

## **“Strip Clubs According to Strippers: Exposing Workplace Sexual Violence”**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this paper is to investigate women's experiences in stripclubs and to describe the activities in stripclubs from the women's point of view. The format approach is collective story narrative with the author as part of the collective voice. The research was inspired by the author's experiences in stripping over the course of thirteen years. The author's intention is to examine the conditions of stripclubs by describing the fundamental way stripclubs are organized. The description features bar activities focused on stripper-customer interactions; survey data on sexual violence in stripclubs; and women's thoughts on stripping.

### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

Stripclubs are popularly promoted as providing harmless entertainment and as places where respectful men go to watch and talk to women (Reed 1997). Stripclub customers are described as normal men who use stripclubs to avoid adultery and therefore find a safe outlet for their sexual desires in balance with their marital commitments (Reed 1997). In contrast, stripclubs are criticized for being environments where men exercise their social, sexual, and economic authority over women who are dependent on them and as places where women are treated as things to perform sex acts and take commands from men (Ciriello 1993).

Stripclubs are organized according to gender and reflect gender power dynamics in greater society. “Gendered spaces are social arenas in which a person's gender shapes the roles, statuses, and interpersonal dynamics and generates differential political and economic outcomes and interaction expectations and practices” (Ronai, Zsembik, and Feagin 1997:6). Stripclubs are more specifically organized according to gender inequality, which is perpetuated by gendered spaces and consequently sexualized (Ronai, et al 1997). The typical stripclub scenario displays young, nude or partially nude women for fully clothed male customers (Thompson and Harred 1992).

The entire analysis of stripclubs is located within the context of men's domination over women. When organizations are produced in the context of the structural relations of domination, control, and violence, they reproduce those relations (Hearn 1994). These organizations may also make explicit use of gendered forms of authority with unaccountable and unjustifiable authority belonging to men (Hearn 1994). The stripclub elicits and requires direct expressions of male domination and control over women (Prewitt 1989).

In order to dominate or control and secure men's domestic, emotional and sexual service interests, male dominated institutions and individual men utilize violence (Hanmer 1989). Violence against women is identified as physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, and representational, but all violence from men against women should be understood as sexual violence (Hearn 1994).

The concept of a continuum is useful when discussing sexual violence, especially in stripclubs. Continuum is defined as a basic characteristic underlying many different events and as a series of elements or events that pass into one another (Kelly 1987). The common underlying element in stripclubs is that male customers, managers, staff, and owners use diverse methods of harassment, manipulation, exploitation, and abuse to control female strippers.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Despite a substantial amount of research on the topic of strippers, stripping, and stripclubs, none focuses on sexual violence in stripclubs perpetrated against strippers. Instead the studies focus on sociological and psychological profiles of the women (Forsyth and Deshotels 1997; Peretti and O' Connor 1989; Reid, Epstein, and Benson 1994; McCaghy and Skipper 1970; Thompson and Harred 1992) and their strategies for interaction with customers (Boles and Garbin 1974; Enck and Preston 1988; Ronai 1989). Although most studies mention male sexual violence and exploitation, the research regarding stripping fails to investigate and account for the problem of sexual violence in establishments that feature female strippers. The gap is the rationale for my study.

## **METHOD**

Data for this research was obtained through interviews, a survey, and the researcher's participant observation while involved in stripping (Hamel 1993). Women in this study stripped in the local stripclubs in the Midwest metropolitan area where the researcher lives, in local nightclubs in the same area, in metropolitan and rural stripclubs and nightclubs across the United States, at private parties, in peep shows, and in saunas. The stripclubs featured a variety of attractions including topless dancing, nude dancing, table dancing, couch dancing, lap dancing, wall dancing, shower dancing, and bed dancing. In addition, some clubs had peepshows, female boxing and wrestling with customers, offered photographs of the dancers, or hired pornography models and actresses as headliners.

The study was conducted in two phases. In 1994, I conducted free-flowing qualitative interviews for one to four hours each with forty-one women while I was still involved in stripping and compiled participant observer notes about the activities in stripclubs. The women ranged in age from nineteen to forty years old and were involved in stripping from three months to eighteen years. All of the women identified themselves as Caucasian.

In 1996, I proceeded to design a twenty-six question survey according to themes derived from the interviews to investigate sexual violence in stripclubs. My long-time involvement in the strip industry allowed an association with strippers that was invaluable for administering in-depth surveys regarding sensitive issues. The surveys were administered face-to-face to insure the information was indeed from the women in stripping. Again, the surveys and consequent discussions lasted from one to four hours. Many women explained that they had never talked about their experiences so extensively because no one had ever asked them the right questions. Participants were asked to say whether they had experienced different abusive and violent actions in the stripclub, to estimate how often each action happened, and then to identify which men associated with the stripclub perpetrated the action. The categories of men were defined as customer, owner, staff, and manager. Since I exited stripping, snowball sampling was employed to recruit the eighteen participants for the survey. Participants in the survey were asked to pass on postcards to other women. The range of ages was eighteen to thirty-five years old. The age of entry into stripping ranged from fifteen to twenty-three years old, with a mean age of eighteen

years and ten months. The length of time the women in this study were involved in stripping ranged from three months to eighteen years with an average length of six years and seven months. Women predominantly identified themselves as Caucasian. Only one woman identified herself as Hispanic. Twelve of the women described their sexual orientation as heterosexual, two as lesbian, and four as bisexual. The survey data was analyzed on the Statistical Program for Social Sciences.

After the data was compiled, a focus group of 4 women currently in stripping and with no prior association with the study positively evaluated the relevancy of the study and approved the collective story.

Statements in quotations throughout this paper are derived from the 41 interviews and discussions that often followed the administration of the 18 surveys.

## PART 1: TYPICAL STRIPCLUB ACTIVITIES

### **A. Recruitment**

Women find out about stripping from a variety of sources. Upscale stripclub franchises recruit in new cities by having managers and imported dancers scout in nightclubs. Most women find out about stripping from girlfriends already in stripping, male associates, the media, and some from prior involvement in prostitution. One woman told how she loitered in and around urban stripclubs to pick up customers when she was fifteen and how her pimp eventually drove her to small town strip bars because those bars admitted her and hired her. Someone else got involved in stripping through an escort service for bachelor parties. Another young woman who went to a gentlemen's club to pick up her friend recounted her recruitment as an eighteen-year-old. She waited at the bar, was served alcohol, and the owner asked to check her I.D. Instead of censuring her for drinking, he told her she would make \$1000 per week and pressured her to enter the amateur contest that night. She won the contest, \$300, and worked there three weeks before being recruited into an escort service by a patron pimp.

In a typical hiring scenario women respond in person to a newspaper ad promising big money, flexible hours, no experience necessary. As an audition the club manager asks the applicants to perform on amateur night or bikini night, both of which are particularly popular with customers who hope to see girl-next-door types rather than seasoned strippers. The manager will make a job offer based on physical attributes and number of women already on the schedule. Clubs portray the job requirements as very flexible. Women are told that they will not be forced to do anything they do not want to do, but clubs overbook women so they are forced to compete with each other, often gradually engaging in more explicit activities in order to earn tips (Cooke 1987).

### **B. Working Conditions**

Women in stripping are denied legal protection relating to the terms and conditions under which they earn their livings (Fischer 523). Most strippers are hired to work as independent contractors rather than employees. Most strippers are not paid a wage (Mattson 1995), therefore their income is totally dependent on their compliance with customer demands in order to earn tips. More often than not, the strippers have to pay for the privilege of working at a club (Cooke 1987; Forsyth and Deshotels 1997; Prewitt 1989). The majority of clubs demand that women turn over 40 to 50 percent of their income for stage or couch rental and enforce a mandatory tip

out to bouncers and disc jockeys (Enck and Preston 1988; Forsyth and Deshotels 1997). Usually a minimum shift quota is set and the women must turn over at least that quota amount. If a woman does not earn the quota and wants to continue working at the establishment, she owes the club and must pay off that shift's quota by adding it to the quota for the next shift she will work. The stripclubs may also derive income from promotional novelty items, kickbacks, door cover charges, beverage sales, prostitution, and capricious fines imposed on the women. As independent contractors, strippers are not entitled to file discrimination claims, receive workers' compensation, or unemployment benefits (Fischer 1996; Mattson 1995). Club owners are free from tax obligations and tort liability. Owners pay no Social Security, no health insurance, and no sick pay. Some club owners require strippers to sign agreements indicating that they are working as independent contractors and many clubs require women to sign a waiver of their right to sue the club for any reason.

Although strippers are classified as independent contractors, the reality of their relationship to their supervisors is an employee-employer relationship. Regardless of the agreements claiming independent contractor status, clubs maintain enormous control over the women. The club controls the schedule and hours, requires strippers to pay rental fees, tip support staff large amounts, and even sets the price of table dances and private dances. Clubs have specific rules about costuming and even dictate the sequence of stripping and nudity. For example, by the middle of the first song the woman must remove her top, she must be entirely nude by the end of the second song, and must perform a nude floorshow. All this regardless of whether customers are tipping her or not. A club may further influence dancers' appearances by pressuring them to shave off all their pubic hair, maintain a year-long tan, or undergo surgery for breast augmentation. At nude clubs, it is common for the performers to be shaved clean, giving them an adolescent and even childlike appearance.

Clubs also exert significant control over the strippers' behavior during their shifts by regulating when women may use the bathroom and how many of them can be in the dressing room at one time. Some clubs do not provide seating in the dressing room and forbid smoking in that room, thus preventing strippers from taking a break. When a woman wants to sit down or smoke a cigarette, she must do so on the main floor with a customer. Clubs enforce these rules through fines (Cooke 1987; Enck and Preston 1988; Ronai 1992). Women are fined heavily by club management: \$1 per minute for being late, as much as \$100 for calling in sick, and other arbitrary amounts for "talking back" to customers or staff, using the telephone without permission, and touching stage mirrors. Women are fined for flashing, prostitution (Enck and Preston 1988), taking off their shoes, fighting with a customer, being late on stage, leaving the main floor before the DJ calls her off, not cashing in one dollar bills, profanity in music, being sick, not cleaning the dressing room, using baby oil on stage, dancing with her back to a customer (Enck and Preston 1988) and being touched by a customer.

Despite the stripclub's representation of a dancing job as flexible, strippers attest that their relationship with the club becomes all consuming and everything associated with being a stripper interferes with living a normal life. And despite the common perception that a woman can dance her way through school, many strippers report that their jobs take over their lives. Long and late hours, fatigue, drug and alcohol problems, and out of town bookings make it difficult to switch gears. Not only do the women spend a significant amount of their time in stripclubs, the activities and influences from the club environment permeate their personal lives and detrimentally effect their well-being. Although stripclubs are considered legal forms of entertainment, people unassociated with the industry are unaware of the emotional (Peretti and O'Connor 1989; Ronai 1992), verbal (Mattson 1995; Ronai 1992), physical (Boles and Garbin

1974), and sexual abuse (Ciriello 1993; Ronai 1992) inherent in the industry. Despite claims from management that customers are prohibited from touching the women, this rule is consistently violated (Enck and Preston 1988; Forsyth and Deshotels 1997; Ronai and Ellis 1989; Thompson and Harrod 1992). Furthermore, stripping usually involves prostitution (Boles and Garbin 1974; Forsyth and Deshotels 1997; Prewitt 1989; Ronai and Ellis 1989; Thompson and Harrod 1992).

### **C. Stripper-Customer Interactions**

#### **Main Floor**

Stripclub activities are offered in public spaces or private rooms or other isolated parts of clubs (Forsyth and Deshotels 1997). The typical stripclub scenario presents young, nude or partially nude women mingling with fully clothed male customers. They circulate through the crowd, encouraging men to buy liquor, drinking and talking with men, and soliciting and performing a variety of private dances (Prewitt 1989; Ronai and Ellis 1989). Women describe their role in the stripclub as hostess, object, prostitute, therapist, and temporary girlfriend and say they are there to entertain and attract men and business for the owners.

Women who work at small strip joints say they can hang out, order in food, and play pool during their shifts. On the other hand, women who work at gentlemen's clubs have to hustle photographs and drinks and are required to sell promotional T-shirts, calendars, and videos. They can be mandated to sell the items with private dances. For example, the dancers buy T-shirts from the house mom for \$8 and sell them for \$15. So for \$15, the customer receives a T-shirt and 2 \$10 table dances. Strippers at gentlemen's clubs are further informed by management that they are not allowed to buy their own drinks, that they have to be sitting with customers, and can never turn down a drink, even when their drinks are full.

## Stage

Women report dancing on stages as cheaply constructed by laying plywood on the benches of restaurant booths to stages covered with kitchen linoleum to wood parquet or marble stages in a few upscale clubs. Some stages are elevated runways so narrow that strippers say that cannot get away from customers on each side touching them, especially when they are kneeling down to accept a tip in the side of their gstrings/t-bars or when they have their backs turned. Stages can also be sunken pits with a rail around it and a bar for the customers' beverages. During a set, a stripper may do striptease, acrobatics, dance, walk, or squat to display her genitals. Generally the progression for striptease begins during the first song with the woman wearing a dress or costume covering her breasts and buttocks. Over the course of a set of 2 or 3 songs she will remove her bra and in nude clubs, her g-string/t-bar. Some clubs feature floorshows in which women crawl or move around on the floor posing in sexual positions and spread their legs at the customers' eye level. During a floorshow, a dancer changes her movements from upright to positions on her knees and squatting in a crabwalk in order to 'flash' tipping customers. "Flashing" is pulling the g-string/t-bar aside, revealing the pubic area and/or the genitals. Dancers describe this as "doing a show" for paying customers. Ordinarily, a dancer only positions herself in front of tipping patrons (Prewitt 145). Customers who fail to tip are ignored. Audience response can be expressed by clapping, hooting, barking, whistling, amount of money tipped, or complete silence depending upon time of day, state of inebriation, excitement over the musical selection, or the appearance and abilities of the stripper.

On stage, some women's thoughts wander, while others' focus on angry desperation. *"I daydream about nothing in particular to pass the time of 12 minutes."* *"I'm thinking about how good I look in the mirrors and how good I feel in dance movements."* *"I tell myself to smile."* *"I think about getting high and that I am making money to get high."* *"I am giving these guys every chance to be decent, so that I don't have to be afraid of them."* *"I am filled with disdain for the customers who do not tip, but sit and watch and direct you to do things for no money."* *"I think of how cheap these fuckers are, what bills I need to pay."*

## Private Dance Activities

Private dances are usually performed in areas shielded from the larger club view (Forsyth and Deshotels 1997, Prewitt 1989). As a rule, the private dance involves one female dancer and one male customer. Private dances are situations where women are often forced into acts of prostitution in order to earn tips (Forsyth and Deshotels 1997; Prewitt 1989; Ronai and Ellis 1989). Men masturbate openly (Peretti and O'Connor 1989), get hand jobs (Forsyth and Deshotels 1997), and stick their fingers inside women (Ronai and Ellis 1989). Men with foot fetishes have been known to suck on dancers' toes.

A variety of private dances are promoted in strip clubs. **Table dancing** is performed on a low coffee table or on a small portable platform near the customer's seat. The woman's breasts and genitals are eye level to the customer. **Couch dancing** for a customer entails the dancer standing over him on the couch, dangling her breasts or bopping him in the face with her pubic area. **Lap dancing** requires the woman to straddle the man's lap and grind against him until he ejaculates in his pants. A variation involves the woman dancing between his legs while he slides down in his chair so that the dancer's thighs are rubbing his crotch as she moves. **Bed dancing** is offered in a private room and requires a woman to lay on top of a fully clothed man and simulate sexual intercourse until he ejaculates. **Shower dancing** is offered in upscale clubs and allows a

clothed patron to get into a shower stall with one or more women and massage their bodies with soap. **Wall dancing** requires a stripper to carry alcohol swabs to wash the customer's fingers before he inserts them into her vagina. His back is stationary against the wall and she is pressed against him with one leg lifted. **Peep shows** feature simulated or actual acts directed by openly masturbating customers. Customers sit in a private booth and view the women through a glass window. **Live sex shows** involve 2 or more individuals engaging in simulated or sexual activity performed behind glass or on a stage. Customers openly masturbate while watching the show from the audience or through an opening in a private booth.

During private dances women are conscientious about their boundaries and safety. *'I don't want him to touch me, but I am afraid he will say something violent if I tell him 'no'.'* *'I was thinking about doing prostitution because that's when customers would proposition me.'* *'I could only think about how bad these guys smell and try to hold my breath.'* *'I spent the dance hyper vigilant to avoiding their hands, mouths, and crotches.'* *'We were allowed to place towels on the guys' laps, so it wasn't so bad.'* *'I don't remember because it was so embarrassing.'*

#### **D. Dressing Room**

Women describe a range of types and qualities of dressing rooms. Strippers are expected to change clothing in beer coolers, broom closets, and public restrooms. Some stripclub dressing rooms are nice with lights, mirrors, vanities, and chairs, and are equipped with lockers, and tanning beds. Other clubs have make-up mirrors but no chairs or ashtrays to prevent dancers from lingering. Women complain that too many dressing rooms are down isolated halls or in the basements of establishments and that they have to scream for help when customers intrude. Some are so damp or filthy that the women cannot take their shoes off. Other dressing rooms are so frigid that dancers carry small space heaters to and from work. The dressing rooms are used to change costumes, drink, do drugs, do hair and make-up, iron costumes, do homework, bitch about customers, avoid customers, talk about problems, hang out. In strip joints and rural bars, women lay on blankets or inside sleeping bags between sets and nap and read.

The greatest response to questions regarding preparation for work was "drink". Women drink while getting ready to go to work and they drink while doing their hair and make-up once in the dressing room. Women who work at nude juice bars that do not serve alcohol or at bars that do not allow women to buy their own drinks report that they stop at another bar on their way in and "get loaded". Between stage sets and private dances, women drink some more, clean themselves with washcloths or babywipes after performing on a dirty stage or being touched by a lot of men, apply deodorant, and perfume their breasts and genitals.

#### **PART 2: SURVEY DATA**

One hundred percent of the eighteen women in the survey report being physically abused in the stripclub. The physical abuse ranged from three to fifteen times with a mean of 7.7 occurrences over the course of their involvement in stripping. One hundred percent of the eighteen women in this study report sexual abuse in the stripclub. The sexual abuse ranged from two to nine occurrences with a mean of 4.4 occurrences over the course of their involvement in stripping. One hundred percent of the women report verbal harassment in the stripclub. The verbal abuse ranged from one to seven occurrences with a mean of 4.8 occurrences over the course of their involvement in stripping. One hundred percent of the women report being propositioned for prostitution. Seventy eight percent of the women were stalked by someone associated with the stripclub with a range of one to seven incidents. Sixty one percent of the

women report that someone associated with the stripclub has attempted to sexually assault her with a range of one to eleven attempts. Not only do women suffer the abuse they experience, all of women in the survey witnessed these things happen to other strippers in the clubs. The overwhelming trend for violence against women in stripclubs was committed by customers of the establishments. Stripclub owners, managers, assistant managers, and the staff of bartenders, music programmers or disc jockeys, bouncers, security guards, floorwalkers, doormen, and valet were significantly less involved in violence against the women. According to the women in this study, almost all of the perpetrators suffered no consequence whatsoever for their actions.

### Physical Abuse

Customers spit on women, spray beer, and flick cigarettes at them. Strippers are pelted with ice, coins, trash, condoms, room keys, pornography, and golf balls. Men pitched a live guinea pig and a dead squirrel at two women in the survey. Some women have been hit with cans and bottles thrown from the audience. Customers pull women's hair, yank them by the arm or ankle, rip their costumes, and try to pull their costumes off. Women are commonly bitten, licked, slapped, punched, and pinched.

**Table 1 - Physical Abuse**

<b>Abusive Action</b>	<b>Ever (by men in stripclub) (%)</b>	<b>At Least Once Every Day (%)</b>	<b>At Least Once Every Week (%)</b>	<b>At Least Once Every Month (%)</b>	<b>At Least Once Every Year (%)</b>
Grabbed by arm	78	44 C 6 M 11 S	17 C 6 O 6 M 11 S	11 C 6 O 6 M	6 M
Grabbed by ankle	56	28 C		6 C 6 M	11 C
Grabbed by waist	94	50 C 6 M 11 S	33 C 11 M 11 S	6 M	11 C
Bitten	56	6 C	11 C		11 C
Licked	78	28 C	17 C	11 C 6 O 6 M 11 S	22 C
Slapped	39	6 C	11 C		17 C
Hair pulled	39	6 C	6 C	11 C	
Punched	72	6 C			
Pinched	72	17 C	17 C	6 C 6 M 6 S	22 C 6 S
Kicked	11	6 C			
Spit on	61	6 C			28 C
Pulled costume off	83	22 C		6 C 6 O 6 M	22 C 6 S
Ripped costume	44	6 C		6 C	17 C
Flicked cigarette	33	6 C	6 C		11 C
Sprayed beer	39	6 C	6 C	6 C	6 C

Threw ice	61	6 C	11 C	6 C	6 C
Threw coins	83	17 C	11 C	11 C 6 S	28 C
Threw cans/glasses	22	6 C			
Threw garbage	39	17 C	11 C		
Threw other	28	11 C			

**N = 18**

**Key: C = customers, O = owners, M = managers, S = staff**

### Sexual Abuse

Stripclub customers frequently grab women's breasts, buttocks, and genitals. Customers often attempt and succeed at penetrating strippers vaginally and anally with their fingers, dollar bills, and bottles. Customers expose their penises, rub their penises on women, and masturbate in front of the women. Women in this study consistently connected lap dances to the sexual abuse they suffered in the club. *'That's the first thing men try to do when they get close to you and always in a lap dance.'* Stripclub owners, managers, and staff also expect women to masturbate them and some have forced intercourse on strippers.

**Table 2 - Sexual Abuse**

Abusive Action	Ever (by men in stripclub) (%)	At Least Once Every Day (%)	At Least Once Every Week (%)	At Least Once Every Month (%)	At Least Once Every Year (%)
Grabbed breasts	94	28 C 6 M	17 C	17 C 6 M	17 C 6 O
Grabbed buttocks	89	39 C	11 C	39 C 6 M 6 S	6 O 6 S
Grabbed genitals	67	17 C		11 C 6 M	17 C
Exposed penis to her	67	11 C	6 C	6 C 6 O 6 M	33 C
Rubbed penis on her	78	39 C 6 M	22 C 6 O 6 M 6 S	6 C	22 C 6 O
Masturbated in front of her	78	33 C 6 M	11 C	28 C	6 C

**N = 18**

**Key: C = customers, O = owners, M = managers, S = staff**

**Table 3 - Sexual Abuse**

Abusive Action	Experienced Attempted Abuse (%)	Experienced Successfully Completed Abuse (%)
Penetrate her vaginally with fingers	61 C 6 M	39
Penetrate her anally with fingers	33 C	17
Penetrate her with object	33 C 6 O	11
Force her to masturbate him	28 C 6 O 6 M	17
Force intercourse on her	17 C 6 O 6 M	11

N = 18      Key: C = customers, O = owners, M = managers, S = staff

### Verbal Abuse

Customers, owners, managers, and staff alike engage in harassing namecalling. Women are continually called “cunt”, “whore”, “pussy”, “slut”, and “bitch”. Women in this study charge that men in the stripclub called them other demeaning or degrading names like ugly, looser, fat, pregnant, boy, stupid, crack, slash, snatch, beaver, dog, dyke, lezzie, brown eye, hooters, junkie, crackhead, and shit.

Forty four percent of the women report that men associated with the stripclub have threatened to hurt them physically. These women report from three to 150 threats during their involvement in stripping. Threats range from verbal threats of slaps, ass whippings, and rapes to physical postures of punching and back hand slapping. *“When I wouldn’t let a customer grab on me, he would call me a bitch and threaten to kick my ass or rape me.” “When a customer grabs and the woman and the girl takes action, they threaten”.*

**Table 4 Verbal Abuse – Namecalling**

Abusive Action	Ever (by men in stripclub) (%)	At Least Once Every Day (%)	At Least Once Every Week (%)	At Least Once Every Month (%)	At Least Once Every Year (%)
Called “cunt”	61	28 C 6 M	6 C	17 C	11 C 6 M
Called “slut”	61	28 C 6 S	6 C	17 C 6 O 6 M 6 S	11 C
Called “whore”	78	28 C 6 S	6 C	17 C 6 O 6 M 6 S	22 C
Called “pussy”	72	39 C 6 S	11 C	11 C	11 C
Called “bitch”	89	39 C 6 S	11 C 6 O 6 M 6 S	6 C	22 C 6 M
Called other	56	17 C	6 C	17 C 6 M	6 C

N = 18      Key: C = customers, O = owners, M = managers, S = staff

### Stalking

Men associated with stripclubs repeatedly attempt to contact the women against their wishes. Strippers are followed home and stalked by stripclub customers. Customers telephone, write letters, send gifts, and follow the women around against their wishes. Women recount stories of catching customers following them to fitness clubs, parks and lakes, day care centers, and even lesbian bars. They describe times when customers have broken into their homes and taken underwear, hairbrushes, and family photographs. Women say that other customers have used their jobs at the telephone company or within the criminal justice system to target the women. The women complain that customers also have followed them home masturbating while

driving in the next lane. Women who travel the strip circuit to rural areas report that customers and stripclub owners, managers, and staff alike follow women from city to city and state to state. Furthermore, local men in small towns harass the visiting women by calling and knocking on the doors of the motel rooms and have been caught peeping in the windows of strippers' motel rooms.

Twelve percent of the women who reported being followed to their cars further reported that they were robbed (5.6 %), beaten (11.1%), threatened with a weapon (5.6%), verbally sexually harassed (66.7%), and sexually assaulted (16.7%) by customers. A customer who claimed he was in love with the woman followed her to her car, called her a "fucking cunt" and strangled her hard enough to cause blood to squirt from her neck.

**Table 5 - Stalking**

<b>Abusive Action</b>	<b>Ever (by men in stripclub) (%)</b>	<b>Range of occurrences</b>
Sent her letters against her wishes	28	3-100 times
Sent her gifts against her wishes	22	2-100 times
Called her home against her wishes	39	2-360 times
Followed her home against her wishes	56	2-500 times
Followed her to her car against her wishes	67	12-500 times
Followed her around on her private time	28	1-150 times
Followed her from club to club, city, and state	28	6-360 times
Other	28	1-360 times

**N = 18**

### **Sexual Exploitation**

Only a minority of women report that they were asked to perform sexual acts on men associated with the stripclub in order to return to work (11% by owners); as a condition of being hired (11% by managers, 11% by owners); in order to continue working there (17% by owners); in order to get a better schedule (6% by owners); or for drugs (17% by customers, 11% by managers, 22% by owners, 11% by staff).

A majority of the women, however, report they were asked to perform sexual acts on men associated with the stripclub for money (100% by customers, 6% by managers, 17% by owners, 11% by staff). Customers and pimps constantly proposition women (Boles and Garbin 1974; Forsyth and Deshotels 1997; Ronai 1992; Ronai and Ellis 1989). Fourteen (78%) women from the survey report they are propositioned for prostitution every day by customers, three (17%) every week, one (6 %) every year. Women comment that customers ask them "Do you date?" all night long. "*Infinite...too many too count.*" Women say that prostitution is influenced and suggested by management. One woman new to stripping was dumbfounded at how little money she was making taking her clothes off, so she asked the manager for his advice on increasing tips. He suggested turning tricks and said he could help her set up dates. Management sets up tricks, says it is good for business, and obligates women to turn over money from prostitution to the club. Women say prostitution is promoted even though owners tell women

they would be punished if they turn tricks. Some stripclubs are notorious for promoting prostitution. *“You have to be a ‘ho to work there”*.

Women disclosed that they were recruited into prostitution through stripping. Although the strip industry markets stripping as something other than prostitution, some women consider prostitution an extension of stripping and stripping a form of prostitution. Pimps season women first with stripping and then turn them out into brothels or escort services for more money. Tricks, sugar daddies, pimps, and drug dealers in the stripclub seek to engage women in prostitution. Another young woman said that soon after she became involved in stripping, a pimp who posed as a customer in the stripclub manipulated her into an escort service by promising that she could make more money in less time simply by accompanying businessmen to dinner. She agreed in order to feed her crack addiction and as her addiction increased she slid down from gentlemen’s clubs to escort service to brothel to street and crack house prostitution.

Not only are women in stripping pressured by customers to perform sexual acts on them, owners, managers, and staff pressure the women to perform sexual acts on them, their relatives and associates, on vice officers and police officers. Women explain the pressure could range from being coerced into dancing for the intended with an expectation to put on a real good show with special treatment, extra time, and sexual contact, to engaging in prostitution. Strippers, like other subordinates in worker-management relationships, respond with obedience to directives from management and others with authority (McMahon 1989).

**Table 6 - Sexual Exploitation**

<b>Recipient</b>	<b>Pressured by customer (%)</b>	<b>Pressured by owner (%)</b>	<b>Pressured by manager (%)</b>	<b>Pressured by staff (%)</b>	<b>Pressured by vice officer (%)</b>	<b>Pressured by police officer (%)</b>
Owner’s friend		39				
Owner’s relative		11				
Owner’s business associate		33				
Manager’s friend			17			
Manager’s relative			6			
Manager’s business associate			11			
Customer	72	22	17	6		
Vice officer		17	11	6	11	
Police officer		17	11	6		22

**N = 18**

### PART 3: WOMEN’S THOUGHTS ON STRIPPING

Women in stripping are overwhelmingly motivated by the promise of wealth or a will to survive (McCaghy and Skipper 1970; Ronai 1992; Thompson and Harred 1992). Stripclub owners, managers, pimps and the media portray stripping as a glamorous way to earn big money fast and use this strategy to lure young women into stripping. Women in this study report the

best part of stripping to be the money. *“The only part that keeps me there is the money”*. At the same time, women are trapped and disappointed by the money. *“I hated it...but glad I had it at the time for the income.”* *“Women are reduced to exposing genitals for \$1 bills.”* *“It pays the bills... if we could pay bills another way we would.”* *“The bar owners and management are exploitative, they steal money.”* *“It’s hard to get out because of the money.”* With respect to the money strippers seek to earn, they in turn must pay out fines, kickbacks, 100% of their social security insurance and taxes, travel and hotel expenses, and the costs for costumes, tanning, and plastic surgery. Women report that they have to have the right attitude to make money (Ronai 1992). This ordinarily was described as being drunk, high or numb (Forsyth and Deshotels 1997). Others feel it required tolerance. *“The ability to ignore customers for just being there.”* Most women say it is easier when the men are tipping regularly and when they do not have to interact with men intimately. Women acknowledge that strippers measure their worth according to the amount of tips they earn and that they want attention, acceptance, and approval from the customers because it brings money (Futterman 1992).

Women in stripping feel it doesn’t take much skill to be a stripper (Forsyth and Deshotels 1997; McCaghy and Skipper 1970). *“It would be nice to say women need dance talent but it’s not true.”* *“Tits, pussy, and blonde hair is all it takes.”* Instead they referred to dissociation to abuse. *“It takes a willingness to do it...anybody can do it.”* *“It takes somebody who can shut themselves off and be really fake.”* *“...the ability to take a lot of abuse.”* They state a stripper needs a good head on her shoulders, an open mind, guts, strength, and survival skills. They believe they need abuse counseling, a lifeline from the “outside world”, and education about what’s really going on. *“Need to know they have options, that they aren’t always going to be a ‘ho’.”* Women in stripping want a union to protect strippers, decent working conditions, fair treatment, and an end to cruelty by management. Lastly, strippers think that women and girls don’t know what they are getting into when they first start dancing. *“It’s really harmful because it is so benign, so accepted.”* *“Girls think they will have fun dancing and get paid, they have no idea they have to fight men’s hands, and dicks, and tongues, and then fight for every fucking dollar bill you earn.”* *“It was a lot different than I originally thought.”*

The women in this study condemn the men associated with stripping and the impact stripping has on them as the worst parts of stripping. Women do not like the way customers treat them (Thompson and Harred 1992). Furthermore they say they do not like talking to customers, asking men for money, and resent having to have to deal with them at all. They find customers irritating because they are drunk and have negative attitudes towards women. Women characterize customers as scum, psycho mama’s boys, rapists and child molesters, old perverted men, idiots, assholes, and pigs. Strippers are largely disgusted by customers and describe them as pitiful and pathetic, stupid and ignorant, sick, controlling and abusive. *“They smell so sour, they breathe very heavy and kind of wheeze when women are near.”* *“They are weak abusers who have to subordinate women and girls to feel like a man.”* *“I see my dad. They’re old enough to be my father.”* *“Yuck. I am repulsed by the sight, sound, smell, and touch of them.”* *“I’m embarrassed for them.”* The women offer insightful evaluations of stripclub customers. They say that these men do not know how to communicate. Moreover, they perceive that customers are out of control, have power and abuse problems, and will do anything to degrade women because they hate women. Strippers also state that customers want a free show and think women are cheap. In contrast, a few women positively perceived some customers as nice and added they are thankful to those who tip well.

Women in this study undoubtedly denounce stripclub owners as pimps and “glorified pimps” and maintain that owners misuse power and are sick. The women also label managers as

pimps citing that they mistreat women, that they make every attempt to take money from the women, and that they are sick because they are affiliated with the industry and know the harm they do. Strippers accuse managers of being threatened and jealous of the money women make and that women are just a dollar to management. Finally, women refer to staff music programmers, doormen, bartenders, bouncers, floorwalkers, and valet as wanna-be pimps because they always want to be tipped. The women see staff as derelicts who can't get a job anywhere else and who think they are cool for working in a stripclub. Strippers perceive staff as creepy and disrespectful and as "looky-lous" who just want to look at naked women for free. Women criticize staff by pointing out that at least owners are making big money. Few women had positive responses, but those that did felt they got along well with staff and had no real hard feelings.

Clearly strippers' attitudes about men are impacted by the activities in stripclubs. Women say they don't like men and men are worthless. Likewise women believe stripping inhibits their ability to be involved in a normal relationship. *"It affects your lovelife and feelings about men."* *"Nice boyfriends can't handle it."* *"Too large a percentage of men fit into category of customer and I do not want to hate men."*

Women in this study expressed mostly negativism regarding their experiences in stripping with themes of abuse, deception, drugs, and low self-esteem. *"I would never do it again. It was degrading."* *"No doubt that it led me to prostitution and my pimp."* *"Taught me how to control men and gave me a false illusion of control. Takes a long time to regain self-control."* *"Don't do it. Once you do it, it is hard to get out."* *"If there is any way you can avoid it...it is hard to get out once you start."* *"I wouldn't recommend it. It is too stressful and I am always comparing myself to other women on the outside."* *"I wish I had put more money away and had more education by the time I quit. I just didn't know it wasn't about success for us, it was about using us."* *"I spent my entire young adulthood being abused. It is hard to undo all this."* *"Drugs destroyed beautiful, healthy women."* *"I blame the men...it is all bad. I didn't think highly of myself while I was in stripping, but I am glad I got out of it by standing up for myself."* *"It is hard to view myself for who I am and my accomplishments rather than how I look and attention from men. I got this from stripping."*

Some women expressed fascination with stripping. *"It has been an experience of a lifetime. I've seen everything...some crazy shit."* *"I have never seen things like I have seen in stripping. It is weird."* Still others felt positively about their experience. *"If it wasn't for the money I made at it, I would have nothing right now. It has its ups and downs, but I always enjoy the music and dancing and the attention."* *"I have been extremely fortunate as far as what happened in stripping. It provides a good life, but I look at it as a job, work day shifts and work a straight job at the same time."* A few women also determined positive outcomes for themselves from their involvement in stripping. *"It served its purpose as a group for a sense of belonging."* *"Helped me recognize what is right and wrong, and what is right and wrong for me."* *"After surviving it I felt strong."* *"Stripping distracted me from my personal problems that led me into stripping...no way could I have held normal job with the problems I had."*

Above all, women in stripping reject the popular image of stripping and clarify the common misperceptions about stripclubs. *"That no one touches you, women enjoy it, and it's okay for men to go there."* *"That women actually get to wear a costume and actually get to dance."* *"That we get sexually aroused doing this."* *"That men are there to have harmless fun, when they are really there to abuse women."* *"That it is a big party and that the women want to be there for some reason other than money, like sex or to meet men or because they are nudists"*

*or exhibitionists.” “That you are doing things you want to be doing.” “That they are not degrading us because girls always are justifying it with college.” “That it is not prostitution.” “That it is glamorous, fast money, easy work, way to get ahead.”*

## **DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Men associated with stripclubs use force and coercion to establish sexual contact with women in stripping, proposition women for prostitution, intentionally inflict bodily harm upon the women, and expose themselves to the women. These actions are prohibited by law, yet when these crimes are committed against women in stripclubs, the general attitude that strippers deserve what they get prevails. Women’s complaints of abuse are met with contempt and are dismissed by owners, managers, and staff. Women are customarily told to ignore abuse and have been rebuffed with “Go bend over and do your job” and “You have to expect a certain amount of that.” In the case of women in stripping, enduring sexual violence is part of her job description. Women in stripping are expected to endure these abuses, degradations, and humiliations with a smile and a “Thank You”.

The degree of sexual violence perpetrated against strippers explodes the myths about stripping as harmless entertainment. The verbal harassment, physical and sexual abuse, and financial exploitation women suffer in stripclubs is unparalleled in any other legitimate workplace. Women in stripping are subject to actions that would be perceived as assaultive or at least unwanted in any other context or were directed against other women. Stripclubs allow men to use and abuse women in a manner that is not tolerated in any other business.

The organization and conditions of stripclubs not only produce and reproduce gender inequality, but facilitate and normalize men’s violence against women. Sexual violence has been normalized, institutionalized, and legalized in the stripclub industry as socially sanctioned male behavior. Stripclubs and the men associated with stripclubs have turned acts of violence into entertainment and tied male sexual pleasure to victimizing and exploiting. Stripclubs are structured according to male domination and control, and are inherently violent. It is impossible to set up stripclubs without sexual violence and that is reason to challenge the legitimacy of stripclubs.

Future research should address men associated with stripclubs and their views on women in stripping and stripclub activities. An exploration of why stripclubs exist, an explanation of why men go to stripclubs, and a description of how stripclub owners and government policy establish the tone and culture of stripclubs are also in order. Future research should explore gender role socialization and female strippers’ perceptions of sexual harassment and violence. The definition of sexual harassment should be tested with strippers to learn if they perceive actions differently than women in other workplaces. In turn, strippers’ rights in the workplace must be considered. Studies focused on women’s emotional and psychological response, including drug and alcohol abuse, to violence in stripclubs should be conducted.

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