical attributes featured in the musical's song titled, "Big Black Man." Despite his age, Horse clarifies his value to the group during his audition as he sings, "Daddy told me 'Son that thing there underneath your zipper can be lots of fun. When you get a little older you'll understand that every woman in the world loves a big black man.'" The lyrics of David Yazbek's song continue with Horse's character exclaiming, "I'm what your sister and your mother's always thinking of; they put my picture on the cover of the book of love" (2000). The lyrics build on the black man as penis stereotype, developed from objectifying racial fantasies and epitomized in the white patients of psychologist and philosopher Frantz Fanon. Fanon's book *Black Skin, White Masks* illuminates what he identified as the "Negro myth" and the white man’s racial fear and jealousy of the eroticized black body.

Fanon's analysis discusses how white women are said to find it difficult to return to a white man after having a black lover. Discussing the experience of a white man knowing that a black man has penetrated his wife with his black "sword," Fanon explains, “One is no longer aware of the Negro, but only the penis: The Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He is the penis” (Fanon 170). Whether intentionally or unintentionally *The Full Monty* narrative feeds cultural assumptions about the lack of diversity in the male strip show while implying possible positions of fear, inadequacy and penis envy for white dancers working with black dancers. While meant to be a comedy, *The Full Monty* narrative is one of the first popular mainstream narratives on stage and screen to represent the racial division within the stripping industry. The
narrative largely highlights white heterosexuality while prescribing costumed antics of the police officer theme that is commonly associated with the white male strip show.57

Another strong example of racial disproportion in the industry, where most dancers of a group is of a specific racial makeup, is found in more recent Magic Mike films. The exhibition of primarily white dancers in the Magic Mike films again presents lack of diversity in the male strip show. The notable exception in Mike's group is the light skinned Hispanic actor, Alex Rodriguez, playing the only dancer with any non-white ethnicity. To this point, however, for anyone not knowing the actor's ethnicity or last name, one could mistakenly categorize Rodriguez as "white," as the initial film does little to acknowledge or distinguish racial difference among the dancers. The sequel, Magic Mike XXL, in fact goes so far as to joke about the lack of racial diversity in the group. The character Big Dick Richie played by the light skinned Italian, Joe Manganiello, attempts to acknowledge more diversity in the group due to his "Algerian decent," only to receive laughter and ridicule about the comment due to his visibly light skin. Ironically, this character's name, "Big Dick Richie," both supports and challenges Fanon's "Negro myth," in a way that attempts to imply a physical comparison separated by race through his acknowledged Algerian heritage and darker skin tone. While Richie's skin tone is noticeably light, the Negro myth, as articulated by Fanon, and the white man's fear of physical inadequacy are implicit when comparing most of the other dancers as white to his non-white status.

57 Refer to the Magic Mike film example discussed at length in the last chapter with two male dancers in police theme attire in the private party setting.
Examples of racial representation and lack of diversity are equally found in real life example as well, for instance in the *Chippendales* Las Vegas show website. While the site today exhibits a more diverse cast, a noticeable majority of the dancers are visually identifiable as white. The current display of diversity with the Chippendales website contrasts advertisements of the company from previous decades. I provide a post-show souvenir photo of my mother-in-law from her experience with the Chippendales in the early 2000s to at least acknowledge a definitive 2-1 white to black ratio with how the company portrayed their brand in this post-show photo on this night. Originally, I had intended to include a promotional shot of the Chippendales from the late 1990s that highlighted a cast of ten white dancers and one black dancer, shirtless and adorning cuffs and collars underneath the banner of Chippendales. After numerous phone

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58 I provide a link to the dancer’s page on the *Chippendales* website as a visual example of the company's current cast of dancers and diversity of the group [http://www.chippendales.com/dancers](http://www.chippendales.com/dancers)
and email conversations with the company’s press and booking agent, I was unable to secure permission to use the photo as supportive evidence. While the included photo of my mother-in-law, above in figure 12 above, is not as strong of an example as the company promotional photo from the 1990s would have been, it does, at least at that moment, identify a slight racial preference to a white masculinity. Equally, it is worth noting that the Thunder From Down Under Las Vegas show regularly projects predominately light skinned bodies in their promotional advertisements.

The Internet booking agencies discussed in the last chapter also present examples of racial imbalance in the representations of the dancers. For instance, the Pittsburgh Male Strippers site advertises a stock of available talent that consist of five white dancers and one black dancer, the same racial arrangement as The Full Monty casting. The Skin Deep company in Toledo, Ohio no longer provides images of dancers. Male erotic entertainment is being phased out of the services offered by the company as they are more focused on limousine rentals and female stripper servicing the Toledo, Ohio area. However, when I danced for the company, the website had a limited number of dancers and only advertised two white males posed next to four white female dancers. Equally, there are numerous companies across the country that promote black masculinity as their principal form of entertainment, and consequently, they limit or exclude Caucasian dancers from their repertoire.

The Black Diamond Entertainment company, with shows in New York City, Boston, Chicago, Miami, and Los Angeles for instance, claim they are, "your premiere source for black male strippers." Even though the company's website advertises that, "Black, White and Latin Male Strippers will cater to your every need," the promotional photos and videos on the company's website strictly highlight black male entertainers (Black Diamond,
Additionally, Chocolates Finest, a black specific company servicing the West Coast, devotedly promotes erotic black male entertainment stating, "Chocolates Finest was first started back in 2000 - 2001 by Godfather Hollywood Prod. Inc. because of the want for top-notch black male strippers in California. It was a market that was never produced before and our company didn't know if it would be a success or not..." They go on to clarify that "We cater to the black community and offer black men to all the customers who love a little dark ebony meat. So if you like African American strippers, or just want some freaky Nubian love at your house event, then order . . . now." (Chocolates Finest, http://chocolatesfinest.com/menpage.htm). While I imagine it is not the complete intention of any of these examples to racially isolate their entertainment pool, the lack of diversity in their promotions does suggest that companies have a specific understanding of their customer's social needs and the erotic community that they serve.

Today it has become easier to acknowledge how color lines mark the male strip industry as numerous websites, films and examples posted on YouTube validate the ways in which racialized tastes influence the marketing of male strip shows, and ultimately the approach to the erotic interactive performance. However, prior to 2015, examples of how race influenced the marketing of male strip shows, and the approaches to the performance were rarely addressed on television or cinema as white dancers were more commonly featured. Before 2015, only two films have demonstrated limited segments of male strip shows with predominantly non-white dancers and audience. "Episode23" of the HBO documentary series, Real Sex, provides a segment focused on an all-black male strip show in Cleveland Ohio in the late 1990s. Additionally, another Cleveland area all black male strip show is revealed through a short prank segment on MTV’s 2013 hidden-camera film Bad Grandpa.
HBO's *Real Sex* documentary series explores diverse sexual subjects in order to investigate human interest in and practice with various sexual activities ranging from the more common to the bizarre including masturbation, role-playing, fetishism, swingers, voyeurism, and erotic performance art. "Episode 23" of the series, which aired in May 1999, comes just two years after the initial release of *The Full Monty* film. While this segment was not a reaction to or in conversation with *The Full Monty* narrative, it does provide a sharp contrast in terms of how the industry runs and functions. The episode provides a unique segment focused on a black male stripper, Rump-Shaker, and his dual strip show featuring black male and female erotic dancers on the same night. The segment concentrates on Rump-Shaker's preparations for the up-coming event, while it also highlights his interaction with the public, back stage encounters, action shots of various dancers, and reactions from the audience. Rump-Shaker's depiction establishes the extensive promotional work that goes into promoting a show and how a professional like himself negotiates his public presence with confidence and charisma.

The *Real Sex* series is more informative rather than critical or analytical, as neither the segment nor the series makes any overarching claims about stripping, the sex industry or how race functions in these areas. However, it is impossible not to acknowledge how the segment is focused on a particular racial community. Unlike the largely white cast required for *The Full Monty* or characters in the *Magic Mike* films, *Real Sex* "Episode 23" establishes how race and Rump-Shaker's African American community have a uniquely different promotional agenda and approach to performance than seen in these other popular depictions of the male strip show. The result displays how *Real Sex's* mission of providing insight and awareness into various areas of human sexuality transcends racial bias, and offers support to the previously referenced work of Frank and Carnes: strip shows are a niche event often distinguished by race and sexuality,
fulfilling different social needs for customers that arise out of a unique social and historical positionings. The typically represented generalities and concomitant cultural assumptions too often support that all forms of erotic entertainment follow the same format, regardless of differences with contexts and elements of production. *Real Sex* "Episode 23" is another prime example of how the industry creates various niches.

While the MTV comedy film *Bad Grandpa* is hardly informative to my project in most regards, it does capture a segment that highlights the racial specificity that occurs in the male stripping industry. The loosely pieced together plot full of destruction, toilet humor and self-inflicted pain follows the outlandish journey of a perverted grandpa and his grandson searching for assistance to bury the corpse of grandma stored in the truck of the car. In one segment grandpa Irving wanders into a bar for a drink, before realizing he has "accidently" stumbled upon a black male strip show. The film attempts to harness comedy out of improvised moments of a vulgar elderly man (played by a young white actor aged to look mid-eighties), and his interactions with the audience and dancers of the predominantly black establishment that are unaware of his concealed identity. In the contrived moments of the film, "Grandpa" disrupts the black male strip show. While the content of the male strip show is limited, the moments do build a comic bit by exhibiting how the white elderly man is displaced due to his race, age, gender and ultimately his actions. He is the only white male in a club full of black women and half-naked black men. Even though the film provides a limited moment of erotic performance to critique, the segment further evinces the racial boundaries in the strip industry and how specific racial configurations exist. As the majority of scholarship on and popular examples of the male strip show address venues with a predominantly white context, each of these examples present

59 It bears mentioning that this is guerilla filming. Cameras were preinstalled in the club to capture the event and reaction in real time without any interruption. The folks in the club are real; they don’t know “Grandpa” is an actor.
predominantly black venues and clarify the need to further examine racial circumstances when examining erotic performance and the performance of erotic masculinity.

*Magic Mike XXL* is one of the most recent cinematic releases focused on the male strip show and the first big budgeted Hollywood film to acknowledge the racial divide within the male dancing industry. The film exhibits erotic differences and a racial division when Mike and the predominantly white group find themselves entering a predominantly black space. Searching for assistance from a previous business acquaintance, Mike leads his troupe to a club where he previously danced, in an attempt to reconnect with club owner and friend Rome, played by Jada Pinkett Smith. The group progresses into an elaborate house where the strip show and erotic action unfold. The white dancers display a sense of wonder and amazement as they experience this location for the first time; all aspects of the performances within are fundamentally different from the style of stage show to which they are accustomed to performing, as is displayed in the initial film. The group learns that the setup of this venue is now a members’ only club, created as a way to legally navigate around local governmental restrictions regarding the content and the purpose of the business. As the camera pans the venue, the visual displacement of the white group is immediately evident in the club filled with black dancers and a black female audience. The club seems to display a similar example of the advertisement from the *Chocolates Finest* website mentioned above, which promises to service the customers of the black community who prefer darker "Nubian" eroticism. Just as *Chocolates Finest* clarifies on their home page that they cater to the black community, and all customers that want “freaky Nubian love,” the portrayal of Rome's club suggests that it is a niche venue, which has a specific understanding of their customer's social and erotic needs and the racial preferences of community that they serve.
Similar to Frank and Carnes' findings, Rome's black female members’ only club demonstrates a fictional niche event with its own set of social rules and boundaries.

The scenes in Rome's club are the first substantial moments of the film to exhibit extended sequences of male strip routines. Comparing the climatic strip show from the finale of the first *Magic Mike* film with the stripping scenes at Rome's club in the sequel presents noticeable differences regarding context of the audience, the venue, the performer, and the performance. The performances and expectations displayed in Rome's members’ only black club highlight established racial difference in the male strip show at a niche venue with a unique spatial arrangement. Whereas the design of the final strip show with the white group in the first film had a thrust stage featuring a traditional variety style format, the all black show at Rome's club exhibits a complete inverse, which appears to initially amaze the white dancers. Rome's club is organized like a fluid party where the customers roam various rooms engaging several dancers among mood-enhanced settings. There is no specific stage or apparent structural format; women congregate throughout the venue and only make space for dancers to perform once they are announced. Additionally, the black dancers perform routines that are not based on recognizable character types such as a cop, cowboy, construction worker, or doctor: the common costumes seen displayed by the predominantly white group in the first film. Rather the dancers' costumes are styled more with a street gear design highlighting their muscular bodies as well as the fluidity of their movements, individual attitudes, and styles.

While the segment in Rome's club doesn't initially appear to be filmed to specifically address racial difference, it does so in a way to progress the storyline with Mike's predominantly white group. The white group has reconnected for one last show, and their experience with the black dancers becomes the catalyst for the climax. They are encouraged to scrap their old
gimmicks and reinvent their style by creating new and original routines. Inspired by the personal
flare and individuality of Rome's dancers, Mike's group redesigns their entire show. They move
away from the more "traditional" approach to their thematic identities and create routines based
on individual talents, personality traits, and desires. They strive to "keep it real" and create new
stage personas based on who they are, not about how they have traditionally performed. The
inspired reinvention of Mike and his group displays the unique difference between their former
style of stripping, and their new approach to erotic representation influenced by Rome's dancers.
The film does not attempt to further address racial style and difference, but exhibits how the
integration of different erotic techniques, in addition to adding racial diversity, leads Mike's
group to a successful final show through new, innovative, and personalized erotic performances.

Considering these various films and Internet examples, which highlight racial separation
and difference in the strip show, it is apparent that racial and cultural identity influences how a
male strip show can be experienced, interpreted, and understood. Cultural identities are, as
cultural theorist Stuart Hall posits, "the unstable points of identification . . . which are within the
discourses of history and culture" always creating politics of identity and position which, "has no
absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'" ("Cultural Identity" 226).
For Hall, cultural identity can be viewed in two different ways as it sits on a continuum between
"being" and "becoming." The first position is defined, "in terms of one shared culture, a sort of
collective one true self," where people have a shared history with similar experiences and codes
in common that promote a sense of unity and community ("Cultural Identity" 223). I use Hall's
definition of cultural identity to make sense of the work I do and have done, and the stripping
cultures that I engage when I navigate different venues. Hall's definition of cultural identity is
useful here for understanding differences regarding race and identity, since contextual difference,
and hence cultural difference, are not topics often addressed in scholarship nor represented in mediated examples regarding dancer identity, race, and expectations. Since erotic dancers work in the same industry, a collective category in the cultural imagination based on sameness often socially defines strippers and the rules, behaviors and expectations of the position, thereby suggesting a type of collective "oneness."\textsuperscript{60} This oneness contains, as Hall explains, "stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history ("Cultural Identity" 223). Such an umbrella understanding of oneness and being that collectively represents the identity of "stripper" has hindered progressive understandings of erotic masculinity in various types of male strip shows.

Hall's second definition however, addresses cultural identity as, "a matter of becoming as well as being," allowing for more fluidity in the understanding of erotic masculine identity ("Cultural Identity" 225). While there are points of similarity to a shared history when being a stripper, there are, as Hall might explain "points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or . . . 'what we have become'" ("Cultural Identity" 225). For Hall, we cannot speak about one experience or one identity for an extended period with exactness without acknowledging other sides of the discussion and any ruptures and discontinuities it may include. This position belongs to the future as much as it does to the past, and allows cultural identity to "undergo constant transformation" ("Cultural Identity" 225). Valuing the influence that cultural identity has on minorities and the understanding of individual bodies, Hall expresses a preference for the position of becoming over being so the past will not hinder the present and

\textsuperscript{60}Again, I draw attention to Frank and Carnes' research as the only work to specifically address the importance of identifying stripping communities as niche venues and how identity, the rules, behaviors, and expectations of a particular venue determine performance. Just because individuals work in the same industry, does not mean they share the same experience. As Frank and Carnes acknowledge, sameness or oneness is not necessarily an accurate understanding of the work, relationships, and various dancers in an industry that is really constituted with numerous niche scenarios.
future understanding of individual bodies. Hall's second definition of cultural identity allows for deeper insight into the cultural differences in erotic male performance and the cultural variations of erotic masculinity. While a performer may always be categorized as a stripper, as they enter specific contexts with deep and significant differences with their non-stripper identity, they may become something more specific than just a general classification.

I draw attention to Hall's definition of cultural identity and his ideas of being and becoming to distinguish how I make sense of my identity as a stripper and the work that I complete in different venues with various audiences. The expectations I face as a male stripper based on my cultural identity is an issue I am constantly aware of and in negotiation with each night on the job. In the simplest terms, I am a stripper. In Hall's terms, I can say I am always being this identity. However, it would be more accurate to state that I personally identify as a heterosexual white stripper, and when I perform in venues that are predominantly heterosexual and white, I identify as a stripper; my race and sexuality are implied when I perform in that context. However, when I perform in venues that are not predominantly heterosexual and white, I am in a state of becoming something more than just a stripper. I am defined by my difference and by my minority status, therefore I am a white stripper.

While most my work opportunities are for predominantly white heterosexual audiences, I become hyper aware of how my identity has an impact upon my reception in settings that are racially and sexually different from my identity positions. I claim my identity as a stripper when I dance for women (specifically predominantly heterosexual white women), because I am performing a heightened version of my eroticized self (a white man sexually interested in women). My white heterosexuality informs my approach to constructing my erotic identity in venues servicing predominantly white heterosexual women. However, I experience a process of
becoming something more than just a "stripper" when I dance in venues that are not predominantly heterosexual and white. In venues where the audience is gay and most of the dancers are as well, or the audience is black and so are the dancers, or the audience is lesbian and I am completely a gag gift for entertainment or comic circumstance, I must attempt to make adjustment to my performance that will best suit my audience. In these moments, I am then becoming something more than just a stripper. I may be the white stripper, or I may be the straight stripper, or the gay white stripper, depending on how I am viewed by the audience or how my presence is established based on the context majority. I am performing a variation to what I consider my traditional role and become something other than a heightened version of my eroticized self. This is not to say that an understanding of being and becoming happens to all dancers, as some may not have the opportunities that I encounter, or some may choose not to perform in various contextual venues, or others may not accept work variation when offered performance scenarios beyond their comfort zone. It is when a stripper moves into venues beyond the comfort of his racial and sexual identity that the definition of stripper and expectation of the performance begin to be defined based on the circumstances of the dancer, space or venue.

Below I expound on an example of becoming more than just a stripper as I continue with my "night in the life" journey. I move onto my next event at a venue with predominately black dancers and audience members. I clarify how my white heterosexuality is distinctly juxtaposed to black heterosexuality and the manners in which I negotiate being a white stripper and become adjusted to being just a stripper in a predominantly black venue. I first recall my experience along with the expectations and reactions of cultural difference throughout the night. I then return to my ethnographic content to provide a cultural critique of gender, race and sexuality from the responses from the dancers who participated in my interviews.
Space and Meaning

I hustle out of the anniversary party that I just completed. I must move quickly from one similar place to another, rushing from a social hall and a private anniversary party, to another social/banquet hall for a public event hosting a male strip show. My adrenalin pumps as I grip the steering wheel. Beads of sweat begin to stream down my arms and drip from my elbows. My stomach tightens with fear that I won't make my next gig on time. It's almost 8p.m. and I'm twenty miles from my next destination. The show starts at 9p.m., but the venue will overflow with patrons as soon as the doors open an hour beforehand. I must get there early to plead my case with the dancers in the hope of getting an early spot in the rotation so I will be able to make it to my final gig of the night. My eyes blaze green with greed and anticipation. A later spot in the rotation will mean I forfeit my last gig booked later in the night. I must play this scenario just right so I can perform, get my full pay, and exit the show early enough to fulfill my last booking. Thankfully, there is no traffic and the lights continue to glow in my favor.

Space has possibilities, carries meaning, and defines circumstances. However, while some venues are defined, others may be waiting for a definition. As I enter my next performance venue, my identity, its meaning, and my purpose are defined by that moment in time and the relationship I develop with the place and its context. Space, as Jeanine M. Mingé and Amber Zimmerman argue in their book *Concrete and Dust*, "is a performed process" made up of movement, rhythm, and patterns of energy (86). Space carries meaning and has the power to transform or order the world around us based on its relational design within its domain. Space also, "has a history," as Michel Foucault posits in the article, "Of Other Spaces" (22) that is based on timing and reality. As Foucault explains, "it is not possible to disregard the fatal intersection

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6 This party was discussed in detail in the last chapter.
of time and space," (22) as it can transform and redefine its meaning. A classroom in the morning can become a meeting room in the afternoon and a rehearsal studio at night. A reception hall can host a wake one afternoon, house a wedding reception the next, and become a club/concert hall a few days later. The meaning of an individual in the same space at different times can shift as it becomes associated with a different purpose.

Purpose and timing can determine the meaning associated with a space in its performed process. As Mingé and Zimmerman posit, "Spaces are created in order to fashion a reality, a way of being in the world, which dictates an individual’s relationship to the space" (83). For Mingé and Zimmerman, "Our spatial relationship to the space allows us to cultivate a sense of place. Place is also not static but in constant negotiation with our bodies, ideologies, ideas. But place is the cultivation of a patterned knowing, a performed identity within space. As we move through space we begin to cultivate body memory" (83-84). My movement into and through time and space at my next location is defined first by my race before my gender and sexuality. The venue is no longer just a community social hall, tonight the place is host to a male strip show. The local community is predominantly black, as are the dancers. The show, my performance, and my usual understanding now become based on race. I am no longer just a male stripper; I am defined by my racial difference being the minority. I am the white male stripper at a predominantly black male strip show. Racially defining the show is not my doing. Racially dividing the industry is a classification tactic used to discern black and white shows; it was a way in which other dancers (both white and black) explained the business to me to understand differences and practices within the industry. Passing through the threshold of the venue I navigate the space of my body as well as the space of the venue. As I enter this new place, identifiable racial boundaries are
immediately apparent. I am instantly challenged to see myself and the work differently in order to shift social frames and imagine new possibilities for my performance in this context.

Negotiating the Place: Keeping it Real at the Chocolate and Vanilla Factory Tour

A good friend from previous tours, Lorenz, has provided this booking. When Lorenz gets access to local work, he always shares the wealth and invites as many dancers as he can. Tonight, he connects me with the "Chocolate and Vanilla Factory Tour," a male revue organized by his "girl," Monique, an up-and-coming event promoter. Since Monique usually throws events that service the black community, I expect some adjustments to my routine and approach will be necessary to better adapt to the show expectations and compete with the other dancers. This is not my first rodeo, as the saying goes, regarding my experience working with black dancers. However, my experience is limited to a few handfuls compared to all of the other types of shows in which I have performed. I am appreciative of the work, but I know I may be navigating outside of my comfort zone. I ignore this sensation, grab my costume chest from the trunk of my car, and rush in. Time is money and tonight's clock keeps ticking fast.

The first order of business is to learn the details about the show, secure my spot in the rotation, and begin to calculate if I will make my last gig scheduled in just a few hours. However, before I even make it through the door I'm overcome with euphoria by the line of women spilling from the venue. Sweet sensual scents of estrogen infused body sprays and deliciously tantalizing food aromas infiltrate my nostrils and invade both my stomach and erotic senses. I'm giddy with the anticipation of having the opportunities to enjoy the sexiness, greed, and greasy goodness circulating through the venue. Just like my previous anniversary gig, this show is held at a banquet facility and Monique has pulled out all of the stops to maximize the facility’s potential to
throw a great party. Usually, I like to explore the venue and socialize with potential tippers before the show. Preshow flirting can increase the audience response and reaction later in the night. However, Monique has the place filled with excitement and too many preshow distractions from area vendors. The DJ has the crowd excited from hard bass hitting beats, the chefs create their savory sensations in the kitchen, and vendors of the sensual arts push their decadent erotic products to interested customers. This facility is no longer just a social hall; it has become a funhouse of fantasy and a sensuous space of sexuality.

I make my way backstage to find that I'm the only white dancer in the rotation; I am indeed the only vanilla in the promoted Chocolate and Vanilla Factory Tour. Past experiences remind me that using the routines I use in predominately white club settings may not be the best approach. Lorenzo's mentorship has helped me realize that many of my thematic routines that I use with a white audience are not relevant and do not relate as well to an audience that is predominantly black. Routines based on iconic performances of white men in film may not be my best approach. Some of my favorite cinematic themes and characters from my youth, like a John Travolta "Grease-lighting" routine, a Kevin Bacon "Footloose" routine, or Arnold Schwarzenegger Terminator routine are less likely to resonate with cultural recognition in a black space as it may in a white space. Lorenz stresses that black women will probably not have a cultural connection to my white thematic identities, as there are no notable black actors in these films or any recognizable acknowledgement of black culture. He is very blatant with his explanation of the fact that it is not likely for many black women to be overly familiar with or get excited about a cute and silly interpretation of white hetero-eroticism that they may know relatively nothing about. As he explains in his personal interview, most women at his shows want to see men bring a raw eroticism that, to use the popular hip-hop adage, 'keeps it real,' hits hard
and makes them think about Fucking!" (Lorenz, Personal interview). While acting like a character from a white movie might engage a white audience, it most likely will not tonight.

Lorenz's lesson offers a reality check to my whiteness and my thematic approach to the way I create my representation of a stripper. His lesson implies the unacknowledged privilege I carry in my choice to embody white themes in my performances, and the relationships I develop with a white audience based on their cultural memory of those films. "Reality check," as critical race theorist Henry J. Elam explains, is "a moment that traumatically ruptures the balance between the real and the representational," where the moment "demands that the relationship between the real and the representational be renegotiated" (173). In venues where the audience is predominantly white, they are likely to react favorably to the way I renegotiate a theme and my erotic identity dealing with culturally recognizable white actors and theme music. Those moments in those spaces carry a different history of popular white cultural knowledge than the space carries this evening. The timing of tonight's show and the reality of the spatial makeup define the possibilities and meaning in the venue differently than I am usually accustomed. While the movements, rhythms, and patterns of energy are oddly familiar in their erotic intention, they are equally different and distinct to a culturally recognizable black vibe.

Although the venue and purpose is defined as a male strip show, the space is ordered to value and privilege black culture. In this venue, I am in a liminal space between being a white stripper and becoming something more, where the real and the representational would function differently than it would with a white audience that would likely recognize and relate to my common white themes. Lorenz's warning cautions me against the probable disruptions to spectators' expectations if I present my "white" themes tonight and the potential renegotiated meanings they elicit. His insight about my routine choice suspends a possible moment of rupture,
thereby providing me with an informed opportunity to assess the context to determine if I should perform my usual routines or make needed adjustments. The scenario becomes a question of being or becoming; a choice where I will either repeat a usual thematic character and simply be "the stripper" I typically perform, or if I will alter my approach to become something more suited to the wants of tonight's audience. I must make a choice based on my own cultural assumptions about black (erotic) culture. I either stage and "be" a costumed routine I am most comfortable with in my performance as a stripper, or allow my erotic identity to undergo a transformation and enter a process of "becoming" something different than I usually am, that will not be fully informed by my white themes and the cultural meaning associated with my white body.

Lorenzo's mentorship toward my routine choice for the evening clarifies how race trumps the representation of our erotic identity. I am not just a stripper in this venue; rather I am the only white stripper, and he is one of many strippers of color. A reality check of this kind is not a topic of which Lorenzo is unfamiliar as he relates his experiences and the performative adjustments he makes when he is the only black dancer performing with a group of white men for predominantly white audiences. When asked about some of the differences he has experienced when dancing for racially specific audience, he eagerly shares his knowledge of the variations between the wants and expectations of predominantly black and predominantly white audiences. As an African American male that has danced for more than a decade for racially specific audiences, he proudly clarified his privileged experience. With a breath of exhaustion, he explains, "It is a whole lot harder to dance for black women. They just expect and want more." He believes that black audiences may have fantasies that are physically and visually deeper than just the popular themes and costumed gimmicks more commonly used in white strip shows. He clarifies that, "They [black women] don’t just want to see you walking down with a limp dick. They want to see you
walking down, dick hard, like you the Pimp King." Lorenz goes so far as to say, "Black women want to see the full monty, white women aren’t ready for it" (Lorenz, *Personal interview*). While his language is explicit and his understanding is based on his own perception, I regard this statement as needing to be valued with some discrimination. However, his comments and experience highlight how race plays a factor in the performative expectation in this type of show, how dancers make sense of the audiences they are performing for, and just how significant racial makeup of an audience can alter the understanding of a space and performance.

As the only white man in the show, my performance is as much about my understanding the differences regarding cultural wants as it is about understanding erotic differences and expectations when performing the role of a stripper. Like Elam's explanation of the reality check, Lorenz's layman experience offers an explanation regarding the politics of representation in the strip industry and how the relationship between race and representation must be renegotiated in racially different spaces. For Elam, the reality check focuses specifically on black expressive culture where "realness and 'authentic' blackness depends on outward displays, dress, style, and attitude" (174). An example of this "realness" and "authentic blackness" appears evident in the *Magic Mike XXL* film discussed above in the club scene with Rome and her black dancers. As the white men enter the black club they immediately acknowledge their otherness and the differences in performance; the black dancers' outward display and attitude present a style of realness and authentic eroticism that was unfamiliar to Mike's crew.

Lorenz acknowledges this understanding in his discussion of black woman's desires for how a black male stripper will perform and what he will reveal. He believes this particular audience values a masculine attitude and erotic confidence presented in the outward display of style and attitude in the way the men move like a "king" with a "hard dick." Lorenz understands
the variables of attitude, display, and style between black and white dancers, and how they affect "realness" in the display of authenticity, race and otherness. He states, "I think it’s a harder transition for white males to go in and perform for black females as opposed to the way it is for a black male to go into performing for white females at an all-white show" (Lorenz, *Personal interview*). He describes witnessing numerous white dancers struggle in an all-black space because they were not accustomed to the preferences of the audience and the variations of how black dancers approach stripping. He believes white dancers are accustomed to white audiences "flocking and falling" all over the dancers from just entering the stage with thematic costumes the audience adores. He clarifies that, "black women aren’t like that; they go right past that," implying that a black female audience does not react and respond immediately to just costume and thematic music, rather they wait until the dancer has impressed them with his style, attitude and outward display of eroticism. For Lorenz, dancers (both black and white) must work harder to impress an all-black audience, and the fact that the industry is often racial separated means that white dancers are not as accustomed to dancing for a black audience the way black dancers are, by economic necessity, used to performing for white audiences. However, he is quick to expose that the opposite is not always true for black dancers performing for an all-white audience. From his experience, he believes white women are more intrigued by the racial difference and style of performance, and that black dancers rarely experience any problems with confidence when transitioning to perform for predominantly white audiences. He understands how different audiences react toward a dancer and how that can sway a dancer's confidence, attitude, and ultimately his performance.

The analysis offered by Lorenz extends to Fanon's "Negro Myth," where white male dancers can fear the eroticized black body. By highlighting the struggles of white dancers that are
not accepted and praised by black women, in the cases where white dancers were avoided by and struggle to please black women, the white male anxiety extends beyond the fear that white women may not respond with interest after experiencing a black dancer. The greater fear is that both white and black women will prefer black dancers and no women will desire the white dancer's eroticism. This fear and anxiety is something with which I am all too familiar. I know that when dancing for a black audience, I am often marked as the only white stripper, not only due to the color of my skin, but by the thematic and musical influences of the performances I choose to perform, as is the case with routines that often highlight my whiteness. Routines created based on popular films and images of attractive white men mark me as the white stripper that plays on his whiteness as opposed to the stripper that is white whose performance is based on his eroticism. Being the only white dancer on tonight's rotation, managing how I handle my whiteness and eroticism is imperative. Disruptions and lack of audience interest will be inevitable if I do not address my apparent differences in style compared with the other dancers and take into consideration the audience's tastes and preferences, in order to adjust to better satisfy their desires.

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I get backstage and I am flooded with chaos; dancers roam the area as they claim their preparation space. They decorate their territory with costumes, cases, and materials, and begin to groom for the show. Unlike me, most of the men are from out of town and are not in a hurry to complete their set and move on to another gig. They have traveled a significant distance and are making every effort to settle in and relax as they unpack show materials. I, on the other hand, packed lightly; I need a small area to place my tote, make a quick change, and get to business.
I'm eager to start the show, complete my performance and sneak out for my next gig. However, no one else seems in a hurry.

The backstage area is less than friendly at first. While all of the dancers know Lorenz and Monique, most are unfamiliar with each other. I don't know if it is awkward for anyone else, but I can't help but feel slightly uncomfortable as the only white guy in the room. My racial difference and uncertainty stick out like a sore thumb. No one is mean; however, no one is initially welcoming either, as we are all focused on our individual preparation.

Thankfully Lorenz breaks the backstage awkwardness with some playful introductions. He doesn't deny the obvious joking about my white otherness with statement like, "I sure hope that the ladies like cream with their chocolate." Our embrace, however, assures the rest of the guys of my credentials and that I'm a good fit for tonight's crew. He relieves even more of my tension when he confirms that I'll be third in the rotation, following him and the dancer named "Penetration." Maybe our relationship over the years privileges my earlier requests regarding my time conflict and my need to perform early in the rotation; maybe it's my whiteness. My position as the third dancer in the rotation seems like a strategy to add variation to the lineup. Thankfully the other dancers support this idea. They plan to relax and spend the night in the area once the show is over, whereas I plan for a quick performance and then to be on my way to another gig.

Introductions and backstage foolery quickly consume the free time before the show. We talk about where we are from, where we have traveled to dance, who we have danced with and know in common, how we work out, what kind of supplements and drugs we take, who we have had sex with, how often and how many times, all of the usual stuff. Before we know it, hanging in a room of half-naked male strangers playing with erotic performance materials as well as their
penises seems natural. While erotic outsized egos cannot help but fill the dressing room, tomfoolery, personal ritual and preshow customs sprinkle the preparatory back stage area.

As with any important event or competition, some participants are always going to have their superstitious habits and personalized practices. This is true with many dancers, and their preshow routine. As we chat, we sprawl through the area doing pushups, stretching, and other forms of exercise to work up a glisten and a muscular pump, oil up our bodies, pose in front of the mirror, clean and prepare our costumes and props, watch porn, and other sexualized practices to prepare ourselves for our erotic identity and performance. Personally, I have very few rituals, customs and habits before a performance. Once my costume and props are set, I spend my time stretching, talking to the other dancers, and watching as much of the show as I can in order to assess the types of routines that are going before me, and the kind of crowd reactions each dancer receives. However, few dancers are as simple and efficient with their preshow time as I am; many prepare their body and appearance right up until they hit the stage.

With all of the backstage commotion, time passes quickly and the extravaganza begins. Since Lorenz is the local favorite he starts the night to give the other dancers more time to prepare and unwind from their lengthy commute. As I have worked with him for numerous years, I assume that he will start off the night as he does when we work in predominantly white venues; he usually performs his humorous doctor routine with a quick transition into a dynamic
Michael Jackson compilation. His routines are always refined, and I'm very fond of his creativity and all of his tactics. His music editing and movement abilities have created remarkable routines that highlight several of his skills with thematic interactive improvisational erotic performance. However, much to my surprise, Lorenz doesn't sport a lab coat with stethoscope to inspect the health and wellbeing of a lucky spectator as his thematic costume. Instead, he wears a green and blue leopard print outfit, or what may be better described as coverings with a yellow mask to conceal his face. The fabric of his costume covers each leg in a manner similar to full length stockings, with a hooded open-chest vest, and a penis cover over his engorged member. This is not what I'm used to seeing him in; it is a huge surprise, as his costume defies a logical thematic classification. Instead of an institutionalized doctor's jacket that covers his entire body, he's more exposed than covered.

I'm momentarily taken aback by the exposure he chooses to begin with as there is little left to the imagination or available to strip out of, but I'm appreciative of the uniqueness and
simplicity of his appearance. Figure's 13 and 14 above highlight the sharp contrast between these two approaches to his performance. His new attire was literally putting it all out there right from the beginning, displaying an outfit that does not correspond with the usual theme-based costumes we wear when working together for white audiences. Lorenz thereby establishes the custom practice for the evening. The fully pumped penis is the preferred method of body preparation for tonight. When initially seeing Lorenz, I can't help but respond with momentary

\[62\text{ Lorenz's extreme differences to identity construction between his approach to white and black shows is as much about challenging racial assumptions about black men in his doctor outfit, as it is about meeting the expectations of the performance context. He is a very versatile performer with various costumes. A thematic structured routine around a doctor identity could equally work in the black context. However, that is not how most black dancers approach creating their erotic identity in black context, just as the more exposed stylistically unique approach is not how most white dancers approach creating their identity. While the black doctor in a white context can be viewed as challenging racial assumptions, it is equally a better fit for the context. Additionally, it is his stronger, more preferred thematic routine. While he has other costumes, he prefers to associate to the idea of "Doctor Love" more than any other identity. However, tonight is his show, and he chooses to play and perform in another way.}\]
shock and astonishment at such a uniquely different approach to his erotic construction. In amazement, I comment, "Holy shit man, I'm not used to seeing so much of you!" He chuckles clarifying, "that's just how we roll here dancing for black girls." While I am accustomed to altering my approach depending on my audience and what amount of interaction I think will best suit their interest, I'm unprepared to make such a striking alteration of appearance and costume to better meet what I now understand as the audiences’ expectation. Partially, I'm too lazy to spend additional time to make my penis hard for reasons other than sex, and I refuse to subject myself to the physical discomfort of forcing an erection for aesthetic purposes. I normally do quite fine with a limp penis, and I do not see the cost benefit for the pain or medical risk. Plus, I'm too cheap. I have an ageing collection of thongs and costumes, and I have never made the artistic decision to purchase attire that would complement an erection as well as Lorenz's sleeve highlights his physical attributes. I accept the fact that not only will the color of my skin immediately acknowledge my racial difference to the audience, but my choice in attire and my decision not to highlight my penis might also be less than alluring to this audience as I am not following the other dancers' modus operandi.

After seeing what Lorenz has in store for the crowd, I have no idea what the second dancer, Penetration, plans for his routine; the uncertainty is more than a little intimidating. This man is a muscular behemoth, and one of the most physically impressive men with whom I have worked. Typically, being the dancer with the largest stature, I am usually completely confident in my appearance and erotic abilities. My size and height are among my defining assets that enhance my appeal for an audience; many are often surprised that a white guy with my size can move and perform as deftly as I can. Unfortunately, Penetration far exceeds my physical stature, as he looks like he belongs on the professional football field as much as he belongs in the male
strip show. I have this sinking feeling that his performance is going to be something unparalleled. All I can do now is watch and hope that my show can compare and equally please the crowd.

Reality Checked/ Keeping the Reality Check Real

Figure 15: Multiple photos of Penetration. Taken from YouTube Promotional video cited below in footnote 59

Holy shit! I can't do that! At least I don't think I can do that! Wait, did he just pull out a spectator's weave and place it on his own head? Oh my god, he's simulating the act of fucking the hairpiece he just pulled out and they are loving it. The women are celebrating his aggressiveness by throwing money over his body and the body of the woman he has pinned on the floor. What? He's sitting in a chair masturbating under a towel in front of the audience, and they love it even more. How am I going to follow this performance? I can't get away with similar aggressive erotic acts in the same ways, can I? I am very physical in my performance but this guy puts me to shame. Hell, I thought I was a dirty, kinky, sleazy, physical performer, but I don't feel comfortable thinking about doing half of the things he just displayed. Would such erotic acts performed from my white body even be accepted and applauded for in the same ways as the performance coming from his black body? These are thoughts and questions that run through my
mind as I witness moments similar to the images above in figure 15 that highlight the dominant erotic confidence Penetration exudes throughout his routine.63

Assessing from backstage, I experience an intense sense of uncertainty. I have witnessed various approaches and styles of male stripping in my career, but I have never seen such a forceful display of aggressive eroticism that is performatively negotiated in a way that is so well received by an audience. This dancer, Penetration, is getting away with tactics that I never would have imagined. I do some unbelievably vulgar things as part of my act but he far exceeds my caliber of egotistical erotomania. I slap asses. I simulate sexual positions with moments of thrusting and hair pulling. I make any number of inappropriate gestures with my thong covered penis directed at a woman's face, breast and genitals, and usually erotically assault their body by removing money they buried in their breast or their crotch with my teeth. I have come to accept all of these actions as a staple in most of my performances. However, to push the interactive physical boundaries in the manner that Penetration does is uncharted territory. I don't think I could get away with it. I actually don't even think it is morally and legally acceptable to be that forceful, let alone necessary, and I would not even want to perform these acts. If I push physical boundaries with women, I always try to keep an undertone of light-hearted humor, but that isn't what his performance suggests. Penetration appears to be performing an act that focuses on being physically aggressive and even abusive to ensure a tone of complete dominance.

Watching Penetration, I experienced a reality check that traumatically ruptures the balance of power I'm accustomed to in male strip show settings. As I witnessed him yank off a

63Below I provide a link to a YouTube clip highlighting one of Penetration's routines. This was not the performance I discuss above, although it is similar; however, the clip provides a better visual example to the unique physically aggressive approach that I am so unprepared to follow.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9Ho4sXxly0&oref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3Df9Ho4sXxly0&has_verified=1
woman's hairpiece and be celebrated for that act, I realized just how much I was the other in this environment and unable to conform to the established performance norms he had just established. The reality is, he just made this room full of women explode with excitement. They were literally rewarding him for his performance, of what seems to me to be a kind of sexual assault of a spectator, by throwing money at him. Some even followed that by paying to watch him masturbate under a towel.

From the moment Penetration entered, nervous tension began to circulate through my body like an electrical current full of apprehensiveness and self-doubt. He entered from back stage with seventy percent of his body already exposed and the rest covered with a futuristic red and black skin-tight latex material. There was little left to the imagination, and like Lorenz, he hardly had anything to take off. The material covered half of one arm and the lower portion of his legs while the rest of his muscular body was openly displayed. His erect penis—covered with the same material, propped up and extended in a fashion that made it appear nearly two feet long—swung back and forth as if it were taunting me with chants of No. No. You can’t top this. His performance was not about stripping; his body was already exposed and the limited amount of designer material stayed on for most of his routine. Rather his performance focused on displaying his superior muscular body, his individual style of sexual movements and aggression, and a dominant display of his massive erect manhood. My gut churning reality check pierced and deflated my erotic ego balloon thereby reinforcing my fears of how flat my performance would turn out. His simulated oversized futuristic penis sleeve foreshadowed the real thing, as the exposure of his erect penis was the routine’s climax. Gripping his appendage in one hand, he poured hot wax over his chest and lower stomach, and then began to masturbate with creamy
white lotion. His act was a showstopper. Nothing that any of the dancers following him might do would come close to producing anywhere near the reaction he just received.

In my usual circumstance, working in a white venue with mostly white dancers, I might follow the established norm set by the previous dancers and what I consider to be a more traditional approach to stripping. By traditional I mean simply throwing on a cheesy costume based on some theme of heroism or cultural popularity, and jumping around like a fool in front of a half-intoxicated crowd. Normally this kind of performance would be an easy sell. However, Lorenz and Penetration have established a different standard and expectation for tonight's show. Their unique individualistic style, with bright and dynamic, yet minimalistic approach to costuming, a more aggressive approach to audience interaction, and the display of their full frontal phallic power, are not customs and practices that I usually follow or am accustomed to experiencing on a regular basis. My police routine has a battered costume from age and poor maintenance, and has a cheesy voiceover recording, which requires me to frisk and mimic the act of a forceful arrest with erotic faux-coercion. The police officer with an erotic arrest routine is usually well received in predominantly white venues, as the intended humor in the language and the physical action seem to find a home of acceptance. However, I cannot help but consider the cultural climate and tremendous amount of conflict historically associated with the police and the black community; I definitely do not think this would be the most appropriate choice of a routine for tonight's crowd. Considering Lorenz's earlier advice regarding my *Grease* or *Terminator* themed routines, these are also not in my best interest. As much as I want my cowboy routine to be my act of choice, I cannot imagine a routine based on the song "Wanted Dead or Alive" from a 1980s white, long hair, rock band is the best choice. My cowboy fallback is also not a strong
option. When I'm not stripping by the light of a fire to Bon Jovi as part of my Western motif, I create a hootin' and hollerin' erotic fool that grounds the basis of the act to the popular 1980s Kenny Loggins’ song, "Footloose." While some may argue that these songs are timeless, as well as current with the 2010 country music star Blake Shelton's remake of "Footloose," both options, in my opinion, highlight my whiteness as well as my inability and laziness to modernize my music to better service any audience of the new millennium.

I would be naive to believe that a topless cowboy playing on erotic humor would be a hit in all venues. If I follow the attitude and personality displayed in the one-minute introduction to the Magic Mike film that highlights Matthew McConaughey as Dallas, the law-breaking Cowboy MC, I would be ignoring two very important realities. Firstly, this is a film and not my current reality. Second, this staged scene and all strip scenes in the film are filmed in front of a predominantly white audience, a detail that has significance considering my current scenario. However, if I take Lorenz's advice based on his personal knowledge and experience, I cannot fully believe tonight's black audience will be into my dated white music, especially right after experiencing such strong, dominant performances of black eroticism from Lorenz and Penetration. My decision to not be current and more diverse with routine music immediately highlights my inability to be accessible for all audience, as well as emphasizes my naive whiteness. To refer back to Hall's understanding of being and becoming, I'm stuck somewhere between deciding to "Be" a stripper and perform one of my typical white routines, or make some distinct alteration and attempt to "become" better suited to meet tonight's expectations.

It was time to make this scenario work. My usual themes and music were not going to work, but I could still salvage my routine and at least try to achieve some kind of positive

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64 This comment refers back to my rite of passage cowboy routine discussed in earlier chapters and the construction of my performance.
reaction from the crowd. After witnessing all of Penetration's erectified glory I have very little
time to make alterations with my final preparation. Lorenz thankfully comes to my rescue, and
like my original mentor nearly a decade before, he provides me with a musical track that
promises to get the audience eager to move. He instructs me on how to implement elements of
various costumes in order to construct an image that will surprise and ultimately get them excited
to see what I was going to serve with my course of eroticism. Handing me the artist Ginuwine’s
(1996) number one R&B Billboard hit "Pony" was a reality check in itself. "Pony" is a song that
I trained to in my teenage years in my parent's basement. I pumped iron and examined the
striations of my developing body while dancing in front of the mirror and fantasizing about
moving erotically as Ginuwine does in his music video.

At that moment, "Pony" was the perfect song to use in reinventing a cowboy routine.
Interestingly, today, Ginuwine’s "Pony" can be considered a male stripper classic as is evidenced
by its use in both Magic Mike films, for it is played in critical narrative moments that are
performed through erotic dance. Like Marvin Gay's famous song, "Let's Get It On," Ginuwine’s
"Pony" is a song that may arguably be considered one of the most lyrically suggestive sexual
songs of all time, requesting to its listeners, "if you are horny, let's do it, ride it, my pony." The
suggestiveness from the word "pony," plus the songs sexualized lyrics, and the hard-hitting
methodical bass is perfect to throw a cowboy hat on and perform several pelvic thrusts in
succession. With Lorenz's suggestion, I now had the opportunity to revisit my juvenile, idealized,
fantasies and renegotiate the real experiences I have had in this business, with the
representational understanding I have with the cowboy as an erotic theme. The improvisation
that happens combines the realness of my memories and fantasies produced by the song and the
realness of the current situation with the representational construction of a cowboy stripper routine on the spot.

In strip shows, as Liepe-Levinson has discussed, “both female and male sexual desires are designed and managed by culture” (5). Interestingly, Ginuwine’s music video displays a cultural managing of both sexual desires and racial conflict with a scenario suggesting that all it takes to spice up a party is a little color and the right music. The video produced for the song exhibits racial integration as culturally varied white and black masculine representations connect to a new hot sound. The men blend their masculine interests of drinking, gambling, and projecting sexual gazes upon women, while the women sensually move to a sound that repeatedly tells them through the lyrics that the men's saddles are waiting, and for the women to, "Come and jump on it" (Pony). In the video, sexual expression through music trumps the previously exhibited racial tension, allowing the party to continue.

Although there is mention of a saddle, a pony, and ridding on it, it is not so much the lyrics that invoke the Western motif, as it is the suggestive symbols and oppositional binaries that are performed within the video (black/white, country/city, urban/rural). The video depicts Ginuwine on a tour bus with his predominately black entourage, coming upon a low-down country bar filled with mostly white men sitting at a quiet bar, drinking beer, smoking cigarettes, and shooting pool. Initially there appears to be the potential for a racially heated scene as Ginuwine’s crew quickly infiltrates the suggested segregated bar, and begins to make the most of their unexpected stop by drinking, smoking and taking control of the dance floor.

All tensions are abandoned once Ginuwine hits the stage. The dance floor and mechanical bull are occupied by several women, many in cowboy hats, and the masculine aggressive tension disappears. The women begin to drink and bump and grind throughout the bar, as Ginuwine
performs his erotic song connecting country Western themes to sex. His metaphorical use of saddle, pony, and “reach the stream” implies sexual intercourse and climax, as he states he’s looking for someone who is horny “who knows how to ride without even falling off,” (Pony) and can take him to his “limits.” The sexual nature of the lyrics and video links Western themes of bull riding, lassoes, and cowboy hats in a way which illustrates racial unity around sexual interests. The video ends with a representational gesture of shared masculinity as a young black man trades his designer hat to a long-haired, bearded, older white man for a cowboy hat, over a beer and a handshake.

If I was going to sell a cowboy theme and better integrate myself with the shows expectations, my routine had to be a representation that exuded smooth sexuality, dominant sexual attitude, and some unique and creative movements, and not just some performative gestures in front of a small fire. The symbolism of racial tension and integration in the video's narrative, the erotically suggestive nature of the lyrics, the simple connection to a Western theme, and my history with the song were perfect variables to use to create a performance in the moment and hopefully to excite the crowd. With little time to organize, I collected all of my available costume pieces and organized my significant tricks and gimmicks as Lorenz arranged the stage following Penetration's exit. I musically introduced myself with "Pony" and entered with a slow walkout, grinding, gyrating and improvising my way to the stage.

I slowly snaked through the crowd as "Pony" sounded through the venue, finding my way to engage the levels throughout the place by grinding on chairs, lip syncing and pelvic thrusting on tops of tables, and transitioning with roles, spins, and gyrations. The music selection was a strong choice as the women reacted positively by dancing in and around their seating area. Some seemed willing to entertain my presence as they danced and grinded on me as I traveled the
venue. I did my best to caresses, thrust, and pump their bodies to the suggestive lyrics, in order to stimulate both myself and the rest of the audience. However, others appeared more into dancing alone or were busy trying to settle down after the experiences they just had with Penetration. The minimal interest in my entrance was enough to be an ego crusher, but I expected such due to the nature of the introduction and the fact that my visible difference may be of little interest to some.

I was challenged to implement the transition from backstage with my entrance following Penetration. Introductions do not necessarily function in the same way tonight as they do when I dance with my usual groups. With my white groups, introductions are meant to be quick, in order to get the audience interested so the dancer can then quickly move though a thematic routine and spend the majority of time collecting tips from the audience. For these black dancers tonight, introductions are drawn out; the dancers take their time entering the stage in what they consider their walk out. While it is part of the performance, it is not necessarily a part of the routine meant to display much active entertainment. Rather it is time for the dancer to establish his while continuously displaying his body, attitude and erotic ego.

The walk out is a custom that I usually do not practice as I am used to a much faster mode of performance. In my usual shows, I'm introduced, come on stage and begin immediately. Here the actual performance does not begin until the dancer makes his way to the stage after a long introductory walk out. Understanding this custom made the audiences lack of interest a little more bearable, but still it made me feel undervalued and suboptimal compared to the previous men. In opposition to the previous dancers, I did not follow their approach with costuming, as I stated earlier. Instead of implementing the less is more mentality of Lorenz and Penetration's costume, I chose the layered approach, as is my custom. Implementing layers has traditionally been associated with burlesque, an association that allows me to place my act in a historical
understanding of the art of erotic reveal. Instead of starting mainly exposed like Lorenz and Penetration, I covered my body in a way to allow a reveal as an erotic transition for each song. The top layer consisted of black jeans and a red cutoff flannel shirt with a cowboy hat and designer shades. The second layer came as I slowly removed the jeans, flannel and hat to reveal my body in tight black booty shorts, a black tank-top with slits throughout the fabric to expose my ripped body underneath, a dark bandana, and chains wrapped around my neck, chest and upper arms. The third layer provided the remaining booty shorts, while the final layer exhibited the thong that best highlighted the size of my limp penis.

I did my best to develop a slow build throughout my introduction until I reached the stage. I accepted my implementation for what it was and prepared myself for a transition that I hoped would gain more audience interest. I transitioned to a 2001 Marilyn Manson's cover of Gloria Jones' 1964 song "Tainted Love" while dancing in front of fire. I was familiar with the track and it was the best available music choice for the fire. It was a stretch and I doubted if the punk, queer, metal, rock of the Manson track would be of much interest to this audience, but the original heritage of the track might resonate with the audience. I was hoping that the alternative sound with underlying techno and hip-hop elements would provide the unique blend of distinctness that would mask the usual whiteness of my themes and define me more based on my erotic alternativeness than my race. Finally, I painted my body, to R-Kelly's 1994 number-one hit "Bump-and-grind." The artistic gimmick, which I detailed in my previous chapter, is always a crowd favorite, and I had no reason to doubt that it would not produce the same effect.

Below I provide links to YouTube of the music videos created for each song I mention above to allow the reader access to the musical material as well as the images and content associated with each song to better experience their erotic nature and contrast.

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbnoG2dsUk0
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YaGoc3E9zFQ
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Amhj_dujIU
The distinct shift between the hip-hop/R&B sound of "Pony" to the alternative sound of Manson’s song, compiled with my costume transition and the shadowy lighting defined by the fire definitely gained more audience attention. I assume the audience was excited to make sense of the transition, experience the spectacle of the fire, examine more of my body as it became exposed, and possibly enjoy the danger I was subjected to in my efforts to control and manipulate fire in an enclosed space. I was excited to get a reasonable portion of the audience interested in the erotic work that I was performing on stage as a few spectators came and littered the stage with money while I continued to remove clothes and control the fire. I attribute their reaction, partially, to the fact that I think I was entertaining, and, partially, to the fact that the music selection was such a jarring difference from the previous track, that the beat may not have been a sound that interested many, but watching the erotic risk I was working with in the dark was an appealing enough entertainment.

The final transition was the hook that got the audience willing to buy into my erotic identity. As Manson ended and the music transitioned into the slow R&B jam "Bump-and-Grind" by R-Kelly, a reaction happened unlike anything I had expected. The simple music choice itself had ladies lining up to drop money on the stage. The more I began to unpack my painting materials, the more excitement reverberated throughout the venue. As I began the act of painting my body, ladies continued to stand throughout to get a better view, while more and more lined up to deposit money at my feet. For three short minutes, I felt on top of the world. In less than ten minutes, I had shifted a room that displayed little interest in my erotic brand, to having their complete attention. With helpful advice and strategic alterations to my approach to

66l discuss my body-painting act in more detail in the previous chapter. The song, the act, and the materials were the same, and in this case I would say the reaction was significantly better, as the act served a different purpose for a better-suited audience.
developing a routine, I was able to achieve a well-favored reaction. In no way do I think I attained the kinds of reactions Penetration had, but I, in no way, compared to his style, nor do I understand how to best serve the audience with whom he is more familiar.

My overall glory was short lived. Once the paint was stored and the "Bump-and-Grind" song had finished, I was ready to move into the tip collection portion of my set, but the audience was waiting for me to continue to build the excitement. It was a mildly awkward realization to recognize that their interest was rapidly fading as my goals and the audience's wants seemed to divert. I uncomfortably roamed the venue for a short time looking for any additional sign that someone wanted to offer a financial reward for my erotic work. In addition to not being prepared to continue a performative build, the remaining music I had cued for this section of my routine did not provide any inspiration for improvisational glory. My remaining music was more up tempo rock and hip-hop that provide musical energy to allow me to circulate with more rapid succession, in order to interact with more patrons. This is how I normally approach the crowd in a predominantly white show once I complete my stage routine in order to circulate the audience and quickly collect tips. However, this was not the mode previously established by Lorenz and Penetration. The audience seemed to want a more slow and methodical interaction for the remainder of my act, just as I implemented with "Bump-and-Grind." Unfortunately, the mood and tempo of the remaining music did not lend itself to that approach. I accepted that my routine had climaxed, and that I was complete; at this point I was best served to accept my momentary success, call it quits, and continue on with my night.

I had various reality checks in processing the work I needed to successfully complete a routine for this show. The space and its racial demographic for the night defined a new understanding of the work that I needed to complete. By creating the performance in the
described manner, I walked a fine line with "being" and "becoming" the erotic identity for this show. By using so many of my previous gimmicks, I continued to be the stripper that I usually performed, but by compiling multiple elements that are normally not performed in succession, I adopted an alternative performance practice in order to better suit the expectations for this show. In no way did I attempt to perform or appropriate blackness in my routine as defined by Lorenz and Penetration, or attempt to imitate their approaches to strip performance. I did not dance erect, or alter my style in a way that mimicked a revealing costume to highlight my penis. Nor did I attempt to add aggression to my style or over perform forceful masculinity as to outperform Penetration. Rather I altered my usual performance tactics in a way that I felt reasonable to my usual approach. I explored the comfort of my own boundaries and the potential of my own materials in an attempt to create the best erotic representation for this audience.

In his book, Appropriating Blackness, performance studies and critical race scholar E. Patrick Johnson critiques the nature of white-identified subjects that perform black signifiers, stating that, "in many instances, whites exoticize and/or fetishize blackness" resulting in an entangled discourse of otherness (4). In my case I ran the risk of fulfilling Johnson's prophecy of performing wigger where my whiteness would attempt to dance black and fetishize the elements of performance that were implemented so well by the black dancers, as a way to suggest that I try to embody erotic black culture, attitude and style. I did not dance black, nor did I attempt to perform blackness and mimic elements of performance that I had just witnessed. Like all of the men performing that night, I danced to a beat that drums deep inside of me. I altered my

67Johnson explains his understanding of "wigger" by clarifying the ways one must perform appropriate "essential" signifiers of one's race or belonging to a particular group in racially or politically charged environments (6). Specifically, he is implying white individuals that embody signifiers of black culture. Had I attempted to adopt the black erotic dance practices to which I was not accustomed, I could have been labeled with the pejorative title of “wigger” due to my restructuring of a routine informed by an understanding of the performance of black masculinity performed that night.
performance of erotic whiteness based on my assessment of the wants and expectations of an
audience that happened to be black. The venue, the context, and the established expectations
clarified a new understanding of the work with which I was so familiar and ultimately clarified a
broader perspective to the way the male dancing industry is organized.

The Dancers Respond: Race, Costume, Expectation, and the Big Dick Idiom

In her article “The Reflexive Self through Narrative: A Night in the Life of an Erotic
Dancer/Researcher,” former erotic dancer, Carol Rambo Ronai, explains that in the strip show,
one's identity "exists as a process in a constant state of transformation and flux; it is a dialogue
between the facets" (107). After experiencing the manners in which Lorenz and Penetration
prepared before their performance at the Chocolate and Vanilla Factory, it was immediately
evident how differently we construct and perform our erotic identity based on our experiences
and understandings of the desires of our audience. In the example at Chocolate and Vanilla
Factory discussed above, I originally planned on performing in a way to which I was
accustomed; however, in that circumstance, at that moment, I was not fully prepared for the
expected practices or being the one visual difference against the norm. I was in a state of flux
somewhere between the facets of being a white stripper and just a stripper, trying to make sense
of how I could adjust and potentially transform my erotic presentation to the already established
expectations. Ultimately, I constructed my performance based on my interpretation of the
prescribed customs that I was comfortable with and the materials I had available at that moment.

My transformation based on prescribed customs resonates with ideas addressed by
Sandra Bartky's essay “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power.”
Bartky highlights how the female body and sexuality can be understood as constructed in
accordance with stereotypical prescriptions based on media and popular culture. It is impossible to ignore how Lorenz and the other dancers of the night constructed their erotic identity in a manner that reverberates with elements of Fanon's black man as penis idiom, and supports stereotypes of well-endowed black men as these dancers emphasize their physical attribute with exceptionally unique penis coverings. Bartky specifically focuses on the idea of “badge(s) of acceptability” (410) which women learn and produce through a practiced and subjected body, and she examines the cultural disciplines that invade and regulate the body's look and functionality. Comparably the black dancers discussed above appear to subscribe to reinforcing Fanon's theory by focusing on the display of the penis as the center of their erotic identity through regulating its look and functionality as a sign of acceptability for the audience’s expectations. The fact that the hard black penis was readily on display by all of the dancers might suggest that they were eager to reinforce the stereotype of the "Big Black Man" song emphasized in *The Full Monty*, and the big black penis theorized by Fanon. Lorenz's and many of the dancers that night continuously reinforced images and ideas of superior and inferior bodies, and the disciplinary techniques that individuals should implement in constructing their identity based on body modification and exposure. In this case the body modification being the display of the erect penis after getting hard and taking measures to tie off the erection to ensure that it would not go limp during the performance.

This is not to say that white dancers do not engorge their penis for a performance in hopes of getting a better reaction and more interest from a crowd. Plenty of white dancers do dance with an erection while others find ways to suggest a larger penis through temporary prosthetics or by other means such as stuffing socks, balls and other objects down the front of their thong. A cinematic moment furnishes an example in the first *Magic Mike* film where a
moment of phallic humor is provided early in the film when the men are backstage preparing for the show. We are supplied a glimpse of the white character, Big Dick Ritchie, displaying a masturbatory act with a penis erection pump, an indicator of how the character establishes his name. Additionally, dancing with an erection is a visible practice highlighted in the first episode of the documentary series *I am a Stripper* (discussed in an earlier chapter) with male dancers of various races in a Canadian strip club. Additionally, the pornography site *Dancing Bear* and *CFNM*, which highlight actual male strip shows, male strippers and sexual intercourse with customers, displays the erect penis as part of the performance protocol. Arguably, however, dancing with an erection and exposing the erection is a practice that is less common for white dancers in the States. Internet sites such as *Dancing Bear* and *CFNM* are verifiable pornography sites and apparently international companies, thereby suggesting perhaps that stripping and more sexualized practices regarding the male strip industry are more openly permitted and accepted in other countries. In this country, however, the stripping with an erection practice appears often to be defined by racial expectations. In my experience, the display of an erect penis is not common practice by most white male dancers, but it was a practice that appears to define all of the men dancing the night of The Chocolate and Vanilla Factor Tour.

Interestingly, dancing with an erect penis is a practice I have experienced every time I have danced in predominantly black spaces, a practice that is highlighted in HBO's *Real Sex* segment, discussed earlier in the chapter. Toward the end of the segment, a few performance moments highlight the black male dancers during Rump-Shaker's show executing their performance with the pumped up, erect practice. While the moments are brief, they show dancers

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68 I respectfully omit links to the above-mentioned pornography sites *Dancing Bear* or *CFNM*. While I feel the hyperlink to the above Penetration YouTube video is a powerful visual example to support my discussion that does not push the pornographic boundaries, I leave you, the reader, the right to take my word or search said sites for supportive visual proof that will be overtly pornographic.
with highly decorated specialized thongs that emphasize the movement of a hard member and how dynamic of a tool the penis can be in the performance when emphasis is placed on it through costume, preparatory enlargement, and movement practices that accentuate the bouncing, swinging and swaying of an erection. Ironically this practice in not emphasized by many of the more recent films regarding male dancing and has only been highlighted in one actual Hollywood film, the first *Magic Mike* film with character Big Dick Ritchie I previously discussed. Additionally, in the all black male review strip show scene in the film, *Bad Grandpa*, we see momentary acknowledgement of the practice of dancing with an erection. While the film only provides brief glimpses of the black male dancers in action, many are seen with the same style of costume depicted in the picture of Lorenz and Penetration. These are the only films I know of that demonstrate the hard penis tactic of male dancers, but they do so in a way that is brief and inconsequential so as to not draw more attention to the actual penis.

The choice to pump up the penis as a performance practice was a topic that arose during the dancer interviews and, in particular, the erroneousness decision for so many of the recent films and documentaries on male strippers to disregard the penile enlargement practice. The defining differences between black and white male strip shows, as described by most dancers, is the variation of individualized stylistic costumes and the deployment of full frontal phallic power. Most dancers I interviewed discussed how the penis usually remains a private, shrouded territory in white performance contexts, while in black contexts the exposure and exhibition of a performer’s penis often highlights the way audiences participate. The fruitful discussion regarding race and erotic male dancer practices during my interview process was extremely
conflicted and at times controversial, but these moments provided ample opinions for why practices and expectations can vary in the male strip show.69

Many dancers addressed how different audience responses between white and black women could be at strip shows. Lorenz goes so far as to say that white women, "tend to be a little more reserved," and that, it was more culturally acceptable for black women to be sexually expressive (Lorenz, Personal interview). This reserved/expressive belief was an opinion addressed by many and used as an understanding as to why black dancer practices can differ from white practices. Some dancers mentioned differences between class and how expectations and practices can vary in shows based on the economic demographic and the venue; they compared spaces by discussing the economic demographic and geographic location of a venue by using terms such as "classiness/classy," "proper," "ghetto," or "neutral." Other dancers went so far as to compare venues and audiences based on the explicitness of the dancer’s performances and the interactions of the spectators, thereby rating performances as G, PG, R, or rated pornographically. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in this delineation of space, a clear understanding of race, class, and expectation became problematic as many responses appeared racially biased and classist. However, most dancers agreed that regardless of race most women appear more sexually expressive within the space of a male strip show and dancers respond accordingly on any given show.

69Some of the following responses sound charged and biased. I believe that the nature of some of the questions as well as some of the dancers' understanding of racial expectations allowed them to speak frankly. Some of the responses are blue and racially inflected. Unfortunately, this language is common to the business in the backroom of strip clubs, but is inappropriate perhaps to a scholarly dissertation or, indeed, for most social situations today. I make this statement to clarify that every dancer interviewed had at one time danced for both predominantly white and black audiences and with predominantly white and black dance groups. While some responses may appear racist and sexist, I attribute some of this based on the way dancers in general acknowledged the semi segregated male stripping business, and how most dancers speak in the business when collectively discussing women or distinguishing between certain types of shows based on race.
While class was mentioned at times regarding some venues, it was never an extreme focus for any discussion. I attribute this to the fact that any venue can be profitable on any given night. I can have an unbelievably profitable performance in a lower income area on one occasion, and make significantly less on another occasion in a location that would be considered to be located in a better economic area. This could be for any number of reasons. Due to this circumstance, I believe all of the dancers I interviewed never took a particular position on class and context. While some dancers discussed the enjoyment of dancing in upscale venues, and others commented on enjoying places that were nicer or cleaner than others, none seemed to place focus or importance on those details. Since a portion of the work that dancers complete is tour based, a high percentage of the time a dancer never knows where he is performing or the class status of audience at the location until he arrives. If a show is profitable, most dancers care very little about the condition of the venue or the economic status of the participants.

I provide responses from a joint interview with a bi-racial dancer, Lightning, and a white dancer, Caesar, both of whom have danced with black and white groups. They clarify how they understand the racial separation of the business more so than class separation and the difference regarding the penis and its display in performance. Lightning distinctly acknowledges the difference between the racially divided shows, by stating:

I would think, at black shows it's more about the black male just dancing, being able to dance; just dancing by himself, showing how good he can move. His sexuality is expressed that way. At a white show, it’s more about characters, you know, what character you are. What type of fantasy are you creating with that character, versus the fantasy created with the black show is more about how he’s dancing. Also, a lot of the focus is on the penis because, before the guys start
dancing, they beef up, which means they get their penises hard, and they have special G-strings [also addressed above as sleeve or cover], so they can dance and have their dicks swing in between their legs. A lot of their attention is based and geared toward their penis. So, there is a lot of hip movement, and a lot of sexuality just like with white shows, but more so with black shows as black women want to see the dicks swinging around. Then they want the dick to come out. (Lightning, Personal interview)

Caesar agrees that in a black show:

It is expected for you to show your penis . . ., and in a white show it’s not expected, at all. It’s more expected to be entertained and to have that valued more than the penis. Black shows entertain as well, no doubt, but girls are coming there and they are expecting to grab your dick. They are expecting you to show them. (Caesar, Personal interview)

Caesar clarifies that the interactions in any show are a negotiation controlled by the dancer as well as the audience. His clarification seems to suggest that while some preferences and expectations are individualized, many are equally pre-established culturally accepted practices. For instance, many dancers addressed the distinct differences with the preshow activities when dancing with different racially distinct groups. Caesar explains that:

When I go to black shows, they have their portable DVD players stroking their pipe, and stroking their dicks in the back of the show, in a room getting prepped. But when I go to white shows, its everyone laying their uniforms out, making sure they smell good, making sure that everything is prepped out, setting it aside making sure everything is right. (Caesar, Personal interview)
Lightning, the bi-racial dancer, expounds on how he understood culturally accepted practices, and how the penis issue is a discussion point pivoting around race, expectations, and individualized practices. He states that:

The expectations are definitely different, because when I do black parties, private parties, they almost get angry when I don’t pull out my penis. They’re like, "why didn’t you pull it out? That's what we pay for." They’ve said that to me. We pay, we want to see the penis, and I wouldn’t do it. However, I think when it comes to private parties, the similarities between the cultures becomes a little more closer. Because I’ve had plenty of white parties, private parties, where women, white women wanted me to pull out my penis. Never at a show, but more so in a private setting. (Lightning, Personal interview)

Lightning's distinction between public shows and private parties was a topic discussed in the last chapter. However, his remarks help establish how volatile it can be to racially understand the business and performance practices. Interestingly, Lightning clarifies that regardless of an audience's wants or the preferences of a particular dance group, he has his own system of beliefs and practices. Despite his bi-racial ethnicity, some of his routines are based on individual style, while others are more thematically identifiable. While he understood the racially separated nature of the business, and agreed with how distinctly different some practices are, he was quick to address his style as "alternative" as opposed to a specific racial identity. He explains that, "each environment was the same for me. I did the same thing. I beefed up for a while, for the black shows, but after a while it was just real uncomfortable, and I realized that I wasn’t making any more or any less, whether I was doing it or not" (Lightning, Personal interview). He situated his style based more on techno music and the rave influenced culture. While I feel it is necessary to
address the racial divide in the male stripping industry and what constitutes the white/black separation, Lightning is a prime example of the individualization of the business.

In general, the consensus with most of the dancers was that predominantly white groups are less likely to dance with an erection and predominantly white audiences seem to accept that practice, while predominantly black groups regularly dance with an erection which has come to be the accepted expectation for predominantly black audiences. If a dancer is not a regular part of a group, it is the dancer's choice to follow the prevailing protocol. Beyond the question regarding the display of the penis, there appears to be culturally accepted practices that define the approach to stripping based on various elements. Most of the white dancers described the practice of stripping by comparing the work that they do to formal routines that follow a set structure, costumed theme, and performer/spectator relationship based on notions prescribed by their understanding of professional shows such as the Chippendales. The consensus of the descriptions includes a variety show format, various group numbers, individual routines that are approximately ten to twenty minutes in length, costumes based on specifically culturally recognizable themes, and a specific time length usually between 90 and 150 minutes. Contrastingly, descriptions of black shows differed based on the lack of group numbers, longer individual routines, uniquely individualized themes, and an undefined time length.

Some dancers went so far as to explain the difference between white and black shows by suggesting one show being more of a socially professional form of entertainment and the other being a party. This distinction appears depicted in the Magic Mike XXL film by comparing the decorum of the club of Mike's group and their approach to stage work with the work displayed by the black dancers in Rome's club. The differences between "professional entertainment" and "party" were explained by my interviewees as being based on structure and time constraints. The
"professional entertainment" of white shows follows an understanding of a Chippendales-like model that implements a formula of providing the utmost entertainment while earning the maximum amount of money for as little time as possible. In some venues, dancers remarked how the performance was billed as a "dinner and a show" type of event with a specific beginning and ending time. The "party" model of the black show was described as more laid back. While the dancers still strive to provide the utmost entertainment while earning the maximum amount of tips, they appear to value time differently by hosting shows that last for multiple hours and go well into the night.

Dancer Jay-Rock specifically comments on the differences with how dancers value time and how white dancers often have predetermined, agreed upon time constraints regarding routine length while black dancers often have no set structure, and continue to dance until they decide they are done. He explains:

I think one guy went 45 minutes. I was like, jeez how much longer are you going to be? ... I got some feedback from some of the girls there, and I watched a lot of the girls leave, and then come back, and then leave, and then come back. They were like, "yea, he’s going to be out there for a while. I’m not going to miss anything. I’m going to go out and have me a cigarette." Some even went and got something to eat and came back. I was like are you kidding me. I watched her leave and I thought she was pissed about something. Nope, she came back like fifteen minutes later with McDonalds in her hand. (Jay-Rock, Personal interview)

In addition to the length of time and the framing of the penis, one of the most controversial distinctions between the white and black performances the interviewees discussed was the individual approach to style or theme. The consensus regarding the responses about
white dancers and the customary approach to costume and routine continued to focus on the previously mentioned culturally recognizable themes (cops, cowboys, doctors, bikers, or designs based on popular movies). However, most of the dancers went so far as to use terms such as "dirty," "nasty," "gross," "raunchy," "ridiculous" and "X-rated" regarding some of the acts they performed as or have seen by some black dancers. One particular description highlights how unique some dancers can be in developing their eroticism. Unfortunately, the response exhibits how unaware the white dancer was of his sexism when detailing his story. I have decided to quote him at length without editing to better situate his reaction. I do so in order to help clarify his shock at witnessing the act, and his uncertainty of how to handle constructing his erotic identity following such a performance. The dancer explains:

The white is about the performance: what are you wearing, what is your costume, what is your music? Black is about, how many sexual acts can you do, and whip it out, and how big is your dick, and if you just beat it off some chick's butt, which I have seen. Can I tell you about the nastiest thing I just seen? This guy comes out. No costume, just some ghetto rap song I've never heard before, and he does this thing-- he doesn't perform at all. No show, no costume, no semblance, no order, no nothing. He made the most money and got the most screams because, it was the grossest thing I've ever seen. He grabs the fattest, nastiest chick, pulled her pants down, almost raping her. I felt bad for her for a minute, and it turns out she liked it. And he pulled his dick out. He put cellophane over her naked fat ass. Like half of her ass was hanging out. He put cellophane over her butt crack. He poured chocolate syrup on the cellophane over her butt crack, and started licking it. So, he's giving her a rim job through the cellophane, then he proceeds to pull out his
crank and he’s stroking it. He starts like rubbing his dick inside the cellophane, and I’m like, he’s butt fucking this girl in public and people are throwing money like it’s their job. I’m like--I have to follow that! "Here comes the cowboy." That just fucked me up dude! That just happened like two weeks ago, and I’ve been doing this eleven years. I was like that is the freakiest thing I’ve ever seen. I’ve done my thing with cock rings and beefing up a little bit, putting the super ball in the G-string, making it jump around a little bit, giving it some extra play, but I’ve never seen nothing like this! That was just crazy, but they loved it. After the show, I went up to the girl and I said, I just want to apologize. I hope you had fun, I mean he was a little aggressive. “Oh, I loved It!” –Okay, clearly, I need to reexamine my performance; note to self. (Cisco, Personal interview)

As offensive as this response is, the lengthy reaction does help to position how different experiences can be when performing with or witnessing groups or dancers that follow different approaches to stripping. The dancers Lightning and Lorenz comment often about how challenging of an experience some dancers have when dancing with groups or for audiences to whom they are not accustomed. Both agree that many dancers have a particular style and are not always aware of the alterations they may need to make in order to best suit the expectations of a show. The shocked and descriptively offensive dancer above was performing with a group that was not his usual troupe. The bewilderment of his experience highlights the gap there can be with difference in style, approach, and expectations regarding various shows.

Another white dancer specifically comments on his experience dancing in a black show featuring Penetration, the dancer highlighted above. He was amazed by the difference and the amount of aggressiveness of his style of performance, but couldn't believe the masturbatory
portion of his act where he sat in a chair, covered in a towel while holding his erection, as women lined up in order to take turns witnessing his engorged manhood. He explains:

He sat down completely naked and held himself while each and every girl came up to him, rubbing on him while he was sitting there holding it. I was like, "oh my God you’re just going to sit there and hold your cock this entire time and let every woman come up and throw money at you and rub you, and that’s what you are going to do for minutes." Wow! First, I can’t believe you even did that. Second, to do it this long, girl after girl after girl. (Jay-Rock, Personal interview)

The reaction by Jay-Rock was a result of witnessing the unexpected. He was not fully accustomed to the set of practices at black shows and was not fully aware of the outrageousness of some routines when compared to the practices he considered common.

Since time can be valued and handled differently at black shows he was unaware of how much time dancers might spend on various moments of their routine. Jay-Rock explains, he was more familiar with a different type of show structure where dancer's routines were much shorter and most of the costumes were based on more common themes. He even recalls a dancer bringing a slip-N-slide as part of his act. He explains that he had never seen such a tactic and was shocked at the amount of time it took the dancers to enter the stage, set up the apparatus, and execute the usage of the slide. Apparently, the setup exceeded twenty minutes not including the time the dancer later took oiling the slide and his body, before interacting with the audience by placing participants at one end and sliding into them as the erotic climax of his routine. After his first experience dancing with a black group, Jay-Rock further clarifies how much more aware he was about male stripping, and how much more individual, expressive and unique a routine could be than just the familiar approach to which he was trained and accustomed.
While some of the remarks by white dancers highlight how differently they distinguish the styles of performance between black and white shows, the black dancers I interviewed were less definitive about the differences they experience when dancing with white groups. The reflections in many cases were quite different. There appeared to be some frustration when white dancers were asked about their experiences dancing with black dancers and for black audiences, as many of them were troubled with not being prepared for the performance in the ways the black dancers were prepared, or receiving the same kinds of responses they were accustomed when dancing for predominantly white audiences. The black dancers I interviewed, however, were less aggravated in their reflections and appeared to understand how difference played to their advantage when dancing with white dancers and predominantly white audiences. Lorenz's understanding of the aggravation and apprehension that some white dancers have when dancing with black dancers for a black audience is quite informative. I quote him at length here where he reiterates some of his thoughts that I mentioned above. He explains that:

I have had white guys try and they give up, because they are not used to black females, and when they see rejection from a girl out there, they are not used to it. They are used to white women flocking and falling all over them and black women aren’t like that, they go right past that. They may see something, and be like “oh he did his damn thing,” or they just won’t care. They won’t give you the time of day. It’s not because they hate you, they just prefer not to get at you. So, I think it’s a harder transition for white males to go in and perform for black females as opposed to a black male performing for white females, white shows.

(Lorenz, Personal interview)
Considering many of the dancer’s remarks, it is apparent why white dancers struggle more than black dancers when dancing in circumstances that are not primarily racially homogenous. Black venues usually require much more physicality and endurance. Many black dancers tie off the penis to keep it erect, and tend to perform for longer periods of time. White dancers are a marked body in a black context. Black men are used to being a marked body in a white context, but white men are not often the Other.

Ultimately, most white dancers appeared to struggle with making sense of performance differences and alterations, if needed, to best suit a different audiences' needs. The underlying difference in the discussions I had with black and white dancers seemed to focus on the inability of white dancers to accept change and difference when subjected to performance conditions that pushed their customary boundaries regarding performance etiquette with individual style and the framing or implementation of the penis as the key element of a routine. The overarching understanding was that there are distinct differences regarding the racial lines of the male stripping industry. Just like the racial tensions that continue to plague our country, issues with inclusion, acceptance, difference and individuality blanket the male stripping industry, and position the business as an erotic enterprise rooted in sexism, racism, and base instincts of sex and physical domination, constituted by fragmented and separated audiences, expectations, and practices.

Chapter IV Summary: The Racial Divide is Real

The racial divide of the male stripping industry exists and insofar as my experience and the experience of the interview participants would suggest, it is an accepted fact. Acknowledging this division reveals much about the performance of erotic masculinity and cultural
understandings of the male strip show, as well as acknowledges many generalizations about the topic. Very few films establish the racial division within the industry as it exists. Films that imply the separation do not appropriately suggest how performance practices can vary distinctly based on the contexts of the show and the make up of the audience. In the particular examples I examined throughout the chapter, I have furthered Frank and Carnes' findings about race and gender to establish how different niche types of male strip shows are, and to explore how the cultural understanding of male stripping and erotic masculinity can certainly depend on various elements; some norms are socially acknowledged and others are continually negotiated based on space and race. Many examples found through various media have conditioned cultural assumptions about the acts and actions within the strip show; however, most of the examples do not fully establish just how the industry is racially structured to service particular demographics.

As I discussed, the idea of racial division in the male dancing industry appears to be an accepted fact among dancers. While some shows in larger cities may have more integrated and diverse groups of dancers, a larger portion of the industry in smaller markets function on performance practices that exhibit a high level of racial separation and difference. The numerous examples given here provide a sampling of the divide that exists throughout the business. As I discussed above, two of the defining differences between black and white male strip acts are the variation of individualized stylistic costumes and the deployment and framing of the erect penis as a highlight of the performance. A black dancer’s strip routine often focuses on individual style that frames an erection while white acts often do not. The penis usually remains a private, shrouded territory in white performances, while in black shows the exhibition of a performer’s penis and individual style often highlights the way audiences participate.
Black performers that focus on the display of their penis as part of their performance challenge normative performances of masculinity where the penis typically remains a private and protected territory. As anthropologist Maxine Sheets-Johnstone explains, the penis is often shrouded in mystery, “never made public,” and “never put on the measuring line the same way the female sexual body parts are” (69). Equally, feminist theorist Susan Bordo in "Reading the Male Body" suggests that outside homoerotic representations, “the penis has grown more, not less, culturally cloaked over time” (33). However, the performance of masculinity and the politics of representation based on the practice of cloaking or implementing the frontal bulge are continuously negotiated differently in the racially specific spaces.

In the black male strip show, realness and authentic blackness appear to depend on outward displays of individualism, attitude, and the erect penis. If Elam's understanding of the popular hip-hop adage of “keeping it real” becomes a slogan that connotes how individuals remain true to one’s roots within the black urban community, then if a black dancer were to follow a different performance code in a different context, the understanding of his “realness” and authentic blackness may be challenged. A phallic display becomes a behavior expected in a black performance setting but commonly remains forbidden in others. The topic becomes muddy and challenging, as the exhibition of realness and authentic blackness or whiteness for dancers becomes about their performances practices, the amount of focus on the penis and ultimately if they conform to different standards when performing in different spaces.

Historically, early American consciousness culturally assessed the black man’s body as “a powerful exotic commodity” (DeFrantz 107). Notions of black dancing being “overly sensual or primitive,” (28) as Wendy Perron explains, “lends itself to the perception of the sensuality and sexuality of black dance as animality” (28). The full-frontal exhibition and phallic display of size
and power becomes a negotiated element of performance for black dancers that challenges readings of realness and authenticity against compliant mimicry in different circumstances. Ideas of eroticism and animality become challenging to understand when comparing the ways in which white and black dancers construct their erotic commodity. The way a dancer constructs and performs his identity often depends on the context of the performance, and what he perceives to be the expectations of the show. Although many black dancers conform to white strip standards by remaining limp or less erect and unexposed in a white performance, the erect frontal display is a performance element that most women in black contexts apparently find sexually appealing and have come to expect as a sign of black dominant masculinity. Given that the black penis is a powerful performance tool usually only visually available in spaces dominated by their own race, the display and individualism attendant on the presence of the penis becomes an overtly sensual and sexual element privileged only to those specific sites.

The display of the penis in some black contexts is a marker of “realness” that is valued and expected, while a veiled penis in other white contexts is the expectation that does not distract from the performed illusion of “realness” or authentic eroticism. Since white dancers typically do not display the penis as often in performances as black dancers do, as it is generally not the expectation, “realness” and eroticism often take on a different, less pornographic, connotation. Bordo explains that in strip routines where the penis remains covered, the elements that are eroticized are not the strip or the exposure of nakedness, "but the teasing display of phallic power, concentrated in the hard, pumped-up armor of muscles and the covered frontal bulge straining against its confinements” (35). With the examples I discussed above we see that there are distinct differences in expectations with types of male strip shows, and regardless of the penis being covered, the ways in which the bulge is implemented in performance, in some cases, is an
element that helps define the type of performance. When dancers are placed in situations where they must negotiate their performance, they are faced with being true to their understanding and interpretation of the erotic art form, or challenged to make alterations to their performance identity to become better suited to meet the wants and expectations of a given performance.

Actors are constantly faced with situations where they must negotiate their identity in performance. If we do not do what the audience wants, we run the risk of getting booed and not receiving the reinforcement we work so hard to achieve. The difference here with the male strip show is that the norms shift so much between the contexts. An actor prepares a role based on a script that usually remains consistent for the run of a production, while a male erotic dancer must prepare his performance based on an individual show's context and must potentially fluctuate his approach night-in-and-night-out. White dancers who have not performed in black contexts previously are faced with expectations they have not encountered. These expectations can push comfort boundaries, even for men who are used to performing half naked, as many white dancers may never have thought that they were signing up for a job where they would have to show their penises. Once the penis is revealed, the act moves further away from stripping and more toward the direction of porn. The black venues and performers discussed above push the performance toward porn, or at least a kind of simulated sex or simulated porn. Meeting certain expectations and following expected norms with costume, individuality, or erotic displays are the accepted practices that dancers must be aware of and submit to in order to best acclimate to a given audience. Such examples of being and becoming a stripper may be best exhibited in the examinations of differences between white and black strippers/shows. In many ways, there are certain performance expectations white performers are less likely to meet, or exposure lines white performers will not cross. In comparing cases of these extreme differences among the male
strip show, the Negro myth as well as the white man’s racial jealousy or fear of the eroticized black body is impossible to deny when the penis and such racially specific construction of erotic masculinity are being performed, as they evidently are within black contexts.

“Realness” and authenticity in erotic spaces become displayed in a dancer's ability to embody a sensuality and sexuality that best suits the performance at hand. The various film and Internet examples and my participants’ interviews testify to how race informs expectations within the male dancing industry. Racial divisions remain within the industry; the unique performative negotiations that occur in different male stripping performance contexts bring the division into stark relief.
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSIONS

“The self exists as a process in a constant state of transformation and flux; it is a dialogue between the facets” (Carol Rambo Ronai, “The Reflexive Self Through Narrative: A Night in the Life of an Erotic Dancer/Researcher” 107).

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A long night of work is beginning. This time I start in front of my computer. I've tucked my son in bed, kissed my wife goodnight, and finally finished grading that stack of papers that seemed endless. My wine glass is empty, and I choose to keep it that way as I transition back to face what seems like a relentless project. I try and continue my keystrokes but pause and return to a reflective stare into the mirror as a way back into my reflexive state. I *flex* and *pose* in the mirror to see if I *still got it*. *I don't!* This time, as I assess my body, I am fully clothed. The elements of my erotic identity are now more compartmentalized and covered, and the ways in which I understand the stripping industry and the performances I once completed become clearer.

--I *am* 37.

On the surface, I used to be a noticeable physical presence; what some consider a muscular, athletic man, trained and developed to resemble an ideal masculine Greek form. However, age has produced a less defined, much softer man now losing his erotic edge. I am no longer the representation of youthful hyper-muscular masculinity. My body and its physical capacity have devolved from that of an earlier arrogance when I could *hustle* the industry non-stop in support of my creative, financial, and academic pursuits. Today, my time and energies, both physical and psychological, are resourced to more focused and enjoyable responsibilities.

My youthful vanity has faded, as well as my erotic value in a business that once served my creative, educational and erotic needs. The body that I constructed in my testosterone
pumping youth, a body trained to resemble the cultural prescription of lean, muscular density so often displayed on magazine covers and print ads, is slowly slipping away. My “built body,” a space cultural studies scholar Pamela Moore describes as a, “dynamic, politicized, and biological site,” (2) offers me new understandings. As I flex and pose, the mirror allows me to remember the body that once was, while my body today identifies my age with looser skin, wrinkles, and thinning hair. Even though my body is covered, I know my chest is not as toned as it once was. The defined abdominals I once had have vanished, and age lines have formed in the corners of my eyes. Age and maturity have repurposed my value system, thereby reducing my arrogant desire for physical perfection to a broader value for physical and psychological elasticity and awareness. I envision the person that I once was and the body that I once possessed. At the same time, I see my current self staring back. I no longer have the drive to do and be an erotic persona. While, I’m not what I once was, it may be possible that with the right lighting, costume apparel, and certain level of audience intoxication, I might still might be able to pull off a performance as a male stripper one more time. I hope that I never need to find out.

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My journey in this business and the research for this study have been long and exhausting, yet filled with academic fun and various kinds of pleasure. Long nights, sore muscles, tired eyes, a dehydrated body and cramping fingers from hours of either driving, dancing, sitting and typing or unfolding dollar bills stuffed into my thong have brought me to this conclusion. I will never underestimate the power of knowledge and the diversity of gender and sexuality, as my experiences stripping have taught me many things.

I’ve danced, nearly nude, for hundreds of men and women at various points in my career. Never in those moments in the early years would I have imagined that one day I would write
about those experiences in a way that did in fact entice hundreds of students to overflow a lecture hall for two consecutive nights to attend a "performative lecture" on the topic of erotic masculinity and male stripping. I would be lying if I said I did not hope that I would create some interest, but I never expected the turn-out that I received while presenting Beyond the Thong: Context and Representations in the Male Strip Show(s)- A Performative Lecture.

The text was developed in partial fulfillment of the capstone project for the Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies Certificate at Bowling Green State University. The piece was staged on the campus of Bowling Green State University on September 21st and 22nd 2012. In just under two hours I took my audience on a seven-night journey into the life and work-week of a male stripper. I explored as many facets of the business and niche moments that I could as I compiled several scenes that charted the organizational structure of the male stripping industry. Using the work-week framing, I presented a week in the life of a male stripper and various areas of the business that create the industry hierarchy. I examined the borders and boundaries of male strip show performances and how gendered and sexual identities are performed in various contexts of participants and spectators.

It was through the development of this representation of participants and spectators of the male stripping business that I first began to become more confident in my research and the importance it has in academic discourse. My performance was not just a solo approach, rather it was an ensemble based production where I recruited a team of graduate students to assist in the staging and direction of the production, along with a group of ten undergraduate student actors (five men and five women) cast to embody the interactive audience of my erotic work. While I could say that developing the text or doing the actual performance to a standing room only crowd were the highlights of the whole process, the most rewarding moments came during rehearsals.
In the early stages of the process, as I began to develop my team and ensemble, I could only be as transparent with the work and content that a few minute summary would allow. I tried to be specific but brief in clarifying the themes of the show and its purpose in order to gain their interest and commitment to the project. After recruiting my team, it was in those first few days of reading the text, viewing numerous photos and videos, and physically working on numerous erotic interactions that I realized how unaware my team was of not only the industry, but of the variations of difference regarding human sexuality. Explaining how the context of a performance matters when thinking about or discussing erotic performance, and how ideas of eroticism that are most commonly highlighted on film and television usually limit the scope of gender performances within the stripping industry, were ideas that they never had previously considered.

My team was completely unaware, when I pointed out, that there have been volumes of scholarship and popular articles written about the female strip show, but very little has examined the male side of the industry. Establishing how physically different and specifically niche the work of a stripper can be based on context and location was a topic that completely surprised the group. Being able to exhibit in the performance how specific ideas about gender, race, and sexuality can influence the discourse about erotic performance and sexuality completely opened their willingness to physically develop my work so others could have a deeper understanding about eroticism, gender, race, and sexuality as it pertains to the stripping industry.

The content within the performative lecture became the foundational point of entry for many of the ideas I have presented and developed throughout this study. My goal throughout my study has been to address how the nature and purpose of a performance can fluctuate greatly due to context of the circumstances, and to reveal how the interpretation of the act of male stripping is very individualized; the interpretation is based on the moment and on an individual's ideology,
his understanding of erotic play, imagination, improvisation, fantasy, and imitation. "Context matters," in strip shows, to reiterate Kim Price's sentiment one final time. My group and I worked hard to highlight how the realities and social contexts of particular places produce their own outcomes, behaviors and performative expectations based on a gendered organization. We strived to highlight various branches of the industry hierarchy and establish that unless an individual has access to and examines various social contexts of erotic spaces, the tendency seems to be that most people would believe that much of the erotic labor that exists in the sex industry (more particularly the stripping industry) mainly resembles the examples that are presented in popular film and television. By following the journey of my white queer/straight body through various moments and interactions of the performance, my team and those in attendance began to see how vast the male stripping industry is, and how specifically niche certain performances can be in specific context. Similar to the work of sociologist Mindy Bradley-Engen I worked to demonstrate how erotic performers' work experiences are shaped by the context in which they dance and the different approaches and interactions that occur in various settings.

This idea of variation is exactly what I have highlighted throughout this study as I acknowledge how the industry is ordered and organized in different segments, sectors and types of locations, and how masculinity is performed differently in various contexts. Specifically, I focus on three topics and explore how masculinity is performed based on the moment and the context of the performance. Through looking at various performance examples along with my personal reflections and the experiences of many dancers related through interview responses I

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70 I choose to use queer/straight as I identify as both throughout the study at different moments. To clarify, I have always identified as straight in my sexual preferences. However, today, due to my more informed understanding of the fluidity of gender performance than I had when I began stripping, the nature of what I do, and owing to how openly inclusive I am, I also, and more accurately, identify as queer.
displayed just how "tangled up in culture" (Agustin 618) commercial sex is, and how the ideas of segment, sector, style, type and race help identify a structural system at work that prescribes expectations in the way masculinity is performed in various social contexts.

The film examples I examined throughout this document, condition cultural assumptions about the business regarding the sensationalized atmosphere of public performances, the ease of entrance into the business, the similarities between purpose and function between public and private performances, and some very basic assumptions about racial division in the industry. The examples establish cultural beliefs that are common, but are not consistent or always hold true. Entrance into the business can be challenging, private parties are not always sensationalized and well received, and the racial borders that exist and the differences in behaviors and expectations can be quite different.

In the public show gender construction and relations follow an interactive variety show model where interactive behaviors have historically been established as the standard. Performance structures are usually consistent in the public show where costume dramas are common and interactive participation in many forms is the expected norm. However, because there are any number of variables that can change once a performer leaves the conditioned public sphere and enters the private sector, the established expectations of the public sphere are upheld, if and only if, the audience is informed and willing to accept and engage in the practices of the public show.

It is in the shift away from the public strip show to the private sector strip show where the variations of gender construction and in power relations develop and are based on each situation and the circumstances of the context. While the costume dramas in the private sector may mirror those in the public show at times, a dancer must adapt to each performance. Space may be
limited in the private context, resulting in a dancer making alterations to his intended approach. A group may be unaware or uninterested in the performance, so attitude shifts for the performer may be necessary and tactical adjustments may be required. For example, using fire as an erotic prop in an enclosed place such as a party bus or trolley, or in somebody's home may not be the best choice in constructing an erotic masculine persona. Employing erotic sex toys in simulated sexual acts might not be the most appropriate way to engage someone's grandmother. Aggressively attempting to utilize food as an erotic gimmick with a spectator that refuses to participate and requests to be left alone might not be the best way to win over a crowd in a small intimate place where all members of the audience know each other. A dancer can prepare one way for a public performance where quality stage work is both expected and can be executed, but he must also be prepared to change performance tactics and prop usage according to context if he works in the private sector.

My examples throughout the study were situational and could have resulted in any number of outcomes, but I have endeavored to display how varied the male stripping performances can be and equally how specific performances of masculinity are based on context and experience. My entrance into the industry challenged the ways in which I understood my sexuality and manhood. Rejection, as was discussed by the interviewees and as evinced in my own experiences, is often part of the entrance process, as is being forced to address comfort zones and boundaries of sexual comfort. I was first rejected by my heterosexual peers at a straight club, then hazed into questioning my sexuality as CJ required me to dance for Tommy G at a gay bar, before he would invite me back to my initial place of rejection. I was later gifted work and routines from my mentor Marcus based on the bonds of trust and friendship that we had formed, before I again experienced rejection as I attempted to reinstitute myself in a new
queer performance space. Acceptance into the business is situational. For a dancer to succeed in a club or group, acceptance is often contingent on the other members. New members must learn the ropes of the business, be a good fit for the context and earn the respect of other dancers before continuous performance opportunities will be available.

As I moved the study into the private sector, I charted the ways in which the industry can be independent with niche examples, where context influences how a performance is constructed and erotic masculinity is presented. The members of the first private party I described could have been more engaged by participating and interacting with my show. A different reaction would have influenced my decisions on how to approach them and what tools to utilize. Equally, I could have played it less safe in my second party with more erotic props and physicality. The result may have been positive and similar to the reaction with Jay Rock and the ninety-year-old birthday participant, or it may have been completely negative. With each example, the various contexts highlight how the ego-driven, aggressive dominant form of masculinity commonly found with dancers in the public sector and in filmic representations, will not always be the performance of masculinity that is wanted or accepted. Even though there may be various desires in the public show, larger public audiences seem more prepared to accept an aggressive, stylized form of masculinity. Eager and consensual interactions from larger, enthusiastic audiences permit dancers to play toward those wanting to participate, while the rest of the audience builds intrigue and willingness. In some instances, the audience may be conditioned by the venue to respond in a particular manner, as conventions are more set in the public venue. However, in the private sphere, conventions are situational and require more attunement on the part of the dancer.

In the final chapter I examined my racial reality check which ruptured how I understood my performance of erotic masculinity and the reasons why I renegotiated my performance of
identity. In spaces where the audience is predominantly white, they are likely to react favorably to the way I renegotiate a theme and my erotic identity dealing with culturally recognizable white actors and theme music. Those moments performed in white spaces carry a different history and cultural currency for the white audience than they would for a black audience in a black space. By exploring my performance in "The Chocolate and Vanilla Tour," I addressed how race and the contextual makeup of an event can define the performance possibilities and the resultant meanings constituted in that space. The reality of the spatial makeup of "The Chocolate and Vanilla Tour" defined the possibilities and meaning in the venue differently than what I am usually accustomed to in predominantly white contexts. While the movements, rhythms, and patterns of energy of "The Chocolate and Vanilla Factory Tour" were oddly familiar in their erotic intention and purpose as most others shows in which I have performed, they were equally different and distinct to a culturally recognizable black vibe.

In my performative lecture, I rushed from my experience at the Chocolate and Vanilla Tour to my final gig at a reoccurring club booking, as part of their “beauty and the beef,” drag and stripper night. In the performative lecture, I addressed how my identity functioned in this queer space where most of the regular customers still enjoyed my body and performance despite my clear heterosexual preferences and sexual unavailability. I specifically focused on this performance event where three drag queens and I negotiated our introductions and dressing room etiquette in order to share a tight, cramped room with all of our attitudes, personalities, and constructed identity paraphernalia. I've omitted this example from the main portion of my study and a more critical analysis of the gay/queer sector of the industry than I give it here as I feel that segment deserves more attention than I can provide in just a chapter. I also believe that I need to
do additional research in order to fully understand how the public/private sector functions in that context and to discover how race functions in that specifically gay/queer space.

Since space and context can influence every performance, stripping can be a nervous occupation, full of high excitement and stress. Each performance often comes with a new geography and a relatively specific set of rules of engagement. Each show is full of unexpected experiences, interactions, and surprises that can only be handled with a tricky equation of preparation, experiences, luck and improvisation. My examples throughout the study which highlight *a night in the life of a male stripper* emphasize how each show or performance can be unique and specific based on the context. In my examples, I believe some spectators liked my performance, while others did not. But overall, I think my brand of white erotic masculinity sold well enough to fulfill many spectators’ expectations. I think I did what I was expected to do in each cultural setting. Each setting I performed in had its own context, requiring that I be prepared to immediately negotiate the circumstances upon entering. I altered my performance of masculinity in each experience I described. In many ways, each audience wanted/expected certain rules and behaviors, but each were specifically unique in their wants and expectations.

In all the examples that I examined, it becomes evident how space has possibilities, carries meaning, and defines circumstances differently. While many public spaces were easily defined and identified throughout the study based on the context of sexuality and race, other spaces in the private sector needed me as a performer to define the expectations based on the circumstances of the context. As I entered each venue, my identity, its meaning, and my purpose became defined by that moment in time and the immediate relationship I developed with the venue and its context. In my two private parties, I performed erotic masculinity based on the performed process and energy of the circumstances, just as Jay Rock explained in his experience
of performing in a trolley and tailoring performances for patrons that were physically challenged. These moments and the context of their spaces carried meanings and had the power to transform the organizational order of how erotic masculinity was performed in their respected moment.

Space can also carry meaning based on the context, its relationship in the moment and its intended purpose. As I entered "The Chocolate and Vanilla Factory Tour," I realized just how the space was being defined based on its racial context. In that moment, the publicly defined social hall became a racially specific space defined as a black male strip show. The purpose and context of the event determined the meaning associated with the performed process of the context. The context and purpose of the performance fashioned the reality of the moment, which dictated my relationship to the moment. My relationships to the context and my performance within it became an immediate source for negotiation with my body and ideologies. I analyzed how best to perform my erotic identity based on the current practices other dancers established within that venue, the materials I had access to, the uncertainty I had for audience expectations, and the racial assumptions the audience might have about my body. Entering the show and passing through racial boundaries permitted me to see myself and the context differently than what I expected from my previous experiences so that I could shift my social frames and imagine new possibilities for my performance.

Throughout this study I explored erotic labor, gender performance, and spatial boundaries, as well as physical and psychological negotiations of self while being invested in an erotic culture founded on predetermined images and expectations. My use of popular and culturally recognizable filmic and Internet examples chart a foundation of sensationalized and glorified representations of male strippers that permitted me to juxtapose contradicting examples based on reality and personal experience in order to expand the perspectives about the style of
performance and the approach to gender performance that happen in the male strip show. My use of both autoethnography and performative writing as a method allowed me to explore a particular life through a “layered account,” a method which sociologist Carol Rambo Ronai explains shifts, “forward, backward and sideways through time, space and various attitudes” (“Reflexive Self” 103). By inviting the reader, into an “experience of being” (“Reflexive Self” 123) through the text, I offer a way to enter this co-culture to reflect on, understand, and cope with different assumptions about this style of erotic performance.

By providing a personal and intimate space of thoughts as a way to “understand the way of life,” (Ellis, *Ethnographic I* xvii) juxtaposed to various sensationalized popular examples, I bring attention to the complexities of lived experiences often ignored by cultural representation. My aim to bring attention to the complexities of my lived experience, juxtaposed with similar and contradictory examples, is not meant as a means to assert a singular truth, but is meant to provide a story and a reflexive analysis that allows the reader to decide “the meaning it has for them in their lives” (Skott-Myhre et al. xv). I offered various vignettes, reflexive passages, and multiple voices presented through introspection to allow readers (at times) to enter into an "emergent experience" (Ronai, “Reflexive Self” 123), and to consider this evocative and critical text as an important site for investigation and analysis.

Throughout the study, I focused on male stripping as a labor practice, and how practices inform the understanding of spatial context, the performance of masculinity, the body, performance tools and physical technologies implemented in this erotic occupation, as well as the cultural systems of power that inform the business. I stayed focused on the motions through space, time, and thought in order to better understand the constant state of transformation and flux I experienced moving in and out of different contexts. There are many additional areas to be
examined in the male stripping industry in order to bring attention and cultural awareness to niche examples of human sexuality and gender performance in this business.

A broader understanding of gender and sexuality is needed to fully grasp the intimate negotiations of identity performance and construction that occur in the stripping industry. Like Frank and Carnes' essay “Gender and Space in Strip Clubs,” future studies must look more exclusively at issues regarding race and sexuality in more specific contexts like their "BBSDW" space (black women dancing for black women) in order to generate comparative analyses to determine if erotic performances functions differently beyond spaces that are predominately heterosexual and white. A broader cultural-studies approach to commercial sex practices and performances will further clarify the industry structure and how context can influence erotic performances in different segments, sectors and locations.

There are several areas for future research where this project can be further developed. A deeper analysis of class can inform the ways in which we understand gender performances in the male strip show. Exploring the idea of actual and perceived status and privilege of both performers and spectators would be a complex undertaking, but may offer new and interesting ways of analyzing performed eroticism. Examining how class functions and impacts gender performances in the male strip show would benefit greatly by juxtaposing ethnographic experiences from the dancers with statistical data regarding population density of the geographic regions under consideration, as well as data regarding the range of ages, income of spectators, their sexuality, their relationship status, and the reasons they attend erotic performances. Such an analysis would require further research beyond what I can reasonably address here. Nevertheless, let me acknowledge that how performances of erotic masculinity are affected by these factors could substantially augment how I discuss erotic performances across varying contexts.
Additionally, new case studies to reevaluate how specific male strip clubs function today and how erotic masculinity is performed as compared to the findings of the original studies on the topic in the 1980s, 90s and early 2000s can chart cultural shifts in eroticism and masculinity, to presentation, style and lyrical content in music. Exploring how other racially specific contexts construct erotic masculinity, and where they intersect or deviate from white and black erotic masculinity is also an area of future research. Also, examining if specific racial contexts influence the performance of erotic masculinity in gay/queer clubs in larger, more population dense cities is another area for future research. Exploring if there are agencies that cater to gay and queer demographics for private booking and, if so, do performance expectations vary in relations to my findings about the private sector. Comparing the occupational protocols and erotic tactics in male heterosexual and homosexual male strip clubs with each other or against those of female strip hustle clubs is another possible avenue of future study. Continuing with a broader cultural-studies approach will benefit how we discuss the intersections of eroticism, performance and identity with art, ethics, consumption, entertainment, economics, class, space, gender, race and sexuality.

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This journey is finally winding down. I pour a final glass of wine, turn on the stereo, and listen to my theme song one last time before this project concludes. Throughout the soundtrack of my performance *Beyond the Thong: Context and Representations in the Male Strip Show(s)- A Performative Lecture*, I continued to return to Bob Seger's 1973 hit "Turn the Page" as my melodic transition between scenes. Like Seger's reflective journey creating his track, here I am

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7) For your listening pleasure, I provide one final link to a YouTube video of Seeger’s song "Turn the Page" to offer a musical and lyrical conclusion to the many thoughts and moments that I experienced throughout my journey in both the male stripping industry and academia. Enjoy! [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kh9ih2XJg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kh9ih2XJg)
on the page again, thinking about all of those long nights in small towns and large cities living a
life on the stage. Night after night, as I stepped away to make sense of all that had happened in
my career as a male dancer and the course of this project Segar's refrain would echo: "Here I am,
on the road again, there I am, up on the stage." I hope those long nights of erotic work and
critical reflection have created a thought provoking argument about the life, the work, the
experiences, and the variations that occur throughout the male dancing industry. Media examples
have conditioned many cultural assumptions about the strip industry and chances are that if you,
the reader, have occupied a seat in the audience of a strip show (male or female), you may have
accepted many of those assumptions as beliefs. There are, however, variations to all of the
popular beliefs that are provided in the films which I have highlighted and discussed.
Unfortunately, unless an individual has continual access to the industries and those variations
throughout the different sectors and segments, it is hard to look beyond those popular
assumptions in order to see additional truths and facts. Hopefully, this study has provided more
insight into popular assumptions about the stripping industry, and how vastly different variations
of those assumptions regarding performances can be based on the context of a venue.
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The chart in Appendix A helps establish the contextual criteria of different segments, brands and styles within the organizational structure of the male stripping industry. The chart is meant to provide a general understanding of the industry in order to distinguish contextual differences in various types of performance.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supervision &amp; Control</th>
<th>Clubs</th>
<th>Tours</th>
<th>Private parties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes a head dancer or managerial figure. Sometimes it's a shared responsibility among veteran dancers. The agreed responsibility of the men working each night is to keep a show moving, maintain a sense of organization until the night is over.</td>
<td>The head dancer often serves as the booking agent. They determine contract stipulations regarding the duration of the show, number of men, and any practices or laws that must be upheld based on the venue's culture.</td>
<td>The dancer is in control of the show's structure. It requires understanding the request of the performance, the expectation of that particular audience, and the functionality of the performance space.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Structure | Multiple thematic routines. Dancers get a predetermined amount of time to perform each routine ranging from 10-20 minutes. A portion of the show is stage based and has a high degree of theatricality with predetermined blocking and choreography. The remaining portion of the performance is more improvisational as the dancer leaves the stage to engage in the audience in the interactive tipping ritual. Sometimes there is a continuous flow of performances throughout the night, other times fluidity is more broken due to low volume of dancers or audience. | Similar to club show structure. However, the predetermined duration and number of dancers requires a more organized and fluid show format. The number of routines, the themes, and duration of each act is predetermined based on the prearranged stipulations of the booking contract. | Usually a single routine geared toward engaging a guest of honor for a special occasion. These are mainly birthday and bachelorette parties. A group contracts a dancer requesting a special thematic costume. Due to the veritable nature of possible location, each performance is in some way altered the physical structure and contextual makeup of each party. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clubs</th>
<th>Tours</th>
<th>Private parties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collecting of tips while in the crowd. Some money may be earned on stage during a thematic routine. The majority is collected once the stage performance is complete and costume has been removed. At this point dancers leave the stage and interact with the audience. The tipping ritual occurs while the dancer negotiates his way through the space engaging patrons that appear interested in tipping. Depending on the culture and physical architecture of the club, lap dances and private room experience may be available if the space allows. A small nightly wage may also be paid out by the club. This is not always the case and payment often depends on the number of paying customers and the number of dancers per night.</td>
<td>Similar to the club tipping ritual. However, there is usually a substantial nightly payout based on a percentage of the contract booking fee. Merchandise sales and gaming are additional methods of earning extra income. Dancers may have raffles to give away personal items, posters, shirts and promotional pictures, or sell similar items throughout the night.</td>
<td>There is a booking fee based on an industry average. This can range from $100 and upwards of $300 or more depending on the location, required travel, and any special requests. In addition, most spectators at these parties also engage in the tipping ritual. However, because the situations of these parties vary on a case by case basis, the earning expectations do as well.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**$3$ Method**

Women of various age. Patrons can potentially be racially specific depending on the area demographic of the performance location. There is a potential for regular customers; those that return to the club on a fairly regular or more than occasional basis. Audience population can range from few to none, or be into the high hundreds depending on the size of the venue. | Similar to the club demographic, but often a one time event. Tours are less likely to have regular customers due to the limitation or irregular scheduling of the show. | Same as club and tour population regarding age and race. Audience population is consistently much smaller ranging from just a few women to a few dozen. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homosexual/ Gay/Queer Segment</th>
<th>go-go bars</th>
<th>drag/variety shows</th>
<th>combo show</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Permanent. The venue's primary purpose is a social establishment that serves alcohol and regularly has erotic entertainment.</td>
<td>Same as go-go bar</td>
<td>Same as go-go bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong># of dancers</strong></td>
<td>Varies depending on size of club and availability of dancers. Can range from a handful to a couple of dozen.</td>
<td>Usually predetermined in the booking agreement. Based on the club's wants. Usually ranging from three to ten.</td>
<td>Varies depending on size of club and the desired structure and duration of the show. Can range from a handful or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Show Duration</strong></td>
<td>Performances last for predetermined times based on the venue's schedule. If the location is a popular club known for its go-go dancers, shows may last up to 6 hours or more and start as early as 8 pm and ending when the bar closes. If the location is smaller, or doesn't have access to a large pool of dancers, than shows may last for 1 to 3 hours during lunch or happy hour, or a few hours in the evening, a few nights a week.</td>
<td>Performances usually last for an hour depending on the number of performers. Depending on the start time for the show, there may be a number of performances with the same rotation of performers throughout the night, separated by thirty to sixty minute intermissions between each show.</td>
<td>Duration for this style of show can vary. Depending on the number of performers, the stage performance may last anywhere from twenty to sixty minutes. Once the stage show is over, dancers then internet and mingle with the crowd to collect tips. This period of interaction is an informal part of the show, but nonetheless an extension of the duration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dancer management is various and dependent on the venue. Sometimes dancer are managed by bar manager/owner, head bartender, the DJ, or promoter if the club has one. Rules are also based on case by case basis. Some venues restrict touching and dancer/customer interaction. Other venues' touching policies are more relaxed, and still other venues have private dance room where prostitution and various sexual acts are reported as common between dancer and patron.

The responsibility of the show director, venue manager, or owner. The show director is often the drag queen that claims the venue as her home club, or is the current reigning queen of the venue. Booking the performers also depends on the venue, again being the responsibility of the show director, venue manager or owner. Ultimately, the show director decides on the performance, as well as the length of each routine, and the number of routines a performer will complete.

Supervision is again various and dependent on the venue. Sometimes dancer are managed by bar manager/owner, head bartender, the DJ, show director or the promoter if the club has one. Since the show structure is somewhat varied and has elements of go-go, club and show bars, the show structure and rules of engagement are varied and dependent on the venue.
Go-Go Bars

Dancers usually perform within limited space and dance either on a small stage, platform, or the bar. Elaborate routines are not required, and most dancers simply wear a g-string, t-back, or a tight pair of booty shorts or boxers. Usually a number of dancers perform at the same time throughout different areas of the club. This continues throughout the night, and dancers periodically take breaks as long as enough other dancers are still working.

Structure

Collecting of tips is either hand to hand at a distance as dancers are often positioned above the patron on a stage, bar or platform. When dancers circulate the audience to sell shots and socialize, tips may also be collected hand to hand, or more intimately and aggressively distributed as patrons want to get a "glimpse" or a "feel" of the dancer's package. During the socialization while on the floor, physical touch may be an expectation established by the bar or by the individual dancer. Since the duration of the night may last numerous hours, socialization and interaction varies with each customer based on the number of customers and the amount each customer is offering. If interactions are extended, intimate conversation may lead to private dances in a specialize location or agreements established after work hours.

SSS Method

Drag/Variety Shows

Show structure varies considerably in terms of performance expectation depending on the types of performers booked for the evening. In essence, this is a variety show, where each performer gets three to ten minutes to perform their individual act. There is usually a host to introduce each routine leading up to the headliner. Often the host is the headliner.

Collection of tips happens more on stage rather in the crowd. While some money may be earned in the crowd, the structure of the show and variety of routines limits the time and interactions between performer and patron. Performers are usually paid a larger base pay based on their ability to perform a refined stage routine, and the restricted time period they get to work the crowd for tips.

Combo Show

Show structure may also vary considerably and mirror more of a go-go show or a variety show. It may also be equal parts of both, where following a stage routine dancer's then go-go dance for the remainder of the evening.

Earning method can be a combination of the go-go show or the variety show. The dancer may be paid a larger or smaller base pay based on the allotted time a dance works, average number of patrons usually at show, and the budget of the particular venue.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>go-go bars</th>
<th>drag/variety shows</th>
<th>combo show</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predominantly men of various age.</td>
<td>Men and women of various ages and sexual interests.</td>
<td>Same as drag/variety show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potentially can be racially specific depending on the area demographic of the performance location. There is a high potential for regular customers; those that return to the club on a fairly regular or more than occasional basis. Audience population can range from few to none, and be into the high hundreds depending on the size of the venue.</td>
<td>Potentially can be racially specific depending on the area demographic of the performance location. There is a high potential for regular customers. Audience population can range from few to none, and be into the high hundreds depending on the size of the venue.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
December 14, 2009

TO:        John Paul Staszel
            Theatre & Film

FROM:      Hillary Harms, Ph.D.
            HSRB Administrator

RE:        HSRB Project No.: H10D163GE7

TITLE:     Beyond the Thong: The Stripping Male(s) and Semiotics of Erotic Male Entertainment

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving human subjects. As of December 14, 2009, your project has been granted final approval by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). This approval expires on December 7, 2016. You may proceed with subject recruitment and data collection.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures (including increases in the number of participants), please send a request for modifications immediately to the HSRB via this office. Please notify me, in writing (fax: 372-6916 or email: hsrb@bgsu.edu) upon completion of your project.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/Modifications:
Stamped original consent document is coming to you via campus mail.

c: Dr. Montana Miller

Research Category: EXPEDITED #7
DATE: December 19, 2016

TO: John Paul Staszell, PhD
FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [293466-7] Beyond the Thong: The Stripping Male(s) and Semiotics of Erotic Male Entertainment

SUBMISSION TYPE: Continuing Review/Progress Report

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: January 6, 2017
EXPIRATION DATE: January 5, 2018
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of Continuing Review/Progress Report materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on January 5, 2018. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsrbo@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.
Dear research participant,

Thank you for taking the time to further a research project that I am pursuing for the completion of my doctorate in theatre at Bowling Green State University. My name is John Paul "JP" Staszek, and I am a doctoral student currently working on a research project on the male exotic dancing industry.

My research will specifically look at the male exotic dancing industry and how it is viewed, structured and performed as a cultural form of entertainment. While I initially seek to learn how the male industry differs from the female exotic dancing industry, the overall project will attempt to achieve a general understanding of the individuals that work in the industry and those individuals that are associated with it. The study will seek to confirm or deny cultural stereotypes of the men who work in the industry while understanding the sexual identity that this type of performance constructs. Through interviews with a variety of men who have worked in this business throughout this country, the study will consider performance and performance identity, and question the influences, process, and production of such performances in order to understand its position as a growing yet underground culture form of entertainment. This study seeks to understand the industry, the performance, the performers, and their audience to show that male reviews and male exotic dancing as entertainment often occurs in a space that is frequently recognized as a marker of certain rites of passage, such as weddings and birthdays.

There is minimal risk to you in participating in this study. I am, however, seeking your personal and intimate knowledge about the industry, the effects you have experienced and other specific information that can help provide a better understanding of the industry as a whole. If you choose to discuss any topics that involve illegal activity such as drugs or prostitution, you may keep your comments to your observations of the industry in general and you should not give me any specific identifying details (names, places, times) about criminal acts. The interview has the potential to be very in depth and may last approximately two hours. I wish to video record our conversations for later review in order to accurately transcribe and quote you, as well as to have the ability to visually compare your body language to the responses of other participants. If you wish, your identity will remain confidential and you will be identified by a pseudonym you provide. In any quotes I use in writing the analysis of my research, you will be referred to by this pseudonym. Also, any identifying details about you will be removed from any quote that I use in any publication or presentation. At any time you wish to refrain from answering certain questions or end the interview, you have the right to do so without explanation. For security purposes and to ensure the confidentiality of your identity all recordings and transcriptions will be kept in a locked file safely stored in my home office. Upon completion of this project, you will also have a right to a copy of any final published academic work. My personal contact information is provided along with the information of my advisor. I am asking you permission to interview, tape record and video, and potentially use your responses in my academic publications and presentations. In signing this consent form you are giving me your permission to use the information and data that I obtain here as I further this project.
Again thank you for your time. My contact information is provided below. You may keep a copy of this consent form for your records.

Thank you,

John Paul "JP" Staszel
Bowling Green State University

Contact Information:
If you have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact me at the following:

John Paul Staszel
jpstasz@bgsu.edu
724-366-4938

You may also contact my project advisor, Dr. Montana Miller at 419-372-0184 or montanm@bgnet.bgsu.edu. If any questions or concerns arise during the course of the study, you can also contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University at 419-372-7716 or at hsrh@bgsu.edu.

By signing your name below you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this research study, and to have your interview recorded.

Name (print and sign) __________________ Date ______________

[If you prefer to be quoted by your real name, please check here: __________________]

[If you prefer to be quoted using a pseudonym, please check here: __________________]

Do you prefer a particular pseudonym? If so, please write it here. __________________

BGSU HSRB - APPROVED FOR USE
ID # 1455
EFFECTIVE 12/16/03
EXPIRES 12/15/06
I’m here today to interview you about your knowledge of and experience with the exotic male dancing industry. I’ll be going through a series of questions separated into a number of categories including: personal, professional, training, performance/routine, audience, sex and sexuality, and summary.

To begin:

- Can you summarize the male dancing industry for me in one minute or less?

Personal

- Tell me about yourself. Who are you? How do you describe your lifestyle and image?

  What is your current occupation between the hours of 9AM and 5PM? What else do you do? Do you have another job? Specifically, I’d like to know your:

  - Current age
  - Day-time Profession
  - Education level
  - Marital status
  - Family status
  - The age you got started in the industry

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73 A copy of the approved application and list of question for interviewing human subjects is available upon request from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Bowling Green State University.
- How long you have been in the industry
- Your sexual orientation/preference - hetero/homo/bisexual

- Why do you strip? Is it for the money, girls, attention...what? What draws you to being a stripper?

- Tell me how or why you got started. Tell me about your first time. Tell me about the whole day. How did you get the job? What was going through your mind the entire day before you even got to the location? What was the first experience like- (describe it please) (costume/character, location, emotions, reactions etc)? How did it turn out? How did you feel immediately after? How did you feel the next day (physically, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually)? Is spiritually even a question that you can comment on? Are you religious or practicing any faith? How soon after did it take before you tried it again? Do you regret it? Would you do it all over again? Would you change anything about this “lifestyle” that you have chosen?

- What were you like when you first started? How have you changed/matured? What have you learned from the industry? How specifically has the industry changed you?

- What would you say are the ways to becoming a male stripper/ how can someone get started?

- How does someone find work/ gigs/ locations to perform?

- What qualities does it take to be a male stripper?

- Why do you think other guys strip?
• Can just any type of guy strip? What does it take? A certain approach, a certain mentality, a certain belief? Is there more than one approach?

• Do you tell your friends you are a stripper? How do they react? In general, do men react differently than women? If you don’t tell them- why? Does your family know? What’s your family’s reaction/response?

• What is your viewpoint on relationships while in this profession? What is your relationship status? Is it hard to keep a relationship doing this job?

**Professional**

• What is the hardest part of your job? Think about it from the bigger picture beyond just the stage.
  • Is it the body maintenance?
  • Is it finding the work?
  • Is it the rehearsal? Do you rehearse? How often?
  • Is it the travel?
  • Is it the reactions/perceptions of what people really think about you?
  • Business aspect-relating to/ dealing with colleagues, agencies and club owners
    • Do you think of starting your own business?
    • How do you describe yourself to club owners, trying to land a gig?
    • Where have you worked (states, countries, specific clubs etc.)?
    • How do you book a private party or a show?
How does one succeed in the industry? Is there a level of success to be determined or established? How do you define success and are you or do you know any successful male strippers?

How do you get along with other male strippers? What do strippers talk about amongst themselves (backstage, before and after the show)?

Describe the level of competition between male strippers at the same show.

When there are several male strippers performing at the same show, is there a formal “game plan” to work the audience?

How do you describe other strippers? Are there certain ones you work with all the time? Can you describe them to me? Is there a common body type? Certain age? Certain skill level? Certain attitude? Certain performance background? Can you describe why you think they are in the industry?

Is male stripping territorial?

Are there job requirements? Are there physical job requirements? Does one have to meet a certain body standard—in any area of the body? Do you compare yourself to others? Do you have insecurities?

Does the job ever get annoying, if so what is the most annoying part? Do the women ever get on your nerves? Do the men in the audience ever get on your nerves?

What is the best part of the job? Are there any benefits: fringe or actual?

What is the worst part about the job?

Do people ever ask about your day life? Does your day life ever get involved with your night life? Do you enjoy carrying on two personas?
• What is the post-show customer interaction policy? Is there one? How strictly do strippers adhere to these policies? Do you ever go home with any of the customers? Can you tell me your policy? Does the policy differ between private parties and stage performance?

• What do you think about when you are dancing? Are you focused on the performance, the audience reaction, the stage/performance space, the money? Something else?

• Do you only dance for women? What is the audience policy? Are the shows only for women or do men come as well? Is the audience normally heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual or do you dance at alternative locations where the audience is a mixture?

• Does your personal performance change based upon the audience reaction?

• Do you ever get turned on while performing? Have you ever? How do you react in that situation? If yes, does it hinder your performance, or make the crowd react differently?

• Do you perform intoxicated? Drunk or high? What is your position/ opinion on drug use or abuse in regards to male strippers or performance in general? Is it a common occurrence at shows/ after shows?

• If you perform while intoxicated, does it increase your self-confidence? Or does it help you relax? Or Other?

• Can you comment on the financial aspects of the job? Simply put, are you often asked “how much do you make/ is it worth it?”
Tell me about your stripper identity. Are you a different person? What are your costumes/ character identities? Do you have more than one? Tell me about the one you use most frequently and why?

Can you describe other routines that you also use? (theme, costumes, music, duration, the responses you most often get) What influences your construction of these routines?

What are the common identities (cop, cowboy, construction etc…) that other strippers use? Why do you think this is?

What says (cop, cowboy, construction worker)? What is your costume like? Please describe it and how it was designed? How was your routine constructed (music, movement, gimmicks)?

What cues and symbols do you use in your performance that say “sexy” “sexual” or “erotic”? Is your performance about being sexy, sexual or erotic? Or is it about something else?

What message are you trying to send to your audience and does it vary by performance?

Can you explain your performance? In general or as a specific costumed identity? How do you approach the performance?

Do you do the same routine every time?

What informs your character choices? Are there male identities, movie identities and influence your character?

The music- who chooses it?
• The actual costumes—who puts them together/makes them?

• Where can you get the costumes and thongs?

• The routine—who choreographs it?

• How do you rehearse, or don’t you?

• Are props used? If so what and how? How many dancers use them?

• Do you use your own name or a stage name?

• Is there anything else you can add about what influences your show and what informs your character choices?

Training/ Routine and Audience

• How did you learn to dance/perform? Do you have any formal dance training? Is any training required? Is there a place that strippers can get trained?

• Are you open to the idea of teaching the art of stripping?

• Often times, during performances, women are brought up on stage or interacted with in the audience. How does one handle this situation? Are the women pre-selected? Do they know what is going to happen? Do they always cooperate? Is it completely improvised? How do you approach this? Every stage/venue is different, does this have an effect on your performance? Do you even think about stuff like this? What goes through
your mind right before the performance starts and what are you thinking about during the routine? What happens after your routine is finished?

- What is your view of the audience? How do you approach your audience? What is your goal and what are your tactics? Is there a process for circulating through the audience? Is there more than one process? Is it different at different locations or for different audiences?

- What are the cues that you look for or identify while you are working? Does body type affect the improvisation with the audience? How so? What other cues do you identify with while you are performing in the audience? (age, status, comfort level, sexual appeal etc.)

- In circumstances where you do private parties for birthdays, bachelorettes, and such- how do you approach/handle the participation aspect? What if no one is willing to participate? How does this affect your performance/approach? Has that ever happened to you? Do you believe a stripper should have a good sense of humor or always try to take the job/gig seriously?

- What do you think your audience sees? Why do you think they are there/why do they come to shows? What is the appeal that attracts women to attend these shows? What are your tactics of audience promotion? What tactics have you found to work and not to work?

- Why do women have strippers at private parties? What are the celebrations/occasions? What is the attraction that entices women to have strippers attend private parties?
• How do you think your audience views you, your performance and the show in general?
  How do you hope they view you? What is your goal when you approach the stage, a performance, or a private party?
• What do you do differently in your routine if the audience isn’t engaged in your performance?
• Do you get a personal high from stripping? What is the stimulus that causes it (the screaming men/women, money, attention, etc…)
• How do you feel when you get home after a show? Do you critique yourself? What’s a typical high/low point?
• How do you unwind after a show (physically/mentally/emotionally/spiritually)?

Sexual

• How does stripping affect your sexuality? Does it make you feel sexually dominant?
• Can you address the topic of performing with an erection? Do you perform with an erection? Is it a requirement or choice? If you do perform with an erection, why or why not? What seems to be the “industry norm”? Do most guys perform with an erection or not? Can you comment on why you think this is? Do you/they do anything deliberately to achieve an erection before performing?
• If having an erection is not a requirement, how do you not get one while performing?
• Do women ask about your sexual preference? Do they ever just straight out ask if you are gay? Why do you think that is? Does male stripping give off more of a heterosexual or homosexual vibe/identity?
• Can you comment on your sex life? How does being a stripper affect your sex life?
  Does it enhance or hinder it? How so?

• How would you define the word “hustle” in relation to your industry?

• The ideas of pornography and prostitution can easily be related to male stripping. What is your opinion on the subjects? Are you familiar with other areas of the sex industry? Are you aware of any male strippers that may also be familiar with other areas of the industry?

• Porn, prostitution and hustling are common terms associated with female strippers. Do you think they are terms easily associated with male strippers as well? Why or why not?

**Final/ wrap up questions**

• Is there a separation between yourself and your stripping identity? How do you change, or don’t you?

• Do you enjoy what you do? Why? What is the best part?

• What is your best memory/ and what is your worst memory about stripping?

• Have you ever been stalked?

• Does stripping allow you to approach women differently? How so? Does your approach to people, in general, outside of the “stripping” world, differ? How so?

• How do you feel about cameras? Are they permitted at shows? Do they bother you or make you self-conscious while you are performing? How do you feel about people posting photos/videos with or without your permission after you perform?
• What do you think the overall cultural reaction is to this industry? Acceptance or tolerance? Rejection or intolerance? Something else?

• How is the male stripping industry different than the female stripping industry?

• How do you justify stripping to yourself? If you could do it all over again, would you? Would you change anything?

• Where has the profession led you in life?

• Who influenced you?

• What drives you?

• What do/did you hope to accomplish?

• When is enough enough?

• Do you monitor/measure your performance on an ongoing basis?

• Have you developed a performance rubric that you use to monitor your performance?

• What results are most critical to your success?

• Is there anything that you would like to add that you think could further this study?

To end on the same question we started with: Considering everything we discussed here this afternoon, can you summarize the male dancing industry for me in one minute or less?

**Questions for Managers/ bookers/ agents/ or other?**

• What type of business or organization is this?

• What is your title/position?

• How long have you been in this position?

• How long has your career dealt with male strippers?
• Can you summarize the male dancing industry for me? How is it structured and how does it function?

• What is your opinion on that industry?

• What is your business relationship with male strippers?

• How is it handled? How often do you deal with this type of performer?

• How would you describe the response? Audience response, marketing response, business response?

• How did you get started or come in contact with male stripping?

• Is there a “stereotype” that you can recognize or identity with in relation to male stripping?

• What do you think the overall cultural reaction is to this industry? Acceptance or tolerance? Rejection or intolerance? Something else?
APPENDIX C. PHOTO CONSENT ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Appendix C: Various image/photo usage permission approvals

Heather Mull Photography  www.heathermull.com  heathermullphoto@gmail.com  412-901-1647

11.30.2016

John Staszek
Professor of Music and Theatre
California University of Pennsylvania

Dear John,

I consent to your request to include an image of my photograph of Gloria's Strip Club (made for the Pittsburgh City Paper in the early 2000's) in your dissertation "Beyond the Thong: Context, Representations and the Performance of Masculinity in the Male Strip Show(s)" for California University of Pennsylvania.

Best of luck to you in the completion of your PhD.

Sincerely,

Heather Mull
570 Kilbourne Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15207
Re: Consent Letter from JP

LH

Press the Enter key to open the contact card. [Log In]

Reply all |

Wed 11/30, 5:06 PM

Staszek, John

Action Items

Permission granted for the use of the two pictures discussed for your project. Good luck!

Sincerely,

2016 Monongahela Avenue. Apt 2 rear. Pittsburgh PA 15218

From: Staszek, John <staszek@calu.edu>
To: Playgames1980@yahoo.com <Playgames1980@yahoo.com>
Subject: Consent Letter from JP
Sent: Wed, Nov 30, 2016 9:11:56 PM

Hey JP,

I hope you are doing well man.

I’m writing to formally request your permission to use the images we have discussed in my study. The working title of the document is Beyond the Thong: Context, Representations and the Performance of Masculinity in the Male Strip Show(s). Your photo’s will be exhibited in the last body chapter that examines the race and erotic masculinity in the male strip show.

If you consent and can provide your permission, please reply and clarify that you acknowledge the photo's intended use and that you grant your permission to use the image.

For convenience, I have attached a general letter for you to add your name and address if you permit me to use your photos. Simply add your name and address and resend it back. If you want to edit or rewrite anything, please feel free. If you can send it as a PDF that would be great. If not, just as a word document and I will save it as a PDF later.

In the final document I will place our correspondence in an appendix, and clarify in the document that you have provided permission to use the images.

I've attached the images below.

Thanks again man!!! Much love! JP

JP Staszek

Professor of Music and Theatre
12.1.2016

John Paul Staszl
Professor of Music and Theatre
California University of Pennsylvania

Dear Mr. Staszl,

I consent to your request to include the images we have discussed and I have provided for use in your dissertation “Beyond the Thong: Context, Representations and the Performance of Masculinity in the Male Strip Show(s).”

I really enjoyed our time working together and discussing the experiences I have had in the industry. I look forward to reading the study and seeing my image as part of the work.

Thank you for formally requesting my permission.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

601 Thompson st. Fremont Ohio 43420
3/1/1 2017

John Paul Staszek
Professor of Music and Theatre
California University of Pennsylvania

Dear Mr. Staszek,

I consent to your request to include the images we have discussed and I have provided for use in your dissertation "Beyond the Thong: Context, Representations and the Performance of Masculinity in the Male Strip Show(s)."

I appreciate your request to use my photo in your study to help support one of your critical discussion points. I look forward to reading the study and seeing my image as part of the work.

Thank you for formally requesting my permission.

Sincerely,

Annice Paun
13941 Basswood Circle, Strongsville 44136
APPENDIX D. SAMPLE WORK ORDER

Fw: Gentlemen Strippers Reservation 39537 - Sun, August 10, 2014

From: admin@gentlemenstrippers.com <admin@gentlemenstrippers.com>
Sent: Friday, August 8, 2014 2:07 AM
To: John Paul Staszle
Subject: Gentlemen Strippers Reservation 39537 - Sun, August 10, 2014

name: [redacted]
confirmed: yes
show_date: Sun, August 10, 2014
preferred_time: 09:15
time_window: 900-930
first_name: [redacted]
last_name: [redacted]
party_typeA: Bachelorette
recipient_name: Sierra
address: 446 New York Ave
city: [redacted]
state: OH
zip: 43613

https://outlook.office.com/owa/?viewmodel=ReadMessageItem&ItemID=AAMkAGE5OD... 3/10/2017
guests_type: female
typeA: 1 Male Stripper
costumeA: Cowboy
order_amt: $150
split: 100 / 50
dancer_comments:
customer_comments: Requested Ben

Please Note:

Your reply to this email is mandatory and confirms your acceptance of the terms and conditions contained in the Independent Contractor Agreement previously endorsed by you and Chicago Gentlemen, along with any additional terms and conditions contained in this Engagement Letter.

Your reply to this email also confirms your acceptance of the engagement. Should we not receive a reply, another contractor may be retained for the engagement.
If a party is not completed for ANY reason, you MUST notify us the same night of the party or you will still be responsible for the commission payment for that party.

For those of you mailing out commissions, send check or money order to:

Chicago Gentlemen
Suite 300
Chicago, IL 60656

Contact numbers to use:

1-415-954-9950 Dave's Cell
1-650-286-9213 Next to Office (Best Option)

76.252.121.148

https://outlook.office.com/owa/?viewmodel=ReadMessageItem&ItemID=AAMkAGE50D...  3/10/2017