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“  
The dancers are  
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## THE DIALECTICAL GAZE

Exploring the Subject-Object  
Tension in the Performances  
of Women Who Strip

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*Much of past research on female exotic dance has characterized strippers as deviant workers who are either passive, objectified victims of a sexploitation system that trades on their bodies for financial gain or as active subjects who work the exchange for their own benefit. Drawing on theories of power, performance, and communication, this work complicates the subject-object tension, showing how power circulates through a system of competing discursive relationships forming a dialectic of agency and constraint in which strippers are simultaneously subjects and objects. The author presents ethnographic data of how strippers discursively negotiate the ambivalence and contradictions they experience during their interactions with customers, management, and their families. Finally, this work concludes that given the need for all women to perform their prescribed gender in the course of their everyday lives, the occupation of the exotic dancer may not be as deviant as previously defined.*

**Keywords:** *exotic dance; ethnography; power; organization; communication; gender*

*A football game on a big-screen TV silhouettes a half-nude woman dancing for a row of cheering men. Waitresses wander through the club in white lace G-string lingerie. One asks what I want to drink. Her name is Ilona, and she speaks with a soft Spanish accent. \$4.50 for a Miller Lite! "PUT THE GREENERY ON THE SCENERY," I hear an amplified voice ring out over the sound of Madonna singing, "Like a Virgin." "COME ON GENTLEMEN, THESE WOMEN DON'T GET A SALARY FROM THIS ESTABLISHMENT. THEY RELY ON GENEROUS TIPS FROM YOU!" Though stimulated by vision, the customers are controlled by sound. A dancer performs a table dance for the man next to me. He is alone. She is called the "Polynesian Queen." In this dark room full of smoke, he can pretend to be her king. Her breasts appear too round. Are they real? He doesn't seem to care. He watches her body move to the beat as Janet Jackson sings "Nasty Girl." She leans forward and presses her perfectly round breasts together—in his face. She bends down—her head in his lap. Her hair hides what she is not doing—mock fellatio. She turns around. With her back to the patron, she bends over again. This time I see her face. She looks disinterested. He looks impressed. I'm impressed with her ability to walk in four-inch heels. Music pounds so loudly it*

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*vibrates my chair. "Welcome to Paper Dolls," a sign out front declares, "The Hottest Show on Earth."*

\* \* \* \* \*

Paper Dolls<sup>1</sup> is a "first-class" strip joint nestled between a Shell gas station and a Budget rental car shop. The "hottest show on earth" depends on the manufacturing of a seamless performance where outside men in tuxedos park cars and inside women in G-strings take off their clothes for money. As such, Paper Dolls is a "sexploitation organization, where sexuality is exploited for the benefit of the managers and owners" (Hearn and Parkin 1987, 68). As members of "sexploitation organizations," striptease dancers are categorized as sex workers along with prostitutes, erotic models, and erotic film stars: their work is based on a sexual trade.

Sexploitation organizations, and in particular strip clubs, have been the subject of academic interest and controversy.<sup>2</sup> The majority of literature on stripping, whether male or female, professional or amateur, defines the activity as deviant (Calhoun, Fisher, and Cannon 1998; Ronai and Cross 1998; Wood 2000). They question why strippers are drawn to the "stigmatized" profession (Skipper and McCaghy 1970; Carey, Peterson, and Sharpe 1974) and consider the justifications they make to rationalize their choices (Thompson and Harred 1992). They analyze the types of relationships the strippers develop (and often fake) with the customers (Enck and Preston 1988; Ronai and Ellis 1989) and with each other (McCaghy and Skipper 1969; Carey, Peterson, and Sharpe 1974; Reid, Epstein, and Benson 1995). And they explore the consequences for self-esteem and identity for the women and men working in this industry (Reid, Epstein, and Benson 1994; Ronai and Ellis 1989; Dressel and Peterson 1982). While most of the literature focuses on professional female strippers, a few studies have emerged distinguishing between male and female strippers (Peterson and Dressel 1982; Margolis and Arnold 1993; Montemurro 2001; Tewksbury 1994) and professional and amateur shows (Calhoun, Cannon, and Fisher 1996; Calhoun, Fisher, and Cannon 1998; Cannon, Calhoun, and Fisher 1998).

At the heart of feminist investigations into sex work is a concern about the degree of agency women have within an industry that positions them as objects. Feminist responses, however, are divided (Bell

1987; McCormick 1994). Radical feminists have directed their energies toward eliminating the sex work industry, arguing that it contributes to a continued objectification that harms all women—not just the sex trade workers (e.g., Barry 1995). Liberal feminists, on the other hand, believe sex workers are active participants in a social system—exploiters who trade on their own sexuality for commerce. Some seek to increase the amount of power that women in these roles have through unions and increased protective regulations (Hanna 1998; St. James 1987). Other liberal responses reveal how dancers are more subjects with power than objects of power (Ronai 1992; Ronai and Ellis 1989; Wood 2000). Ronai and Ellis (1989), for example, wrote about the types of strategies female dancers use to control the customer-dancer interaction and to capitalize financially. Wood (2000) also closely examined the gendered power evident in female strip clubs. She took issue with the radical anti-sex work position that places the strippers solely as the object of the male gaze. Focusing on the interactions between the customers and the dancers, she found that the dancers gain agency and subjectivity through their discourse and are therefore more than mere sexual objects of a masculine gaze. She said, “Rather than understanding power as a monolithic social force oppressing women . . . power is understood to be a contested, negotiated social resource that is constantly being enacted during interpersonal encounters” (p. 7). Ronai (1992) wrote about the complexity of her own stripper subjectivity as she worked through her simultaneous and often conflicting roles of exotic dancer, researcher, and wife.

In this vein, this study will maintain that female professional stripping cannot be viewed as either entirely liberating or entirely constraining: strippers are neither completely with nor completely without power. I will explore the resources and constraints these women encounter and the rhetorical and performative tactics they enact as they negotiate power relationships both in and out of the workplace. First, I draw on relevant theories of power, performance, and communication. I focus on how expressions of power through performance complicate the subject-object tension; it is a dialectic rather than a dichotomy. Second, I present data from ethnographic observations and interviews of how power is performed and negotiated during interactions between customers and dancers, management and dancers, and the dancers and their families. Throughout, I argue that it is not about whether strippers are object or subject, or whether they have power or not. It is about how

they discursively negotiate the ambivalence and contradiction inevitable when competing expressions of power are culturally and socially constructed and performed. Finally, I conclude that stripping may not be as deviant a profession for women as it has been previously defined. Whether through expression or suppression, for many professional women, sexuality is a spoken or unspoken component of work. Their jobs do not have to require them to take off their clothes for them to feel that to be successful they must shape and discipline their bodies toward a prescribed feminine image (Nadesan and Tretheway 2000; Tretheway 1998).

### EXPRESSIONS OF POWER AND PERFORMANCE

At first glance, female strippers provide extraordinary examples of what Bell (1993) has described as the "female body as object and situated in performance as display of that object" (p. 352). Indeed, for centuries the female body has been the object of public surveillance and desire. She is displayed for popular consumption in films, paintings, television, and stage where heterosexual men can desire her and women can desire to be like her. Unlike their male counterparts, female performers are marked for sexual appropriation, availability, and sexuality (Dolan 1993; Tannen 1994).

Slavoj Žižek (1992) helped us understand why watching is such a pleasure. He believed that watching is the embodiment of unfulfilled desire. For the male customers, the strippers represent the "object *a*" or the object-cause of their desire. The object of desire eludes our grasp no matter what we do to attain it; yet "the final purpose of our demand for an object is this, not the satisfaction of a need attached to it, but confirmation of the other's attitude toward us" (p. 5). In light of this, male customers may believe they are attempting to satisfy their desires by attaining the object *a*. To attain it, however, eliminates the desire, and subsequently the spectators lose their subjective control. Žižek described this as the paradoxical relationship between the gaze and the object of desire. The object can only be perceived by a gaze that is "distorted" by desire. Without the distortion of desire, the object does not exist. So, the objectified female body only exists in the subjective desire of the male spectator. As a "sex object" in itself, she does not exist, "since [she] is nothing but the embodiment, the materialization of his

very distortion, of this surplus of confusion and perturbation introduced by desire into so-called 'objective reality' " (p. 12).

Therefore, while the male customer exerts power over the stripper by constructing her as the object *à* of his subjective desire, the man is controlled by his very spectatorship. Calling this the "dialectic of the gaze," Žižek (1992) stated,

The gaze denotes at the same time power (it enables us to exert control over the situation, to occupy the position of the master) and impotence (as bearers of a gaze, we are reduced to the role of passive witnesses to the adversary's action). (p. 72)

From this perspective, the male customers experience the dialectic of the gaze as they are simultaneously in control (they occupy the position of the master) and yet are impotent (both figuratively and literally in this case); as bearers of the gaze, they are reduced to the role of passive witnesses of the adversary's action.

In strip clubs, however, it is not always so clear who is watching whom. As numerous researchers describe, the female dancers watch the customers as much as they are watched (e.g., Ronai and Ellis 1989; Ronai 1992; Wood 2000). Management watches customers and dancers, and dancers watch management. Jill Dolan (1993) recognized the more complex manifestations of gaze in both performances on stage and everyday life. According to Dolan, women have the ability to resist the passive position as the object *à* of the gaze. The gaze is not unidirectional but instead fraught with exchanges of desire "among performers, spectators, and audiences in particular, historicized, localized contexts" (p. 130). The strippers, then, also experience the dialectic of the gaze, positioning them as mistress<sup>3</sup> and yet rendering them impotent.

Central to this work is how this control/impotence tension translates into creative and constraining dialectic forces of individual action. Giddens (1979), Wentworth (1980), and Eisenberg and Goodall (2001) each described how individuals are molded, formed, and controlled by social forces and institutions, while simultaneously these same individuals shape, create, and reinforce society and social systems of meaning. Giddens called this the duality of structure in which individuals are bound by the governing rules and regulations while open to the possibility of shifting or changing those rules, or even creating new ones. De Certeau (1984) further explored how power is expressed in this

dialectical relationship. He distinguished between strategies and tactics. Strategies are dominant forces of power in institutionalized sites such as patriarchy, organizations, and families. They create constraints by dictating what is "proper" within each institutionalized site. For example, in an organization it is proper for an employee to defer to the authority of an employer; in a family, a child defers to a parent. Tactics, on the other hand, are the "art of the weak" (p. 37). Tactics take form as creative guises, trickery, and deception. An employee may defer to the authority of an employer while siphoning money from organizational accounts. The child may return home for a midnight curfew, only to sneak out of a window later in the night. As Wentworth stated, "We are rule and system users and rule and system breakers as well" (p. 40). In light of this, the dancers at Paper Dolls can be seen to tactically negotiate and break the rules that they are simultaneously molded, controlled, and ordered to follow to maintain a "proper" performance when watched by their customers, their managers, and their families.

## METHOD

To explore the stripping performances at Paper Dolls, I spent three months (120 hours) observing the practices in the club, including time watching the front-stage activities and hanging out backstage in the dancers' changing room and in the manager's office. Field notes were taken whenever possible, and as discreetly as possible, so as not to draw too much attention to my presence as a researcher. Extensive field notes were written after each observation period. During observations, I informally interviewed dancers, waitresses, bartenders, and floor managers. These interviews were conversational and were not tape-recorded, but notes were taken and the interviewees were aware of the study. I formally interviewed ten dancers, the general manager, two assistant managers, a doorman, a waitress, and the housemother (the person who helps the dancers put on makeup and change clothes). Interviewees were selected to provide a cross section of day- and night-shift workers, ages (ranging from eighteen to thirty-nine), and dancing experience (from two months to nine years). Each person approached agreed to be interviewed for the study and was promised confidentiality in exchange. These formal interviews lasted between one hour and four hours and were all tape-recorded and transcribed. The interviews



followed a moderately scheduled format that asked the same questions of each party but allowed for flexibility to follow up interesting tangents. Five of the formal interviews with the dancers, the general manager, the two assistant managers, and the doorman took place privately in the manager's back office. The housemother, waitress, and three of the dancers were interviewed in the dancers' changing room. The final two dancers were formally interviewed in a restaurant. Afraid of how the customers would react to questions, the general manager requested that I not interview them. Following prescribed research methods, field notes and interviews were all analyzed according to prevalent themes of power and resistance (Bantz 1993).

Several characteristics of Paper Dolls merit mention as a context for the research presented here. First, the club sells alcohol and is therefore regulated by the state to follow specific policies. For example, the dancers are only allowed to strip to G-string underwear and must wear pasties over their nipples. Legally, customers are only allowed to touch the dancers on their arms and hips. Second, the club has a policy that no single women are allowed to enter alone as management views them as competition for the dancers. Therefore, throughout this research a male companion or off-duty dancers accompanied me. Third, the dancers are considered employees of the club. They do not have to pay an independent contractor fee for dancing. They do, however, have to tip out the DJ and the housemother.

Prior to this research, I had never been to a topless bar. As a naive participant, I was a woman experiencing a space primarily created for the fantasies of men. Callaway (1992) noted the implications of gender in fieldwork: simultaneously constrained and enabled by gender, researchers will "experience" their fieldwork differently (p. 29).<sup>4</sup> Clearly, my experience of life at Paper Dolls cannot be identical to others. Indeed, Clifford (1986) stated, "Ethnographic writings can properly be called fictions in the sense of 'something made or fashioned'" (p. 6). In this spirit, throughout this analysis I provide italicized ethnographic fictions drawn from interviews and field note data to help provide more contextual narratives for my findings.

## DIALECTICAL GAZE: DANCING ON CENTER, ORGANIZATIONAL, AND PRIVATE STAGES

As stated earlier, strippers are molded, controlled, and ordered to maintain a "proper" performance in front of their customers, their managers, and their families. Goffman (1959) noted that a performance is usually given in highly bounded regions. These front regions can be as obvious as dancing on a center stage or as subtle as an evening dinner with family. In either case, in the front region, there are spoken or unspoken "proper" expectations guiding the behavior of the performers and audience members. The "back region," on the other hand, "may be defined as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course" (p. 112). Accordingly, for Goffman, it is only in the back region that the vital secrets of the show are supposed to be revealed, where we may discover the discursive tactics such as complex webs of self-presentation, trickery, and deception that help strippers create new rules for power. The following sections detail the front and back regions of the center, organizational, and private stages on which strippers dance. It is important to remember, however, that for strippers, the front and back regions are not so discrete. They must negotiate the competing performance demands associated with their different audiences. For example, performing a table dance for a customer is a front region for that customer but may be a back region for their families. The very tactics that render them powerful in one region may render them impotent in another.

### DANCING ON CENTER STAGE: CUSTOMER AND DANCER RELATIONS

*"GET THOSE DOLLARS READY, GENTLEMEN, 'CAUSE HERE THEY COME," the DJ screams over Aerosmith singing "Girls, Girls, Girls." Part of the stage is lifted, and thirty dancers descend to infiltrate the main floor. Some men wait by the stage to get first choice for a table dance; others sit back and allow the dancers to come to them. In front of us is a long speaker on which unsolicited dancers are forced to stand. Like an auctioneer, the DJ calls out to the customers to take "one of these fine-looking ladies" until eventually all the dances have been sold. Soon the whole room becomes a faceless mass of bodies moving to the beat of Snoop Doggie Dog. The scene is unnerving and alive with naked bodies*

*moving in synchronicity. They are rhythmic—spellbinding. The second song breaks in, and a whiny voice declares, “I don’t like Mondays.” Not only is the song undanceable, it is depressing. The awkward move ruptures the rhythm of the room and breaks the spell. The formless bodies once again have a face, some laughing, some glaring at the DJ as they try to move to the music—their hips not able to catch the halting rhythm of the song. I feel uncomfortable in this place—conspicuous. I sit next to my husband, and there are naked breasts everywhere. All sizes. Some real, some not. I mock the women who have fake boobs, yet I wonder why the flat-chested women don’t get boob jobs. Small and even average-sized breasts seem out of shape and out of place.*

\* \* \* \* \*

On the surface, the center stage presents an image of dancers as powerless victims in a system that objectifies their sexuality for commerce. Although the chairs in the bar lounge are arranged around a strobe-lighted center stage, the majority of customer-dancer interactions takes place at the guests’ individual tables. During these interactions, the customer is released from any traditional expectations—there are no promises of commitment or long-term relationships—he does not have to be witty, nice, or smart for these female bodies to serve and entertain him. To make money in this occupation, dancers must stand almost naked in front of fully clothed men and tolerate their insulting and degrading comments, daily sexual propositions, roving hands, and even some physical threats. Strippers do perform the “proper” performance in front of their customers. As one dancer explained, “You become whatever they [the customers] want you to be.” This is an important statement as she is not saying that the strippers *are* what the customers want them to be. They become or they *perform* what the customers want them to be. To do this, they cannot remain as passive objects of male desire. They must devise creative discursive tactics that simultaneously enable their own active subjectivity yet allow them to appear in the proper form, that of the passively observed.

There is no formal guidebook to teach strippers these strategies. Instead, they rely on informal socialization methods to discuss tips and tactics ranging from how to tell if a man has money to how to handle an obnoxious customer. As noted in stripping literature, some form friendships and mentoring relationships<sup>5</sup> (e.g., Calhoun, Fisher, and Cannon 1998; Carey, Peterson, and Sharpe 1974; Dragu and Harrison 1988;

Sweet and Tewksbury 2000). For example, Annie started working at Paper Dolls four months ago. She did not make any money for a week until Kit showed her how to talk to guys and ask them for table dances. "Kit took me under her wing," she says. "It was really nice." Debbie has been at the club only two months. Her friend Stacie recommended the job. Although Stacie no longer works at the club, she has become Debra's mentor, teaching her valuable lessons, such as putting all her money in a safe deposit box and running it through money orders so that it is not traceable by the Internal Revenue Service, explaining how to make the most money on stage, and insisting that she always personally thank a customer who tips her on stage so that she is set up for a table dance. Not all of the dancers at Paper Dolls describe having a mentor or a friend show them the ropes. Jennie explains, "When you first start working, no one is going to tell you what to do because they don't want you to make their money." Phoenix agrees,

You learn by watching; you take a move from one girl, a phrase from another, and a head tilt from that one over there; then after a while you have your own thing. And I have to admit, I do my country act really well.

Whether taught through mentoring friendships or by watching others, knowing how to use the center stage for her own benefit is perhaps the most important tactic a dancer can learn. As documented in other studies on professional and amateur stripping, many of the dancers expressed joy and pride in their performances on stage (Calhoun, Fisher, and Cannon 1998; Carey, Peterson, and Sharpe 1974; Forsyth and Deshotels 1998; Skipper and McCaghy 1971). For example, when Stacie goes out on the main stage, she "wants all eyes on her." She is in her own words "a bit of an exhibitionist." While some of them told me that they "love their time" on the main stage, others admitted they considered it "doing their time." Debbie, for example, hates to dance on the main stage. She said, "I don't have any floor work and it seems like they always have me following the girl who can put her ankles behind her ears."

Despite their different feelings, all agree that the main stage is their opportunity to check out the room. So, just as the strippers are watched, they also watch—from their vantage point on the main stage, they use their nonverbal reading skills to assess where the money is (Ronai and

Ellis 1989). A couple of the dancers explained to me that they look for the man who is alone, wearing khaki pants, a button-down oxford shirt, and expensive loafers. One dancer, Jennie, went to a local department store to study what expensive shoes and watches look like so that she would be prepared. "Either a guy has money or he doesn't," she said. "And," she continued, "you don't waste your time on someone who doesn't."

Though the center stage is a critical vantage point for the dancers to shift the power of the gaze, they make little of their money while dancing there. They must try to gain the attention of the customers who they believe have the money to purchase individual table dances. As Wood (2000) noted, customers tend not to approach the women—the dancers typically ask individual customers if they would like a table dance. Several dancers explained that they find it difficult to just walk up to a customer and ask for a dance. Instead, they try to break the ice while on the main stage by trying to make eye contact with a potential "money" customer from the stage. Jennie states, "My gimmick is that I smile." Men tell her that they chose her because she is the "only one who has smiled all night." She explains that she may look like she is having fun, but it is a "fake smile." She said,

It is not like I am having fun. Most of the time it is just work. I put in my time and get out of there, but you still gotta smile, act like you are having so much fun, and that you are practically falling in love with them.

For her performance to be successful, the dancer must convince a guest that he is the only one she is smiling for. "Confronting man, woman is always play-acting," explained Simone de Beauvoir (1952). "She lies when she makes believe that she accepts her status as the inessential other, she lies when she presents to him an imaginary personage through mimicry, costumery, studied phrases" (p. 543). Enck and Preston (1988) described this deception as "counterfeit intimacy." Through counterfeit actions such as the "fake smile," the dancer can maintain an imaginary relationship with the customer so he is more likely to keep buying table dances from her. She is also able to control the interaction without the customer realizing it. At times, men will attempt to assert their masculine control by becoming more physically aggressive. Although they violate the established rules of touching, men often sit with their legs apart and pull the dancer into them, making them rub up

on them. "It makes you so mad," Debra states. "You want to just slap them." But Debra knows she cannot do this without risking the relationship. Rather than directly combat them, the stripper can covertly control the situation by maintaining and even enhancing her performance (Ronai and Ellis 1989). Annie describes the situation like this:

It is really easy to control. Let's say your back is facing them and they are touching you, you just turn around and step back. Or, if a guy puts his hands on your behind, I just grab his hands and smile, like we are having fun here. I am being friendly by grabbing his hands. I am not being rude like, don't touch me.

The counterfeit performance continues even when the dancing stops. Before or after a table dance, the entertainers will sit and talk with the guests. Jennie laughs as she explains her use of studied phrases.

When you talk to a guy you have to make them believe you are totally into them. You lean forward and say, "That is *so* interesting." Or, when they tell you about their job you say, "You must be *so* responsible."

The trick is to make the audience feel like they are somehow special or unique. Jennie became so practiced in this counterfeit intimacy that one of the bartenders would imitate her from across the room, mouthing the words, "You must be *so* responsible."

The stripper seduces the customer by manufacturing a believable relationship. They pose as sexual objects to control their audience. While at work in their club, their secrets are "strategic" (Goffman 1959), where their audience expects and desires that there be secrets kept to maintain the performance. Their audience does not want these secrets revealed to them because then they will no longer be able to play in the performance frame that Turner (1988) called "let us make-believe." He will continue to pay as long as he and the stripper can continue to play "make-believe." Stacie states, "I've had guys tell me they love me. One guy gave me his credit card and told me I could have anything I wanted" (she made \$3,500 that night).

As the dancers perform the sexual object *à* of the male desire, they do it from a position of subjective power. Jennie states, "I am making so much money off these guys that are stupid enough to spend it. That is power. What is more power than that?" Annie explains to me, "If I were

a guy, I would never come into a place like this. For one thing it costs way too much money. And what do they get for it?" Annie continues, "One time there was this guy who really thought I was going to go out with him." She had been playacting an intimate role with him and was incredulous when he "really" believed her. She continues with an incredulous sadness in her voice: "He said, 'You mean you aren't really going to go out with me?' I couldn't believe he really believed me. I felt so sorry for him." Debra remarks, "The first time I got a drunk guy to give me all his money, I had to go home and call Stacie. I know that is a terrible thing, but [in] there that is the game."

These examples clearly show that the stripper is not solely the passive object of the masculine gaze. She maintains agency through her own watchful eye. Just like the men, however, this position renders them simultaneously in control and controlled. Dancers are not immune from the societal constraints defining their profession as deviant. For example, after calling Stacie to tell of her financial victory, Debra cried all night "from shame." She said, "I couldn't believe that this is how I was going to make a living." They also reveal their own vulnerability in the face of rejection. Kit explains,

It is very bad for your self-esteem. You go to one customer and say, "Hi, would you like a dance?" And they say, "No, I don't have any money." You are like, "No problem," and you leave. Then he buys a dance from every other single woman but you. Tips every other woman but you. Then that brings your self-esteem down and makes you feel ugly.

Again, the dancers are simultaneously in control because they watch and are controlled because they are watched. Their identities are not defined purely as the object of desire of the masculine gaze, nor are they totally immune from it. The next two sections explore this conundrum of control as it plays out in the performative personas of the working stripper and the woman in her private life.

## **DANCING ON AN ORGANIZATIONAL STAGE: MANAGEMENT AND DANCER RELATIONSHIPS**

*Sitting in a small, cluttered office in the back of the club, Bob explains how he came to work for a strip club. "When I turned eighteen, my brother took me to my first titty bar. Just as I was taking a bite out of my cheeseburger, a naked woman stood on the table with her legs on either*



*side of my head." As Bob continues to talk, I can hear the club music playing in the background of our conversation. Jimmy Buffet croons, "Cheeseburger in paradise, paradise." "That was my first naked woman," Bob explained. "Ever since then I have been going to clubs or have been affiliated with them. Not to sound conceited or anything, but I have opened six clubs already and I have worked with some of the best people, knowledgeable. I know how to run entertainers, how to speak to guests, and the floor men. I know exactly what the DJ needs to do. I know what kind of advertising we need to do, what kind of clientele we need in here."*

\* \* \* \* \*

Paper Dolls is a corporation, and as such, in addition to the center stage, the performance of exotic dance takes place on an organizational stage. As in many corporations, the dominant or preferred organizational practices are determined so that all employee actions serve corporate interests. Furthermore, previous research has found that given the morally "tainted" position of strip clubs, they are subject to more scrutiny than other mainstream organizations, and accordingly, managers maintain even closer control over their employees (Ashforth and Kriener 1999; Montemurro 2001). Dancers, therefore, are watched not only by the customer but also by management. During my time at Paper Dolls, I was exposed to the managerial "party line" through my interactions with James, a new assistant manager, and Bob, the new general manager. Proud of his new position, James provided me with his seventy-seven-page managerial handbook. The handbook continually reinforces how the manager is the "most important single individual" in the entire organization. James had highlighted the following lines: "The buck stops with the manager. He is the one held accountable for the bottom line." The bottom line is of primary importance to Bob as well. Recently recruited from a sister club as the new general manager in charge of operations at Paper Dolls, Bob is pleased with the club's increased profit margins since his arrival.

Bob's efforts are directed toward a strategic plan to establish Paper Dolls as an "upscale adult entertainment club." De Certeau (1984) reminded us that "as in management, every 'strategic' rationalization seeks first of all to distinguish its 'own' place, that is, the place of its own power and will, from its 'environment' " (p. 36). Paper Dolls has to be distinct from any other club right from the beginning. For Bob, this



means the performance must be strictly scripted and starts from the moment the guests walk through the front door. The front door hostess has to be as bubbly and as full of energy and as genuine as you can possibly find. He tells me,

She should say, "Hey, how are you doing? Welcome to the world-famous Paper Dolls. Where are you guys in town from?" They all have to be with it. It starts right there, and goes all the way down the line to the entertainers.

Bob acknowledges that the entertainers are the center of the business. "Without them, none of us would have a job," he explains. He does not, however, seem to see them as employees; they are viewed as sexual objects to be manipulated and controlled for managerial gain. To do this, Bob says,

There are times you have to be their brother. There are times you have to be their father. There are times where you have to be, I won't say lover, but intimate. You have to compliment them; you just can't go in and treat them like they are children. That just doesn't work.

His use of intimacy masks a classical, patriarchal management style. He further explains, "Communication is the key to everything. I tell the employees exactly how to do their jobs." During nightly staff meetings, Bob goes over a list of items the entertainers need to pay attention to. Although the show revolves around the entertainers, Bob explains, "They cannot control it. They don't know how to run the show."

In a recent memorandum, Bob laid out the ground rules for employee behavior in the club. "This is my favorite part," he says as he reads the memorandum to me. "Be aware that even though you may not see me, or you know that I am not in the building, it does not mean that I am not conscious of how the club is being run." In saying this, Bob tries to establish his own power through a managerial gaze. He exercises control through unpredictable surveillance. He never tells employees what his hours are or when he might come into work. "That way," he says, "they never know when the boss is going to be around." Foucault (1977) described this as the panoptic gaze in which the major effect of the "panopticon [is] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (p. 200).

Employees functioning under a panoptic gaze do not know when they are being watched. Therefore, they may participate in self-regulation and choose to reproduce organizational policies to avoid disciplinary action.

Bob has been met with ambivalent reviews by the dancers. Some think he is “just what the club needs,” that he is “bringing in a more upscale clientele,” and that “he is more professional and it is better since he got here.” Others state that “this place really blows now,” “he is way too corporate and inflexible,” and “he is a control freak.” Accepting, even if not liking, the masculine power characteristic of sexploitation organizations (Hearn and Parkin 1987), Jennie, a dancer, claims that “dancers know their place. We are dancers and these people are for some God-given right, or by virtue of them being men, managers.”

Dancers do appear to know their place. They regulate their behavior and perform a subordinate role on the organizational stage much in the same way they perform the role of sexual object on the center stage. Participating in self-regulation, however, does not completely strip dancers of their subjectivity or agency. Indeed, the very action of self-regulation demonstrates a level of subjective agency that opens possibilities of resistance (Ashcraft and Pacanowsky 1996; Ferguson 1984). McPhee (1985) further stated, “The capacity to resist gives [people] some degrees of control over the conditions of reproduction of the system” (p. 168).

Most prevalent at Paper Dolls are subtle resistant practices that interfere with the organizational preferred practices. One of the biggest problems facing the managerial staff is that the dancers do not identify with the organizational goals and values. The dancers are not in the business to make money for the club. Therefore, there are a number of entertainers who do not show up for their shifts. Maintaining a resistant air of plausible deniability, they will manufacture excuses to cover up their absences. According to Bob, it is common for a dancer’s grandmother to die one week and then be very sick the next. One dancer explains,

Most of the girls do not consider this a job. They think of it as another part of their social life. So, when they don’t show up for a shift, they don’t think about it as being unprofessional. They just figure they aren’t going out that night.

For these women, their work is not taking their clothes off for money; their play is. This finding is similar to the motivations associated with amateur stripping and male professional stripping rather than female professional stripping (Calhoun, Fisher, and Cannon 1998; Dressel and Peterson 1982; Tewksbury 1993). Sweet and Tewksbury (2000) found that though most women enter the professional stripping profession for money, that is not, however, the only reason that they stay. They claimed that the "party dancer" is one of three different types of women in the stripper occupation. Unlike the "career dancer," whose motivation for stripping is to make money, or the "power dancer," who obtains psychological rewards by being desired by others, the party dancer uses the club as an outlet to enact a lifestyle of alcohol and drug consumption. Regardless of their type of individual motivation, the point here is that motivation is not organizationally driven. By constructing their own meanings for their performances at the club, the dancers defy managerial preferred meanings and practices.

Furthermore, dancers use tactics of trickery and deception to maximize their own profits. Often, these tactics are in opposition to managerial goals. For example, management is not concerned that a particular dancer makes money. It is only necessary that customers remain happy and continue to spend money. The club makes most of its profit margin off the inflated cost of drinks, and a customer must continue to buy drinks for a dancer to remain sitting with him. The dancers' drinks cost the same as regular club drinks. They come, however, in a smaller glass and are made with only half the alcohol content as a regular drink. Dancers have learned to use their drinks for their own profits—to save their spots for a customer with money. Rather than finish an entire drink (something that management wants them to do so that the customer will have to purchase another one), the dancers will sip their drinks and leave them partially full on the table with the customer to mark their spot should they have to leave for any reason. This is important because the dancers make most of their money during personal interactions with the customers, but they are also on a strict rotation schedule to dance on the main stage. For management, nothing is more financially harmful than an empty stage. Therefore, when the dancer's name is called, she must leave whomever she is with and get ready for her turn on stage. Dancers are forbidden by management to "mark a spot" with a customer when they must leave since management wants the customer to

continue spending money by buying drinks for another dancer. The practice, however, was prevalent at Paper Dolls.

Dancers will also attempt to maximize their own profits at the expense of other dancers through tactics such as "blocking." Blocking occurs when one dancer leaves a guest momentarily, either to take her turn on the main stage or to use the bathroom, and another dancer purposefully takes her place. The second dancer may "block" the first one by manufacturing stories about her. She may tell the guest that the first dancer has emotional problems, has a large boyfriend or husband, or hates dancing. Concerned for customer satisfaction, Bob claims he will not tolerate any "blocking" over guests. The policy is not to protect the dancers but to protect the club's financial interests. Knowing that blocking will not stop simply because there is a managerial policy forbidding it, dancers have devised buddy system tactics to counteract blocking. Phoenix explains,

Let's say I am sitting with a guest and I recognize that he has a lot of money to spend. I will call Kit a friend over to sit with them. We will both work together to "drain" him and cover for each other when one of us has to go on the main stage.

Exotic dance is a site of work, and strippers must perform on an organizational stage. Stripped of their voice in decision-making practices, dancers appear powerless as management determines the dominant or preferred organizational practices. Like disempowered workers in a variety of industries, strippers "bargain with the company to accept conditions of subordination for the sake of financial payoffs" (Deetz 1998, 167). And through their own strategies and tactics, dancers undercut managerial authority and determine their own hidden organizational practices and meanings to maximize that financial payoff. The relationship between management and the dancers also reveals that the performance of intimacy is not reserved for the patrons and the dancers. While Bob claims a need to be "intimate" with the dancers to control them, Stacie explains how she uses her sexuality to control Bob. Once she was walking in the mall with her sisters. At the time, none of them knew that she takes her clothes off for a living. She was due in for her shift in thirty minutes, so she slipped away from her sisters to find a phone and call the manager. He was unsympathetic to her plight,

saying, "If you don't come in, then find another job." Caught in an impossible dilemma, Stacie chose to risk her job rather than tell her sisters the truth. She told me, "I went to work the next day. Bob looked at me and said, 'Hey, didn't I fire you?' I smiled big at him and said really sweetly, 'Yeah, but I figured you didn't mean it. I brought you cookies.'" Stacie's story shows the dialectic of control and subordination possible in the stripper as employee discourse. She plays off the very means of her subordination to control the situation and to get her job back. Her story also shows the third stage on which strippers must perform—the private stage.

#### **DANCING ON A PRIVATE STAGE: FAMILY AND DANCER RELATIONSHIPS**

*No one in Stacie's family knew she had been stripping for almost a year. Every night before she left for work, she would call her mother. "That way," she explained, "she would have talked to me once a day, and wouldn't be likely to call later that night." Stacie's system of lies was working. Due to the nightly phone calls, her mother had no reason to wonder where she was. But one night she wanted to talk to someone, so she called her sister. "I felt so isolated and alone. So I told my sister." Stacie thought she could tell her anything and really wanted to share it with her. "My mother told me she found out because someone saw me," Stacie said with resignation. "But nobody would have seen me there. I mean, nobody that she knows. They are all church people and they wouldn't have been there." Stacie's parents were so upset that her mother told her, "We know we are going to find you lying dead in a gutter somewhere." Her parents stopped talking to her for three months. Then they began calling the club and asking for her by her stage name. When she would get on the phone they would tell her she was going to "burn in hell." She had to continually change her stage name so that her parents wouldn't know whom to ask for. I am struck by the ironic life of the stripper: privately she must hide what publicly she exposes. She can't tell her family or close friends what she does; yet she can sit in a crowded restaurant and tell her secrets to me.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Throughout Western history and in numerous cultures, women have been paid to be attractive or to provide men with sexual gratification. If these women do so in traditional, heterosexual ways such as wife and

mother, they are considered “Madonnas” or “good girls” (McCormick 1994, 83). However, if they are heterosexual women with multiple partners, or sex workers who exchange sexual services for money, they are “bad girls,” promiscuous, and “despised as ‘whores’ ” (McCormick 1994, 83). The good girl–bad girl dichotomy reflects cultural judgments regarding the (de)sexualization of women. To be good means to suppress one’s sexuality; to be bad means to express and embody sexuality. Strippers are caught among competing institutionalized forces regarding these bad girl–good girl performances (de Certeau 1984). The gaze of the center and organizational stages requires and legitimizes “bad girl” practices. Private relationships, including families, however, require them to maintain a “good girl” performance.

As noted in previous research (e.g., Reid, Epstein, and Benson 1994a, 1994b; Ronai and Ellis 1989), the strippers at Paper Dolls employ identification tactics to resist the “bad girl” image. For example, they commonly referenced their own work in opposition to the strippers at another local club. “I thought these clubs were all prostitutes and drug addicts, dark walls and red lights,” Kit admits. “But it isn’t like that here,” she continues. “It’s not like the club down the street.” Other typical distinguishing comments are, “If you are going to prostitute yourself then you should just go to [other club].” “We are ‘good girls’ here; if you want ‘that,’ you better go to the [other club].” “If guys come in looking for action like that, I send them to the [other club].” By projecting the “bad” characteristics associated with sex work on the other clubs, the strippers at Paper Dolls maintain their own “good girl” image in relation to the others.

The strippers define themselves as a group when comparing their “higher class” version of dance to that of other strippers. There is also research support indicating that strippers will rely on this group outside of the club and form a “family” of sorts as a means of negotiating the potentially isolating and deviant occupation (e.g., Thompson and Harred 1992). Many of the dancers at Paper Dolls, however, claim they do not want to maintain a group identity or even associate with any coworkers outside of the club. “I’m sorry,” Kit says, “when we are working I will be your best friend, but I can’t socialize with girls that will *act like a dancer* after work.” Acting like a dancer outside of the club jeopardizes the rationalization many use for dancing in the first place. Strippers try to separate their “working” identities from their “real” ones (Ronai 1992; Thompson and Harred 1992). They make

comments such as "I am really a college student," "I am different than the other girls here," and "I am only doing this for a little while to make some fast cash." Kit sums up this distinction: "I put the wig on and I am a dancer; I take it off and I am me." "When I leave this place, I leave it all behind me," Phoenix says. "It doesn't impact my home life; I won't let it." Though she makes less money, Phoenix works the day shift so that she can more easily present the "proper" image to her two sons who believe she works as an executive secretary.

All the strippers I spoke with were keeping their stripping a secret from someone important in their lives. Like Phoenix, some were hiding it from their children. "My daughters only know that I work in a big people's place," Annie says. Others were hiding it from parents: "I was raised with conservative midwestern ideals. I will never tell my parents what I am doing," explains Debra. In this way, many dancers engage in "defensive strategies" to maintain their secret identities (Goffman 1959). They ambiguously tell people that they dance, that they are entertainers, or that they "work in a bar." Annie, whose father is the deacon of a church, says, "When people ask me directly, I don't lie. I mean I *am* a dancer. They don't need to know that I take my clothes off." Others employ more extensive defensive practices. Kit tells people she is a teacher (she does teach children physical fitness part-time at a local community center). All but three of Debra's family and friends believe she is a nurse's aide. She says,

I lie. I am a liar now. I have become a liar. I can honestly say that before [this job] I was a very honest person. But now I lie. I lie about my lies. I can't remember who I told what or where I am supposed to be on this night.

Through her secrets and lies, the stripper is not only on stage while she is dancing; she is on stage in her private life as well. However, unlike the strategic secrets she keeps from the customers where she and the patrons play "let us make-believe," the secrets she keeps in her personal relationships are dark. Goffman (1959) described a dark secret as one kept in a relationship in which there are no expectations that any secrets should be kept. The audience does not know or expect that any secret is being kept so the performance is framed in what Turner (1988) would call "let us believe." If her dark secrets are discovered, her carefully constructed "good girl" image is destroyed, as stripping is incompatible



with the image of self that she attempts to maintain before her private audience.

Making their dark secrets difficult to maintain is the way their bodies become marked as "strippers." The "stripper look," according to the club manager, is "tanned, thin, and in shape." Strippers manipulate their bodies to achieve the "stripper look," going on crash diets and laying in tanning booths—sometimes twice a day. The most drastic form of bodily manipulation is breast augmentation. Annie states, "Most girls get boob jobs if they are going to strip for any length of time." They spend much of their private time preparing for their public performance.

She may be able to remove a wig or change her clothes, but the bodily manipulations are not something the stripper can remove once she leaves the club. In fact, Jennie claims she can pick out a stripper anywhere by the way she walks and the way she looks. Similar to an experience related by Ronai (1992), Jennie explained that once when a man stared at her in the mall, she wanted to scream, "If you are going to look at me, then you better give me money!" She may not have been in a strip club, but her body still had the look.

Foucault (1977) claimed that the manipulation of the body, the molding it into the wanted as opposed to leaving its natural form, is the turning point in the creation of power relations. It is through the body that women in our culture learn their own particular forms of self-surveillance. Sandra Bartky (1998) identified the "panoptical male connoisseur" in women's consciousness (quoted in Wolff 1990, 127). Women learn how to monitor their own appearances and conform to what the culture presents as the ideal for femininity. In this way, "the discursive practices that produce 'femininity' are in the culture and within women. It is through the body that women collude in their own oppression" (Wolff 1990, 127). Strippers provide an obvious example of feminine collusion as they manage their appearances by disciplining and manipulating their bodies to fit an ideal feminine image. Yet it is also through their bodies that strippers enable themselves and construct their own subjectivity. They are both subject and object in the process. Ashcraft and Pacanowsky (1996) explained that it is important to recognize that women are active agents in their own oppression. As is the case with their self-regulation on the center and organizational stages, their agency in private performances allows the capacity for resistance. Through the lives of strippers, we can see that people can be caught in



contradictions that they simultaneously resist and reproduce, challenging meanings as they also undermine those challenges.

### CONCLUSION: SEXUALITY, PERFORMANCE, AND WOMEN'S WORK

*Fumbling for a match, Kit finally lights a cigarette, takes a long drag, and with smoke still emerging from her lips says, "I have always been a dancer. When I am up there, I usually wear a wig and I am a whole different person. I am more theater than anything. I am not the typical 'here are my boobies, here is my butt.' No, I am going to show you aerobics, gymnastics, ballet, and theater all at once. And I do. . . . The younger guys go for the big-boobed, blonde-haired, dream-looking girl. I have natural boobs, and they are big enough to where I can make money off them." Later in the interview she tells me, "But, the job screws with your outside relationships. It ruins you. I used to have a fiancé and when I would get home from the club he would say 'I love you.' I told him, 'I know you love me; hell, so does everybody else, give me something.' Eventually he started throwing thousands of dollars on the bed and that would turn me on. It was money."*

\* \* \* \* \*

Separating the center, organizational, and private stages is an effective analytical tool to understand the different stages on which strippers must perform. As has been shown, there are clearly defined and conflicting requirements for what constitutes a "proper" performance of self for the various viewing audiences. The dancers negotiate the constraints of the "proper" performance with their own creative actions. They do this through discursive tactics that range from nonverbal displays (holding hands and laughing, while moving the customer's hands away from their bodies), strategic secrets (counterfeiting an intimate relationship with the customer and/or the manager to control the relationship), and dark secrets (lying to family and friends about their occupations).

Considering all three stages together contributes to the growing literature on stripping by extending the theories used to understand the performance of self. For example, several studies compare Hochschild's work on the emotional management of flight attendants to performance

of emotion by strippers (e.g., Montemurro 2001; Ronai 1992; Wood 2000). Drawing on Goffman's (1959) theory of impression management, Hochschild created dichotomies between public and private selves that are used interchangeably with false and true selves (Wouters 1989). Like putting on and taking off masks, workers are seen as presenting a false self in public, while a true self is expressed only in private. This image works well for flight attendants to explain how they are required to sell their smiles as part of their service (Hochschild 1983; Murphy 1998, 2001). The comparison to strippers does not hold up as well when you consider how in practice, the boundaries among the stages and between false and true selves are much more blurred.

For example, in the excerpt above, Kit displays a sense of pride in her center-stage performance. She claims to be a "whole different person" when on the center stage. She also, however, explains how her working performance interferes with her private relationships. In this case, Kit's "bad girl" or stripper identity is not separate or any less real than her personal identity. Although numerous studies, including this one, show that strippers attempt to keep them distinct (i.e., "in my 'real' life, I am a college student") as a way of coping with their sexualized and stigmatized profession, the idea of a "real" self and a "performative" self is arbitrary, and keeping them separate is a rational ideal. Strippers may claim to take on a different persona when working. If they could, however, really see their occupation as role-playing, as distinct from their "real" selves, then it would not affect their self-esteem. Furthermore, though she may not wear a wig to disguise herself in her private interactions, many dancers keep dark secrets from their families, performing a self that is no more real than the characters they play on stage.

Accordingly, an analysis of women who strip is about more than regional impression or emotional management. Identity is more complex than either an objective or even subjective presentation of self for different audiences. As Dolan (1993) stated, "Identity becomes a site of struggle, at which the subject organizes and reorganizes [within the constraints of] competing discourses as they fight for supremacy" (p. 88). This is particularly evident in the case of women who strip as they simultaneously exist in and with conflicting requirements for their displays of self. In her analysis of her own conflicting roles as stripper and researcher, Ronai (1999) described this process as "drawing, erasing, drawing again, composing, and destroying narratives of the self within contexts that are constantly in flux (p. 128)." As such, strippers are

neither pure object nor pure subject but negotiate their own agency resources and constraints within each of these conflicting fields.

Blurring the boundaries between work and home, public and private realms, this work also provides a lens into more than the world of sex work. It offers a magnification of the sexualized and intimate roles that many working women perform, showing that sex work may not solely lie in exploitation organizations. Sex work has been viewed as an oxymoron. We are taught to think of organizations as "pure products" (Clifford 1988) where work does not encompass sex and sex does not encompass work. Feminine sexuality, however, is a spoken or unspoken component in all workplace settings. As a category, women are marked (Tannen 1994). To be unmarked is to be without descriptors. In Western culture, white, heterosexual males constitute the unmarked category. As the norm, it is assumed that the unmarked category is present unless otherwise indicated. Therefore, any other deviation must be marked with a qualifying descriptor: a lady doctor, a female manager, a woman lawyer. Accordingly, every woman's life, whether she is a stripper or not, is a sexual performance (Butler 1990; Dolan 1993).

Speaking about the gendered strategies of mainstream working women, Nadesan and Tretheway (2000) stated, "In short, the literature indicates that the woman with the entrepreneurial spirit is able to manage her life and career successfully through shaping and disciplining her very body, in terms of its image, sexuality, and nonverbal displays" (p. 237). Clearly, it is not just in the sex work industry where sex works in women's lives. And it is not just strippers who must live with and negotiate the ambivalences associated with a subject-object dichotomy. Waggoner and O'Brien Hallstein (2001) turned the research lens back on themselves and other feminist scholars by considering what they called the agency/constraint conundrum of feminists who love clothes. They find that although feminist scholars realize that the fashion industry objectifies the female body, making "no distinction between a woman and her attire," they still desire and embrace the idea of being fashionable (p. 27). And, like the strippers, they are neither fully object nor fully subject, neither complete agents nor completely constrained. To negotiate this ambivalence, they even display role-playing and identity-distancing tactics very similar to those used by strippers. Nadesan and Tretheway continued,

Despite the emotional and physical labor that must be expended to successfully perform an exemplary identity, many women may feel that they have little choice in this matter as organizational performance measures increasingly focus on the employee's ability to embody and enact a highly prescribed image. (p. 223)

Given the need for all women to perform their prescribed gender in the course of their everyday lives, the occupation of the exotic dancer may not be as deviant as previously defined.

Much past work on female exotic dance has characterized strippers as either passive, objectified victims of a sexploitation system that trades on their bodies for financial gain or as active subjects who work the exchange for their own benefit. By considering (and blurring) all three stage performances, this work shows that it cannot be one or the other. Power circulates through the system of discursive relationships forming a dialectic of agency and constraint in which strippers are simultaneously subjects and objects. The strippers at Paper Dolls empower themselves through performative tactics that do not confront reified power structures (whether masculine, organizational, or familial) head-on. Instead, they role-play, lie, and distort their images to aid their own agendas. At the same time, a sense of ambivalence emerges through the visual representation as strippers negotiate their own identity resources and constraints. Indicating a level of subjective desire, there is a sense of pride that arises from the identity implications for a woman dancing on a stage: as part of her identity, she wants to be watched. She is, however, constrained by her own visibility. And given the sexualized visibility of all working women, there is no "off stage" for the stripper to go.

## NOTES

1. The names of the club and the employees have been changed to provide confidentiality.

2. For a more complete review of stripping literature, see Calhoun, Fisher, and Cannon (1998).

3. "Mistress" is used here as the female equivalent to "master" used in the previous paragraph. The sexualized connotation of mistress should not be ignored.

4. During these initial visits, I felt uncomfortable, conspicuous. I felt like I had entered a male fantasy cliché: football played on a gigantic television screen adjacent to a main stage where a topless woman danced around a pole filled with bubbling water. My fourth visit marked a turning point in my research. At one point in the evening, Bob, the manager of the club, came over and told me to take a seat in a chair he had retrieved from a nearby table. In front of me was a blonde woman wearing a black Lycra bra and G-string bottoms and holding a tray full of shots in test tubes. "What do you want, sex on the beach?" Bob asked as I tried to figure out what was going on. "Sex on the beach is fine," I replied, still not knowing the full implications of that response. The woman took one of the liquid-filled test tubes off her tray and with her head tilted back lowered the test tube down her throat and back up again; then, with the end of the tube still in her mouth, she leaned over me putting the other end in my mouth, forcing the alcohol down my throat. Cheers rang out as I finished the shot. I was no longer watching the spectacle; I had become a part of the show. Later, I realized the importance of that shot. If I had turned it down, I would have rejected the lifestyle of the organizational members I was trying to understand. After that evening, I had open access to the club.

5. Past studies on professional stripping have found that relationships can turn romantic or sexual. See, for example, McCaughy and Skipper (1969), Ronai and Ellis (1989), and Calhoun, Fisher, and Cannon (1998), who all discussed the prevalence of lesbianism in strip clubs. Although this may have been prevalent for the strippers at Paper Dolls, it was not a finding in this study.

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