

A STUDY OF THE WORK AND INTERACTIONS OF EXOTIC DANCERS

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This is a study of the occupation of exotic dancing. Interaction is at the heart of the work of the exotic dancer and is explored in several ways in this study. First, the stage performance itself consists not only of physical actions, but of the dancer constantly interpreting the actions of customers and modifying her behavior accordingly. Second, in some clubs, dancers are expected to sit with customers and interact with them. In order to do this successfully, the dancer must correctly interpret the expectations and desires of her customer and act accordingly. She must balance this act with maintaining her own personal boundaries in regard to emotional and physical access to her body. Third, formal and informal rules are created in the club through interaction with customers, management and coworkers. Not only are these rules created and learned through interaction, but they exist to govern interaction in the club, with each part of the interactional equation having an interest in either following, enforcing or breaking the rules

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

This is a study of the occupation of exotic dancing. The various aspects of performance, interaction, relationships and rules will be discussed. While many studies have explored the issues of deviance and exotic dancing, few have looked at the work as an occupation that requires skill and learning. Issues of work, interaction, gender and sexuality will be discussed in the context of exotic dancers' experiences while at work and in balancing the work with their personal lives.

This chapter provides an introduction to the research, including its methods and sociological perspectives. Data was collected for this study by conducting in-depth interviews with five women who were currently working or had worked as exotic dancers. To the women interviewed, I was what Lofland and Lofland (1995) refer to as a known investigator taking an outside research role (pp. 36-37). Dancers were recruited initially through flyers (see Appendix A) displayed throughout Athens, Ohio. Response to the flyer was instantaneous. In the first week, I was contacted by two women and scheduled interviews with them immediately. One of the first women to be interviewed volunteered to display a flyer in the club in which she worked. After seeing the flyer, another dancer contacted me and offered to be interviewed. Two other women later agreed to be interviewed after another round of flyers were distributed. In all cases, interviews were set for a time and location that were convenient for the

interview subjects. I interviewed four of the women in their homes; the fifth asked to be interviewed in my home.

Each interview was structured by an interview guide (see Appendix B). Although the interview guide contained specific questions to be covered, the interviews themselves were informal and conversational. Each interview lasted between one and three hours. At the beginning of each interview, I explained why I was doing the research and how I intended to use their information. I also assured the woman that what they said in the interview was confidential and that there would be no way to connect her identity to our conversations.

Dancer Profiles

Brandy, a dancer at a club in a nearby city was twenty-eight years old at the time she was interviewed. She had worked as a dancer for two years, both at her current job and at a club in the northwestern region of the country. She has a Bachelor's degree and was working at a job in her professional field as well as dancing in the club. Brandy entered the business while she was doing a photographic essay on dancers. After befriending many of the women who worked in the club, she was persuaded to do an "amateur night". Overall, Brandy enjoys the work and likes the money, freedom and flexibility the job offers. Also, she is one of the older dancers in the club in which she works and feels that this is an advantage in that she is better able to balance her work with her personal

life. In terms of sex work, Brandy has not only worked as an exotic dancer, but has also posed for nude photographs and prostituted.

Chloe, who was twenty-six at the time of the interview, worked in the same club as Brandy. She only worked in the club for a winter and a summer break from school and started the work when a friend told her how much money she could make dancing. Chloe used dancing to make money to take a trip to Europe and buy Christmas presents for her family. At the time she was interviewed she had recently completed a master's degree and had started her professional career in that field. She had no plans to return to dancing and saw her participation in it as possibly threatening her new career. Chloe was very matter-of-fact about the pros and cons of the career – she felt the money was great, but the hours were difficult and she questioned the safety of the work. Other than exotic dancing, Chloe had done some nude modeling and had been featured as a model in a “how-to” guide written by a sex therapist.

Shawna, at the time of the interview had been working as an exotic dancer for eight years and it is the only kind of sex work she had done. She was thirty-four and was considered an “old dancer” since she estimated that she was between seven and fifteen years older than everyone else she worked with. Shawna had conflicting views of the work she did: on the one hand, she felt that she was very good at her job and that it was an art form; on the other, she was ashamed of the work and felt that doing it made her an immoral person. Shawna

acknowledges that a lot of feelings about the work come from the way her family feels about it; she described them as very religious and not accepting of her occupation. Shawna also uses alcohol while she works and the results have been destructive; she has been convicted of Driving Under the Influence, has wrecked her car and has passed out while at work. While drinking alcohol is a necessary part of working in the club, Shawna feels that she is an alcoholic and that when she is drunk, she is not in control of herself.

In the city where Brandy, Chloe and Shawna work, there are many strip clubs and they get business from much of Southeastern Ohio and West Virginia. The club does not pay a salary or hourly wage to the dancers. The dancers make their money by soliciting tips and “splitting the bar” with the club owners. Drinks for the dancers are priced as low as five or ten dollars and can be as high as one thousand dollars. When a customer buys a drink for a dancer, the dancer receives half the price of the drink. Also, more expensive drinks buy more privacy with a dancer, either in the “VIP” lounge, in a room set aside for slow dancing or in a room designated for private stripteases. When a dancer performs, she usually must dance to three songs and be completely nude by the start of the third song. While she is dancing, she may receive tips. After she dances her set, she is free to do anything she likes, but her most lucrative option is to go up to customers and ask them for tips or sit at a table with a customer and solicit drinks.

Jackie, at the time she was interviewed, no longer worked as a dancer. She had moved from the Southeastern region of the country to attend college. The town where she worked as a dancer was a coastal tourist town and the customer flow was seasonal. At the time of the interview, Jackie was twenty-seven years old. She had worked in the industry for four and a half years and had also been a nude model for a photographer. Jackie worked at a variety of clubs in the town where she lived. Jackie described different kinds of clubs in the area: go-go bars were establishments where dancers would get partially nude and the regular strip bars were similar to that in which Brandy, Chloe and Shawna worked. Jackie also experienced the different levels of being a dancer. As a new dancer, she had to learn the spoken and unspoken rules of the club, get regulars and earn the respect of the veteran dancers. Once she became a veteran dancer, she was able to make more money from her experience and her large clientele that would follow her from club to club. Finally, she became what she referred as a “crack whore”, or a dancer who would allow sexual contact with customers for small amounts of money. In this stage of Jackie’s career she was addicted to drugs and it was her friends from work, the other veteran dancers, who convinced Jackie to get help and enter a rehabilitation clinic.

Morgan, who was twenty-seven at the time of the interview, worked as a stripper for bachelor parties and private parties. She worked through an agency that delivered singing telegrams and strip-o-grams. While Morgan’s hours were less regular than those of a club dancer, she found that she had complete control

in her performance. Because she performed in an environment that was not directly controlled by her or the agency for which she worked, she had to make up her own rules and enforce them in her own ways. For Morgan, tips were her primary way to make money, although she was paid a per performance fee by her employing agency. She approached each party as not only a way to make money but as an adventure and as a way to validate her skills as con-artist and seductress.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data from the interviews, I employed techniques referred to in Katz's 1983 article, "A Theory of Qualitative Methodology: The Social System of Analytic Fieldwork" in that I wanted to overcome the "risk of ignoring diversity" (p. 130) in my analysis. Qualitative research is more difficult than quantitative in that data is complex, rich and varied. Therefore, analyzing qualitative data like quantitative data, as many qualitative data analysis software programs do, is ineffective. The number of times an issue or topic is mentioned, while notable, is not an adequate analysis of the data. In order to fully understand the data and do justice to its richness, a researcher must search for negative cases, or those that do not fit with the assumed "types". That is, the researcher must look for difference in the many already created facets and categories.

When approaching my data in this way, I found that my supposed categories, in some cases, did not work for the study. I allowed the data in its richness to define categories and then elaborated on those issues that did not fall into the categories. In my analysis, I also used the Grounded Theory techniques described by Charmaz (1983). I employed an elaborate system of coding, first finding large topics in my initial coding and then using a more focused coding to structure my organization of the report. I also took extensive notes or “memos” in order to place different categories in context with one another and to provide the sociological framework that the data required. All of this was done while paying close attention to the differences or those issues that cannot be categorized. The result is a narrative-driven organization and analysis of the interviews.

Dancer Interaction and Symbolic Interactionism

At the heart of the work of an exotic dancer is interaction; interaction is the product sold by the dancer. A dancer must interpret meaning from the actions of her customers and co-workers and adjust her behaviors according to these interpretations. The interaction in the club is as Blumer (1969) describes symbolic interaction in that “meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things [she] encounters...” (p. 5). Interpreting and modifying behavior are crucial to the success of the exotic dancer in order to balance a safe, comfortable and lucrative working environment. What distinguishes the work and interaction of the exotic

dancer is the direct link it has with the amount of money she makes on the job. West and Fenstermaker (1993), in describing gendered interaction, state, "... to the extent that members of society know their actions are accountable, they will design their actions in relation to how they might be seen and described by others..." (p. 157). The exotic dancer is accountable for the actions in the extreme: not only does she risk social alienation, she also risks her livelihood. Her financial gains and money-making abilities are dependant upon her success as an interacting being.

Interaction for the dancer is explored in several ways in this study. First, the stage performance itself consists not only of physical actions, but of the dancer constantly interpreting the actions of customers and modifying her behavior accordingly. The dancer smiles and makes eye contact with customers, a form of interaction, in order to keep them interested in her performance (and perhaps tipping her for a job well done). Second, in some clubs, dancers are expected to sit with customers and interact with them. In order to do this successfully, the dancer must correctly interpret the expectations and desires of her customer and act accordingly. She must balance this act with maintaining her own personal boundaries in regard to emotional and physical access to her body. The dancer must also interact with co-workers and family members in terms of the work, as well as developing and maintaining a sense of self in the work and in her non-work life. Third, rules are created in the club through interaction with customers, management and coworkers. Some rules are quite

formal and rigid, and therefore require little in the way of interaction to be understood and followed. In other cases the rules are less formal, not followed in every circumstance or understandable only after extensive interaction with those in the club. These rules can also vary from individual to individual or group to group in the club. Not only are these rules created and learned through interaction, but they exist to govern interaction in the club, with each part of the interactional equation having an interest in either following, enforcing or breaking the rules.

Researching Women from a Feminist Perspective

This research was conducted from a feminist perspective in two ways. First, the subjects were approached and viewed throughout this research as what Dorothy Smith (1987) calls, “knowers and actors” (p. 105). I, as researcher, did not take the position of condescendingly interpreting the interviews from a position of objectivity and as an “all-knowing scientist”. I instead accepted that I have no position that allows me to understand the subjects better than they understand themselves; I can only place their experiences in a sociological framework. Second, I saw this research as a way of discussing a group of women who have been excluded from many academic feminist writings, or have been dismissed in social science as deviants, “sluts”, betrayers of women or victims. These labels overlook exotic dancers as complex women who do skilled

and difficult work and the work itself as that which can be analyzed in a sociological framework just as are other professions.

It is not my intention for this study to be in search of the “truth” about exotic dancers. Instead, I took the position of Smith in looking for, “high level accuracy and a faithful depiction of the experiences in my organization and description.” (p. 122). I tried to present the women who participated in this study in the way in which they described themselves – to be faithful to their words, so to speak. I also realize that while this study could be recreated, it may not have similar results. The experiences and interpretations described by the dancers are snapshots into their lives at the time of the interview.

Smith, when researching the social world, proposes, “...a method of inquiry that relies on the existence of a world in common ongoingly created and recreated in human sensuous activities. It is a method of inquiry that proposes to explicate the same world as that of people’s action and experience.” (p. 127). As a researcher, I recognize that the interviews were effected by the context in which they took place. The location, my role as researcher, their role as researched, my questions, my reactions, their relation to the work all had an effect on what was discussed and how it was discussed in the interviews. It is in using the five interviews, as a group, that I was able to place the work and experiences of individuals in a sociological framework.

This study is in no way intended to be exhaustive in its exploration of the women who work as dancers. It is meant to show one aspect of a very complex web of financial, emotional, interactional, personal, political, psychological and physical issues of exotic dancers. Therefore, issues of degradation and oppression will not be discussed as a central issue, although the work's relationship to a patriarchal society is an important topic. In some ways I see this research as directly confronting the issue of oppression in that it allows us to see dancers as multi-dimensional women, not just marginal women who either are victims of or partners-in-crime with a patriarchal system. The handling of these women in the past has made them into caricatures. When segments of women are still looked at and discussed as one-dimensional characters by many writing in academic and popular arenas, that in no way furthers the status of women overall and undermines the possibility of a unified movement against oppression. As Hooks (1984) writes, "to build a politicized, mass-based feminist movement, women must work harder to overcome the alienation from one another that exists when sexist socialization has not been unlearned, e.g. homophobia, judging by appearance, conflicts between women with diverse sexual practices." (p. 149).

Work and Emotional Labor

This study is primarily about workers, how they do their work and the conditions of their workplace. The labor performed, in this case, is primarily interaction. The dancers must interact with customers, whether it is on stage or

at their table. The job requires that, while at work, the dancers are always performers, whether it is on stage physically dancing and stripping, or off stage demonstrating to the customer interest, availability, etc. The dancers perform emotion and this performance is done to solicit a feeling or emotion from the customer. This is an example of what Hochschild (1983) calls “emotional labor” (p. 7). Emotional labor is the primary work done by the dancer. She interprets the customers’ needs and wants and provides for them a demonstration of emotion in order to fulfill these needs. However, unlike Hochschild’s example of flight attendants, achieving the desired emotion of the customer, while necessary, is not the ultimate goal; it is merely a means to an end. The dancer’s earnings are dependant upon her ability to solicit this emotion. Her success is rewarded by tips and drinks.

Every movement a dancer makes, every expression that she shows is a delicate balance between her performance and her personal boundaries. The dancer portrays herself as a potential sex partner or a girlfriend first and foremost. The emotion she wants to create for the customer is one of arousal, importance, attraction and interest. But it is usually clear to both parties that the interaction is limited to the club. The emotions performed by both the dancer and customer do not end in a way that these actions may end in another setting. That is, the dancer does not become the customer’s girlfriend or sex partner. Therefore, the dancer must be conscious of this boundary while she makes the

customer feel otherwise. It can be said that her emotion is faked in order to create genuine emotion in the customer.

The dancers also must manage emotions and interaction with others inside the club and out. The dancer must interact with the other dancers and learn the rules of the club and the expectations dancers have for each other. Also, the dancer must balance her work in the club with her non-work life. For many in society, exotic dancing is a career that is seen as immoral and deviant. Dancers face these assumptions when they share their work lives with their family and friends. Because these relationships have the luxury of being more "genuine", the dancer does not have to present artificial emotion, but must balance her own way of thinking about and doing the work with the others in her life.

Gender and Sexuality

The club in which the dancer works is a hyper-gendered environment. It is an environment in which men and women are expected to act in very rigid confines of acceptable gendered behavior. In many ways, it is the gendered behavior of the women that is the very product for which the customer pays. From this perspective, gender is not a biologically-determined status or set of behaviors, but something that is accomplished in unique ways by the actors involved. As West and Fenstermaker put it, "gender is an interactional accomplishment

contrasting it with traditional perspectives on sex roles and on masculinity and femininity as internalized attributes.” (p. 152).

For the dancers in the club, the fact that they have the political or biological distinction as women makes them qualified for the job. But, the way they perform gender in the club is also crucial. The owner, managers, bouncers, other dancers and customers have an expectation of the way a dancer performs gender in the club. The performance of this gender may vary, in accord with whom the dancer is interacting, but is nevertheless a product of interpretation of expectations and compliance with established appropriate behavior. West and Fenstermaker point to the interactional nature of doing gender when they state that, “gender is a situated accomplishment: the local management of conduct in relation normative conceptions of appropriate attitudes and activities for particular sex categories.” (p. 156). Since gender is not only done in the usual expected way of the club, but is also a product to be sold, the appropriateness of the actions is crucial, while the attitudes themselves are not necessarily genuine. The club is place where a specific kind of gender may be overtly demonstrated and accomplished, but, in terms of the dancers, it is not an attitude that they necessarily carry. Their actions are appropriately gendered based upon customer expectations (they are flirtatious, sexual, submissive, etc.), but the behavior does not have the attitudinal or emotional buy-in of the dancer. The two are often kept separate from one another and more than one dancer described her work as a “con”.

It should be noted, also that while the occupation of the exotic dancer is many times described as sexually deviant, the gender performed, in some ways, fits the most traditional and accepted kinds of behavior associated with being female. However, the ways in which gender is done in the club are not ways that are always appropriate in other contexts. As West and Fenstermaker state, "...we cannot determine the relevance of gender to social action apart from the context in which it is accomplished." (p. 157). The exaggeration of these somewhat traditional gendered actions would be unacceptable in many other work environments and social interactions. It is when money is at stake, that these actions become a means to an end, and, therefore, can be performed quite safely in the closed, hyper-gendered environment of the club.

In taking the issue of gender another step, it is logical to see the work as one that is based upon sexuality. Denzin writes, "gender...involves sexuality, sexual desire, and being sexual; that is, enacting a gendered sexual identity with another." (p. 200). The performance and interaction between dancer and customer in the club mirrors that of traditional, if not exaggerated, heterosexual sexuality – it is presented as possibly monogamous, male-dominated and, at times, in conjunction with romantic love. But the reality of the gendered and sexual relationship that is created is very different than the one that is performed by both dancer and customer. The dancer shuts off the performance, interest and performed attraction when it is clear that these actions are not lucrative.

Even when they are performed, they are rarely performed to their supposed conclusion: a sexual and/or romantic relationship. Also, while the dancer performs the role of submissive so that the customer can perceive himself as dominant, it is clear that the dancer, in a traditionally male role, is controlling the situation and “conning” the customer into giving her money by proposing through actions and words sexual contact that the customer is never going to get.

This study focuses on the work of exotic dancers and how this work encompasses aspects of interaction, gender, emotional labor and sexuality. While its content is limited by the five interviews conducted and analyzed, the richness of this data and the broadness of topics covered make this a study work that organizes and presents the findings in a meaningful and faithful way.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

In the last thirty years, a number of studies have focused on sex workers. These studies range from looking at the work from a deviance perspective to studies done by workers themselves describing how their work is done. This chapter will review different types of studies: those that focus on deviance or assume the work to be deviant; studies that paint the sex worker as victim; studies that focus on the male side of sex work - that is, men as workers and consumers of sex work; studies that explore the ways sex work gets done, from job requirements to ways in which women make sense of the work; and studies and writings, both academic and non-academic, done by the workers themselves. This chapter will also highlight those issues that have not been addressed by existing literature, and how this study addresses some of these issues.

Deviance Studies

Traditionally, sex work and, more specifically, exotic dancing have been studied as deviant occupations or with the underlying assumption that the occupation is deviant, harmful, or otherwise negative. Among the first published studies conducted about exotic dancers and dancing were those by Skipper and McCaghy. Their 1971 article discusses strippers' attitudes toward sex and their occupation. It also explores the nature of their stage performance and what the authors describe as "off-stage deviant sex behavior." (p. 275). This study and others by Skipper and McCaghy are important because they describe the

performance of dancers and set the tone for much of the future research about dancers. The Skipper and McCaghy studies are deviance-driven. That is, the studies focus on not only the act of dancing as deviant (in fact, the authors never describe the reasons for the deviant label, but only assume this as a fact already known by the reader), but other deviant or otherwise negative aspects of dancers' lives that may have led to this occupation or accompany this occupation.

The authors describe the act of exotic dancing as a performance of mostly sexual content, requiring little training or skill. They found that strippers, on average, tend to be taller and heavier, come from a background of troubled relationships with parents (this point in particular fueled later studies which paint dancers as victims, as discussed later in this chapter), physically matured early, and to have had an early marriage that ended in divorce. They also maintain that the women had a history of exhibitionist behavior for gain. These studies describe the occupation as leading to further "sexual deviance", such as prostitution and lesbianism.

Of particular interest is McCaghy and Skipper's (1969) link between exotic dancing and lesbianism: "the stripping occupation may be analogous to the prison setting in that its structural characteristics contribute to the incidence of homosexual behavior." (p. 266). The authors make this connection by relating it to a dislike of men: "A recurring theme in our interviews was strippers'

disillusionment with the male of the species.” (p.267). This notion is particularly problematic in that it links exotic dancers to “man-hating”. The authors take this notion further by equating “man-hating” with lesbianism. In addition, the authors find that women involved in same-sex erotic relationships felt there was no stigma attached to these relationships as long as they were discreet. The authors considered this belief further deviance on the part of the dancers. The notion that “man-hating” and lesbianism are linked or are causes of one another is problematic in today’s context of gender and sexuality, and thus make the authors’ simplistic equation obsolete.

Skipper and McCaghy (1971) also presented in their research ways in which dancers deal with stigma. These techniques were used and expanded upon by many later studies. These tactics include: accepting the negative stereotype and, thus, seeing oneself in a negative way; denying the stereotype and portraying dancing as a non-deviant activity; or accepting that some of the stereotypes are true, but feeling that their actions are of no concern to and do not harm others.

In general, the Skipper and McCaghy articles provide one of sociology’s first glimpses into the exotic dancing occupation. Although the studies were the basis of many that followed, they are not without problems and consequences. These studies assume a more “correct” view of the work than the dancers themselves have. It dismisses much of the ways in which dancers see the work

as rationalizations, and, therefore, ways of disguising what the authors consider to be the unquestionable truth of exotic dancing - that it is deviant and that those who are employed as dancers are deviant.

As stated, many other studies about dancers have followed the assumptions and findings of Skipper and McCaghy. Carey, Peterson, and Sharpe's (1974) study found that women who become exotic dancers have similar backgrounds as those described by Skipper and McCaghy. In addition, the authors described these women as having been initiated into sexual intercourse at an early age and to have entered into this work at times of financial crisis. This study also describes dancers being socialized into further "deviance" while working, such as promiscuity, bisexuality, and lesbianism. Miller's (1978) chapter on deviant entertainment describes dancers in similar ways.

Using a typology developed by Sykes and Matza "(1957), Thompson and Harred (1992) explore the ways in which stigma is dealt with by exotic dancers. The authors found that most dancers managed the stigma they experienced by either "dividing the social world" (the authors describe this as "establishing a relatively small group with which the discrediting information is shared, while keeping it hidden from the rest of the world") or by the act of "neutralization", more specifically a "denial of injury", a "condemnation of the condemners" and an "appeal to higher loyalties" (p. 291-311). While a study of the ways of dealing

with a deviant label is an important and useful part of this study, the authors never question the legitimacy of the label or the deviant status of the work.

Forsyth and Deshotel's (1998) study takes the astute position that, "...like many other forms of work from deviant to professional, [the dancers'] work has taken on meanings other than economic." (p. 90). This study discusses findings similar to previous studies, such as dancers having previous jobs that required them to show their body. The study also explores how dancers get started in a profession and manage stigma. When dancers state, however, that their reason for doing the work is primarily financial, they are questioned by the authors:

Although money was the most frequently given response to the question of why these women entered into the occupation of nude dancing, there were many indications in the data to suggest this was not a logical answer. (p. 89)

The reasons given by the authors for questioning this motive, is that dancers had no firm plans for the future and that some women returned to the work after becoming financially secure. Although these circumstances probably exist for many people who work "legitimate" jobs, it is unlikely that a financial motivation for working would be questioned. This double standard assumes that there is some aspect of perversion, sickness, or other defect that lead women to the occupation of exotic dancing.

In addition to deviance literature on exotic dancing, many studies have been conducted about the deviance of prostitution. It is valuable to look at these

studies because they, too, discuss sexuality as deviant behavior and neglect to really investigate the nature of the work. Like Skipper and McCaghy's studies, Jackman and O'Toole's (1963) study found that certain backgrounds and personalities are more likely to lead to women to become prostitutes. The authors found that more isolated personalities find deviant behavior, including prostitution to be acceptable. This study also discusses dealings with stigma, finding that prostitutes must rationalize their violation of societal values. Like so many other deviance studies, this study never questions the occupation's label of "unacceptable behavior".

In Bryan's (1964) study of learning to be a prostitute, although the assumption of the work as deviant pervades the study, the author does discuss the actual learning process and some training issues of the work. The author concludes that prostitution skills are simple and quickly learned, and that a prostitute's technical training is of little importance to the progress of her career.

In response to "prostitute as deviant" and "prostitute as social problem" Studies, Brock's (1998) book, *Making Work, Making Trouble: Prostitution as a Social Problem*, declares that it is not necessarily correct to discuss social problems as social facts. Instead, the author looks at the creation of prostitution as a social problem that's problem status has waxed and waned in accordance with social and economic factors. She finds that what space the work occupies problematizes it. In addition, issues such as child prostitution further

problematize the work of adults. In the author's view, however, prostitutes continue to weather the storm, seeing themselves as, "knowledgeable and savvy political subjects; more so because they come up against the state in a more direct and unpleasant way than most people experience..." (p. 138). She finds that this leads to some prostitutes even developing an activist voice (an issue that exotic dancers have taken on, as discussed later in this chapter).

Victim Studies

Related to deviance studies, many studies take the position that women who do sex work are victims. These studies assume and do not question the deviance or "wrongness" of the work. However, they do not look for the flaws or perversion among women who do the work. Instead, these studies see culture, society, and/or sexist institutions to be responsible for the "deviant" occupation. In these studies, women are painted as helpless, unwilling victims of the work. One of the most problematic aspects of both deviance and victim studies is that it assumes women are a unified group, whose backgrounds and feelings about their jobs fit into two or three simple categories developed by researchers. Victim studies, in particular, assume the role of knowing what's best for the women, many times, without asking the women themselves.

Many victim studies focus on sex workers in countries other than the United States, where women are more likely to be coerced into sex work than

women in the United States. These studies are used as ammunition against all exotic dancing, as is described (above) by Brock in relation to prostitution. It creates exotic dancing as a “social problem” for all women, assuming that they have a single experience of the work. In addition, many of these studies link sex workers with issues of AIDS/HIV, as does Casteneda, Ortiz, Allen, Garcia, and Hernandez-Avila’s (1996) study of Mexico City sex workers and HIV/AIDS prevention.

Another “victim study”, Whittaker and Hart’s (1996) study focuses on the risks taken by indoor vs. outdoor sex workers. The authors found that risk level is effected by social space, and that indoor sex work is, overall, safer than outdoor sex work.

In addition to academic articles on strippers as victims, general-audience periodicals and newspapers carry articles that paint sex workers as victims and other women in society as victims of sex work. In the September 4, 1994 issue of the New York Times, reactions to a local carnival strip show varied from titillation to claims of victimization: “I had two calls from women who were abused after their husbands attended the show.” (p. 20) In “Gorby’s Girls: Soviet Strippers Tell a Tale of Deception” (1991), the author describes a scam that lured young Soviet women to Toronto promising modeling careers, but instead forced them into sex work.

Coerced sex work is, of course, victimization. But, it should not be assumed that all sex workers are victims. In response to “victim” studies, Herman’s (1987) article scolds those who conduct victim and deviance studies for not recognizing that all work, not just sex work, is, “distorted by gender bias” (p. 40). Herman disagrees with the crusade of some feminist groups in trying to save sex workers without the active participation of the workers themselves.

In response to the victimization and deviance research on sex workers, Kari Lerum’s, “Twelve-Step Feminism Makes Sex Workers Sick: How the State and Recovery Movement Turn Radical Women into ‘Useless Citizens’” (1999), advocates a more complex understanding of sex work. The author is discouraged by the tendency to see sex work and sex workers in “disease terms”. Lerum proposes that researchers stop studying the “why” question and the issue of stigma surrounding sex work. She proposes that researchers refocus their attention to the issue on those who have had the strongest response to it – lawmakers, activists and health care workers – to discover why they have reacted negatively to the work and the workers.

Men as Workers / Customers Studies

Few studies have explored men’s roles in sex work. Those that have, however, should be mentioned since they offer a unique view of the sex work

industry. These articles explore both men as sex workers and men as consumers of sex work.

Margolis and Arnold's (1993) study of male strippers found that men's sex work and their relationships with female customers are not mirror images of female sex work. Assumptions of power in the club vary, as well as do male performances and female (audience) participation and perception. Male strippers present themselves as sexual assailants and freely allow women to touch them since their power and safety are not in question. In addition, women who attend these performances are more likely to view it as a "joke" rather than means for arousal. Men who do sex work of this kind also do not experience the type of stigma that accompanies women's sex work.

Dressel and Peterson's (1982) study finds that, like other more recent studies about women sex workers, men who do sex work find it to be "just work". Many men describe the only difference between stripping and other more traditional types of male work is the stigma experienced as a male exotic dancer.

On the other side of the erotic performance are men as consumers of sex work. Stewart's (1972) description of "...First Being a John," deals mostly with the foreignness of the experience as well as the author's nervousness in soliciting sex from a prostitute.

Erickson and Tewksbury's (2000) study of strip club patrons finds that the club affords men an opportunity to act in ways that would be considered deviant in other settings. The authors describe the clubs as being, "...one of the very few places where men have the opportunity to openly exhibit their latent sexual desires..." (p. 289). Although the men feel as though they are able to "capture" the women in the clubs, the authors recognize that it is the women who, "grant the latitude of behavior which the men can operate under."

In her article, "Strippers and Screammers: The Emergence of Social Control in a NonInstitutionalized Setting" (2001), Beth Montemurro finds that the norms of interaction in a male strip club, "are not by any means established or institutionalized." (§ 68) The rules of the club, while described similarly by the employees themselves, are not enforced equally among the patrons of the club.

The Transition from "Why?" to "How?"

In all deviance and victim studies, there is a subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle assumption that the work is wrong, unpleasant, or otherwise bad. Therefore, each study in its own way seeks to answer the question, "why do women do sex work for a living?" Recent studies, however, have approached the work without considering the value of the work or passing some kind of judgment on the work; the studies ask the question in some way, "how do women do sex work for a living?"

Some of the earliest research exploring the “how” of sex work was conducted by Barbara Heyl about the intricacies of the prostitution business. Her 1976 study about the training of prostitutes focused on female trainer and trainee relationships as well as the content and process of the training.

In a series of articles published by Carol Rambo Ronai, exotic dancing is explored through participant observation and in-depth interviewing. Ronai’s 1992 “The Reflexive Self Through Narrative: A Night in the Life of an Erotic Dancer / Researcher” (p. 122), explores the universal difficulty of researcher distancing oneself from what is being researched. Ronai offers a “layered account of her lived experience so that emotions can be known by others without experiencing...” the work.

In her 1994 article, “Narrative Resistance to Deviance: Identity Management Among Strip-Tease Dancers,” Ronai finds that, “the relations between strip-tease dancers and society can be characterized as simultaneous domination and resistance.” (p. 212) The dancers Ronai interviewed understood the pull between social inequality and personal survival and gain. While they felt that it was unfair that society was set up so that the best way for women to make money was by using her body, they also felt that it was their right to take advantage of this and to use this system to obtain money from men.

Ronai and Cross's "Dancing With Identity: Narrative Resistance Strategies of Male and Female Stripteasers," (1998) discussed how dancers make sense of their work. In reaction to what is considered to be a negative identity to many, these dancers create other meanings: "Through the process of biography work and narrative resistance, we become the authors of our identities, charting for ourselves a place in social space which transforms negative discourses into more positive identity resources for ourselves and others to draw upon in the future." (p 112).

In "Turn-Ons for Money: Interactional Strategies of the Table Dancer," (1989) Ronai and Ellis look at interactions in a club as, "...representing a microcosm of strategies used to gain and maintain control in 'respectable' exchanges." This article describes the tactics used by a dancer to assess the trustworthiness of the customer and project trustworthiness herself, not unlike the relationship between salesperson and customer.

Weinberg, Shaver, and Williams' (1999) article explores quantitatively the differences in work of female, male, and transgender sex workers. This article finds that women are more likely to see sex work as just "work" and are better able to, "build boundaries between work and nonwork sexual activities."

Pasko's (1999) paper, "Exotic Dance and the Social Act: A Symbolic Interactionist Perspective," discusses the act of interaction with customers:

By giving tips, customers symbolically tell the stripper they want the act - albeit a sexually objective or emotionally intimate - to continue. Through the management of emotion and symbolic communication, strippers continually read the meaning of customers' conduct...in order to achieve individual goals and to create an environment of inauthentic intimacy and utmost feminine attention, sexual stimulation, and desirability. (p. 10)

Elizabeth Anne Woods' "Working in the Fantasy Factory: The Attention Hypothesis and the Enacting of Masculine Power in Strip Clubs" (2000) switches the focus of the traditional study from stripper or customer as subject to the interaction is precisely what sets dancers and their performance apart from erotic videos, and is therefore at the heart of the issue of exotic dancing. Woods explores the relationships established between strippers and patrons and the ways in which they use impression management and emotion work in their occupation. The author finds that , "...the customers have paid money to come in and pay more money to watch women strip, but they also pay to be seen by the women. They, too, receive recognition and attention." (p. 10) Woods also finds that "the best paid stripper is likely to be one that is best at creating and conveying feelings of intimacy, interest and desire for her customers." (p. 28)

Non-Academic Writings by Sex Workers

In recent years, several volumes have been published that include writings by women in the sex industry about the work. These works range from all of the categories described in this chapter – deviance, victimization, answering the question of "why do the work?" and answering the question of "how do you do

the work?”. These writings also cross the line into the anecdotal, emotional and spiritual experience of sex workers. They also provide a glimpse into the world of sex work, but often serve an advocacy purpose. The volumes have been created to explore the complexity of the issue of sex work – the volumes highlight the many positions taken by women/groups in sex work and many works highlight the complexity of political, social and emotional issues, often contradicting, about the occupation. Most volumes have been written in response to the anti-pornography feminist position.

Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry (Delacoste and Alexander, 1987) was one of the first of these volumes published. It contains essays, stories and poetry that deal with all aspects of the work, advocate writing for and against the work and how race intersects with sex work.

Jill Nagle's, *Whores and Other Feminists* (1997) takes pro-sex feminist stance and its essays range from issues of body image, popular culture, human rights, sex work discourse and anecdotal, experiential and justification writing by sex workers. Vicky Funari's essay explains that, “there is no standard sex worker” (p. 28) and explores the complexities of pro- and anti- sex work advocates, accepting that both arguments have aspects that are correct and incorrect. Cosi Fabian's essay looks at “bad women” and prostitutes in the Bible and mythology. Annie Sprinkle's “We've Come a Long Way and We're Exhausted”, looks at the improvements that could be made in the sex work field

and offers women a guide for how to deal with: Sex Worker Burnout Syndrome” (p. 67).

Wendy Chapkis’s *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor* (1997) melds the history and political and social status of elements of sex work with the writings of women who do or have done the work. The book explores entry into sex work, feminist objections, anecdotal tales of sexuality and sex work, coerced sex work and changes in the discourse surrounding the subject. The book also speaks to political and societal responses to and controls on sex work. It acts as a book of advocacy for sex workers and places them as a central political subject.

The Portland, Oregon publication *Danzine: An Exciting Monthly for Ladies in the Biz*, contains writings by workers about the business, advice on doing the job of exotic dancing and managing money and resources for fitness, counseling, gynecological health, legal counseling and violence prevention. It also contains restaurant and book reviews, employment opportunities and discount coupons for area services. The publication’s only intended audience is other dancers and its purpose is to legitimize the work and unite workers in the area.

The journal *Social Text*, while a traditional academic journal, devoted an entire issue to sex work and to the writings of non-academic sex workers. Like

the other volumes mentioned, the issue explored the lived experience of sex workers as well as the social and political issues surrounding them.

The literature about exotic dancers remains largely based upon deviance and victimization. However, studies that focus on the demands of the work have begun to emerge. This study describes an occupation that consists of skilled and difficult labor and is an original addition to this literature in three ways. First it explores the types of and complexities of the stage performance, the way it is learned and the way women “settle into” their work. Second, it takes the work of Pasko and Woods a step further by describing the various roles that must be played by a dancer in her social interaction with customers and the power the dancer holds in the club. The performance of these roles is an example of what Hochschild (1983) calls, “emotional labor” (p. 7). It also takes the issue of interaction further by discussing the relationships with coworkers, family, friends and self. Third, it discusses the formal and informal rules that are created by and strictly govern the interaction in the club.

Chapter 3: Learning and Doing the Work

This chapter focuses on the “nuts and bolts” of being an exotic dancer. First, it will explore the ways in which women are recruited and trained to do the work. In most cases women enter the occupation and are trained in informal ways. Second, the techniques and aspects of the erotic performance will be discussed. These techniques include a combination of a physical and emotional presentation. For each woman, the degree to which the physical and emotional were important and incorporated varied. Third, the earning potential and techniques of the women interviewed are explored. In all cases, the women depended primarily on tipping for their income. Assertiveness seems to be necessary for effectively making money in the dancing industry. Fourth, the general working conditions of the club will be discussed. And last, women becoming accustomed to the work is explored. All of the women interviewed described a sense of nervousness when they began their work, but after they had mastered the performance, ways to make money and the general operations of the club, they felt a sense of knowledge and comfort with their work.

Recruitment

For the women interviewed for this study, the reason for entering into the occupation was, without exception, money. All began dancing for financial reasons. For these women, exotic dancing offered a kind of financial

independence and flexibility that few other occupations have. Chloe describes her reasons for entering the work:

I was talking about how I'd really love to go to Europe. And I'd never been there and it would be so much fun to do, but gee, it costs so much money, and I don't know how I'll ever be able to afford it, and I've been saving like crazy, and it just didn't seem like I was making the money, you know, I wasn't really making a whole lot of money just doing odd jobs... it just wasn't making it, you know, because I was also going to graduate school full time. And I met this friend... and she was telling me the kind of work that she does and how much she makes, and it sounded like it would be kind of an interesting experience so I gave it a try and ended up making a lot of money, enough to pay for most of my expenses when I went to Europe. I just went for a month by myself, but I got a lot of money through that.

Like Chloe, several other women were introduced to the work by friends who had experience in the occupation. Recruitment for these women was informal. Brandy, who worked in the same club as Chloe, was informally recruited and found the work to be more lucrative than other occupations:

I did a photo essay on dancers in Montana, where I was living at the time. And I had such a wonderful time doing the photo essay. I got the most beautiful pictures I had ever taken before, you know, and I was just blown away by the whole experience. And all the girls were great, all the bartenders, everyone, you know, that I came in contact with were just so much fun, they were all like you've got to try it, you know and I said I want to. So I did an amateur night. And I won second place and they hired me on the spot. And I needed a job so I took it out there. And I worked out there for just a few months and then I moved back to Ohio. And I worked for a long time here, like for over a year doing all kinds of different jobs and then I said, wait, you know, I wonder if there's any way I could dance on the weekends, or something, and travel, and make some money and have that be my job. And I found a good place to work for, so now I've been doing it for two years here.

Morgan, who worked as a bachelor party stripper, was recruited into the work in a more formal way. While working for a singing telegram and murder mystery theater agency, she was asked to fill in for a woman who did partially nude dancing for bachelor parties:

So I started doing these little, very similar to these kind of naughty nurse kind of, holy smoke, which is another routine, and stripping down to a bikini, at you know business, retirement parties, that kind of thing, birthday parties, um, even like sixteen year old birthday parties and eighty year old birthday parties, the whole gamut. Until one day I received a call and they asked me, their girl Tracy was sick, and would I consider doing a topless routine. I thought about it, and I was like, yeah, I love my tits, sure, why can't somebody else see my tits and you're going to give me fifty bucks instead of twenty-five? Yeah, no problem, how much longer do I have to work? That kind of thing. So one of the main guys... was my quote unquote body guard. He takes me out to this place, I do the routine, it was over in like fifteen minutes, it was the same thing that I had just been doing. It was absolutely no different. I don't even remember taking my top off. But I did it in a more risqué way, much more kind of a Mae West kind of Gypsy Rose Lee kind of seductive way, and just had a blast. It was like, I want to do that all the time. I get a fifty dollar paycheck, plus the guy gave me twenty bucks. So it was like seventy bucks for twenty-five minutes. This is alright. And he saw how excited I was and gave me a bunch of topless routines, like I said, I have nice tits, whatever. And next thing I know, Tracy's sick again, or whoever, and would you mind doing a bachelor party? I'm going, ok, this one's totally nude, right? Yeah. Well, what does it pay? It pays a hundred and fifty dollars in check for each job. You do three jobs, you get 450 dollars in a check, plus you get to keep all your tips, with the exception that we suggest tipping twenty dollars per show to your bouncer guy.

These findings are in agreement with Dressel and Petersen's (1982) article about the recruitment and socialization of male strippers. The article describes many of the men coming to the work informally at the suggestion of family members or friends. Carey, Peterson and Sharpe's 1974 article on the recruitment of strippers and go-go dancers reports similar findings. However,

this article found that many of the strippers “entered the occupation in times of financial crisis” (p. 13). Only one of the women interviewed for this study described a “crisis” situation that served as a catalyst for her entry into the work. All others saw stripping as merely a better paying alternative to other employment. It is important to note that both studies mentioned above took a deviance studies approach to the subject of exotic dancing. By looking at the occupation from a work studies approach (as this study does), it becomes clear that these women entered the occupation for varied reasons, not unlike a group of women in any other occupation. The experiences of these women are not the same, and the subtle and not-so-subtle differences of these experiences are central to this study.

The First Time and Learning How to Do the Work

None of the women interviewed for this study described receiving any kind of formal training when they began stripping. Without exception, the women danced for the first time having only watched other women do the work. It is not surprising that most women talked candidly about their nervousness and most felt that their first performance was awkward and that it was obvious to the patrons of the club that they were inexperienced and nervous. Chloe describes her first time on stage:

Well, I'll tell you, going up there the first time was so nerve racking. I had no idea what I was doing. I mean, I always thought that I'd probably know how to do this, but when it came to it, I was just so nervous and I wasn't very seductive at all. I just kind of danced

around and had fun, but I wasn't really doing what the other people were doing.

Several of the women described using alcohol to relax and become more uninhibited. For Brandy, she describes using alcohol her first time to make her less nervous:

The first time I ever danced I definitely drank before hand. I had a little bit of a buzz. I was real nervous, but excited. I mean it was fun and exciting for me. And I had a great time doing it. I had a great response from the crowd. You know, it was high energy.

In order to learn the work, all women who worked in a strip club observed their co-workers. According to these women, there is no right or wrong way to perform on stage. The performances ranged from very physical and acrobatic to regular dance routines to less physically demanding performances. When describing how she learned to do the work, Jackie said:

I didn't get any training. I guess I just knew, you know, I just knew what to do. I mean, I don't want to sound mean, but it's just a bunch of men out there. You don't have to do much for them, just walk out in something skimpy and put your leg out there. And then you watch the other dancers, and as time goes on, you figure out what they like, you know. And certain men like certain moves, you know. And certain dancers dance a certain way. I was a very acrobatic dancer, as far as I was doing splits on the ceiling and all kinds of wild things, you know, I'd walk over top of their heads on the cat walk, and pick my leg up and do splits over top of them. I'd always make them think that I was falling; they tried to pick me up.

Many of the women found their previous experiences with athletics and dance classes to be crucial to their success as a dancer. They relied on this skill to help them initially be comfortable in the work.

I've always enjoyed dancing. I love to dance and when I was young I took a couple modern dance classes ... but that was it. I was a cheerleader too. I think that it is training and I think it has something to do with it in a way. Because, I mean, being a cheerleader is dressing up in skimpy clothes and jumping around for men, you know. (Brandy)

Shawna began her club work as a waitress, but was intrigued by the athletic ability required of the work:

So I went there and waitressed. And then that same night I started dancing 'cause I was watching them up there. And I'm pretty athletic and I'm like I can do that. But they were like way better than me. I thought it looked so easy and it's not very easy. I don't know. They have those real thick steel poles and in order to be good you have to practice all the time. And I had bruises all over me, big ones all the way up my legs and everything. It was worth it though.

Morgan, who worked as a bachelor party stripper, did not have the luxury of watching other women in order to learn the work. Drawn to drama and acting, she relied on these skills to do her work for the first time. She describes her first show as, "a Mae West kind of, Gypsy Rose Lee kind of seductive way."

Most of the women interviewed did not receive formal training when they began dancing. With the exception of Morgan, the bachelor party stripper, the women were trained by themselves, by observation and by the other women who worked in the club. None really experienced the "turning out" by another dancer that Barbara Heyl describes among house prostitutes in her 1976 study. While the dancers all mentioned being helped by and helping other women in the club,

it was not in the structured, teaching way that Heyl found in women who work as prostitutes. The women interviewed used informal means to learn the work.

The Performance

The performance of the exotic dancer is a delicate balance of the physically grueling dance and the convincing presentation of emotion (discussed in detail in chapter 4). Every dancer had a different technique and placed a different amount of importance on the physical versus emotional parts of the performance. Each woman had a different idea about ways of using each in her performance, and several felt that there were multiple styles of performance that were effective and that different women felt comfortable utilizing combinations of these techniques.

Shawna, who is a very physical dancer and enjoys doing pole tricks and other athletic moves, chooses not to connect with the audience in ways that other dancers do. She sees her performance as art and as dramatic, but as she performs it, she usually looks in the mirror, not into the faces of the patrons. She does, however connect with them, using her physical moves and a sense of humor:

I've got this thing with my butt. I'll flex it, you know move it... guys like that and they'll tip me. I think it makes them laugh. And I laugh with them, you know? And they like that. And you have to, you have to smile. All the time. You do. The only time I smile is when there's a guy right in front of me, and he'll give me money and I'll smile real big at him.

All the other dancers stressed the importance of smiling and most felt that making eye contact was an effective way to engage the audience. Chloe used these techniques, with a sense of playfulness to connect with the patrons. Her comparison of her own performance with those of the other women demonstrates the variety of acceptable stage acts:

I always made eye contact with them, and sometimes if they were, you know, if they were bashful, it was hard for them to make eye contact. But I would let them know by smiling and making eye contact that it's okay for you to look at me, that that's what I'm here for basically and that's okay. So, you know, I don't know, I guess I did it that way, and it was real playful, I always picked real playful music, um. A lot of times I picked fast music. Not necessarily slow, erotic music, but I played, you know, old Elvis Presley, you know "All Shook Up", and stuff, and just had a lot of fun with it, and was real teasing. I did a lot of strip tease. There were a lot of women who didn't do that, who, this would like tick me off, but in like in between a song, because we would play our songs in a juke box and then just go up, and when the first song was over, they're standing there, just kind of standing there, and getting ready for their second song, they would just sort of drop off their top, just like plop. And I was like that's sexy! That's what I'd be thinking. So I would always just do it in a real teasing, 'cause I always wanted to have fun with it and that's what I always pictured a strip tease to be. Not just drop off your second piece of clothing, the prerequisite piece of clothing that's off on the next song, you know. So I had a lot more fun with it.

Several strippers went beyond smiling and eye contact, incorporating "sexy" faces and actions. Morgan talks about one of her favorite performances involving this:

I'm a very sensual, I guess, in comparison to what I've seen, I'm a very sensual dancer. Where I'll stroke myself, and I'll get down on all fours, and it's very egocentric. Focused on me, instead of focused on showing them what I've got. It's more like they're a voyeuristic kind of person, looking in

watching me dancing for me. And I think that's a huge turn on. It's what I would be turned on by if I was a guy, you know. And it's what I'm turned on by in movies, and what I'm turned on by in real life. If someone's walking down the street and they look like they're the shit and they don't care about you, you immediately are drawn to them. And so that's kind of what my conscious was telling me about how to turn these people on.

While not a requirement for the work, all of the women described a love of the dancing aspect of the work. All described it as an art form and all agreed that they were excellent at this part of the work. Brandy felt that it was her favorite aspect of her job:

I love to dance. And everyone I work with, most people I work with, love the dancing part. You know, that's the fun part. You're up on stage and you get to have that audience feedback, if there is a good audience. Like, a lot of times there's only two or three guys in there. But, you know, if there is an audience, you get that feedback and that's the fun part.

Shawna, while acknowledging that dancing skill is not crucial to a stripper's success, supports the notion that there are many types of erotic performance:

You really don't have to be a good dancer, you could probably just stand there with your clothes off, I don't know. You don't really have to be a good dancer, I mean, it's good if you are, but I don't know, I can get up there and work my butt off and make a fool of myself and none of the guys will still come up and tip me, you know? If I don't do what I do every night, like show off, I'm really strong, and I can do a lot of things the other girls can't, and they don't do what I do. I like, do really weird stuff, and most of the girls there are like posers, like they'll pose. Like there's one girl that likes real fast music, and she'll dance to it in slow motion. She looks really good, though. She looks like a Barbie, she's real pretty. So I don't really think the guys really care what you do, you know what I mean. I don't think you can really make a fool of yourself unless you're really doing something weird.

Jackie found that she was more successful as a dancer when she made her performance very physical:

You have to be very agile and flexible and stuff. To be able to do any kind of dance you have to be super flexible. Especially in nude dances or go-go dancing because the more you can make yourself bend, the more it turns some men on. And they would love it... most bars they have a pole that runs along the ceiling and then it comes down in the center of the stage, and one of my favorite things was to get up on that pole and do splits on that pole up on the ceiling, and then at certain moments in the song, I would fall down. That's what I meant by when I would fall, the men would actually think I was falling, and they would try to catch me. But, a lot of them, god, it would just turn them on so much. I'd be up there, and you know, sometimes I'd swing up there and do crazy things, they just loved that, they'd have their dollar in their hand and after the song was over, you'd walk around and get their money because they just thought that was the coolest thing. And they'd just wait for you to fall and come get their money.

Most of the women commented on the amount of physical strength required to do the work. Most clubs require the women to dance and mingle in heels. Dancing and bending to take tips while performing requires a great deal of physical strength. For those dancers who did much of their performance on a pole, they felt that the work put them in the best physical condition they had ever been in. Chloe describes the way she felt the day after her first night of work:

The first night I worked there I could barely walk the next day because a lot of what you do is, well, for one thing you have to dance in high heels and I can't hardly walk in high heels, so I always danced in like really small high heels. Like my friend, she dances in like 5, 6 inch heels. I couldn't even walk in them. Mine were always like 2 1/2, 3 inches. I'm already tall to begin with so I was lucky that way. But the taller the heel you wore, the longer your legs looked, the thinner you appeared. A lot of guys got off on high heels, but it was important that you had good, especially this quadricep, I think this is, it's important that you have really strong quadriceps and that's why when I was working there I was in really good shape from doing that. Because a lot of times you would be

kind of on your tip toes from the heels or from being on your tip toes. And squatting down so you could get the tip, having to squat down and get back up. I mean that squatting, that's tough. And so walking down stairs the next day after I did it, oh it was hard. My legs were shaking... It was really hard. And the next time I danced, I was still in pain. It was just a few days later. And I was saying to the other dancers, I don't know if I can dance, I don't know if I can do it. I can barely walk up steps. And they said, well, go up there and you'll find that you can do it. And I could. And after a while, it got to where it didn't hurt at all. But if I were to go back there now, I would have the same next day pain.

Naturally, a confidence in appearance and abilities is necessary to do the work. When dancing, the performer is the center of attention and all aspects of her behavior must be managed. Morgan explains how she feels about herself doing the work:

A knowledge of your body [is important], I think. And I felt really safe and good in that. I don't think somebody who's raised in a sexually inhibited environment, unless it was a reaction to that environment, could do this. Because I am so comfortable, I have looked at my body in mirrors, I have watched myself masturbate, I am completely open with my body with people I care about and with myself. I am number one on my list of loves, you know. So dancing was, to me, as much fun for me as it was for anybody. More for me. And I'm the kind of person who likes, I guess you could call it talent, I have a talent at getting joy from seeing other people feel joy. Like sometimes it feels better to give a gift than to receive one, because both people are happy when you give a gift, and it makes you feel good and powerful that you gave that gift to somebody. And that was what dancing was for. I had talent at giving a gift. And making them feel like they were special for getting it. Like it wasn't just any Joe Schmoe who walks in off the street and gets it. That I'm something special.

For Morgan, her ability to connect with her customers was a primary focus of the work. While she is totally aware of the sexual nature of her work, she does not

see that as negative, dirty or shameful. She sees her ability to give pleasure and joy in her work as an appealing aspect.

Chloe also found that she enjoyed the work as an outlet for what would be considered inappropriate sexuality in other contexts:

It was like my exhibitionist side of me. My crazy wild side was coming out because that's, I mean I can be wacky and stuff on the outside, but when it came to working in that fantasy bar, that was when I really wanted to show my wild and crazy side, my sexy side, you know. More so, because I can in that atmosphere and it's acceptable in that atmosphere and you just can't be sexy in your daily life without it being really inappropriate, you know what I mean?

Physical beauty is, naturally, important, but it is not crucial to the success of a stripper. Jackie found that to be a successful stripper, you must be outgoing and willing to interact with the customers. She did, however, acknowledge that some clubs would only allow women who are very physically attractive, many times having been enhanced by surgery, to work in their bars. Jackie called these women "Silicone Sallies".

Chloe found that she was not accustomed to the amount of attention she had to pay to her appearance in order to do the work:

I had to really focus on beauty to more of an extent than I ever did when I was in school, for sure, making sure that my legs were shaved, my armpits were completely clean shaven, and my vagina was shaved. I mean, I didn't shave all of it, but a good portion of it, because that's what everyone else did and it seemed like that was the big turn on so they could see it and all that.

The women interviewed did not discuss physical appearance a great deal, although good lighting was considered an important part of the performance and that some insecurity was obvious in the performance of heavier dancers. But, Brandy felt that physical beauty was not the most important part of a successful performance:

Any girl can do great there no matter how unattractive she may think she is, or even overweight, or anything like that. Like, you can do well if you're like the most beautiful woman, or even better, if you have a personality to hold you.

Chloe expressed concerns for those women who were aging in the industry:

I worry about the women who depend on it and use it as their sole means of work, instead of trying to find another skill, and thinking well I'll just do this until I can't do it anymore. I worry about that, because of course, unless you're planning on saving up your money and getting breast implants and face lifts and stuff like that, you really couldn't do it forever, I don't think, you know. Your body would just give out on you at some point. I don't really think it's that good for your joints, your knee joints and stuff...

While these women engage in an elaborate balance of the physical and emotional on stage (each dancer placing different amounts of emphasis on each), the women all accepted and understood what the customer is looking for in their performance.

Well, it's pretty quickly realized that men really do just wanna see, I mean they wanna see your private parts, that's what they're there for and so that's really the main thing. I just try to make a show that I feel good about and that I have fun doing and try to tease them and make them wait, you know, and um, but a lot of them are just like, they just want one thing. Namely, they want to see the pussy. That's what they really want. (Brandy)

Well, they just want to see you naked, you know, they want you to take your clothes off. (Shawna)

The exotic performance of the dancers interviewed varied. It is clear that the performance is a way to make one's self stand out from the other women dancing in the club. Each woman feels that her presentation best allows her to make tips off of the customers. Presenting teasing, playfulness, athleticism, vulnerability, eye contact and smiles all enhance the performance that is grounded in physical appearance and a willingness to show a fully naked body.

Earning Money

There are several ways of making money doing the work of stripping. The most obvious opportunity for income is getting tips from patrons. This also seems to be the most lucrative way to make money in the industry. In some clubs, the women will "split the bar" with the management. That is, the woman will receive half the money on any drink purchases she "hustles" from her customers. Also, some clubs pay a small salary, comparable to a waitress salary. As for Morgan, the bachelor party stripper, she solicited tips and was paid a fee by her agency for every performance. Topless performances were paid more than bikini performances. And fully nude performances were paid the highest price.

The women all spoke of techniques they had for soliciting tips. In general, the women must be very assertive to receive the tips, and those who are not

assertive don't make as much money. Morgan describes her techniques for soliciting tips:

I would have different things that I developed along the way... Like, you can do this for this much; you can do this for this much. But I would coordinate it in my act almost. Where I'd pick the person who looked the least likely to participate, and pull him and use him as my guinea pig and teach everybody else how to tip a stripper... Now this is what you do when you go to a bar, this is how you impress your stripper. This is not how you impress your stripper. And... if somebody grabbed my ass, I'd turn around in the middle of it and deadpan, and say that is definitely not how you impress a stripper... I would do things like, it would change depending on how much they were offering up to start with. If they had ones on their knees or if they had five dollar bills on their knees or if they were handing me tens. Or if they were trying to put it in my crotch or if they were trying to put it in my garter. If they were just handing it to me timidly. The more timidly somebody handed it to me, the more aggressive I was with them. The more aggressive they were with me, the less attention I paid to them. I just barely even paid them any attention. And paid those people who were giving me less attention more attention to kind of influence the other people... You put a dollar in my garter belt. You can put a dollar in my underwear, if you choose. Don't try to do little grabby things, because I'll call you on it, you know. If you put a dollar of your forehead, and my top's off, I'll come over with breasts and take it off. You don't need big breasts to do that, and I didn't know that... And then, you encourage people to go up to their friends, to their buddies. It's like buying them a shot sort of. And you put a five on their forehead, and you know the stripper's coming over there and putting her tits on you. And if they aren't tipping, it's no fun because you've got nothing to do... it's the process of taking the tips that can be real fun. That's the interaction. There's no interaction when someone's just watching you. And the interaction is in giving the tips and how you take them from them and how you teach them, and have fun doing it. Put a bill on your knee, and I'll come over, once my underwear is off and pick it up. You put a fifty on your face, or usually it was just the bachelor, sometimes the best man, and sometimes if they were tipping really well, and they were putting hundred dollar bills on their noses, they'd get what I called a floor show, which is, you lay down, you put a fifty or hundred on your nose, depending on how much I tell you to put, seriously. If the person was being a jerk, I'd say, no, I want hundred dollars on your nose, I'm not doing it for fifty. you want it, you put a hundred down. You'll do it if you want it bad enough.

And I'd do the hard to get. And so I'd get the best man to help me get the bachelor to lay down... So, the put a hundred dollar billon their face, and my big specialty move, which I didn't really realize was special, was that I would go down and pick it up with my vaginal lips. Which isn't hard to do, and everyone's like no way.

Shawna, who works in a club, does not try to solicit tips while on stage. After her dance, she approaches each customer:

Basically, after we get done dancing, I just go up to them and ask them. I just go around and say would you like to tip me for my dance and usually they do. Either that or they don't have no money. I really don't do anything like dance in front of them or anything outrageous or stupid, you know. You just have to ask them and they usually tip you.

Chloe found that assertiveness was the key to making money, something not all women are able to project:

Well, I'll tell you, there were some women who just couldn't make it because they didn't have the assertiveness to go up to a table and say mind if I sit down. They were too afraid to do that and they would really miss out. They weren't making the money. They were just too, they just weren't as assertive, so I think assertiveness is essential. You have to be assertive, you have to be able to ask for what you want. Will you tip me for my dance? You have to be able to say that. Some women felt too uncomfortable to do it. Too bad, that's your money that you're losing. That's money lost and all you have to do is ask a question. So I think assertiveness is probably the most important thing.

Jackie made most of her tips while up on stage. She describes the understanding between customer and dancer when it comes to tipping:

You would focus on one or two guys in particular, but you had to work the crowd also, that's part of being a performer, you know... you have to work the crowd, because you have to get the money from all of them, because if this guy turns out to be a total flake, you don't want the guy over here to say, oh she ignored me, I ain't giving her no money. So, you know, you just gotta get up there and

look sexy and make them want to give them money. You look at one or two guys and try to figure out who you're going to sit with... Whoever tips you the most money is generally who you go to. They'll go can I buy you a drink. Or when you get off stage come sit with me, you know. They know the game too. They know that they're supposed to be paying for you and paying for your time and time is money. That's the attitude that you have to have, if you're gonna be there to be an empathetic partner, have them take you to another bar, because you're not going to make any money. If you wanna make money, you have to hustle... After you get over the whole performance and all that other stuff, it's a numbers game. If this guy is not going to give you whatever you need, say you need to make five hundred dollars in the night, you know you got eight hours, so what, you need to make a little under a hundred dollars an hour, you know.

For those women who sold drinks so that they could "split the bar", this lucrative aspect took a lot of time and many women had their own techniques for getting a man to buy drinks for them. While sitting at the tables with the men, the dancers may also be tipped. Most of the women found that they just needed to make themselves seem very interesting. Also, it was important to make the men feel special, interesting and attended to. Brandy describes the importance and difficulty of learning how to read men and give them what they want so they'll continue to buy drinks and tip:

You can never be sure... The minute you think you know something, you'll see some totally scruffy guy come in and be like oh, you know, with his flannel and his baseball cap and a beard, and you'll just be like oh, you know, I'm not even going to approach that guy, you know, loser central, and then someone will sit with him, and he'll have hundred dollar bills just flowing out of his pocket, you know? So you can't be sure, but there's certain categories. Like you know if a fat guy comes in by himself, go immediately to that, because they need more attention than most people. They haven't gotten it. So they really want it and they're willing to pay for it. That's one thing I know. It's kinda hard to tell otherwise, though. I mean, you can tell a guy, if he has money or not, by the way he looks in a lot of ways, but you can always be

wrong. And also a lot of guys with money are on a big power trip and they either want to spend a ton, or they want to try to make you work as hard as you can for every dime, you know?

Chloe found that being straightforward and honest was the best way to handle her customers when it came to buying drinks. She also used enticement to convince the men to buy her drinks:

Well, I'd explain how it works. I'd tell about the time limit and everything. I would say a 10 dollar drink will be a short amount of time to spend with you. A 30 dollar drink, that's a better deal for you because you're getting a lot more time. You know, I would just talk about what it's worth to them and how much time you want to spend with... Whatever I did, the most important thing was to make them interested in you immediately so that they wanted to know more about you so that they'd have to buy more to hear more. If they asked me questions about me, I'd talk about stuff that was just, like especially if they hadn't bought me my first drink yet, something very interesting and exciting, you know, whatever that be, you know, whatever they're already hinting that they're interested about. I would talk about something very interesting before the waitress would come up so that they would want to buy me a drink so that they could hear the rest of the story.

Jackie found that the key to making money in the area she worked was to get regulars. These men would come see her dance in whatever club in which she was working:

My regular customers wouldn't think of tipping me any less than a 20 to go on stage. You know, that's how you make 500 bucks a day is by getting regulars. You get four or five regulars in, spend 2 or 3 hundred dollars on you each in the course of a day, you're doing good.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, money is the bottom line for the women who do this work. Therefore, the techniques for making money are of the utmost importance for those who do the work. While the money made by these women

is tied to the quality of their stage performance, it is equally important for the women to be assertive in asking for tips and drinks. The interaction necessary to receive these tips and drinks will be discussed further in chapter 4.

Working Conditions

The general working conditions of dancing varied from woman to woman. The women were most concerned with the hours of work, flexibility and safety of their environment.

The women interviewed worked in a variety of environments. Morgan, the bachelor party stripper did her work in spaces that are not directly under her or the employing agency's control. Her working conditions changed from job to job, but she did control the music and the time she spends doing her work. The control she had over the hours she worked was one of the aspects she liked most. For the other women (working in a club environment), the number of days they worked was flexible, but the shift hours were not. Also, because strip clubs get the most business on Friday and Saturday nights, most women wanted to work these nights. For Shawna, the hours she worked were convenient for her life as a single mother:

I don't have to go in until eight, so I can be with my daughter. I only have to work four nights a week, which is good, so I can be with her. Any other place they'd make you work a certain day, and there they don't care. And, the hours are good and the place is really nice.

Chloe feels that the hours of work, because the bar is open into the early morning, are difficult. She also feels that the smoking and drinking are bad for the dancers' health:

...well the bad things, I think, are the hours are hard on people, the night hours. The atmosphere, being in a bar, it's so smoky too, you know, the smoke and the alcohol. And the attitude about alcohol and just for the young girls I don't like it, because it really shows them like drinking is a good way to get through everything. Um, so the drinking and the smoking, and there is a little bit of drug stuff that goes on here and there. Not too much, though.

While the club has many rules about customer and dancer interactions (discussed in Chapter 5), some of these rules are created for the safety of the dancers. Shawna feels that, for the most part, the bouncers try to do a good job:

The guy they have now is big, and he's pretty good. And the other guy, he's good, but he's like really little. I don't think he knows karate or anything. If there was like a fight or anything, I don't think he could handle it. I could probably handle it better than he could. But he's real good about walking back and forth and watching everything. He's really good about tapping them on the shoulder and saying you can't do that. And the guys make fun of him and say what can you do. But all he does walk back and forth, he's good, but he should be a little bit bigger. Make us feel safer. But he's a really nice guy.

Chloe, who worked in the same club, felt concerned about her safety at times:

I didn't feel really safe, no. That back room. I think how it was supposed to be, I think the bouncer was supposed to stay by the door or whatever, but he never did, so we were always kind of on our own once we got back there. Plus there were some, there was also a slow dance room, which is weird, that they'd have, a slow dance room that was dark that was almost a completely black room where you could have a slow dance with somebody. And, um, you know, the most that anybody'd ever do was just grab your butt or something. But in the back, there were two little private stages and those are even more private back there and the guy would sit down on the floor, and the woman was again up on stage with one little

pole on those two little private stages back there, and I didn't feel too unsafe there cause I was up, up above them. It was mostly that semi-private room that you never knew what was going to happen. You were always wondering, oh so and so dancer's in here, you know, I better make sure that he's sitting so that he can't see them, because she's going to let this guy do just about anything to her or whatever.

Brandy, who also works in the same club, feels very at home in the environment:

It's like being at home in a way. I've heard other people say it's our home away from home. I mean, we have a kitchen there, we have a bathroom, we have a shower, a tanning bed, um everything, so anytime I'm not busy with a customer, I can go make myself something to eat, or go, I don't do this, but lay in the tanning bed if I wanted, or, you know, I mean, I can sit and relax, I can read, I can do anything I want. Like, I work for myself. Like, if there's no one in there to talk to, then I can do anything I want. And I can read, meditate, whatever, and that's a nice perk, you know. It's not like if there's time to lean, there's time to clean, it's like nothing like that, you know. I mean... we would never have to clean anything.

Getting "Used To" the Work

Every woman interviewed could recall a sense of transition from the newness of the work, to a sense of comfort and knowledge of the work. For some the performance aspect of the work still could produce a sense of anxiety. Some women found themselves much more comfortable with their own naked body and the naked bodies of other women.

For Chloe, her comfort came from feeling that she was accepted by the other dancers:

...I got used to it just from getting to know the other dancers and then knowing me and you know, and calling my name when I came

in the door. And just getting comfortable with the whole set up, and probably the first month I worked there I was nervous or didn't feel one hundred percent confident that hey I'm really part of this place, you know, but yeah, it did get to where it was no big deal...

Brandy, although a seasoned veteran, found that the performance aspect of the job still made her a little nervous:

It's funny because sometimes I'll still get butterflies before I go on stage. Almost every night, at least your first time is a little bit weird, like your first time of the night, because you're not quite on yet so I get butterflies, but for the most part I'm so used to it now that it's just something I do, you know and it's a routine and I do it.

When Shawna first began working in the club, she was very uncomfortable with seeing other women nude. She often felt embarrassed and made a point not to look directly at the other dancers while they were nude. Now that she has worked as a dancer for quite a while, she no longer has any discomfort or awkwardness about this aspect of the work:

Like, it doesn't even faze me, them things that used to bother me. The other girls dancing in front of me and I would be like oh, my gosh, and I would look away. Now it's just like um-hmm. You know, I look right at them. It doesn't really bother me at all.

Like many jobs, as the women became more experienced in their work, they felt a greater sense of competency and comfort with their environment. In later chapters, the women's experiences of interpersonal relationships and their knowledge of their job will be explored.

Summary

The women interviewed for this study were required to master a number of techniques in order to do their jobs successfully. In general, the recruitment and training was informal. The women usually were recruited by friends and then learned the job primarily by observation. As they learned the work, they found that they had their own style of performance, incorporating varying degrees of physical and emotional displays. While the performance of the women varied in style, physicality and emotional display, each woman maintained that displaying her nude body was the “bottom line” of her erotic performance. Their ways of doing the work varied, and it is clear that being confident and assertive enough to solicit tips and drinks is crucial in being a successful dancer. Once they had become familiar with the performance, money-making techniques and the general working conditions, the woman felt an increased sense of competence and comfort in the occupation.

Chapter 4: Interaction and Emotional Labor

In this chapter, the interaction an exotic dancer experiences through the work will be discussed. Interaction takes place in four ways. First, and most obvious, dancers interact with customers. At the heart of this interaction is the notion of emotional labor. Dancers must present emotion and play roles that are not based upon true feeling. This is the expectation of the customer and the part of the job that can be most lucrative for the dancer. Second, dancers interact with other dancers. While these women compete for the attention of the customers, they also share a common work experience and in some cases friendships. Third, dancers interact with family, friends and others in their non-work lives. Because the work is often seen as “slutty” or degrading, women must choose carefully how to tell the people in their lives, and, in some cases, who to tell. Last, dancers must interact with themselves. As most workers do, they must find a comfortable separation between their non-working self and their working self.

Interaction with Customer

The work of the exotic dancer goes far beyond just dancing and removing clothing. For all of the women interviewed for this study, the interaction with the customer was the hardest part and most lucrative part of the job. Appropriate interaction with a customer varied, and it was important for the women to be able to read what was required of them early on in the interaction so that they could

successfully fulfill the customers' expectations. For some women, interaction was a requirement in that they must sit with the customers after their dance so that the customers can buy them drinks. In other cases, the dancers must interact with the customer in order to get tips and make a customer a "regular".

All interaction by the dancer can be considered what Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983) calls "emotional labor" (p. 7). Hochschild defines emotional labor as "to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (p. 7). This is at the heart of the nature of exotic dancing. In the case of flight attendants, Hochschild's example, the goal is to have customers achieve comfort and a feeling of being safe and cared for. In the case of dancers, it is to make customers feel turned on, cared about, interesting and attractive (although the exact response desired is not always known by the dancer and may depend upon what the customer has come in to the club in order to feel. In this way, it is the dancer's job to make the customer feel any way the customer wants to feel, within the boundaries of legal and/or accepted behavior.) But, unlike flight attendants, the emotion created is not the ultimate goal. The dancer's quality of emotional labor is rewarded with money. The more convincing the performance or the better she does her job, the more money she makes. Also, unlike flight attendants, dancers do not receive any formal training to perform the emotional labor, despite the women being the primary advertising and commodity of the club. The dancers sell the club more than any other worker, not just through their

physical appearance and naked bodies, but through their ability to make the customers feel a certain way.

In his essay, "Where the Action Is," Goffman (1967) describes different types of practical gambles taken in various occupations. The risk of success or lack of success in these occupations lies in unpredictable and uncontrollable territory (for example public opinion, weather, accidents and dangers). In the case of the strippers, their success is not only dependant upon the quality of their emotional labor but of the mood and personality of the customer, the atmosphere of the club and the abilities of other dancers. Therefore, the dancer controls what she can – her appearance and her behavior, but must adapt to the other dynamics. She must learn to read customer's personalities and anticipate their needs and desires.

A dancer's interaction is an elaborate game of what Goffman would term "face-work". Her presentation of herself is a carefully, although often quickly, crafted combination of desires, experiences, attitudes and knowledge that is modified for each customer she encounters. This face work has less to do with how she wants to be seen, as Goffman describes, but in how she estimates the customer wants her to be seen. So, her presentation of self is not crafted by a sense of characteristics she values and wants to project, but by the expectations of other individuals. Because each customer's desire may be slightly different, she must adjust this presentation for each interaction she encounters.

Hochschild notes that, “women make a resource out of feeling...” (p 163). Exotic dancing is primarily women’s work. The work requires the dancer to take on roles that are thought to be traditionally feminine. They must present themselves as attractive, submissive, interested in the customers and flirtatious. However, the work also requires that these qualities be for show and not based upon true emotions. Therefore, in order to do this work successfully, the dancer also must take on the traditionally masculine roles of con artist and power holder. These roles are hidden from the customer in order to give the appearance of authenticity of the feminine roles. When a masculine attribute of con artist or powerful woman are uncovered, the customer often responds with anger at the dancer’s betrayal. What makes this balance of the traditionally masculine and feminine roles more complex is the unspoken understanding by customer and dancer that what is being created in the club is fantasy and therefore the dancer’s presentation is not authentic. As long as this part of the relationship is not outwardly demonstrated by the dancer, the fantasy can continue and the customer is happy.

The most obvious expectation and role that is played by the dancer with the customer is that of potential girlfriend or sex partner. While both sides are aware of the limitations of the relationship, both play along as if there is a relationship that has the possibility of extending beyond the club. This is one of the main products that the strip club and the women who are working in it sell – a

manufactured courtship – a courtship with the understanding that the relationship is false, but without an outward recognition by both parties of its limitations. In order to create her side of the courtship, a dancer may play various parts individually or in combination: therapist, interested and supportive partner, flirt and con-artist. She must balance these roles with her own power in the interaction and her sense of boundaries with the customer.

Stripper as Therapist

One role dancers must effectively take on in their work is that of therapist or counselor to the customers. Many of the women describe their customers as in need of a “sessions”. Brandy sees this role intertwined with the more obvious role of girlfriend:

It's very therapeutic for the guys. I mean they come in to get there little therapy session, come in to see there pseudo-girlfriend, or whatever, someone to support them... they all need something, and a lot of them are lonely and that's why they go there. They need someone to talk to, or they need support, they're going through a divorce or things like that. Like, a lot of them really need to talk. They just want to talk to someone.

Chloe, who was studying to be a counselor when she was working, found that her training was very useful in the interaction she was required to engage in with the customers:

...a lot of the men there really just needed someone to talk to, so with my counseling background, it came very naturally to me, and, um, I remember sitting and talking at length with some guy whose wife was diagnosed with clinical depression and how tough that's been on him being the partner, you know how frustrating it is. So,

you know, I would just be very empathetic and reflective and say that must be really hard for you and what do you do when you're feeling real lonely and how do you get that love that you're not getting, or whatever. And so, I would just make them feel like I understood where they were coming from. that I was very interested in what they had to say, whether I was or not, and that, I'm a people person, so whatever story they had to tell, I was usually very interested in hearing it, if I had respect for the person.

Like a counselor, Chloe found that there was no conflict over her therapy session being a service that the men should have to pay for:

In some ways I felt like I was really doing them a service by listening to them and talking to them, and giving them a lot of attention. Obviously they're not getting that kind of attention somewhere else, or, I don't know, I don't really know what's going on in their home life. But somehow they needed this. They needed to have a young attractive female listening to their daily woes. You know, they needed it. So they could pay for it, you know, in my opinion. So I didn't really look at it as a power thing there that we were both helping each other out. That they were paying me for a service- to listen, you know, was a lot of it.

Jackie, also felt that when it came to listening to the men, payment was required and that it was a service she provided. However, in the club in which she worked, it was less of an expectation to take on this role. She found herself doing it primarily because she was not old enough to drink alcohol while on the job:

At that age I had to deal with them on a level of just talking to them. Most dancers just got drunk and forget about them. Just listen to them and shake your tits for them and their fine. You don't listen to them. But I was too young to drink. So I had to like sit there and listen to them. Oh well, you know, it's okay, I'll be alright, just give me some more money. You don't waste time with them. If they're not giving you money, you get up and move on. If they want to tell you their story they have to pay.

However, Jackie did not see her job as a without social benefit:

But I theorize that a stripper and sex industry people, prostitutes, phone sex, strippers, all of them, help men that are sexually, and women, that are sexually frustrated, and that would go out and would rape a little girl because they can't get sex, you know. They go to a prostitute or they can go to a strip bar, and they can go to a nudie flick, and do whatever they need to do, and get over it. And they don't have to find my friend's twelve-year-old walking home from school and pull her into their car, and rape her. I think that would make things so much easier to deal with as far as, you know, everybody needs sex, everybody's going to have sex. Even the ugliest person on earth needs to have an orgasm. And if he can't pay someone to do it, and no one else will do it, he's going to hurt somebody.

While research that has dealt with the topic of exotic dancing as deviance (discussed in the literature review of this study) would dismiss the dancers' role of therapist as a rationalization or a way to neutralize the negative feeling they and society have about the work, the women interviewed in this study seemed to only see it as part of the job. They took on an expected and lucrative role, that of therapist, not to make themselves feel better about a "deviant" occupation, but because they could make money from playing this role. Any benefit to the customer or society was secondary and incidental to the primary money-making purpose of the stripper as therapist.

Stripper as Flirt

In a stripper's interaction with a customer, the most obvious role to be played is that of potential girlfriend or sex partner. Most of the women

interviewed found this to be the most important role to play. This role is at the heart of the “manufactured courtship” of customer and dancer. While each party realizes that the interaction that takes place is based upon a customer’s willingness to pay for it and the understanding that the relationship will not lead to sex, both act as if they are in a courtship or dating scenario. Brandy explains how she flirts with customers so that they’ll tip her and buy her drinks:

... if I’m sitting with someone, I’m going to give them extra attention, because they’re buying me drinks, and they’re like my guy for that period of time so I’m going to pretend that way to them, like yeah, oh you’re the first one I’m going to dance for when I’m up on stage, you know. I’m going to make sure that I look at you plenty, or, so I’ll give them extra attention.

Jackie found that the best way to handle flirtation with customers is to act in a stereotypical gendered way. She describes herself as playing a submissive role. However, she has to be the one controlling the situation. These two conflicting roles, one for show and the other never to be shown, are a delicate balance:

The customers expect you to be submissive, for sure. I mean that’s their expectation. And then to be in control of them and look like you’re being submissive, is totally strange. Because you can’t ever let them know you’re in control, because then you’d never get any money. But you have to be in control of them, because you have to get them to give you money. You have to let them think it’s their idea to give you money.

Jackie also finds that playing “head games” with flirtation and playing customers off of one another an effective way of making bigger tips:

... you can do that game... where you make the one guy jealous because you’re over here spending your time with another guy and so he’ll buy you another drink, and well here’s more money, you

know. It's just a lot of head games. It's a lot of stupid little head games, you know, that you have to play... I mean it's all about sex, but they all know that they're not going to get any...

Morgan found that the flirtation aspect of her job allowed her to display feminine beauty in a way that she normally found to be vulgar. In her role as a dancer, however, she felt comfortable and empowered by incorporating this beauty:

I found some weird self glory in my feminine side that I had for so long denied in some weird way, by being this almost butch lesbian kind of thing without being a lesbian, you know. I found how feminine could be sexy without being ugly. Because usually when I saw women trying to be sexy, it was ugly... and again it comes back to the ideal of bachelor parties, and who I was at these bachelor parties, and not being necessarily what was expected - some trashy 'ho coming in and taking off her clothes. Here I was in a black evening gown, and long gloves on, jewels and stuff, and I'd slowly take them off and tease them with them. It was totally different from what I would think a typical stripper would do. And it was very hard to explain that to other people, and almost better because I couldn't and because people weren't with me sharing it, and it was my secret. It was all mine and it gave me that sense of inner power that I didn't have to prove anything to them.

Flirtation is the primary interaction between customer and dancer. It is the underlying foundation for all other kinds of roles and is incorporated into every move the dancer makes at work. She is primarily a sexual being in her work place and she must always remind her customers of this.

Stripper as Interested and Supportive Partner

Similar to the role of therapist, dancers must also play the role of partner to the men they are trying to get tips from. They must be supportive and understanding to the men and act as if their thoughts, needs and feelings are of utmost interest and importance. Some of the women interviewed found that the men they interacted with for tips and drinks were lacking something in their personal lives that made them come to the club and pay for the attention of the dancers. Chloe describes how she played the role of the interested and supportive partner:

...and I would just try to, I know this sounds awful, but just put all my emphasis on them and ask them about who they are and really make them feel important and special, because, I mean, everybody likes to feel that way, likes to feel like they're getting some attention and so that was the main thing as far as going up to them. Now, I'd almost always ask them have you ever been here before, you know. And if they said no I would go ahead and explain to them how the bar works, because a lot of them would get real angry and actually kind of resentful after the waitress would come up and say would you like to buy the lady a drink, and then when they find out that it starts out at \$10, they're angry and they're feeling cheated, and so I tell them that you know a waitress will probably come up here and ask you if you'd like to buy me drink and let me just show you our menu...

By explaining how the club works and the system for buying drinks, Chloe created an atmosphere in which she was the customer's guardian. She focused her attention on the customer – his ideas, feelings and needs. The customer finds an ally in the club, and Chloe hopes to be rewarded by tips and drinks.

Jackie found that some customers wanted to be treated in a way that was not necessarily sexual, but was demonstrating interest and affection:

Some of them wanted you to, you know, it just depended on the guy. Some of them wanted you to sit there and smile at them a little bit, pat them on their head or something; I mean stupid stuff like that worked.

It isn't surprising that some of the women found their role as partner tiring and tedious, especially when working long shifts multiple days per week. Brandy describes her role as interested and supportive partner:

You never know who you're going to have to deal with and just trying to stay interested, you know and pretend, you know, show interest and everything, and support them, and show them the good part.

The role of interested and supportive partner may be the most emotionally taxing role the dancer must present and it is the role that may require the most amount of emotional labor. While the roles of therapist and flirt require emotion to be presented and faked, the role of supportive and interested partner creates the most amount of intimacy, even though it is a false intimacy, between dancer and customer.

Stripper as Con-Artist

All of the roles described in the sections above are not based upon genuine emotion or roles that would be played by the dancers were there not money at stake. All of the women interviewed in some way referred to the roles

they play to get tips or drinks as a “con” or as “hustling”. The behaviors that they engage in are not based upon authentic feeling or emotion. While this is the case for many people in all types of interaction in day-to-day life, as Goffman describes, the dancer’s demonstration of fake emotion is solely for the money – it isn’t based upon societal or group expectations. In order to get paid, the dancer must hustle and the better the con, the more money she can make.

For Chloe, “working men” is a skill she says she’s had since she began dating in high school. This skill made her more successful in her work as a dancer:

I knew how to work men, kind of, I know that sounds weird, but I’ve always known that I’m an attractive female and that I can, not necessarily get what I want, like using men. I’ve never been into anything like that. But, I know how to kind of get my way in some situations. I know how to be seductive; I know how to be attractive. The whole thing, when I was growing up, the whole thing I focused on was how to be good looking. I’m sure a lot of it has to do with society and everything and the way I was raised... going into that bar, it’s like a fantasy world and you become any man’s fantasy. And I felt like I could really work that because I was always trying to be seductive with my boyfriends, being that I had such a low self esteem growing up I felt like, and I think a lot of people go through this, a lot of females, that the only way to get love is through sex.

For Morgan, she only felt competent with “working men” once she danced for a while. She relishes the thought that even in every day life her skills as a “con” can be utilized at any time:

But it’s a feeling, weirdly enough, that I carry with me still. That I look at anyone, [the guy] at the gyro stand, I would know how to play him. I know his secrets, even if their not his. I know the male secrets. I’ve been to the bachelor parties that women aren’t

allowed to. I have seen this other side of men that women aren't allowed to see. I've been to the bachelor party.

The con begins with a dancer figuring out whom to approach and/or sit with so that she can make the most money. Jackie felt that this decision was the most crucial one to make and would determine whether or not she would make money that night:

...you're more nervous in how much time you're going to have to spend with a guy before he's going to give you what you, you know, how much money can you make off of this guy. You know, checking out the crowd, going ok, is the guy a loser, you know, cause you can't tell by, you know the guys with money, they might have three thousand dollars in their pocket, but some of them will sit there and bait you with that three thousand dollars and not give you a dime and then you got some little geeky looking guy over hear in the corner that will blow his whole paycheck on you, which, and you can't think about that as far as moralistic views. You gotta go ok, I want the geeky guy's money.

Chloe also found the decision of who to sit with crucial – not only did her tips depend upon it, but she found it was easier to find one or two men to spend the evening with rather than approaching many customers in a night to make her tips:

Obviously, you want someone that has money, who can keep on buying me drink after drink after drink. It's a lot easier to sit with the same person half of the night than to have to really work it and have to go up to total strangers every time and try to introduce yourself. And, you know, you'll be rejected, and that was hard sometimes. You'd sit down and they wouldn't want to buy you a drink. You'd say, well I, luckily the waitress would be the one who'd say, well house policy is the lady has to have a drink or she can't sit with you, sorry. And I'd say, sorry, I really wanted to talk with you, or whatever. You've got to make it sound like, not like you're not buying me drinks, I don't want to have anything to do with you. But often times once they got a little liquored up, I know that sounds

kind of bad, but you'd come back, re-approach them and they'd buy you drinks.

Brandy describes the difficulty in making a decision on whom to approach and shares a few tricks of the trade for determining who to sit with:

You never know, I mean it's like the weirdest thing. The minute you think you know something, you'll see some totally scruffy guy come in and be like oh, you know, with his flannel and his baseball cap and a beard, and you'll just be like oh, you know, I'm not even going to approach that guy, you know, loser central, and then someone will sit with him, and he'll have hundred dollar bills just flowing out of his pocket, you know? So you can't be sure, but there are certain categories. Like you know if fat guy comes in by himself, go immediately to that, because they need more attention than most people. They haven't gotten it. So they really want it and they're willing to pay for it...

Shawna found the entire notion of the con difficult and embarrassing. She was only able to initiate it successfully when she used alcohol:

Oh god, I get so embarrassed. I don't get embarrassed on stage really. I get really... I can't talk to the guys at all. I will not say nothing. They'll say what's your name? And I'll tell them my name. And I'll say where are you from? And they'll tell me. And if they're real quiet, they won't talk back to me, they won't ask me where're you from or, they just sit there. And I'll just have to get up and leave because I don't know what to say.

Once a dancer has found a customer to sit with, she must then determine how she will keep him interested enough in her to buy her drinks and tip her. Although she always felt like she remained genuine, Chloe often made adjustments to her presentation of self in order to conform to what type she perceived the man to be and what she assumed his expectations were:

Well that's something that my friend was telling me was the hardest thing for her was figuring out what kind of a gal the guy was wanting when you sat down. I can't read a person's mind, I don't know what kind of a gal they want, so I was myself. The only thing I would change about the way I was depended on how they started interacting with me, right off the bat. If they were real professional types and they wanted to talk about their business or whatever, then I was more into that. But if they wanted to talk about, if they were more like a good old boy and wanted to talk about their truck or whatever, then I got a little more relaxed and felt like I would try to be more, I don't know, more on their level... It's not like I was lowering myself or anything like that, but I don't know, I felt like I was always myself, no matter what, but I would pull from my roots, being that I'm from South Eastern Ohio, and yeah, I grew up here, and small town stuff, and I'd get into that, and sometimes even put out a little bit more of my twang, which I don't have, I don't consider I have it, but I would maybe utilize that a little bit more, let it come out more freely, which, you know, if they were like that, then I'd kinda talk a little more like that. Not like fakey, cause that is a very natural way of talking when I was growing up, that way, so, but it just depended on what kind of person they were really, well not really what kind of person they were looking for, but who they were. I tried to match myself with their likes and interests and stuff, but I was always myself, though.

Morgan also changed her interaction and performance based upon her perceptions of the customers:

And I would come up with different little things each time... and if it was some little Hillbilly party, I would take the father-in-law's baseball trucking hat and put it on and dance around to that. I'd humor them. I would play their game. And sometimes you'd dance for doctors. Wealthy doctors. And I would play another kind of little stereotypical fantasy, you know. And I had this niche, I think, that being a fairly attractive upper class girl, and being able to pull that feminine girly thing off, and all the sudden I'm naked and I have tattoos and I'm hard, you know. That it was a fun contradiction for me as well as for them.

Jackie used her performance as a way to solicit tips. But she still had to balance her customers' wants and expectations with her own commodity (in this case how much skin she would show):

You would get up there, ok, when you're up there you've gotta figure out ok well what am I gonna do for this guy to turn him on. What is the least I can do to turn him on. Because if you take all of your clothes off, he's already seen it. So, you've gotta, certain bars have certain rules about how much you have to take off. By the third song you're supposed to be totally nude. So you've gotta get as much money out of him while you're standing on stage, by that third song and your clothes are off. Because when you get back down on the floor, if he's intrigued by what you have, he will give you more money and then he can make or break your night. And you've got like two minutes to figure it out... These men were in there to spend their money on us, you know. It was our job to take it.

Shawna felt that the con or what she described as "bullshitting" was wrong and only used this in regards to her age because she was considerably older than the other women working in the club:

Like the only thing I really lie about is my age. You know. It's mostly to younger guys. That way they don't think I'm an old woman, you know. Because everybody I work with now, they're like, I'm between seven and fifteen years older than everyone I work with.

Several of the women interviewed expressed sympathy or regret for the way the men were conned in the club. Although the men were voluntary participants in the interaction and club culture, some of the women felt that the customers were still exploited by a confusing system of cover charges, overpriced drinks and the expectation of the dancers to be tipped. Brandy describes her mixed feelings about the con, especially because it is clear that

some men do not understand the notion of the manufactured courtship. That is, they don't understand that the environment is not a singles bar or a place to meet women for romantic or sexual relationships; the club is place where men see naked women and they pay to have women act (presenting emotions and interest without authenticity) as if they are potential dates or sex partners:

...a lot of those guys, they just get in there and it's like a whole different game, and it's a con and girls know how to work them, you know. They can get every last dime, you know, someone's whole paycheck in a night, you know, easily, just depending on the person, but, you know, those guys work really hard and they come in there and there whole paycheck's gone for virtually nothing. I mean, maybe they have someone to talk to for a few hours, but they have all these hopes of sleeping with this person or having this person be their girlfriend, and the girls will say oh, yeah, you know, that sounds great, you know, why don't you call me tomorrow, or give me your number, and all that type of thing goes on, and so, I don't know, a lot of them don't know what's going on at all, and so, I feel sorry for them because they don't even know how a place like that operates and they get in there and spend all their money...

Chloe also feels the men are somewhat exploited by the obvious and hidden expenses of the club, but feels that it is the price paid to be in such an overtly sexual environment:

I think in some ways [the men are exploited] because they often don't know what they're getting into when they come in. I mean, they're hit up with like a \$5 cover walking in the door, they have to give their driver's license, they have to sign their name and everything, and then when they come in, they're really hounded. They're drinks are more expensive... I don't know they do have a lot of things that are more expensive and stuff like that. So in some ways I could say maybe a little bit, but not really, ultimately, no, because they are paying for a service. This is a privileged kind of thing, you know, women aren't allowed in West Virginia, women aren't allowed to come into the bar alone, unescorted. It's against the law. Only men have this opportunity, really, to come in and see women whenever they want and to have women be completely naked in front of them. I mean they are charged a little too much

sometimes, in some ways, like their beers are like \$5 a beer. But it's really the atmosphere you're paying for, so in the long run no, they know what, some of them don't know what they're getting into when they come in, but it's the whole atmosphere and the opportunity to see all these naked women. You're going to pay for it... I mean, men make more money than women anyway, in the whole scheme of things. So no I don't think that they're exploited.

The con of the work was something that Jackie found hard to reconcile with her own morality. She found it necessary to suppress those feelings in order to do her job effectively:

I think the customer is totally exploited...How stupid do you have to be to go into a place and look at somebody and give them hundreds of dollars and not be able to go home with them? I mean, I think it's pretty stupid, myself... You just gotta get over this feeling of, like, playing with people's emotions, and that's why I quit is because the emotional pull of, you know, seeing these men in my bar one night and then going to the grocery store and seeing them with their wife and three kids on food stamps, you know. And I had their three hundred dollar paycheck in my garter...the mind games [are difficult]. Playing the mind games with the customers. Trying to get over dealing with them being people, you know, they are people too. They have emotions, they have feelings. The guys that wanted to save you, they really did want to save you. They really did think that they could help you. Um, they thought you needed help. We did, but not in the way they wanted to help you...

Stripper Power

Power is an ever-exchanged dynamic within the club. As Jackie mentioned, it was important for her to never display any sense of power she may have in her interactions with the customers. The power and who holds it is carefully negotiated throughout the interaction. For the dancer, she must act submissive and sexually available, while knowing that she has control over how

much physical and interactional access a customer may have to her (this may also be controlled in part by the formal and informal rules of the club, as described in Chapter 5). Depending on a dancer's abilities as a con artist, she also has the power to relieve a customer of his entire paycheck.

As for customer power, it is clear that the customer has the power to give or withhold money and reject a dancer's offer to sit and have a drink with him. If the dancer's performance, whether it be on stage or at the table one-on-one, is not convincing to the customer or not what the customer desires, he may choose to not pay or interact with the dancer. From this standpoint, it is clear that the dancer's ability to read the desires of the customer, that is, how to "play him", is crucial in maintaining the balance of power between dancer and customer.

Chloe describes how she viewed the power dynamic between customer and dancer:

They were the ones with the money, you know, they were the ones who, without them, I wouldn't have had any money at all. But I felt like I was, this is kinda hard because I felt two different things. In some ways, I felt like, like in some ways I felt like I was really doing them a service by listening to them and talking to them, and giving them a lot of attention. And I felt like I'm doing them a big service by doing that. Obviously they're not getting that kind of attention somewhere else, or, I don't know, I don't really know what's going on in their home life. But somehow they needed this. They needed to have a young attractive female listening to their daily woes. You know, they needed it. So they could pay for it, you know, in my opinion. So I didn't really look at it as a power thing there that we were both helping each other out. That they were paying me for a service- to listen, you know, was a lot of it. But the dancing part, I mean, they, I couldn't say that I felt real powerful sometimes because I'm only getting dollar tips or \$5 tips... I never felt like I

was getting how much I was really worth. I'm worth a lot more than I can ever make there, but, so I don't know... I think we both had a degree of power. Me, to show them as much as I wanted to show them, the power of that, or be as interested or uninterested in them, you know, to see how much that they could get away with. I had the control over that, 'cause if they went beyond my comfort level then I could have them thrown out. And that was powerful to have that kind of control and feeling. But they're the ones that had the money. They're the ones that are going to decide whether to tip you or not, so they had a lot of power too.

In contrast to Chloe's mixed feelings about the power in club, Morgan, the bachelor party stripper, felt an enormous sense of power in her performance and interaction:

I'm fully clothed when I walk in there, and can walk out at any moment. I'm not taking off that next piece of clothing until I feel comfortable. And if that's not until the last two minutes of me being there, oh well, sorry guys. So you have to make me feel comfortable. It's your job to make me feel comfortable. I'm here for you, but you gotta keep me here. It's not like at a bar where you can get up and walk out and leave, and I have to because there's some boss looking over at me telling me what I can and can't do. I can do whatever I want, you know.

Brandy also feels she has the power when it comes to her interaction with the customers. She sees the club as her turf, a place where she calls the shots and can give as much or as little of herself as she chooses:

And I feel like I have the power even if the guy is power tripping me and trying to get me to do what he wants, it's just like you know I have the say. I can go in the back room and never come back out if I want to, you know? I mean, I still have to go out on stage, but I never have to talk to that guy again or whatever. So I feel like I have the power.

Shawna feels that she has no power when it comes to her interactions with customers. This isn't surprising when she feels that her line of work is morally wrong and degrading:

Beth Kilgore: When you're on stage or when your there in the club, do you feel powerful? Do you feel like you have some kind of power over the men?

Shawna: No.

Beth Kilgore: No?

Shawna: I just feel like I'm doing my job.

Beth Kilgore: Do you think men have control over the situation in the club?

Shawna: Oh yeah.

Beth Kilgore: Really?

Shawna: Yeah. They're the customers, you know.

Beth Kilgore: And the customer is always right?

Shawna: Yeah, it's like a normal job, you know. The customer's always right. That's the way it should be. You have to please the customers. You know, that's the way I feel about this job. I try to make them laugh, or whatever, but I'm not fake. But, you're an entertainer.

Stripper–Customer Boundaries

There is an understanding between customer and dancer that the flirtation and partnership experienced by the two are not real in the sense that they will not result in a sexual or romantic relationship. This is unlike what these behaviors result in or have the possibility of resulting in outside of the club. This

understanding does not always exist or it is ignored by customers. Once this boundary is broken on the customer's side of the interaction, it is up to the dancer to decide how to deal with it. Most dancers interviewed had techniques for reminding the customer of the reality of the situation – she breaks out of her role as player in the fantasy that has been mutually constructed and reminds him that she is not sexually or romantically available to him. In some cases, however, the dancer may engage in behaviors that are not a part of the “legitimate” culture of the club. She may allow sexual contact or allow the customer to continue to believe that theirs is a romantic relationship.

In “The Managed Heart”, Hochschild describes the boundaries flight attendants have with their passengers and the fact that the corporation does not back up these boundaries with policy or punishment of offending customers. In the strip club, there is policy protecting the dancers from inappropriate customer behavior. It is the dancers, however, who are hesitant to use this policy because their income will be directly effected if the customer is unhappy or leaves the club. Therefore, the dancers often craft other tactics for dealing with broken boundaries and maintaining their own set of standards for customer behavior.

Chloe describes her own personal boundaries with customers in the club:

The only time I'd ever feel exploited is if somebody did something I thought was crass or really gross, like would blow on me, would try to blow on my vagina or something. I would just really feel repulsed and disgusting and really taken advantage of- like they couldn't touch me so they'd blow on me, you know. Or them saying something really gross, you know, um, which I thought, I don't

know. I don't mind if they say "you've got nice tits" or "nice ass" or whatever. That's okay, but when they say something like, "stick your fingers in you cunt for me," you know, I'm like, get away, you're so gross. I would get up and I would go on to the next person. Or if they'd say "I'm not going to tip you until you show me your pussy," or something, I would be like fuck you, I'm not even coming back here then. That's just the way I was, cause then I'd feel taken advantage of. I'd feel exploited because in my opinion I want to do what I want to do, show as much as I want to show, and as far as my comfort level. If they just shut up and are looking and enjoying the show and tipping me or whatever that's fine. But once they start talking, you know, really crudely. Now there's some things, I don't mind if somebody says, "Hey you've got nice tits", or whatever. I didn't mind that because, you know of course I'm naked, you know, there going to say something. This is a fantasy bar, there's is a certain degree of that I will accept here. Outside of the bar is another whole story, you know.

Brandy describes the feeling of loss of power she experiences when certain customers play games with her. In this case the "power-tripping" customer breaks the boundaries of the understood relationship by expecting too much for the money they are able to spend on the dancer:

When I get up on stage I will dance for every single person in the club. I'll make eye contact with every single person in there, you know, and give them a little bit of attention, until someone bothers me or says something disgusting. If someone says something that really bothers me or acts like a jerk, there's a lot of power-tripping that goes on, if there's any of that, then I will ignore that person, I won't go sit with that person, I won't try to talk to that person. I'm not going to be rude, because then you'll put out a bad attitude that people will see, but I'm not going to be nice either, I'll just ignore that person. I usually am nice to everyone until I can just tell or they say something... And also a lot of guys with money are on a big power trip and they either want to spend a ton, or they want to try to make you work as hard as you can for every dime, you know? There's a lot of power things that go on that I've noticed with the men. I mean , it's either like, where they want to make you, you know, they'll just suck the energy right out of your, like they'll stare at you and make you constantly have eye contact with them when you're talking, and you know it's just like, they're just having fun sucking the energy right out of you.

According to the women interviewed, the most common boundary that is broken by the customers is that of personal space and a refusal to acknowledge that the women are not available to the men in a sexual way. Brandy describes how these broken boundaries often play out for her by escalating from typical flirtation to a customer who refuses to acknowledge or does not understand the reality versus the fantasy aspects of the club culture:

I would start to do like the whole con thing with the guy. Well, yeah that sounds fun, or maybe I would meet you sometime, you know. And then having them like relentlessly pushing it and pushing it and not knowing, like how to get away from this person without, like, pissing them off. I mean, I never want to piss anyone off or be really rude, or cause the bar to lose business, you know. It's just a balance. You know, one night I was like what am I doing talking to this guy, he's never going, you know, I can't sit here anymore, and so I went and found this other girl to steal him away from me, ...There's just guys who are just relentless. I mean, they're just constantly grabbing at you or something, or sticking their hand up your dress or you know, begging you to meet them later for money and offering me money, and constantly grabbing you, stroking you, just like doing everything they can, you know, to like, hug you. Just real touchy feely, like that. That's what drives me nuts.

Chloe describes her technique for reminding the customer of the reality of the mutually-constructed fantasy world of the club:

...mainly you want to know that they're going to buy you another drink later, you wanna still keep them happy, but I would joke around, and laugh, and say no, you're not supposed to do that and you're being a bad boy and stuff like that and just be real dumb, you know, just be real flirtatious and just keep telling them no, you're not supposed to do that, and so that's what I'd keep doing.

In one situation, Morgan convinced the men who were offering her money for sexual contact that she wasn't worth the price. Again, she had to blatantly remind them of the reality versus the fantasy of the situation:

I was offered eight hundred dollars cash to give a hand job with a condom on a guy. The best man kept upping the ante. He was like come on, come on. I was like, oh, you know what? It's never going to be as good as you think it's going to be. You know, he's going to feel guilty about it. It's going to be harder on their relationship. You don't want to put your friend through that, and talked them out of it, you know? Rationalized their mind out of it. And I was like, if it's something you really want, go downtown and get a hooker and get a lot more for eight hundred bucks, you know? Um, you don't want it. I'm not that good. I'm a much better dancer than I am a love maker, so, you know deal with the myth and not the reality.

For Shawna, a boundary being broken becomes particularly dangerous when she has had too much alcohol:

Some guys will take advantage of you. Like this one guy the other night. We were in the VIP lounge - that's in the back and there's like a couch and we sell pitchers. And he's been here a couple times, and, you know, he took me out to dinner and it was just like, I already know what he wanted, you know. So I just told him the other night, I was so messed up, I wouldn't want to go with him any way, because I was so messed up. And he wanted me to go back to his motel and I was like no, I don't think so. And he said, well, I'll never be back again.

For the women who worked in the club, they were protected by formal house rules; that is, the clubs had rules against touching and becoming sexually aggressive with dancers. However, this rule meant to protect the dancers was contradicted in one club by the private room or the back room. If a man purchased an expensive drink for a dancer, they were entitled to take that dancer into the back room or a private room. In these rooms, the customer could slow

dance with the dancer, enjoy a private strip-tease or sit on a sofa with a dancer.

While the dancers made more money if a customer paid to go into the back room with them, all felt that their safety and the boundaries they worked hard to establish were at risk. Chloe describes what it was like in the back room and a particularly bad experience she had with a customer there:

But if the drinks go past a certain level, I think it's \$100, maybe it's even 50, it's been a while since I've worked there, but there's this semi-private room, and if you spend 50 or 100 dollars on you they would take you back to that private room. It had great big couches in it and it was dark. People could still see in there, there was like shimmery like streamer type things and people could still see in there but not as easily. So when someone would ask what does a \$100 drink get me, you know, like haha, like you know there's, I'd say, well, it doesn't really get you anything else that buying me a \$10 drink except that back there it's more private, we can get a little bit more comfortable. I did not lie. I wanted to be as upfront and honest as possible because I didn't want to get in any situation that might be unsafe for me and I felt that by lying I could maybe make someone real angry and act out on me. So I was always really open and honest and sometimes they, I think they had it in their mind that I was just saying it because I had to, and that maybe once they got me back in that semi-private room, that they could do whatever they wanted. So we'd get back there... Sometimes I would hold their hand or let them put their arm around me or I might even put my legs up on their legs so they can like touch my legs, but I didn't let them grope me, but boy they tried, they would try and try and try, and if it got to the point where they were being, I never had anyone be real aggressive with me to where it would scare me so I never had to worry about that, but if it got real uncomfortable, we could just get up and get the bouncer to throw them out. I never had to worry about that thank goodness. I did have one really scary instance. It was the very first night I ever worked there. I had this guy buy me a \$100 drink and we went back there and he was wanting me to give him a hand job and I said no that's not what I told you was going to go on back here. I told you that there's no touching and everything... And he started calling me a bitch, I was lying, and getting really verbal with me. And I was scared... And he said I should just slap you and I was like Oh my gosh.. And I said we're not going to have that and if you lay one hand on me I will have you thrown out. And he said well I'm just leaving, I'm so pissed off I'm just leaving. And I said I'm sorry you feel that way,

but I was really glad. He just left he was so mad. He was like, you ripped me off. And I said I didn't lie to you. And then he left in a huff and I got my 50 bucks and I was like screw him, you know. But, you know, it was, I didn't really like, it was nice that you got a big drink buy that means more money for you, but it also means how is this person going to act and treat you once you get back in this room. Um, a lot of times there are already other dancers back there with their customers and that was okay except if a dancer was letting a customer do whatever with her and he's thinking why won't you let me do that to you. And that was real uncomfortable...But I think the most difficult aspect was worrying what they might try on me once they got back in that semi-private room. That was probably the scariest part of working there...

Chloe's description also demonstrates how important it is for dancers to have an agreed upon set of rules for sexual contact with customers. This is discussed at length in Chapter 5. Brandy found herself sometimes giving into the demands of customers when she was in the private room with them:

...when you do have a situation, like a private dance or a slow dance, and a guy is really pushy, um, I mean it just gets hard to balance it out because you don't want to totally piss the person off, you don't want to lose the money, you don't want to lose him as a customer, but yet you want, you want to maintain your personal boundaries, and its hard, its a hard one to balance out. I've definitely done things that I never thought I would do, or that I didn't even want to do, but I just did it just to avoid a hassle... I've let a number of guys do stuff like possibly finger me, or even taste me, oh god, it's so gross. They all like, I don't know, but only on very rare occasions when I've been in sort of a weak state of mind or whatever, just didn't feel like dealing with it I have allowed things to happen that I never thought I would ever do.

Morgan, while she did not work in a club and therefore did not have to work a "back room", also found that she would allow the boundaries to be broken as long as she did not feel that her safety was in question:

I would let them go as far as spanking me sometimes, depending on how ruthless they were being. If they put a dollar bill in my

underwear, and just accidentally slipped their finger across my vagina, just barely touching it, just to see if they could get away with it, if they were harmless, I knew it was harmless and I was cool. I'd almost pretend like I didn't notice, and I'd look at them a little, now you know you shouldn't have done that, don't let anybody else see you do that. Because if somebody else does it, I'm calling you all on it...

In this situation, even though a boundary was broken by a customer and Morgan accepted this, she established a new boundary for the situation she was in, declaring that if some else tried to overstep the boundary, she was going to "call" them all on it.

In Jackie's case, customers blurred reality with fantasy in the club by wanting to pursue a romantic relationship with her. Jackie describes these men as wanting to rescue her from her job as an exotic dancer. In some ways, these men had a better grasp of the reality of the customer/dancer relationship. They understood that the dancer was doing this work for money and that her displayed emotions for other customers were not real. However, the customer allowed himself to believe that he was the exception in his relationship with the dancer. In his mind he understood what the dancer's needs were and felt that his relationship with her could change her circumstances. This "Taxi Driver" mentality, while not taken to the extreme of Travis Bickle in the movie, still refuses to acknowledge the manufactured courtship the dancer creates with all customers. Jackie describes how her potential rescuers treated her, the possible danger of these rescuers and how she dealt with this broken boundary:

I had this one trucker that thought he was going to marry me, and take me away from all of this. And he followed me to like twenty different bars, left his wife, and I finally just sat him down and said look, this is my job, I don't want to marry you, you know. They really want you to stop. They want you to go in the back room, get your things, they don't even want you to get your bag, they just want you to hop in their car. I had this one guy who wanted to take me to Arizona, and he was going to make me his wife, and I was going to raise his kids, and he had this whole scenario, and I was like What? No! And they're serious. And then you have the guys that want to save you and you turn them down and they become pissed. And they're sickos. We had this one guy. And he didn't do it to me, but to several of the dancers, he was stalking them... And they will hurt you. Some dancers would get hurt leaving the bar. In most of your bars, the management didn't leave until the dancers were gone. Some dancers would have their old men pick them up and they'd be waiting out side. You can never keep your eye on everybody you know. They would get hurt. They would get raped or beaten up.

While Jackie had a clear sense of the boundaries and why rescuers had to be reminded of the reality of the situation, she did allow some of her regulars to take on a "rescuer" role. However, she made certain that these customers did not expect anything outside of the boundaries in return for their financial assistance:

I had some regulars that would, look, there's a hundred bucks. Just sit and talk to me, get drunk with me tonight. You know? And you'd sit with them while you weren't busy, and that was cool. And you're regulars were ones you would go to at off times and you'd tell them, look my electric's going to be shut off tomorrow, I need three hundred dollars. And they'd give it to you. And they would never, ever think of having sex or asking for it. If you offered it, that was fine. Most of them were perfect gentlemen, believe it or not.

When a dancer deals with the issues of boundaries in the club, she is dealing with something that all people deal with in their non-work lives. For Brandy, her experiences dealing with the customers and maintaining boundaries

with them, made negotiating her own boundaries easier in her life outside of the club:

I've learned how to say no. I've always had boundary issues in my life, um, and I've learned, um, I'm so much better now at saying no and just knowing what my boundaries are with people, especially outside of the club. I mean, in the club it does get blurred and it gets hard to balance it out, but just from working in that atmosphere, I've learned that when I'm outside of there it's so much easier to say no, and just to draw my boundaries.

There are many ways in which customers can and do break boundaries in their interactions with dancers. However, rarely do the dancers interviewed turn to formal means of taking care of the problem. While the clubs in which they worked had policies on touching and sexual and aggressive contact and bouncers to back these policies, the dancers usually developed tactics for gently reminding the customer of the reality of their relationship and the manufactured courtship they were creating together.

Interaction with Co-workers

The women interviewed in this study described the relationships and interactions with the other women in the club. With few exceptions, the women didn't speak of any intense competition among their co-workers. As described in Chapter 5, as long as a dancer follows the informal rules of the club, she can work without problems from the other dancers.

The women's perceptions of their co-workers varied, but most saw that those who were youngest had the most difficulty navigating the business.

Brandy, who experienced a sense of camaraderie with her co-workers describes them:

...They're all different. There are a lot of really neat people, really together people, and then there's others that I think are too young, and they get a little bit caught up in the alcohol and there's some drug use. I think that's a negative of being in a bar, you know. So you see people drinking a lot. I think, the girls, they're different. They're all different, you know, I like some of them, and some of them really turn me off...I definitely [have friendships with the other women] when I'm working, but I don't do too much with anybody from work outside of work. I have before. One girl, um, she left, but we would do stuff occasionally. But, I feel like it's sort of a family atmosphere there in a lot of ways, even though I don't do anything with them outside of work, it's nice to be around them at work... we talk and we eat together, you know, and stuff like that. We help each other out too, like help each other make money and stuff, which is nice.

Jackie describes her experience of her co-workers:

...you don't automatically get friends in that business. You have to learn who to hang out with and who not to hang out with. And some of the girls I would want to bring home and hang out with. And some of them were thieves, and some of them were really bad people, and some of them were really nice people, and you had to figure that out and some of them you didn't want within a hundred miles of you, so that was a thing. But you really didn't hang out with people from the bar. The worst thing to ask a dancer is do you want to go out to a bar and go dancing. As far as to a club, no. After dancing in three inch or nine inch heels all day, I don't want to go dancing. I don't even want to go to a bar. Give me a bottle, I'll sit at home, I'll be fine...

Because Shawna is significantly older than her co-workers, she finds interaction with them to be difficult and likens their behavior to that of her young daughter:

They're very immature. I don't know, nothing really fazes me, you know. It's no big deal. They're childish. There's this one girl, she's so, like if something goes wrong, she complains about everything, you know. It's just the way they act. I guess I'm just older, you know. They act like my daughter. She's only twelve but that's what they act like. And it's funny really, to sit back and watch them.

All of the women who worked in clubs described either personally abusing alcohol or witnessing co-workers struggling with alcoholism. Jackie found that her co-workers used alcohol to deal with the work:

That's another thing with that whole crowd, is that they don't really talk much, you know. They just get really drunk, and do stupid things, and make their money, and it's really a never-ending circle of chaos, craziness. It really is, because people are trying to deal with their emotions, and they don't discuss how they feel. I think is the main problem. You don't talk. I think most of the women would agree that that is a big problem with the whole professional dance industry. You know, if you're gonna be in a bar in the same location for a long period of time, you're gonna have to get drunk, it's a choice you have to make. All the older dancers use, they had to get, some of the dancers there. I had one friend there who had a husband and a little girl, and the husband would beat her if she didn't bring home three hundred dollars a day. So, I mean, you have those kind of things that go on too. Just trying to live, you know these people were just trying to live.

Only Shawna and Jackie described competition or fighting among co-workers. For Jackie, she felt that the level of camaraderie or lack of it depended upon the type of club:

In some places they're totally rude, I mean their in your higher class establishments. Those are your places that will have fifty women on the dance floor at one time on three or four different stages, you know. And on the main drag in town. And nobody there has a waist bigger than twenty inches, and they've got so much silicon in their bodies, and their hair's been dyed so many different shades of blond that they probably have brain damage. Those places, they're nasty. Nasty women, nasty, because they have to be. That's what they have to do to make money in those places and that's what

they work at. Now in your places, in your sleazier bars, there's a lot of, I don't know what the word is, cordial. They're not rude, but their, that's not the word. They're very cordial, I mean they aren't rude, but some of them will have their certain mirror that they like to put makeup on in front of, and you don't mess with that. They have their areas of seniority as far as the older dancers will make themselves known to you to stay away from them until they talk to you. You know? And if they want to talk to you, they'll talk to you. If they don't they don't. I'm not the type of person to, now some girls that would work the circuit... we all knew each other at some point or another. Some women would only stay in it a year or two and then get out of it if they couldn't handle it. But those of us that did for a while knew who everybody was pretty much at the bars. And there were some girls that just couldn't stand it if they weren't everybody's friend at the bar, you know. And I think we know those kind of girls in every circle, you know. But they would end up getting themselves into more trouble trying to be everyone's friend, you know.

Interaction with Family / Friends / Others

While stigma and deviance are not central and are not discussed in detail in this study, the way that many people in society look at the occupation of exotic dancing must be discussed. This is an important part of a dancer's perception of her work and how open she feels to tell the people in her life about her work is central to how she feels about the work. All of the women interviewed were somewhat selective in who they chose to tell about their work. Some felt their relationship with the family could be or was damaged by their choice of work and others felt that they could jeopardize their "legitimate" careers if they were to be found out. Still, others felt more open and were fairly open with friends and family about their work as an exotic dancer. While all of the women interviewed said that they had told people in their lives about their work, several had

experienced being found out unexpectedly to embarrassing and sometimes hurtful ends.

Chloe describes how she feels about sharing what she did for a living and who she chose to tell:

I didn't really, I didn't talk about my other job to anyone else because I knew that they would probably put some judgments on me and be real critical and look down on me, and so it wasn't something that I ever wanted to tell anyone about... I told my brother. And my brother actually came one time to visit me there which was really strange and awkward and I really never understood why he came over... I told my cousin, who is my first cousin. I told some family members on my father's side because they're a lot more liberal, you know like my uncle. But no one on my mother's side of the family, no one, except for my cousin, which is my mom's sister's daughter... I'd kind of like feel it out to see if I thought they were going to think that I was really degraded by doing that or whatever. I told my best girl friend and you know, she thought it was a pretty liberating thing for me to do, you know, she was thinking I had a lot of guts and all that, but I don't know, I guess who I could trust and who wouldn't think I was a slut or whatever.

For Jackie, she feels very comfortable talking to people about her work as a dancer, but felt that it was a difficult subject that she one day would have to explain to her young daughter:

I talk about it a lot more that most people would. Most people are so embarrassed by it. Because they don't know what someone's reaction is going to be. I don't care. I really don't care what someone thinks about me in my past. I needed that to get to where I am today... one of the things that I've been working on for me lately, is telling [my daughter] about my past, and what to tell her. And if it weren't so hard to tell adults about this, I don't think I'd have so much of a problem telling my kid. Not that I want to sit her down at five years old and tell her, you know, hey I used to be a stripper. She doesn't even know what the word means. But in years to come, she's going to ask questions. I mean, I have

pictures of days' where I was stripping and she's going to see them at some point, you know. And what am I going to say?

For several of the dancers, friends, acquaintances and family members found out about their occupation either through coming into the club or being told by a third party. This exposure puts the dancer in the position of what Goffman, in his essay "On Face-Work," (1967) calls being in the wrong face. The women have carefully integrated their work into their lives and have maintained a comfortable level of the personal and professional parts by telling some friends and family and not telling others. When a family member or friend suddenly learns of the dancer's work, her presented face is destroyed, and she must adjust to their new knowledge of her. Brandy describes her fear of seeing people she knows in her life outside of work as customers in the club:

...There's been times when, especially when people that I've known have come to where I work, not having any idea that I work there, and it really blurs at that point. And that's hard, its embarrassing, it's kinda weird, but, I mean, I don't know, it's a part of me, so it always, there's always, it's definitely a part of me that blurs a little bit in everything I do... It feels ok, at this point. I think it has taken me a while to get that point. I mean, I used to be really scared that if anyone found out, you know, they would just freak, and stuff, now I really accept it, and if anyone wants, if they find out, and you know, that's their problem and not mine, because I'm comfortable with what I do.

Chloe was raised in the area where she now works. She has run into several people she new from her non-work life and worried about who else could find out:

...being that I grew up in that area, I was always afraid that someone would come in from my school that I would know. And it did happen a couple of times. The first time it happened the person

didn't recognize me. The second time they did and it was really embarrassing for me because they were like "what are you doing here?", because it isn't the most prestigious job, it really isn't. That was why I could never tell my mother. I could never do that. She would freak out if she knew. So, that was difficult, I was always afraid what if somebody I know comes in here...

Now that she is a professional, she is aware of how detrimental her past employment as a dancer could effect her professional reputation:

Someone even told me, there was one person at work, and I'm a therapist, that I had told that I had this in the past, and he said if I ever did it again that I could lose my job. And I don't know how that could really be legally, I don't know how I could really lose my job, but I know that I wouldn't be comfortable if a client came in and saw me like that. There would be no way that my relationship with that client would ever be the same. It would probably never be the same. So, I just wouldn't want anyone to know that I do that kind of work, because of the stigma attached to women that do that kind of work.

The women interviewed for this study described a variety of reactions by family members and friends to their work. Chloe, who lives with her boyfriend and has been in a serious relationship with him for several years, felt that he had some conflicting feelings about her work. In some ways, he was supported her and worried for her safety, but he also sometimes questioned her motives for doing the work:

...He'd been to strip bars before and he said I know what goes on there and he never accused me of that or anything like that. And he was worried about my safety mainly. And he didn't really like the fact that was showing my whole body to total strangers. And there were all these guys that were trying to give me their phone numbers, or find out more information about who I really was, where I lived, that kind of stuff. He didn't like that aspect of it either, but, yeah, he said I just hope someday you'll be able to make as much money in a more respectable job ... Sometimes I'd tell him about a crappy guy that I had to deal with or a really neat person

that I met that was really interesting... he always said how much money did you make. That was always the first thing that he'd ask me, but it was always kind of like, we would battle, who could make more money, cause he works, he gets paid per evening kind of thing, the work he does and he never knows how much money he's going to make, so we'd always like battle just jokingly, you know, did you make more money than me, and that kind of thing. But he just wished that I didn't have to do it, you know. But I think, I guess one thing, one fight that we'd have pretty regularly... was that he would say, when he asked me why I did it, I would say I did it first and foremost for the money. And he said I think you do it for more than the money. I think you do it because you like to get naked for people. And I'd say I'm doing it for the money and that's the main reason. And he'd say yeah, but I think you like, you kinda like teasing and stuff. And like, well what if I do, you know. He's like well I don't know. He didn't really like that, that I like bit. And I'd say well that's not the main reason I do it, but that's part of it...

Jackie felt that when she told other people about the kind of work she did, she was treated in a more familiar way by men and resented and questioned by women:

A lot of them think that because I was a stripper they're allowed to, a lot of them are more relaxed around me, really, they feel they are allowed to relax, if they're not with their significant other, you know. It's a totally different thing if the man is with his wife or his girlfriend and I'm there than when he's by himself. They'll feel more at ease. Some of them feel like they can touch me and stuff like that, and you have to tell them, look, I don't like that either... everybody wants to make assumptions, just like the woman who moves closer to her boyfriend when I walk into the room. She's making the assumption that because I made a living by taking my clothes off, I'm going to do something to her husband, and I wouldn't even think of doing. The thought would never cross my mind, believe me. I've always had my men, and have been very happy with them.

For Shawna, being discovered by her family was a painful and shameful experience. In order to punish her, Shawna's ex-husband told her parents, who are devoutly religious:

He got real mad because I lied to him for a week. I told him I was working somewhere else and I told him and he said you're not doing that. But then after the money started coming in, it was like, oh, I don't care. Then he started calling it dirty money. If we got into an argument or something, he'd call it dirty money and then, it was weird... My ex-husband called my mom and dad up and told them... And they didn't like it. And they were down here that day that he called and said why are you doing this? And I just didn't know what to say, and I think right then, when he did that to me, called my mom and dad, I didn't want to have anything else to do with him. You know what I mean? That was awful. And he knew how religious they are. Why would he do something like that? They don't talk about it. They know, but, every time I go to see my mom and dad, my mom says we're praying for you... I know I shouldn't be doing it, and I don't know, my sister, I've got two older sisters, and they don't really talk about it, but they'll ask me do you have to work tonight. They know where I'm going. But they don't talk about it. I don't really have anyone that I can talk to about it. I don't really have any friends. They all moved away.

Because of negative status dancing is given by many parts of society, the women who do the work must decide who to tell and who not to tell by weighing their own comfort with the work and the importance of others' opinions. Also, the women must consider how important relationships in their live may be effected by telling or not telling.

Interaction with Self

The emotional labor of the dancer can be tedious and tiring. She constantly must fake emotion to make money. But, as Hochschild describes in *The Managed Heart*, it is necessary to protect the "real self", the self in which emotions are real and feelings can be felt outwardly. Hochschild describes this protection as donning, "a cloak to protect us against the commercial elements,"

(p. 34) of our working lives. For some women, this protection of the real self is easy and their non-work lives are very separate from their work lives. Others, however, see themselves or co-workers struggling to separate the two. One common technique for minimizing the struggle is to use alcohol or drugs. Brandy feels that her age and experience have allowed her to keep her work and personal life in proper perspective:

...I feel like since I'm older, I have a little bit more perspective, I had a little more self esteem when I went into it. I knew myself better. And even I have had problems in just sort of, like, dealing with it all, because you just get a warped sense of your value. As your only valued for being sexy and looking good that it's hard to imagine, like, oh well, I have a brain. You know? And, um, that I have other things to offer. You know? You start feeling a little bit objectified and, I mean it's just hard to keep it in perspective... I only work about three days a week. So it's an every other day thing- Monday, Wednesday, Friday- and I have a lot of time, I have another job that keeps me well-rounded for me. And I'm pursuing other interests, you know. And I just try to keep it as my job only. But a lot of girls I work with work five nights a week, even six, and they sleep all day. And you get up and go to work every night and that's their life. And I think it's harder on them and, you know, I worry about them sometimes.

For Chloe, she found that the attention she got from men at the club helped her feel good about herself:

I always felt more attractive than ever. Because so many people would tell me how attractive I was and how good looking I was, you know my body was wonderful and all this stuff, so it was like compliments all night long, all night long, and it really I think it was a self-esteem boost for me.

Morgan also found that her physical transformation to dancer was empowering. She was able to leave behind the stress, boredom and responsibility of everyday life and become a character that, she felt, showed the

best side of her. She also found that using her dancer persona is useful in everyday life:

Honestly, just the process of getting ready became a ritual. Where it's like putting on your makeup each day. When you're putting on your makeup, it's like you're painting a picture. It becomes this meditation almost. I'm getting ready, and I'm putting on this character. It's like putting on this mask. A mask doesn't look good someday and bad some days. It's always good. And sometimes I'd look at a picture of myself when I was all dolled up. You know a picture that somebody had taken on my way out or that a bachelor gave me, a Polaroid from the party or whatever. And I would be like you are all that and more. It was suddenly, it was the best qualities and what I wanted to share with someone, and nothing more. It wasn't that I go home and am moody and cry because my cat died. All that is left behind immediately. It's like this huge mental transition. It's like, I would think, sometimes when you have to go to a class, an eight o'clock class everyday, and you get in the habit of doing it, it becomes habit almost to the point where your body almost knows to put everything else aside and you've gotta focus on this class or you've gotta take this test, you can't think about the fact that your boyfriend broke up with you last week. And it becomes work, you work at having fun. You work at becoming the life of the party. You're the stripper. It's that ideal again. And you start to buy into it... I use Morgan all the time, just like you use your Morgan, just like everybody uses their Morgan, you know. When you want to get out of a speeding ticket, and you smile and act a little bit sillier, and a little bit dumber, or whatever. They are always blurred. But, one was in complete control all the time. And it was a very healthy thing for me. I was in so much control even if my personal life was a wreck.

Not all women who dance felt completely empowered by their work.

Likewise no woman who danced felt completely degraded by it either. Shawna embodies this complexity of feelings. She is proud of the athletic and artistic ability that the work requires and she resents the labels of "slut" and "whore" that get attached to the women who do the work. However, she feels that the work is morally wrong and that she is degraded by it. Shawna uses alcohol in excess to

get through her working shift and it has damaged her life: she has several DUIs on her record and at the time of the interview did not have a car. Jackie also developed a drug and alcohol problem while she was working as a dancer. For her, the link between “messing with people’s minds” and using drugs and alcohol was clear:

I was disgusted by the way, you either had to become really cold and an alcoholic and not care about anybody or anything except what you can get out of this man’s pocket. Or, get out. I mean, that’s your choice at that point. I was to the point where I was either gonna have to, because I knew these men, they were my regular customers. I knew these people and I couldn’t go on having these people as my friends and also taking their money. That’s a big head trip. I couldn’t do it, because, you see, you get your college crowd, you get your tourist crowd, and all that, and that’s fine. But the people that support you are your regulars. And you know these people. You know that their wife is in the hospital, you know. You know that their kid is going to college, and maybe will walk through the door one day. You know that they’re the principal at a high school, or whatever, and you these become either friends or customers. You know, that line is just too , it’s so weird, and I couldn’t handle it. I said, no, I’m too good of a person to take money from friends ... I mean, there was a point at which I got so messed up on drugs that I would have done anything, and I wasn’t in control but it wasn’t the dance industry’s fault. It was the drugs. And the industry with the head games made it easier to be high. And that’s why I did the drugs, because it was so hard to figure all this stuff out in your head. It wasn’t something that you go home on Thanksgiving and tell your grandma that you’re a stripper, for most people. It wasn’t something you could be proud of. But, a ballerina can do that, and it’s fine, you know... And to be looked down upon for making a living was such a nasty feeling, you know... I think the women do drugs because they can’t have any other release. It’s such an emotional roller coaster to be in that industry. Everywhere you go you’re looked down at. So, for me, and for a lot of my friends who were dancers, the only way out of it is to do drugs or to drink, you know...

Like all work, there is an emotional toll on those who work as exotic dancers. This toll may be greater because of the demanding emotional labor

required and the stigma associated with the work. In some cases the dancers easily protected their real self and derived strength and empowerment from their work. In other cases, the protection of the self was not easy. Some women used drugs and alcohol to handle the blurring of the work self and the real self.

Summary

The work of the exotic dancer is primarily about successful interaction. In order to make money, the dancer and customer interact to establish a manufactured courtship in which each participant acts as if a romantic or sexual relationship may unfold, while always knowing, but not acting as if, theirs is a business relationship. In order to create a successful courtship, the dancer must take on various roles: therapist, flirt, partner and co-artist. Playing these roles and balancing the power of customer and dancer is crucial to the financial success of the dancer. While the other types of interaction a dancer negotiates are not necessarily directly tied to the financial success of the dancer, they must be managed by the dancer as well. The role of co-worker is a balance of competition, respect for elder dancers and friendships. The interaction with friends, lovers, family and others can be difficult: the stigma and “deviant” label of the work can cause the dancers to fear strained relationships and judgments from those they are close to. Finally, the interaction of a dancer with herself requires a dancer to balance her non-work life with her work life. Dancers protect their real selves with varying degrees of success. In some cases, the line

between the real self and the work self are evident and can be turned off and turned on easily. In other cases, the two blur, and the results can be painful and difficult for the dancer. For the dancers, the interaction with the customer was the most deliberate and the most easily executed. There are “rules” and “roles” for this interaction. For the other types of interactions, there were less rigid strategies for dealing with them. What these interactions all have in common is that they require the dancer to expose, in varying degrees, her real self.

Chapter 5: The Rules of Work

For dancers who work in a club, the creation and knowledge of both formal and informal rules are crucial to the individual's and group's success. The rules keep the business legitimate and running smoothly as well as maintain a dancer's safety and boundaries. This chapter will focus on the informal and formal rules of exotic dancing, as described by the five women interviewed for this study. The functions of these rules, as well as the consequences for broken rules will also be discussed.

Why are rules necessary?

Rules for working in the club are necessary for a variety of reasons. First, rules are established both formally and informally in order protect the safety of dancers. Because of the nature of the work and the intimate dealings with customers, the dancers are at risk of encountering inappropriate and violent behavior. Second, rules maintain the legal and individual sexual boundaries of the business. Formal rules maintain the club's compliance with legal regulations governing the business and formal and informal rules maintain the sexual boundaries for all the women in the club. Third, rules "level the playing field", so to speak, for the dancers. It is important that services be offered at the same price by all women, so that all women have a relatively equal chance of making money (within the confines of acceptable competition). Last, rules lay the foundation of an orderly and lucrative business. These rules ensure that the club

will be staffed at all times and that the services the club offers are provided in a way that will make customers want to return. While the rules of the club serve clear purposes, they are not always observed. The offending dancer may be fired, disciplined or ostracized by the other dancers. Many of the women interviewed described a hierarchy in the club. This understood hierarchy, though not formal, not only enforces the rules of the club, but also is created by the individuals who do and do not break the rules.

In the case of Morgan, the bachelor party stripper, her rules had to be established with every gig because she was not in a club atmosphere where rules were enforced by a number of workers (dancers, owners, bartenders, servers and bouncers). Therefore, the rules of interaction, performance and customer behavior depended upon her interpretation of the situation. Also, as shown in the chapter on interaction, the rules could change for Morgan from moment to moment. Morgan describes her ground rules for a show:

I had this whole routine. I'd say, my name is Morgan, I'm going to dance for you tonight. I just have a couple of things for you to keep in mind. No pictures or video or anything after my top comes off. And if you want to take some afterwards, talk to me or whatever. Um, don't make me feel uncomfortable and I won't make you uncomfortable. Um, I'm a stripper, not a hooker. Don't offer me money if it's something I'm not going to do. I'll tell you what you can do. And I took control as a dominatrix almost right then. Played girly and flirty, but real straight-forward, listen you mister, and gave them the eyes and everything. And said I work for tips, I used to say that I just work for tips alone. Which seemed completely plausible, that the company gets the money. And that didn't come until maybe fifty shows. And also it depends; I surveyed the kind of town I was in, the kind of area I was in, because sometimes I would drive an hour, and hour and a half. And the money that they had. First of all, if it's some kid's twentieth

birthday party in the ghetto and his mom got him a dancer as a surprise, I'm not going to expect much, and I'm going to do a lot more. And if I think the person's cool, you know. Like, I've had bachelor who are handicapped or there will be somebody at the party who's really old or something, and I'll give them some sort of special attention because I dig the interaction of them, I dig the vibe of them.

Each rule of the club, whether it is formal or informal, may serve several functions and may not be enforced by those who've created it. Some rules are further complicated by their hindrance of money making for the sake of a safe or less-competitive working environment.

Rule-Making, Rule-Enforcing and Rule-Breaking

Some rules are simple and are designed to maintain an orderly and lucrative business. These are the kinds of rules you find in many workplaces and include rules for scheduling and showing up for work. Shawna describes the general rules for working in the club:

...you have to call two weeks in advance to get a weekend off or get a Friday or Saturday off. If you don't and you don't show up, you have to pay two hundred dollars on a weekend and a hundred dollars on a weekday. And then, if you have a doctor's excuse, then that's alright, then you don't get fined. And if you don't show up for work, and you come back a week later ... you have to pay two hundred dollars to come back. You know, the managers kind of make you do it... if you're late for work, you get docked a dollar for every minute you're late. He hasn't really been following that lately, he's been letting it pass, but he'll probably, a month from now, he might need money, so he'll start docking everybody....

For Jackie, who worked in a different club, she found the rules for schedules were not enforced:

...the management will have a schedule and they will make us up a piece of paper that says when they want you there. But, that doesn't ever work. Like I said, I used to show up, I used to follow my schedule, and I would tell them, look I'm not working Sunday and Mondays. My days not to work were Sundays and Mondays or Sundays and Wednesdays, depending. Um, and I'd tell them that, and after so many years they knew that I didn't work those days. But most girls would just show up whenever they ran out of money. And when I got really bad, you know because I had a bad cocaine habit, for my last year that I was dancing, I would not go to work for a week and then show up. I looked so bad I couldn't make money, but I would try, you know and it was really sad. But, yeah, the management tries to make the schedule. The girls do what they want to.

In order to maintain a lucrative environment, rules for how much time money buys were created. In clubs where dancers "split the bar" or make half of any drinks that are purchased for them, the women had to make sure that they didn't spend too much time with any customer who was not paying for it. Chloe describes this system as well as safety precautions taken when drinking at the club:

...you're not allowed to ever leave your drink at the table because they could drug you, you never know, those rape drugs, they could drug you, so never leave your drink there, but always bring your drink wherever you go. But I'd always just take it to the bathroom with me and just dump a lot of it out. And there is a time limit, see that's another thing that my friend helped me figure out, is that each drink has a time limit on it. Like a \$10 drink is about 10, 15 minutes. A twenty dollar drink is about 20, 25 minutes; a \$100 drink is like 45 minutes. So you have to kind of monitor the amount that you are drinking and really you know, if it's a 10 minute drink, you have to drink it in 10 minutes. So that was the best way. Because if you're not done drinking it and the waitress says would you like to buy another drink, he'd say she's not done with her first

one, you know so they wouldn't have to spend more money, so you had to really, you had to know, I mean there's a real system to it...

According to Shawna, the dress code of the club not only maintains a level of sophistication for the benefit of the customer, but it also diminishes competition and confrontation among the dancers. This is an example of a rule that is developed to "level the playing field", so to speak, for all women in the club. This is a common function of many of the rules of the club. Also, although it is no longer a formal rule in the club, there is an understanding between dancers that approaching another dancer's customer is unacceptable without that dancer's permission. This also creates a fair working environment and prevents confrontation among dancers

...and the way we dress, we have to be classy. Um, all the girls get along. Most of the other places, there were like cat fights and backstabbing, and you're allowed to wear anything you wanted. It was real cutthroat and it's not like that there. It never has been. But, it used to be if you went and sat with someone's customer without asking them you got in trouble, but it's not like that anymore. Basically, the girls have to figure that out themselves. And sometimes there are arguments, but they'll get over it.

The most complex set of rules in the club are those that dictate the dancer's sexual contact with customers. While all of the women that worked in a club described a "no touching" policy, there were various degrees of enforcement, adherence and disregard for these rules. Also, the consequences of these rules went beyond legal issues and the issues of personal boundaries. Breaking the rules for sexual contact damaged the money making potential for all of the dancers in the club. Jackie describes the danger in one dancer allowing

more than the agreed-upon contact with customers and the way it “ups the ante”, so to speak, for the other dancers:

...when you are in the dance room giving private dances, you will generally get about this close, you know, and you will become, I can't remember, there's a personal zone, you know, right above skin contact... and you'll get about that close to him, and the dancers are fine with that. And they can touch your sides, your belly, your back. Now some dancers will let them touch their breasts and some won't, you know, it depends. No between the legs, ever. That will get you thrown out. Not by the management or the law, but other dancers will, they'll beat the crap out of you. You just don't, and that was when the crack whores started coming in, they were letting them doing all kinds of things, between the legs, and everything else. And we were like, how do you make a living? For five bucks, if Judy will let me do everything I want, and Marcy won't let me do anything...

Jackie explains how formal rules sometimes must be enforced informally by the other dancers. As described above, if a dancer lets a customer have sexual contact with her that other dancers will not allow, the dancer has given herself an advantage in the club in terms of money making opportunity. Enforcing this rule is not always possible for the owners and bouncers, so it is dancers that keep an eye on each other; they have the most at stake if the rules are broken:

House rules, the legal rules are, no showing pink, we'll talk on the full nude level, because that's where you have more of a dancers' rule. No showing pink. We have to stand within a foot away from the customer's chair, you have to be back here. Um, no humping the person, you can't get up close and do any bumping and grinding on them, legally. Now when you're in a room smaller than this and it's full of fifteen or twenty dancers and the lights are off and the music's really loud, nobody's really watching you except the other dancers because they're the only ones who really care how close you're getting and what you're doing...(Jackie)

Obviously, the club is a place where sexual fantasies are generated, so some sexually-oriented behaviors are legally offered by the dancers. Even so, there is an agreed-upon price for these services that is important to maintain for the same reasons that sexual contact for low prices is a violation. If the rule is violated, the rules change for all the dancers. Now, the woman who gets the most business is the one who shows the most for the lowest price. Jackie describes why sticking to the agreed-upon price is important to all the dancers in the club:

...the women that would dance, do a five dollar private dance would ruin it for people who charged normal dance costs, 10 dollars for a topless dance. That's how much it costs. If you wanted it totally nude, it was 20 or three for 50 sometimes, you know, and that means three songs, 10 dollars a song for a topless, 20 dollars totally nude. You know, and then if you got another girl that is going to cut you, do a totally nude dance for 5 bucks, those were your crack whores, you know. They would come in and they needed that rock, and that's what they were doing. Doing nude dances for five bucks and you couldn't handle it. In the go-go bars, you had a manager that would watch that shit and wouldn't let them slide on it. They'd go get out of here, you know, if you're going to cut throat like that, you go on down the road, because we've got respectable girls here and we're not doing that, you know. So it just depends on how far you wanted to go...

Jackie felt that as far as the owners and bouncers of the club were concerned, they were willing to let sexual contact with customers happen as long as they were paid. Again, this left the dancers as the main enforcers of the rules:

...the law and the management had their own rules, but the dancers did watch. The management never watched. They could care less, you know. And usually, you know, in some of your sleazier bars you could pay off the doorman to do a trick in the

dance room. It wasn't unheard of, you know. A quick blow job, or a hand job, or something like that...

Shawna explains the bottom-line of the customers' behavior toward the dancers – they are not allowed to touch a dancer:

...the guys aren't allowed to touch you. If they do touch you, they get one chance. The second time they get thrown out. Or they have to do something really major the first time. And you're not allowed to sit in their lap, and you have to wear a gown, like long dresses. And you're not allowed to kiss them or hug them. But when you're back in the VIP (Back Room), basically, you have to, I mean that's what the VIP is, you know, we can sit on their lap back there and stuff like that, but nothing sexual or anything like that.

It is evident, however, that, once in a more private setting, men will try and often succeed in touching the dancers. In some ways, the private rooms are the ultimate contradiction to the “no touching” rule. The customers must pay more to take a dancer to the private room. This implies that in this space, the customer has more privileges with the dancer. So while the club maintains the “no touching” policy on the books and on the main floor, it has created a space in which this rule can easily be broken and the customer expects that rule to be broken in this space. This creates yet another situation in which the dancers are forced to enforce the rules themselves with little or no support of the club owners and bouncers.

For Chloe, the back room was a particularly unpleasant place to work. While being taken to the back room meant more money in her pocket, it also meant having to work harder to maintain her boundaries, even when other

dancers in the back room were breaking the rules for sexual contact. Again, not only did this threaten Chloe's boundaries, but it also made what she had to offer the customer of less value, since other dancers were willing to give more for the same amount of money.

Outside of the club walls, dancers also had the opportunity to break club rules easily. Chloe describes witnessing dancers breaking the rules of acceptable contact with customers:

... there would be dancers that would have like diamond rings and stuff and would meet their customers outside, not after, I mean later ... they would make maybe arrangements for other rendezvous, um, and I knew one dancer who did go home with a man for extra money and had sex. And I was really surprised that she did that. I didn't think that she would do that and it really surprised me. But I thought, I don't know her situation. You know, that's her thing. That's something that I would never do, but I just thought that that was really unsafe of her. But I don't think she would have done that if she didn't know the guy pretty well.

Jackie explains that some owners broke the rules of sexual contact with dancers themselves and felt entitled to sexual contact with the women they employed:

There were some places, you know, where the owners of the bar wouldn't let you work if you didn't let him grope your breasts for the first fifteen minutes of shift, you know. And I was never like that, I was like look dude, I'm here to work, okay, this is my job. I don't want you feeling me up, unless you're going to pay me.

Alcohol is everywhere in the club, and the women who dance there are expected to consume it. In some cases this leads to addiction. For example, Shawna described herself as an alcoholic. She further described her use of

alcohol as contributing to her breaking rules of sexual contact with customers.

So, while drinking is an accepted part of the culture of the club, it can lead to boundaries being crossed and rules being broken. Chloe describes a dancer's alcohol use in the club:

... I did one time witness a guy performing cunnilingus on a dancer and that really upset me... because she had a drinking problem really bad. She would drink herself until where she was completely passed out by the end of the night. And I knew that she was really drunk that night. And, you know, probably not really knowing what was going on, maybe even blacked-out, who knows, but it was just, it just disgusted me. And I thought I don't really want to be, I don't want to be associated with this and that's about the time when I stopped working there.

For legal and professional reasons, the clubs described by the dancers would not allow drug use on the premises. Despite this, the women all described knowing dancers who worked under the influence of illegal drugs. Jackie, who became addicted to cocaine while she worked as a dancer did not bring drugs to the workplace because she knew that that she would be fired. However, a dancer who disliked Jackie used her addiction against her to get her fired from a club:

...she told [the owner] that I had brought some coke onto the premises, some cocaine. And she had planted, I didn't have any, I never brought anything with me to work, you know, or anything like that. And, uh, she had planted some coke in my bag, and so they called me back there, and said look we're going to call the police, and have them come out here, and if you want to leave right now we'll forget about it. If you want to leave the bar right now, we'll forget about it, we won't do anything to you, we won't call the cops. I was like fine. I didn't have the coke, but I'm not going to say I didn't in front of the cops, you know. I didn't even want to deal with that. So, I went home, and I wasn't allowed back in that bar again.

In one case, formal rules were broken in an informal, agreed-upon way by the dancers with management's knowledge and approval. While formal law was being violated, Jackie describes the dancers' elaborate ways of getting around it:

...you weren't allowed to show any pink at a go-go bar, you know, you weren't allowed to show anything under the pasties. Or at the nude bars, you weren't allowed to do floor shows, because that would show pink, and uh, the girls used to braid their pubic hair so they could do floor shows at the nude bars, but the cops would come in and they would get upset because they were doing floor shows, and you know, there ain't no pink, look down here, what do you see something. You know, because there wasn't. And it was fun, it was really fun...

This was clearly a rule that was not enforced by dancers and did not threaten them with unacceptable competition or broken boundaries. In the club in which Jackie worked, a floor show was agreed-upon acceptable behavior, even by the management, as long as the legal aspect of the performance was addressed by the dancers.

Rule breaking, especially in the case of rules for sexual contact, seemed common in the clubs where the women interviewed worked. However, Chloe took pride in the fact that she was able to make money without crossing legal and her own sexual boundaries even though it was a common dancer tactic and became tedious to refuse:

...if you had the most drink sales you were called top 'ho' of the night or whatever. And there were a couple of times that I was and I didn't have to, I felt really good about myself that I didn't have to do anything illegal to get that money. I didn't have to, you know there was that no touching policy except for like the person could hold your hand or maybe touch your leg, but no touching was the policy, but needless to say there were some women that went way beyond

that. And being that I was in a committed relationship and didn't feel comfortable with that anyway, I didn't let people grope on me or anything like that. It made it tough though sometimes, you know, because some guys were really touchy-feely and even when you'd say no they'd keep on, keep on, keep on...

Dancer Hierarchy

In several cases, dancers described a hierarchy in the stripper profession. This hierarchy seemed dependant upon freedom of performance, safety of the situation, amount of time doing the work or, in the case of the club, adherence to formal and informal rules.

Morgan put herself and the way she did her job in a category above those dancers that were confined to performing in a club:

I had a friend who worked in a club. Sleazy. We called them pussy bars. And there's a whole red-light district, sort of strip of nasty bars. And, like where the Ford factory workers will go, and they're open twenty-four hours a day, and they serve juice, you know they can't serve alcohol. And I went just because I thought that looked like *Pretty Woman* or it was like the seedy side of life. Like was what I was doing kind of wasn't because, it wasn't, because in my whole little weird kind of altruistic fantasy world. It wasn't real enough and grounded. So, I went in and watched my friend dance. And thought how fun would that kind of feminine camaraderie be of getting your makeup on together, and coming in late... it just seemed like such a great movie piece that I was like, oh, I've gotta check these other people out. I've gotta do this because I've gotta see these other women. I couldn't imagine anybody who worked as a stripper being anything like me. Even my friend wasn't anything like me. You know? Here I am coming from a fairly upper class background, enjoying fairly upper class lifestyle things, whether it's electronics or computer or literature and art, drama. And I just imagined this stereotypical trailer trash. And unfortunately that's most of what it was.

However, Jackie, who worked in a club, saw bachelor party stripping as something a respectable dancer would never do, mostly because of the threat to her safety:

You wouldn't do that as a quote respectable dancer, because it's just too dangerous. You can't put yourself in that situation. First of all, most of the parties don't want another man there that they don't know. As a respectable dancer, you won't go anywhere without some kind of backup.

The clubs in which Jackie worked had clear status of the dancers. This was not something formally created, but it was a dynamic that all dancers seemed aware of. The status of the dancer determined her relationship with other dancers and could fluctuate within a dancer's career. A dancer could prove herself by maintaining sexual boundaries, respecting veteran dancers' space and regulars and creating a high-quality, artistic performance. Jackie describes the general hierarchy of the club:

...I was a young dancer when I first started, and to get the respect of the older dancers was really tough, you know. You had to show that you weren't going to go home with the owner, and that you weren't going to take their regular customers, and that you weren't going to let them go further, let the customers feel something that they weren't... Most of the time you could feel a thigh and the side of your butt, but you can't actually have full frontal groping, you know. Um, and so, the older dancers wouldn't even hang out with you until they knew this, so when you're in that inner circle, you know, it took four and a half years to get into that inner circle... some of them will have their certain mirror that they like to put makeup on in front of, and you don't mess with that. They have their areas of seniority as far as the older dancers will make themselves known to you to stay away from them until they talk to you. You know? And if they want to talk to you, they'll talk to you. If they don't, they don't. And there were some girls that just couldn't stand it if they weren't everybody's friend at the bar, you know. And I think we know those kind of girls in every circle, you know. But they would end up getting themselves into more trouble

trying to be everyone's friend, you know... And then you have your crack whores, which is your lowest dancer, which is there to get a rock...

Jackie held the status of young dancer, respectable dancer and finally, crack whore, before she got out of the business. Her case demonstrates how following the rules determined status and how, once she became addicted to cocaine, she no longer followed those rules:

...your older dancers that have been around a while, those are your respectable dancers where that's there living. They don't just do it to get a fix, they don't do it to get a trick, um they do it as a nine to five as their job. Those are your respectable dancers. Those are the dancers that aren't going to let you feel them up for five bucks. They're going to dance a set, and they're going to do a dance, they are going to artistically have routine that they have set up for a certain song, and they're going to dance to that song, and you're going to pay them for that. And they're not going to take any shit, you know otherwise. They don't want to be touched, they don't want to fondled, they don't want you to buy them a drink, and give them money. If you don't want to do that, then you're wasting your time. Then you have your young dancers, which is what I was when I started, that don't have any kind of placing on the scale. You're pretty much a freshman, you know. And you make your reputation by what you do in the bar and what people see you do, you know. As far as, when you asked me if I thought I was good at my job, I was a very good dancer. Is showed up, I didn't steal tricks, not tricks, customers. Tricks is a whole different thing as far as, a lot of dancers turn tricks and a lot of dancers turn their regulars, you know. But they don't look at it that way. That's just what they do to keep their regulars, but that's another whole issue. And it's not condoned by the management of the dance bar. It's not done on premises. That's illegal. But these are your dancers where that's what they do. You know, that's why they can call these people up and tell them they need money for their electric bill or whatever. ... I was a crack whore at one time when I went down. That's how I knew I was down and that I needed to go to rehab for me. And the only reason I went to rehab was because the people that knew me as a dancer and as a person, my friends in the industry, not my old man and his friends, but the friend from the dance industry, Connie and all them, they said you've got to get help, you need help, you got to go do something with yourself

because this is not you. And they helped me get into rehab. They put me in rehab because I was just gone, I was out of it, I needed help, you know. I was doing things that I don't do. I was stealing, I was lying, I was letting people use me for things that I would never ever let them do in my right mind. And that's what that stuff does to you. And in that industry, you can make money to support that habit, but you're not respected as a dancer. They don't like that. I didn't like it when I was a dancer at a respectable, a respectable dancer, nor when I was down on the bottom, and a crack whore. And I'm very grateful to my friends for putting me, putting up with me, much less putting me in there, you know... Because I didn't want to be like that. And none of them do. I mean, you can go through the ranks. You don't just stay, you can stay at one level, but you generally don't. You have your many levels...

Summary

While dancing is work that requires much physical and interactional skill and allows a lot of freedom in both, there are rules that govern the way the work gets done. Some of these rules simply keep the club a legal, legitimate and orderly business operation. Other rules exist not only for legal purposes, but in order to provide safety, boundaries and a fair working environment for the dancers. While rules governing sexual behavior may appear to hinder an individual dancer's ability to make money, they serve to allow all women in the club to maintain a standard of behavior and earnings that would not exist were services rendered only by the women willing to accept little money. Although these rules are necessary, they are often not formally enforced in the club. It is the dancer's responsibility to enforce the rules among her coworkers. The rules are often broken and can result in a dancer being ostracized or fired. A dancer's

status in a club is related to her willingness to follow the formal and informal rules of the club.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The skills, products and lucrative aspects of exotic dancing all involve interaction between the dancer and the customer. This study focuses on the types of actors and interactions performed in the strip club, as described by five exotic dancers. The dancers interact in their performance, their social contact with customers and others and in their role in creating, following, enforcing and breaking rules. The women participate in not only the physical dances of the performance, but also in an ongoing dance of interpretation of others' expectations and desires and of constantly modifying their performance of emotion, interest and desire to conform to what they perceive.

While this research is done in a feminist spirit, it does not directly explore issues of patriarchy and oppression. Nor does it operate on any assumption about an oppressive nature of the work. This study is different from other studies about dancers in that it seeks to better understand the nature of the work and its emotional, physical and interactional requirements without judgment about the work itself. It presents a “nuts and bolts” view of the many roles a dancer must take inside the club and in managing her work in her non-work life. This study does not incorporate a woman's sexuality into her occupation as a dancer like many other studies and writings about sex work do. For the women interviewed in this study, the two were entirely separate in their lives.

This study does not approach the work of the exotic dancer as deviant. Women do this work because it pays well, and the dynamics of the work itself are very similar to those of non-deviant occupations. In losing the assumption of deviance, I was able to look at the work as precisely that – work. This study looks at what is required of dancers and what makes a dancer successful, not only in performance, as Pasko (1999) and Woods (2000) discuss, but in their direct emotional labor and its relationship to earning potential.

Many of the women entered the occupation in informal ways, mostly through friends. None of the dancers were formally trained, so they had to learn the work by watching other dancers and experimenting with their own performance onstage. Performances ranged from the erotic to the acrobatic. Each dancer interviewed, however, felt she was an excellent stage performer and felt that the dancing and physical activity was her favorite part of the job. All women also discussed their increased comfort with the work and displaying their bodies once they had worked as a dancer for awhile.

The exotic dancers most important and most lucrative responsibility in the club is that of interactor. In order to get tips or have drinks purchased for her, the dancer must manufacture a courtship scenario with the customer. It is necessary for both dancer and customer to act as if there is possibility for a sexual or romantic relationship to develop, while always knowing, but not acting as if, the relationship is limited to the club and to “flirting” and will only continue if the

customer is willing to pay for it. In order to create this courtship, the dancer must give the customer the emotional experience that he desires. These desires can range from or be a combination of arousal, importance and/or being cared for. In order to create these emotions the dancer must fake flirtation, interest, caring and/or arousal.

The dancer must also interact with others where her work is concerned. Her relationships with coworkers are a combination of competition and friendship. A dancer must decide how much to incorporate her work life into her non-work life; this means she must decide who it is safe to tell and what consequences others' knowledge of her work will have on her relationships. She must balance the work self and the real self on a personal level also. The dancers interviewed were able to do this in varying degrees of success, and it was clear that the interactions with "self" and those in the dancer's personal life were most difficult because they were not governed by agree-upon rules, like the interactions in the club. These personal-life interactions also require the dancer to expose more of her real self, thus increasing the risk of emotional pain.

Through interaction, rules are created. Rules exist to keep the club legal, the workers safe and the competition fair. In the club, formal rules are created by management to be followed by the dancers. However, in some ways it is informal rules or informal enforcement of rules that is most important for the dancers. The rules allow all dancers to control the kinds of acceptable

interaction and to maintain personal boundaries with customers. In some cases, the breaking of these rules has little consequence for the violator or others in the club. But some rules, when they are broken, harm other dancers' boundaries and ability to make money. For example, when a dancer allows sexual contact with a customer, all other dancers in the club have now lost their ability to maintain that boundary while still making money. The consequences for this type of rule breaking are also informal and carried out by the dancers in the forms of confrontation or ostracization. In general, how a dance is seen by coworkers and her status in the club are dependant upon her understanding and willingness to follow rules.

Research about sex workers and dancers in particular is limited, in many ways to discussions of deviance, victimization and oppression. This research explores dancing as work and as a place where performance, emotional labor and rule making and breaking takes place. Future research should focus on issues of race and class in sex work, areas that have been discussed very little in the literature.

In doing research on exotic dancers, I was required to face my own ideas about the work, the women who do it, sexuality, gender, feminism and the reasons for my interest in the subject. Taking my cue from Mattley's work (1997) on her emotions while doing field research on phone sex workers, I kept a journal of my own feelings about the research. I went into the research certain that I

already knew the answer to the questions I had prepared in my interview guide. The answers I found were much richer and complex than I imagined.

I had believed the women who did the work were all empowered by it and had less-traditional ideas about sexuality. In some ways, this was true. All of the women interviewed experienced pride in their abilities and their performance, but it was also mixed with uncertainty about themselves and the legitimacy of the work. Also, my supposed link between personal sexuality and doing the work was not validated by the interviews. These women did not even relate the two. The work is just that – work. It involves performance and interaction, but has little to do with the personal sexuality of the women in their personal lives.

My interest in gender and feminism brought me to this research. In approaching this research, I concluded that this study was an overtly feminist act. I still feel that way, but I have changed the way I categorize myself as a feminist and realized how difficult it is to stay true to doing feminist research. I no longer feel that feminism is only to be found in academic writings and endeavors. I found my feminism in my willingness (and, at times, my unwillingness) to understand experience and be open to it, regardless of how I could relate to or my level of agreement with the experience. I also found it in my recognition that I still have assumptions about gender, race, class and sexuality that are based upon learning in a patriarchal society. I found that I have a level of comfort with

these issues that changes from situation to situation and that requires regular self-assessment.

Finally, I found that my sense of the research was often effected by the reaction others had to it. Among my graduate student cohort, I became the “sex expert” and often was asked questions about my research or sex work. It was evident that the reasons for these questions were, many times, for the titillation factor that some found in the subject. This isn’t to say that there were not supportive and interested cohorts. These individuals were extremely important in that they allowed me to run ideas by them and gave me honest opinions about my work. All of these interactions played a role in how I saw myself as a researcher. I began to question the validity of my choice of subject and reasons for doing the research. In the end, I concluded that all reactions to my research were valuable in that they gave me other ways to look at the work.

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Appendix A

Research Project Volunteers Needed

Have you worked as an
exotic dancer or stripper?

Sociology researchers from Ohio University need
volunteers for a study on the work of exotic dancers.
If you are a woman who has danced, please tell us
your story!

This research will give you a chance to tell your
experience in your own words, and challenge
some of the myths about this kind of work.

Volunteers will participate in one-on-one interviews
to share their experiences.

CONFIDENTIALITY IS GUARANTEED.

If you are interested in sharing your experiences, call
Christine Mattley at 594-2105 or
Beth Kilgore at 592-5338.

Appendix B

Opening Statement

Hi. My name is Beth Kilgore. I am a graduate student working on my master's degree in Sociology. What I am interested in, and what this research is focused on, is the work and emotions that you experience when you work as a dancer. In other words, I want to know what it is like to do this work, and what your attitudes and opinions are about the work. This research will give you the chance to tell your experience in your own words, and challenge some of the myths about this kind of work. Please remember that your participation is voluntary and that you will remain anonymous in all the research (and to me). In order to insure your confidentiality, please do not provide me with any identifying information, such as places of employment or the names of guys. Everything that you say in this interview is confidential within the limits of state and federal law. Also, you can stop this interview at any time, and turn off the tape at any time or for any portion of the interview. While I am doing this research, the tapes of our interview will be kept under lock and key. After I finish the research, the tapes will be destroyed. Thank you for deciding to help me with this research and for your contribution to my work. I want to be sure to get your words exactly, so may I tape our conversation?

Demographics

How old are you?

What is your race?

What is your educational background?

Would you classify yourself as poor, working class, middle class, or rich?

How many years have you been working as an exotic dancer?

Have you done any other kinds of sex work besides your present work?

Background/ Training

Tell me something about your background.

How old were you when you started doing this work?

Are you currently working other jobs? **OR** While you were dancing, were you working other jobs?

How did you get into dancing?

Did you receive any training from other women or train yourself in any way?

Have you had any formal dance training?

Have you had any experience doing amateur nights in clubs or wet T-shirt contests?

What is it like to be new at this work?

Do you feel that your (embarrassment, nervousness, disgust, etc) was apparent to the guys/s?

How did he/they react?

Have your feelings changed since the beginning?

Do you focus on the audience or on certain men when you are working?

Do you do anything in particular to get the men turned on, more comfortable, pulled in?

Do you treat all guys the same way?

How do you know what the guys expect?

How did you figure this out?

Are there rules at your place of work on how to deal with guys?

Is this the only club you've worked?

IF NO: How have the places differed?

What has been the best place to work at?

How do your feelings about the job differ in different situations or with different guys?

Are there different "types" of guys that come in? What are the types? What do you think of them? Who do you like to see? Who do you dread seeing?

Do you feel powerful over men? Exploited? Depend upon the situation?

Do you think men are exploited by the industry?

Do they have control over the situation?

Work

What kind of talent or ability does this work take?

Do you think you are good at your job?

What is the hardest part of this work?

What is the most fun part of this work?

What is the worst part of this work?

What do you do to separate your work life from your personal life?

Do the two ever blur?

Do you have trouble keeping them separate?

What does it feel like if it is blurred?

Are your working conditions safe? Have you ever been threatened or abused by anyone on the job?

Do you feel safe most of the time?

What were/are the other women like that you worked with?

Do you have relationships with other women in the profession? Friendships?

Personal life/ Family

Do you have a partner?

What do they think of your occupation?

How do the two of you deal with this?

What do other family members think of your job?

Have you told all of your family and friends?

How do you choose who to tell?

In your relationship with lovers, does your partner sometimes suspect your reaction to sex as being insincere?

How do the two of you deal with this?

Feelings about the Job

Does your work empower you?

How do you feel about your work?

How do you see your future?

How long do you see yourself doing this? **OR** would you do this kind of work again?

What problems do you see this line of work as having?

What are the perks of this kind of work?

Attitudes about Sex Work

What do you think about sex work in general? Should it be legalized?

Decriminalized?

Do you feel that the job has changed now that sex work gets talked about so much more on talk shows, in magazines, and in movies like Striptease and Showgirls?

How so?

Do you think these shows, articles, movies depict sex work/dancing accurately?

Are you aware of the prostitutes/exotic dancers rights movements? What do you think of them?

How do you feel society looks at your profession? How does this make you feel?

Some people have suggested that dancing degrades women. How do you respond to that notion?

What term do you prefer when you talk about your profession? Why?

Wrap up

Is there anything that I haven't covered that you think is important or you would like to add?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you, again, for your time.

Would you like a write-up of the results of this research?

Is there anyone you know who has danced that you think would be willing to talk to us?