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**Stigmatized Labour:
An Ethnographic Study of Strip Clubs in the 1990s**

**By
Chris Bruckert, B.A./ M.A.**

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of**

Doctor of Philosophy

**Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
May 2000
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the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
acceptance of the thesis

**Stigmatized Labour: An Ethnographic Study of
Strip Clubs in the 1990s**

submitted by Christine Bruckert, B.A., M.A.

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Thesis Supervisor

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Carleton University
May 19, 2000

Stigmatized Labour: An Ethnographic Study of Strip Clubs in the 1990s

This ethnographic study positions itself politically by prioritizing the voice of experience and highlighting the importance of ‘other’ knowledges. It is argued that understanding the subjectivity of skin trade workers in relation to the labour they perform requires joining symbolic interactionist insights about process and stigma to sociological analyses of class, labour and resistance. In addition, the skin trade work and workers are located within dynamic social and economic structures as well as gender relations and discourses. The use of multiple research methods facilitates a comprehensive analysis that attends to the particular as it shifts between structure, discourse and individual accounts of experience.

The research reveals strip clubs to be a dynamic industry. The labour is shaped by a complex interplay of structural and interactional processes. Moral regulation, market economy, stigmatic designations and the widespread commodification of the post-industrial age have had profound implications for the way the labour is organized, strategies of exploitation and specific labour activity. At the same time, these conditions are not static and, in spite of the apparent relations of authority, the labour site is highly contested terrain. Industry workers employ a range of collective, individual and discursive strategies of resistance as they challenge the relations of authority and assert themselves. Though not without negative consequences, these tactics of everyday politics are effective and appropriate techniques for women positioned in marginal labour spheres. While the labour of strippers in the 1990s constitutes emotionally, as well as physically, challenging labour that necessitates the acquisition of complex skills and competencies at work and negotiations around stigma outside of work, this employment also affords women a level of autonomy, flexibility and economic compensation rarely available to working class women in the labour market.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to some very important people:

Heather Jon Maroney for being my supervisor and mentor. This project could not have been completed without her commitment, innumerable insights, wisdom and patience. I will remain forever indebted to her academic and personal generosity. It is a gift that can never be adequately acknowledged.

Derek Smith for always being ready to share his thoughtful reflections. More than once his enthusiasm sustained me and provided the encouragement I needed to continue.

Janet Siltanen for making time in her already full schedule to read the thesis. Her comments proved invaluable.

Lorna Weir for seeing me through the first part of the doctorate and opening my eyes to the many possibilities of academe.

Ross Hastings and Bob Gaucher for being, each in their own way, truly inspirational teachers.

Simon and Benjamin Bruckert, who were boys when we started this project and who are now two very special young men, for their love and support even though it meant Mom was busy far too often. My heartfelt thanks and apologies.

Sandy Hitsman for being a great friend and academic confederate who was always there to work through ideas, to encourage, to sympathize and to listen.

David Rawlings for so unselfishly giving me the opportunity to start this academic journey so many years ago. I wish he could share the fulfilment of this dream.

The men and women working in strip clubs who took the time to talk to me and patiently responded to all my tedious questions.

Ann, Alex, Debbie, Diane, Jackie, Jamie, Josey, Kelly, Kerri, Marie, Rachel, Sarah, Sally and Tina: for sharing their lives and stories. Without their generous assistance I would have had nothing to say.

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CHAPTER ONE

SITUATING THE PROJECT: POLITICAL, PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC AGENDAS

Upon entering one of the eleven strip clubs in the Ottawa area you would notice a number of scantily attired women sitting and listening with apparently rapt attention while men regaled them with stories. Most likely on the stage a dancer would be doing contortions and periodically removing an item of clothing while (male) patrons looked on with surprising indifference. Wander into the champagne room, and you would see more women dancing for, or talking with, (clothed) men who are sitting only inches away from their naked bodies. The male voice of a diskjockey or manager might rise over the music arguing with a dancer, threatening her with dismissal if she does not appear on stage. The markers appear unmistakable - the power, oppression and exploitation are so self-evident that to engage with explanations seems hardly necessary.

Nonetheless things are not as straightforward as they seem. The strip club is, in fact, a complex cultural, social and economic space. What we see and how we interpret it is also highly subjective and context bound. This subjective diversity has profound implications: what we know, and how we know it, is determined by whose experience is

privileged as speaking the 'truth'. If we ask a patron, it is entertainment; for the anti-pornography feminist it is violence; for the moral majority it is sinful and corrupting; and for the police, it is a place for potential criminality. If we ask the women 'deep' in conversation or dancing on the stage, they would tell us they are at work. This project is about that work.

Placing the accounts and subjectivity of workers at the center of inquiry immediately highlights the importance of labour without obscuring the fact that the skin-trades¹ are difficult and stigmatized 'immoral' work. In the rest of the introduction I will sketch the political, personal and academic context out of which my particular research questions and approaches emerged. These are all interrelated aspects of a project that started as a political undertaking and became a personal journey.

POLITICAL/PERSONAL CONTEXT

Although the 'obscene' has been problematized since the 15th century, pornography only emerged as a Canadian 'social problem'² during the 1970s (Lacombe, 1988:39). The product of a particular historical and theoretical moment, the issue came to our attention through claims making by anti-pornography feminists and by an anti-sex right as epitomizing, somewhat contradictorily, both a general deterioration of Canadian society³ and a continuing threat of patriarchal practices to women. These two conflicting, but ultimately affiliated, positions will be briefly sketched to locate the dissertation within the context of recent Canadian morality debates.

The traditional anti-pornography position is associated with conservative opposition to non-marital sex, nudity, homosexuality, recreational sex and perversity as well as their depictions. Right wing pro-family, often church-affiliated interest groups, like Canadians for Decency established in 1974, took issue with the new morality and vigorously lobbied for state control of the 'obscene'⁴. Calls for state intervention intensified in 1977 after the murder of twelve year old Emanuel Jacques in Toronto's red light strip. This brutal homicide came to symbolize the American-like (moral) breakdown of urban Canadian society, in particular the danger inherent in commercial sex. This particular discourse has continuing relevance. During the 1990s, community groups periodically organized using moral contamination arguments.

The emerging feminist anti-pornography position was, at least ideologically, very different. In the 1970s, new theories of gender hierarchy, a recognition of violence against women, and an increased consciousness of women's objectification gave rise to a particular discourse on pornography that politicized male sexuality as violence or dominance. In this political and intellectual context, a new form of pornography, sexist and violent as distinct from sexy, apparently emerged (Lacombe, 1988:41). The 1977 release of "*Smuff*", a pornographic movie that claimed to show a woman's actual murder, contributed to a perception of escalating pornographic atrocities and gave the issue prominence. It also led to the formation of feminist organizations⁵ that relied on assumptions of universal female understanding and/or anecdotal material⁶ to legitimate their argument that pornography reflects violence, causes violence, and ultimately *is* violence against women⁷.

In spite of very different ideological positions and political agendas on issues of women's equality, homosexuality, and the primacy of the family, these feminists were united with right wing lobbies in their profound belief that pornography is destructive. The danger posed by pornography legitimated, even necessitated, legal strategies to control it. This in turn solidified problematic alliances, and ultimately empowered and legitimated the state and legal system (Smart, 1989:13).

In spite of evidence that the claims made by the producers of "*Smuff*" were a publicity stunt (Lacombe, 1994:29), that pornography was getting less violent (Segal, 1992:6), that correlations between depictions and acts of sexual aggression are unclear (Canada, 1985:99), and that anti-pornography campaigns relied on questionable social science research (McCormack, 1985), the ensuing moral panic⁸ fueled calls for state action. In 1983 in a traditional state approach to "doing something" (Hawkins & Zimring, 1988:5) then Justice Minister Mark MacGuigan convened the Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution (the Fraser Committee). The Committee funded non-feminist research, received submissions from feminist, liberal and right wing organizations and held hearings across the country. Notably, the Fraser Committee's report (Canada, 1985) incorporated only anti-pornography feminist recommendations precisely because the complex analysis of socialist feminist submissions could not be integrated into legal/criminal discourse (Lacombe, 1988:86). More recent reform efforts have continued to focus on legal strategies, including the 1991 Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) submission to the Supreme Court of Canada. LEAF successfully petitioned for state

recognition of pornography as “sex discrimination against individual women and women as a group” (LEAF, 1992:2).

The extent to which feminist concerns can be addressed within capitalist and patriarchal state apparatus remains highly questionable. Pornography does however afford the state the opportunity to rhetorically address feminist issues while retaining the support of the anti-feminist right (Wilson, 1993:15) and setting up an increasingly repressive social control apparatus with more laws, more police, more powerful customs officers⁹. The application of feminist rhetoric to oppress sexual minorities in the 1992 Supreme Court of Canada *Regina v. Butler* decision and the 1985 introduction of the ‘communicating law’, (section 213(1) of the Canadian Criminal Code, that which targets sex trade workers who offer their services on the streets), sustain concerns that the resulting reforms will address white, middle-class heterosexist morality through the oppression and suppression of sexual minorities and the curtailing of freedom of expression. Arguments of civil libertarians aside, state intervention promises to further marginalize, stigmatize and criminalize skin-trade workers.

Throughout the early and mid 1980s the principle feminist challenge to the anti-pornography position¹⁰, though diverse and politically valuable, continued to be somewhat constrained by its oppositional nature. Envisioning pornography as symptom/symbol rather than cause, these feminist authors championed more proactive measures to further equality and strenuously rejected the repressive methods of the anti-pornography position. Nonetheless, the two positions rarely moved beyond the product to the integration of workers’ experiences. At best, when this critical literature paid attention to the dimension

of labour, it normalized the trades as work like any other (Bell, 1987; Hartley, 1987).

Locating the trades in the class and market relations of capitalism highlights the economic exploitation of workers but does not necessarily bring us any closer to an understanding of their everyday workplace experiences. Such an approach also risks obscuring the specificity of participation in stigmatized labour markets.

By and large, feminist discussions of pornography tended to focus on product or text. Bodies are everywhere, but actual people - as social and personal agents - strikingly rare. The result is a reading that negates subjectivity (Lacombe, 1994: 62). This is most disturbing when anti-pornography campaigners accused feminists who opposed their control strategies of failing to listen “with serious and honorable attention to women who have been exploited in pornography” (Dworkin & MacKinnon, 1993:88). Rather it is in the anti-pornography literature that the much maligned actions of the pornographer are mirrored: the skin-trade worker is objectified as a representation of all women’s degradation and shame¹¹.

The anti-pornography position also forgets about the reality of men’s lives where men not only consume and produce pornography but also engage in sex and sexualized acts for the camera and audience. With the possible exception of arguing that male actors who receive the phallus in gay male pornography are victims of the saber/penis weapon (Dworkin, 1979:25) and so can be conceptualized ‘as women’ (LEAF, 1991), male workers are not even afforded symbolic presence. This ‘oversight’ is politically expedient: when we remember male workers, simplistic assumptions about gender homogeneity and relations to power are immediately destabilized and feminized victim schema

problematized. While we cannot deny social, economic and discursive conditions that exist outside the arena of the pornographic studio or strip club neither can they simply be mapped on and generalized. This tendency limits the analysis of the skin-trades and reduces gender to binaries which obscure the complex interactions of social stratifications¹².

Ultimately the debates among anti-pornography and anti-censorship feminists may have, as Susan Cole (1989) claimed, dislodged pornography from the (masculine) domain of moralists, pornographers and customers who previously established the parameters of the debate (1989:17). However, while feminists have said a great deal about pornography, they have done so without really incorporating the various voices of workers in the trades. Is it perhaps the very politics of the skin trades that led to ignoring the central principle of feminist social science that to make up for having been “kept off the record” (Spender, 1982:14) feminism must take women’s lives as a central point of departure?

It is in regard to the particular construction of workers in the industry that the politics of this research project becomes explicitly personal. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, my history included a variety of marginal labour activities including stripper, ‘B-girl’¹³, peep show attendant and prostitute¹⁴. None of this labour was particularly problematic. I comfortably reconciled my emerging feminist consciousness with my job, enthusiastically reading “Women in Sexist Society” (1971) in between taking my clothes off for a roomful of intoxicated men. At the time, as I recall, I was frustrated by some aspects of my jobs and enjoyed others.

In 1982 I went off with a number of colleagues to a screening of the anti-pornography film *"Not a Love Story"*. There we learned, in the words of director Bonnie Klein, that we (as nude entertainers) were "part of it, [and] serve the whole thing". That experience remains disturbing. In spite of vowing "not to override or dismiss any woman's voice"¹⁵ (Price, 1989:59) the pornographic model of anti-pornography analysis is a caricature - stripped of her soul/humanity/ subjectivity through the feminist lens, if not the pornographer's camera, she truly is "not someone we might know" (Griffin, 1981:36). Furthermore apparently "we do not even enter those places where it [pornography] is sold" (Griffin, 1981:3) and "self-respecting women do not want to [even] see pornographic magazines" (Bat Ada quoted in Lederer, 1982:116). It follows that women who support the pornography industry and maintain their right to participate in the consumption or production of pornography can be condemned as complicit in the subordination of all womankind, agents of patriarchy whose lack of political consciousness allows them erroneously to assume themselves to be self-determined actors. Or they are victims¹⁶? Victims are, by definition, not autonomous actors. Nor are they credible witnesses: the workers' own understanding is ignored, or worse, reconstructed and appropriated as proof of subjugation (Cole, 1989; Price, 1989). Either way the women are 'other'.

Ultimately it seemed to me (and still does) that a separation between the feminist subject and the sexualized object, between knower and known, structures discourses and practices that are oppressive and more alienating, offensive and damaging than the experience of the sex and skin trades. This sense of 'othering' is evident even in texts that

consciously seek to overcome binary understandings. The 1987 collection edited by Laurie Bell, is self-reflective and humorously identifies its authors' own stereotypical assumptions (Bell, 1987:12). It is nonetheless subtitled "Sex-trade Workers and Feminists Face to Face" - as if the two groups are mutually exclusive.

It is in relation to the anti-pornography feminist presentation of women in the trades, indeed because of, and against it, that I locate my undertaking. I am not rejecting feminism, but attempting to expand its parameters by forcibly integrating what 'other' women say. Fortunately my position is no longer marginal. Over the last decade, the underlying assumptions of the pornography debate have been destabilized by new work that demands, and begins to carry out, the integration of real peoples' experiences and accounts.

Sex radicals¹⁷ first challenged the dichotomous and limiting parameters of the pornography debate by reinserting sexuality. From the margins the limited and alienating discourse around sexuality aroused anger and spurred action. After the suppression and denial of the sexual that characterized feminism in the 1970s, this work asserted that the sexual, including the pornographic, was significant. In other words sex radicals claimed agency over sexuality. A diverse collection of sex-positive work (McClintock Text, 1993; Califia, 1994) sought, with varying degrees of success, to transcend the feminist, liberal and libertine sexual and discursive boundaries through experiential accounts as well as careful analytic considerations. This literature holds considerable promise of a more adequate theory of sexuality and sex work and warrants consideration although it remains confined by the very marginality and pluralism that give it strength. It certainly offers

unrepentant workers entry into the discourse through reflective work that informs, and is informed by, theory.

In addition, in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s a number of Canadian (Ample, 1988; Atkinson, 1995; Tracey, 1997) and American (Snowdon, 1994; Mattson, 1995) autobiographical or semi-autobiographical accounts by former strippers were published. Some of this work explicitly 'took on' the patronizing position of some feminist academics:

You're not giving legitimacy to our story of how we're being hurt and who is hurting us. You - with your unwillingness to contact us - you're hurting us....You sit on your little pedestal....you don't like my definition of who's doing it, and so you don't want to hear my story.

Bell (1987:138) [Participant Two]

While the quality of these accounts is uneven, and none is as insightful as Lindalee Tracy's (1997) complex consideration, they collectively constitute a critical mass of public proclamations by skin trade workers. Whatever their weakness, the very existence of this work holds the promise of new ways of seeing. I hope that these collective, articulate voices cannot be easily dismissed and rendered invisible. While I applaud these women's contributions these texts are, with the possible exception of Tracy's, not analytic. In other words, while they necessitate a reconsideration of the role of workers they do not, on their own, move the analysis any further.

In addition, they are limited by the particular moment in which the authors experienced the trades. These writers all worked in the 1970s and early 1980s, before table dances and champagne rooms transformed the industry from entertainment to a service industry. This shift, as we will see, had profound implications for how the labour

was organized and experienced. More importantly the writers consistently believed that they participated in the golden age of stripping and are consequently not sympathetic to the practices that emerged in the trades during the 1980s. Ample, the most outspoken critic, describes the table dancers with whom she refused to work as “part hookers part dopers” although she allows that “there are probably some really nice table dancers” (1988:160). Tracy (1997) stops well short of such condemnation but identifies the shift toward table dancers as undermining the dynamics of the strip club so that:

It hardly makes sense to have strippers at all. Sometimes fifteen go-gos are wiggling on their separate boxes during my show - it looks like a Roman orgy out there, men's eyes firmly planted on a thigh, a belly, a breast only a nose away from them.

Tracey, 1997:183

In short, not only are these accounts about very different labour processes than those of the 1990s, but they ironically legitimate stereotypes that undermine normalization¹⁸ of today's strip clubs. For my part, I shared some of these preconceptions and, at a minimum, assumed the shift to table dancing had resulted in increased exploitation and stigmatization of workers. I was to discover that class, culture and labour process interacted in convoluted ways resulting in a more complex environment and more complicated subjectivities than I would have ever suspected.

ACADEMIC CONTEXT

Approaching deviantized occupations as labour is not original. In the late 1960s and 1970s¹⁹ a number of criminological analyzes in the symbolic interactionist tradition were undertaken that explicitly rejected a focus on the characteristics of ‘deviants’ or

state definitions and instead argued that since, for the participants, crime constituted work, analyzing crime as labour held considerable promise:

Criminologists stand to lose little and gain much in the way of sociological understanding if, when studying people dedicated to an illegal occupation, they will overcome their fascination with the 'illegal' part long enough to focus on the 'occupation' part.

Polsky 1969:91

Numerous ethnographic studies sought to transcend moral and social judgements in order to apply sociological rather than criminological frameworks to illegal or marginal (no distinction appears to have been made) occupations. Considerable work was undertaken on women as prostitutes (Bryan, 1965; Lanar, 1974), fortune tellers (Tatoe, 1974) and strippers (Boles and Garbin, 1974; McCaghy and Skipper, 1974; Miller, 1978).

Although this work constituted a considerable break within criminology, it nevertheless displayed the limitations of its time and place. First, the theorists appeared unable to transcend common (non)sense assumption regarding deviance. If the skin and sex trades were seen as deviant, so was getting an abortion (Ball, 1974) or being a lesbian (McCaghy and Skipper, 1974). Since the deviant designations were never challenged but only temporarily set aside in favor of a different point of entry, the literature replicated and legitimated prevailing definitions. Second, there is no adequate theory of sexuality and gender. In fact, McCaghy and Skipper (1974) linked stripping and same sex partnerships in a deviance-begets-deviance scenario. Thus in the best mainstream tradition, there was something of an obsession with, but little insight, into women's sexuality.

Third, the distance between the criminologists' and their informants' social spheres was never actually traversed. They failed to fulfill the basic Meadian task of taking the

position of the other. Consequently the language continued to be 'othering', with reference to 'subcultures' rather than work culture and the labour itself dismissed as low-moderate skill (Miller, 1978:166). Fourth, the interesting possibilities opened up were never realized, not only because blindness of the social theorists to their own social location but also because of their incapacity to analyze the 'deviant' jobs as *jobs*. While a concept of occupation was employed, it was not extended to the point of erasing the line between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' occupations and more importantly - if we want to better understand what workers do and how they actually experience their workplaces and relations - between legitimate and illegitimate workers. Finally, beyond a few introductory remarks regarding disadvantage, which are the mark of liberal texts, capitalist and patriarchal social structures were inadequately theorized. Thus, the analysis replicated the astructural basis for which symbolic interactionism in general has been thoroughly criticized (Gouldner, 1973).

The problems of application do not negate the conceptual framework nor the value of underlying assumptions. For me, the literature provided a point of departure. First, understanding the subjectivity of skin trade workers in relation to the labour they perform means joining the interactionist tradition to sociological analysis of labour and resistance. Second, we must locate the skin trade work/worker within dynamic social, economic and structural contexts in part overcoming symbolic interactionism's astructural bias. Finally, emphasis needs to be placed on gender relations and hierarchies.

RESEARCH METHODS

Critical social science has established the necessity of 'doing sociology from the bottom up'²⁰, integrating the perspectives of marginalized individuals and addressing historic silencing through the documentation of 'ordinary' (unfamous rather than unexceptional) lives. It quickly became evident that in order to realize a comprehensive and nuanced analysis, strip clubs needed to be examined at three levels. First, in order to locate the industry within the broader context of class, gender and labour relations as well as discursively realized ideology, the social, economic and ideological condition of Canadian society in the late 1990s needed to be sketched. Second, the labour site itself had to be explored in order to extrapolate labour process and labour relations. Third, the project had to operate at the micro level of individual actors, integrate subjectivity and 'get at' how the labour is experienced and negotiated by participants.

The scope of the project required that archival work (on laws, court cases and regulatory agencies), media analysis, participant observation, interviews with support staff working in an Ottawa area strip club as well as in-depth interviews with strippers. Multiple methods allowed for a comprehensive examination and an analysis that integrated structure and interaction. It also allowed me to move from, and more importantly between, conceptual levels in my analysis.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This project is based on an ethnographic research undertaken in the Ottawa area.

The focus of the research revolved around the following four areas of inquiry:

1. How is the strip club industry located in terms of existing social relations, economic structures and moral regulation? What are the organizational and experiential implications of this location?
2. How is the labour of women in the strip club industry organized? How do the eroticized labour site and the commodification of gendered social interactions shape the labour? How is the labour process negotiated by workers? What skills, strategies and competencies facilitate workplace success?
3. What are the everyday and organized strategies of resistance employed by pornography workers both within and outside the confines of the labour site?
4. How does stigma operate? Where does stigma (and the awareness of stigma) arise? What is the relevance of stigma to the labour process? How is stigma experienced and negotiated both on and off the job? How are the implications of stigma resisted?

AGENDAS

This project has a number of theoretical and political agendas. It seeks to transcend boundaries of the literature on the skin trades by assuming a different point of entry, centering upon workers, and making a methodological and theoretical space to make sense of these missing subjects and their subjectivity. The analytic approach, which

considers structure and experience as well as the interplay between the two, endeavors to demystify the skin-trades to add a new dimension to the understanding of labour and expand symbolic interactionism. At the same time I am trying to extend the theoretical tools of criminology by opening up new ways of seeing the deviantized. Finally, this project is not only informed by my own feminism but has several explicit feminist agendas including legitimating women's understanding and generating politically useful 'knowledge'.

Centering the labour of the pornography worker allows us to see her as an agent and to explore her subjectivity without obscuring the fact that the skin-trades are economically marginal, and culturally stigmatized, 'immoral' work that blur the boundaries between private and public, presentation and identity, work and leisure. Among other things, skin trade workers inhabit a space on the margins of the economy, morality and, sometimes legality. It is work that cannot easily be categorized. While it is labour it resonates with multiple social and cultural meanings which operate independent of the labour market. This complex space, where discourses intersect, is inhabited by women labouring in stigmatized occupations. It is a space that needs to be explored.

ENDNOTES

1. The term which refers to individuals who engage in labour that is defined in the public forum as visual sexuality or pornographic, not only focuses attention on labour but it also reflects the distinction made between sex and skin trades by industry workers (Cooke, 1989). While prostitutes and strippers share moral stigma the labour processes are quite distinct and should not be conflated.
2. Social issues and processes emerge as *problems* at particular historical moments and are constructed through claims making by interest groups (Spector and Kitsuse 1973). The claims making model includes: the assertion of an interest group that a condition constitutes a social problem; a recognition by the state of the legitimacy of the claims and (implicitly) of the expertise of the interest group. This may result in the third stage - an inquiry/ investigation by the state into the (now) social problem. Finally, the original complainant group may withdraw its support of the state response, citing the inadequacy of the government action (Spector and Kitsuse, 1987:147).
3. As Valverde (1991) has shown, in social purity movements degeneration is moralized.
4. The liberal position which understands pornography as benign sexual expression and fantasy has traditionally opposed state control on the basis of the implications of censorship.
5. For example in 1977, Toronto Women against Violence against Women was established.
6. See for example Dworkin, 1979; Cole, 1989.
7. This focus on the sexual is clearly opposed by socialist feminist presentations that locate women's oppression in multiple social institutions (Wilson, 1993:15).
8. Moral panic is the result of a process that sees an issue defined, through claims making and media construction as a threat to the established social order (Cohen, 1972).
9. See for example the recommendations of The Fraser Report (Canada, 1985).
10. See for example the Canadian collection edited by Varda Burstyn (1985).
11. See for example to work of Susan Griffin (1981:111).
12. It is the very complexity of gender on the margins that precluded adding men on to this project as well. My preliminary observations clearly indicted that men's experience labouring in the skin trades was neither analogous to their female counterparts nor opposite. Interestingly my informants offered little insight and generally subscribed to surprisingly stereotypical assumptions that: *oh ya I'm sure they love it, ya ya all those*

women looking at them (Rachel).

13. In a number of European countries you can find bars that hire women to provide company for men in exchange for alcoholic beverages. In addition to a small wage the worker earns a percentage from every watered-down drink she solicits. Some of these establishments are strip clubs, some bawdy houses, many are simply bars. Similarly some women are also strippers, some prostitutes; many are neither.

14. My history is unusual not only for the variety of jobs I undertook within the industries but also because I worked in both Ottawa and a number of countries in Europe.

15. Token reference is made to Linda Lovelace who claims “there was always a gun pointed to my head, even when no gun could be seen, there was a gun pointed at my head” (1980:62). Lovelace does not create an alternate discourse. Rather, she substantiates the suppositions of the ‘moral majority’ that a ‘decent’ woman must be forced, coerced or threatened to participate in pornography or prostitution.

16. Female consumers of pornography are defined not only as victims of masculinist sexuality but also as have a greater likelihood of experiencing sexual assault because they are less likely to avoid high risk situations (Russel, 1988).

17. Sex radical is a somewhat inadequate category that includes lesbians, gay men, feminist consumers and S/M participants in fact anyone whose sex/sexuality is outside moralistic, heterosexual ‘norms’ and who is “defiant as well as deviant” (Califia, 1994).

18. This concept of normalization will emerge repeatedly throughout the dissertation. My use of the term is premised on the understanding that what is ‘normal’ is culturally constructed through a process of normalization that reflects, and is embedded in, relations of power/knowledge (Wolfman, 1996:101). The normal then becomes the taken-for-granted against which alternatives are deviant. My use of the term is somewhat subversive. Here we reconceptualize the ‘deviant’ by accessing precisely those discourses, those knowledges, which are used to marginalize. In this way we not only immediately destabilize dichotomized understanding and highlight the problematic nature of normal/deviant designations but create new analytic spaces and access useful theoretical lenses.

19. There was also an earlier trend in this direction in the 1920s and 1930s which is epitomized by Sutherland’s The Professional Thief.

20. The implicit hierarchy of this phrase is personally offensive. I prefer (and will use) the term marginalized, although not without problems the expression at least more accurately reflects process and experience.

CHAPTER TWO

ESTABLISHING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: WOMEN WORKERS IN STRIP CLUBS

Introduction

In this chapter we develop a theoretical framework that will allow us to analyze the experience of skin-trade workers as *workers*. Conceptualizing the skin trades as stigmatized labour and the workers as working class women involved in a marginalized labour process allows a point of entry that by-passes the traditional criminological focus on sexuality or (perceived) deviancy in favour of the relatively morally neutral language of labour studies. The shift from deviance to work is, however, not so easily made since its theory has a limited capacity to analyze marginalized and stigmatized labour. When we seek to make sense of this labour, tensions between concepts of social structure, labour process, culture, and gender quickly become salient and limitations of the sociological approaches for analysing women's work are exposed.

This chapter identifies the key sociological, feminist, and labour literature that will allow us to locate this work theoretically and to develop a framework that is capable of accommodating the complexity of participation in the skin trade industry. The approach to theory is consciously eclectic. Drawing on divergent theories that operate at structural

and interactional levels opens up new analytic spaces and ways of seeing the everyday. The first section very briefly highlights key concepts of structural and cultural class that are useful for this study. The following sections locate the project in terms of labour theory generally and more specifically the work on women's participation in, and experience of, the paid labour force. The focus then shifts from similarities to difference to consider concepts of stigmatized labour, erotic labour and emotional labour that will allow us to understand marginally positioned workers. The final section weaves these theoretical threads together, providing a structure for the subsequent analysis and presentation.

THEORIZING CLASS

This project starts by recognizing that Canada is an advanced western capitalist society (Clement, 1988, 1997a; Nakhaie, 1999). Here social, economic and political relations are organized in a particular manner which mediate the objective conditions and subjective experience of labour (Dunk, 1991; Daenzer, 1993). The former, including socio-economic context, labour process and work site can be roughly understood as constituting class location. The subjective experiential aspect reflects the ways in which one's position within these structures gets taken up and shapes culturally relevant labour and social relations. Dunk (1991) effectively argues that it is necessary to maintain meticulous analytic distinctions between economic position and cultural expression, even though the two are experientially inseparably (1991:32). At the same time, we cannot limit the analysis to these levels. It is important to consider the complex and sometimes

contradictory ways practices and discourses on labour, gender, morality, and sexuality intersect and take on meaning in relation to the self⁴.

Class Matters: Structure

Capitalism, according to Marx, is an economic system where the means of production are privately owned by capitalists (the bourgeois) who, as a class, purchase the labour power of those who do not own or otherwise have access to the means of production, and are therefore obliged to sell their labour power (the proletariat). Capitalism is organized in a way that means workers are *exploited* in the wage relation. That is the capitalist will derive benefit because he/she is able to extract free labour from employees by paying the worker less than the value her/his labour adds to the product (Marx, 1974/1867). In the interests of profit, capitalists will also embrace scientific and technological advances and reorder the social organization of the workplace (Rinehart, 1996, 11) so that “working people are structurally estranged from the process and product of labour”(Rinehart, 1996:12) - or *alienated* from their labour. Finally, to realize profit capitalism requires ever greater patterns of consumption through *commodification* (Rinehart, 1996, 25).

These concepts of exploitation, alienation and commodification are still relevant for the way labour is organized in the 1990s in spite of the fact that the classes have experienced shifts in composition and size and continue to be reconfigured in a post-industrial age. At the same time however the analytic framework must be modified to take into account the organization of labour, the nature of the labour force and the complexity

of social stratification in the 1990s². Wright's (1989a) concept of contradictory class location helps us to understand some of the complexities of inter and intra class stratification without abandoning Marxism. In Wright's model, the private ownership of the means of production is still recognized, but secondary processes, which arise through social formation and (though interrelated) can be abstracted for analytic purposes and constitute "different modes of exploitation", must also be considered (Burris, 1989:162).

Wright's (1989a) model of twelve class locations, distinguishes class in terms of ownership of the means of production but also considers that importance of skills/credentials (the expert dimension) and organizational assets (the management/coordination dimension) for the class location of non-owners. Wright also stipulates that while the individuals of the old middle class are neither exploited nor exploiters, the new middle is characterized by individuals functioning as both exploiters and exploited and consequently are in a contradictory class location³. Wright provides a useful way of thinking about the class location of strippers by focussing our attention on the skills that strippers bring to the labour site; their ability to organize the labour process; the ways that relations of exploitation operate in marginalized labour sites and what, if any, are the implications of particular modes of exploitation for workers' capacity to organize themselves or realize solidarity.

At the same time, this is hardly enough. Wright has been critiqued as overly structural; failing to "theorize the process through which workers develop their world views" (Brenner, 1989:190)⁴; and for not taking into account non-class social stratification (i.e. gender), non-material manifestations of class experience (i.e. culture), and intra-class

stratifications. Wright, while defending a structuralist position, does open up a space for cultural analysis when he maintains “the concept of class structure is only one element of class analysis.....[however] class structure remains *conceptually* pivotal [*emphasis in original*] (Wright, 1989b:271).

There is, in fact, widespread recognition in mainstream work that class relations "never exist in 'pure' form; that they are always combined with other social relations" (Clement, 1988:22). In order to carry out an analysis of the ways workers experience labour generally and a particular workplace, we have to expand the parameters of the discussion since class reduced to structure and stripped of its social context and cultural manifestations are of limited value. It is more useful to recognize that:

capitalist labour process as not simply a medium for the production of profitable goods and services; they are also the outcome of, and conditioned upon, the efforts of workers and managers to organize their respective subjectivities

Wilmott, 1989:138

It is precisely integrating this missing subject/subjectivity that is of interest to the current project.

Class Matters: Culture

The discussion now shifts to the more concrete and experiential/subjective arena. Here we consider that class is not just a theoretical concept but an important social dynamic with real implications. In multiple ways "class matters" (Phillips, 1987:16). Not only do structural relations have real impact on economic and social (dis)advantage, but they are how we situate ourselves in relation to the social world. While economic

relations do not determine culture in any simple sense, the meaning of cultural expressions can only be understood within the context of economic structure and the limited range of options available (Dunk, 1991:22).

Class consciousness is a process of political awareness that develops where opposing interests grounded in economic relations are recognized. Furthermore class consciousness, or unconscious resistance⁵ based in material dynamics is expressed in culture. The work of E. P. Thompson (1966), Willis (1977), Dunk (1991) and McRobbie (1991) supports understanding of class conflict in terms of expressive hegemonic and counter hegemonic cultural forms and practices that are not second best but embody resistance to capitalist appropriation of the self and attempt to construct a self that is outside the relations of ruling. Unfortunately, expressive options are limited and defined by the far-reaching commodification that is the marker of modern capitalism so that culture is frequently expressed in patterns of consumption⁶ (Crompton, 1993,171) and radicalism is "blunted by the inherently regressive features of the forms of expression they [working class men] choose" (Dunk, 1990:160).

We must exercise caution. If we can talk about the "working class having a culture in some anthropological sense" (Foley, 1987:157), we cannot generalize this belief in class culture to a concept of a unified culture or even politicize all alternate realizations of culture. Cultural manifestations of class location are complicated by the range of inter-class differences as well as the fact that class does not function in isolation but rather in relation to, and combined with, other social economic, political, cultural and ideological dynamics (Clement, 1988:22)⁷.

That is, of course, exactly the problem confronting us. Though politically and ideologically expedient, lack of political or social homogeneity does not justify ignoring the existence of the working class in Canada. To do so renders both the material and cultural reality of a large population invisible and denies the possibility of class-based cultural expression⁸. At the same time we cannot assume a unified, single working class culture but must recognize that labour, economic and social relations, are mediated by gender, ethnicity, region, personality and a wide range of subjective and material dynamics can have an impact on culture. How then do we make a space for specificity and still locate the class position of strippers in terms of economic relations and cultural expression?

Class Matters? Gender, Morality, and Marginal Labour Location

Of particular relevance to the present discussion is consideration of gender and morality, as well as the implications of the cultural realizations of socially constructed but structurally embedded stratifications. The implication of ideological constructs regarding women's 'nature' are understood as instrumental in the hierarchical relations between the sexes that characterizes Canadian society. Furthermore, expressive manifestations of class are informed by broader discourses on gender. Culturally it is clear that class does interact with gender to determine not only expectations, but the manner by which women experience, understand and respond to imposed sexuality and femininity.

A further distinction in terms of the formation of morality is potentially useful for theorizing women's relation to marginal labour. The differentiation between 'reputable

working class' and 'rough working class' at least allows us to begin to conceptualize diversity within the working class, and simultaneously to appreciate the importance of morality without undermining the existence of a community grounded in distinctive relations to production. At the same time, when expressions of values and morals are considered we can begin to recognize the extent to which class location can be subjectively experienced, and can be culturally manifested in very different ways.

According to Marks (1996), the stratification of morality interacts with gender so that men's disreputable behaviour is more readily associated with a lack of commitment to legitimate labour, in loafing and drinking, while women's respectability is contingent not only on a positive relation to (legitimate) labour but to sexuality as well. In this framework, strippers labour and their labour site are both located in the rough end of the respectability spectrum. Whether or not the relation to respectability shapes objective conditions, it has considerable subjective relevance (Marks, 1996:86).

We can then start by considering where dancers are positioned economically and appreciate that strippers as engaged in a marginal labour activity. This highlights the complexity of being simultaneously in the labour force but also, because the industry is disreputable, outside the mainstream labour practices and markets. Strippers' labour is not only associated with sexuality, and the labour is largely unacknowledged *as labour* within dominant discourses but the work site is itself precisely the type of male leisure site that Marks (1996) identifies as where rough working class culture emerges. If we consider that strippers inhabit an ambivalent class location that is peripheral vis-a-vis the working class the question becomes: What are the implications of this in terms of culture,

strategies of resistance and class solidarity? Alternatively we can ask: What are the implications of being positioned as both product and producer of rough working class culture? And does the specific location have an impact on stripper's identity?

Class, Identity, and the 'Self'

If class is culturally realized it is also personally significant. In this way, class becomes an identity marker shaping the way we see ourselves and perceive others to see us as well as how we ascribe meaning to our lives (Clement, 1997b:4). This still leaves us unsure of how identity functions in relation to class, particularly when we factor in the apparent ambivalence of Canadians towards working class identity (Corman *et al.*, in press) and the complexity of class location on the margins. We are not able to assume that working class identity is available to, or embraced by Canadians who share the same sorts of relations to the means of the production. The dominant ideology of classlessness and myth of meritocracy have thoroughly obscured the reality of oppression so that class may be suppressed rather than celebrated. Class stigma may then operate as another "hidden injury of class" (Sennett and Cobb, 1973).

Here the model presented by Bradley (1996) is helpful. She argues that three types of identity are discernible - passive, active, and politicized. 'Passive identities' are those that structure our social world but are generally not at the forefront of our understanding. 'Active identities' are those that are central to our own understanding of ourselves and provide a base of action, while 'politicized identities' are those that form the basis of collective political action (Bradley, 1996:25,26). Using these distinctions allows

us to do a number of useful things. We can continue to centre class as an organizing principle and yet recognize that, at least in Canada, it is largely a passive identity. We can appreciate the ways identity is fluid, situational and dynamic - that we all inhabit multiple identities. Finally we can understand identity as relational in Mead's (1934) sense of reflexivity and seeing the self through the eyes of others.

However, the typology remains limited. We must appreciate that identity is not simply a product of social, personal and economic location but something we create using existing discourses as we relationally position ourselves (Goffman, 1963). What emerges in Goffman's work is a dualistic 'self' which is both passive product and active agent (Goffman 1959). Put another way, the self is agent within the confines of existing discourses⁹, that she and other social actors employ to fashion 'reality'. It is how those discourses get taken up, the meanings ascribed, and the strategies of negotiations out of which the self emerges that are of interest to this project. My use of the term will occupy this middle ground that complicates identity, as sometimes "fractured" (Bradley, 1996), sometimes contradictory, and always nuanced.

THEORIZING LABOUR

The strip club industry does not fit easily into existing labour theory. On the one hand it is physically, economically and socially separate from mainstream Canadian society and, as we will see in the coming chapter, the subject of moral condemnation and regulation. At the same time, the industry and its workers do not operate in isolation but are ideologically and physically embedded in the market economy. In other words, it is

truly an industry on the margins. Though we will have to modify and extend its conceptual framework to accommodate marginal work, labour theory affords analytic entry and provides insight around issues of control.

Canadian Labour in the 1990s

Much has been made of the transformation occurring over the past several decades in advanced capitalist nations. It has been argued that the emergence of a global economy, a new technological revolution, a shift of manufacturing to the third world and free trade agreements have had real implications for the way labour is organized in Canada (Phillips, 1997). What has happened and what is the impact on workers in marginal labour markets?

During the 1980s and 1990s Canada experienced periods of recession and a general stagnation of fiscal growth following the post-war upward swing in economic activity (Phillips, 1997:73). According to Phillips (1997) Canada was “wracked by high unemployment, rising inequality, falling real wages and a collapsing welfare state” (1997:64). There was a general impoverishment of the Canadian population as real wages fell 6% between 1990-1995 (Corman *et al.*, in press). The 1980s “assault on unions and collective bargaining” (Phillips, 1997:66) was exacerbated in the 1990s. In Ontario, the neo-conservative policies of the Mike Harris government not only further eroded the power of unions but systematically eliminated those aspects of the social welfare state that aided the most vulnerable Canadians: nonprofit housing, subsidized child care and transfer payments. Greater and greater segments of the population were forced

below the poverty line (Rinehart, 1996:58) and classes become increasingly stratified (Corman *et al.*, in press). These shifts had a fundamental impact on how class was constituted and experienced. Most certainly, such an economic climate had serious cultural and identity implications within the lower strata of the working class.

Not only was the economic climate of the late 1980s and 1990s dismal, but there were particular implications for the types of work available, how labour was organized, and forms of resistance. As corporations undertook restructuring, manufacturing jobs were increasingly displaced into third world countries where labour was cheap and regulation minimal. The service sector grew but this did not, as optimists had predicted, lead in absolute terms to better and more interesting knowledge-based jobs (Rinehart, 1996:74). Instead the traditional service sector¹⁰ burgeoned as capitalism expanded into areas such as child and elderly care that previously operated outside of the capitalist labour market (Maroney and Luxton, 1997:93).

The classed experience of structural changes warrants comment. For working class women, the shift in the labour market did not mean an absolute movement towards more or better jobs, but instead a move from manufacturing to low level service sector employment. Service work is not goods production (Paules, 1991:17) and encompasses a range of occupations with considerable status differences. However convenient and rhetorically appealing it is to discuss service as a unified whole, this effectively obscures the reality of a bifurcated market comprised of a "two-tiered service economy composed of professionals and those that serve them" (Salzinger, 1991:150). It is important for this project not to negate either the complexity of the service sector or the internal class and

gender distinctions which render essentialist arguments highly suspect. Numerous intra service sector distinctions, can be drawn (i.e. direct and indirect service). More useful, however, is consideration of social services, producer services - the former the sphere of middle class women that latter dominated by men - and consumer services or what Boyd *et al.* refer to as the “servant industries” (1991:428).

What we saw throughout the 1980s and 1990s was an increase in exactly those areas of consumer services that are most prone to non-standardized labour practices such as part-time and casual labour (Rinehart, 1996:78). These jobs are largely classified as semi-skilled jobs¹¹ - itself a value-laden term which obscures the multitude of competencies that workers must bring to the labour market. In fact, the redefining of labour as semi-skilled is consistent with the trend towards deskilling that Braverman (1974) identified as characteristic of twentieth century capitalism. That deskilling is ideologically and economically useful (for capitalists) is revealed when we realize that throughout the 1980s and 1990s, at the same time as skills were being denied, employers were establishing inordinate educational requirements (Rinehart, 1996:78). It would appear that labour-dependent personal service industries (Smith, 1984) capitalize on existing age gender and racial stratifications by hiring marginal workers and then justify their low wages through reference to their marginal status (Reiter, 1991:148). Furthermore, while these consumer service workers engage with people rather than things, the emergence of sophisticated technological advances has meant that these jobs increasingly became subject to the processes of rationalization previously imposed on the manufacturing sector (Rinehart, 1996:128).

Another notable shift, was the growth of self-employment as increasing numbers of workers merged leisure and labour sites and started to work in the home for wages. In 1997 one in six Canadian workers (17.8 % of the work force) was classified as self-employed in Canada (Hughes, 1999:1). These are frequently non-standard jobs and innovative labour arrangements that allow the capitalist to circumvent existing labour regulation. So while bearing the markers of the traditional petit bourgeoisie, this trend towards 'own account workers'¹² marked a reformulation of working class labour that is "no more than a disguised form of casualisation wage-labour, often marked by dependency on capitalist employers through some sort of sub-contracting system" (Bradley, 1996:49). Not only do women in this sector experience a greater gender income disparity than their counterparts in the traditional labour market, they are still clustered in sales and service and 75% work part-time (Hughes, 1999:2). For most women, the move to self-employment does not appear to be indicative of upward mobility.

We can conclude then that the 1980s and 1990s were characterized by economic downturn in Canada. The dismantling of the welfare state was accompanied by the loss of manufacturing jobs and the growth of an increasingly automated and regulated service sector comprised primarily of part-time and casual labour. In short, there was a process of impoverishment where, for the majority of working class people, acquiring steady, well paid, employment became an increasingly unrealizable goal while social welfare support was also eroded.

Women in the Labour Force

We now turn our attention to what the current economic situation means for women and how class and gender interact to structure the location and experience of women in the paid labour force. Socialist feminists have demonstrated the need for an integrated approach to gender and class (Maroney and Luxton, 1997)¹³ so that "patriarchy and capitalism become an integral process; specific elements of each system are necessitated by the other" (Eisenstein, 1979:28). Thus gender cannot be added onto class analysis nor conceptualized as constituting an additional level of oppression. Class and gender are seen as mutually dependant so that "gender has entered into the very construction of class and class into the construction of gender" (Cavendish, 1982:67)¹⁴. Accordingly "more attention should be paid by class theorists to women's own work positions than to the conjectured effects of sexual divisions of labour" (Webb, 1990:219)¹⁵.

As such, women's relation to the labour force has come under increasing scrutiny and analysis (Armstrong and Armstrong 1983; Phillips and Phillips, 1993). The post 1939 - 1945 war period witnessed a tremendous increase in women's labour force participation, a change that is generally acknowledged to be related to ideological shifts, the economic climate that rendered the family wage increasingly mythical and the growth of a service sector which relies on women's labour (Duffy and Pupo, 1992).

In general terms, we know that women increasingly participate in the paid formal labour force and do so for longer periods of time. This trend is hardly surprising in light of the economic climate. As Maroney and Luxton (1997) point out, it now takes sixty-

five to eighty hours of paid work a week to support a family of two adults and two children (1997:94). It would appear that participation in the paid labour market is an economic necessity for most Canadian women in the 1990s and that the outlook for female-headed single families is increasingly bleak.

Participation rates of 69% (Corman *et al.*, in press) notwithstanding, women as a group continue to be disadvantaged. Women in the Canadian labour force earned just 70% of male wage in 1994 (Maroney and Luxton, 1997:92) and the prognosis for employment parity in the coming years is poor (Fillmore, 1990:290). Women continue to be concentrated in sales, service and clerical work and disproportionately involved in involuntary part-time employment (Duffy and Pupo, 1992). In spite of the rhetoric of equality, the collective access of women to traditional male bastions of occupational power continues to be limited through complex ideological and practical dynamics¹⁶. The most recent economic downturn has had special implications for women as we lost labour market advances realized in the 1970s period of relative economic growth (Corman *et al.*, in press). This has been aggravated by neo-conservative government policies that undermine or, as in the case of the Harris government in Ontario, attempt to abolish employment equity.

At the same time we must remember that women assume primary responsibility for the daily maintenance and generational reproduction of the labour force. That women have made real ideological gains over the past three decades cannot distract from the fact that women bear children and assume primary responsibility for care giving within the family. Rhetoric of equality and shared responsibility notwithstanding women, whether

employed outside the home or not, continue to assume primary responsibility for housework and childcare (Luxton, 1990; Corman *et al*, in press). Of course, for the growing population of women who are heading lone parent families, these discursive nuances are irrelevant to the material reality of their lives. The resulting “double day” (Luxton, 1990) clearly has an impact on women's relation to, and experience of, the paid labour force, limits their employment options and restricts strategies of resistance.

Working Class Women and Labour Force Location

While we can discuss in general terms women's relation to the labour force, there is a wide range of experience - whose extent challenges an essentialist understanding of women and once again reinforces the importance of class. As previously noted, it is widely recognized within feminism, and increasingly political economy generally, that class and gender interact in complex way and that concepts need to be rethought accordingly.

Working class labour is characterized by limited organizational and skills assets (Wright, 1989a). In everyday terms, working class individuals have jobs, not careers. They tend to be clustered in sectors of the labour market that offer limited advancement opportunities. Furthermore, unless unionized, their work is generally inadequately paid and characterized by poor and sometimes dangerous working conditions. Working class jobs are traditionally not associated with high educational attainment nor status. Finally, although it has been well documented that the traditional manual/non-manual distinctions are not always appropriate in our technological society, we might consider that while not all working class jobs are manual, physically challenging jobs are overwhelmingly working

class. Consequently, the labour sold by working class men and women frequently has a socially unacknowledged (though recognized by wage labourers themselves) youth imperative and uncompensated costs in terms of health and well-being (Dunk, 1991).

The consumer services, where working class women tend to cluster, are labour intensive, characterized by low pay, low capital-labour ratio, limited job security, and poor working conditions. Theoretically protected through labour legislation, marginal, non-unionized workers in this sector in practice have limited recourse to legal protection and are vulnerable to a range of exploitive practices. For example, waitresses are regularly denied the breaks, overtime and holidays to which they are legally entitled. They can of course 'protest with their feet' - a strategy that is hardly attractive in the economic climate sketched above.

Today, not only are working class women's access to well paid employment limited compared to their privileged middle class counterparts, they also experience a greater gender-income differential (Phillips and Phillips, 1993). Furthermore, the double day has a special meaning for sole support parents and for individuals who do not have the economic resources to benefit from the expanded service sector and the commodification of labour traditionally performed by women in the home¹⁷. The dismantling of the welfare state means that poor women's burdens increase: Unable to purchase these services they increasingly were positioned not only to assume extra labour but to organize their work day in a manner that allowed them to meet their ever-increasing obligations. The shift toward contract and self-employment can be understood as not only meeting the needs of

capital for a flexible labour force, but as embraced by workers who must meet increasing family and financial obligations as the state decreases the levels of support.

The nature of the labour market and options available to working class women leads to a number of questions about participation in the skin-trades. What impact has economic restructuring had on the skin trades? What is the relationship between stripping and the increased participation of women in the formal paid labour force, economic downturn, and the demise of the welfare state? How does the possibility of employment in nude entertainment intersect with the changing ideology of labour and the existence good and/or 'respectable' employment opportunities for women¹⁸? Is there evidence to support the contention that during economic downturn, competition within the skin trades is greater as women are more likely to enter stigmatized occupations (Cooke, 1987a:97)? If this is so, what are the implications for the labour process and how the labour is organized?

Working Class Women and the Experience of Labour

Wage or exchange labour¹⁹ has historically constituted a real and central component of working class women's lives and women labourers express pride in their personal and generational relation to labour (Sacks, 1984; Frankel, 1984). Reitano (1984) speaks of a class consciousness centred around the relation to wage labour. That neither woman's contribution nor the role of wage labour in women's lives has been acknowledged (until privileged women claimed it for emancipatory purposes) is evidence of the class and gender bias of 'knowledge'²⁰ which traditionally ignored working class women or

employed stereotypical constructs and prioritized the concerns of middle class women (Phillips, 1987:7). This is changing. The commitment to incorporating diversity into understanding and the increasing trend to do 'sociology from the bottom up' means that the lives and experiences of working class women no longer remain as Glastonbury (1979) argued twenty years ago "the best kept secret" (1979:171). Maroney and Luxton (1997) go as far as to argue that working class women have been focussed on by researchers in Canadian political economy to the exclusion of women in the professional or business class (1997:92).

Having framed the issue of women and work in terms of the changing labour market we can now move on to consider the literature on the subjective experience of labour force participation. This is not as straightforward as sometimes assumed and classism is evident throughout theoretical analysis of working class women's work. Ferree (1984) identifies the tendency of early analysis to dichotomize women's relation to the paid labour force as either middle class emancipation or working class obligation. This binary not only trivialized middle class women and their private and public contribution but (since this argument is not advanced in relation to men) results in the gender-specific and over-simplified conclusion that working class women would prefer not to work (Ferree, 1984:64).

The complexity of working class women's motivation to participate in paid labour does not, of course, discount class difference in the incentives nor the rewards realized in the process. There is evidence that not only do working class women's family relations and identity shape their work environment (Livingstone and Luxton, 1989:246) but that

labour itself is instrumentally motivated by family need rather than personal fulfilment (Porter, 1991:8). The long tradition of women in the informal sector²¹ was a function of the exclusion of women from the formal sector, but also suggests that working class women adapt to the reality of multiple domestic responsibilities and do what is necessary to meet their own, as well as their families', needs.

Analysis that takes subjective experience as its point of departure has revealed a number of interesting findings. At a minimum, working class women, like the young men of Willis's (1977) study, assume that labour is unpleasant and hold few expectations of fulfilment through the labour process (Ferree, 1984). Dangerous work environments, where many working class individuals labour, may even be positively experienced as exhilarating (McIntosh, 1995:303). Ironically, these women may have higher levels of job satisfaction than their middle class careerist counterparts precisely because they have no anticipation of emancipation or personal gratification through the experience of capitalist exploitation (Ferree, 1990:182). Like working class men, women workers in spite of, and at times because of, repetitive work, difficult work environment and limited advancement opportunities receive rewards that extend beyond the realm of economic need and the acquisition of luxury items (Westwood, 1984).

As problematic, dangerous and exploitive as labour is, most Canadians continue to work, or want to work. Not only does a job provide economic resources so valued in consumer society, but work also offers non-economic benefits. Most importantly it structures time and allows leisure rather than long periods of imposed idleness (Rinehart,

1996:6). In addition, work may provide other rewards which render labour force participation appealing.

What are the secondary (i.e. non-economic) benefits derived from participation in the labour market for working class women? Whether or not a job meets middle class standards of 'interesting' or 'rewarding' , it offers women social contacts and friendships (Connelly and MacDonald, 1986:66), and a recognition of their labour that is not afforded full time home-makers (Reiter, 1991:106). Greater economic contribution can also be correlated to power within the family (Ferree, 1984:75) independence, status, and sense of self worth and self-esteem (Penney, 1983:21). Burdensome as juggling work and home roles may be, it also affords women diverse sources of self validation and effectively balancing the demands is a source of immense pride and accomplishment (Eckart *et al.* 1979).

We might also consider working class women's jobs in relation to the autonomy they offer. This approach necessitates that we first reclaim autonomy as a potential characteristic of working class labour. This is certainly a somewhat unusual 'take'. Traditionally autonomy has been associated with a quality of work that is by definition middle class. For example the study by Boyd *et al.* (1991) on power and gender in the service industry identified autonomy (control over own work), decision making and authority (control over the work of others and the right to impose sanctions) as key dynamics which determine power relations.

I would argue that autonomy operates across class lines. This position accepts Wright's insight but questions his conclusions when he rejects autonomy as determinant of class location:

Autonomy always seemed more of a characteristic of working conditions than a proper dimension of class as such...the semi-autonomous category also proved particularly troublesome, generating a number of *counterintuitive* results. For example janitors in schools who also performed a variety of 'handyman' tasks ended up being more autonomous than airline pilots [*emphasis mine*]
Wright, 1989a:28

Perhaps what we need to do is to suspend intuition and instead listen to what workers *say*. Certainly autonomy appears to be important to some working class labourers. For example explaining why she chose domestic service over factory labour, one woman mentioned pay but then explained that "I like this work, you don't have to punch in, you can negotiate your own terms" (Salzinger, 1991:142). Similarly Paules (1991) argues that autonomy is an appealing aspect of waitressing. This autonomy results from diverse forces including the non-standardization of service, the chaotic work environment, the tipping system, the role of management as fill-in person, employee control over speed/intensity of labour and the limited commitment waitresses experience to a particular job.

Clearly we must be careful not to obscure the reality of control. Autonomy is relative and constrained as Braverman so graphically characterizes it as the freedom to "adjust a machine, replace a light bulb, move from one fractional job to another, and to have the illusion of making decisions by choosing among fixed and limited alternatives" (Braverman, 1974:39). In addition, the experience of autonomy may obscure oppression

so that the quasi-independent structure of contractual work and the tipping system that locates women outside of managerial control (Paules, 1991:78) also partially obscures the exploitation of the labour.

Recognizing a positive relation to labour does not justify ignoring the potential physical and psychological costs of working class women's participation in the paid labour force. These include, but are not restricted to, physical danger and stress. Both these issues warrant consideration here as we seek to sketch working-class women's labour experience in order to frame the analysis of the experience of women in the particular marginal labour site of the strip club.

It has been clearly established that, in spite of automation and computerization, working class jobs still frequently extract a physical toll on workers (Houtman *et al.*, 1995:221). While this is partly a function of the manual/body imperative of much of this labour (Shostak, 1980), it is also directly linked to capitalist profit orientation and the failure of the state to effectively monitor corporate behaviour. Among other things the liberal democratic state, while ideologically committed to a free market economy, may regulate corporations but consistently fails to acknowledge both economic and violent crimes perpetrated by capital against workers as crime (Reasons *et al.*, 1986). The result is not only that employees are frequently not protected but that they may actually be endangered by their labour market participation.

The second issue to consider is stress: "the state of individuals that arises when they cannot or feel unable to cope with the psychological load imposed on them" (Houtman *et al.*, 1995:209). The literature has linked this to the 'blue collar' problems of

shift work and automation (Levi *et al.*, 1986:59). Stress is also correlated to the lack of autonomy and control over the labour process (Duffy *et al.*, 1997) task overload, lack of simultaneously variation, few creative opportunities (Levi *et al.*, 1986:55), poor work relations (Michela *et al.*, 1995:61) and direct monitoring of an employee's labour (Aillo *et al.*, 1995:163). These dynamics interact so that stress is exacerbated when, for example, high work pace is paired with low discretion (Houtman *et al.*, 1995:225)²². In addition, there is an interface between the private and public spheres so that the experience of stress is intensified when there is lack of social support for the worker in the home (Levi *et al.*, 1986:55); this dynamic may have particular relevance for women whose role and hardship in the labour force may not be fully acknowledged within social and familial areas (Corman *et al.*, in press).

Applying the insights developed here into working class women's experience allows a point of entry into the examination of dynamics operating in marginal labour spheres. It is only by asking that we will be able to determine what social, economic and personal rewards are realized, or expected, by workers in the industry and at what costs. Also open to question is whether an inherently competitive labour process allows skin trade workers to offer each other social, emotional and physical support (Cooke, 1987b:190). Do they, like other working class women, develop and confirm (alternate) knowledges regarding labour location? How are camaraderie and relations of support (or lack thereof) determined by labour structure and marginal status? How are social relations and behaviour organized to facilitate a successful work environment? We can also critically consider the nature and manifestations of autonomy and explore two issues: first,

how does the organization of the labour examined here facilitate or undermine autonomy on the part of workers in marginalized occupations more generally, and secondly, how is autonomy understood by the women workers themselves?

Finally we should note that while we can appreciate commonality, difference must be acknowledged and we must be aware of the danger of obscuring the variations not only among women workers generally but within the skin trades as well. Not without limitations, Dragu and Harrison's (1988) nude entertainer typology which includes vamp, sex kitten, burlesque and hippie nonetheless draws attention to the fact that while we can discuss common skills, work process and social location at another level, there is an individual component that each woman's presentation is shaped by not only her abilities and appearance, but also her motivation, ideology, personal politics and the understanding that she brings to the labour market. Therefore, without resorting to psychology, it is worth remembering the individuality of women in the trades and the specificity of experience. Notably, the experience of labour force location is related to other identities. The university student who on occasion works as a nude entertainer may well be responding to the shrinking labour market and increased exploitation of youth. However, unlike her working class counterpart, she likely understands the work as temporary and envisions a future filled with reputable opportunities. At the same time, because meaning is forged relationally, clients' perceptions, are also important. These too are unlikely to operate outside of these dimensions of class and gender status.

THEORIZING RESISTANCE

Does the disadvantaged position of working class women in the labour force mean that they are simply victims acted upon by sexist and classist social processes and discourses? If we turn to the literature on women and work, we can say *certainly not*. Working class individuals practice innumerable acts of everyday informal work place defiance, from pacing output to quitting, that undermine capitalist control (Shapiro-Perl, 1984) and assert selfhood in the face of dehumanizing environments (Lamphere, 1984)²³. Resistance, is the "small arms fire in the class war" (Scott, 1985:1) - the strategies employed by subordinated peoples to challenge the status quo. That tactics are shaped by social location, contingent on available discourses, reliant on cultural capital and complicated by the far-reaching ideological instruments of advanced capitalism (Scott, 1985:320) does not render resistance any less real but affirms that ideological and economic resources are not evenly distributed.

For this project a broadly based understanding of resistance gleaned from anthropological (Scott, 1985; Scott, 1990) and ethnographic accounts (Paules, 1991; Sacks & Remy, 1984) will be employed. Somewhere between defining "any sign of life at all as that mythical thing, resistance" (Pringle, 1989:150) and missing the agency of the worker because we "visualize actors perpetually wearing fake smiles and moving along with the reluctance of a chain gang" (Scott, 1990:34) is a middle ground. The skin-trade worker is not simply a victim acted upon by social and structural forces but an agent, who within the confines of exploitive and oppressive practices and class-gender relations seek to maximize personal and social advantage.

Resistance To Capitalism

Resistance can assume a variety of forms and positions and while marginalized populations can and do, successfully employ direct action to oppose capitalism (Webb, 1991) such attempts are frequently mediated by ethnic and gender stratifications (Frager, 1992). The process is further complicated for stigmatized workers by social ostracization and threats of state legal action (Arlington, 1987).

Resistance to capitalist control and efforts at manufacturing consent to ensure that "workers come to comply with and otherwise advance their own dehumanization" (Burawoy, 1981:91) warrants consideration. Within labour process theory, consent is frequently understood to be structured by the relation to work but also confined by cultural capital so that:

manual-work groups are seldom able to develop a counter-ideology to legitimate their own oppositional activities, ensuring that they remain hidden even to themselves.

Thompson, P., 1989:174

However, the process is not that straightforward. We could also argue that positioned outside the ruling apparatus and without the structurally vested interest in capitalism that characterizes the middle class, members of the working class do not have to believe nor reproduce its ideological justifications (Willis, 1977:123) and may be better positioned to consciously deconstruct and subvert obscured capitalist exploitation. From this location outside the ruling class (or the appropriated middle class), the rhetoric of the Canadian dream of equal access to benefits and the realization of prosperity through hard work is exposed. Accordingly, the 'advantages' of middle class labour themselves are

made suspect and the fine graduations that have an impact on status but not on the worker's experience or autonomy, are rejected. For example, Webb found sales clerk to have a "radical understanding of departmental working" (Webb, 1991:213) and "were fully cognisant of the relative insignificance of being assistant department manager" (Webb, 1991:210). Similarly Paules (1991), suggests that waitresses' lack of interest in achieving management positions is not a function of their inadequate motivation: instead, and in direct contrast to images of power and prestige, waitresses recognize the lack of autonomy, overwork, low pay, limited real control over the work of others and poor work conditions of that position. Located outside the status hierarchy, this is a job where the only real control is the "freedom to push around those under them" (Reiter, 1991:128) is evident.

The result may be paradoxical. The rejection of capitalist ideology including values, educational mores and idealization of status achievement may necessitate participation in exceptionally abusive work situations (Willis, 1977) so that subordinates "unintentionally reproduce the conditions of their own domination, insecurity and disenchantment" (Knights and Wilmott 1985:24). For skin trade workers, rejection of prevailing morality and the dictates of respectability may facilitate greater control by capital. In addition, individuals who already define themselves as outside the normative social order may not only constitute a readily exploitable (in the Marxian not anti-pornography sense) labour pool, but the existence of stigma may flavour the nature of the selection process and exclude workers whose identity is incompatible with the work culture (Thompson and McHugh, 1990:320). These become issues that the current study

will shed light on through the consideration of which aspects of the dominant ideology are consistently deconstructed by this population of workers and how this relates to the specific social and labour location.

To understand the complexities of resistance, I would argue we must first of all closely and honourably attend to what people *tell us* and what they *do*. If we do this we will be extending our understanding of the political beyond structure to an awareness and validation of everyday politics that are manifest through interaction (Bookman and Morgan, 1988:3). If we are sensitized, the everyday acts of defiance and assertion are revealed and we can recognize that working class women's empowerment and feeling of control, in and outside of the labour site, are real but "constrained by the way their gender as well as their race and class limit their access to economic recourse and political power" (Bookman and Morgan, 1988:4). This also gets us away from the binary understanding of resistance as the opposite of 'power' (Rose, 1999:279) and allows us to *see* the often subtle ways that the discourses, social world and the relations of authority are *contested*.

Without this awareness we are in danger of reproducing anti-pornography perceptions of industry workers as an acted upon 'objects' and once again negating subjectivity by assuming that:

the model in a pornographic magazine is not defiant ... she has been paid to take off her clothing. She is chattel. When she is chained her chains are redundant, for we know she is not a free being

Griffin, 1981:111

Resistance Through Discourse

At this point it becomes necessary to consider the ways that our social reality is discursively constructed. Discourses are the way we make sense of our social world, the conceptual frameworks that structure assumed 'truths' - the 'natural' understanding, into which the articulators and recipients of social interaction 'slip' (Penelope, 1990:203). Discourses are 'everyday theory'. Here I draw on feminist work that suggests women "live inside a discourse that is not ours and that expresses and describes a landscape in which we are alienated" (Smith, 1987:36). We need to explore whether strippers experience "lines of fault... [disjuncture] between the forms of thought, the symbols, the images, vocabularies, concepts, frames of reference...and a world experienced at a level prior to knowledge" (Smith, 1987:49). If such contradictions are experienced, it becomes necessary to explore how this is linguistically and discursively negotiated. As a point of departure we can consider the literature which suggests 'reversals' which either invert dominant understandings (Dunk, 1991) or actively subvert it via a 'hidden transcript' that "cannot be spoken in the face of power" (Scott, 1985).

At the same time we have to appreciate that discourses are not open to being constructed at will and are conversely constraining by limiting the options that are imaginable. In other words people can adapt, subvert and undermine, but are still working in relation to those discourses which permeate and have become the taken-for-granted understanding.

The approach advocated here assumes that working class persons can speak the truth of experience. It legitimates and accepts working class standpoints (classed

knowledge) while acknowledging ideological constraints. Hardly revolutionary, it nonetheless requires a certain openness, similar to what is required when incorporating women's experience and understanding. Currently, the 'truth' about working class people is often written by researchers constrained within a particular set of highly classed assumptions. As Paules (1991) wryly notes, "apparent contentment with conditions the observer defines as exploitive is a sure sign that one suffers from false consciousness" (Paules, 1991:186)

A final point needs to be made: discourses are realized in practice. However, the meaning is not necessarily transparent. In other words, we have to critically examine performance. On the one hand, social actors follow 'scripts' or the unquestioned ways of interacting. Scripts:

provide our routines and roles with significance and meaning, tell us how we should be acting and feeling at a particular moment, provide us with details of others whom we encounter in the situation and forecast the next move in the game, the next development in the play

Cohen and Taylor, 1992:70

Scripts are the subtexts of the performances (Goffman, 1959) we give, and give off, in our daily lives. Their very familiarity allows participants to 'make sense' and affirm their own conceptual frameworks through continuity. Put another way, if we are all following the same script - our understanding informed by the same discourse - then we can confidently give meaning to the actions of another. On the other hand, the notion of performance highlights the fact that discursive incongruencies can get played out in complex ways. The appearance of a common script can obscure the very process that is inherent to performance: that one party may be cynically performing and "act in a certain way solely

in order to give the kind of impression to others this is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain” (Goffman, 1959:6). Extending Goffman’s argument, we can argue that in some cases the exploitation of a script - manipulating the expectations of the ‘other’ - can be an act of resistance. For analytic purposes, this interplay between discourse and practice highlights two important areas of exploration: how do individuals structure their interaction in marginal labour sites? And what meanings do they ascribe to that interaction?

THEORIZING MARGINAL LABOUR

So far this chapter has attempted to locate strippers within the existing literature on class and labour. Inevitably there has been a poor ‘fit’. The complexity of the particular situation requires an approach which extends the boundaries or existing conceptualisations. In the following sections, we will focus on the markers of difference. Incorporating the interrelated dynamics of stigma, sexuality, and emotional labour into the analysis allows us to tease out nuances of the labour process and realize a more complete understanding of labour practices and experiences. This also allows us to reverse the process of simply normalizing the work strippers do and begin to make links to the specific aspects of work in a strip club to expand sociological understanding of women’s work by integrating the marginal.

Stigmatized Labour

Labour in the nude entertainment industry, as previously noted, is work, but not work like any other: it is disreputable work. The marginality is linked to the position within labour markets, but it is also a function and reflection of its relation to stigma. This concept, like the subsequent consideration of sexuality to which it is linked, will be introduced here and developed analytically in a subsequent chapter.

Symbolic Interactionism has highlighted the importance of subjective interpretations that give meaning to objective conditions of social life. It focuses on the dynamic processes through which meanings emerge and are taken up by individuals to make sense of the world and their place within it (Goffman, 1959). This allows us a point of entry to shift from structure to symbol as well as to explore the *meaning* labour has for participants. The concept of stigma opens up a space to ask different questions and forge a more comprehensive analysis of marginal labour participation.

Stigma is an attribute that reduces an individual "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discredited one" (Goffman, 1963:3). Relationally realized, it is "a special case in the typification of difference; that is one that is very much in the foreground of our attention and negatively evaluated" (Goffman, 1963:4). For our purposes, of particular interest is the blemish of individual character that implies:

weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty, these being inferred from a known record of, for example mental disorder, imprisonment, addictions [or] alcoholism.

Goffman, 1963:4

Labour market location can be a discrediting attribute if the work is illegal, immoral or improper (Polsky, 1969). Since the nature (if not the necessity) of work is something we are presumed to choose, devaluation based on moral criteria and culpability can be justified by the definers of social meaning. Sander's (1981) definition of stigmatized occupations is useful here:

Occupational stigma is a discrediting attribute accorded to individuals or groups who are performing certain occupationally defined roles...[which represent] an actual threat to full social acceptance for the socially disgraced (by reason of their work function) who are perceived as negatively departing from the work norm of those engaged in 'respectable' occupational activities.

Saunders, 1981:43

Furthermore, when occupational stigma is constructed as a personal attribute, the implications extend beyond the sphere of work and the label has permanence so that the former worker is not an "individual without a blemish but one with a record of having blemish removed" (Goffman, 1963:9).

Identity takes on particular significance when stigmatized characteristics need to be either integrated or discredited. The literature tells us that special forms of identity management may be employed including "cynically preforming" (Goffman, 1959:18) and the assumption of other (non-stigmatized) identities that explicitly reject the identity as personally appropriate without challenging prevailing stereotypes (Davis, 1984). Alternately, the identity can be defiantly assumed while the discourse which legitimates the stigma is deconstructed. Finally, identity can be counter-cultural expression and resistance when it is embraced as a "role as a means of defence, attack or adjustment" (Lemert, 1985:287).

Stigma is thus analytically useful. Occupation can assume ascriptive importance and may override other roles (Lemert, 1985), and whether the label is accepted or rejected, it is sufficiently prevalent to preclude indifference. First person accounts that problematized the experience of stigma (Kaiser, 1987; St. James, 1987) suggest that workers in the trades are as cognisant as individuals without the discrediting attributes of the symbolic value of whoredom and that "people automatically assume that its bearer possesses other undesirable traits as well" (Becker, 1963:33).

Stigmatization is a complex dynamic that operates at both a structural and interactive level. On the one hand, it is a multi-level interplay between individuals, shifting subjectivities, socio-historic contexts and specific social interactions. It is important therefore to begin from a position that acknowledges the reality of stigmatic designations, but leaves room for individuality. We must consider the implication of, and resistance to, stigmatic designations within and outside the immediate labour site, so that we can expand the parameters of the discussion to the exposure and/or subversion of imposed ideological constructs. In this project, the concepts of stigma and stigmatized labour raise three important questions. First, how do stigmatic designations shape the nature and experience of the labour site? Second, how is stigma negotiated by workers in the industry? Third, to what extent do stigmatic designations get taken up in identity²⁴? These are key problematics of the thesis.

At the same time stigma, is also conceptualized as operating in another, more structural, way. Embedded within the conceptualization of stripping as stigmatized labour is the recognition of historical process of moral regulation²⁵. That is to, say when morally

disreputable activities are enacted as work, the process, the labour and the workers, are stigmatized as deviant in particular ways that are class and gender specific. This approach, which integrates stigma and moral regulation into the ways labour is socially constructed extends the boundaries of labour theory for a more nuanced analysis of marginal labour. It also raises an interesting question. Given the transformation and evolution of regulatory discourses and strategies (Valverde, 1991:167), what is the role of the state and private agencies in moral regulation in the 1990s? How is this played out? The following section examines sexuality in terms of working class women's labour. Together, these concepts allow us to analyze the labour process and interactional dynamics of strip clubs in relation to the complex interplay between the erotic, stigma and moral regulation.

Erotic Labour

Traditional analysis of the skin trades, whether feminist or not, assumes and reinforces the male gaze, effectively reifying and legitimating the woman worker as sexual²⁶. As problematic as this is, the reverse - the total denial of the sexuality - is equally unrealistic. It is also inaccurate. The performance is sexualized and in fact the erotic (or a parody thereof) is the part and parcel of doing a strip tease. To deny this would be to deny the eroticisation of the naked form in modern Canadian society.

Sexuality is increasingly problematized and destabilized by feminist theorists. Early feminist work that identified sexuality as site of oppression (Brownmiller, 1975; Dworkin, 1979) still resonates in some more recent work (Russel 1988; Cole, 1989) and in the neo-conservative agendas of the state, which seek to control not only sexuality but

its representations available (Lacombe, 1994). Refreshingly different are the writings of sex radicals (Bensinger, 1992; Reich, 1992; Califia, 1994) that challenge prevailing discourse on sexuality and the emotional meanings they carry. An outcome of the 'sex wars' has been a general rethinking of the meanings invested in sexuality and a questioning of the association with danger (Baxandall, 1995:243). Today women are urged to own their sexuality (Califia 1994); 'sex workers' is no longer a marginal term (McClintock, 1993); and the commercialization of sexuality and its appropriation for capitalist goals are widely acknowledged, at least within socialist feminism. These insights open up spaces to expand the discussion, but still do not allow us to theorize erotic labour. Put another way, how do we make sense of sexuality, but not sex, when it is absolutely integral to labour process?

The first thing we must do is carefully distinguish between sex and sexuality: between feeling and presentation. Erotic labour requires a sexualized presentation of self that operates at the level of the visible body. It is the appearance of sexuality, which requires surface acting where "the actor's body evokes passion in the *audience's* soul, but the actor is only *acting* as if he has the feeling" [*emphasis in original*] (Hochschild, 1983:37). It is a visual presentation of the erotic, not actual eroticism, needs to be explored.

Secondly, we must integrate an analysis of gender into concepts of sexuality. This seems rather simple, but in order to analyze sexual presentations by women for (or at least in front of) men, we must appreciate the meanings that participants ascribe to the visible and to the emotional in the 1990s. Giddens (1992) suggests that "in so far as male power

is based on the compliance of women and the economic and emotional services which women provided, it is under threat" (1992:132). In the changing gender relations which characterize the latter half of the twentieth century, sexuality has emerged as a terrain on which men struggle with these new expectations and their own need for intimacy (Giddens, 1992:180). We must then ask, how does this shape the labour of women participating in erotic labour?

Third, we need to overcome the false dichotomy of labour and sexuality; interactive labour by women explicitly or implicitly demands a feminine and sexualized presentation of self. Traditional skills women are required to bring to labour market include the ability to assume an attractive 'made-up' appearance so that "part of job for women consists of looking good" (Adkins, 1992:216). However, more than just a *good* appearance is required. There is a process of sexualisation in the attire (Adkins, 1992:218). In fact much of the publicly visible labour that women traditionally undertake has a visible sexual sub-text. Sometimes this sexualization is made respectable by the terms through which it is described. For example, secretarial graduates are assessed in terms of their "femininity, defined in terms of appearance, fashion awareness, clothes and taste" (Pringle, 1987:132). While Susan Cole (1989) is right that pornography is not mere representation but the documentation of real sexual events (1989:27), this sexuality does not locate the skin-trades outside of labour as Cole appears to assume, but rather provides another potential dimension of comparison.

For working class women, the distinction between the skin trades and other labour forms may be one of degree and explicitness. Sexualized presentation not only marks the

labour process of much of working class women's interactive work in the main and is also correlated to the application of moral stigma (i.e. the costume of cocktail waitresses). Ironically, in spite of the fact that "sexuality is a structuring process of gender" (Adkins, 1992:208) and that gender and sexuality are central "to *all* workplace power relations" [*emphasis in original*] (Pringle, 1988: 84), this workplace sexuality is largely ignored analytically.

Finally, we need to locate sexuality in terms of class culture. There are class-based approaches and meanings to sexuality and its integration into everyday practices (Aronowitz, 1992:62) and shape the meaning ascribed to sexuality. For example, sexual interaction may not necessarily be understood as sexual harassment (Westwood, 1984), and ethnographic accounts offer a very different image of such practices as sexually explicit shop floor banter (Barber, 1992:81). Furthermore, positioned to recognize the costs of capitalism and patriarchy (Ferree, 1990), working class women may deconstruct the advantages afforded by 'morality'. This would have a very distinct impact on extent to which sexuality is openly employed, or (as in the traditional middle class practices) obscured, denied or manifest as maternalism. Perhaps, then, the relationship to sexuality is classed and working class women are more comfortable and willing to assume control through sexualized interaction.

In short the distinction between sexuality and labour is a false dichotomy. Instead we can conceptualize labour in terms of the erotic and see sexuality and class mediating one another. The question here becomes: what does this sexuality mean? Is sexuality a further site of oppression to women in marginal labour spheres? Or does the very

explicitness of the sexuality paradoxically afford women in these areas of the labour market a possibility of actively negotiating a space of resistance that permits them to own their sexuality? Like the young women in McRobbie's study who claimed sexualized expression as their own cultural terrain (1991:51), are nude entertainers assuming the right to utilize their sexuality by flaunting the mores of the moral majority? Can sexuality be a site of resistance? Are strippers engaged in potentially subversive actions?

These questions warrant careful consideration. Indeed care must be taken not to slip into a liberalized celebration of the individual. Sexuality is never simply of our own making, but the sexual, like the beautiful and the feminine, are culturally constructed. We are at some level constrained within the discourses of what is sexual, what is erotic, what is acceptable.

To articulate this without romanticisation, it is necessary to recognize that erotic presentations within already scripted discourse of sexuality are not necessarily emancipatory. In fact, the body in erotic labour must be disciplined. Bartky's (1988) Foucaultian analysis suggests that in modern society all women are alienated from their physical reality. Compliance with the standards of make-up, hair dressing and body clothing, renders the woman an ornament. Perhaps the epitome of Foucault's internalized panopticon is the woman who perpetually checks (and fixes) her appearance, ever conscious of herself as an observed object of others gaze (Bartky, 1988:81). Women's discipline of the body is seen in body language, especially the careful movements as she postures and positions her body/object to take up limited space. If women's site of discipline is the body, to what extent can she then transcend her-self through the body?

And to what extent can the stripper reproduce sexuality without internalizing an alienating and oppressive regime of physical representation?

To conceptualize the complexity of sex/sexuality and begin to address these kinds of questions requires a model which moves beyond pleasure and danger, erotic and labour, to a more fluid position that consider not only how sexuality is imposed but also owned and manipulated as a source of power and pleasure (Pringle, 1988:102). I suggest that the relation of nude entertainer to sexuality provides us with a point of departure that allows us to perceive sexuality and its erotic manifestations as destabilized and *contested* terrain.

Emotional Labour

Arlie Hochschild (1983), in her groundbreaking study on airline stewardesses, argues that the boundaries of labour have expanded and new expectations on workers are being imposed. Capitalism has colonized some emotions so that for modern service labourers, the “emotional style of offering the service is part of the service itself” (Hochschild, 1983:5). Rather than simply selling her mental and physical labour, the modern service workers must now engage in emotional labour which requires the worker, in exchange for a wage, to “induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (1983:7). In effect, modern service workers engage in ‘deep acting’ by re-creating personal experiences in a commercial setting. Such a worker must manage her feelings not just for private social relations (which we all do), but as a commodity to benefit the corporation which pays her wage. The process, which require her to transform her smile into a *sincere* smile, cannot

avoid creating a sense of alienation from feelings (Hochschild, 1983:21). That is, the alienation inherent to the labour process in modern capitalist societies (Rinehart, 1996) is extended into a new arena. Even coping strategies intended to mitigate the appropriation has costs:

dividing up our sense of self, in order to save the 'real' self from unwelcome intrusions, we necessarily relinquish a healthy sense of wholeness. We come to accept as normal the tension we feel between our 'real' selves and our 'on-stage' selves

Hochschild, 1983:183

Somewhat problematic is Hochschild's agreement that the process primarily has an impact on middle class workers (1983:156)²⁷ although it affects half of all working women (Hochschild, 1983:11). This study uses the concept of emotional labour as another point of entry into the analysis of the experience and management of labour in a strip club. By applying the concept to strippers, we can ask if and how sexuality, class and marginal labour location have an impact on emotional labour.

Understanding emotional labour as an aspect of wage work and paying attention to the complex ways that capital is expanding into the realm of the personal also open up questions regarding commodification. The need for ever increasing patterns of consumption to fuel capitalism and some of the far reaching and multi-faceted implications in Canadian society today have been already been noted. These include the disappearance of alternate non-consumerist discourse so that ultimately even resistance to class structure become bound up in patterns of consumption (Dunk, 1991:159,160). That identity and identity markers are increasingly expressed through patterns of consumption and that

commodification no longer simply refers to things, but increasingly to people, experiences, and services highlights the commodification of leisure (Dunk, 1991).

Considering emotional labour allows us to broaden the discussion. We can build on these insights to ask if the service industry is not only expanding, but if it has changed. Have the boundaries of service and server blurred so that increasingly, the product is not only the service but the server themselves? Tracing the genealogy of strip clubs and closely attending to the labour experience of strippers will allow us to consider if consumers service labour in the 1990s not only requires the management of emotions as Hochschild (1983) argues but if capitalism has expanded to include the supply of emotional and interpersonal services that provide a commercial imitation of authentic social relationships.

APPLYING THE THEORY

This chapter locates women in the skin trades in terms of existing literature on class and labour. It was argued that conceptualizing nude entertainers as working class women at the rough end of the respectability spectrum is a legitimate exercise and a useful point of entry. Looking at labour process, structure, and experience allows us to examine commonality between marginal sexualized workers/work and more reputable labour, without negating the reality of working class heterogeneity.

Throughout this dissertation consideration will be given to immediate problems of how to make sense of the experience of women working in the marginal labour sphere without engaging in class or gender reductionism. Rather, to adapt Phillips' (1987)

language, gender is classed and class is gendered. Furthermore, consideration must be given to the complex intra-class differences on issues of morality and labour as well as the need for social class itself to be subjectively realized through consciousness: as a class-for-itself.

The challenge of this dissertation is to analyze the labour of strippers by locating them structurally and culturally, and then to knit on conceptualisations of stigmatized, erotic and emotional labour. Integrating these concepts immediately resolves a number of pragmatic and theoretical problematics and allows a unique point of entry into the pornography debates. At the broadest level, it allows us to refocus attention away from deviance and victimization onto work. The challenge is acknowledging specific class, gender and cultural dynamics without suggesting that stripper's work is work like any other, or that the worker is a fully autonomous agent unconstrained by economic, gender and social relations. By considering how labour dynamics reflect and reinforce existing social stratifications, including hierarchical stigma designations, we can move between two levels of analysis - the capitalist-patriarchal structure and the specific social context in which the labour is embedded. We can also begin to untangle the complex and at times contradictory ways that stigma, sexuality and morality operate.

In this chapter, a series of problematics emerged. Resolving these in the coming chapters may provide a unique conceptualisation of marginal and stigmatized labour. The resulting framework should facilitate a useful and more thorough analysis of pornography workers specifically, and of marginalized labour generally.

ENDNOTES

1. For instance, non-class discourses can take on particular meanings and paradoxically manifest themselves as signifiers of class consciousness (Dunk, 1991). At the same time, the intersection of discourses can translate into fractured identities (Bradley, 1996:23). In other words, these discourses take on meaning in relation to class and function to create the social world and the self in complicated and sometimes contradictory ways.
2. The argument that emerged in the 1970s that class is increasingly irrelevant to social stratification (Clark and Lipset, 1999:29) has already been effectively discredited (Ransom, 1996). It is outside the scope of this project and is not addressed further.
3. Structurally, individuals located within the new middle class (technical experts, professionals, managers) are of particular interest for considering the class location of workers in the industry, particularly managers and diskjockeys.
4. For Brenner (1989), this consciousness arises out of the shared day-to-day experiences that go beyond abstract material relations to the perceived and experienced commonality of the workplace.
5. The point here is that failure to embrace Marxism or develop a systematic analysis of class does not mean that subordination is not resisted. In fact the dominant discourse is subverted when the working class create new meaning, invert existing hierarchal arrangements, and create alternate discourses (Dunk, 1991:159).
6. This highlights the relationship between taste and cultural capital (see the work of Bourdieu, 1986).
7. Clement 's (1988) point highlights the complexity of conceptualising the experience of women in marginal or contradictory class locations. For example, exploitation must be understood not simply in the Marxian sense of capitalists deriving undue benefit from material resources but also include consideration of cultural, gender and discursive resources as potentially facilitating exploitation.
8. See Donnelly (1988) for a discussion of the classed nature of sport which is both site of culture and resistance. He makes an excellent point in discussion of national parks, while rhetorically people's parks, are nonetheless policed according to middle class norms and values (1988:75).
9. Including of course the discourse of class.
10. According to Rinehart the service sector can be distinguished in terms of dynamic (i.e. banking, utilities) nonmarket (i.e. education, health) and traditional (restaurants, retail) (Rinehart, 1996:78).

11. Semi-skilled refers to jobs where the worker does not sell her skill base but sells the ability to learn non-transferable skills for the job (Rinehart, 1996:127)
12. Hughes (1999) distinguishes between self-employed employers who have employees and self account workers who work alone.
13. Simultaneously the importance of adding racism to sexism has been argued (Spellman, 1990).
14. Similarly, race/ethnic stratification is structural and "has always been one of the bedrock institution of Canadian society, embedded in the very fabric of our thinking, our personality" (Shadd, 1991:1).
15. For example Webb's (1991) ethnographic study of sales clerks concluded that the class identity of the women workers was a complex function to their education, age, experience and labour (1991:215) rather than measurable in terms of the men with whom they are associated.
16. See for example Russell (1987) for a study on how the education system functions to reproduce social stratifications.
17. I am referring not only to the employment of housekeepers and/or child minders but also the purchase of such things as convenience food and the amount of time that must be invested in careful shopping.
18. Some excellent work on the history of pornography has been undertaken. In particular, Linda William's (1989) study stands out.
19. Exchange labour is referring to informal sector work and kin assistance.
20. The family wage was likely a concept that reflected the reality of a minimum of working class families (Sacks, 1984:28). Nonetheless, the ideal functioned to undermine the coping strategies and obscure the reality of working class women's economic and social roles.
21. Informal sector employment is labour that is not contractually regulated and therefore is outside of the security afforded by legislative and government control, it tends to be small scale highly labour intensive work such as goods or services produced in the home and sold on the open market (for example piece work sewing) (Johnson and Johnson, 1982).
22. Which suggests that, for example, secretaries and waitresses are potentially more stressed than their managers (Houtman, 1995:225).

23. Stigma and the subsequent de facto exclusion of workers from other labour spheres is arguably a control mechanism employed by capital. In addition the mainstream strategy of exploiting existing age, gender and racial stratification by capitalists who hire marginal workers and than legitimate low wages through reference to employees peripheral status (Reiter, 1991:148) may be utilized (though modified to accommodate stigma) in the skin-trades.
24. Among other things the needs of the pornography industry to control labour through the imposition of (devalued) identity may directly conflict with the worker's need to fashion a non-stigmatized self-image.
25. See Valverde (1991) for an analysis of the social purity movement initiated by the moral reformers of the progressive era.
26. See, for example, the NFB ant-pornography film *Not a Love Story*.
27. Hochschild makes careful class cultural arguments to support her claim.

CHAPTER THREE

ETHICS, POWER AND OTHER PROBLEMS THE POLITICS AND PRACTICE OF THE RESEARCH

**Research is formalized curiosity.
It is poking and prying with a purpose.**

**Hurston quoted in
Maggio, 1992:272**

Introduction

I must now set out how I went about ‘poking and ‘prying’ and explain why I chose to poke and pry in particular ways. Framed sociologically, we are raising questions of methodology, the "theory and analysis of how research should or does proceed" (Harding, 1986:3) and also methods - the specific research strategies. This is a useful organizing principle, although the differentiation is also misleading and constructs artificial distinctions. To varying degrees epistemology (the theory of knowledge), methodology and methods are interdependent and mutually determinant (Fenow and Cook, 1990).

The first section of this chapter positions the research in relation to some interesting political and politicized questions and challenges that have emerged in the past decades in sociology and feminism. From this broader academic context, the second section details the

research methods employed here. The third section is a more reflective piece that considers the dilemmas and problems encountered and also identifies my (often compromise) position in relation to key debates in the literature. As is to be expected with research that entails multiple levels of interaction, not all issues can be resolved. Lived research is too complex, too 'messy', to allow for simple conclusions and neat summations. Indeed, the final part of this chapter will answer some questions and ask others.

THE POLITICS OF THE RESEARCH

The Politics of Feminism: The Quest for Useful Knowledge

Feminist methodology is politically motivated research that aspires to produce knowledge that is useful to women, makes women visible, and opens up the potential for change while causing minimal harm to participants (DeVault, 1996:32,33). How these principles are to be realized and what they mean has increasingly been problematized within feminism led to lively debates. If early work confidently argued that feminist research was work by and for women, the recognition of class and racial bias increasingly destabilized such assumptions. Even acknowledging that there is no feminist method, but rather an array of feminist methodologies (Jayeratne and Stewart, 1991:92), such a grouping has been challenged in the 1990s as essentializing and problematic, assuming a unified world view and special women's skills (Reinharz, 1992:20) if not among women then, at the very least, among feminists. Feminists asked whether having abandoned the search for a truth in favour of multiple positions, we were still locked into a notion of women's standpoint that obscures the differences among women (Stanley and Wise, 1990:22). Does the claim to women's voices, understanding and experience

mean that feminist knowledge is better, purer knowledge based on women's natural affinity for soliciting oral history (Minister, 1991:33)? In short, feminists started to self-consciously consider the subtexts of their collective work to ask if knowledge was being presented as a more complete, scientific truth, in large part through an alliance with feminist theory, without fully abandoning a positivistic ideal of objective truth through inquiry.

In 1985 Krieger argued that feminist work, having critiqued as false and arbitrary the distinction between researcher and researched, continued to assume a stance of distance in the analysis, as if this relationship did not exist. Sally Cole suggested that ultimately the researcher:

appears in the analysis not as an invisible, anonymous, disembodied voice of authority but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests - ones that are often in tension with one another. Since these characteristics of the researcher are part of the evidence readers need to evaluate the results, they are presented with those results

Cole, 1995:195

Recent feminist work has sought, to overcome the universalizing and self-congratulatory tendencies characteristic of some earlier work. This has resulted in the emergence of a body of self-reflective work that through careful discussions and self analysis (Wolf, 1996b; Lamphere *et al.*, 1997) 'takes on' many of the hidden processes of research, those problems, emotions and doubts which have traditionally been obscured in scientifically presented textual products (Wolf, 1996b; Kulick and Willson, 1997). The extent to which these problems can be fully rectified given the nature of the academic enterprise is uncertain. At the very least, the current trend towards open acknowledgement and incorporation of the role of self is a positive first step.

There is a danger however. Lynne Phillips argues that while such reflexivity is positive, we risk losing sight of the implicit feminist political agenda: making change (1995:32). Similarly Wolf cautions against being so self-reflective that one is immobilized. She instead advocates a

course of action that acknowledges, addresses and develops strategies and then “moves on” (Wolf, 1996a:36). I am convinced that this challenge, though fraught with the possibility of failure, are ignored at our peril. This agenda informs this chapter and project, as I take this advice - position and problematize my academic and social self and the research, but then move on.

The Personal is Political: Locating My - Self

To resurrect an old slogan from the days of women’s liberation, ‘the personal is political’. The research was certainly both political and personal in ways that prohibit dichotomizing the two. On the one hand, it is in relation to the presentation of women in the trades identified in the introduction that I wish to frame/locate this undertaking. This political motivation is, in turn, grounded in the personal. As a former skin and sex trade worker, I spent many hours in university lecture halls listening to academics speak a (the?) Truth I did not recognize. Frustrated and angry, I was silenced by my lack of language and legitimacy. While this experience of being an ‘outsider within’ is hardly unique, it is powerful. As Smith (1987) neatly summarises:

the experience of being members of a category that is the object of sociological inquiry [who] can recognize the strangeness of finding ourselves as subjects transformed in the course of reading into objects and of the unspoken sociological stipulation instructing us to disregard what we know of ourselves as embodied subjects

Smith D, 1987:117

In short the undertaking was politically motivated, but experienced as an intensely personal endeavour, a journey of discovery. Here self and process are one and no attempt is made to presume a false sense of distance. I am arguing not only that dialogue is important (Vanessa, 1990:16) but that such dialogue can only profitably be undertaken if we transcend. As for me, reproducing othering means denying my own history, self and subjectivity.

To realize this dialogue we must refocus the discussion from the participant's position. Identifying prostitution and pornography as sex and skin trades respectively is more than a linguistic subtlety. It represents a fundamental conceptual shift that rejects assumptions of deviance by embracing an occupational framework.

The Politics of Knowledge

The dissertation occupies a grey area between occupational study and life history. The approach is consistent with, and influenced by, the work of Dorothy Smith and of action research. This work provides a useful point of departure for my project as it is a fluid space that is not confined or constrained by a specific sociological vision, but the project itself. It allows me to move back and forth between the individual and context with a priority on "creating a new way of seeing from where we actually live, into the powers, processes and relations that organize and determine the everyday context of that seeing" (Smith D, 1987:9).

Feminists and other critical social scientists have established the legitimacy (even imperative) of 'doing sociology from the bottom up', integrating the perspectives of marginalized women and addressing their historic silencing through women's biography or the documentation of ordinary (unfamous rather than unexceptional) women's lives. As previously discussed, existing studies on the trades, though rhetorically prepared to refer to workers, frequently fail to afford legitimacy to those stories and voices that are not politically expedient. Instead, real social relations and people are rendered potent but abstracted symbols. If feminists see their research as politically motivated expressly to transform patriarchy (Fenow and Cook, 1990:79) and for the benefit of women, the question raised is *which* women¹. For those marginalized and silenced even

within feminism, I would suggest adapting Stanley and Wise's (1990) term to consider women in the trades as the 'other other' whose reality needs to be incorporated into accessible and legitimated discourse. Re-centring the 'other other' involves more than adding on another set of voices. It dictates a particular methodological approach to the collection and manipulation of data. Dorothy Smith argues that we need an approach that extends knowledge production beyond tools to adopt:

a method that, at the onset of inquiry creates the space for the absent subject, and an absent experience that is to be filled with the presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday world.

Smith D, 1987:110

In other words we need to "begin[s] from the standpoint of those outside ruling regimes" (Smith D, 1990:631). Here we see a link to action research. Action research advocates a sensitive, focussed and attentive approach that prioritizes the "how questions" (Barnsley and Ellis 1992:14) and is "the systematic collection and analysis of information for the purposes of making change" (Barnsley and Ellis, 1992:9). Put simply, "asking people about their experiences is the respectful thing to do. It also makes sense. It makes it possible to learn about social structures and their impact on people" (Barnsley and Ellis, 1992:13).

Critical sociology generally (and action research by definition) is oriented to change through a focus on "collectively investigating reality to transform it" (Maguire, 1987:3). It also legitimates the research process or Hurston's prying and poking. Certainly, it is essential that we understand the world before we can affect change (Barnsley *et al.*, 1992:9). George Smith (1990) notes that such studies "although they take up the standpoint of ordinary people, do not, in themselves, produce a political analysis or a 'political line' " (1990:646). As Salzinger (1991) has demonstrated we must be vigilant to ensure that our politics and desire to impart knowledge do

not obscure the more nuanced and complex reality that emerges through research - even when such truths apparently block rather than facilitate action². Put another way, while research opens up a space to identify appropriate strategies for change it also forces us to recognize that political tactics must be consistent with lived reality to be effective.

Such work is necessarily political to the extent that the social science enterprise is located within personal and social politics whether or not these are explicitly imbued with ideological and practical implications. Put simply, if a bit rhetorically, we cannot abstract the social context and significance from our own or our informants' lives nor deny their relation to our research. Ultimately, even locating the project in this way, we are compromising and potentially exploiting academic privilege. While ideally "researching from the margins is best done by those on the margins" (Kirby and McKenna, 1989:105), the advantages of access to the public arena and in the construction of legitimated knowledge enjoyed by the professional classes must be recognized. Marginalized social actors in the trades do not have access to the public forum nor can they easily assume the cloak of intellectual and academic legitimacy that affords feminist and mainstream discourses the status of knowledge³. We need to provide a way that women's experience outside the dominant frames of dichotomous structure need not be left unmade for lack of alternatives (Smith D, 1987:59).

At the same time, creating texts remains an important undertaking. Texts are important transmitters of understanding, instruments of legitimating (reifying?) discourses that allow constructed truths to be presented as fact. As such, texts are implicated in knowledge production

in ways that are important if we accept Foucault's (1980) conceptualization of knowledge and power as dialectically related.

Given the prevalence of and reliance on "textually mediated discourse" (Smith D, 1987:110) in the social as well as academic realms, what is required are approaches that:

organize our inquiry and write our sociological texts so as to preserve the presence of actual subjects while exploring and explicating the relations in which our everyday worlds are embedded.

Smith D, 1987:111

Of course the process is not straightforward. The academic nature of the exercise perverts the process. That is to say that interviewing, listening and really attending to a woman's story is a rich, precious but also painful undertaking that allows us a limited, but nonetheless real, way to vicariously partake in her subjective world. To transform this joint event into a piece of analytic academic work is to effect a metamorphosis from the concrete life world, with all its potentials and malleability, into abstract frozen language. The result is necessarily only "a text" (Langness and Frank, 1988:88). Charming titles aside, we cannot in fact "write a woman's life" (Heilbrun, 1988). Ultimately written language, even in the hands of the most sophisticated user, cannot hope to capture the richness of experience.

Politics in Action: Ethical Research

Identifying a political and epistemological commitment to the integration of multiple voices into knowledge immediately directs our attention to the question of ethics. Good intentions and admirable political agendas do not justify losing sight of, or worse replicating, the very silencing that motivated us in the first place. These problems will emerge repeatedly

throughout this chapter as I seek to resolve the many implications of doing research in marginalized social spaces. It is however imperative, at the onset, to centre ethics and recognize that the political must extend well beyond subject area and methodology to truly inform every aspect of research.

Unlike covert research, this project was characterized by open, honest discussion of the research process and goals both with informants and in the field. Nonetheless, there are undeniably complex ethical issues to address, and compromises to make, in any human subject research. As Lofland and Lofland point out, there are always some areas of the research agenda that is not fully revealed (1984:24). At the very least, the extent of analysis and abstraction is unlikely to be shared at the onset of data collection. This problem is exacerbated in grounded research where, by definition, the researcher herself does not know where the research is *going*. This brings up the predicament of truly informed consent and questions whether, even after granting permission, the informant truly "understands the implications of what she or he has said or written, and the 'use' to which it is being put" (Personal Narratives Group, 1989:130).

Perhaps consciousness helps. In an effort to sensitize myself to the process, I attempted to put myself in the place of the researched and analyzed subject by engaging in two preparatory exercises. First I assumed the informant role in my own research. While this interview was not used in the analysis the transcription and resulting textual product was in itself enlightening. It highlighted how quickly words and experiences were transformed into data, how easily the individual could disappear in the very words they had spoken, and how unintended meaning could be *seen* into stories. In addition, I agreed to be an informant in a respected colleague's methodologically-sound qualitative research project. Once again my words became data but here

I had ‘consented’: relinquished control. The result was a profound sense of alienation and appropriation as I read a report resplendent with my words but from which *I* was absent⁴.

These two experiences compounded my dilemma and left me wondering: What, do informants actually consent to? Do they consent to us transforming their words and lives into data? Do they consent to us extrapolating phrases as evidence of our brilliance? Do they consent to our first scrutinizing their world with our sociological lens and then drawing conclusions? Perhaps the term consent itself is misleading, suggesting informants are acquiescing to a process when in fact they cannot, our best efforts notwithstanding, be full aware of its implications. The term compliance⁵ more accurately captures the reality of research relation and is linguistically powerful. It compels us to remain ever conscious of the danger that we try to rectify the historic silencing of marginalized populations through exploitative and alienating research process.

RESEARCH METHODS

Feminist Ethnography

My objectives in this exploratory study to document women’s lives, to understand these lives from their own perspectives and to locate them in the broader social contexts places the project firmly within feminist ethnography (Reinharz, 1992:50) and in the long tradition of field work which focuses “on interpretation, relies on the researcher’s immersion in the social setting and aims for intersubjective understanding” (Reinharz, 1992:46). The study’s premise is that the stories of women in the trades are the only legitimate point of departure and that carefully analyzed personal narratives are invaluable as they “illuminate the logic of individual

courses of action and the effects of system level constraints in which those lives occur" (Personal Narrative Group, 1989:6)⁶.

Having decided that qualitative approaches, the question became which qualitative techniques to employ in order to remain true to the ethical and methodological issues raised above. The next section moves to a practical level. Although not wanting to get bogged down in technical details, it is also necessary to grapple with the specifics and details through which curiosity and commitment are transformed into "textually mediated discourse" (Smith D, 1987:110) or accessible knowledge.

The project relied upon the primary methods of ethnographic research - participant observation, interviewing and archival research. The ensuing data allowed us to move from the general to the specific, describe the social and physical environment, to locate stripping with a historical and dynamic context, to capture that ways these are subjectively experienced and negotiated and finally to extrapolate the interplay between setting and experience. Primarily motivated by a desire to make women's lives visible and their voices audible (Reinharz, 1992:48), the approach uses multiple intersecting research techniques in a way that is consistent with the established practices of triangulation (Berg, 1998, 6). Advocates argue that the use of multiple methods facilitates not only validation but the refining and extending of concepts, the integration of different perspectives and a broadening of understanding (Berg, 1998:6). In this way then I attempted to realize both critical ethnographic concerns but still do what more mainstream texts construct as *good* ethnography - holistic, context sensitive, careful field work (Stewart, 1998).

Archival Research

In order to achieve even a rudimentary understanding of the experiences of individual actors those experiences need to be analyzed in the broader social, legal and discursive contexts in which they are embedded. This simple goal - to sketch the ways the industry is structured, controlled and constructed - proved more difficult than anticipated. It would appear that labour on the margins is not systematically documented. By default, I turned to the textual residue of the government, courts and the media to piece together a macro level setting of the labour.

There were two levels of archival work. The period from the turn of the century to the 1990s was first examined in a fairly superficial manner. This provided a sense of genealogy and revealed the dynamic nature of the industry as well as affirming that, though marginal, stripping is an evolving industry, the product of particular economic moments whose structure is clearly connected to broader socio-economic trends. This preliminary work also highlighted the importance of the period from 1974 to 1999. As we will see, in these years the industry underwent a major transformation from an entertainment to a service industry with a substantial impact on its labour force and practices.

Stripping is a heavily monitored industry and one that, while legal, operates on the margins of legality and morality. This regulation has very real implications for the way the industry is organized, and consequently, how the labour is experienced. In order to locate the industry within the context of state management, documents from a number of regulatory bodies needed to be examined, including municipal bylaws, provincial health regulations and corporate registrations. Preliminary analysis of these documents quickly highlighted two key questions.

How was the industry is regulated? And what was the moral subtext which legitimated this regulation?

Shifting from regulation to coercive control, laws and legal judgements provided insight into how the industry was monitored through the criminal justice apparatus. By carefully analysing relevant sections of the criminal code, as well as court cases that addressed either public nudity or indecent performance⁷, I was able to tease out how the state, through its most coercive level of intervention, structured and confined industry practices. At the same time laws and judicial hearings are, of course, much more than illustrations of social control: they speak to particular discursive and moral moments (Smith, G., 1990). This research also allowed a glimpse into these moments and into changing discourses on strippers and strip clubs.

Finally in order to 'fill out' the contextual picture, I turned to the mass media. This aspect of the project was premised on the assumption that media are an extremely influential institution (Herman and Chomsky, 1988) that reflect and reinforce but also shape dominant social discourses. Seeing how strip clubs and the women who labour in them are portrayed in the media was a useful endeavour. Using the *Ottawa Citizen*, the major Ottawa area English newspaper, as my primary source⁸, all articles between the period of 1974 - February 2000⁹ were extracted¹⁰ for analysis.

The media was useful in another way as well. Though initially intended to be solely for the purposes of discourse analysis, newspapers and magazines became a source for sketching out the history of strip clubs. Because stripping as an industry has been largely ignored by mainstream sources, I was forced to turn to the somewhat sensationalized, but still fact-based, mass media

presentations. Information culled in this way was always substantiated either through interviews or further focussed archival research.

Participant Observation

Fieldwork allows the comprehensive examination of a social setting and an appreciation of relations and interactions not realizable through other approaches. It allows “direct experiential and observational access to the insiders’ world of meaning” (Jorgensen, 1989:15). The subsequent development of analysis grounded in the everyday experience of participants is well established (Jorgenson, 1989:18). Field work is particularly appropriate in stigmatized labour sites which have clear insider/outsider demarcations¹¹ and where particular presentations of self mean that everyday reality is obscured by public presentations hidden in discourse.

Initially, I had assumed that my personal experience already afforded me experiential insight and depth of understanding. I quickly discovered not only that the transformation of the industry had rendered my experience obsolete, but that as a full participant I had not been a particularly systematic observer. I lacked a true sense of what *happens* in strip clubs, how they operate and how personal and professional relations are structured in the labour site. I also felt linguistically challenged. Effective interviewing and analysis requires fluency in the local language or what Denzin calls the idiolect: the special language, concepts, codes and assumed knowledge of an individual or group (1989:71)¹². It was in search of this fluency that I elected to enter the field.

The primary field work consisted of a total of twelve months (divided into two periods February to August 1997 and February to June 1998) during which I worked full-time¹³ as a

bartender and occasionally as a waitress in an Ottawa area strip club. In addition, I also worked four shifts as a 'shooter girl'¹⁴ in a somewhat atypical strip club outside of Ottawa and went to all clubs as a client at least once. Experience in the food and beverage industry, history in the trades and personal relationships with managers made entry relatively easy. Standing behind the bar proved to be an effective physical and social location. In multiple ways, the role and I were 'legitimate'. I was performing established and necessary labour; I was a competent worker; and like, my co-workers, I was economically dependent on the income I earned. I was able to become part of the environment; I had access to all areas of the club; I was privy to conversations between and among strippers, support staff and managers and was generally positioned to observe club dynamics. In spite of the fact that the management and staff at the club were all apprised of my research interests prior to my entry into the field and casually reminded of them periodically. I was largely invisible.

Working in the club was comfortable. The negotiations, strategies and "interactional shitwork" (Reinharz, 1992: 60), like those at other working class labour sites, was reassuringly familiar. At the same time, the field work was not without problems. Many of these issues will be addressed in subsequent chapters, but it is necessary to note that at times my very legitimacy and familiarity often blurred the lines between my researcher-self and my bartender-self. I went 'native'. Working in a strip club became an identity both in and out of the labour site and I, much to the dismay of family, assumed the language and markers of a highly sexualized industry¹⁵. As Altork (1995) points out, we must remain cognisant of our own sexuality in the field. This recognition of our own, and not just our informants' sexuality, is particularly important when the field is permeated by a sexual script. Highlighting the contradiction inherent in field work which

requires us to be “simultaneously detached and intensely engaged” (Willson, 1995:255), I periodically found myself a non-observing participant focussed on the work and everyday politics. In short, field work was a contradictory experience - simultaneously fun, exciting, difficult, disheartening and confusing.

Other more practical problems also emerged. It is a truism that participant observation, particularly in marginal or illegal social spaces, can be problematic (Berg, 1998). When researchers become insiders they are also in a position to suffer the consequences of that location. During the course of the research, I became aware of illicit prostitution and drug transactions. In itself, this knowledge posed no ethical dilemma since I perceive state intervention into these areas of social life as, at best, intrusive and morally questionable. More worrying, however, was the possibility of criminal prosecution. I was repeatedly left in charge of the bar which opened up the possibility of charges under either section 168(1) (allowing an indecent performance), or section 210 (operating a bawdy house) of the Canadian Criminal Code should we have been raided. Charges under the Narcotics Control Act were also a threat. At one point, as part of an ongoing drug investigation, the phones of the establishment were tapped and an undercover police officer was unwittingly employed as a doorman¹⁶. Ultimately my exit from the field was precipitated by a change in club policy. When doormen were employed only two nights a week, I was not able to ensure the safety of the strippers nor did I have confidence in police protection. Under the circumstances, I felt uncomfortable continuing in the role.

Interviews

A series of semi-structured interviews lasting between one and three hours were undertaken with individuals working as support staff - disc jockeys, waitresses, doormen and two managers, one of whom I worked with (see Appendix 1 for Interview Guide). Most of these interviews were conducted at work on slow summer afternoons. I shared work and social space with these informants and as a result, the interchanges were extremely relaxed and marked by frequent references to shared experiences. These interviews, which were only partially transcribed, were intended to flesh out what I was observing and to garner insight into the multiple dynamics operating at the club. Like the archival work and participant observation, interviews with support staff were secondary methods designed to provide context and analytic insights. In other words, these were substantiating rather than substantive sources.

It is the interviews with performing informants that I will focus on in this chapter just as I privileged this data in subsequent analytic chapters. This understanding of interviewing as a legitimate approach in its own right contradicts the traditional view of the technique as a second-best method to be used when participant observation is impractical or impossible (Brenner, 1985:149). Lofland and Lofland argue against sharp distinctions between the two research techniques (1984:13). I would agree, but instead conceptualize these as complementary: participant observation allows the researcher to analyze a setting; observation of social interaction; discerning what people *do*; and attending to speech. Intensive interviewing holds the promise of revelation of subjective understanding and personal meaning and allows access to (admittedly mediated) thoughts and feelings. In keeping with the research agenda, I adopted the

model suggested by Reinharz (1992) which suggests that fieldwork and interviews be conceptualized as moving from context to the individual within (1992:50).

Intensive Interviews

Gathering rich, detailed material about an unexplored area of social life suggests that intensive interviewing - the collection of detailed accounts by individuals who have first hand experience of the area under investigation - is appropriate. Such an approach is useful for accessing experience as well as ideas, beliefs, understandings and perceptions. It facilitates the development of hypotheses, allowing themes to be identified and meanings explored (Paget, 1983:78). By bringing the subjectivities of the people studied into knowledge (Cotterill, 1992:594), this approach reveals how insiders make sense of their social world, understand their location, and negotiate an identity.

For this study, fifteen female strippers working in the Ottawa area in 1997 and 1998 were interviewed¹⁷. Mindful of the need not to exploit relations of authority, with one exception¹⁸ I elected not to interview the women with whom I worked. Since no claim to a representative sample is made, the social composition of the group will be only be sketched briefly. The women ranged in age from 21 to 46. All had been working in the industry for a minimum of one year, but most had considerably longer careers. One informant had worked in the industry for twenty-eight years, beginning her career as a go-go dancer in the 1960s. It is impossible to draw a composite profile. A few of the women were exclusively heterosexual, most bi-sexual and two self-identified as lesbian. Approximately half the women were mothers, while one was a grandmother. Most were from working class families, although only two identified themselves in terms of class (one

of these a middle class informant). Their backgrounds spanned the class spectrum from very marginal, criminalized parents to comfortable middle class. All, except one, were Anglophones. One was a woman of colour. The one constant was that they were all articulate, insightful individuals who had something to say. This is of primary importance. We must acknowledge that the success of this sort of project is clearly contingent on reflective verbal interviewees (Reinharz, 1992:21), individuals who are willing and able to communicate experiences, thoughts and pain. When we centre the informant in this way, we also appreciate that the sophistication of the researcher, the quality of the techniques, instruments and approach can only take us so far.

The interviews were collected over the course of twenty months. Most were conducted in the informants' homes, although four took place in restaurants. Lasting between one and one-half, and three and one-half hours these interviews were relatively unstructured and flexible so as to allow ideas and issues to develop, for individuality to emerge and for the informants to identify what was significant (Reinharz, 1992:21). These were free-flowing interactions with a very basic and simple interview guide (see Appendix 2). The use of such an instrument was intended to ensure consistent attention to key areas and provide a common basis for comparison.

The collection of in-depth material requires that the interview itself be participant led and characterized as an interaction instead of a question and answer sessions. The interview is an exercise in data collection that is made easier and more pleasant through the illusion that it is a conversation. This frequent analogy is potentially misleading. Unlike true conversation, this interaction requires strategic questions (or probes) which are (without judgement) asked, by an interviewer who is much more attentive, to potentially leading body language, tone and expression. How many of us take careful notes after conversations? Anderson and Jack (1991)

point out that there is also a need to break the normal conventions of conversation such as deflecting the discussion from painful issues. Finally, during the interview, it is also necessary to allow periods of unself-conscious silence instead of engaging in a "desperate attempt to mine some gems" (Connors, 1986:47).

In contrast to a notion that interviewing requires only already mastered skills of listening and talking (Denzin, 1989:12), feminist work suggests that good interviewing requires the development of acute listening skills. 'Hyper-listening' ideally practised without the participant hearing you think, is perhaps the key initial skill to master (and one reason to record the interaction). Hyper-listening means "attend(ing) to both dominant and muted channels" (Anderson and Jack, 1991:11). This involves listening not only to what is said, but what is not said (hesitations) or cannot be said because of a lack of linguistic symbols or conceptual frameworks (DeVault, 1990:106) or because, contravening the acceptable world view, it is unspeakable. Listening also means attending to nuances of meaning and identifying those times when meaning is not shared (Mishler, 1986:53).

Research Process

Informants were asked if they were comfortable with my use of a tape recorder. Three declined, and in these cases I relied on my notes. All other interviews were recorded and then carefully transcribed in a manner that captured words, tone and hesitations. In spite of my attempts to do an honest transcription precious material is lost when interaction is encoded into linguistic symbols. Not only were nuances of language rendered invisible, it is also impossible to capture (or remember) all non-verbal communication. In the end in spite of the richness of the

data obtained in this way, I continue to be disturbed by the limitations of coded scripts and my ability to read the interaction properly. After all, each interview is a story and the outcome of multilevel personal and situational interactional dynamics that operate in complex and contradictory ways. Explicitly, we have the informant's story, or more accurately the presentation that emerges in the context of a particular interview, my interpretation and analysis and the interview context itself. More implicit is my academic and personal story as it intersects and interacts with our shifting and situational presentations of self. Each interview is a "collaborative venture...the outcome is the result of a dual input from two individuals with their own experiences, biases, interests, needs and motives" (Langness and Frank, 1988:61) at a particular social and personal moment.

In the interests of protecting the confidentiality of my informants, all identifying information was changed during transcription (see Appendix #3). This included changing the names of clubs and of informants themselves; altering any identifying aspects of stories and sometimes changing locations. The sensitive nature of the data that was solicited also meant that any reference to criminal activity was deleted. In light of the information shared and the potential for state sanction, the tapes were destroyed after transcription and examination. Informants were provided with the opportunity to review the transcripts and further delete material. In short, I am confident that every reasonable effort was made to guarantee the confidentiality of informants and protect the women from disclosure.

I am arguing that the methods I employed were appropriate given the organizing frame and established priorities and the need to move from context to specifics. It must however be acknowledged that the approaches to this and any other project are shaped by other factors.

Specifically I am referring to restrictions such as ethics board, material constraints such as time and money, and less tangible but equally real determinants including emotional fortitude, morality, social skills and theoretical understanding, the strengths and weaknesses that the researcher brings to the project. Although findings are presented as accurate they are in fact necessarily constrained and defined by the reality of our personal, social and academic worlds.

Analysis

Before moving on the dilemmas and problems of research we have to consider the analysis. To ignore this process would construct a sharp distinction between the collection and analyzes and result is a pseudo-scientific presentation that denies the subjectivity of the researcher precisely at the moment when that subjectivity is intellectually and textually realized:

The very act of giving form to a whole life....[requires] considering the meaning of the individual and social dynamics that seem to have been most significant in shaping the life. The act of constructing a life narrative forces the author to move from accounts of discrete experiences to an account of why and how the life took the shape it did.

Personal Narratives Group 1989:4

Recognizing the value of interpretation opens up a space for the feminist researcher. It does not, however, provide a licence to impose meaning upon or deligitimate informants. The question comes back to the tensions between interpreting and analysing and remaining true to the voice (or more perhaps more accurately and problematically the understanding) of informants. How can we proclaim that informants reveal the truth of experience (Personal Narrative Group, 1989:261), yet claim analytic authority? The legitimacy of doing so is in part supported by my own experience. As a conscious feminist stripper, I was certainly able to understand the industry, but lacked the conceptual and theoretical tools necessary for a sociological analysis. In my desire

to resolve this tension and ‘move on’, I turned back to the literature on inductive methods and grounded theory for direction (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Analysis of the interview data started during transcription. Ultimately the exercise of transcribing the interviews, though time consuming, proved invaluable. Not only was it an excellent way of familiarizing myself with the material but it left me with a text that functioned as a check on my selective memory. Consequently, I reject analysis based on memory (DeVault 1990:107) and would suggest that field notes cannot hope to provide comparable data for analysis. Careful transcripts also allow us to extend the analysis from what is said (the content of the narrative), to how it is said (the narrative form and language).

Having produced a textual product, I spent many days reading and rereading the transcripts waiting for them to *talk to me*. Of course what I *heard* was unavoidably shaped by the conceptual channels to which I was tuned. I tried. As themes and patterns emerged, they were identified and transcripts were again reread with an increasingly focussed eye to check the accuracy of these themes. I then turned to my field notes and support staff interviews to provide another point of entry¹⁹. Next, the context revealed through archival work was reconsidered to see how things fit. As I started to make sense or develop analytic frameworks, the transcripts were again reviewed, this time to look for inconsistencies. It was only when my analysis fit all the data and could integrate apparent contradictions that it was related back to the sociological literature. Throughout, I continually challenged myself. Was I being as rigorous and faithful to the data as possible, or was I imposing meanings? Beyond this I applied a personal ‘acid test’. As analytic frameworks congealed in my head, I honestly asked myself whether I could defend²⁰ this analysis, not to an academic audience, but to the women in the field.

There is nothing particularly new or exciting about my approach to analysis, but for me it helped resolve some of the tensions in feminist research. Ultimately it supported the value of triangulation, research rigour and grounded theory. With such an inductive method, there is no claim that the product is objective. It is necessarily shaped by my subjectivity. That is, what I saw, or more importantly, failed to see was in part a consequence of the strengths and weaknesses of my personal, political and academic baggage. However, allowing the accounts of experiences (data) to speak to the focus, categories, and images of the analysis prior to the development of a grounded theoretical framework, opened up a space that held the promise of discovery. Certainly the end product is very different from my proposal. I was continually reevaluating my positions - and (ultimately) my-self. In order to 'make sense' I was forced to abandon some concepts, embrace others, and periodically rethink my own integrative theoretical frameworks.

The process has left me clinging to an admittedly modernist faith in 'doing sociology'. While postmodernists have made us cautious about truth claims, the very process of research requires some acceptance of representational ability. Perhaps we cannot speak the truth, but can at least strive to realize a truth - and perhaps even a truth, grounded in experiences of women's everyday lives that I still believe should be privileged. Without this, research becomes an exercise in futility. As Stewart points out, "it is difficult to see why people would put up with the tribulations of participant observation, would bother to be there if they did not have some hope that their account would be more or less true" (1998,12). Certainly my research is based both on the underlying belief that we should not abandon rigorous sociological inquiry in favour of free-flowing individualism. Instead, I am convinced, new methodological spaces need to be opened up that facilitate a broader vision.

PROBLEMS OF POWER AND TRUTH

This section somewhat arbitrarily classifies the methodological issues raised above into questions of the research process and representation. Reflecting on the literature and highlighting key methodological debates allows me to locate my work within broader ethical issues. These problematics are all operating along the axis of power. Wolf (1996a) argues that the “most central dilemma for contemporary feminist in fieldwork, from which other contradictions are derived, is power and the unequal levels of control that are often maintained, perpetuated, created and re-created during the field work” (Wolf, 1996a:2). Acknowledging the power and privilege we hold is not easy for feminists. Commitment to politics of equality however means that we must address the fact that power is inherent to research and enters at the levels of personal interaction, process and during writing.

Dilemmas of the Research Process: Getting at the ‘Truth’

Shared Experience

There is a long history in ethnographic work of “starting where you are” (Lofland and Lofland, 1984:9) and using one's own life experience in intellectual work (Denzin, 1989:26). This basic principle is neither as simple nor as straight-forward as it appears. While there are advantages to shared experience, language and understanding, there are also potentially negative consequences (Zavella, 1997). In the words of Lofland and Lofland (1984) “whatever that relationship (to the setting), it is simultaneously an advantage and a drawback” (1984:16). Krieger (1985) argues that investment of self must be tempered with clear consideration of what can be realized for the researcher through the process, warning against unrealistic expectations.

Although we, as researchers, are inevitably changed by the research process (Daniels, 1983:196) and may achieve greater insight, we cannot, and should not, attempt to resolve our own problematic histories through researching others. Nor should the research process itself simply validate our sense of personal and social merit. Langness and Frank note that too close an affiliation to the field may result in missing the obvious (1988:38)²¹. There is also perhaps a danger of assuming one's own self as normative, and becoming the primary source of data. It is for these reasons that I, after considerable thought, decided to remain a partial outsider, restricting my participant observation to a non-dancing role. I was afraid that if I worked as a stripper I would validate my own experience (and given my social location it could not be completely legitimate) and mute the complex and contradictory experiences of others.

Alternately we could argue that the insider/outsider discussion is misplaced as it constructs a false dichotomy. Zavella (1997), after considering the merits and problematics of being an insider doing research on Chicano women, ultimately rejects a clear delineation between the two statuses and suggests a continuum where researchers identify themselves as simultaneously insiders and outsiders (1997:44). This approach requires that we make the space of the researcher visible so as to acknowledge its advantages and limitations. In this project I was an outsider within, my field work location and personal history offset by the existence of a research agenda and lifestyle options. This ambivalent unnatural location will necessarily shape what I saw, how I saw and, importantly what I failed to see.

Rapport

Rapport is a well-established requirement of qualitative research, inevitably noted in the literature on interviewing techniques. Rapport, as I understand it, is the social-scientific version

of the connection, the spark we experience with some, but not other, individuals. Even if we perform in daily life and manipulate our presentation of self to ensure that others "act voluntarily in accordance with [our] own wishes" (Goffman, 1959:4), I still find something vaguely offensive about this particularly instrumental version of interpersonal relations. For me, the objectification of very personal social dynamics and the reduction of rapport to technique remains troubling. At the same time, my gender as well as my social and personal location facilitated an interchange between myself and my informants that might have been difficult for differently situated individuals. Furthermore, though disliking the objectification and instrumentalization of rapport in the literature, I was nonetheless clearly anxious to achieve and maintain a sympathetic relationship with my informants and managed my presentation of self accordingly.

Disclosure

Associated with questions of rapport and shared experience is disclosure. How much of her own history, and for what purpose, should the researcher share with informants? Although self-disclosure has the potential to increase criticism and render the researcher herself vulnerable (Reinharz, 1992:34), it also facilitates communication and a more complex discussion because experientially grounded meaning is shared. Here the researcher can assure informants that they can "comprehend what they [have] to say in a way no outsider could" (Evans, 1979:x).

For me, whether to disclose my work history was a non-question. Both in the field work and during interviews I was very honest about my background. Since many female bar staff in strip clubs have previously worked as strippers, my history was ordinary. In the interviews, disclosure was not intended to garner a better (or more revealing) interview but rather arose out of a sense that honesty precluded an artificial distancing of informants or the subject area.

However, since the research goal was not an autobiographical account or even auto-ethnography²², I negotiated this by acknowledging my own location (to do otherwise would be fraudulent) without imposing my perspective. This compromise was intended to facilitate insight and maximize understanding without engaging in self-exploitation or self-indulgence.

Disclosure in an academic context is much more loaded. I became aware that, when there is an incongruence between identities, rapport and disclosure could have unintended consequences in a manner not discussed in the literature. I have revealed a self that, irrelevant to the academy, is usually not shared in that context. During transcription, I was continually tempted to edit out my own stories. While I was fearful that this is indicative of a willingness to appropriate and utilize another woman's history but not my own, it is also undeniable that informants and an anonymity I did not.

Relationship

Although feminist methodologists problematize a contradiction between getting "reliable and valid data and make(ing) the interviewee believe they are not simply a statistics-to-be" (Oakley, 1981:33). Forging, as they advocate, an interactive relationship between researcher and informant may make communications easier, but does not, in itself, render the process any less instrumental. While Reinharz (1992) suggests that the research relationship is somewhere between friend and stranger (1992:27), other authors, like Oakley (1981) more explicitly invoke images of, and similarities to, female friendship. This is a powerful image since female friendship is a rich, almost mystical, symbol in western society (O'Connor, 1992).

With this in mind, the informant-researcher relationship needs to be considered in terms of ethics, manipulation and exploitation. Daniels frames this issue in a way that does not suggest

malicious intent, but perceives emotional attachments to be a byproduct of the dynamics inherent to qualitative human subject research. In her self-reflective article, she considers that her (sincere) admiration for key informants was also self-serving, since it allowed her to, in clear conscience, interact with them (Daniels, 1983:203). She also notes that after the study little basis for the relationship that was established on the asking and answering of questions remained, and a lack of common ground quickly became apparent (Daniels, 1983:210). This position is both more honest and more sophisticated than the assumption of compatibility which implies that a single characteristic (i.e. gender) can form the basis for alliance. Furthermore "...it may be the most vulnerable women who are most likely to be drawn into intimate talk and who look for a caring response" (Ribbins, 1989:587). Cotterill (1992) argues that the vulnerability of most marginalized women can thereby be exploited. Though her critique may be valid I would speculate that cultural incongruity may be at work here. Working class women may misread middle class 'niceness' as sincere²³. The introduction of the friendship model poses the further danger that less sympathetic participants (who perhaps do not want to be your friend) may not be accorded the same space and legitimacy as their more amicable counterparts.

The issue is complex. We may try to emulate friendship yet, in the last instance, most informants are not friends. At the very least, maintaining a distinction between friendliness and friendship is crucial and even the best compromise of friendly stranger seems inadequate. Without a shared history or the personal commitment characteristic of friendship, are attempts to emulate this relationship, in and for, research ultimately exploitive? For me, this dynamic also has an aggravatingly patronizing flavour given the status or class differences of the respective actors involved.

On the other hand, sometimes we do interview friends. Certainly the shared history, mutual obligation and bonds of friendship can make an interview disconcertingly better. Does this mean that we are positioned to better extract data by exploiting ourselves as well as our friends? Stacey argues convincingly that in spite of an articulated goal of non-manipulation and non-hierarchical research, the language and rational of feminist work may obscure even greater exploitation (1991:113). The fact that I did have an honest relationship with a number of my informants does not alter the fundamental fact that I intruded into, and retained the ability to leave, their lives. More specifically what was shared (and shared because of the relationship) is ultimately *my* data. This is not a new or specifically feminist problem. As early as 1968, Sjoberg and Nett identified the contradiction of gathering data as friends instead of as scientists and then using that data for scientific ends.

The question becomes, what do we call the people we interview? Do the dynamics change when we use the newly fashioned term participants or is this simply a linguistic concession? It was after some hesitancy that I concluded that, in spite of the multiple meanings invested in the code informant or informer, this term was the most desirable one. When I think about it too much, the word seems too appropriate.

Overall, I would maintain that the relationship between informants and researchers in social science research is structured by expectations and commitments unique to this interaction, and it is best to accept it simply on those terms. We need only to reflect on the intensity of the interaction between participants in addictions treatment programs, during religious retreats or in self-help groups to realize that there are other open, caring, sincere relationships that transcend archetypes of affiliation. I am not arguing for a return to cold and distant interaction, yet I

continue to question the value of pigeon-holing the interaction and even more, of mystifying a dynamic with warm fuzzy words that ultimately mean very little. The in-depth social science interview constitutes a particular and legitimate form of social interaction that structures the relationship within which it occurs (at least at that particular moment). The research process itself assured me that there was no need to define or confine the informant-researcher relationship as a convenient or 'nice' archetype, or to imitate either the pseudo-scientific objectification of positivists or the pseudo-friendship approach suggested in some of the feminist literature.

That one need not mimic conversation or friendship in order to interact well was reinforced by one respondent's comment that the interview was more *like a rap session with you and I* (Alex). Perhaps conversation is subjectively understood as occurring when one has the opportunity to talk and be attended to in a comfortable, non-therapeutic environment. The result is an interaction that is neither a conversation nor a question and answer period. Participant led, the interview is also guided.

Research Interaction

At the risk of stating the obvious, because interviewing is social interaction it has at least a minimal impact on those involved, including of course the researcher. The research process itself may affect the lives of informants outside the research setting. Intensive interviewing by definition means reliving both pleasant and painful experiences and may cause considerable disturbance. Out of consideration I probed intensely only about situations that were highly relevant to my research focus, and left other potentially painful areas unexplored. For example, I asked about violence (including sexual violence) on the job but did not delve into issues of childhood abuse,

even when such abuse was clearly indicated. I am still left with the question of whether I had the right to expose women to this evocation of difficult or painful memories in the name of research.

We can also ask another question. That is: why do informants take the time to share their lives with us? What do we offer in exchange for their generosity? Informants and researchers are presumably motivated to take part in a research project of this sort for a variety of personal, social and political reasons. While researchers want the experience to be positive for their informants, their control is so limited that whether or not the research process is personally rewarding is ultimately contingent on subjective experiences and values.

The interview affords the informant the opportunity to talk, to have someone listen to their story (Patai, 1991:142) and confirms the importance of the narrator's life (Gluck and Patai, 1991:2). There may also be pleasure in providing assistance. Most importantly perhaps the research affords the informant access to the creation of knowledge - to set the record straight (Olson and Shopes, 1991:198). Ideally, research can return to oppressed populations the power to name reality (Maguire, 1987:39). More accurately, it affords this opportunity to articulate members of the population. Of course, while giving voice is not without value, and one of the better uses of academic privilege in my estimation, I fear that the significance of this is contingent on accepting the merit of the academic enterprise. I am not at all convinced that marginalized individuals hold this in the same high regard that academics do. In fact recent reflections by feminist researchers suggest that informants derive little benefit from the process (Wolf, 1996a:24).

The researcher of course also seeks advantage. Ultimately the potential benefits realized by the researcher render illusions of fair exchange questionable. The researcher ultimately owns

raw material and access to the means of production that transform words into commodities (Patai, 1991:146). Such commodities, to use Liz Stanley's concept, constitute symbolic credit within the academic mode of production (1990:6) that can be applied to prestige, hiring, tenor and promotion (Olson and Shopes, 1991:198).

Relations of Power

Related to the discussion above is the recognition that all social relations are imbued with questions of status, authority and relative power. As Cotterill (1992) notes, these are variable and not at all simple: power is always a fluid, contested dynamic (Foucault, 1980). I concur with Olson and Shopes's comment that "most (interviewees) in fact seem not especially overwhelmed, intimidated, or impressed with us at all. If we assert power by inserting ourselves into their world unbidden and asking for their stories, they also assert power by gratifying or denying our request" (1991:196). Of course (though not wishing to deny the differences in privilege), the status enjoyed in the middle class world of academe is largely conferred in that same social strata. It may be conceptualized in a very different manner in working class culture (i.e. over-education as the ultimate self indulgence).

This is useful to keep this in mind to avoid patronizing. On the other hand, it is at best naive to suggest that there are no status differences between researchers equipped with the legitimating props of tape recorder, notebook and academic credentials and marginalized informants (Patai, 1991:139). It seems to me that redefining the role as learner (Reinharz, 1992:29) is somewhat simplistic and problematic. Whether it is desired or solicited, it is difficult to deny that privileged women derive status and prestige in a stratified social system. This advantage is, in part, inevitably contingent on the marginalization of the populations studied.

There is a continued need to negotiate power and the assumption of expert status with its associated benefits.

Dilemmas of Representation: Hearing and Speaking the 'Truth'

Gender and Communication

To the extent that it exists, any relationship between researcher and informant is presumably established with reference to shared experience and language. Early feminists researchers argued that gender was crucially important. They argued that women interviewing women utilize linguistic interaction characteristic of women-to-women talk that is more honest and open than mixed group communication (Spender, 1980:112). This finding suggests that women have a natural advantage in interviewing other women.

DeVault's more sophisticated approach to same-sex interviewing suggests that when women experience "linguistic incongruence", they either translate experience or use language in non-standard ways (1990:101). She advocates that women listen "around and between words" (1990:101) when they interview and analyze the talk of other women, drawing on their own experiences to fill unarticulated gaps. While her approach is valuable, it is also problematic. Meaning is variable and contingent on social location of which gender is just one determinant. To adapt the words of Reissman "...gender is not [necessarily] enough" (1987:172) to ensure shared meaning in interviewing.

For Mishler, meaning is negotiated in the discourse "between interviewer and respondent as they try to make continued sense of what they are saying to each other" (1986:54). The assumption of shared meaning may then function to distort an interviewee's intent to a greater

extent than if no such commonality is supposed, since it desensitizes the interviewer and analyst to the process of meaning construction. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that when women do share similar class, culture and language having the same gender may help increase communication. As previously noted, it was in part my lack of language that compelled me into the field. Fluency in the nuanced meanings of words is essential to be able to make sense of an insider's knowledge. For the most part, informants and I shared sufficient common experience to speak a similar language and negotiate meaning fairly easily. In spite of this, there were moments of incongruence at both the level of words and concepts. For example, in one interview I searched for the linguistic code for an individual with whom one is involved in a long-term relationship. Ultimately I settled on the word 'husband' since the term 'partner' has very different meaning in this informant's social space than in other cultural locations, such as the university.

More problematically, I tended to slip into mainstream rather than local and personal meanings. When one informant discussed 'degradation', in spite of the fact that my own understanding mirrored hers, I assumed that she was referring to sexual acts and erotic labour processes rather than social reaction. At times then, I suspended the very shared understanding that legitimated my research. On the other hand of course, it was important to clarify meanings to ensure that the women's accounts are accurately represented in the analysis.

Translation

Van Maanen suggests that ethnography exists on the margins of two cultures interpreting one for the other (1988:4) so that the researcher functions as a translator. Of course, with any translation there is distortion (DeVault, 1990:107). We need to consider the role of language and the apparent need to nuance the idiolect. Do we attempt to explain away a language by

footnoting terms or appending a glossary? This practice popular practice in journalistic and some sociological accounts further marks the 'deviant' populations as outsiders.

Not only does translation reify the distance between informant and audience, but translations cannot capture the nuances of meaning grounded experientially. Practically, the decision becomes whether we attempt to translate with problems including loss of meaning or allow the audience to translate on its own and risk its imposition of their own assumptions and connotations. Neither solution is fully satisfactory, since regardless of the language, all non-fluent speakers engage in a conscious or unconscious process of interpretation. As a compromise in an attempt to ensure terminological nuances are recognized, the meanings of unique words, or the unique meaning of common words will be explained in some detail as they arise. After that, these terms will be employed in the text to allow the reader to appreciate the richness that is conveyed through context.

Presenting the Words of Others

Most ethnographic accounts make extensive use of quotes. The goal of this practice is clearly to support the analysis by turning back to its source - the voices of the informants. Still this apparently benign intent should be seen as a potentially 'loaded' practice. The quotes are bits and pieces that the author has first abstracted from the contexts of the interview and the lives out of which they emerged, and then presented in the different context of her analytic piece. We must ask if we are not once again turning words into data in the hopes of realizing a pseudo- scientific product?

The issue of quotes also raises a more symbolic issue. When we intersperse our carefully constructed and thoroughly edited academic text with casually made statements by informants, the

differences between researcher and researched is reified. This is not to say that their speech is somehow lacking or that oral speech is inherently inferior to more polished written forms. When verbal interaction is presented as text, the fillers, repetition, profanity and hesitation of the speaker may be presumed to be less articulate. On the other hand, if we 'clean up' the speech articulated in the interviews we risk losing even more, as we edit out the subtle richness of the thoughts and experiences being conveyed. Ultimately I decided the former was the lesser of the two evils and elected to employ unedited quotes throughout the thesis. Furthermore, to ensure smooth transitions that does not distort voices the quotes are presented in italics and without quotation marks.

My approach to the authority and representational dilemmas is two-fold. First, I make ample use of quotes but attempt to be vigilant in ensuring that speakers' intent, ideological position and understanding are not misrepresented and their words frivolously employed to further my own analytic or political agenda. Second, the thesis has three analytic chapters where I explicitly assume authority, spatially and thematically organizing the material and taking analytic and editorial control. A final chapter, 'Talking about Work'. This last section of the thesis is comprised of a series of unedited quotes organized in terms of subject areas and is explicitly intended to expand the range of voices that are actualized. This chapter gives the reader a better sense of what was said free of imposed interpretation. It is a compromise, though admittedly one where I still control access through my selection of quotes.

Appropriating the Lives of Others

Producing an academic product can, for the conscious feminist sociologist, reverberate with frightening images of exploitation and appropriation.

[A]s we appropriate the power of texts, can we help but to cannibalize the lives of others? - to the extent that we dare have anything serious to say. The mere desire to give form and therefore meaning to others' lives or their writing is, if you think too much about it, forbiddingly arrogant

Hampsten, 1989:130

We must acknowledge that the academic exercise frequently means that "a story or statement that, in its oral form, is 'by' the speaker, very often reaches the public in the form of a text 'by' the scholar" (Gluck and Patai, 1991:2). The process of constructing a text by definition requires the assumption of authority. In spite of the emphasis placed on women's voices in feminist work, the reality is somewhat different as the researcher must assume a measure of ownership over the text (Gluck and Patai, 1991:2). What are the implications of this and how can we make peace with the power implicit in this dynamic?

The question becomes whether original intent can be retained through assumption of interpretive authority (Borland, 1991). Even at its best, research is imbued with political and social relations since the ability of one group to represent (or interpret, or mediate) another is involved (Van Maanen, 1988:4). At worst the researcher appropriates and makes the words her own. In either case, she clearly assumes authority. She collects, edits and analyzes to produce a text in which the experiences have been transformed into data. This data was itself extracted, decontextualized, deconstructed and then temporally or thematically organized (Abwunza, 1995:247).

It is obvious but nonetheless worth considering the fact that researcher, at the point of presentation and analysis, assumes control and edits the narrative text. Appropriation threatens to become real through the loss of connections that characterize lived reality. Gluck and Patai note

that, ironically, it is at the moment when the feminist researcher is fulfilling her political agenda that appropriation occurs (1991:2).

As I have discussed throughout this chapter, the action and product of the subjective interpretation by the researcher are problematic. Alternately, Langness and Frank suggest that many life histories, lacking systematic analysis continually fail to realize their potential to inform (1988:70). This position locates us within the tension between straight presentation that allows the voice to speak to the reader and interpretation which analyzes but also assumes the right of the author to speak for the 'other'. At the same time it is also (to some extent) the same conceptualization and analysis that give meaning to the narrative - meaning that, framed as action research, can be instrumentally employed by the researched population.

Admittedly, although action research holds some promise, we are still left with an undeniable power dynamic. At what point does giving voice become appropriation and to what extent is this rectified when informants retain a final veto? At another level this apparently positive solution of sharing control can also be ethically problematic. Reflecting on her own Silicon Valley research Stacey demonstrates how this can put us in the unpleasant position of omitting key information from the analysis or colluding in reproducing a particularly biased world view (1991:114). Given that informants have the right and ability to speak for themselves and analyze their own lives (Reinharz, 1992:130), at what point can we impose judgment? To completely silence your own voice does not inherently result in a superior product. In fact, it may result in an analysis that is less critical, and perhaps less honest from the researcher's perspective than if informants had not been consulted. At a practical level, this approach means losing control over the content and timing of the research project and makes completion contingent on the

continued good will of the informant. I did share my analysis with informants, but continue to be troubled by a sense that such practices are premised on the notion that control over the text is inherently the right of the researcher who can *give to* (or share with) the informants if she so chooses.

Ethnography: Between Two 'Truths'

Even if we acknowledge the impossibility of one truth and even the instability of careful and tentative statements of positional truth, it is nonetheless problematic that with this sort of research approach we are left with a subjective account interpreted by another subjective individual (Watson and Watson-Franke, 1985:31). We must consider the problems of both these 'truths.

First there is the 'truth' of the account. As an partial insider I was unlikely to be given deliberately false information. Nonetheless, as symbolic interactionists have shown, there is some deception in all social interaction (Goffman, 1959). Retrospective accounts may be distorted for a number of reasons including a desire to maintain a positive self or public, presentation. This uncertainty is complicated by the fact that accounts are, by definition, elicited rather than naturally occurring phenomena. In addition, a person's understanding of events may be transformed through the process of narration (Watson and Watson-Franke, 1985:2) by the very process of translating them into language. This malleability suggests not only that meaning and truth are continually changing but also that the specific context and meaning of the interview itself are key to understanding the data.

Perhaps we should rethink the concept of truth - freeing it from the oppositional framework that defines it. The Personal Narratives Group argues that abstracted from the

distorted or false or exaggerated account of events, informants are revealing the truth of experiences. Such truths which unlike the reassuring (though erroneous) truth claims of empiricism, are plural, fluid and subjective; as a result "sometimes the truths we see in personal narratives jar us from our complacent security outside" (Personal Narratives Group, 1989:261, 262).

The issue of reliability is focussed upon in mainstream but not the feminist literature. Despite a rejection of positivistic language feminists do not, for the most part, abandon assessing and analysing data. Perhaps it is more honest and useful to consider reliability and exercise some caution in taking accounts literally (Brenner, 1985:150). Lofland and Lofland suggest basic checks assessing: how direct the report; how self-serving; how biased; the past history of interviewee's reliability; and internal and external consistency (1984:51). The strategy I adopted to address the incongruencies that arose in several interviews was to consider the information in terms of the relationship, interview setting, informant's perception of the interview process and motivation for participation that I gleaned from my post interview notes and the transcription of the interview itself. This allowed me to understand comments not as facts but "statements whose true significance lay in the way they had been negotiated in the encounter" (Watson and Watson-Franke, 1985:76). In this way I was able to negotiate an analysis that did not rely on dismissing or re-defining informant's truths but still accommodated rigour.

An other problematic 'truth' in ethnography is of course the account itself:

Hermes was a trickster: a god of cunning and tricks. The ethnographer is not trickster. He, so he says, has no cunning and no tricks. But he shares with a problem Hermes. He must make his message convincing.

Crapanzano, 1986:52

Throughout this chapter the arguments against assumptions of objective have been highlighted. To deny personal bias is unrealistic. Similarly we must acknowledge that access to the production of knowledge is contingent on privileged location, a location that shapes the content and form of expressed truth. The ideological and political ramifications of the researcher's relation to the academic mode of production (Stanley, 1990:2) must not only be acknowledged they must also be integrated. This reasoning is just a critical 'take' on an established view that ethnography necessarily involves writing about self, method and group studied (Reinharz, 1992:74). We must remember that ethnography is a constructed "true fiction" (Clifford, 1986:6) a dynamic that is obscured when the ethnographer ignores the multiple subjectivities in the work and attempts to present a partial truth as complete.

MOVING ON

I have not been able to truly resolve the contradictions that emerge when we do reflective and critical methodology and must grapple with the inevitability of dimensions of power in research (Wolf, 1996a). If research is, by definition, exploitive, do we therefore withdraw from the field leaving the construction of knowledge to "the golden boys who wish to investigate the 'social' from the library and at the archives" (Hitsman, 1999)? I offer no solution. To do so would be either unbearably arrogant or hopelessly naive. We are left instead with a number of tensions and dimensions that shape and define the project. How do we interpret without imposing meaning? Can we provide a forum for voices without appropriating those voices? Engage with, but not exploit, a life? And how do we transform experience into data and the lifeworld into text without abstracting the humanness of either? Acknowledging that we can not silence our own

voice and history, how do we manage this in an honest manner without marginalizing the informant? Finally how do we forge a personal academic space without exploiting another's (or our own) personal space? I remain cautiously optimistic that an understanding of the complex realities of research and a willingness to exploit academic privilege can maximize the positive aspects of the research undertaking.

The analysis holds the promise of "creating a new way of seeing from where we actually live, into the powers, processes and relations that organize and determine the everyday context of that seeing" (Smith D, 1987:9). The inductive method being advocated does not abandon theoretical frameworks nor surrender interpretive authority, but allows the experiential and subjective to be incorporated into discourse through sensitive grounded analysis that "illuminate[s] the logic of individual course of action and the effects of system level constraints in which those lives occur" (Personal Narrative Group, 1989:6)

ENDNOTES

1. See Harding, (1986) for a full development of this argument.
2. For example, I incorrectly assumed going into the field that organized labour action held the promise of empowerment to strippers.
3. For example the work of Fran Shaver (1994) is getting considerable attention and legitimacy. Her research finding replicate what prostitute's organizations have maintained for many years (Miller, 1993).
4. I was 'truthful' in my presentation, at least I tried to be honest and careful, and yet the analysis revealed many incongruencies. As a result of this experience when contradictions emerged repeatedly in this research I attempted to remain vigilantly true to meaning; analysing but not reading into the apparent inconsistencies.
5. This insight and the term must be credited to Derek Smith who drew my attention to the problematic terminology we employ in a such matter-of-fact way.
6. Starting with the need to incorporate those alternate ways of knowing that are realized through lived experience (Maguire 1987:14) allow us to bypass the well-documented debates concerning the relative merits of quantitative versus qualitative research. Instead we can proceed from a critical position that challenges the scientific way of knowing as both limited and limiting, objectifying the social actors it claims to represent and as suspect in Truth claims. We can also dismiss the viability or desirability of suspending the "subjectivity of the thinker" (Smith D, 1987:72) and thereby make a space for the explicit - as opposed to obscured but real - researcher already discussed.
7. These were extracted using Quick Law and Law Find.
8. The Ottawa Sun is generally recognized as a highly reactionary source and therefore too extreme to capture an accurate picture. The articles on stripping that I had initially examined from this source were highly sensationalized reports that were inaccurate in fundamental aspects of the report. They also bordered on hysteria.
9. Initially my research stopped in 1998, however the supreme court ruling in 1999 obliged me to extend the research into early 2000 when this dissertation was submitted.
10. The process was aided by the advent of computer data bases for the period from 1992. Articles prior to that were accumulated through tedious examination of micro-fiche.
11. These are not only drawn along the lines of employees, some of the regulars also realize insider status, however the options for women researchers are considerably restricted.

12. I do not share Denzin's optimism that the idiolect can be readily learnt.
13. On average I worked four shifts a week, although it varied from three to six. Shifts where both day (11 am to 7 pm) and night (7pm to 2am).
14. Shooter girls walk around a club, usually attired in a fairly sexual outfit, carrying a tray of premixed shooters which they attempt to sell to patrons. Pay is strictly commission. On average a woman earns seven dollars for every tray of forty shooters they sell.
15. For example, not only did I dress in a particular sexualized manner at work but increasingly donned more revealing attire outside of work. I went more native than the natives: such a presentation of self is not characteristic of all workers.
16. Ironically this individual was quickly signaled by staff because of overtly sexual behavior towards the dancers. Unlike most of the doormen employed he was unprofessional.
17. One interview had to be discounted since the informant was clearly under the influence of illicit substances at the time making the actual sample size fourteen.
18. This particular woman was a person friend and I was confident that my marginal authority in the labour site was inconsequential in the broader context of our relationship.
19. The order here is very important. As already noted I went native during research. In practice this means my notes are resplendent with commentary from a bartender in a strip club. As will become clear in subsequent chapters this positioned me oppositionally to strippers.
20. Implicit here is a recognition that informants may not necessarily agree.
21. Throughout the process of drafting chapters of this dissertation I needed to be prodded by Heather Jon Maroney to include a sketch of the physical layout of clubs, identify day to day interactions and describe practices. Over and over again I had to be reminded that my taken-for-granted world of strip clubs had to be detailed for the reader.
22. See the anthology edited by Reed-Donahue (1997) for a discussion of autobiographical approaches to ethnography.
23. The danger of misunderstanding goes both ways. Middle class researchers might, for example, misread working class interactive styles as indicative of collegiality.

CHAPTER FOUR

MORAL REGULATION AT WORK: TRACING THE LEGAL AND DISCURSIVE CONTEXT

The Question of Moral Regulation

Strip clubs are uniquely situated commercial enterprises. While embedded in the market economy they are also, unlike most businesses, the product and focus of dynamic social processes including moral regulation. If we are to appreciate the nature of the industry and what work *means* for the women who labour inside the clubs, we must also understand the context out of which the industry emerged and assumed particular manifestations. Before proceeding to the presentation and analysis of club dynamics in the coming chapters, we will first trace the historic development of the industry by locating it within broader socio-economic developments as well as within the particular laws, regulations and discourses¹ through which it has been constituted. This moves us toward the broader perspective of political economy which requires:

a holistic approach to understanding society from a materialist perspective.....[it] connects the economic, political and cultural/ideological moments of social life...its claim is that to understand each of the political, economic social, and cultural requires conceptualisation of the other

Clement, 1997b:1

From Posture Molls to Burlesque: Entertaining “The Boys”

The first modern strippers and table dancers on record were the “posture molls” of 18th century London who “stripped naked and mounted upon the table to show their beauties” (Burford, 1986:91). Like their sisters almost three hundred years later, these women carefully differentiated themselves from prostitutes² and maintained a clear division of labour, seeking to entertain and possibly arouse, but not sexually satisfy their clients (Burford, 1986:92). This entertainment never reached a wide audience and appears to have been restricted to a relatively small clientele of the disreputable poor and slumming upperclass men. It would take another two hundred years for stripping to attain greater mass appeal.

It is in the American burlesque theatre, the disreputable cousin of vaudeville, that we can locate the genesis of the modern striptease³. Unlike vaudeville, which catered to bourgeois sensibilities and rendered the performer part of the product, burlesque was a self-consciously subversive entertainment that centred on the female body, while it challenged and ridiculed the Victorian ideal of female purity⁴. Almost immediately it was condemned as immoral and disreputable (Allen, 1991:16).

From the 1890s onward, there was a trend to employ female sexuality in ‘hot’ shows. Such productions were characterized by the display of women's bodies and highly sexualized humour (Allen, 1991:221), but not by nudity and certainly not by the act of disrobing. The 1893 Chicago World’s Exposition introduced the American public to the belly dance, an “exotic” folk dance which was perceived as titillating. The sexuality of the Egyptian dancer was ‘safe’: as the alien other she did not threaten the ‘evolved’ white

male as could the unrepressed sexuality of the bourgeois woman (Allen, 1991:228). By 1910 the “cooch dancer” was a standard of the burlesque line-up. There she joined the increasingly risqué non-dancing disrobing acts (behind opaque screens) and ‘strip’ dances where the dancer’s flesh toned tights were daring for the time.

Stripping did not become central to burlesque until the 1920s. As audiences were lured to the movies, and radio brought amusement into the home and away from vaudeville, this raunchy stepchild of the entertainment industry came into its own. These pioneering strippers “put on a show” with elaborate costumes, carefully choreographed routines and gimmicks ranging from flying birds, to expert tassel-turning, to the sophisticated rap and comedy of Gypsy Lee Rose (Preminger, 1984). Central to the performance was not nudity but the *tease*. Even the most risqué star finished her routine with G-string and pasties firmly in place (Corio, 1968:85). It is questionable that, as some commentators maintain, these female performers were silenced and rendered only as bodies (Allen, 1991:259). Early strippers were highly vocal and, in the best tradition of burlesque parodied the very genre they were creating. Unfortunately, but not surprising for an industry kept “off the record” (Spender, 1982), few accounts by showgirls survive. Certainly Ann Corio (1968), who became a star and whose experience was presumably more gratifying experience than her less successful sisters, presented the job as artistic, the labour site as supportive, and the atmosphere largely positive.

It is no coincidence that stripping first emerged during the Great Depression as an autonomous form of entertainment, no longer simply a part of burlesque, but synonymous with burlesque. Admittedly the social transformations of the 1920s with new image of

liberated womanhood paved the way for increasingly explicit displays. Nonetheless, producers found it difficult to attract chorus girls. By the mid 1930s, however, the lack of employment alternatives and the escalating wages of high-end strippers meant producers had a talent pool from which to draw (Zeidman, 1967:88). At the same time there was a growing population of impoverished working class men who, since the 1890s, had constituted the bulk of the audience (Allen, 1991). In the history of American popular entertainment since the 19th century, an economic downturn works to the advantage of lower cultural forms at the expense of their more upscale counterparts (Allen, 1991:250). This moment then marked the convergence of those two key elements for a successful disreputable entertainment enterprise: cheap labour and customers. At this point as well a bifurcation occurred in the industry⁵. Women like Ann Corio and Gypsy Rose Lee earned four hundred and one thousand dollars a week respectively, whereas their counterparts, the “bowery strippers”, worked seven days a week, twelve hours a day, for eleven dollars (Zeidman, 1967:187).

Ultimately the expansion driven popularity proved burlesque's downfall in its birthplace. Not only did increasing competition encourage the breaking of moral codes, which left the theatre open to censorship, the move to Broadway in 1931 meant that the genre was no longer contained in the anonymity of working class neighbourhood. Like the modern-day strip club, early burlesque theatres became the focus of considerable moral outrage. Observers of burlesque in the 1930s readily conflated representation with reality so that burlesque became equated with sex not sexuality (Allen, 1991). Thus, while the on-stage behaviour of the workers was challenged and perceived as an indicator, it

was the depravity of the milieu that was discursively linked to erotic presentations which allowed moral entrepreneurs to construct the labour *site* as amoral and which become the focus of reformers' indignation⁶.

Eventually, in order to close burlesque neither propriety nor moral discourses sufficed; instead, reformers explicitly associated sex crimes with these sexualized displays. Notwithstanding that no connection was ever discovered (Allen, 1991:256), the District Attorney of Brooklyn confidently maintained that burlesque was "largely responsible for the sex degeneracy and sex crimes of the city" (quoted in Zeidman, 1967:229). In 1937 burlesque was banned from New York and within a decade the burlesque theatre disappeared, albeit temporarily, from the eastern United States.

The 'Exotic' Comes To Canada

In the more reserved north, night clubs and cabarets first emerged in Quebec. In these establishments strippers entertained men and women alongside comedians, interpretive dancers, and singers. During the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s a range of clubs, some disreputable others decidedly not working class, opened and closed their doors in Montreal and Quebec City. The strip act, either safely restricted to underclass areas or appropriated into a different cultural milieu, was not initially problematized by the media, politicians or community groups.

The attempts by Montreal police chief Pacifique Plant to "clean up" Montreal in the 1950s had the desired effect; by the early 1960s, burlesque in Quebec was in decline as venues for strippers got increasingly shabbier and smaller (Tracey, 1997:42). At the same

time, however go-go dancers, the quintessential product of the 1960s openness and increasingly visible sexuality, emerged. The women did not strip but danced in carefully coordinated silver or gold costumes that resembled the bikinis of the era: complete with a requisite two and a half inch side seam. In between shows they were, in some establishments, expected to mix with the predominately male patrons who bought them watered down drinks from which the worker earned a small percentage in addition to her wages.

Until 1973 the Ontario Liquor Control Act employed a very restrictive definition of a theatre which in practice prohibited strip tease acts in licenced establishments. In Ontario therefore, strippers worked burlesque theatres located in the larger urban centres. In these establishments, patrons could, for the price of admission⁷, watch five or six strippers performing carefully choreographed and rehearsed shows lasting between thirty and forty minutes each. Ottawa's last old-style burlesque theatre, the Bodee Shop on Richmond Road, closed its doors in 1978, unable to compete with the new forms of entertainment that emerged (Hart, 1978).

For the most part, clubs on both sides of the provincial border operated relatively independently of excessive moral meddling by the community or state. Certainly dancers were expected to comply with the criminal code prohibition against public nudity "without lawful excuse",⁸ and were periodically and somewhat randomly charged, with appearing in an "immoral theatre performance" contrary to section 152 of the Canadian Criminal Code⁹. As late as 1969 in *R. v. Sequin* the 1868 Hinklin test for obscenity¹⁰ were being employed by the courts which considered if the performance was likely to "deprave and

corrupt those whose minds are open to such influences” (Canada: 1955). That audience members were consenting adults was deemed irrelevant and had little impact as the courts conscientiously sought to protect the moral integrity of the vulnerable ‘other’. By 1970 the Hinklin test had been fully superseded by section 159.8 of the Canadian Criminal Code (now section 163.8) which defined obscenity as the “undue exploitation of sex”. The test that emerged through judicial reasoning was “what the contemporary Canadian community will tolerate” (Canada, 1998).

Several important legal decisions in the early 1970s had consequences for burlesque. In 1972, Ontario Provincial Court Judge Wheelton evoked a restrictive definition of community as constituted by the audience that voluntarily attended the theatres¹¹. In addition the 1973 Supreme Court ruling in *R. v. Johnson*¹² no longer accepted that women’s bodies were inherently “obscene” when it distinguished nudity from immorality stating that “a performance is not rendered ‘immoral’ solely because it is performed in the nude so as to constitute an offence under section 163 of the Criminal Code” (SCC, 1973). These judicial rulings had an impact on the way strippers conducted themselves on stage and severely reduced the success of prosecutions. Ultimately, however, it was not federal but provincial statutes that set the stage for strip clubs. In 1973 the Ontario Liquor Control Act was amended and the definition of “theatre” was expanded (Ontario, 1973). Suddenly, it became possible, in Ontario, to combine alcohol and nudity in a legal commercial endeavour.

Booze and Broads: The Ottawa 'Scene' 1974 to 1981

In 1974 when Frank Bentivoglio opened the Playmate Club on Montreal Road offering clients almost nudity (G-strings were initially kept on) for the price of a beer, the most recent incarnation of burlesque, the strip club, emerged in Ottawa (Bentivoglio, 1991). The concept had obvious appeal. By May 1979 the Ottawa circuit included eight Ottawa bars, three bars on the Quebec side of the provincial border and an estimated seventy strippers working in the Ottawa region (Hill, 1979). While strip clubs became increasingly common place in the 1970s, venues remained largely restricted to traditionally working class areas of the city, as taverns started to hire dancers in an attempt to improve business. For the most part, these were not “strip clubs” as much as “taverns with strippers” where a stripper would periodically appear, remove her clothes on a very substandard stage and dance to the sounds of a juke box¹³. In other words, strippers constituted an additional diversion but were hardly the focus of the establishment.

Wages for Ottawa area dancers at the time started at two hundred and seventy-five untaxed dollars¹⁴, but would quickly climb to three hundred and seventy-five dollars and could increase to six hundred dollars for a six-day week. Of course, the fining system¹⁵ often did not receive full wages. For the most part, bars hired two dancers who were expected to alternately perform five sets of four songs (three fast, one slow floor show) during their six-hour shift. Between performances, dancers spent their time socializing with each other, reading and generally hanging out. Prostitution was rare, although a few dancers went on ‘hundred dollar dates’¹⁶.

The proliferation of venues, the move from the theatre to the bar, and from burlesque performance to strip show, marked a shift in the industry that had a number of implications for the labour process of dancers. The job still required some capital investment on the part of workers, but expectations of originality or innovation diminished. The shows became repetitious: during the first song the dress came off, next the T-bar, during the third song the bra was removed and in the final “floor show” performed on a mat, the G-string would, in spite of legal prohibition, often be removed. While dancers took pride in their shows and were inordinately protective of “their” songs, look and moves, for the most part they did very similar routines with varying degrees of enthusiasm and finesse¹⁷. Lindalee Tracey dismissed these dancers as making “themselves into cartoons . . . in genital ordinated and coarse [acts]” (quoted in Atherton, 1986).

Although as previously noted, genital exposure “without lawful excuse” was contrary to case law, dancers risked dismissal if they refused to “do spreads” (Tracey, 1997:143). By 1981, however the courts started to define nudity as “total bareness” and hence characterised by the complete absence of clothing (*R. v. Szunejko*). Citing community standards of tolerance, Judge Wallace firmly rejected the crown’s contention that the accused, an exotic dancer, “offended against public decency” (CC 170(2)). The ruling meant dancers could remove their G-string provided they wore some item of clothing, and did not through their actions, “offend against public decency or order” (CC 170.2).

The popularity of the strip clubs also provided Frank Bentevoglio with another business venture. In 1976 he established the *All Star* agency to meet the growing demand

for strippers in the Ottawa area¹⁸. Under the system, dancers paid ten percent of their fees to the agent who booked them for one week contracts in the Ottawa circuit, which eventually expanded to include clubs as far away as Arnprior, Kingston and Pembroke¹⁹. As a result, dancers periodically went “on the road” where they earned a minimum of three hundred and fifty dollars a week and, whenever possible, worked double shifts to maximize income. Hotels provided dancers with a room (of sorts) but not board or transportation. Life on the road was monotonous, emotionally challenging and sometimes dangerous (Atkinson, 1995). After expenses were paid, it was not very profitable either (particularly for women with families), but essential to remaining in good standing with the agency and for steady employment.

In my survey the new clubs did not initially receive a great deal of media attention. The few articles on the industry that did appear between 1974 and 1981 in the *Ottawa Citizen* were more patronizing than condemning suggesting that the women had “tattoos and black eyes and ...look kind of dirty” and describing the “peeler” act as “the lumbering antics of a dancer whose dimensions far exceed her charm” (Coic and Mesar, 1979). The women may have been pathetic and lacking in authentic talent or skill, but they were not a social problem and neither were the clubs in which they laboured.

Innovation, Exploitation and Moral Regulation: 1982 to 1985

As noted in chapter two, throughout the 1980s Canada’s economy was in steady decline and the financial position of working class women was rapidly being eroded as good manufacturing jobs disappeared and the labour market was increasingly

characterized by part-time, casual labour practices and service sector employment. Strip clubs may have been marginalized but they were also firmly embedded in the economy. It is only in this context that we can understand shifts in the way the work of strippers was organized within the clubs in the early 1980s and the further changes that occurred in the 1990s.

As early as 1981, wages for area strippers were decreasing, with some bars urging dancers to augment their wages by serving drinks between sets. Table dancing, introduced in Montreal in 1980, came to be an option for Ottawa dancers in 1982, and by 1983 a job requirement. Justified by what was inaccurately and euphemistically referred to as the extra “tips” workers could earn by soliciting customers to purchase five dollar table dances²⁰, wages for dancers were cut to thirty-five or forty dollars a day, shifts were increased from six to eight hours²¹ and bar fees were implemented. In other words, the industry deprofessionalized the dancers’ trade by redefining the workers as service providers (who earn tips) while simultaneously reducing wages and increasing the labour expected. At the same time clubs were able to hire more dancers, promote table dancing as a new attraction, and implement a new industry standard of continuous shows. All of this in turn legitimated charging an admittance fee to the bar’s clientele.

While most dancers were seeing their job requirements expand and their income diminish, a stratification emerged between table dancers and “features”, or between service providers and entertainers. Interfacing with the growing film and magazine pornography industry south of the border, American porn actresses began to appear in area clubs. These highly publicized “stars” worked the North American circuit, earning up to fifteen

thousand dollars a week (Tracey, 1997:107). They assumed a highly professional approach often bringing their own lights, sound equipment and entourage. Like the burlesque stars of the past, they had gimmicks ranging from lions to fire to showers and generally maintained an interactive rap with the audience throughout the four, thirty-minute shows they performed daily. There was also a second level of features, Canadian strippers earning between one and two thousand a week. At the onset these women were the recipients of legitimate titles such as Miss Nude Canada. By the mid 1980s, however, there were so many contests, many fixed, that titles started to mean very little; dancers started to fabricate titles in what Annie Ample (1988) refers to as the “Great Canadian Skin Scam” (1988:86). Features did not table dance but supplemented their income by selling Polaroid photos of themselves with patrons.

Other changes were also occurring. The “taverns with strippers” disappeared and instead a number of clubs opened with carefully designed stages, good lighting and sound equipment and an environment explicitly and consciously focussed on erotic entertainment. Success may have been the clubs’ downfall. These ‘Mc-strip clubs’ increased competition locally resulting in progressively ‘raunchier’ entertainment; more well-endowed stars; duos; and special events, such as wrestling (in mud or Jell-O) or wet T-shirt contests. The clubs also became more visible as they aggressively advertized their special attractions and migrated out of working class areas²².

Strip clubs were first identified as a social problem in Ottawa by community groups in 1982²³. It would appear that, Judge Wallace’s ruling notwithstanding, full nudity in strip clubs and increasingly risqué performances were inconsistent with the

standards of vocal segments of the community. In addition, moral contamination arguments also started to be presented suggesting, somewhat hysterically, that strip clubs were “breeding grounds for rapists and murderers” (Adami, 1982)²⁴. Like their counterparts in New York fifty years earlier, these community groups also made reference to sexual danger for ‘other’ women. Most stopped short of the Alberta group that directly linked sexual assault and strip acts (Edmonton, 1988; Edmonton, 1990). Instead residents of Goulbourn Township darkly hinted at the danger posed by intoxicated and sexually aroused patrons to their teenage daughters (Egan, 1982; Citizen, 1982)²⁵. In addition, as the clubs became discursively associated with organized crime, illicit substances and all forms of vice, the community expressed a fear that the clubs would result in increased crime (Miller, 1985)²⁶.

The discourse on clubs that emerged at this point and continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s can be understood as interfacing not only with the fear of moral disorder detailed in the introductory chapter, but also the “fear of crime” that was taking hold, and restricting the lives of Canadians in urban areas (Nelson and Fleras, 1995)²⁷. The media, for their part, did little to dispel these assumptions and appears to have reinforced the image of strip clubs as degenerate environments resplendent with the illicit substances (Barron and Kessel, 1982; Harper, 1983).

Consistent with the model identified by Spector and Kitsuse (1973) in response to the small scale and localized social problem of strip clubs, city councillors seized the platform that clearly identified them as defenders of the moral right. They actively and publically sought extra-legal and legal strategies aimed at eliminating strip clubs²⁸. In 1983

Nepean and Gloucester city councillors, despite no complaints, cited moral concerns and noting that “strip clubs generally attract a very undesirable element and undesirable activities” (quoted in MacLeod, 1983), imposed dress codes for entertainers, licenced dancers and clubs and restricted the location as well as the operating hours of clubs²⁹. The moral subtext to these regulations was explicit and staunchly defended by aldermen like Brian Bournes, who was dismayed that councillors disallowed live animal sales while “encouraging the peddling of live flesh to satisfy the appetites of the stranger parts of our society” (Miller, 1984). He also noted that “they’re earning profits on people’s degradation” (Citizen, 1984).

Clubs across Ontario responded to the increasing regulation and moral agitation by uniting in the Burlesque Club Owner’s Association in 1984 to fight the threat to their collective economic well being. In February 1985 the Supreme Court of Canada affirmed that morality was outside of municipal jurisdiction when it refused to hear an appeal by Burlington and Markham whose bylaws, like those enacted by regional governments around Ottawa, were premised on moral arguments (Miller, 1985). Municipal councillors were left with little option but to revoke the bylaws.

Between 1982 and 1985 then, strip clubs emerged as a social problem in Ottawa. It would appear that community groups were honestly concerned about the danger posed by clubs in their areas. At the same time, the very lack of evidence that strip clubs increased criminal activities suggests that the fears were largely engendered by moral considerations and the disrepute of sexual displays. Regardless of the initial reasons, the process of municipal regulation itself legitimated and reinforced the idea that exotic

entertainment parlours constituted a threat to the community in which they were located.

This quickly became an accepted 'truth'.

Moral Regulation Through City Planning 1986 - 1991

In response to the setbacks produced by the judicial rulings, municipal politicians abandoned the explicitly moral discourse and no longer attempted to interfere with what was happening *in* the clubs or more specifically what was *on*, or not *on*, the dancers' bodies. Instead they implemented new regulatory bylaws with reference solely to city planning principles. In this way, they avoided thorny moral questions while also directly addressing the concerns expressed by community groups. In October 1986 the Supreme Court of Canada implicitly upheld Oshawa's jurisdiction to retroactively restrict the location of strip clubs³⁰. Nepean and Gloucester moved quickly to enact severe zoning restrictions and further specified that clubs must be located at least five hundred metres from schools, churches and residential areas. In 1990, the Ontario Municipal Act was amended by the provincial government authorizing municipalities to limit, but not ban, strip clubs. Cumberland, Vanier, Gloucester and Nepean, imposed a one club limit instead of the prohibition which they preferred (Tolson, 1990). Ottawa's city council, which had taken a much more careful and civil libertarian approach since the 'problem' first emerged, did not immediately enact similar restrictions. However, when community groups organized against The Den on Russel Road on the basis of its close proximity to a teen club³¹, an interim zoning restriction was imposed in 1987³².

By the late 1980s an association between dancers and drugs appears firmly established and the connection provided a subtext to many articles on the trades. The problem was further confirmed in the media by rather questionable reports like a story that chronicled the slide into drugs by Cherrye, a stripper who “it may be hard to believe, but she’s basically a nice girl. The product of a typical two parent suburban hearth” (Campbell, 1989:50). Further verification came through reformed insider Annie Ample’s exposé that suggests that cocaine and its derivative crack, had infiltrated the clubs to such an extent that “the girls were rapidly becoming coke whores” (1988:84). For the most part, however, the use of illicit substances by dancers was seen as an indicator of the general disrepute of clubs themselves and that these “festering sores” attracted “the underbelly of society that is associated with strip clubs, and that is as much a danger to children as anything else” (Alderman Smith quoted in Richardson, 1991).

Both these assumptions came into play in the comprehensive bylaw enacted in Ottawa in June 1991³³. Not only were clubs banned from residential areas, thereby threatening four of the seven Ottawa clubs operating at that time³⁴, clubs were also required to take out fifteen hundred dollar licences. Furthermore, “adult entertainment attendants” were obliged to purchase an annual one hundred and twenty-dollar licence or risk a twenty-five thousand dollar fine and imprisonment for up to one year (Corporation, 1991). Strippers refused to purchase the licence, which (revealingly) required a letter from the chief of police attesting to their good character and stipulating that the individual had not been convicted of indecent acts, procuring, prostitution or for any offence under the Narcotics Control Act. Licencing was also understood to facilitate more effective

surveillance of clubs and workers by police (Corporation, 1991:8). A few dancers did, under threat of sanction, procure licences (Scullion, 1992:58) but the bylaw quickly fell into disuse³⁵. While the process of implementing the bylaw certainly fulfilled an ideological and rhetorical function, in practice Ottawa, as in Nepean in 1984, was ultimately defeated by the very transient, precarious and marginal nature of participation in the industry that rendered licencing too costly and inefficient to police (Bindman and Barron, 1984).

Moral Regulation through Health Directives: 1992 - 1996

In 1989 Ottawa area clubs start adding “champagne rooms”, a row of cubicles for ten dollar private dances³⁶. With the champagne rooms came the illicit touching generally referred to as “dirty dancing” that will be addressed in considerable detail later in the study. Despite this innovation the industry was in serious decline by 1992 and attendance at area clubs continued to dwindle. Arguably this downturn was a result of the poor economic climate, increasingly punitive response to drunk driving and expensive legal battles. Perhaps too, the novelty of strip clubs had worn off. Clubs responded to this crisis with a number of strategies aimed at maximizing profits by reducing labour costs and increasing clientele.

First, clubs went from exploiting workers to the full appropriation of their labour. In 1992 as the economy continued to spiral downward threatening even the bad jobs in the service industry, bar and serving staff at many area clubs were offered the choice of working “under the table” or receiving a pay check that they immediately signed over to

the club³⁷. Most workers, faced with the option of unemployment in a highly unstable job market or working for gratuities, complied³⁸. Many augmented their earnings with government transfer payments of some sort, a practice that not incidentally rendered them particularly vulnerable to further illegal labour practices and placed them outside the minimal protection normally afforded to working class women by labour legislation.

Clubs also dramatically reduced the number strippers they employed in the traditional sense of paying wages. As a result many dancers found their pay eliminated³⁹ as they too were offered the option of working for “tips” or not at all⁴⁰. Put this way it is evident that strippers were experiencing similar labour conditions of many of their working class sisters - decreasing income, non-standard labour practices. By becoming own-account workers, they also lost whatever minimal economic or legal protection they had previously enjoyed.

In part the removal of salaries was defended by club owners with reference to income potential afforded by the newly introduced twenty dollar lap dancing⁴¹. The practice, which first gained popularity in Montreal and Toronto, came into considerable legal and public controversy⁴². Some of the outrage was cultivated by dancers for whom the change meant not only an increase in the amount of labour, but a shift in the nature of the labour itself. They argued that the lines between visible and actual erotic labour, or between skin and sex trades, had disappeared.

In 1991, Cheaters Bar in Toronto was charged under section 167 of the Criminal Code with “Indecent Theatre Performance”⁴³. In 1994 basing his decision on the 1993 Supreme Court of Canada ruling in *R. v. Trembley* that had deemed masturbation in

private cubicles, with no contact, to be consistent with community standards, Judge Hachborn of the Ontario Provincial Court, ruled that the touching between patrons and strippers was “innocuous behaviour”(Chidley, 1995). The ruling and comments were widely reported and condemned in the media (Bhaba, 1995; MacGill 1996). Dancers in Toronto subsequently organized the Association for Burlesque Performers through which they collectively argued that lap dancing was prostitution and called for the crown to appeal Judge Hachborn’s ruling. In February 1996, the Ontario Court of Appeal overturned the acquittal, and in March 1997 the Supreme Court of Canada in *R. v. Mara* upheld the conviction.

This ruling was important not only because it, in effect, made lap dancing illegal in Canada, but because the judicial reasoning relied in large measure on the 1992 Supreme Court of Canada ruling in *R. v. Butler* that identified behaviour that degrades or objectifies women as socially harmful and, therefore, beyond community standards of tolerance. Confirming the legitimacy of this position, Chief Justice Sopinka ruled that lap dancing represented the *undue* exploitation of sex required under the criminal code. The ruling substantiated the claim of harm integral to anti-pornography feminism. In many ways the Mara and Butler decisions, although framed in feminist terms, marked the reemergence of presumptuous morality and the authority of vocal and mobilized community to impose moral restrictions on vulnerable ‘others’ that characterized the Hinklin test.

As a result of a pre-emptive step initiated by the provincial government the Supreme Court ruling had little impact in Ontario. In 1995, the Ontario Labour Minister ruled that lap dancing constituted a potential health hazard for workers contrary to the

Occupational Health and Safety Act. While this did not make lap dancing illegal in Ontario, workers were in principle afforded recourse from compulsory lap dancing inasmuch as owners could be charged under the provincial statute. In 1995 a number of municipalities including Toronto, implemented bylaws outlawing lap dancing citing the newly established health risks associated with the practice. The Ontario Divisional Court rejected the clubs' claim of Charter infringement and, in October 1995, upheld the municipal jurisdiction (Hum, 1995). Ottawa and all surrounding municipalities implemented similar bylaws in 1996 ending lap dancing, at least officially, in Ontario⁴⁴. Once again the municipalities had found a strategy to pre-empt the Supreme Court of Canada and federal law by eliminating the problem of strip clubs in ways that carefully circumvented the question of morality. At the same time the discourse in the media and politicians' pronouncements made little secret of the moral condemnation behind the amendments.

Moral Regulation through the Whore Discourse: 1997 - 2000

Although lap dancing appeared to have come and gone in Ottawa area clubs by 1997, the high profile issue had discursive relevance and continued to shape the way dancers were perceived. On the one hand, the association with prostitution and brothels was made explicit in almost all articles on the subject during this time period (Hum, 1996; Citizen, 1995, 1997). Ultimately the two labour processes were conflated in the dominant discourse. On the other hand, because dancers had organized against the practice (Chidley, 1995), a number of articles appeared which stressed that some dancers were

fundamentally moral women: victims of unscrupulous clubs and the reality of their lives (Bindman, 1997a, 1997b; Jaimet 2000). Put another way we were back to women as victim or immoral agent: either whores or ersatz Madonnas - the two carefully bifurcated.

By once again focussing public attention on the women working in the clubs as opposed to the concerns of the community the lap dancing debate resurrected questions and judgements about industry workers. Certainly the series of articles and letters that appeared in *The Ottawa Citizen* in response to the December 1999 Supreme Court ruling in *Pelletier* (SCC, 1999) not only reaffirmed the link to prostitution (Jaimet, 2000; Kay, 2000; Morse, 2000) but went much further reiterating the contradictory, but frequently conflated, image of women in the skin and sex trades as simultaneously degenerate and victimized. We were advised that strippers are “to be pitied” but at the same time are not victims, since they are “free to impose on herself the same standards of behaviour that other young women (even financially desperate women) impose upon themselves” (Citizen, 2000).

Police charging practices in the late 1990s also reflected the understanding that strip club activity was prostitution. In spite of the bylaw that prohibited lap dancing, all charges laid by police in the Ottawa area from 1998 to February 2000 were criminal code offences, almost all under section 210, the bawdy house provision. Dancers and club staff quickly realized that police were undertaking “sting” operations modelled on the proactive policing approach adopted in an attempt to control street prostitutes. This had an impact on the labour site. In the past managers were periodically charged, although rarely convicted, with the hybrid offence of “allowing an indecent theatrical performance”

(Canadian Criminal Code section 167(1)). As of 1998, bartenders, doormen and managers were charged with the indictable offence of “keeping a common bawdy house” (Canadian Criminal Code section 210(1)). Put another way, not only had the potential stigma and penalty of state sanction increased, but moral regulation was extended to those who shared the labour site with the stripper.

Moral Regulation: How it Works

This brief history of the industry revealed several interesting dynamics that highlight the ways intersecting and conflicting social processes operate to shape and define the strip club industry and necessarily impact on the experience of workers. Strip clubs have been revealed to be firmly embedded in the larger Canadian market economy. Not only were they subject to the vagaries of the market, they also regularly capitalized on the vulnerability of their workers to extract more labour, decrease operating costs and maximize profit. Strip clubs, as capitalist enterprises, were in a position by their workers’ moral and economic marginality to exploit workers, who did not even enjoy the minimal protection afforded by the liberal democratic state. At the same time, however, the industry was subject to particular restraints that are imposed by the state precisely because it operated on the margins of *morality*.

The moral regulation that was inflicted is multifaceted. In part this was a function of complex jurisdictional divisions that resulted in municipal, provincial and federal regulation being imposed in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. In part it was because the clubs operated in grey, undefined areas of the law so that, at times, the

industry became the site on which questions of morality got played out. Federal jurisdiction notwithstanding, issues of morality appear sufficiently provocative that governments at both the provincial and municipal level developed strategies to restrict and control the industry. Not infrequently these controls, although intended to regulate the industry, in practice also further restricted the options of the women workers.

Community groups and feminists emerged as powerful forces in the Canadian political landscape in the 1980s and have impacted on the way the state responds to erotic entertainment. We must be careful not to dismiss these individuals as conservative reactionaries who purposely generate moral panics (Nelson and Fleras, 1996; Kappeler *et al.*, 2000). Instead we should acknowledge their concerns and closely attend to what they are saying. In doing so we can remain critical but appreciate the genesis of their concerns: social disorder, moral degeneracy and crime. This then in turn highlights the ways that strip clubs have been discursively constructed and allows us an analytic point of entry into questions of moral regulation.

Moral Regulation: Class Matters

A final reflection. While the naked or nearly-naked female form has served to entertain since the time of antiquity, the history of striptease, the record of the public removing clothes as entertainment, is sketchy. Beauty, body and objectification exist equally in the ballet theatre and in the strip club. Perhaps the somewhat arbitrary distinction between high and low culture tells us more about relations to truth, and who is entitled to name, define and ultimately dismiss or applaud (Allen:1991:40)⁴⁵. Considered

in this way it is perhaps not surprising that the cultural representations that have historically provided pleasure, entertainment and, of course employment, to working class individuals are not only obscured but dismissed. Ideologically constructed as both product and producer of deviance, it became and remains the unquestioned subject of moral regulation. We must continue to ask why and reflect on the possibility that it is not the naked female form that is the problem but more specifically the explicit sexuality that is associated not only with disreputable working class culture but also with the claims to sexual autonomy made by women of that social strata (Rotenberg, 1974; McRobbie, 1991).

ENDNOTES

1. My use of the term discourse is premised on the recognition that 'knowledge' is always linguistically and symbolically constructed. As such it is an adaption rather than an authentic replication of Foucault's (1979, 1980) development of the concept.

1. Although they did participate in flagellating their customers.

2. There was also erotic entertainment that actually presented nudity as early as 1893 in the theatrical disrobing acts of the Folies Bergere of Paris (Allen, 1991). The trajectory of the entertainment in Europe is different and quite independent of the process in North America and for that reason will not be discussed further here.

4. Burlesque from the Italian *bulare* which means "to laugh at, to make fun of" (Corio, 1968:9).

5. Although Zeidman is wrong to say that "strippers could meet on one common ground, they were all, or nearly all devoid of any authentic talent" (1967:76), suggesting that a star was merely an untalented woman who employed publicity successfully.

5. For example in 1932, the Forty-Second Street Property Owners Association campaigned against burlesque on Broadway. Their argument was simply economic and classes - the economic decline which accompanied the depression was blamed on burlesque specifically the working-class clientele (Allen, 1991:253).

7. Five dollars in 1974 (Hart, 1978).

8. Section 205 of the Canadian Criminal Code; revised to section 170 in 1955; changed to section 174 in 1992

9. Revised to section 163 in 1955; revised to section 169 in 1992.

10. The test was no longer being applied to published material by 1969.

11. All provincial court cases are listed in the bibliography under Ontario. The type of court is identified followed by the year, case and citation source.

12. All supreme court cases cited are referenced in the bibliography under Supreme Court of Canada, followed by the year, case and citation source. The Supreme Court of Canada cases are identified as SCC in the remainder of the chapter.

13. This meant that halfway through her set she would have to walk across the bar to the jute box in some state of undress, deposit more quarters and select her final song.

14. Then as now virtually everyone used "stage name".

15. At the time dancers were fined twenty-five dollars for being late or intoxicated on stage.

16. The source for this sketch is primarily personal memory substantiated with interview data from two of my informants, Alex and Marie.

17. See, for example Anni Ample's annoyance that other dancers adopted her shaggy blond hair style (1988:87)

18. Dancers were recruited, then as now, through advertisement and word of mouth. As the industry expanded a number spin-off industries emerged including driving services and costumers. In 1978 costumes started at forty dollars for the required three piece set of glittery g-string, t-bar and bra. For a novice these were supplied and the cost deducted from the first weeks wages.

19. Dancers could also book into clubs as far away St. Catharines and Sudbury through All Star's connections with other agencies.

20. The table or stool on which the dancers gyrate beside the patron's table is considered to constitute a mobile stage and is allowed under the liquor control act.

21. Although sets were also reduced from four to three songs this did not reduce the work load. It just meant dancers had to rotate more frequently.

22. In a few cases, the clubs did not move but the area around them was part of the general trend of urban renewal as middle class professionals moved into and changed the class composition in areas like Old Ottawa South and the Byward Market.

23. This mirrors the increasingly politically active community groups that mobilized during this time against street prostitution (Lacombe, 1994). The processes were not only parallel they overlapped in terms of discourse and people.

24. Although newspaper articles would also periodically quote a feminist who suggests the practice objectifies women, this is clearly an add-on position.

25. In 1985, a similar crisis occurred thirty kilometres north of Ottawa in the town of St. Cecile-de-Masham. Although also agitating for state intervention and ultimately succeeding in having the bar's liquor licence revoked (Aubry, 1986) the approach was very different than in urban areas. In this small town women not only explicitly organized around moral concerns but they also used traditional approaches to social control. Residents told me that shaming was effectively employed with patrons frequently accosted and castigated by their female relatives protesting outside. The success in many ways highlights the difference between constructed communities and authentic community (Cohen, 1985).

26. It would appear that rates of crime in strip clubs were not exceptionally high during this period. According to police statistics between the period 1984 and 1991 clubs averaged between seven and ten police reports were filed annually (City of Ottawa, 1991:21)

27. The fear was not based on any statistically real increase in violent or property crime (DuWors, 1999). However, the fear itself had real consequences and has to be acknowledged as real fear, if not real danger. The result was that people, particularly women, restricted their public behaviour to avoid danger (Centretown, 1991). For the most part, criminologists link this "moral panic" to interest groups (in particular victims' rights organizations), media presentations and political opportunism (Nelson and Fleras, 1996; Kappeler *et al.*, 2000).

28. City councillors threatened a process of harassment that also included building and fire inspections and police identification checks (Barron and Kessel, 1982a).

29. A similar Ottawa bylaw was narrowly defeated in December 1984.

30. In October 1986 the Supreme Court of Canada refused to hear an appeal effectively upholding the lower court decision.

31. Ironically, the teen club was a source of disruptive behaviour and was obliged to hire off duty police officers to patrol the parking lot to reduce vandalism and illegal drinking (Citizen:1987).

32. After considerable legal altercations the club did move in 1995.

33. The action was also provoked by Bentevoglio's opening an unlicensed strip club on York Street in the Byward Market (Buchanan, 1991).

34. Ottawa decided not to offer one club a monopoly and instead enacted retroactive zoning restrictions ultimately two clubs change locations. The other two convinced city council that the planning principles are not sound and hence would not withstand legal challenge. By grandfathering three clubs (that is allowing them to remain in spite of the new zoning restrictions) the city temporarily breaks the alliance within the industry

35. In 1999, although bylaw number L-241 was still active, it has been largely forgotten and ignored by dancers and the city's bylaw officers alike.

36. This trend was not embraced uniformly and some area clubs did not adopt this innovation until 1992.

37. Most of the other area clubs simply stopped offering wages and forewent the fiction of paychecks.

38. It should be remembered that the already precarious position of marginal workers was exasperated not only by the general economic decline but also the increased obligations and decreasing support that resulted from the disappearance of the social safety net.

39. Bar fees were also increased in some clubs. Traditionally bar fees supplemented the income of the diskjockey, but after 1992 they constituted it in full.

40. By 1995 Toronto area bars had further eroded the income of dancers by implementing a "Strip chip" system that required patrons to purchase five dollar chips for which the dancer was reimbursed four dollars (Bhabra, 1995:54).

41. A lap dance requires the dancer, clad in a g-string, to sit on the clients lap and gyrate while the patron could, if he wished, fondle her body.

42. Ontario and Quebec respond differently. The practice legislated out of legal existence provincially through the Ontario Municipal Act in Ontario (1995) but in Quebec it continued throughout the 1990s.

43. As the case worked through the judicial system the status of lap dancing remained unclear until the Supreme Court ruling (SCC 1997) and continued in area clubs until the provincial government took a proactive step.

44. This is not the case in Quebec. Aylmer, Hull and Gatineau had like Ontario communities enacted bylaws in the early 1980s that were subsequently overturned for jurisdictional reasons. However by the late 1980s, communities on the Quebec side of the provincial border largely relied on informal strategies of harassment rather than bylaws to control strip clubs. Denied the health ruling that Ontario municipalities rely on to validate their regulations, they took no action against lap dancing. Even after the Supreme Court of Canada ruling in *R. v. Mara*, lap dancing continued throughout the 1990s with very little interference from municipal politicians or the police.

45. Certainly the courts supported the distinction between nudity in strip shows and "nudity related to a truly artistic endeavour" (*R. v. Diaz*, 1981).

CHAPTER FIVE

ORGANIZING THE LABOUR: MAKING SEXUALIZED LABOUR WORK

Introduction

The strip club, in both its incarnations as leisure and labour sites, is a cultural and commercial anomaly located somewhere between a bar and a brothel. In keeping with the ethnographic approach adopted, this chapter provides a relatively unanalytic description of strip clubs gleaned from my interviews with dancers, managers and support staff as well as from the extensive field work undertaken. This will set up a context for the subsequent analysis of the labour practices and relations. There are four main sections to this chapter which move from the general to the particular. In the first, the industry itself will be sketched, with an emphasis on the associations and operational approaches of clubs in the Ottawa area. In the second section, the physical and social configuration of a typical club will be laid out. The third examines labour relations and, in particular, the ways support staff are positioned to manage and control dancers. Finally, the snapshot concludes with a consideration of how the work day is temporally organized.

ORGANIZATION OF THE INDUSTRY

The Community of Clubs

In 1998 there were eleven strip clubs or, in the parlance of the ads, 'exotic dance bars' located in the Ottawa area. In keeping with section 224(3) of the Ontario Municipal Act, which forbade an outright ban on strip clubs while allowing municipalities to prevent more than one from opening, the communities around Ottawa (Kanata, Gloucester, Nepean) had one club each. This restriction, coupled with the limits imposed by city planning and moral contamination arguments detailed in the previous chapter, resulted in a particular geographic concentration: a disproportionate number of clubs were located in the central-commercial zone of Ottawa with the remainder scattered throughout the region.

There were also a further six clubs on the Quebec side of the provincial border in Hull, Aylmer and Gatineau. Some of these clubs allowed lap-dancing, which though not legal in 1998 was nonetheless common practice in some Quebec communities. For the most part strippers, depending on their willingness to engage in this particular labour practice, consistently worked in one province or the other. Respecting this apparently important distinction made by workers in the industry, the current study explored clubs located in Ontario only.

Ownership was not concentrated; Benivogolio Holdings' proprietorship of three clubs was exceptional. Most clubs were owned by individuals who took a greater or lesser interest in the management of the club¹. Despite the complaints of owners and the hidden costs including driving services, fees for dancers and promotions², the industry

appeared sufficiently profitable to discourage rapid proprietary turnover³ as a result, ownership was relatively stable.

The independent ownership of the clubs does not, however, mean that they were not connected. In fact dancers, bartenders, waitresses and diskjockeys rotated through the clubs while owners and managers communicated socially and professionally. In addition, the threat posed to the industry by community groups, policing practices and municipal politicians resulted in professional associations to further the interests of the business. The result of these interactions was two-fold: a community of sorts and consistency in the organization of clubs. The former came with all the benefits and drawbacks entailed in the notion of community, including a continual sharing of information throughout the industry⁴.

The second implication of the close association was that labour was managed in remarkably similar ways and that innovations (read strategies of exploitation) that were successful in one club were quickly adopted throughout the industry. In 1998, only a few clubs booked dancers 'on schedule'⁵, most had abandoned this practice. Instead they relied on 'freelancers'. Under the freelancing system, individual dancers entered into verbal agreements with the club to pay the established bar fee⁶, follow house rules, remain in the bar for a minimum of four hours and perform between one and five three-song sets on stage⁷. In exchange, the bar provided the setting where the stripper could solicit dances. It must be remembered that dancers not only received *no* direct financial compensation from the establishment for her work, but also that her fees paid the wages of the diskjockey, who also received no remuneration from the club.

Industry Stratifications: Straight and Dirty

The industry was understood by insiders as clearly stratified by 'dirty/straight' and appearance criteria. The former refers to the amount of dirty dancing - illicit touching or sexual contact - that was tolerated in a club. The 'dirtiest' bars had brothels attached, where sex trade workers, not strippers, worked (although in one club they overlapped). The second set of distinctions refers to the appearance standards imposed by management for the dancers. The most exclusive clubs only accepted the most conventionally attractive dancers although increasingly managers recognized that sex appeal could be subjectively. The standard continued to be the blond, tall well-endowed beauty with tan lines⁸ but without visible tattoos - a model that could have particular implications for women of color⁹. These lines of stratification were not parallel, and on the one hand reflect demarcations imposed by management (appearance criteria) and on the other, the dancers' relation to the labour (the dirty/straight continuum). In general, however, the straighter the club, the more selective it could be, and the 'nicer', cleaner, more luxurious the interior.

In practice, a circular self-perpetuating dynamic appeared to have been established. The more popular a bar, the more dancers wanted to work there: and the more 'girls' there were, the more clients were attracted. The result was that some clubs could legitimately advertize thirty dancers and turn away freelancers on a regular basis, while the less successful bars had difficulty attracting workers and their claims were gross exaggerations. Of course, as we will see shortly, the more popular a bar, the more management was in a position to impose rules, and the more likely dancers were to

comply. In addition, these stratifications shaped the nature and expectations of clientele although the neighborhood was also important.

There was another level of stratification operating in the industry, which will be developed further in coming chapters, but which warrants mention here. Some bars were known as particularly exploitative labour sites. Management in these establishments largely relied on the most marginal of dancers: women whose appearance, tattoos, or past behavior limited their employment opportunities. These clubs shamelessly exploited the women's need, imposed excessive (by industry standards) expectations, inflicted harsh sanctions for non-compliance. They frequently had trouble retaining support staff. Two of my non-dancing informants had fled a club because, in the words of one: *I just I just couldn't take it anymore the way Steve treats the girls. Ah it's horrible there (John).*

Employment Opportunities: House Girls, Freelancers and Features

A final set of distinctions between 'house girls', 'freelancers' and 'features' is necessary to understand the industry. House girls were freelance dancers who, in a mutually advantageous arrangement, developed an association with a particular club and worked there on a regular basis. For the dancers, it allowed them continuity and the opportunity to build up a client base, as well as to participate in a familiar work environment, to know the specific limits, expectations and rhythms of work and to develop social relationships with the other dancers and support staff. Since bars relied on house girls, there was some reciprocity. The house girls were treated with considerably more consideration and allowed some leeway with regards to house rules. It was, in

short, a privileged status. Dancers offered fidelity in exchange for a negotiable power. In contrast, freelance dancers rotated the clubs they worked. They did this for a number of reasons, including boredom and an attempt to maximize earnings. The outcome was complex. Freelancers were more vulnerable but, because they were not associated with the club, they were better positioned to remove themselves from its stressful and competitive internal dynamics.

The experience of features, the elite strata of the industry, was strikingly different from that of their less high status co-workers. While many features had been table dancers, the move necessitated a considerable investment. Features required expensive costumes, a series of themized and choreographed shows, professionally compiled tapes, promotional photos and, of course, a title. Though the earning potential was substantial, few dancers, recognizing the high outlay, continual travel and lack of camaraderie, aspired to becoming a feature act. In short, becoming a feature constituted accepting a *career* in the industry.

Agents: Mediating Between Work and Workers

The final players to consider are the agents, who sometimes mediated between entertainer and employer. On the local scene, these "strange beasts with voracious appetites" (Billington, 1973:21) have been displaced over the last ten years because dancers either had standing arrangements as house girls or assumed responsibility for identifying and contacting clubs themselves. Out of town engagements¹⁰ and features were still booked through these middle-men (or women). While ostensibly providing a

service for the worker who paid him/her, alliances were enigmatic and inevitably determined of social and economic power and the search for profit. That is to say that since the club was the more valuable commodity for the agent it was rare for agents to side with dancers in a dispute. Observations suggest their primary task was to ensure that dancers complied with the dictates of the club. For the worker, this relationship resounded with the flavour of obligation, not to mention power - the agency negotiated the conditions and location of the worker's labour. Although perceived as inevitable in some areas of the industry, the essential exploitation of the relationship was not lost on the workers (Tracy, 1999)¹¹.

The role of employment agencies in stripping resembles the mediated employment of women workers generally. Increasingly, service sector jobs (domestic service, clerical, child minding) are arranged by agencies¹². The result is that largely unorganized women, who have limited cultural and status resources, are subjected to this double layer of exploitation. These workers never attain the status, identity or protection of other similarly placed, more respectable, more male, more middle class contract workers.

ORGANIZING THE STRIP CLUB

Setting the Stage

The strip club is a bar that is imbued with visible markers of the brothel. It is a business that self-consciously relies on women's bodies. Other industries, including airlines and tourism (Hochschild, 1983; Atkins, 1992), use women's bodies to make a product or service more appealing. Here, the service and the body are conflated. This

play on sexuality will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters, but for now I want simply to sketch the context that is defined by, and defines, the labour process. Historically, strip clubs, as already mentioned, ran the spectrum of plush to spartan. However with the proliferation of clubs in the early 1980s, a McStrip model emerged that rendered clubs increasingly similar¹³. It is this homogeneity which allows me to present the following as a description of a *typical* club and *typical* distribution of labour.

The exterior of the club is determined by geographic area rather than industry. That is, clubs located in the downtown core tend to restrict their outside promotion to a neon sign bearing a club name that leaves little question as to the nature of the entertainment, and perhaps the nude silhouette that appears to be the unofficial emblem of the industry. Clubs located in rural or industrial areas are more explicit in their self-promotion, and billboards frequently grace their parking lots. These signs are as likely to announce pool tournaments, upcoming events, pizza and big screen television as to promote an inflated number of exotic dancers.

Upon entering a strip club, one is immediately struck by the exceedingly subdued lighting. At the entrance, just past the coat check¹⁴, is invariably a glassed-in notice board, which promotes future events and contains pictures of current and upcoming 'features'. To one side there are pool tables and assorted electronic games. In addition to the perpetually running pornographic videos, the bar itself is decorated in an eclectic collection of pornographic images, beer advertisements and sports memorabilia. Tucked in a corner, so as not to intrude or impede anyone's view of the stage, is the bar where drinks are dispensed. It is essentially a service bar with a few stools scattered in front. I

often perceived the area around the bar as neutral zone. It afforded patrons a period of acculturation and rationalization for customers who were unwilling to acknowledge themselves as *the sort of guy who goes to a strip club*. The pool tables, at times, fulfil a similar function.

Off to the side but usually near the bar, is a kitchen, which is either operated by the establishment or leased to an independent restaurateur. The extent to which clubs cater to the gastronomical desires of their patrons varies considerably. Most clubs offer an assortment of 'pub fare'; in some, a more varied menu is available. Periodically clubs offer free lunchtime buffets on Thursdays and Fridays to entice patrons into the establishments during a traditionally slow period of the day.

The diskjockey's primary work site is a room or booth measuring perhaps five feet by ten feet, positioned above the floor with a large window and equipped with microphone, table, and chair. Most of the space is taken up with assorted sound, lighting and special effects equipment. It is further cluttered with personal effects and compact discs. The public space of the bar as well as the stage is under the continual surveillance of the diskjockey.

Hidden from view, but close to the "DJ booth", is a dressing room, a communal space shared by all the table dancers. Equipped with mirrors, shelves and hooks, these rooms are uniformly poorly ventilated, overcrowded and smell of a mixture of marijuana and tobacco smoke, sweat, perfume and body odor. The illusion of sexuality stops at the door.

Off to one side are eight or ten champagne rooms, the site of ten dollar private dances, (and in Quebec twenty dollar lap dances) as well as variously priced dirty dances. Since champagne is rarely served in Ottawa strip clubs, I can only hypothesize that the term is intended to convey a totally extraneous sense of luxury and exclusivity¹⁵. These cubicles, measuring perhaps three feet by five feet each, are equipped with two vinyl chairs facing each other, an ashtray and a ledge to hold drinks. While the cubicles are hidden from the general view of the club, they are usually open to be monitored by anyone passing down the aisle of this area.

Inevitably, pride of place is reserved for the stage. Backed by mirrors and surrounded by perpetually flashing mini-lights, it is outfitted with assorted lighting and 'effects' equipment. In the middle of the stage is always a pole employed for sexual poses as well as more acrobatic innovations during the strip show itself. Surrounding the stage is 'perv row'. Chairs along the perimeter of the stage, in front of a somewhat lower ledge which accommodates drinks and ashtrays, afford patrons a close up view of the stage show.

The stage is the center of activity. Depending on the club and the number of dancers who are 'on the floor' at a given time, shows run continually or with one 'break' song between dancers¹⁶. Each dancer is expected to change into a costume and dance for two 'fast songs' during which she strips to her g-string. She then disappears briefly and returns wearing a sheer covering to do her final 'slow song'. The quality of the stage show is highly variable, largely depending on the extent to which an individual dancer is prepared to *do a stage*.

As in any bar, customers congregate in a strip club to drink. They also eat, talk, play pool or video games and purchase illicit substances. On the other hand, a strip club is not a bar 'like any other'. The most noticeable difference is that women are scattered throughout, uniformly dressed in abbreviated sexualized attire that, at times, borders on the bizarre. Incongruently equipped with purses¹⁷ and towels¹⁸ they wander through the club, chatting, posing, and giving off the visual and verbal cues of availability. For all that, it is a contradictory space: it is sexualized, but not a place have sex.

Manufacturing The Atmosphere

The club is above all a male space, culturally reproducing the masculine atmosphere of the tavern that earlier generations of men enjoyed as a result of laws that banned women. Women, physically present throughout the public space of the bar, are inevitably confined by their roles. From the perspective of the client, the female employees in the strip club are there to serve by catering to his physical or sexual desires. In either case, any pretense of equality between men and women is suspended. Within the framework of malestream dualism, the dichotomous positions available to women are either whores or Madonnas, women in the club are whores. This is important as the whore status allows male patrons to act as if no women were present at all. Moreover, none of the concessions afforded non-whores in this supposedly emancipated age are necessary. Women in the club can be rendered objects of the male gaze¹⁹. Though disconcerting as it harkens back to earlier eras of gender relations, it is perhaps a more honest reflection than the politically correct environment of the university.

Paradoxically, the very proliferation of female bodies ensures the continuation of the club as a male space. Within the whore-Madonna dichotomy, to which of course not only men but women also conform, 'respectable' women do not frequent strip clubs. By definition then, women who enter for leisure are, at a minimum, suspect. More frequently the assumption is made is made by male clients that these women are not only *like* whores, but *are* whores. 'Other' women are both subtly and actively discouraged; and generally pushed outside through physical and verbal cues²⁰. In fact exclusionary processes are sometimes not so subtle, and unaccompanied women are sometimes asked to leave the establishments. Not surprisingly then, female customers are rare. Women who do enter are generally careful to legitimate themselves through association with a male patron or an employee²¹.

In addition to the proliferation of representational and real naked female bodies, the maleness of the environment is further strengthened through that other marker of stereotypical maleness: sports. When not tuned to pornographic videos, the big screen television inevitably transmits images of athletic prowess. Conversation, rituals and pools further reinforce the importance of sports to the bar culture. Seen by management as a strategy for encouraging patronage, sports can become an undesired and disconcerting source of competition for the strippers: *they [management] put the hockey game.... they [customers] forgot about us - totallythat's bad* (Tina).

Even a very cursory examination of the club reveals three types of clients, with very different relations to the establishment and its employees - the boys, the regulars and the loners. Without analyzing the motivations of customers, it is evident that staff are not

only cognizant of these distinctions but organize their behavior accordingly. The 'boys' collect in groups, talk, joke amongst themselves, watch the stage sporadically and generally enact the rituals of male bar culture (Dunk, 1991). These men rarely accept invitations to the champagne rooms, although they periodically converge on 'perv row'. Consistent with the general rhythms of bar patronage, the end of the week is popular. This clientele dominates on Thursday and Friday nights making these shifts less profitable for the dancers than might be anticipated. 'Regulars' are likely to frequent the bar any time singly or in groups. Treating the club more like a neighborhood pub, they form friendly associations with the staff and house girls. They look at the stage with studied indifference and rarely contribute to the dancers income, although they may treat the women to alcoholic beverages.

In contrast, 'loners' who are often regular clients of particular strippers come singly and apparently with the intention of enjoying 'private dances'. These individuals while providing the bulk of the dancers money, are also those that are invariably contemplated with pity or disdain by staff. In the coming chapter, the relationship of these customers to dancers and the ways they help shape the strippers' labour processes will be explored in some detail.

ORGANIZING 'OTHER' WORKERS

In the preceding sections, the context, the industry and the physical environment in which the labour occurs were sketched. In this section, the focus is on what social actors *do* in this setting. The strip club, like any other social setting, is a complex web of social

relations and interactions that constitute, and are constituted by, the particular environment in which they occur. In addition to dancers, the strip club is also a labour site for diskjockeys, waitresses, bartenders and doormen. Laying out their tasks and their perception of those responsibilities will allow us to understand the interactive context of dancers' labour.

The Managers

Support staff and dancers all operate under the supervision of a manager. Most clubs are fairly flat organizations where one manager, usually an employee but occasionally the owner²² assumes overall responsibility for ensuring the smooth running of the establishment. These traditionally male, but occasionally female, individuals are responsible for a variety of tasks including: negotiating with agents for features; establishing rules; arranging special events, hiring and firing support staff, scheduling, recruiting dancers and, negotiating staff conflict. Managing a large semi-autonomous group of workers engaged in marginal labour activities undeniably poses a variety of challenges, and success is contingent upon particular competencies. While managers generally share a particular understanding of the labour and employees, they also adopt disparate approaches to realizing control. Some assume a highly authoritarian approach; others are abusive; some are distant and aloof, while a very few strive to establish a labour community. As we shall see, the relations of power in the club are complex. At the same time, at least officially, these individuals retain final authority. They are responsible for the

smooth running of the club, legally and fiscally accountable and empowered to organize the club by establishing rules and identifying expectations.

Structurally, these managers would appear to be part of the new middle class of individuals whose careers are characterized by the relative compensation for credentials, at least the appearance of varying degrees of autonomy, authority and power and who enjoy greater employment security and benefits than working class workers. At the same time the extent to which managers in strip clubs share the residual stigma associated with the labour site warrants consideration. On the margins of respectability, the status of the occupational position may not be readily realized. Once again when we factor in respectability, categories are destabilized and potentially undermined.

The Support Staff

Considering the employees of the strip club as two disparate groups - dancers and support staff - replicates a distinction that is based not only on labour process, but also on how the relationship is experienced by participants. In spite of the interdependence and the semi-autonomous status of all the workers, the lines of solidarity are clearly drawn in terms of relations to the establishment. Only doormen, who average between sixty and a hundred dollars a shift, are actually paid by the bar. The loyalty of staff is therefore not bought by wages; rather the organizational structure and task distribution ensure a commitment to the business.

If we examine the experience of support staff, the first thing that becomes apparent is that this labour site shares the characteristics of other working class working

environments (Ferree, 1990; Paules, 1991). The joking relationship (Spradley and Mann, 1975) is manifest in a particular sexualized manner, in spite, rather than because of, the environment in which it occurs. Furthermore, in direct contrast to the findings of Spradley and Mann, there is a great deal of camaraderie; and solidarity is considerably more than “a thin veneer” (1975:76). This rapport is strengthened by the oppositional position assumed vis-a-vis dancers. This will be made clearer when we consider the specificity of various jobs and the perceived need to manage and control dancers.

The Bartenders

The bartender, either a man or a woman, is in the first instance responsible for bar tasks. That is, they are expected to stock the bar - making sure the beer cooler and liquor cabinet are full, all mixes and garnishes prepared - filling orders, serving customers and waitresses, all the while engaging in bantering with patrons. She is also responsible for the cash and must reimburse the house for any shortages. This task encompasses giving change, supplying and collecting the waitresses' floats, running the Interact Machine and paying for supplies that are delivered. She also often assumes quasi-managerial responsibility for the smooth running of the establishment, in particular in the absence of a manager.

The environment shapes her labour in several ways. Not only are clients predominantly men, the interactions hyper-sexualized and the gratuities exceptionally generous²³, but the existence of a population of independent workers with no clear commitment to the establishment increases her physical and emotional labour. In both her

own and the bar's interest, she is motivated to maintain good working relations and a positive atmosphere. Quite simply if there are no, or few, dancers not only does her income decrease, but she must face annoyed customers who are paying, in their overpriced drinks, for non-existent entertainment. At the same time, she is expected to collect the house fees from dancers, negotiate conflicts, identify dirty dancers and in general retain control over an environment that can be highly unstable.

The bartender must develop strategies that allow her to maximize her control over the workplace. These would include developing good relations, creating situations of social indebtedness and assuming an authoritative presentation of self. Freelance dancers and support staff operate, each in their own interests, in an informal 'economy of favors'²⁴. On the margins, the very antithesis of Weber's rational bureaucratic model emerges. Essentially an effective, if unacknowledged, process of reciprocity occurs where the bartender offers free drinks, notification of generous patrons, pseudo-friendship and, occasionally, covers for dancers by withholding information about rule infractions from management; and dancers repay in kind by conceding to requests to go on stage or to acknowledge a customer. This informal economy of favors operates outside managerial control and while it is generally consistent with managerial interest ensuring shifts run smoothly, it can also function at his expense. In short, because bartenders are in an ambivalent relationship with dancers - characterized by both reliance and conflicting interests - relations between these workers are managed instrumentally²⁵.

The Servers

Unlike the bartender, the always female server rarely assumes managerial responsibilities although she does unofficially monitor the floor and sometimes the champagne rooms. Her time is filled getting orders, making change, clearing and wiping tables and arranging seating. Working the floor also means she is denied the physical barrier from customers enjoyed by the bartender. Accordingly, she carefully ensures that she retains the goodwill of customers in order to realize the gratuities that constitute her income, but also tries to protect her physical space. As already noted, customers appear to take physical and verbal licence with the female staff in strip clubs that they would never presume in other service encounters²⁶.

The Diskjockey

The work of diskjockeys is much more directly shaped by the labour location. In other drinking establishments, these predominantly male, employees are responsible for creating the atmosphere of the bar employing a sophisticated use of music to keep customers on the dance floor, to ensure that they enjoy themselves and presumably will frequent the establishment again. In a strip club, the music is at best secondary. For the most part, it is repetitive mix of a few eighties dance, seventies disco and selected rock tunes. Instead, the diskjockeys ensure atmosphere through his 'rap' as he endlessly promotes dancers, specials, coming events; urges patrons to *enjoy a private dance with the lovely Betty*; and announces dancers as they go on or come off the stage.

The diskjockey also assumes a managerial role in relation to dancers. Ultimately it is his responsibility to ensure that dancers are available, prepared to go on stage, don't cross the lines of 'decent performance' and to advise management of any untoward behavior on the part of the dancers²⁷. As one informant put it: *I'm a babysitter...it's degrading as a DJ*. These managerial responsibilities must be understood in relation to his dependence on dancers for his income, which is directly proportional to the number of dancers who pay the required fee of ten dollars per shift. In this specific labour dyad, the diskjockey finds himself in the unenviable position of controlling the labour of others, but with little real authority or power. The few sanctions he can apply, such as removing a dancer from the floor, are often contrary to his interests and, in any case, are likely to be overturned by a manager highly motivated to placate the entertainers.

Put this way, we can appreciate that the diskjockey's class position is contradictory (Wright, 1989a). The organizational assets of authority are, in practice, undermined by his direct reliance on those he manages for his income and the hierarchical authority structure. Diskjockeys, as a rule, have few illusions:

In a way the DJ is supervisor over the dancers...but it's hard to get girls up [on stage] What is your power there?....see my problem is enforcing it - I can take them offbut I'm always worried about them running up to management.... right now I'm going to start to enforce it more and, and take advantage of the position I'm in cause I'm the only diskjockey (John).

The Doormen

The final occupation to be considered is that of doormen. Traditionally, a doorman is employed to control the clientele and ensure that, in an establishment

predicated on the consumption of alcohol, the situation remains stable. In a strip club, the kind of disruptive behavior (i.e. bar-room brawls) associated with the 'bar scene' is largely absent²⁸. Here the management of violence gets transformed into the management of morality. His job description includes the monitoring of champagne rooms, implying that he performs the undeniably necessary function of ensuring the safety of the dancers. In fact his principal task, according to management, is to insure that the dancers do not contravene established guidelines with their customers²⁹. At the same time however, the relationship of control is undermined by his reliance on gratuities from dancers to supplement his income.

Support Staff and Dancers: Conflicting Labour Interests

Support staff and dancers are similarly located autonomous workers. In spite of this the structure of the labour itself, combined with outside regulation and financial self-interest, effectively positions these workers oppositionally. The interests of the different groups necessarily conflict when staff are required to manage dancers and monitor or control their labour strategies. The possibility of cohesion or coordinated action is structurally undermined and a complex set of social relations is set up that is always confined by this pervasive conflict. Put in this way, it is hardly surprising that, as we will see, staff are unlikely to applaud the resistance of the dancers, but instead perceive these as against their own immediate interests.

ORGANIZING THE RHYTHMS OF WORK

The Work Day

We now shift from space to time to consider the rhythms of the working day.

Before the bar opens, staff start arriving. For the bartender, mornings start with cleaning away any remnants of the previous night, setting up the bar, counting and stocking beer into the coolers, putting the liquor into the cabinet, preparing condiments and organizing her cash. This process will be repeated at shift change. Next the diskjockey and dancers start arriving. The latter, in sweat pants, without make-up or hair-pieces in place, appear to be the antithesis of the stereotypical stripper. As they proceed to the change room to effect their metamorphose, the lights go down, the music starts and the doors open at eleven o'clock in the morning.

The day and evening are spent by workers going about their assigned tasks. The bartender serves, cleans, fills orders, stocks, washes dishes and referees disputes. The waitress runs back and forth filling drink and food orders, emptying ashtrays and cleaning away masses of dirty glasses and empty beer bottles. The diskjockey confers with the dancers about music and establishes the order of appearance, a process that frequently involves extensive negotiations with the house girls. He then spends the remainder of his time playing compact discs, promoting specials, events or the champagne room on the microphone and cajoling, begging or threatening the dancers onto the stage. The doorman intersperses periods of standing at the door with his rounds of the champagne rooms and pool tables, stopping to chat with patrons or staff, or to look at the stage and occasionally

to play a game of pool. The employees appear to be, and in fact are, oblivious to the nudity around them. For most, it is more of an annoyance than titillation³⁰.

The women emerge from the change room with *war paint and costumes* (Ann) in place to work the floor. Since there is no financial compensation for appearing on the stage, work is perceived in terms of making money on the floor. Their strategies of approaching patrons, chatting and soliciting dances depend on both the personality of the dancer and the regulations imposed by the particular club. The result is that at any time there are dancers chatting among themselves, playing pool, sitting alone at a table or engaged in conversation with customers. In spite of the advertized availability of five dollar table dances, these are rare. Most dancers simply refuse to remove their clothes in the middle of the bar. At any rate, most patrons are easily persuaded to enjoy the privacy afforded by the champagne rooms, where the dancer either dances on a stool or sits in close proximity to the customer and moves - a dance in name only.

The club follows somewhat erratic daily and weekly rhythms, with intervals of intense activity interspersed³¹ with periods of relative calm. In particular, the arrival of a stag party can suddenly and dramatically transform the atmosphere in the club. Similarly special promotional events sponsored by beer distributors, contests like wet T-shirt or periodically "Miss Nude Something or Other" competitions, offer a welcome diversion from routine. On a normal day the workday is broken up by "stages". That is, since the prerequisite of a strip club is the presence of a woman at some point of undress on stage, dancers periodically emerge from the dressing room for a stage show. Throughout the day, new dancers arrive, most often brought by one of the many driving services that

operate expressly for dancers, to complete their minimum four hour shifts and leave when they are either discouraged or have earned sufficient money. Thus the number of dancers is in continual flux, although some clubs attempt to regulate shifts. Midway through the day, around seven o'clock, there is a general shift switch when support staff and a number of the dancers leave and new workers arrive. Periodically, uniformed police officers - perhaps they think they are participating in community policing - enter the club, patrol the champagne rooms, wander briefly around the floor, and then, their presence acknowledged by all, make their way out the front door.

At quarter-to-two in the morning³² the diskjockey announces *last call for alcohol*. Lights are turned up and music ceases. The waitresses run around wiping tables, stacking chairs and emptying ashtrays - although a cleaning service arrives in the early hours of the morning to do a 'thorough' job. The bartender reverses the tasks of her day-shift counterpart and closes her cash, locks up the liquor and cleans the bar. The doorman checks the nooks and crannies of the club to ensure no patrons remain. By two-fifteen in the morning the dancers, diskjockey and waitresses have all left and the doorman and bartender are desperately encouraging some (usually) intoxicated stragglers to depart. When they do, the cash is put in the safe, the doors locked, the alarm set and the doorman escorts the bartender to her car³³. Barring a 'routine' police check³⁴ the last staff member has left the parking lot by three o'clock.

The Interactive Day: Conflict, Friendship and Other Dynamics

A labour site is not just about performing tasks, it is also about relationships and interaction. How people perform their tasks and how they experience the job is necessarily shaped by this interpersonal context which gives meaning but can also be distracting and undermine the ability of workers to do their jobs well. This duality is clearly evident when we look at strip clubs.

All employees enjoy a backstage area to which they retreat when the environment or clients become insufferable. In the cases of dancers, the change room is frequently more populated than the floor. There they share information about clubs, staff and other dancers. At the same time, support staff and dancers spend considerable amounts of time congregating around the bar engaging in conversation, and, inevitably, 'bitching'. The result is camaraderie but also a continual undercurrent of stories and gossip:

They all are full of shit, it's not news unless it's something, you know - really interesting. If it's bizarre they'll keep it that way, but like you could go in there and say, "oh ya, I bought a new car." You buy a little Cavalier or something, next week it comes back to you: you bought a Camaro and you slept with the owner of the lot for it (Ann).

There is also considerable alcohol consumption. In fact, drinking by dancers is actively encouraged by management in some bars. The result is that dancers not only end up as 'captive consumers' of the inflated prices charged for the entertainment which they themselves provide, but are also periodically intoxicated.

To summarize, the strip club is an intense, dynamic and often chaotic place. It is impossible to understand the conditions of the labour without appreciating the unique atmosphere that prevails there. It is a space where *there is always bullshit, just bullshit*

(John). The exact source of this, I would argue, is the result of a number of dynamics inherent to a stigmatized labour site, which converge in complex ways. The gossip and stories, the social atmosphere, the class culture and the self-dramatization inherent in that location, as well as the very real crises occurring in women's lives³⁵ collectively mean that not only are there real stressors, but minor at-work issues tend to be exaggerated. The feeling of general instability is reinforced when customers act unpredictably³⁶. Although incidents are effectively contained by staff, the general experience is unsettling, a dynamic that is further exasperated by periodic intoxication and, of course, the competition and lack of personal space intrinsic to the labour of dancers in strip clubs.

SUMMING UP

Predicated on the understanding that we can only begin to understand the labour in relation to the context in which it occurs, the above has attempted to draw a picture, as it were, of the physical and interactive space of the strip club. It is a unique place - a sexualized leisure site. It is a work site, but one that is staffed by semi-autonomous workers, whose interests conflict and coincide as they endeavor to maximize their personal advantage.

ENDNOTES

1. To eliminate a stereotype at the outset, to the best of my knowledge, none of the clubs were or are now owned by criminal organizations including motorcycle clubs.
2. In the bar where field work was conducted the owner repeatedly advised us that his expenses ran to \$2,000 a week.
3. This is, obviously, not an economics dissertation. Accordingly costs, expenses and profit are largely irrelevant to the study. They are mentioned here only to provide the reader with a sense of the economic context of the industry.
4. For example, dancers barred from one club had a hard time finding work in any establishment. Conversely what were deemed inappropriate or excessively exploitative practices by a club became common knowledge and their supply of dancers dwindled dramatically.
5. 'On schedule' meant that the dancer was committed to working a particular shift for the entire week. The pay of forty dollars per shift was collected by the dancer on the last day of the contract. As we will see in the next chapter, any breach of the contract, (coming in late, calling in sick) invalidated the agreement and the dancer received no pay, regardless of how many shifts she had successfully completed.
6. Usually between ten and twenty dollars that included the 'DJ fee'. Regardless of the name, the money, either directly or indirectly was used to pay the disc jockey and, sometimes, the bartender. While the advantage of this arrangement for the club is obvious, dancers were surprisingly accepting of the practice.
7. As previously discussed a dancer 'on schedule' commits to a broader range of expectations.
8. Tan lines are very important. On the one hand, the lighter flesh highlight the sexualized zones of a woman's body (her breasts and derriere). On the other, the existence of these lines reinforces the idea that the client is being given access to something illicit and normally hidden from view.
9. The issue of race/ethnicity needs to be addressed. Quite clearly North American ethnocentric ideals of beauty are powerful *political* discourses (Bordo, 1994) reproducing and reflecting social stratifications and having profound implications for the self image of young women of color (Giddings, 1984). How this operated in strip clubs though is unclear. On the one hand, there was the idealized image of young white womanhood; on the other, many clubs were increasingly embracing a more complex consideration of beauty that valued diversity. The number of minority women who worked in strip clubs during the research period was neither disproportionately great nor small. The apparent

absence of particular populations may have been the result of any number of social processes, including racism and culture. This issue warrants consideration. Unfortunately my research shed little light. During field work and interviews the issue of race/ethnicity did not emerge; although I sometimes suspected one dancer in the club was perceived by clients as 'exotic', this was never confirmed. Of course, as a white woman it is certainly possible that I did not *see* or *hear* problems or deconstruct the subtext or the (for me) apparently neutral relations I observed. At the same time, it must be remembered that my research prioritized the understanding of women in the trade. As already noted, only one informant was a woman of color who denied having encountered racism at work, and made no other mention except to note that she didn't have to worry about tanning. The only other remark was one dancer's comments on owners and managers in which she reproduced a number of stereotypical assumptions about particular cultural groups. For the most part, this dancer's statements notwithstanding, racist discourses were absent from the interviews.

10. Table dancers are booked for one or two week engagements in small or remote communities that otherwise have difficulty finding dancers. In these cases, they are paid forty dollars per day and provided with a room. Again pay was always conditional on complying with all conditions imposed and dancers sometimes found themselves with their wages substantially docked, or even withheld, for minor infractions.

11. One of my informants was particularly outspoken: *They're whore masters ya no shit (Alex)*.

12. See for example Salzinger (1991) for a discussion on domestic service agencies.

13. In Ottawa this trend was exacerbated by the concentration of a number of strip clubs owned and managed by Frank Benivoglio.

14. Most patrons do not check their coats but pay the admittance fee here. Some clubs always charge admission while others do so only when they are offering special entertainment.

15. The term may also originate in the Cabarets of European countries where B-girls are openly, and legally, employed. In these establishments, the purchase of a bottle of champagne customarily entitles the patron to enjoy the company (and in exchange for monetary compensation sometimes other favors) of his companion in a private, and very comfortable, curtained-off area of the bar.

16. Because of freelancing the number of dancers at any one time is highly variable.

17. Purses are needed to hold money, medication and other personal belongings that they would be concerned about leaving in the relatively public change room.

18. As we will see the labour requires that women sit naked on chairs in the champagne room. The towels ensure general cleanliness, comfort and protect the individual from disease.

19. I am hesitant to revive the old subject/object dichotomy with all its theoretical limitations. However the experience of men observing, touching and discussing the physical attributes of women in the club renders it is apt.

20. An important distinction is that this male exclusiveness is not supported by the dancers who sought neither to antagonize women customers nor to make them feel uncomfortable. In fact, dancers consistently expressed their annoyance that women would condemn them and the labour site, without entering establishments of this sort.

21. In addition, female clients will be careful to identify, through verbal and non-verbal cues that they are 'unavailable'.

22. Since task assignment is similar no distinction will be made in the coming chapters between owner-managers and employee-managers.

23. Why gratuities are particularly generous is open to question. Presumably it is a function of the fact that, generally speaking, men tip better than women and in a strip club most patrons are men. In addition customers generally anticipate spending money in a strip club and some of this largess spills over to bar staff.

24. I was unable to find literature on this process but it is certainly common in service encounters. For example as a waitress in a 'straight restaurant' I would strive to maintain good relations with the cooking staff. In practice this meant 'sucking up' (offering drinks, friendliness, favors etc.) and receiving, in exchange, assistance in correcting my food order mistakes.

25. The informal economy of favors is not restricted to bartenders - stripper interaction but permeates all relations between support staff and dancers (and to a much lesser degree also operates between support staff).

26. This is not uniform. In particular, regulars are highly respectful. Furthermore, servers will call a patron on his inappropriate behavior and are usually backed by the bartender and manager.

27. In fact, this is only done in cases where the situation is perceived to be serious.

28. Although my observations suggest that there are 'incidents', however tend to resemble settling of accounts rather than bar-room brawls.

29. It must be recognized that, legal regulations notwithstanding, the demarcations between acceptable and unacceptable are somewhat fluid. In addition dancers can, in

many cases, circumvent the regulations through judiciously distributed gratuities.

30. The few neophyte employees, who had never worked in a strip club, were conspicuous by their demeanor, something that was inevitably commented on by dancers and support staff alike. In fact new recruits are rare since a rotation of employees within the industry and the community ensures that information regarding job openings circulate rapidly. The annoyance is a function of the inevitable stereotypes confronted when interacting with others outside the industry.

31. It is not unusual for the champagne rooms to have a line up and an hour later for the bar to be almost deserted.

32. Bars close at two in the morning in Ontario, three in the morning in Quebec.

33. This was standard practice and one that was done without complaint by most doormen. The exception was the undercover police officer who preferred to depart with the dancers and flatly refused to remain. In those cases a diskjockey inevitably casually but conscientiously 'hung out' until the bartender finished her chores.

34. It is common place for police to wait outside of establishments and systematically stop and question every departing driver. Supposedly for the purposes of eliminating impaired driving, the practice is experienced as harassment by staff.

35. For example, issues around child custody.

36. Every informant had stories, as do I, of incidents involving guns, violence and even bombs.

CHAPTER SIX

LABOUR PROCESS: WORKING THE CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter our focus shifts from the context of the labour to the labour process. Now we try to position ourselves inside labour practices and relations by starting with, and closely attending to, the voices of experience. The following three analytic chapters will pick up the themes of work, resistance and stigma that emerged in the interviews and seek to make sense of them without *imposing* meaning. Together, these chapters explore what the work of strippers *means* both inside and outside the labour site from the position of strippers themselves. Having conceptualized stripping as *work*, it is now necessary to explore what it entails. How it is organized? What skills are involved? How are social and work relations structured? And how do workers experience the physical, emotional and sexual dimensions of the labour?

In order to undertake the analysis, we must bear in mind the relationship between 'labour process', 'labour power' and 'labour realized'. The distinction is neatly articulated

by Phillips (1997) who says that:

a worker, whether self-employed or waged labour embodies a potential to do work. This potential Marx called 'labour power'. The actual work performed or extracted, or realized labour, depends on the way the labour is organized and the extent to which potential labour is extracted at the workplace. This process is called the labour process.

Phillips, 1997:68

The following considers the work strippers *do* and then analyzes the structural location of skin trade workers in terms of Wright's concepts of organizational and skill assets.

ORGANIZATIONAL ASSETS

The stripper is an independent contractor providing an entertainment or social service for the owners and the patrons of the establishments in which she labours. Her presence legitimates the establishment but there is no material product since in personal services of this sort "production and consumption are simultaneous [and]...the useful effects of the labour themselves become commodities" (Braverman, 1974:360). Beyond these initial observations, designations are highly problematic not only because of the range of skills require and the vaguely disreputable services provided, but also because of the paradoxical labour location. The stripper is both an autonomous agent and an exploited employee.

Who Is In Control?

As previously noted, strippers were either on schedule or freelancers. In the former, the club had purchased the labour power of the worker, in the later no such

economic exchange took place and no real employee-employer relationship operated. The freelance stripper entered into a verbal contract with a given club. In exchange for her labour and compliance with the expectations of the club, the bar provided the labour site - the physical space (bar, chairs, champagne rooms) and other co-ordinated and necessary labourers by diskjockeys, barmaids, servers and doormen. This setting was, of course, crucial. Without it, a stripper could not solicit dances to make her money¹.

Strippers who were 'on schedule' generally earned forty (untaxed) dollars for an eight-hour shift. In spite of a rate of pay that averaged five dollars an hour, these workers' labour and general deportment remained under the control of management. That control was realized through economic sanctions in the form of fines that were deducted from their earnings. Strippers could be fined for a variety of infractions:

If you lose the keys you're fined. Like you have to pay the key fee, um if you're late you're docked off your pay....maybe anything from five to fifty dollars. It could be quite substantial. I can give you an example, there was this special, you could get two for one - two dances for the price of one between two and four in the afternoon and if you didn't do it, one girl didn't do it for two afternoons and she got docked a hundred bucks, fifty bucks a day for not doing the two for one.... And that place had forty-one rules....I never saw that before and one of the rules was don't associate....don't become friendly with the staff, like the doorman wants to take you out for coffee at 1 o'clock - you can't go. You can't go to Harvey's and have coffee. You can't say "hello, how are you". That is some kind of stigma (Kelly).

Imposition of fines was a characteristic of this particular work place, but the extent to which regulations were imposed varied:

Maybe it's already in their culture that the woman is a second class citizen and in those bars we are treated as, dancers are treated as second class citizens, or third or fourth class even. But it's mostly mostly in those kind of bars. Like we'll have nothing to say. Like we can't even get phone calls. Like we're not allowed to

have a phone call for an emergency or, I don't know, for example a girl who has a child (Marie).

What was fined was largely dependent on the particular club. The use of illicit substances, violence, or borderline dirty dancing could result in fines in some bars, outright dismissal in others. Some establishments dictated rules of dress. Although they allowed quite unusual outfits, cut-off blue jeans, associated with a particular rough working class presentation of self, were prohibited. These same clubs also imposed appearance criteria so that some dancers found their options severely limited:

The only thing that was holding me back was my tattoos and my lack of tan lines....and it still does - there's only two clubs I can dance in Ottawa. Well I need tan lines, that's what I've been told by, like every club owner except one or two. I need tan lines and I need to cover up my tattoos. So I wear stockings but the ones on my shoulders are hard to cover (Jamie).

Dancers were not just fined part of their income but sometimes fined so that all their income was lost.

You can get fired for anything. Being too fat, for having a big ass, because the owner doesn't like you, for looking too young. I've been fired for looking too young. Arnold [the manager] will get rid of that last dancer we saw. Either he'll tell her to go or just be so mean to her that she'll leave...unless he thinks he can get something from her. Ah.... clubs fire you, they are really sleazy. You're on schedule and on your second day ah, you have no recourse you've worked for free (Sarah).

At other times the bar made further access to the labour site contingent on participating in special events, wet T-shirt contests or beauty pageants:

There's a Miss Nude Ottawa happening now. That's where all the girls are. It's really stupid - mostly dancers they need a title, to become a feature. I'm [deleted], not a big deal. Somehow I ended up being a finalist. I was working this club and the only way I could keep working was to enter. So I did (Sarah)².

The legal parameters of behavior were, in principle, dictated by the state. With the municipal bylaws implemented throughout Ontario in the mid-1990s and the 1997 Ontario Supreme Court Mara ruling expectations became somewhat clearer and champagne room behavior changed accordingly:

it's supposed to be no contact. I still see some girls rubbing but it's nowhere near as bad [as it was prior to the Mara court ruling]. There's no nipples thrust in the mouth what have you. Whereas before there was, you know, a lot of munching going on (Debbie).

In practice however rules continued to be somewhat changeable, increasing the instability of the environment and leaving workers unsure of expectations and parameters:

"There are rules?" You're supposed to have rules? [joking] Before it was chaos. Now it's organized chaos. Now that the laws have been sorta set - they they try to change them, monthly. So we don't know what to follow - we just go by whatever's posted in the change room. Ya whatever they tell us to do that week then, some weeks we're allowed to touch you know like an arm or a thigh, some days we're not allowed to touch (Debbie).

Since the main purpose in placing dancers on schedule and paying them five dollars an hour was to ensure a steady supply of employees, those that failed to complete the contract were summarily denied all their earnings:

So like say you worked three or four days and Friday you had to work day shift, which is at, you have to be there at 11:30 and you didn't show up or something stuff like that. Even when you call in sick or something last minute. It's like you're off schedule and you lose all the days that you've already done (Diane).

As this informant's comments suggest, while recognized as sometimes unreasonable, the withholding of pay and imposition of fines were normalized. Perhaps on the margins, labour relations are shaped by the expectations that they are exploitative. Nor did dancers expect protection from the state, since they were well aware that clubs operated outside of

the security afforded by labour laws. However, at the same time, the ability to deconstruct the relationship, dismiss the pay as *only two hundred bucks, it's nice cause it just gives you that little extra at the end of the week* (Diane) and the recognition that clubs *need us as much as we need them* (Sally) allowed the women to realistically assess the adversarial nature of labour relations and, as we will see in the next chapter, not only positioned themselves accordingly but used the relationship to their advantage.

Most dancers operated outside of even the minimum and fragile benefits afforded through the schedule process. For some, it was a choice intended to maximize autonomy. *I'm there for the money and that's it, that's all and uh, I go in I make what I have to make, and then I leave* (Debbie). For these women, it was precisely the lack of managerial control that was an appealing aspect of the job:

There's no job like this job y'know. [laughter] You work whenever you want when you want, no job can give you that y'know. If some weeks you don't want to work you are sick, or this or that, or mentally, you can't do that somewhere else. But in a club you can (Tina).

The understanding was supported by their conviction that when the labour had not been explicitly purchased, the club was not entitled to impose expectations. In this situation, strippers' willingness to do any work beyond the minimum requirements was understood by all participants as negotiated. As freelance dancers and management, or support staff, operated in their own interest in the informal economy of favours detailed in the previous chapter emerged.

As noted in chapter three, by the 1990s going on schedule was frequently not even an option except in those clubs with unreliable clientele:

Before you didn't find a bar with more than five or ten dancers. That's the most. Now there are so many freelancers, bars don't need to book girls. They can rely on their freelancers. But a club like The Pit, they can't rely even on the freelancers because there's not enough people that go there, there's not enough customers, there's not enough girls. Well one thing, one takes the other to draw in - the one ain't helping the other (Sally).

Though resulting in lower labour expenditure, freelancing also meant that management was faced with a highly unstable labour force and decreasing levels of control over workers. In response, management attempted a number of contrasting approaches. On the one hand, there was a general 'tightening' of the industry, greater sharing of information and strategies between clubs whose managers understood their collective need for a disciplined labour force. We also saw informal paternalistic strategies, including the conferring of status, privileges and social relations, increasingly being bestowed on house girls in a largely unsuccessful attempt to realize 'employee' loyalty without financial costs. It would appear that these strategies were not always effective. In those situations when labour was scarce, the market demands required that clubs implement cash exchange and purchase the worker's presence. Some clubs had rather innovative approaches:

[To work a shift you pay] ten dollars, to the owner. Ya, but they give you back your ten. Let's say they have problems to have girls on Saturday night, so if I work four days or two days or five days I got my ten on Saturday. For each day, if I work the Saturday night (Tina).

Strippers' Negotiating Control

The relationship between workers and management was complex, multi-layered and transient. This lack of permanence maximized workers' autonomy in part because she was not, or only marginally, economically dependent on an individual capitalist and

because the interaction was freed from the mystifications which obscure the exploitative reality of long term association.

Similar to other subcontracting relations (i.e. electricians), the worker was responsible for furnishing tools, in this case music, costumes, transportation and (sometimes) promotional photos. Semi-independent, the entertainer was nonetheless reliant on the capitalist for a labour site to practice her trade, including the solicitation of table-dances. Consequently, while located within organizationally structured expectations, the nature of the labour became negotiated terrain. On the one hand, we had dancers defining their autonomy, right to artistic control, and moral expectation, and on the other, a manager intent on increasing customer satisfaction, which (for him) was almost inevitably associated with explicit nudity. Consequently the number, degree and location of 'spreads' could, and did, become contested terrain.

In short, while exploitation was necessarily a feature of the labour of workers, they also retained considerable organizational assets. She had the freedom to determine the hours and location of her labour, with whom they would interact and established for herself the level of labour output. Within established parameters, strippers exercised considerable control. There remained a mutual dependence between the manager, who needed entertainment, and nude entertainers, who could not afford to be labelled troublesome nor be banished from one or a number of clubs.

The organization of the stripper's labour was complex and defied easy classification. At the same time, to perceive the organizational structure as largely

anomalous risks reaffirming marginality by locating it outside of established labour practices.

In the interests of normalization, it may be useful to briefly compare stripping with the similarly structured but non-stigmatized occupation of real estate agent who, like strippers are in a paradoxical relation to their 'employers'. In fact, in either instance the term is hardly appropriate. Realtors are actively recruited by brokers; they are hired and they can be fired. But since they receive no direct financial remuneration for their labour from their employer, the relationship is nuanced. In exchange for legal protection and access to the necessary legitimizing context (including the use of the name, licence, insurance), means of production (phone services, office space and technical support), the realtor commits her/himself to a particular brokerage firm (including providing 'free' labour staffing the office). Similarly, strippers received access to the necessary legitimizing setting and technical support, but were not financially compensated by the owner of the labour site. Like the realtor, they could not simply practice their trade in any location and had to exchange labour and sometimes fees for access³.

Like the real estate agent's, a stripper's income was unreliable. She may have worked eight hours and made no money, even losing bar and driver fees; or she may have earned three hundred dollars during a four hour period. As we will see, dancers employed a variety of strategies from hustling to dirty dancing to maximize income. Even then, sometimes the situation was beyond their control, and they made very little money. In strip clubs, and possibly in real estate agencies, as well, the ensuing frustration and

instability not only exasperated workplace tensions, but it also increased the stress these workers experienced in their day to day lives:

It's still kinda nice sometimes to have that steady income like a normal job y'know....Like instead of dancing, just have a normal nine to five job - that way you can really do your budget, cause I find when you don't know what you're gonna make or one day it's a hundred bucks you go and spend it cause you figure tomorrow I'll make it back y'know, it's fine. But tomorrow you go and the next day you only make fifty....It's never the same you can never really budget your stuff and ah you spend it as it comes in (Rachel).

This comparison is not intended to imply that real estate agent and stripping are completely analogous occupations. Clearly, there are differences, including educational requirements and legitimating provincial standards. The regulation and self-monitoring via professional associations of real estate agents stand in sharp contrast to the multi-level, intrusive morally-justified control of strippers by both administrative and coercive arms of the state. At the same time, the ability to locate the organization of stripping within broader labour market trends confirms the appropriateness of using political economy to explore the 'deviant'.

SKILLS ASSETS

Skills are assumed to constitute a legitimate barometer of a worker's contribution and therefore the economic and social rewards to which the holder is entitled (Gaskell, 1986:361). Labour stratification is generally assumed to be a function of degree of skill, so that the distinction between skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour is taken for granted as a basis of 'knowledge'. Skills are not neutral measures but embedded in ideological constructs that reflect gender and class bias and legitimate hierarchies of skill

and wages (Cockburn, 1986). Of course, modern capitalism does not simply compensate workers for skills that are recognized as such, but for myriad other attributes that are brought to work site.

It's a Job!

In order to consider the labour of nude entertainers in terms of skill, we must first articulate the nature of the labour itself. The nude entertainer is a worker who provides a service to consumers. Directly, the nude entertainer provided an entertainment service (both private and comparatively public) and indirectly works for the capitalist who uses her presence and labour to sell alcohol. Its distinctiveness lies not only in its stigmatization and marginality, but that it is, at many levels, performance. "The actor's product - a given performance - is inseparable from his or her other attributes" (King, 1986:158). We will return to this apparent conflation of self and labour location when we consider how complex stigmatic designations get taken up both inside and out of the labour site.

Shifting from organization of the labour to what they actually *did*, we can first note that strippers had to continually negotiate two discrete, and sometimes conflicting, jobs during their work day. The 'quasi-contractual' obligation of the dancer was to perform strip-tease shows and 'hang out' *looking like a hooker* (Debbie) - tasks for which she received little or no compensation. She did, however, obtain the opportunity to *make her money*: that is an opportunity to utilize the profitable skills of soliciting and playing the game. For analytic purposes, the two roles will be tasked separately and these two, often

conflicting, sets of duties will be considered in relation to erotic and emotional labour. In this way, skills can be teased out while still centring on the experience of work.

Public Erotic Labour: Putting on a Show

A woman working in a strip club as a stripper had first and foremost, to act like stripper; whether she was on the stage or not, she was always performing. This simple observation can be understood as involving both the ceremony common to visible employees of "playing [her] condition to realize it" (Goffman, 1959:76) and the fact that the dancer was allowed some creativity but was, like actors generally, required to assume a role that was not her own, nor of her making (Henry and Sims, 1970).

To entertain, she had to *do a stage*. This involved the ability to perform for, but also interact with, the audience whose very presence legitimated the work. The stripper engaged with indicators of sexuality, and these links to the erotic and nudity appeared to define her job as a *stripper*. However, even this most explicitly erotic labour was not about sex but nudity and the visible presentations of the erotic: *You manipulate your body in a certain way and you throw a sexual aspect to it* (Debbie). Put another way, the stripper engaged in surface acting where "the body not the soul is the main tool of the trade. The actor's body evokes passion in the *audience*, but the actor is only *acting* as if he had the feeling" [*emphasis in original*] (Hochschild, 1983:37). The eroticized setting, available props, and their own expectations may have ensured the audience defined the entertainers as sexual, but the experience of workers was markedly different:

At the Blue Lagoon it's a lot easier because there's TVs. So I can't see anyone from the stage so I watch TV. I'll listen to music and I'll watch TV and I'll just dance. I've been doing it, you know when you do it so often you're you're looking straight at people's eyes but you're going, you're kinda looking over yonder type, looking at the TV there. You're doing your little crawl and you're like giggling inside cause there's some show on. I mean I've lost it completely because I was doing a show and I was trying to talk to someone and Polkeroo from Polka-dot Door came on TV and I started pissing myself laughing. I couldn't do it anymore. I walked off the stage (Debbie).

In contrast to the idea that women's erotic bodies are simply objectified, the strippers were agents. They established the interaction with the audience, determined the pace, the actions, the movement of the show and, while they may have constituted a sexualized object in the audience's gaze, it was their own sexualized form. Audience members were also potential clients for her personal services, and as potential buyers they were in a position of power. Dancers could still enact a fine parody playing with her own and her audience's sexuality, if she chose; but she had to be careful not to let the audience in on the joke⁴.

By definition, the strippers act required a degree of comfort with nudity and the willingness to expose herself physically, as distinct from intellectually or emotionally as do other performers. In order to do her job, a self-assured and confident presentation of self was essential. An entertainer, of any type, who appears truly vulnerable, rather than assuming the role of a vulnerable female, is liable to experience considerable and disturbing challenges. Many developed a strong stage presence and a number were competent dancers, proficient not only in the standard stripper 'moves' but able to incorporate, and execute (in very high heels) their own eclectic mix of ballet, jazz, acrobatics, aerobics and posing. On stage they had to continue smiling, or at least assume

the appropriate sexually vacant expression - *I think about doing laundry or watch the TV* (Debbie) in the face of apathy or, sometimes insults. This kind of verbal comment touched on not only their performance but, in light of the appearance imperative, on their value as a woman. In short, they needed to develop the capacity to distance them-selves from the negative evaluation of the audience.

Although the difficulty of the work is obscured by the performance component⁵ and nudity, it was physically demanding manual labour. And like so much physical labour it could be dangerous. Beyond the obvious potential harm in dancing in stiletto heels there were other dangers. *You wreck your knees when you do floor shows* (Kelly). Another informant took steps to avoid harm by attempting to control the actions of other dancers:

I've physically hurt myself. They're, they're careless on stage. They got you know oils and waters uh shit like that, and they don't care about other people. So I was, I do certain things in my stage, so the girl whose before me always gets told. "Use a blanket". They don't (Debbie).

The work was also exhausting and technically difficult. *Pole work is a lot of hanging upside down, it's a lot of balance, muscle technique. It's hard to look sexy when you're upside down and all the blood's rushing to your head!* (Diane). Put another way, the 'moves' could only be erotic if they appeared effortless and natural, a feat which necessitated practice, skill and considerable muscle development. Constructing sexuality was hard work: but the more effective the illusion, the more sexual the portrayal, the more the work was invisible to the audience. We are once again brought face-to-face with the problematic dichotomization of sexuality and labour: strippers were highly cognizant of the fact that being sexy is not natural or easy but rather *work*.

This work also required capital investment, as well as countless hours in unacknowledged labour, in appearance, clothes, make-up and sometimes tanning salons or plastic surgeries as well as less tangible capabilities, including comfort with nudity and sexualized presentations of self. Gender stereotypes including the whore complex, means that these intangibles are largely unrecognized, and are dismissed as either indicative of immorality, in the case of the former, or normative female presentations of self, in the case of the latter.

What did this public erotic behaviour mean for workers? Certainly 'putting on a show' was *sometimes* exhilarating and ego-enhancing:

You can feel kind of down or beat, having problems with a boyfriend or whatever and uh you go to work and it kinda takes your mind off everything. And you have people looking at you and you have nice guys being, they're nice to you, and they want you, and you think "who cares about that guy....look I have all these guys begging for more" (Diane).

For most, however, the rewards hardly compensated for *exposing myself for free* (Jamie). Furthermore, most experienced dancers had become disillusioned , *[I was doing] the splits and working the poles and everything and then sometimes they wouldn't even clap* (Rachel).

Ironically, stage work - the epitome of the stripper's job in the dominant discourse - was seen as peripheral by the women themselves in the 1990s. As an independent entrepreneur, the stripper recognized that the stage show *doesn't make any difference. Before we used to make it a really good dance and de-de-da and everything timed and the more it's going, the less we're giving, because money wise it's the same. So why try hard* (Tina)? More importantly, the stage used up the worker's time and, hence, ability to

make money. During the time required to prepare and do a show, no private dances could be solicited or performed. Furthermore, the stage was seen as potentially undermining earnings by offering nudity for 'free'. Accordingly, dancers frequently employed strategies to foil this exposure, for example by demanding low lighting and mastering the illusion of nudity while really *they see nothing, I show them my breasts - that's it* (Tina).

What does this mean for the labour? When I was dancing in the late 1970s and early 1980s 'shop talk' centered around moves, costumes, the quality of the stage and audience response. There was considerable pride in doing a good show and a sense of affirmation was realized when the audience responded enthusiastically. In the 1990s, while a dancer might get congratulated for her 'set' by her co-workers, such conversation was largely absent. The stage, though physically dominating the club and discursively centered in the concept to stripping, was peripheral for the women who worked that stage. I would argue that in spite of a labour site that is permeated with the markers of sexuality the extent to which public erotic labour was seriously engaged with has diminished considerably.

Soliciting: "Wanna Dance?"

As the stage receded as the primary site of labour, the 'floor' became central. Most energy was invested in selling private erotic entertainment. With little or no direct income from the club and responsibility for bar and transportation costs, these workers were well aware that *if I don't work the club, I don't make money* (Josey). While constrained by specific house rules⁶, individual inclination and willingness to engage in

emotional labour determined whether a dancer would adopt a passive, social or hustling approach to solicitation.

Some dancers flatly refused to approach customers: *I'll never ask a guy for a dance, cause I feel it's begging* (Rachel). In fact, there was a marked level of disdain for dancers who hustled: *Some girls go around and ask, "hi baby how you doing" and start shaking their things in front of him, no! I don't like that at all. I just wait for them. If they want me bad enough, they'll come and get me, they'll signal me or tell the waitress* (Rachel). This approach was most effective with exceptionally attractive dancers whose eroticism was physical or visible. As a result, these women often used the stage as self-promotion platform and tended to invest considerably more time and money in their appearance: costumes, tanning and operations. The irony of their approach to work was not lost on the dancers:

We would be sitting there thinking we're little prima donnas, [laughing] going "you want me to dance you can get off your ass and come ask". Or sitting and talking to each other and it's almost like, we act like sometimes we'll get in a conversation, the girls and we're huddling and we're "blah blah blah", having a drink of wine, and the guys almost feel like they're interrupting or something to come ask us to dance. I mean it's hard, it's bad enough the guy has to get up to come over to ask us if he can give us some of his money for a job we're supposed to be doing, but then we look at him like "what!" [emphasis hers] (Diane).

More frequently dancers *worked the floor*: Socializing and engaging promising looking customers⁷ in conversation. Time spent at a customer's table was, of course, purposeful. Many customers were looking for company and were willing to compensate a dancer for her time whether she was providing a social or an erotic service. Although customers were undoubtedly cognizant of the commodified nature of their relations with

dancers, they could be highly obtuse. This necessitated that the stripper simultaneously 'play the game' and also ensure that the customer appreciated that this was a financial and not social interaction. To carry out these two tasks with their contradictory demands, was in itself, a stressful position to be in. Failing to do so meant that she would *lose time talking for nothing* (Tina). It could be frustrating activity:

Ya I hate that, and you, you never know when you go to pick up a guy to sit down, you never know if he likes you to start with. Maybe he doesn't like me but he's too polite to say "bye, don't sit down". You know what I mean. So it's not easy [emphasis hers] (Tina).

The most aggressive hustlers would greet all customers. At a minimum they would *give them eye, just like you would in a bar* (Debbie). Usually the approach was more blunt: *I play on them you know like "has anyone ever told you you're really cute?" na-na-na "I'd really like to dance for you"* (Debbie). There was little point in being coy, since *everybody knows what they are there for* (Debbie). This approach was simultaneously the most labour intensive and ego-defeating but also the most profitable⁸. Both my observations and informants comments indicate that a willingness to hustle - rather than appearance or ability - was one of the best indicators of income potential:

There was a girl that worked at Fred's. Like all of us would be sitting around, and good looking girls, and this girl, she was tall skinny she had no boobs and no bum at all, nothing and short fuzzy blond hair. And, she'd come out and wouldn't sit down the whole night. She'd walk around and even if there was only four or five people in the bar, she would stop and say "hi" to each person, and try to talk to them. And sometimes she got a dance. She'd always make money (Diane).

Unfortunately, aggressive hustling could also earn the dancer the disdain and animosity of her colleagues:

I mean how girls can walk to a table "you wanna dance?" " No, ok" walk to another table, "Wanna dance?" " No, ok". They just keep going and going, and that makes it harder for the rest of the girls that are trying to make money, with these ones hounding them you know (Sally).

When the dancers' business was slow, some strippers would resort to selling tickets. This was an occasionally 'fixed' lottery where dancers sold six tickets for a champagne room dance at two dollars each. The diskjockey announced the winner, who could *enjoy a private champagne room dance with the lovely Pamela*. The dancer kept her usual fee of ten dollars and the diskjockey received his two dollar 'cut' for his assistance. The practice, which not all dancers engaged in, was a labour intensive but sometimes effective strategy. It allowed her to interact with customers without soliciting outright and - particularly on Friday nights when 'the boys' monopolized the club - generate some income.

Regardless of the approach to making money, and in spite of the fact that most dancers had good distancing skills because you *can't take it personal, if I take it personal then it gets ah, a lot of girls take it personal and they throw hissy fits* (Ann), the failure to make money could be perceived as rejection and internalized:

There's another thing, that's a lot the same about girls is that, if you're working and you've put a costume on you can feel good about yourself and you go out and sit for a few hours and you're not getting any dances. Then you go back in the change room and you put another costume on. And the longer you don't make money the more times you change.[laughter] And the more makeup, you keep fussing with yourself and you it's almost like and then it's almost like, so then you're not smiling anymore and then you look bitchy so you're not, so even more

you're not going to make money, and it's just like a snowball effect it just gets worse and worse. And you get feeling like you're fat, you start feeling like you are ugly (Rachel).

Private Erotic Labour: The Hidden Show

In the late 980s, private dances moved from the floor (table dances) to the champagne rooms, a shift welcomed by most dancers. For the most part, dancing naked in the middle of a bar:

didn't appeal to it at all. I hated it, hated it but ah one I wouldn't dance on the box. No, I danced on the floor, because their face was at my flippin crouch level you know. I hated it, I hated it, but then when champagne rooms came in - when it was both of them and someone asked me to dance for them on the floor, ten bucks same a the champagne room ya. Anybody even now, they ask me for a dance on the floor, ten bucks. You might as well take it in the champagne room (Sally).

While the work remained essentially unchanged, private dances continued to be about the removal of clothing and sensuous movement⁹. It was essentially about *how much sex can you give the guy on that little two feet by two feet square* (Marie). This was not necessarily easy:

when I first started I had no idea how to go about it, but we finally discovered. It took us about a year to go from four hundred a week to over a thousand. I couldn't pin-point it, I couldn't pin-point it. It's the way you walk, the way you look at them, the way you move on the box (Marie).

The added privacy may have made some dancers feel more secure since with table dancing *there are too many people and I'm naked in the middle of the room* (Jamie). It also changed the social and economic dynamics and rendered the dancer both more vulnerable to aggression and pressure by customers, as well as in a better position to increase her earnings by dirty dancing.

In order to *make her money*, the stripper had to first sell her service. To do this she employed a range of strategies including bartering:

I'll charge them like for the first song, because they're a little hesitant, I'll charge them half price. Make them think they're getting a really great deal. "But I'll only do it for you na-na-na" well, I'll tell them that; they give me a ten and they don't see their change. So "ya ya I'll bring it to you". Just give me money (Debbie).

She then sought to maximize the spending of each of her customers using a variety of special skills. *Once they come and get me, they're screwed. They're stuck with me and I'm gonna keep them and siphon out every last dime I can get (Rachel).* In the champagne room, she carefully choreographed the interaction to her advantage and policed the boundaries she had established for herself:

If it's, I mean if it's gonna benefit my wallet, pardon me, I'll do it except I will not draw the line, I will not step over the line. To me, I guess to me prostitution is actual penetration or ah ah whether it be hold, holding his ah genitals with your hand, your mouth or ah there, that's that's the line. Cause, cause I mean, I've had several people touch my chest, to me my chest is nothing. You touch me there [crotch] and we'll have words that's the line. That's the only thing private to me (Debbie).

The dancer was required to encourage the customer, retain his attention and good will and yet remain firmly in control of the situation:

It's not what you do it's how you do it. That's where the experience comes in, you know. These girls think you have to touch all over every customer. It doesn't have to be that way at all (Sally).

Because they were vulnerable both from customers and - should the situation cross the obscure but very important line between dirty and straight - from the bar, dancers employed a variety of tactics to protect themselves. Strategies were shaped by their

intentions. If a dancer expected to engage in dirty dancing, she might have bribed the doorman:

It depends on who I'm dancing for. If I'm gonna get really close to a customer because he's a good paying customer, he's got lots of money, I'll I'll pay them to close an eye. [when?] You have to do it either before the dance or after the dance, and you have to explain to him. [pause] He he usually knows, but now, he'll only close his eyes to an extent. He'll only let you go so far (Debbie).

More frequently, they employed 'straight' strategies to maximize income:

I don't stop [dancing] until they tell me to stop and then then I tell them how much. I don't do one dance and then sit. I learned long....I used to do that, one dance and that's it. Then you don't get another dance, so I just keep dancing (Sally).

For dancers, making money also meant being vulnerable to physical aggression.

Dancers routinely relied on each other for protection: *In the champagne room we're all watching each other's back (Debbie).* Most of the more experienced dancers had perfected strategies that maximized their control of the interaction. One informant described her atypically candid approach:

I stand - I make them open their legs like this, if they give me a problem my knees are right here. Ya; I'm serious [in response to my expression]. Every guy has to sit with their legs open. I want full range. Some of them say "why" - "cause if you get out of line I'll kick you right there", fucking right, you hurt me I'll hurt you right back. "These are the rules; you don't like, you get the fuck out, don't ask me to dance". A lot of them [strippers] sit with their legs wide open - he's going to get his hands to your crotch before you get your feet to the floor cause he's got a hold of your legs. You know what I mean? (Sally).

Consistently the erotic nature of the labour was not problematized by my informants. Perhaps context was important, "I found I liked being a sex object, because the context was appropriate. I resented being treated as a sex object on the street or at the office. But as an exotic dancer that is my job" (Sundahl, 1987:176). Given that nudity,

sexual presentations and interactions were normalized within the cultural environment of a strip club, it is perhaps not surprising that these were essentially non-issues for participants. Furthermore, unlike other labour sites, in the club sexuality was explicit and monetarily compensated *it [sexual harassment] was all over, in what I do, no that's the place [emphasis hers]* (Tina). In addition, out in the open, sexuality could be managed

Wouldn't you say in a restaurant, the owners, the cooks they're gonna grab you for free at their convenience. But in a bar, first of all they don't grab you, they're gonna be thrown out, and whatever happens they're always forking out the bucks for it you know [emphasis hers] (Kelly).

Unlike most female employees who are victimized by inappropriate sexual attention, strippers were positioned to effectively reverse the harassment and exploit the customers vulnerability and/or investment in a non-deviant social identity:

A couple of weeks a guy bit me on the ass and I said to him "I'm in here giving you pleasure and you fucken come in here and disrespect me like that. I'm doing you nice things and you bite my ass. Is that a normal thing in you life? You bend over and bite people on the ass?" I fucken belittled him something awful. How dare he? Drove him in the head with my elbow....he hit the wall "what you do that for?" "What did I do that for?" Bite me again and I'll show you why I did it. I made him pay me fifty bucks! It was the first dance, I had my knees on his balls, I said "that's fifty fucken dollars, ra ra ra". I said "you pay it or I'm gonna break your balls". Ah, I wasn't gettin off him either - best defence [emphasis hers] (Sally).

During field work a similar incident unfolded. A customer exposed himself to a young but 'wise' dancer. Not perceiving the situation to be threatening, she elected to manage the incident herself. As she explained to staff in comic detail after he had left, she had righteously advised him that his behaviour was inappropriate and criminal, but that she would be prepared to 'forget it' if he compensated her for her trouble. He complied.

As the above incidents illustrate, strippers learned to assume control over situations and to assertively enforce their expectations. This competence, which is traditionally denied young women who continue to be socialized into 'niceness', also facilitated her assumption of agency in social interactions. As Debbie noted:

Ya it's [stripping] given me self confidence, um, it's taught me - a lot - um self respect. Because things happen and if I feel uncomfortable with it - I stop it, where as before I would have done it cause that's what I was expected to do. So I'm more, confident in the fact that I can do - it's what I says that goes, I am the boss, it's up to me. Before, I was very naive, I was a very very naive girl, ah, very gullible. Now I'm cold-hearted, a lot stronger emotionally, physically and mentally.

Private Emotional Labour: Friendship at Ten Dollars a Song

As already indicated, all or most of the worker's income was directly paid by customers on a fee-for-service arrangement. Explicitly, the primary service was private dances or erotic entertainment. However, equally prevalent, but largely unacknowledged, was another private interactional emotional service.

Many customers, particularly the 'loners', were only marginally interested in nude entertainment whether it was on the public stage or in a private champagne room. Instead these men were: *There for communication , really to communicate. They look at you, but they don't look at you with sex* (Sally). Perhaps they were socially isolated:

Alone, they don't, ah you know, they work, they have a normal life, and maybe they don't know really where to go to meet some people, or girls or something, or too shy or something. So, they go there, and they spend a couple of hundred bucks and they sit there and talk to a uh girl that's nice to them and makes them feel good for a few hours and that's it y'know. And sometimes, I guess, they get.... you get ones that just go to see you all the time and get a little more attached and stuff like that (Diane).

Another informant was much less empathetic:

I have ah, I have one gentleman who, the girls refer to him as my sugar-daddy, but I call him a friend, um in front of him. In in his face I call him my sweetie. He's about, he's 54 he's married, he's got gran-kids da-da-de-da, he's he's fairly well off and all he wants is a friend. And he's willing to do. He's willing to pay anything for my friendship. So he's paying me to be his friend [emphasis mine](Debbie).

These customers were the source of endless discussions by support staff, who regarded them with a mix of pity and contempt: *When you have to pay ten dollars a song to talk to somebody, that's a lot of loneliness* (Brad, diskjockey); *ah customers well mostly I feel sorry for them* (Janet, waitress); *they're losers* (Kevin, doorman). That there was a market for social relations would appear to say a great deal about alienation of social actors and commodification in modern society. This issue, which I feel warrants consideration, is beyond the scope of the present project. For now the question remains: If an interactional service was being purchased, what did this mean for labour and the service providers?

To be successful, the stripper had to master 'playing the game'. The 'game' could be employed as a strategy to procure dances, but it could also be a compensated labour in its own right. The game was a parody of social relations: *It's playing a game, of course it is. It depends on the guy, the drippier you are the more money you'll make. The more you laugh at his jokes, the more money you'll make* (Sally). In essence the stripper gave a cynical performance whenever she was in public space (Goffman, 1959:18) instrumentally and consciously playing to the expectations of an audience of one: *I mean obviously they're going to be nice. They're being paid to be there so it's not like it's not a good*

idea to be a bitch or something cause, like I said, guys aren't gonna spend money on ya and that's what you're there for (Diane).

The game analogy is particularly appropriate when we recognize that the audience was playing along in a fine parody of social interaction where the script was known - but never publicly acknowledged - by all participants. The client colluded and helped to maintain the fiction by “engaging in protective measures” (Goffman, 1959:212). Clients cooperated by never challenging the strippers’ presentation of self and by focusing conversation on what defined her within the club - her appearance: *His conversation was like , “Have you always had your hair that length?” “ Was it always shorter length or did you ever have it shorter or longer?” (Jackie).* In the end, though, the dancer’s livelihood was dependant on her ability to maintain the fiction and *treat them like they're people, you don't just treat them like they're a ten dollar bill (Rachel).*

For the stripper, the charade was routinized as she reenacted the game over and over again with her customers. In each interaction, she was required to reenact the fiction of a novel interaction with a ‘special’ person. This constructed reality was fragile and liable to disruption at any time. With regulars, who might collude in the play but nonetheless expect narrative continuity, this was sometimes problematic:

It's hard to keep your story straight, you tell different. I mean, you're you're one thing for one customer , you're one thing for another customer, and they come in, and they start talking and you forget what you told them, and you're [questioning look] uh you know refill (Ann).

While the interaction between clients and strippers can be conceptualized as a game it is, for the strippers, *work*. With the introduction of private table and champagne

room dancing, workers not only had to sell their entertainment service but also a 'social' service. To do so, they employed a range of highly specialized interpersonal skills, presentation of self and sales simultaneously. Maintaining the balance could be difficult:

Some girls they sit and talk to them three hours and expect to be paid three hundred dollars, and some guys are thinking in their head well she only danced ah ten songs, I only owe her a hundred and it's her own fault if she sat there for two extra hours to talk to me y'know. He's only gonna pay the hundred that he owes and that's it and she's freaking out cause she figures she should be getting two hundred more. And ah I figure well if you don't tell a person at first that you're charging a hundred an hour then it's your own darn fault (Rachel).

Strippers also engaged in extensive emotional labour as they interacted with clients and constructed social relations. Most of the money that dancers made was from 'regulars'. Getting and maintaining a regular clientele involved special relationship and boundary maintenance skills:

They [regulars] come to see you but I don't know [pause] some of them get a little weird and you just gotta know when to back off I guess. Cause it's different with table dancing then just being on stage, because now when you table dance you sit with them, you're sitting with them for a few hours and you're talking one on one with the person a couple of hours every week, plus you're going to start getting to know each other and he's gonna start. I mean he's obviously physically attracted to you or he wouldn't have asked you to dance in the first place and then after y'know if you keep, if comes back to see you then he likes your personality too (Diane).

Of course, in spite of a time commitment which mirrored friendship, it remained an instrumental relationship. As Diane later noted *they know nothing, nothing about you.*

Policing the boundaries could at times, become a matter of survival:

Well ya, that... when I was working at ah Copacabana there was this guy that, that ah, he'd come and see me and I'd know him from before and stuff like that. And uh he kinda got a little ex excessive y'know he'd start calling me and getting ah, first he was really nice and then and then he started being like ah, cause he had another girl dancing and her and I ended up talking and we ended up finding out

he was kinda like playing both ends of it. So ah, like trying to make it that, trying to get us not to be friends like y'know saying things about us. But when we talked we realized. So then I stopped talking to him and then when I stopped talking to him he ended up being like, "oh why are you treating me like this?" Then one day he was outside my house so I had him barred from the bar and he got really upset with that (Diane).

Not only were dancers continually playing the role of a stripper, but they also adopted other personas, in effect they played a number of roles, within a particular spectrum of possibilities, consecutively and sometimes currently:

I used to give every guy a different age depending on what they wanted. I also gave different stories, but that's complicated to keep track of. Sometimes I acted really young and walk around the club in a skirt being cutsie. You don't even have to look that young just act young. It's really weird. Different guys want different things (Sarah).

Most dancers used intuition to 'read' the patron in order to determine the particular presentation of self they should conjure up. Some explicitly asked clients. Debbie noted that *the first thing I ask my customers is "what do you like?" "what do you look for in a woman?" - and I go with it...they are there for the fantasy.*

In order to be successful and make money, strippers engaged not only in the surface acting of cynical performance but also in deep acting (Hochschild, 1983). Deep acting goes beyond the pretense of emotion to dredge up actual emotions to respond in an 'appropriate' manner and to construct a self that was able to be (virtually simultaneously) assertive and coy but always pleasing and interested. Managing all aspects of appearance, *my facial expressions, my body language, my vocabulary, I'm a [giggle] I'm a cold hearted bitch. And of course you make it look like it's it's fun which and it is¹⁰. If I'm not having a good time, then they're not going to want a table dance (Debbie). Jamie,*

who used to work in the sex trades and was exasperated with stripping, was much more cynical:

Ya but I'd rather be hooking. It's it's the same men you get in the champagne room. When it was lap dancing it was easier, you didn't have to smile at them, pretend you're enjoying your dance in front of them. Now all they....if they get ten dances, they blew a hundred bucks and they didn't get any, and you have to be pleasant, make them feel great. If you're hooking you get a customer and you get it over with - like usually as fast as they can get it up. And you don't have to see them again.

Like other direct service workers she had to be able to manage her emotions¹¹ and anger in the face of ignorant and trying customers. In light of the fact that the male clients defined strippers as other, as whores, and since a whore has no private space, she was likely subject to high levels of verbal and physical harassment. But there was more to it than this. The stripper participated in a financial interaction that masqueraded as a social relationship with its sense of reciprocity: *I should probably have my PhD in psychology by now for all the problems I've listened to and all the advice I've given* (Rachel). Social relationships are normally defined by a mutual concern. In the strip club, however, the appearance of concern became a commodity that was purchased *I feel guilty when they tell me things. Because personally I don't give a shit but I have to pretend I do* (Jamie). Notably, unlike the professionals to whom Rachel compared herself, the stripper had neither the language nor the professional training on which she could rely to guide her through the interaction and, instead, she had to improvise as she continually reinvented herself and adapted her performance.

In short, while talking to customers appears to be a rather innocuous activity many strippers expressed exasperation: *You have to go sit down with the guy and blah blah blah*

blah blah blah blah blah. I hate that (Tina). In fact, the most distress was expressed about this activity which is *hard on the head y-know* (Diane). On reflection, this is not surprising. Dancers were alienated not just their bodies, whether through their physical capacity to work or labour power, nor just their surface sexual self-presentation, in a way that was normal in burlesque theaters. They were alienated from something more - their social selves:

Temporarily you're someone you're not, just for this guy , just so you can get his money. If he wants to believe something then you just play right along with it, "ya I'm from wherever" and make yourself up to be something you're not (Sally).

The result was a disassociated sense of self so that *I pretend I'm somebody else and I'd get all glamorous and I go into work. I'm a completely different person in the club, completely different person* (Debbie). Workers were very explicit about the need to distance and separate their different selves: *I have a very distinct difference between my job and my life and I find if I mix the two of them that I can't keep it straight* (Ann). This assumption of separate identity was in part facilitated by the use of stage names so that *on stage I'm Kim so it's not me either* (Alex). Still there could be implications that spilled over from the social self to the personal self in ways that could be very stressful. This breaking of boundaries reinforces that it was not the naked body but the revelation of self that was so difficult. We also see the complex ways personal and social identities can be fractured when a job requires identity management of this magnitude:

I I have a hard time - you know - coming back, coming back to earth. I have a hard time remaining myself, when I get cornered, my defenses always go up, whether it's needed or not , it's made me, it's made me a much harder person, which isn't [indecipherable] but I'm learning how to deal with it....ya....I'm I'm finding it a lot harder to be something I'm not - and I know damn well I'm not.

But because I'm growing, who I play in the club, [chuckling] in the club - in the club is completely different person from when I first started. When you learn how to play the game, I find myself playing the game with boyfriends, um not not consciously you know (Debbie).

Perhaps Jamie's comment is the most revealing when she linked the emotional labour with social relations: *I'm used to [pause] I'm used to playing roles -- I I had a lot of bad relationships.*

NOT AN EASY JOB

We now step back and consider the implications of the particular labour dynamics sketched above. By moving from the conditions of the labour to the worker's accounts we can begin to understand how the interplay between objective and subjective dynamics shaped their experience of labour. We are also in a position to tease out the hidden costs and benefits of participating in a marginal labour site. In the process, a more complete picture of stripper's day-to-day reality also emerges.

Warning This Job Could Be Hazardous To Your Health

Stripping could be a physically dangerous occupation. There was the ever-present threat that customers would act aggressively. All informants had developed strategies to protect themselves however over half had stories of violence, often sexual, perpetrated against them:

I've had to had the bouncer physically remover a customer, from me....several times. Um, same with other girls, I've seen girls get cornered in the booths and the doorman is, he's not quick enough, because that sudden thing is what stays with you for the rest of your life (Debbie).

Like their working class sisters in the manufacturing industry, these workers found little protection from their employers who appear all too ready to blame the victim.

Furthermore, there was a realistic fear that customers would contravene the established parameters and criminal law by attacking a dancer outside the club¹²:

My girlfriend was raped, Cindy. Ya she got ah, ya some guy I guess followed her home a couple of times. Y'know, knew where she lived and everything. One night she came in, she went into her apartment, he was already in the apartment hiding behind the door or something. She came in and he grabbed her, tied her up, raped her and left her there, left her there tied up and everything (Diane).

Physical acts of aggression were not committed just by customers. As we will see in the coming chapters, relations between dancers, shaped by an individualistic and competitive labour structure, were frequently antagonistic. Fights were certainly not the norm but they did occur and could be frightening in their intensity:

There was a new girl dancing in ah ah club, and there was a house girl and she was infamous for her ah - temper. And this new girl approached this girl's customer, and the customer touched her. She didn't know any better. I mean she told the customer "no", but the girl saw her customer touching her and her and her friend jumped this poor girl, in the back room and beat the crap out of her - to the point of hospitalization (Debbie).

Debbie later suggested that some of this hostility may also be a result of the labour situation that left dancers frustrated and angry: *They're taking the violence out that they ah ah from a customer on another dancer, and they're taking their frustrations out on her.*

In short, dancers labored in a highly volatile environment where the potential for verbal or physical aggression was continually present. The labour literature suggests that for some workers, the impact of danger is mediated by the positive perception of engaging

in exhilarating, exciting work (McIntosh, 1995:304). For my informants, this balance of excitement and danger did not appear to be the valued. Instead the potential for aggression seemed to exacerbate an already stressful environment. When asked what she did not like about the job, Tina volunteered:

To have to cope with those fights in the dressing room - things like that [pause] maybe ah maybe the jealousy between the girls....always to ah. All those fights I don't have to cope with this at three in the morning, these fights you know, kids fights. We had one the other night and de de de de dat, and that girl was a shouting all the time, I said "you're like kids" so she said "no I'm a mom" I said "I'm a grandma so shut up....shut up, grandma said to shut up"

Warning: This Job Could Be Hazardous To Your Emotional Well-being

The danger of physical assault was compounded by the physical and mental health considerations of labouring in stressful environments (Shostak, 1980). For strippers 'work overload', identified as a key contributor to workplace stress (Levi *et al.*, 1986:55), was normal. Her job not only required her to fulfill a number of roles at the same time, but also to continually manage the emotional and sexual demands of patrons, engage in boundary maintenance while simultaneously trying to maximize income and to protect her emotional and physical self. In addition strippers were subject to the stress shared by other laborers engaged in emotional work (Adelmann, 1995:372) as well as the stresses of entertainers - performance anxiety and a fear of even minor physical injury that could effectively curtail their career (Sternbach, 1995) *I can't work with black eyes, I can't work with big scars across my face* (Jessie).

How are these issues negotiated by workers? Recent research suggests that stress is not simply the result of objective conditions but “it is the interactive nature of the relationship between demands and the perception of the demands that is important” (Tattersall *et al.*, 1995:140). This highlights the importance of subjectivity. If, as research suggests, autonomy and control over labour process mediate against stress (Houtman, 1995:210), perhaps the autonomy positively identified by workers in the industry was an important buffer. Seen this way, the definitions of self as entrepreneurs that we will explore in the next chapter can potentially be understood as part of stress management strategies. This compensation may be particularly important when we appreciate that some strippers were denied the supportive labour and home environment which is known to mediate against stress (Levi *et al.*, 1986:55).

Of course, some coping strategies are potentially problematic and may exasperate the very dynamics contributing to stress in the first place. Alcohol and illicit drugs provided readily available substances for self-medication¹³: *The days that I can't do it, and I need the money, ya I'll I'll probably smoke a joint - and then I'll go to work* (Debbie). We must appreciate that not only are emotional laborers particularly susceptible to the abuse of substances (Hochschild, 1983), but the stripper's work site was simultaneously a leisure site for men where she was surrounded by the markers of social activity. For some women, alcohol and drugs became more than periodic aides. It is important that we acknowledge this potential cost of the occupation but still realize that, contrary to the dominant discourse, the immoderate use of drugs and alcohol is far from normative. During field work I witnessed two cases where individual dancers started to ‘party’

excessively at work. It was a disturbing process to watch, and one that caused a great deal of concern to both strippers and support staff who frequently attempted to intervene in what was clearly defined as a destructive pattern. Discussing one such situation, Sally remarked:

fuckin right I told her, I said "look at yourself" you came in here wanting to get money for your baby and now your whole life is the bar. That's what you talk about. That's all you think about. You roll out of bed - you come to work'It's sad you know.

SUMMING UP

Unskilled Labour?

Perceiving skin trade workers as contract employees involved in labour process and working at a labour site allowed us to bypass the traditional focus on sexuality and/or perceived deviancy. It also afforded the possibility of locating the work and workers in terms of capitalist labour relations and class structure. Her work, like that of non-unionized working class women in general, is labour intensive, offers limited job security and virtually no possibilities of advancement. The above discussion suggests that the job of stripping is physically exhausting, emotionally challenging and stressful, and that success is contingent on the development of complex skills and competencies.

The very existence of these skills belie the customary focus on sex rather than work process in much of the literature. Given that these skills are largely learnt 'on the job' through informal apprenticeships the work can be classified as semi-skilled labour. However the term is misleading, as it suggests that anyone can successfully undertake the

tasks. In fact, during field work, I observed many women who, enticed by the reported high earnings and relative autonomy, attempted the job but found themselves unable to master the tasks successfully.

That skills are largely dismissed, or rendered invisible, is not unique to the skin trades but characterizes many working class women's jobs. It does however affirm once again the relative and subjective nature of what are defined as skills. Class and gender continue to be associated with skills in complex ways, although it is also necessary to consider skill in terms of stratification within classes (Wright, 1989a:23).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, we could have argued that strippers received financial compensation consistent with the scarcity of the skills and other attributes brought to the market place including the willingness and capacity to suspend traditional propriety and the ability to transcend social norms regarding the appropriate location for nudity. In addition, they were presumably being compensated for the stigma incurred. The effect of stigmatization on wages is not unique, in fact it would be misleading to construe the relationship between wage and labour process as unmediated by exterior factors (Kessler-Harris, 1990:481). We need only reflect on the fact that danger, status, monotony, and responsibility are all traditionally sites for (male) labour negotiations. Here social and cultural constraints of gender and respectable working class culture came into play.

With the industry shift towards service, the worker was required to employ considerably more skill, face more danger and experience more stress than her counterpart twenty years ago. However, the work had been rhetorically deprofessionalized and the

labour redefined as unskilled so that the worker was someone “who can instantly be replaced by another if she or he doesn't smile enough” (Reiter, 1991:129). It would appear that scarcity of jobs, and virtual absence of good jobs available to young working class women through the 1980s increased the labour pool and facilitated a construction of the labour as unskilled. When the skills necessary to stripping are scarce and when there was a need for labour, skills were recognized however when the labour and job market shifts the same, or even more and more complex skills, were defined and compensated as ‘unskilled’. What we see as skill is always contextually defined and subject to reconceptualization when the labour becomes no less difficult, but more available (Gaskell, 1986:373).

Having said this, when we consider organizational assets, we must acknowledge that the nude entertainer is a freelance artist under short term contract who exercised considerable control over the hours, location and nature of her work. Furthermore, that champagne room dancing constituted all or most of her income, put her, like the waitress outside of the manager's control (Paules, 1991:79). As a quasi-independent worker, whose labour is under formal as opposed to real subsumption¹⁴ (relevant to considerations of alienation) and whose capital investment - though small should not be dismissed. All of this confirms the difficulty of classifying marginal workers but suggests that strippers inhabit a particular, contradictory class location¹⁵.

Sexual Labour?

A few comments regarding the sexualized nature of the labour are warranted. As mentioned in previous chapters, while sexuality is a subtext in many jobs and an underlying dynamic of most (Hearn & Parkin, 1987) strippers' labour was explicitly erotic. The question becomes, how does this shape the labour? Perhaps the most telling finding was how few comments were made by informants about sexuality. It appeared to have been largely incidental. Certainly success was not contingent on an outstanding appearance, but on the presentation of accessible sexuality. Accordingly the dress and body language of the strippers reflected an eroticism that was less visible and physical and instead more social or emotional. They did not engage fully with sexuality, but adopted a script and played the roles in a half-hearted manner *y'know I do little moves and stuff* (Diane). Before the deprofessionalization of the industry appearance was very important because a dancer's success was contingent on providing visible entertainment. Dancers from the era speak at length of costumes, music and lighting. In the late 1990s the visible was secondary and the erotic was contingent on emotional connections. However a sexualized self image so that *you feel good about yourself* (Sarah) was noted. Put another way self-sexualization, perceiving oneself to be sexually appealing and worthy of male adoration, was imperative to effectively engage in the emotional work where a dancer could *make her money*.

At the same time, the sexual atmosphere and visible plays on the physical appeared to have a positive impact on the workers' self image and identity. The accepting and open appreciation shown of women's bodies in the club seemed to translate into positive body

image. I was continually struck by how dancers, unlike any other population of women I know, were content with and actually *liked* their bodies. This acceptance and comfort extended to the other naked bodies with which there was continual interaction. This opened up new spaces for sexual expression:

I'm experimenting right now. So it's [stripping] opened my mind to.... to ah different things. I mean I would never ever ever in a million years would I ever think about touching another woman, when I was growing up. Now there are certain women oh I would love to go to bed with - I would - you know just ah, it's opened my mind to new....it's it's expanded my way of thinking (Debbie).

Contradictions: It's a Good Job/ It's a Bad Job

Before moving on in the analysis, the issue of inconsistency needs to be addressed. Throughout this chapter a somewhat contradictory presentation emerged regarding what happened in the club and, more importantly, the meaning of these interactions. We have customers as both oppressor and manipulated commodity; management simultaneously in, and not in, control; strippers as both autonomous agents and as oppressed by customers and management. This is a tension that permeated the interviews and my observations and therefore, if I am going to be true to my political and methodological position, must also emerge in the text. If we are going to attend to the voices of experience and accept those voices as legitimate, we must also reflect and make sense of contradictions in ways that do not dismiss or minimize those perceptions. In reflecting the experience I have also reflected the ambiguity of the work.

Arguably, most work on women in the skin or sex trades is politically motivated and constructs them simply either as victim or agent. In fact on the margins perhaps, these classifications have limited validity and it becomes impossible to place women into

politically expedient categories. The world is simply not black or white and to appreciate the grey, where women live, we must also accept some contradictions. In the following chapters on resistance and stigma these tensions emerge again, and in the process, we begin to understand the ways that objective and subjective aspects of the labour merge to shape the experience. We also begin to appreciate how work, most especially work on the margins of respectability, can honestly be described, by the same informant, as:

I love it, and I like to and it's kinda like a night out too at the same time, drink a little , smoke a little pot, party a little and it's fun. It's like a night out too and you get to choose your own time that you work, you can take vacations when you want....it's great.

and also as:

It's just too much, it's too much, it just gets to you after a while. But I figure if you just space it out, even if you work one day take a day off, work one day take a day off that's that's that's a lot better too cause you you get a chance to like recuperate, y'know, kinda miss your job y'know almost, want to be like "I can't wait to go to work tomorrow" y'know. But if you're doing it every day, and always for eight hours a day, and not knowing how much money you're gonna make or who you're gonna meet, or ah if it's gonna go good, if it's gonna go bad, it's just, I think it's a lot of that too just takes it's toll and you kinda wish you had a steady, a steady job that pays you like three hundred dollars a week and you could budget your things better and y'know just a whole bunch of stuff I guess really burns them out (Rachel).

ENDNOTES

1. Many dancers also did private dances in apartments and stag shows, but for the most part these arrangements were first made in strip clubs.
2. Not all dancers were so casual about these contests. Some dancers appeared to take them very seriously. During field work, one particular contest that was not fixed, caused considerable tension. There was lots of bickering and hushed conversations about why the winner was chosen, or more specifically why another dancer, who felt herself to be far more attractive, did not 'place'. Since many were strippers who regularly worked in the club, the negative ramifications were felt for some time afterwards.
3. This information comes from interviews conducted with two real estate agents with whom I am acquainted.
4. See Tracey (1997) for an excellent discussion of striptease as resistance.
5. How difficult the work was became painfully clear when I joined a number of the dancers practicing on the stage during a particularly slow afternoon. I was bruised and sore for a number of days after.
6. Strip establishments vary in their approach. During the 1980s a number of clubs forbade dancers joining clients at their tables. In 1998, one club in the Ottawa area still required dancers to perch on a table dance stool (which, in a revealing symbolic image, ensures dancers are physically seated beneath bar patrons). The other clubs are trying to define drinking with patron as a job requirement, thereby allowing them to use dancers as (uncompensated) b-girls. In the coming chapter we will see that this expectation is being resisted by dancers.
7. If a customer was not known to the dancer she relied on either a tip from a waitress (about cash or conversational indicators) or her own reading of indicators including dress, demeanor, and body language. Unless there was evidence to the contrary single men were assumed to be 'looking' and were always targeted before those in groups (except for stags).
8. It is also the one most appreciated by customers. The role reversal absolves them of the need to approach a woman and positions him to refuse her sexual advances. This is an example of how complex and contradictory dynamics can be. On the one hand, the woman is positioned as aggressor on the other the man is not only sought after but absolved of a traditional but expectation that men approach woman.
9. In the champagne room some women sat facing the customer.
10. 'Fun' here must be understood in relation to Debbie's particular appreciation of the benefits of the labour the opportunity to exploit men and realize 'payback' for any past injustices.

11. See Hochschild (1983) for a full discussion on the emotional labour of airline flight attendants.

12. The driving service was also perceived by a number of informants as offering a level of protection when leaving the work site.

13. I am trying to distance the practice from deviance by pointing out commonality. Using drugs and alcohol in an environment where they are available can be compared to a nurse or intern getting colleagues to prescribe, or writing their own scripts, for a desired mood altering substance.

14. The distinction between real and formal subsumption of labour in capital is useful. Whereas real subsumption involves that control of the nature and timing of production by capital entertainers generally experience formal subsumption that is capital does not intervene directly in the production beyond specifying parameters for delivery (King, 1986:168).

15. Such confusing and shifting locations are not uncommon in class analysis, particularly when class and gender are considered together. For example the discussion of MacDonald and Connelly (1989) on the class location of households of Nova Scotia fishers who own their own boats.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISPLACING, CONTESTING & INVERTING: RESISTANCE AND POWER IN THE MARGINS

The Question of Power

In this chapter we shift from the ways that the labour of women in the trades was practised and controlled to focus upon the question of resistance. In this process more of the contradictions of the previous chapter are made explicit. To appreciate that these tensions speak to relations of power requires considering power as a complex dynamic. This is not "power with a capital P" (Foucault, 1980:185), power as a 'proper noun' that can be imposed because it is possessed by an individual, institution or the state. Instead, it can be conceptualized as an element that permeates all social relationships and is exercised in social interaction. Power relations are both an effect and condition of other social relations and processes. As a result, the way power is realized varies and power itself is complex, neither simple nor linear (Foucault, 1980:185). Foucault's concept of power not only understands power as contested terrain but also highlights the ways manifestations of power can be, and are, continually subverted (or inverted). In other words, it opens up the conceptual space for the analysis of resistance.

Resistance strategies are employed by people to realize them-selves in the face of oppressive and exploitative social and labour structures. In this sense, resistance is normal. Possibilities for resistance are shaped by social location, contingent on available discourses, reliant on cultural capital and complicated by the far-reaching ideological instruments of advanced capitalism (Scott, 1985:320). These constraints do not render resistance any less real, although they do confirm that cultural, ideological and economic resources are not evenly distributed. Highlighting the strategies of resistance of women in the skin trades is not a denial of the very real oppression they experience, but points to the ways that it is mediated and undermined in the highly contested terrain of the strip club as well as in wider social relations¹.

Resistance, like oppression, is a multi-faceted, a war of 'bread and roses' (Sharpio-Perl, 1984:194) fought on many fronts and in many ways. In this chapter, we consider the discursive and material strategies employed by strippers to resist the apparent relations of authority and domination, and to realize a measure of control and to isolate themselves from the demands and oppression of both the labour site and socially constructed gender². It is perhaps testament to the complexity of resistance, the limited resources and the need for innovative strategies on the margins, that resistance to broader discourses and practices gets realized in interpersonal relations. It is in individual and social interaction that we must look to *see* the complex negotiations around power.

From this position, we can begin to deconstruct the practices of the labour site. As we have seen, management appeared to control the labour, by setting the rules, fees, hours, expectations and imposing fines. In practice, it was relative control, largely

contingent upon all parties willingness to accept managerial authority as legitimate.

Similarly customers were assumed in the popular discourse to have the economic and social authority while strippers occupy an oppressively constructed gender position.

However these women regularly *capitalized on* customers and *used* gender. What we shall see is that these hierarchical scripts were “true fictions” (Clifford, 1986:6) supported by strippers, and that these apparent relations of domination were liable to be exposed and inverted when they were no longer in their interests.

CHALLENGING THE ASSUMPTION OF AUTHORITY

Traditional Strategies: The Question of Unions

Historically, working class women have employed a variety of strategies to counteract the exploitative appropriation of themselves in the labour force. Far from pliable, they actively opposed exploitation through direct action, counter-ideology and, less frequently, organizing themselves into self-defence associations such as unions (Webb, 1990). These strategies were, and are, the outcome of alliances based in class and gender commonalities. Although women have successfully organized for change, these efforts were complicated by ethnicity (Frager, 1992) and gender. The double day made, historically and today, activism difficult for women (Penney, 1983:15). Furthermore, “subordinate classes have not been afforded the luxury of open, organized political activity” (Scott, 1985:xv).

In the past, strippers have rarely pursued unionization. Notable exceptions include the 1933 establishment of the Burlesque Artists Association (BAA) (Zeidman, 1967:217)

and the founding of the Canadian Association of Burlesque Entertainers (CABE) in 1982 (Cooke, 1982). These rare successes were responses to state control and deskilling trends respectively. In these cases, labour action was undertaken not against employers, but as part of a more general strategy to combat stigmatic designations through a discourse of professionalism and occupational redefinition (Cooke, 1987).

In the 1990s, skin trade workers in general showed little interest in organized labour action. Only one informant expressed such a desire: *I wish, I wish we could just get our own union or something like that* (Rachel). Although all informants had complaints some of which, like fees or health and safety issues are classic trade union issues, organizing did not seem to be considered a viable approach.

Collective resistance can take forms outside of the traditional union movement. Mirroring the approach taken by sex worker alliances, non-union associations such as “Danzine” have emerged. This Oregon based not-for-profit agency by and for exotic dancers operates as an advocacy group and publishes a bimonthly magazine that addresses direct labour issues (health, safety and the circuit) and industry related problems (drugs and financial planning). The organization offers counselling and other one-on-one services for strippers. Acknowledging this organization, we must still appreciate that Danzine is an anomaly and does not appear to represent an emerging trend.

If we concentrate on labour unions as the only mark of resistance, we risk replicating the problem of early analysis of women’s work and missing the effectiveness of a wide range of other, non-union strategies that are employed (Shapiro-Perl, 1984; Paules, 1991). Unionization or traditional forms of labour action do not always lend themselves

to all labour sites. We must carefully attend to the particular conditions and ask how class, labour process and subjectivity operate together to understand why marginal populations may choose, or not be in a position, to organize.

We can first look to stratifications within the working class and the split between the reputable and disreputable sectors of the labour market. Certainly, established performance artist unions have not historically welcomed disreputable labour (Corio *et al.*, 1968). We also need to consider that strippers inhabited a contradictory class location which, as we will see shortly, impeded the creation of a cohesive class consciousness.

Secondly, the organization of the labour itself appears to mitigate against unionization. The stratification of workers that has characterized the industry from its inception³ was exacerbated by the market competition among freelance labourers in the 1990s. Furthermore the individualism of the labour⁴ and the self-definition of entrepreneur that we will explore in this chapter, further eroded solidarity. Perhaps too, the motivation to organize for change was blunted by the realization that stripping afforded workers greater autonomy, flexibility and money than many other jobs available to workers in this sector of the labour pool.

Finally, we can look to the relation of the workers to the labour. All informants perceived stripping as a temporary career, limited by the age and the youth imperative as well as the potential for 'burn out'. Investing time and energy in traditional labour organizing may not seem appropriate under these circumstances. All of these aspects of the labour, its organization and the relation of workers to the industry seem to mitigate against traditional labour organizing

Given the myriad of possibilities of resistance suggested by Foucault's concept of power and by the wider history of women's labour organizing, new questions arise. What strategies of resistance were chosen? How are these related to the specific conditions of the strip club and to wider discursive constructions of sexuality and gender? By paying careful attention to the dancers' words and actions we will see that labour relations can assume a variety of forms, collective and individual, confrontational and covert.

Getting Together: Collective Strategies of Resistance

Work culture expresses the shared meanings, values and beliefs held by a labour group that emerge as collective interests grounded in relation to production are recognized. In a dynamic process, individuals interactively forge an understanding that makes sense of their experience of, and relation to, the particular labour site. It is in this context that collective meanings emerge, are legitimated and reinforced. The particular organization of the labour in strip clubs facilitated the realization and sharing of collective knowledge. Specifically, the rhythms of the day dictated that periods of activity were interspersed with intervals of leisure allowing time to interact socially, talking, gossiping and exchanging stories as dancers 'hung out' in the dressing room, around the bar and sometimes, in the absence of customers, at tables. In addition, dancers circulated between clubs resulting in not only a community where *everyone pretty well knows everyone else* (Rachel), but also in the formation of industry-wide understandings and truths⁵.

This shared meaning was constructed informally, but as it developed it became basis upon which rules, expectations and relations were either accepted or resisted within

the labour site. Though largely an unarticulated subtext, these beliefs were made explicit when they were threatened. We will see that while the particular construction of relations to labour can be an ideological and cultural resource that legitimates collective action and shapes the strategies employed, it can also simultaneously limit cooperative action.

Perhaps the stratification and competition in conjuncture with the marginal, transitory and stigmatized nature of the labour itself rendered occasional fluid alliances most viable. In fact, loosely structured but highly political affiliations among exotic dancers emerged in response to particular issues. For example, as noted in chapter four, in 1992 Toronto area strippers aligned themselves with police and successfully employed a legal/moral discourse against obligatory lap-dancing.

By far the most common, and least documented, form of organized resistance are ad-hoc immediate reactions to situations that come to be collectively defined as threatening⁶. For example, when a very dirty dancer started to work a club, the established practices were disrupted and the earnings of other dancers were jeopardized:

These bad girls....customers won't get you to dance, they won't get you to dance - they'll get you for one dance and you're not like the other ones, so fuck you - doesn't matter how cute you are - y'know,...oh ya cause I look and fuck man - I know I look better than some of these girls. Why are they making two hundred and I'm only making fifty? Not right! (Sally).

Such situations were usually effectively dealt with through rumor and gossip as word of the offending behavior was conveyed to management either directly or more frequently using support staff as intermediaries. The latter approach allowed strippers to impart knowledge, invoke sanctions and reinstate previous work terms without being a 'rat' or necessitating confrontation⁷.

If there's a girl that's usually doing more than the other girls, and, y'know, if the doorman doesn't see them doing it, usually one of the other girls will complain about it because [pause] I guess it's taking money away from the other girls if someone is willing to do more than the others (Diane).

The intent was:

To damage other girl's reputation. To get you kicked out, oh ya. Now, now it's a lot easier you just say so-and-so has been doing such-and-such in the champagne room, and if they catch you, you're thrown out. But they usually watch you like a hawk which means you can't do certain things. Ya, there's always bending of the rules to get the money out of the customer. And you can't do it if you're being watched like a hawk, because one girl wants to get you thrown out (Debbie).

As the quote above suggests, strippers employed these strategies in opposition to managerial authority as a way to realize some control over labour practices⁸. To illustrate, when a 'hustler' entered a club, where this approach to soliciting was not normal, it challenged established labour practices and could potentially undermine the earnings of dancers not prepared to approach customers in this manner. In response, the regulars or 'house girls' sought to remove her from the club, either by evoking the tactics of rumor and gossip noted above or, on rare occasions when these tactics failed, through violence:

Working in Toronto is very different. There the girls hustle, going around in a circle asking "want a dance?" If I did that here I'd probably get punched out. Basically the dancers in Ottawa are lazy (Sarah).

Discrediting discourses of immorality based on accusations of theft or dirty dancing⁹ were employed to ensure the removal of the disruptive presence. These strategies were largely contingent on alliances that emerged as complex and fluid coalitions in response to particular labour struggles. A worker, who could effectively manage social relations, earn acceptance and maintain positive work relations with her fellow workers,

positioned herself not only to survive in this volatile labour environment but also to become an active participant in the creation of collective meanings¹⁰.

The use of rumor and gossip as resistance to managerial assumption of authority over labour practices and staffing, afforded dancers a small measure of control over the work place, but they also carried costs. Defining some dancers as immoral, dirty or thieves meant appealing to, and hence legitimating, discourses of sexual immorality and dishonesty that are integral to the very oppression they sought to counter. The problematic implications of this kind of discursive strategy of resistance will reemerge throughout this chapter and will be addressed more fully in the following chapter on stigma.

When these strategies failed, strippers could draw on their lack of commitment to a club and 'protest with their feet'. They would simply stay away from a work place until the situation was rectified and the offending stripper barred. The disruptive impact of a mass walkout or a collective failure to show up for work in an environment defined by the stripper's presence rendered this a particularly effective strategy.

Managerial attempts to assert control over the work situation by changing the rules was also met with strong and quickly organized resistance. During field work, a new manager imposed unprecedented expectations on the dancers (to hustle, to solicit drinks) and attempted through fines and threats to gain compliance. In an illuminating instance of the construction of collectivity, established conflicts, animosities and loyalties were temporarily set aside as the focus shifted to the new communal threat. There was a considerable amount of 'bitching' as the latest evidence of 'tyranny' was repeated and

considered by both dancers and support staff¹. In effect this complaining allowed particular definitions of the situation to be affirmed. In this atmosphere of general unrest, discontent and temporary, alliances the manager threatened to withhold pay from a stripper for a minor infraction. She quickly instigated a walk-out, in which all the dancers and a number of the customers left en masse to go to a nearby club. The few remaining customers disappeared soon after, and the support staff were left in the empty club playing pool and watching videos. It was a highly effective labour action. The club lost not only earnings but credibility with patrons; the support of non-dancing staff who already empathized, and who of course also lost their earnings, was solidified; and the manager was removed from his position. More importantly, the collective power of the dancers was confirmed. This story, along with other similar incidents in which dancers had participated in at other clubs, became often-retold affirming tales.

Every Woman for Herself: Individual Strategies of Resistance

While collective resistance can be a powerful tool, it was not the most pervasive form in the clubs. More commonly workers resisted in their own individual interests as they sought to undermine oppressive labour practices and processes while maximizing their income and autonomy. Although these strategies of resistance might be more effective if they were systemic (Sharpio-Perl, 1984:207), they did operate at the level of the club as a whole (even if unintentionally) to keep management in a state of crisis management. This continual state of crisis reduced their control over the labour site and, in turn, empowered the workers on whom management relied.

Dancers regularly 'called' management on their ability to dictate the rhythm or content of work refusing, for example, to hustle for drinks. It was however, the stage, where unpaid labour was required, that became the key site of resistance as strippers challenged the scheduling of shows and offered any number of excuses for why they could not perform. Some of the time, they were trying to protect income:

I had the stage to do and the doorman came to me a-and I said 'no stage - I'm gone b-by'. If I was to go on stage at that time I was losing, like three hundred, and we we don't have any pay (Tina).

At other times, the reasoning was less clear. Excuses such as *having just eaten, are about to eat, are tired, have just emerged from the champagne room* appear to have more to do with retaining control over the labour process, in what emerged as a battle between the diskjockeys and strippers. Sometimes, rules and expectations established by the dancers overrode formal house rules. At one point during field work, dancers simply decided that they would not dance if there were fewer than five patrons. They subsequently decided that only patrons paying attention to the stage 'counted'. Since customers were unlikely to sit and stare at an empty stage and would amuse themselves with other bar room activities, this proved a highly effective way to circumvent managerial expectations of free labour. In addition, as noted in chapter six, the number, nudity and length of stage shows all became the sites of strategies for undermining managerial dictates. When dancers refused to comply with expectations, management was rendered largely impotent and the complex power relations that underlaid the clubs were exposed. In principle, a manager could fire or fine dancers; in practice, however, unless his was one of the more popular clubs or the dancer had few options, sanctions needed to be judiciously employed.

In the club, a physically attractive appearance, a large client list and customer loyalty can be seen as social and organisational resources (Wright, 1989a) that increased workers' capacity to resist. As in any occupation, such workers could capitalize on their organizational and material assets to manipulate their labour experience. To illustrate: Janet, an exceptionally attractive dancer socializing with friends was approached by a manager who politely and amicably requested she 'work the floor'. She responded in southern belle fashion, complete with drawl and invisible fan, "*if I have to leave here where will I go?*" Since her employment had not been threatened, her response deliberately raised the stakes by reminding him of his relative powerlessness in the face of her alternatives. He implicitly acknowledged her victory when he laughed, retreated and had a drink delivered to her table¹².

Whether they quietly threatened, dramatically packed their bags, or simply failed to show up for work, dancers implicitly or explicitly identified themselves as valuable and positioned themselves to dictate aspects of their own labour process. Awareness that the club relied on their organizational assets rendered management vulnerable, facilitated self-empowerment: *the way I look at it, they need me, I don't need them, my customers will follow me to the next bar I want to dance* (Sally).

In addition to the above instances of confrontation, however, resistance can and does take more subtle forms, particularly when the population is marginalized. Scott (1985) distinguishes between institutional, formal resistance and everyday, informal strategies and suggests that the latter are not second-best, but can be appropriate in order to minimize disadvantage: "open insubordination in almost any context will provoke a

more rapid and ferocious response than an insubordination that may be as pervasive but never ventures to contest the formal definitions of hierarchy” (Scott, 1985:33).

Furthermore, while disempowered individuals may be obliged to negotiate an imposed script, there is agency to the extent that the script is exploited and employed to maximize advantage (Scott, 1990:133). Framed in this way, the 'sucking up' which many dancers unabashedly utilized to further their own agendas were resistance strategies. These include sexual innuendo, playing sick and whining, in effect adopting a weak female persona that, perhaps because they are consistent with social role expectations, were extremely effective tactics to realize control some control and autonomy. Asked if she felt autonomous in her job Debbie gave a nuanced answer:

it all depends on how the day is going - when it's a really dead day and I'm forced to be there I don't feel like my own boss. No! When I'm in there, like I go in for say 4:30, and it's good money - I'm my own boss - I'm working. But when I'm sitting around going do-di-do. I'm forced to be there - I can't leave unless I whine.

Nonetheless, this kind of manipulation potentially undermined collective solidarity. One individual's advantage may be realized at the cost of group support, as acts of favouritism were inevitably noted and commented upon: *They have their little prima donnas, their little favorites like that, like the teacher's pet y'know, they have manager's pets y'know, so ah that I hate, that part of it I hate it* (Rachel).

It's My Business: Defining the Self as Entrepreneur

The above forms of resistance all rest upon a carefully maintained definition of self as private entrepreneur. This individualistic entrepreneurial self-definition by marginalized

workers is not unique to strippers. Paules's (1991) study of diner waitresses identified the symbols and language used, the construction of self and labour, the radical defence of autonomy as indicative of an individualistic resistance to appropriation and depersonalization reinforced by "images of self in which she is the active and controlling force in the service encounter" (Paules, 1991:132). Dill (1988) similarly found that domestic servants had an image of their work as valuable, worthwhile and skilled labour and themselves as agents, even though neither the work nor the worker had high status in the broader society.

As evident from previous discussions of 'making money', there are practical reasons for strippers to define themselves as entrepreneurs. What deserves further attention here is how this understanding of self is maintained interactionally and discursively. Relationships to support staff, to other dancers and to the establishment itself were purposefully constructed to ensure that autonomy was retained and definitions of self as entrepreneur were reinforced.

Relationships to Support Staff

During field work, I was initially frustrated by the lack of camaraderie between dancers and support staff. After all, we shared similar histories and labour sites, had to cope with the same obnoxious customers and staff, and most importantly, no one was being paid by the establishment. Eventually, I recognized that the dancers' 'stand-offishness' was part of their strategies of resistance and derived from our particular physical and labour location within the club.

First, there was no common 'space' for strippers and support staff to unite. A sense of separation was materially reinforced by the lack of a common backstage area. Dancers had a change room, but other than the diskjockey booth, all other space was front stage. Bar staff tended to congregate beyond the bar, an area that was prohibited to dancers. Without a space to interact privately, to construct a unifying world-view and forge solidarity, the extent of shared working conditions was never recognized. Each group of service providers made sense of the environment in a manner that affirmed the otherness of their colleagues. This division was reinforced by the control support staff were expected to exercise over strippers¹³. This may be why one interviewee maintained that: *In some bars, waitresses or managers, the female managers, just don't like dancers - if you don't like dancers why do you work in a strip club?....They give you a hard time* (Jackie).

Second is the issue of contradictory organizational positions. Support staff operated in their own interests, interests that frequently coincided with those of management and conflicted with those of the dancers. A bartender's desire for a smoothly running shift with lots of satisfied, and therefore tipping, patrons could be directly undermined by strippers' resistance strategies of not going on stage, disappearing for extended periods or leaving early. For me, the result was ironic. As a feminist researcher, I applauded the strippers' innovative strategies but as a participant, I found myself frustrated and annoyed and quite incapable of celebrating their resistance.

As a result of these dynamics, I found myself participating in the informal 'economy of favours' to ensure compliance and implicitly reaffirmed the strippers'

definition of self as autonomous entrepreneur. Strippers, of course, also carefully negotiated interpersonal relations and labour practices to maximize income, but always in ways that were consistent with self-determination. These included the offering of 'bribes' detailed in the previous chapter or through amicable relationships with other dancers.

Relationships between Strippers

Relationships between strippers were complex, fragile and at times appeared contradictory. In fact, they were fundamentally structured to realize the twin goals of maximizing income and retaining autonomy. As we have just seen, strippers would work collectively when they perceived threats to their autonomy or income. In addition, the club was the site of various situational and social relations that shaped interaction.

Some relationships were co-operative. For example, dancers came to each others aid.

Sometimes they alerted the manager or doorman to danger:

I will watch another dancer's back when I'm dancing. When I'm in the champagne room we're all watching each other's back. When we're leaving, if we notice that the girl is in distress, and is afraid to say anything because ah he's holding her hand, or he's holding part of her, ah, that he could hurt her with like a wrist or a pinky or whatever. Y-you look at looks on their faces, and when you go out it's, we say "we think there's trouble" cause they can't hear everything that goes on in there (Debbie).

When that protection proved inadequate, some took action themselves:

Well I've been grabbed. Like I think it was the first year I was dancing, and this old man, this old man. I went to kneel, crouch down and he just kinda put out his hand and grabbed me right between the legs. It was this young guy asked me, he said "it's my father's birthday" or something "so can you go over and dance." So I go over to dance right at the stage with the stool, right at the stage, like not like it was hidden somewhere. And he did that, I just like, I was, it was, I hadn't been dancing that long and I just like freaked. And I walked in the back, and I was freaking out, ah, and then the doorman, actually it happened at the Cleopatra, and the doorman came in and ah I told him and he said "well what do you want me to do about it?" And I said "well obviously kick the guy out, fuck."

Y'know ,like Carmen 's with me and she 's like "kick him out" so he goes back and he comes back and he says "well I told him he has to leave after he finishes his beer." So Carmen got all upset, so Carmen walked out and wacked him over the head with one of the stools. [laughter] Ya (Diane).

As already noted, work culture and class consciousness is based on the creation of common knowledge. This emerged, in part, when assistance took the form of advice about particular work places and opportunities and dangers they presented:

We exchanged ideas on traveling. That place is good or that place is bad, or if you go there, watch out for the son's boss, he's a real womanizer. There's this good customer if you just smile at him two or three times during the show he's going to give you a fifty dollar tip (Marie).

While a dancer would, as in the case of Carmen, come to the aid of a friend, these interactions were largely based on the collective need for a safe work environment and retaining the prerogative to dictate parameters. In essence, strippers maintained their ability to operate as entrepreneurs by periodically acting together and offering mutual support.

The limits of this fragile kind of alliance were revealed when individual interests conflicted and when one stripper's business was threatened by another's. In an approach that is fully consistent with the entrepreneurial ideology espoused, the offended dancer might have employed the strategies of rumour and gossip already noted, or resorted to the more antagonistic strategies of verbal or physical confrontation in a radical defence of her property, be it a song, a routine (means of production) or a customer (market):

It can, it can, get very nasty, it can be, cause, ah, a lot of confrontations in the change room. A lot of confrontations on the floor. I had one problem with one girl I work with in particular, she um, approaches my customers....and everybody knows, you have to, I mean....when you're a new-comer in a club there's always respect for the house girls. When you approach my customer, which you know is

mine, after you see me with with them - fine. If you go before I've had a chance to get to my customers, then yes, I'll get in your face (Debbie).

Put another way, class solidarity with its sense of shared interests was quickly replaced by the competitive ethos of capitalism when there were threats to the individual's conditions of production or market. In these cases, strategies appropriate for the particular labour site were readily embraced and defended. It is probable that the market driven environment that requires dancers to compete for a limited number of clients undermines the possibility of systematic unity and true cohesion.

Relationship to the Establishment

Discursive strategies were employed to support and legitimate definitions of self as entrepreneur. Strippers understood themselves to be self-employed *I like the fact that you work when you want to, take vacations when you want to, you're your own boss (Diane).* Freed from the rigid time commitments characteristic of most labour, dancers were positioned to established their own work rhythms and intensity:

You work whenever you want when you want. No job can give you that y'know. If some weeks you don't want to work you are sick, or this or that, or mentally, you can't do that somewhere else. But in a club you can (Tina).

Dancers used the linguistic designation *work*, but did not frame the process in terms of a job, or certainly not a *normal* job: *Dancing is something you can always return to. Nobody, you don't have to apply to anybody for a job. "Can I work here", "sure", "okay". You're on your way (Jackie).* This is consistent with the understanding that stripping is *work* that operates outside of standard labour practices.

Furthermore, they did not accept the paternalistic presentation of self that managers sometimes attempted to project. Instead, they assumed that management

viewed them with a pornographic eye. At a minimum they understood that, from the perspective of management, their bodies were part of the means of production, objects that facilitate profit: *We're meat - we're meat [pause] Um that's all we are, that's it that's all. We can come and we can go, they don't care, as long as there's somebody on stage [emphasis hers]* (Debbie). All of this led to healthy scepticism *I don't trust management* (Jamie) and a recognition that *they could fire me but they need girls* (Tina). Their capacities to deconstruct the worker-manager relationship may explain why the paternalistic strategies of control noted earlier were largely ineffective. Ultimately, the establishment was not perceived as having rights to impose its expectations since *I'm my own boss* (Tina). Since she had no sense of obligation to the club, the stripper would expect compensation and consideration for any 'favor' she did. If none were forthcoming, the manager would be reminded of his 'debt'¹⁴.

Self as entrepreneur was further reinforced through locating labour force exploitation as outside their experience as dancers. Strippers were certainly cognizant of labour exploitation: *Slinging hamburgers at McDonalds for minimum wage* was mentioned by most informants¹⁵. Most had personal experience with the exploitation of low status jobs. *One job I did, I was a Nanny but I did a lot of house work and I didn't get holidays that they were supposed to. I, I never got paid what I was supposed to* (Jamie).

Dancers also appreciated that the club was potentially an exploitative labour site. Indignation at the situation of support staff was expressed by dancers:

I don't understand why anybody, why doesn't somebody call, ah, better business bureau or whatever the hell you call those people who would help you out in

situations like that - He has no right to charge you 25 dollars a night to work. No! I mean I would have [complained], if I, ah, if I was working there as a waitress and he's hitting me with that, like who the hell do you think you are? g-d? [emphasis hers] (Rachel).

Carefully distinguishing between support staff who were exploited and themselves as independent workers who were, by definition, not exploited is self validating. Once again we see the ways strategies of resistance can be affirming in one way but detrimental in others. Projection obscures the exploitation experienced by the strippers themselves, which as we have seen, amounts to direct appropriation of their labour.

RECONFIGURING THE SERVICES, ROLES AND IDENTITIES

As we have seen there were two discreet elements to the strippers' labour. They entered into an agreement with an establishment exchanging labour for access to the appropriate setting and clientele which allowed them to undertake the second aspect of the labour where she could '*make her money*'. Up to this point, we have looked to the first process and considered the ways that managerial authority were resisted and displaced. These included ad hoc collective actions such as walk-outs, individual strategies that were either confrontational or passive, and relationally and discursively organized defence of autonomy and definitions of self as entrepreneur. The next section explores ways that the expectations and control of clients were resisted both through action and discourse. Unlike resistance to managerial authority and control, the resistance was necessarily more concealed, although no less real or strategic.

Describing 'Reality': The Hidden Transcript

"Every subordinated group creates, out of its ordeal a hidden transcript that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant" (Scott 1990:xii). The powerful, for their part, also develop a hidden transcript of the practices and claims of their dominance that cannot be openly avowed. A comparison of the hidden transcripts of the weak and the powerful and of *both* hidden transcripts to the public transcript of power relations offers a significant new way of understanding resistance to domination (Scott, 1990:xi). As we shall see, the hidden transcript did not remain at the level of discourse, but was realized in practice. It was the subtext which from which the stripper as performer (in the everyday and in the Goffmanian sense) fashioned an interactive script (Goffman, 1959).

The hidden transcripts can be seen as an instrumental encoding of a world-view from the position of the individual, affirming a value of self in the face of a dominant discourse that does the opposite. This allows the worker to be "neither disoriented nor self-alienated by the emotional demands of her work" (Paules, 1991:132). Transcripts are forged and confirmed collectively so that it is in association with other workers that consciousness is transformed into knowledge. This collective understanding becomes a personal and political resource. The manner through which nude entertainers fashioned alternate discourses, distancing strategies and negotiations including terminology and self-identification can be considered in this way.

When a prospective customer entered the strip club, he saw a number of scantily dressed women who were prepared, for a price, to please him socially and/or sexually.

Since he was financing the interaction, he imagined himself as agent. In all likelihood, his perception of the workers would be shaped by the dominant discourse about strippers.

This public transcript, the “self-portrait of the dominant elites” (Scott, 1990:18) essentially constructs men as dominant and in control and strippers, not merely as deviant, but as the epitome of disempowered and sexualized womanhood. He might be aware that it was a script, but it was one he accepts and legitimates through his actions.

It is perhaps precisely because the strip club makes explicit the public transcript of sexual relations that it is a potential site for subversion¹⁶. Certainly within the environment of the club, a very different understanding operated, a ‘hidden transcript’ about clients and stripper-patron interaction that was forged collectively and accepted by insiders, the support staff, dancers and management. This discourse, which subverts the dominant understanding of the trades, is valid. It is *not* self-delusion but a functional hidden transcript that reflects a legitimate construction of self and world.

Constructing the Client: The Deviant Other

There are two interrelated elements to the hidden transcript about clients. First they were rendered ‘other’ because of their ‘deviance’. Secondly, the encounter was re-defined in terms that make the stripper the agent in the encounter. Here, a selection of quotes is presented that, while not exhaustive, illustrate the discursive construction of clients.

A particular explanatory framework emerged as strippers tried to make sense of clients and their behaviour:

I don't know they don't know anything about you. How can you know somebody? Like, I don't know I never went to a bar and spent, I never had a guy stand and dance for me or pay someone to sit and talk to me. So I don't know, umm, what they're thinking? (Diane).

Clients were infantilized:

If the customer thinks he can get away with it, with a slap on the wrist, they'll do it again. Definitely. Oh ya, if you say, "okay, that's it that's all you're outa here", they'll go to another club and do it again. But this time they'll do it faster cause they know that girls are watching their back. So if you don't, it's like a child, if you say "don't touch that" a child's gonna do it just to spite you cause that's the way their minds work. If you slap their hand and you say "no" and you take that thing away they're not gonna touch it. So ya, like I said if you slap this guy on the wrist and he goes to another club there he's gonna do it again. If you, you gotta beat it into their heads that hey - this is my job I don't have to put up with shit like you (Debbie).

Of questionable intelligence:

I don't know, they must be pretty stupid to believe what we say and to ah come in to club and spend all kinds of money and get ah. What? (Jamie).

Desperate:

*[giggling] Ya, he was like talking, talking, talking, that guy he is like 58 years old. He's looking for a girl, y'know, to take out on the weekend. A regular girl y'know, a girlfriend. But **anyone** will do [laughter] anyone [emphasis hers] (Tina).*

Clients' behaviour was sometimes medicalized through the application of a disempowering discourse of addiction:

It's almost like they start going, and they go by themselves, and that's almost worse for them. Because that's all they get to know what to do. Well I have guys tell me its almost like an addiction for them. That they're not going to come back. Like guys have said "Okay, that's it for me, I'm not coming back"...y'know "this is no good for me" y'know "I just keep doing this I keep spending my money, I've been doing this for years" y'know And just things like that y'know. And then they always come back (Diane).

Even if no particular ‘problem’ was identified, the client was still assumed to be inadequate in some undefined way:

I asked him “why?” [he came to strip clubs regularly]. He’s not a bad looking guy, he’s in his early thirties and has a good job, and dresses okay. He looks normal [emphasis hers] (Jackie).

Customers were certainly not understood to be agents:

They’re trying to figure out a nice way to get out of the champagne room. You know cause some pretty girl is hitting on them (Debbie).

Finally, as we have seen customers were transformed into the stripper-entrepreneur’s property (market) and inevitably were referred to with possessive pronouns: *my customers*.

The particular construction of customers in the hidden transcript is revealing because it simultaneously inverted the stereotypes and constructed the client as object. The latter was notable. Anti-pornography feminists have been arguing since the 1970s that objectification allows people to be transformed into “a thing to be used” (Dworkin, 1979:128). In other words, objectification inherent to otherness legitimates abuse or exploitation:

You tell them little white lies. My, I tell my customers, “oh you know, fuck, I’m having a rough month the repo man’s gonna come and get my car.” They, they’ll pay my car payment, which is cool, cause now my car payment is money in my pocket. Ya (Debbie).

Furthermore, since clients were constructed as somewhat pathetic, childlike objects to be processed, then the agency of the stripper is presumed and asserted: “*In the champagne room I’m in control - I’m I’m the boss*” (Debbie). In spite of the public transcript, the stripper did not perceive the interaction as undermining her personhood.

In addition, constructing clients as other allowed the dancer to insulate herself from the emotional demands of the labour. In this sense, when a stripper remarked that she *disassociated myself from the people* (Alex), we can understand practice as a strategy of resistance shaped and supported by the negative depersonalizing discursive construction of clients. Purposeful construction can then be extended as she situationally defines herself:

They know me as one way and my friends know me as another - I'm a completely different person in the club, completely different person, I'm not ah, I'm not a very - nice person. I, I, I could be called a, a, slag, ya. When I'm at work, I'm pretty nasty. But that's the way it is now y'know (Debbie).

Putting It Into Practice: Actualizing the Hidden Transcript

The discourse about clients and the nature of the work, was constituted in the three principal sites of labour: the stage, the floor and the champagne room. These spaces became the physical sites where resistance against client control was made real through praxis. On stage, as previously noted, a stripper established the interaction with the audience. She determined the pace, actions and the pace of the show. While she might have constituted a sexualized object in the audience's gaze, it was her own sexualized and managed construct. From the perspective of a well-lit stage, the audience would be invisible (though surprisingly audible in spite of the audio speakers) and devoid of personality or importance. The hidden transcript's depersonalized conception of the audience as deviant or infantile in turn helped her maintain a positive self image in the face of cat-calls or judgements. She could always remind herself that their opinions were relevant *only* to the extent that they could be manipulated for her income¹⁷. Far from being agents of her oppression, the men were transformed into mere consuming objects.

The show itself could also function as a 'show' of resistance that embodied the depersonalizing discursive construction of clients, when it was performed in a highly sarcastic manner, and even taken to the point of absurdity as she parodied the genre in which she was situated. A dancer from the early 1980s noted how she played with the audience:

I got to charge out of what I was doing. Sometimes I would include the audience. y'know, and stuff. If I knew the guys, ah, one night I went up there and I just thought 'what do I care'. These guys are fuckin asleep. So I put a bunch of toilet paper up my crotch took my T-bar off and there's like a pack of toilet paper there. "Oops", y'know. Some guy screams "your flags showing" I said, I said "I surrender" [emphasis hers](Alex).

This strategy could be personally rewarding¹⁸ whether or not the audience appreciated the irony:

Van Hallen, Alice Cooper - 'I'm Eighteen it's my Body'... all that stuff 'Only Women Bleed' for my floor show. That was an interesting one 'Only Women Bleed' [laughter]. Fuck ya. I used to gross them right out Marian Faithful - 'Why'd You Do It', why'd you let her suck your cock. I used to that one for the fuckin guys who had lunch! [emphasis hers] (Alex).

The implementation of table dancing meant that customers became direct consumers of stripper's services and they, rather than the establishment, became the source of her income. As a result, by the late 1990s this form of resistance was largely limited to features. More commonly dancers resisted customer expectations either by presenting an apathetic performance, *you figure why am I going to jump all over the place for all these people* (Rachel) or by undermining audience expectations that strippers should remove their clothing.

The other girls, they they come to the stage just with the panties on. But me I'm always dressed, for the first song I'm dressed. I have my, whatever, bra and panties and I have a dress. So I just pull up the dress up to here for the first song.

I'm still covered, and my slow song. I have a long nightgown and I just roll it up to here. And that's it. I have nothing underneath, but they can see anyways. They don't see my legs they don't see nothing (Tina).

Because it would threaten income, it was imperative that the customer not become aware of the hidden transcript until such time as it was “dramatically made public” (Scott 1990). This occurred when established boundaries were crossed and the stripper identified herself openly as anything but a sexually manipulatable object:

It was the Cleopatra, I was up on stage, and I used to stand at the edge of the stage with my legs open but my back to the audience and bend over. So this fucking guy, a young guy too, he stood up and licked my crotch right in front of the bar. I nearly died. I kicked him in the face. My shoes, were steel heeled, they went in his mouth, out his cheek, ripped his whole face wide open, put seventeen stitches on his face. Oh I wanted to kill him. Fuck I was mad (Sally).

The hidden transcript also permeated interaction on the floor as dancers sought to sell their service:

And if there's a bunch of people sitting at a table, you pay ten bucks; everybody else pays two bucks. Why should I dance? Why should I dance at a table for a bunch of fucking guys? I'm dancing for one guy, six of his friends can watch for free? Fuck that. You're all paying, Oh sure, they all paid. Oh sure, sure they paid. And if they didn't want to, well sorry. I'll be a bitch, I'm not dancing for ten bucks for seven guys. For twenty I'll think about it (Sally).

At other times disdain was communicated. When a customer approached a dancer she might not have responded enthusiastically: *I say ah, “I'll be there in a minute after I eat, I just have to eat okay?” “I'll see you after” and all this stuff. And they'll wait you know, it's just, they don't care (Kelly).* On the floor rumor and gossip were also used against customers. Patrons who had been rude or were defined as cheap, *If they only ever take one dance. Why bother? (Sarah)*¹⁹ were ignored and found themselves unable to procure

social or sexual services as word of their conduct circulated. Thus the hidden transcript was not expressly hidden, when the fiction of subservience was no longer expedient.

The third site of resistance was the champagne rooms. As long as the customer played by the rules, the illusion of “sexual-woman-pleasing-dominant-male” was maintained²⁰. While, as we have seen in chapter six, the stripper carefully orchestrated the interaction to protect herself, she nonetheless rarely appeared guarded. On the surface, out of “prudence, fear and the desire to curry favor, the performance of the powerless will be oriented to meet the expectations of the powerful” (Scott, 1990:2). But the hidden assessment of the customers discursively reversed the power relations, so that the stripper *Make[s] them think you're just this poor little soul lost without them. [laughter] It's a good thing they're there or you don't know what you'd do. They're looking for somebody to save. [laughing] Ya, to save me from who? Kooks like you!* (Rachel).

Like the waitresses, Paules studied (1991) strippers accepted a level of apparent oppression that they considered tolerable and financially worthwhile. However, when a customer crossed their personal boundaries, a stripper would make the hidden transcript public, challenged his image of her as sexualized object and respond with verbal or physical aggression:

If a customer touches me after I tell him not to, I grab them by the back, by the front of their scalp and I bang their head against the wall. I usually get in trouble, told to cool off, go home for the day. Stuff like that. I ah if they'd keep their hands to themselves, ah, I wouldn't have to (Debbie).

Taking the point of view and agency of strippers seriously has allowed us to see the skin trade worker not simply as a victim of social and structural forces and highlighted her engagement with, and resistance to, forces that would render her a symbol, a

pornographed object. The hidden transcript allowed her to make sense of customers and became a resource that legitimated both passive and assertive strategies of resistance. Altogether then, the research has shown strippers as agents who within the confines of existing relations, sought to maximize her personal and social advantage.

Class Matters: I'm a Worker/I'm an Entrepreneur

When we step back and examine the various strategies of resistance employed by strippers against the authority of management and the expectations of customers, a number of striking contradictions emerge. At times, strippers forged work-based alliances and provided each other with the kind of support and working class solidarity that I had been so desperate to find at the onset of the project and that I remember with (probably idealized) fondness. At other times, strippers positioned themselves in opposition to one another and embraced individualistic approaches to labour that were highly divisive.

How do we make sense of this paradox without delegitimizing the workers by resorting to variations of the 'false consciousness' theme? Wright's (1989b) concept of contradictory class location provides a point of entry that allows us to see how the complex labour location of strippers, simultaneously as employees and entrepreneurs, gets taken up within the labour site²¹.

On the one hand strippers were *workers* who needed to fulfill a certain number of expectations at the labour site, including 'hanging out' and doing 'stages'. As workers they embraced a traditional working class views in their collectively forged understandings. Their acceptance of shared relation to labour sometimes resulted in the

recognition of common interests and culminated in collective action. These cooperative struggles for control focussed on particular areas of the labour process specific to their position as workers. As we have seen, these included contesting managerial expectations of nudity, availability and the stage shows.

On the other hand, strippers worked not for wages, as do most workers in capitalism, but for access to a setting that allows them to '*make their money*'. All or most of their income was derived through their labour as entrepreneurs. In this ideological context as private owners and sellers of property or service, relations between strippers were competitive, and individuals identified their interests oppositionally. Accordingly, they engaged in divisive practices including ratting, gossip and violence in a radical defence of their means of production and market.

What we saw being played out is the conflicting location of being simultaneously working class individuals who sell their labour to a capitalist and petit bourgeois who own the means of production. Resistance to managerial authority and oppression in the labour site tended to be individualistic, or at best ad hoc collective responses to particularly threatening situations. As a result, the contradictory class location effectively undermined class solidarity which in turn operated in the interests of management.

This conceptualisation allows us to make sense of the contradictions in management strategies as well. On the one hand, it would appear that management would benefit from having traditional 'workers'. Management did discursively construct dancers as employees, although, as we will see in the next chapter, dancers were presumed to be *inadequate* workers but workers nonetheless. On the other hand, they continually fostered

individualism among dancers through practices that included favouritism and a failure to intervene in conflicts between dancers. Circling back, we see that contradictions in class location undermine the realization of class solidarity in this particular marginal labour site in ways that not only facilitated exploitation but also shaped the nature of that exploitation.

CHALLENGING GENDER SCRIPTS

In this final section, a different aspect of resistance will be considered. Ironically stripping, which appears to epitomize gender roles and women's subservient position, may also function as a site of resistance to those very linguistic and cultural constructs. Supported by an understanding forged experientially and legitimated in the hidden transcript strippers were in a position to invert and manipulate the very relations and gendered scripts that would oppress them.

At one level, engaging in the skin-trades is an explicit and highly graphic rejection of the patriarchal control of women's sexuality realized through a divisive whore-Madonna discourse of respectability and morality (Jeffreys, 1985:60), as well as the negative sanctions of sexually autonomous women. Skin-trade workers used a commodified representation of their sexuality for maximum personal gain in the market. Such non-shameful display and retention of agency in the commercial and social interaction together constituted a transformation that challenges acquired gender roles²². Like the waitresses in Paules (1991) study who inverted the symbols of servitude, the stripper inverted the sexual role and saw herself as controlling and manipulating her own and her client's sexuality for

profit. In both cases the inversion was a hidden transcript that was empowering; and in both marginalized women used public discourses to their own advantage.

For some, the use of sexuality to undermine men's power was individually rewarding in more than economic terms: *I used to be overweight, and I lost the weight, and I wanted to pretty much get back at every man who ever used me. And I, was, ah told this was a good way to do it. And I went one night - tried it - I made a complete fool out of myself but I loved it* (Debbie). Later in the interview Debbie reiterated: *Ya, like I said, it's payback, and watching men cringe is, it gives me, it gives me a form of satisfaction.*

This notion of revenge resurfaced frequently:

And you know what? Dancing too is my way of saying, you know, and being brave, I'm not afraid of saying to a customer or anybody - 'you fuckin ass holes made me this way - you know, like look at me but you can't fuckin have me' - fuckin right! (Sally).

These quotes support my analysis that resistance originates not only from material appropriation but also from the pattern of personal humiliation that characterized that oppression (Scott, 1990:111). For others, their perspective was based on an understanding of women's oppression and men's 'nature' that came close to radical feminism. Explaining her disdain for men in general *yuk..that's what I think of men - yuk [emphasis hers]*. Tina explained:

Nah, they all the same.[long pause] They must have a life, no? They must have a wife, a girlfriend? Ya, at least I got paid for this, you know. If I have a boyfriend who do the same and I am, I am home waiting, you know. For example, if I'm home expecting him, I have kids and I make the supper and wait, you know, and at the end of the week you know we're missing some money for this, for that, and he went there, you know. I prefer to grab the money (Tina).

Taken in this way she was capitalizing on, not only the customers but at a broader level the gender structure and commodification of sexuality. We can perhaps best understand this resistance as an example of maximizing gain *within* real and perceived gender relations and expectations. Of course, employing subordination for personal gain does not challenge stereotypes nor the legitimacy of the hierarchy (Scott, 1990:33) and may support the status quo. Nevertheless, it can be a personally empowering strategy. This is not false consciousness, but an accurate assessment of structural and institutional realities. Imbalances in economic and social power may mean that, although individuals negotiate through an imposed script, they retain agency to the extent that they exploit and employ those scripts to maximize advantage (Scott, 1990:133), and subvert the social relations symbolized in the script. Put another way, the strip club becomes the site (Scott, 1990:7) where the hidden meets the public transcript and in the interface between gender, sexuality and autonomy becomes contested terrain.

SUMMING UP

Nude entertainers appear to epitomize the objectified and controlled female - the owners, managers and bartenders are overwhelmingly male, and unlike the powerful male audience, she is literally naked and symbolically disempowered. In fact, the relationship is considerably more complex. The symbolism of subservience crumbles when the perspective of the worker is considered or even when one observes the play without preconceptions about the power relations inherent in sexual displays. From this perspective, we must recast her passivity as part of her “arsenal of often subtle but

undoubtedly effective tactics to moderate the exploitive elements of her occupation” (Paules, 1991:166).

Using a broad understanding of resistance gleaned from anthropological (Scott 1985, 1990) and ethnographic accounts (Paules, 1991; Sacks & Remy, 1984), we have explored individual, collective and discursive strategies employed by strippers to resist the ability of management and clients to dictate her labour and to subvert gender discourses and roles. In doing so we have moved away from a notion of resistance as “merely the obverse of a one-dimensional notion of power as domination” (Rose, 1999:279) and come to appreciate the politics of the everyday actions by attending to:

The ways in which creativity arises out of the situation of human beings engaged in particular relations of force and meaning, and what is made out of the possibilities of that location.

Rose, 1999:279

At the same time however it has become clear that the skin trade workers resist the implications of their social and gender location and status as sexualized object through the manipulation of these dynamics to their advantage. The ability to deconstruct existing exploitative relations in a *hidden* transcript though personally empowering, is limited in terms of generating cohesive class consciousness or having an impact on public perception, precisely because it remains hidden. In fact, the very oppositional nature of counter-cultural identity may inhibit the formulation of a politicized discourse and political action (Knights and Willmott, 1985:38). This issue provides us with our point of departure for the next chapter on stigma. Strippers subverted the meaning behind the script through inversion without challenging its fundamental tenets and, as we will see,

they were still confined by a dichotomous discourse which, while individually expedient, continued to be oppressive.

ENDNOTES

1. For a full discussion see Foucault 1972.
2. While power relations within the strip club were resisted, the club itself was employed as a strategy of resistance to broader discourses on gender.
3. Go-gos, table dancers, b-girls are afforded lower status than stars, features - different names for different time periods.
4. Paules (1991) argues that the traditional focus on organizing obscures the reality that "that lack of interest in unionization reflects the individualism of the job (waitressing)...not a function of apathy or failure to recognize self-interest" (1991:172)
5. This dynamic also prevented thefts and other unethical behavior. Rachel explained *I remember before it was really bad, like when I first started dancing it was a big competition and the stealing, and they'd rip off your costumes...and nobody could be trusted and no dancer could've, would've been trusted back then but now it's just like, and you always see each other anyway, you always run into each other whether it's a year from now or a month from now, you always see each other somewhere.....so it's like everybody, you can pretty well trust each other now, cause everybody knows pretty well everybody, if I don't know anybody Diane probably knows her from somewhere else.....so I figure if I know three girls who dance I figure through those three girls I probably know the whole circuit.*
6. An individual stripper could also at times assume definitional authority. If she is an effective claims maker, her private trouble could quickly come to be defined as a 'problem'.
7. This is a common strategy for working class workers to employ (see Sharpio-Perl, 1984:203 for similar strategy employed by factory workers). In the club, this put support staff, who functioned as low level supervisors, into an awkward intermediary position. For dancers it was 'safe', since support staff did not have any substantive power.
8. The finding that dancers were not 'solid' and were willing to turn to management to address their needs suggest that there is little similarity with the ideology of a "criminal subculture".
9. The dirty dancing discourse was particularly effective, because it operated in the interests of management who are anxious to avoid state intervention.
10. A dancer who was well liked and managed social relations well might be 'dirty' but never threatened by these types of labour action.

11. Support staff were not as enraged by the manager's dictates as the dancers. We were however hardly inclined to disagree and certainly not motivated to attempt to defuse the situation.

12. It should be noted that the reverse also operated, although it was restricted to a small percentage of dancers. Women who lacked the particular assets, who were perhaps tattooed, unattractive or overweight and therefore had fewer options were subject to excessive levels of managerial control and exploitation. They did not have many employment options so their ability to resist was impaired for precisely the same reasons that Janet's ability was enhanced. The following story captures this dynamic well.

Steve, okay he does book girls, forty dollars a shift, you have to work eight hours, um...um he would find any excuse to take money off the girls. For instance a girl comes in five minutes late, and that's five minutes, that's fifteen bucks off your pay. Donna was working there and she wasn't going to get her check because a friend of hers died and she went to the funeral, so she missed one day in that week that she was booked, she wasn't going to get her check unless she pulled a double on the Saturday and she wasn't going to get paid for that Saturday or the day she missed. She did what he said cause she needed the money. She had to she has three kids and she's a little on the chubby side and not many bars would probably have her. Um. And she does have a tendency to get intoxicated on the job. That tends to be a big thing in this business, people, you know, they have children or you know, they're doing this cause they need the money (John, diskjockey).

13. At one point I was asked, by management, to patrol the champagne rooms. Uncomfortable with this policing role and unwilling to face confrontation, I took my cue from the dancers and resisted through forgetfulness.

14. Favors included circulating and doing a stage. It was not necessarily very subtle. For example, if very few strippers showed up for a shift, staff would attempt to 'call in' regulars. Most would agree to come to the house's aid only after carefully negotiating financial and other concessions from management.

15. So frequent were references to McDonalds and 'flinging burgers' that it suggests that McDonalds has it become a symbol in the collective conscience about low-end work, encompassing concepts of exploitation and menial labor.

16. I am suggesting when the public transcript is implicit, as it is in politically correct environments like the modern university, it is also intangible, and subversion is more problematic.

17. This ability to resist is also a skill. Women who did not engage in this practice were liable to be damaged by the labour experience.

18. Dragu retells a number of stories that demonstrate how the performance itself can be a satire (Dragu and Harrison, 1988:18).

19. Once again strategies of resistance put support staff in an awkward position. I frequently found myself taking *pity* on the men and found myself trying to talk dancers into offering a private dance to patrons who were polite, but customarily only purchased one or two dances.

20. The fact that instances of customer deviance were rare enough to be discussed suggests that most clients were not fully deceived, and that they were cognizant of the expectations.

21. Credit goes to Heather Jon Maroney for this insight.

22. See Carlen (1985), for further instances of women's resistance through 'deviance'.

CHAPTER EIGHT

STIGMATIZED LABOUR: MORAL REGULATION AT WORK AND LEISURE

Introduction

We now pick up themes and tensions that have emerged so far to examine stripping as stigmatized labour. We shift away from the normalizing approach of labour theory to highlight specific differences of the work by focusing on the implications of its marginal labour location. Stripping is work, but not work like any other; rather it is disreputable work. That disrepute results from a process of stigmatization that reduces an individual "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discredited one" as "a special case in the typification of difference; that is one that is very much in the foreground of our attention and negatively evaluated" (Goffman, 1963:3,4). Labour market location can be a discrediting attribute if the work is illegal, immoral or improper (Polsky, 1969).

This focus ties threads of the thesis together and makes sense of some contradictions of labour process, location and experiences by teasing out their meaning of stigmatic designations. Stigmatization is a complex dynamic that operates at both a structural and interactive level as a multi-level interplay between individuals, shifting subjectivities, socio-historic contexts and specific social individual interactions. It is

important therefore to begin from a position that acknowledges the reality of stigmatic designations, but leaves room for individual responses to stigmatization. We need to consider the implications of, and resistance to, stigma as it operates within and outside the labour site. This chapter is therefore divided into two substantive, though necessarily interrelated sections. In the first, we explore the ways that strippers understood and negotiate stigma in their everyday lives. In the second, we focus on the labour site to consider the multiple levels at which stigma operates in that context. Appreciating that social actors are partially confined by established conceptual parameters, we must critically reflect on how negotiating stigma can in turn shape the interactive order and support or undermine, stigmatizing discourses.

STIGMA IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Stigma Matters

In chapter four, the main elements of the dominant discourse on strippers was sketched out. The public discourse associates strip clubs with disreputable behaviour, including commercial sex and illicit drugs. Is the construction of strip clubs as a immoral projected onto workers? Do workers in the industry actually experience stigmatization? It would appear so.

Certainly, the informants recognized that stripping was a stigmatized occupation and were cognizant of both the existence of stigma and the particular sexual nature of the blemish:

It's not ah, it's ah, it's the reputation that goes with it, .people - when you tell them what you do they go 'oh - really!' Oh ya, oh ya, there is um to the outside, to the outside world - There is no difference difference between a prostitute and an exotic dancer (Debbie).

It seems that the experience of stigma can change over time and may be increased by the transformation of strip clubs - whether real or only in public perception - into sites of sex trade work: *so it's it's hard to say [that I am a stripper] the way it is but ten years ago, I didn't mind at all. I would say it, it was my job (Marie).* In fact stigma was consistently identified as a disadvantage of the occupation:

People sometimes look down on you or something because of that or think that y'know y'know I find women - women, I find women are worse than men, about like thinking like, "oh she's a stripper" - just like maybe women will be "oh she looks like a stripper" or whatever, things like that, that's the only thing I don't like (Rachel).

Dancers were exasperated by such public perceptions. In particular, they criticized women for making uninformed stereotypical judgements:

It's weird ya, I figure they [women] should at least go and have a drink in a strip bar or come in with their husbands and have somebody dance for them. Even pretend you were bi to see how, to see what really goes on in those rooms, and how we really are (Rachel).

For the workers, stigmatization was not abstract, but a real dynamic with implications for their lives. They not only contended with moral objection and stereotypical assumptions in the public arena, but also in the private realm as their intimate partners reproduced stigmatizing discourses¹:

[My partner] doesn't like the fact that I have champagne rooms, and the club that I'm at - the reputation that it has, he, to this day does not believe that I've not had a customer pay me to touch me in different ways. All girls do it as far as he's concerned (Debbie).

It intruded upon romantic relationships:

I did it for a few years [pause] and then I uh um started seeing a cop and he told me that because of his job I couldn't do that cause the stereotypes and stuff (Diane).

In fact, for some women being a stripper meant choosing not to have a partner.

So so either, if they're willing to go out it's, it's to take advantage of my body, take advantage of my money de de de dat....that's the thing I'm thinking you know, and nothings going to change my mind on this. So as as far as I'm concerned, as long as I'm gonna dance I'm not gonna have a life you know. And sometimes I want a life like ah, and sometimes when I see life of peoples the peoples there I say ah "I'm ok" - I'm ok like that [laughing]. I'd rather have a one night stand once in a while you know and that's it no problem. It's it's not easy to choose (Tina).

The following story by Tina is quoted at length because it captures not only the fact of stigma, but also reflects very shattering personal effects of its consequences:

Ya. I can't I can't make a life to myself because of that....I met somebody ah in December, I didn't work because I didn't feel like working, and I I make, ah, volunteer work. Okay, people ask me if I was working, I say, "No". And they were talking about dancer all the time the guys "blah blah blah", you know what I mean. And ah I met a guy and he ask me for supper - I knew that he would ask me - I wanted to say yes and no at the same time because I know and finally I say "ok". So at the dinner he ask again he said, "Ah you told me that you're not working". I said "as a matter of fact I'm working.... da-de-de-da, I'm doing that", you know....He start to eat, he start to eat he say, "really". You know he said because he he wanted to go out with me not for one night. He wanted to see me so he said it's like, it's like, "un coup de mass dans le front" [it's like being hit with a hammer in the forehead]. Ya. So I said to him, "you're swinging the hammer back to me," you know and then we talk, we talk, we talk. And at coffee time he said, "Maybe I could handle this, maybe I could handle this, I'm gonna try to - but the only thing never ask me to go where you work". I say "Ahh you never come were I work, that's it". And I ask him after that you know. What you gonna do with your family? What you gonna do with your friends? What you gonna tell them? So he said, "Oh that's no problem. You women you have a sense of twisting the truth." You know like I could say, I'm a barmaid or something like that to them, you know. I said, "no way". I said, "if you don't intend to tell them you don't accept what I do." That was the end of the, the, relationship before it started.

Stigma also intruded on a range of social areas and economic exchange from housing *some places don't rent to strippers* (Diane) to finance *it's hard to get credit in a bank* (Marie) that are generally assumed to operate outside of moral regulation. Finally at some level, stigma may have been internalized so that definitions of self became alienating. Rachel's language is revealing:

[We] hit the bars, took some pictures, stuff like that y'know, of us in the bar playing pool stuff you know. We had a good time and....then it makes you feel, ah that was cool that they'd want to phone us up and ask us out instead of asking a normal person y'know [emphasis mine].

Put another way *working* as a stripper became *being* a stripper, an identity marker with very real implications in the lives of women in the industry and shaped the worker's experience of the wider world. Furthermore, it seems to be a 'sticky' stigma infecting those around the stripper as well (Goffman, 1963:30), so that her family may be, or may perceive themselves to be, stigmatized. Certainly, those who share her labour site are.

During fieldwork, stigma became a tangible dynamic that vibrated through my life and relationships². Since I was offended by the application of stigmatic designations, I became increasingly nonchalant about flaunting my deviant labour location and was alienated and ostracized in some social circles for my efforts. Furthermore, it became a source of shame to those close to me. One of my children and my (supposedly counter-culture) partner, much to my annoyance, were embarrassed and carefully explained my labour location as 'doing research'. It is also sticky in the sense of enduring even after participation in the industry has ceased. The common linguistic designation of *ex-strippers* speaks to an understanding that participation in the trades legitimates continued

assumptions of immorality³. In this sense, it is even more lasting than Goffman suggests when he notes that “when such repair [to identity] is possible what often results is not the acquisition of fully normal status but a transformation of self from someone with a blemish to someone with a record of having a blemish removed” (Goffman, 1963:9).

We started from the premise that stripping is a stigmatized occupation and that participation in such labour shapes the ways individuals are perceived. We have seen now that the stigma of labour location is transformed into a stigma of the worker, with wide-ranging implications for the lives of women in the industry. In the following sections, we look at how this stigma was managed at the level of personal identity and in social relations.

Managing Stigma: Personal Identity

Identity takes on particular significance when stigmatized characteristics need to be either integrated or discredited. Strippers are social actors invested in non-deviant self identities but also cognizant of prevailing discourses. Participants in stigmatized occupations must ‘make sense’ of the work in ways that do not threaten the self. From the outset successful entry into the occupation required that strippers transcend stereotypical assumptions about the industry:

I'd never been in a strip joint before - a female strip joint before in my life. I had no idea what went on until the day I went into one - to work. And, so I mean, I was raised with the persona that everyone is, ah, hoers. So I went in there thinking “oh my god I'm going to have to be a cheap floosy” and then I danced, and then I danced for a customer and I thought, “well is that all there is? This is easy” (Debbie).

The research revealed two distinct and contradictory approaches to managing stigmatized identity among strippers. The first is an individualized construction of the self as normative, by denial, distancing and differentiation. The second normalizes the occupation by discursive deconstruction. While the former approach remains problematic, both are valid strategies that reflect an authentic understanding and cannot be dismissed as 'neutralization' (Sykes and Matza 1957)⁴.

Normalizing the Self

Strippers who adopted a relationally realized non-stigmatized personal identity did so through legitimation of the stigmatic designations applied to strippers generally. Although all these women acknowledged that they sometimes contravened conventional morality and engaged in dirty dancing, they assumed moral superiority over other workers: *The lap dancers have gone to Quebec....they will not dance for ten dollars, they refuse to, it's beneath them. Most of them sleep with the managers for ah y'know, favours - support their habit* (Ann). Rather than challenge stereotypes, these dancers espoused an understanding that mirrored the dominant discourse. Evoking all the clichés they dismissed strippers as 'hookers', 'sleazy' and 'druggies'. They create what might be called 'straw-strippers'. They assumed that the occupation had implications for behaviour and moral status beyond the workplace that they wanted to avoid: *I will not associate with dancers, ah socially. It's the lifestyle, the drugs, the drinking* (Debbie).

It is in relation to such 'straw-strippers' that these dancers defined themselves as different, moral and, most explicitly, not prostitutes - *I'm not on sale - not for saleI'm for show* (Debbie). They were careful to establish that *I am not a typical dancer....I am a*

girl trying to, trying to make a living (Debbie). These distinctions and distancing strategies were sometimes extended to a club or a specific group of colleagues:

I like The Stag, because it's clean. Sometimes there are dirty dancers but either the managers get rid of them or the girls run them out. At the Stag, the girls aren't hoes. Well I guess, some of the free lancers will meet a guy after, but none of the house girls, the house girls are all really decent. We all have something happening in our lives, not just drugs (Sarah).

Like the morticians in William Thompson's study these dancers were so careful not to conform to the 'typical' strippers that they were ultimately much more confined by the stereotype than their more radical counterparts. The judgements of these 'insiders', which replicated the dominant discourses and positioned their moral self-identity against the deviant others, powerfully legitimation of the dominant understandings. Of course, stigmatizing something you engage in is emotionally difficult: *I'm ashamed of what I do* (Debbie). This kind of conditional moral identity made some strippers vulnerable to forms of emotional abuse that threatened to further undermine her precariously maintained sense of self. A number of informants noted that: *when we fight, he gets real mad he says a he he calls me a whore, a slut, ah ya. I hate that* (Sarah).

There is also an interface between identity management and the experience of labour. For the most part, these dancers brought their stereotypes into the workplace and consequently tended to have more antagonistic workplace relations than their more accepting co-workers. Finally, since they did not associate with co-workers socially, they were denied the support that can only be provided by 'insiders' who truly understand the worker's situation.

Normalizing the Occupation

A far more common approach to identity management embraced by career strippers⁵ and by those who entered the occupation already 'wise' (Goffman, 1963), was to counter dominant discourses about the industry and its workers. This orientation is very different from the one described above and does not involve the convoluted distancing strategies or othering of the former approach. Instead these workers were able to transcend assumptions to construct an understanding ground in experience. The result was the nuanced and sophisticated deconstruction employed by most dancers.

Part of this was a defiant resistance that dared outsiders to judge: *I never cared what people think of me, cause I consider, I know my worth, and if they can't see it well too bad they're losing out, that's how I see it* (Marie). This does not mean they did not engage with the dominant discourse in order to counter assumptions, but they did so in the name of the collective identity of strippers. Part of this involved normalizing the job and their reasons for participation; *Most of us are either dancing to, ah, for our kids and we have bills to pay. She [Demi Moore in "Striptease"] was doing it to because she had to go to court to fight* (Diane).

Since stripper stigma was primarily perceived as a whore stigma, with its implicit subtext of female unworthiness and dishonor (Pheterson, 1990), considerable effort was put into countering these particular connections. Prostitution was largely dismissed as marginal to the strip club industry. They clearly identified themselves and most other dancers as fundamentally respectable (and, therefore, not whores)⁶. In fairness, unlike

most women, who have never been offered money for sex, strippers could speak to their 'moral' parameters with considerable certainty⁷:

And sometimes you get old men saying, "Oh, I'll give you two thousand dollars, five thousand dollars, anything, just come home and sleep with me" and all this stuff. And it's like, "No!" I never needed the money that bad I guess. I'm not saying one day I'll never do it, maybe some day I will. No, not at all [difficult to turn down the money] I don't find it hard at all not to sleep with them for money - especially when they're old and all wrinkly too [laughter]. That kind of eases your answer, y'know (Rachel).

The attempt to distance stripping from prostitution led to some linguistic acrobatics that recast what was clearly sex as dance:

A ten dollar lap dance involves a lot of body rubbing um um I'm with my with my breasts in his lap kind of a seductive rub - from head to toe, sitting on their lap making sexual gestures. They were allowed touching me on the breasts, back shoulders, legs, thighs ah y'know. For a twenty dollar dance they, a lot of girls did - I never did a twenty dollar dance - involves a lot of touching between the legs. Some girls would let it go to the actual penetration. And then there's some girls would do a fifty dollar dance which involves a blow job. Some girls, some girls will, for twenty bucks, sit on you. Once (Ann).

The contradiction was not lost on some informants:

But they don't register that, ah "oh I do a hand job now and then" they don't classify themselves as prostitutes. But the minute there is a sexual, that is prostitution [emphasis hers] (Sally).

The association of strip clubs and drugs in the dominant discourse was also addressed by informants:

The coke these days, uh the drugs, they don't do that much at all these girls these days. I haven't seen a drug dealer in a bar in friggin ages. Like I'd say two, three years now I've been working in bars were they don't even have drug dealers. Y'know, you used to work in a bar and there'd always be that guy. There'd always be this one drug dealer in the corner there waiting to make money off you, and everything. And now I've been in bars they don't even have, you can't even find anybody sometimes, most of the girls these days they don't do drugs any ways, they smoke up once in a while, or they'll drink (Rachel).

Marie, started college fifteen years ago and was disenchanted by a number of things, including extensive drug use. She noted:

It's very hard to consider the bars as a major source of drug, of drug abuse. I would say it's allover.... mm it's seen by society. Because first of all people who say that "oh there's drugs in bars", they don't know what they're talking about because all they see is the outside of the bar.

The association of strip clubs with narcotics were a source of secondary stigma for the workers. While dancers experienced the whole stigma in deeply personal ways, illicit substances were seen as part of a more general subtext of labour site disrepute.

The identification of different approaches to managing personal identity highlights the importance of individual subjectivity. An individual's standpoint, her ideological, economic, social and personal position, shapes her world-view, and consequently, experience of stigma. An unconventional take on stigma is not an indicator self-delusion or loss of dignity, as some authors would have us believe (Kretzman, 1992; Thompson *et al.*, 1992), but shows us that there is a wide range of possible responses to stigmatization. Different individual responses may not alter stigmatic designations in public and private discourses, but do transform the dynamic from the experience of shame or embarrassment to the negotiation of consequences.

Managing Stigma: Social Identity

We now shift from personal to social identity. Regardless of an individual's approach to the management of personal identity, strippers are *discreditable* individuals,

rather than individuals whose immediately apparent stigma renders them discredited. They engage in information management to the extent that they accept the legitimacy of the stigma or acknowledge the social implications of its attributes. The options range from passing to full disclosure, the latter transforms the process from the management of stigma to the management of uneasy social situations (Goffman, 1963:100).

Strategies of social identity management can best be conceptualized as occurring on a continuum. Approaches ranged from complete to almost no disclosure. Put another way, some dancers were 'out' and wore the markers⁸ of occupational location with *pride: ah the make-up, the clothes, the walk, the talk*, (Debbie)⁹, while others were so closeted that they carefully concealed their occupation from family and friends, conscientiously monitored their talk and body language and often worked some distance from home in an effort to guard against disclosure. Most fell somewhere between these extremes. The place on the continuum was not static. Once stripping was adopted as a career and the discourse deconstructed, less stigma management was engaged in as occupational location could be integrated into not only personal, but also social, identity. Similarly, since former strippers are not without blemish, but considered to have "corrected a particular blemish" (Goffman, 1963:9), the adoption of other occupational or social roles may require new strategies of social identity management¹⁰.

Regardless of the strategies of identity management employed, stigma remained important (Coleman, 1986:221). The strippers were still obliged to interact in social spheres where their livelihood was presumed to be a definitive identity. The use of stage names by most dancers served a purpose in social identity management. Even the most

defiant deconstructors were sensitive to the fact that disclosure may require others, particularly parents¹¹ to engage in identity management:

I think it's a great job. I think they're, anybody who thinks anything else just doesn't know, they still have this old mentality of it, y'know, this um always drunk or stoned or stoned out of your brains and you spend your money all the time. Or prostitutes. And, ah, they just think we're a bunch of low lives and it's not like that at all. So right now I don't mind telling anybody at all, except my parents. Cause they're kinda – G-d fearing people ya. So I'd rather, my mother would probably commit suicide, or probably think she'd failed or something, or, "where did I go wrong", or y'know. So I'd rather not just, I'd rather not put them through that, thinking they'd failed or anything cause it's not that they failed. I've tried other stuff and I just don't, ah, like it (Rachel).

Research on homosexual men and lesbian women has demonstrated that managing identity can be stressful if it requires the maintenance of a non-deviant identity (Cain, 1991:67). Keeping an aspect of one's life, be it sexual orientation or occupational location, hidden from significant or more general others, is challenging. Individuals are forced to monitor talk and behaviour as well as create fictions to guard against disclosure and the loss of non-deviant identity: *I don't know if I can keep it a secret any longer - you know the lies are catching up (Debbie).*

The risk of being 'outed' may necessitate a preemptive tactic of disclosure to minimize its consequences. Tina told her teenage children, in an attempt to avoid crisis. She explained:

When I start again last year, to work - again, my daughter was sixteen, just about sixteen, so I tell her the principal of my job, lap dancing, what's going on. Because I was afraid that, because she had friends older than her, like eighteen, nineteen. So can you imagine one day they go over they say "eh I see your mom" y'know.

The existence of a discrediting, hidden identity may also render an individual vulnerable as information can be employed as a strategy of control:

Well they [parents] were supportive. Not all the time. Not not when they discovered it. They found out through one of my boyfriend that he didn't want me to dance and he just opened my costume suitcase on the kitchen table and my parents freaked out. And they didn't speak to me for two months. But I hung in there and I said, "They'll come around eventually." And they did (Marie).

For a woman in an abusive relationship, the abuser's knowledge of a discrediting hidden identity can be a source of power over her: another avenue through which domination is realized¹². Similarly, occupational location and time requirements can also be used by the patriarchal state to control women. Many women feared losing their children:

I have to be real careful....child protection has been around....No I I don't think that they would take the kids but I've had problems and they watch me. Sometimes I come home, and there they are. And you know they just come in and, ah, ah sometimes I have to work and I can't find a sitter (Kelly).

Finally, we can draw hypotheses about the psychological and emotional implications of maintaining a hidden identity. Certainly mental health practitioners have identified covertness, in homosexual individuals, to be linked to a "range of social and personal problems such as low self-esteem, social insolation, awkwardness, and a sense of powerlessness and incompetence" (Cain, 1991:67). People may also internalize the spoiled identity implicit in the stigma as Rachel did in distinguishing herself from "normal people" above. Finally, strippers who were extremely covert denied themselves a positive reference group, lost opportunities to collectively deconstruct stigma and cut themselves off from potential solidarity in the workplace and socially.

Stigma Matters: The Costs of Managing Stigma

A number of points emerge in the discussion so far. First, stigmatization was a real dynamic for strippers. Women in the industry were conscious of stigma and employed various strategies to counter-act the implications of participating in stigmatized labour including denial, managing identity, defining the self as different and deconstruction. These strategies while effective could also be stressful and create new sets of predicaments, particularly when social and personal identities were incongruent. They were problematic at another level of analysis as well. The strategies of denial, distancing and differentiating continued not only to support deviant designations but, at a minimum, operated in relation to existing dichotomized understandings. These issues warrant consideration.

It is precisely stigma that renders the individual or collective meanings and understandings of devalued populations suspect. In order to change popular and academic discourses it is first necessary to counteract stigma, to introduce legitimate accounts, and to promote/ensure their acceptance¹³. Efforts at stigma management frequently focus on forging individual or collective non-stigmatized identities rather than explicitly challenging the moral stratified discourse which justifies the stigma in the first place. This is unfortunate. Texts are important transmitters of understanding and instruments of legitimating discourse by allowing particular conceptual constructs to be presented as 'truth' in the Foucauldian knowledge/power dynamic (Foucault, 1980). In real terms, this absence simplifies the transformation of the workers into symbols of degradation and

impedes the codification of understanding which, as knowledge, becomes a personal and political resource for marginalized individuals.

Secondly, even dancers who actively deconstructed and resisted the stigmatic designations, operated in relation to the whore-Madonna dichotomy. Implicitly, in spite of stating *I have nothing against prostitutes* (Ann) they legitimated the othering of sex trade workers by seeing as inherently insulting that designation: *Ya. That's like calling me a whore to my face. You can call me any name in the book - don't call me a slut, don't call me a whore. Anything else doesn't bother me* (Ann).

The relation to prostitutes operated at another level. Patriarchy is fundamentally grounded in the ideological and substantive appropriation of woman's reproductive capabilities by a male hierarchy. Quite simply, the rule, lineage and immortality of the father can only exist if paternity can be assured. Women are, therefore, afforded both tangible and intangible rewards for their conformity to the dictates of female purity. Once female purity is accepted as legitimate, it can have a wide range of effects including the stigmatization of women who violate the constructed moral order.

In this manner, sexuality becomes a gender specific dimension used to define, describe, and because the ascribed statuses are not value neutral but decidedly value laden, to assess women. In patriarchal thought, male sexual behaviour is constructed as occurring on a continuum. In contrast, women's behaviour is polarized into two mutually exclusive categories. The benefit of being a 'good girl' exist only in relation to the status and experience of 'bad girls'. Since female sexuality is considered fundamental, the designation 'whore' becomes an overriding definition. Sheila Jeffreys (1985) suggests that

the division between pure and fallen women is important for the maintenance of male supremacy; by splintering the female element, men ensure that women do not join together to challenge patriarchal power (Jeffreys, 1985:60). Ultimately not only does the process inadvertently support the whore-stigma (for whores) but also obscures commonality and hinders recognition of the fact that the whore stigma is inherently damaging to all women. For women in the skin trades, the whore stigma was something very real, much more than the indicator it is for feminist theorists. Perhaps for this reason, deconstruction was problematic as they, like all women, seek to derive the benefits afforded to 'good girls'- however marginal that 'good' may be¹⁴.

Stigma Matters But Some Things Matter More

As noted in chapter two, working class women derive both economic and less tangible benefits through participation in the paid labour force. The latter include a sense of independence, social and personal worth and camaraderie. To understand why dancers participated in work that required stigma management, we have to step back to consider stigma as relative and conceptualize it within the broader context of the lives and opportunities of working class women. We need to factor stigma into our understanding of workers who are working within a particular range of choices.

Stripping is an momentarily rewarding occupation in contrast to the casual, part-time and poorly paid service sector jobs where working class women cluster (Duffy and Pupo, 1992). Economic resources have real effects and also symbolic meaning in consumerist societies, including status, freedom and social position. Having money also

minimizes disadvantage and signifies freedom from the stigma, the degradation and the “less than human status” (Waxman, 1977:69) that is definitive of the experience of poverty in western capitalist culture (Rubin, 1976; Sennett and Cobb, 1972)¹⁵. Furthermore, for many dancers their multiple social and family obligations combined with the disappearance of the social safety net precluded participation in traditional labour arrangements. For these women, the stigma of disreputable work may be experienced as less oppressive than the stigma of not participating in the paid labour force or the stigma of dependance on state transfer payments. Taken together, these points have several implications.

First, in the negotiation of work and social life in the skin trades, including coping with stigma, needs to be considered in relation to other stigmas (not to mention real economic, social and personal problems) that marginalized individuals cope with.

I try it, I make my night, not a lot of dollar because I was shy, I was straight, I didn't drink and at three in the morning when I get home I um I cried because I say, “uh y'know it's not ok to do that and this and that and ny ny ny nay” and then I say “ok go to sleep you'll see tomorrow.” The next day I say, “ah I have money to eat today so, don't worry, be happy - go to work”. So I make from 82 to 91 like that (Tina).

Similarly, one informant described her decision to strip as: *Now we still don't have much, but my kids play hockey (Kerri)*¹⁶. Her comment suggests that the ability to participate either directly or vicariously in reputable leisure activities may compensate for the stigma incurred through marginal labour location.

Secondly, being tainted by occupational location is not restricted to stripping. While there is a moral stigma attached to stripping, other occupations also carry stigmas.

There is the stain of dirt where you are “*in a bar washing the cigarettes butts*” (Marie) of an inappropriate gender role. Tina explained:

I was a janitor, y'know working with the tools when you can work and make, y'know....the people living they're, they're they're a pain - they call you up. To have your ah “comment dit ca la” changing washroom, changing washroom instead of you know doing my makeup or [laughing] it's a different world you know. And when I start dancing too I was comparing [laughing] there's no comparison I wanted to be, to be. I am a woman I want to have – femininity and the job to go with it. I was feeling not good in the other job.

Third, the stigma associated with the work was perhaps compensated for by some of the intrinsic rewards rarely available to working class women.

You get to travel and meet all new people, and just, ah, just get more out of life. I think, I mean if you're gonna be stuck in a job that most people think is so bad at least you gotta make the best of it, y'know, and you gotta say to yourself “is it bad at all?” And it's true, in other jobs you're, you're stuck behind a desk 8 hours a day, you get two weeks vacation a year, and you're miserable on top of it all, y'know. Most, most people who have jobs they don't even like their jobs, ya, they don't even like their jobs (Rachel).

Contradictions emerged in the interviews. All respondents explained participation in stripping in terms of economic motivators and labour market opportunities. It would appear that this definition was in part shaped by a perceived need to *justify* participation in a deviant labour activity. Such explanations focussed on the least deviant of desires in western capitalism: financial security. At the same time, it is clear that the occupation afforded other benefits - independence, autonomy, ego affirmation. Sally, who carefully maintained economic justifications, described her reentry into the field: *I said “I just want to get on stage” and she's “ya go go” and she's coaxing me and I'm telling her “if I get on stage that won't be my last show cause I'll have dance fever again”*. I am suggesting that strippers' public claims of economic need, while real, are also in part a response to the

stigma attached to stripping: to identify the job as pleasurable would render the stripper truly disreputable and undermine her precarious respectable identity.

These arguments suggest that we must consider stigma as a relative social and personal dynamic. Perhaps experientially, stigma is factored into labour value, something that is acceptable provided it is adequately compensated. At the same time, strippers themselves were cognisant that enjoying the job was doubly deviant, this shapes their discourse as they carefully discount this possibility, even when they evidently derive secondary benefits.

STIGMA ON THE JOB

We now focus on another way stigma operates. Because moral regulation was realized at the labour site itself, we need to move to a contextual or structural analysis. Labour site stigma was more nuanced than the stereotypical assumptions which shape the dominant discourse about strippers. As a result, its impact and the ways it was managed are complex. Interviews revealed three areas that warrant consideration. What effect did state moral regulation have on the labour site? How did customers, management and strippers operate within stigmatic assumptions that shaped the labour process? How were these stigmatic designations resisted?

Moral Regulation: The State at Work

Stripping is not only a marginalized occupation, it is also, as we have already seen, one that is controlled through the coercive arm of the state. The regulation of morality

through criminal justice intervention was perhaps the most telling way that the state legitimates the whore stigma. The reality of moral control was reinforced for workers in the industry by the periodic appearance of uniformed police who patrolled the clubs¹⁷. Strippers understood that their actions were monitored. Discussing a raid, Jackie noted that the police

Would go in, and they were doing it months before. They were all going in plain clothes and stuff and getting dances and seeing what was going on, and seeing what was being offered and everything. And then one night, they just went in and they busted everybody, y'know.

Strippers knew that whatever their own behaviour, simply being caught in a raid would have financial costs and, more importantly, social consequences if stigmatized identities were made public:

When they raided, when they raided Hogans in Oshawa, every girl that was in the champagne room went to jail, for 10 hours. They paid a twenty-five hundred dollar fine, the bar was charged five thousand dollars per girl, in the champagne room. The customers went to jail as well, their names were printed in the paper, a- along with the girl's names. So those girls their career is shattered, um, they were given stipulations which they've all broken -but they're all back. There's no ano-ano- anonymity for them (Debbie).

As a result, dancers chose how and where to work in terms of how straight the bar was and how willing they were to risk having stigma permanently affixed through a criminal record¹⁸.

I haven't a lot of year in front of me I don't know maybe. I, at my age, I never had any record, never in my life, y'know, so you think more about those things. Before I didn't, ah accept the risk, now I accept the risk (Tina).

Moral regulation, reinforced by a threat of state sanction meant the women not only protected but also policed each other:

I'm not doing time for nobody. Ah, if I see a girl lap dancing, if I catch a girl doing a twenty dollar dance, I'll tell, I'll tell the management. Oh ya I'll mark the girl I don't care. No [not for general safety] cause if we were to get raided, I'd be going to jail, for her (Diane).

Arguably within the strip club the police, doormen, managers, support staff and other dancers all acted as disciplinary agents and patrolled moral and legal boundaries. As the stripper, she provided champagne room dances in an apparently private space that was actually under careful surveillance. She had to, therefore continually monitor her own and her customer's behaviour in relation to this panopticonian gaze (Foucault, 1979).

Customer's Stigmatic Assumptions: "How Much Honey?"

Customers operated within the existing dominant discourse. Many assumed that strippers were sex trade workers:

Like 99% by the customers, oh yes, "You must have a price". Some guys go up to a thousand dollars. And they lay it on the table. I have stuffed eight one-hundred dollar bills in a guy's glass and said, "Drink it," and split. Ya they do, they do, a lot of them. No [it didn't bother me] I'd take it as a compliment, because....in a way it is, and in a way the way society is, they're allowed to expect it (Marie)¹⁹.

It would appear that these customers equated surface presentations of sexuality with actual sexuality so that strippers were wrongly presumed to be, if not prostitutes, then highly promiscuous²⁰. Strippers, particularly those who managed their identity outside the labour site by identifying themselves as moral and, therefore atypical strippers, also frequently projected blame onto other strippers for customer expectations: *cause there's,*

they know that there 's, a possibility of somebody in there actually biting. Cause there is, there 's always a possibility that a customer will go home with a dancer (Ann). Such perceptions laid the basis for antagonistic relations between dancers.

At the same time regardless of how an individual dancer understood its source, she was required to cope with customers' anticipation of sexual fulfilment while performing effectively in an environment where she was presumed to be, but could not be, sexually available²¹. The taken-for-granted assumptions of sexual licence were countered by strippers, when they asserted their own boundaries or projected immorality onto customers in their hidden transcript. This distinction between strippers and consumers was supported by appealing to the legitimating discourses of economic need and, sometimes, family obligations; unlike their hedonistic customers who sought immoral pleasure, they were motivated by the legitimate, and implicitly moral, need for economic resources. In other words, they both appealed to higher loyalties and condemned the condemners (Sykes and Matza, 1957).

As I have argued, strippers' 'hidden transcript' generally remained hidden as strippers presented themselves to customers as sexually available: *I guess we all basically pretend we don 't have boyfriends, or pretend we don 't live with anybody, all those things like that you don 't ever talk about that* (Rachel). Kerrie was even more explicit about the source of her success in spite of being older and somewhat less attractive than other strippers at that particular club: *ya ah, ah I hustle, ya, but when I first got here I wasn 't making any money. One of the regulars here helped me out. He started a rumour that I was dirty...ya ya then I was real busy*. In other words stigmatic assumptions were a

discourse which strippers consciously played along with in the interests of making money: *ya, the minute they start thinking that these chicks all they want is our money and we'll never get them, you know this stuff, the less people are going to be in the bars* (Rachel).

In effect, strippers were confronted by stigmatic designations that were imposed by clients, although the implications of social powerlessness were resisted and agency asserted when strippers exploited stigmatic assumptions to make money, and when they reversed the stigma by rendering customers morally suspect deviants. In this setting, a stripper had to cope with the behaviour and expectations of customers, but did not need to seriously engage with their assumptions of inferiority, the subtext of stigma.

Stripper's ability to project stigma was supported by broader social understandings of deviance. Although customers did not have to manage their public identity in the way that strippers did, strip clubs were not only stigmatized labour sites but, at least somewhat, stigmatized leisure sites. The behaviour of customers suggested that, while they hardly equated their deviance with that of the dancers, they were nonetheless cognizant of prevailing sentiments that frequenting strip bars constituted morally suspect behaviour. For example, as we saw in the first sketch of the clubs, customers regularly established their non-deviant intent by saying that they were there *'for a few beers'* and carefully avoided the stage area for a significant period before wandering to 'perv row'. Others shunned the parking lot and left their vehicles some distance away to ensure they were not associated with the strip club. Of course, at least in formal law, the state, police and judiciary arms could charge consumers as well as the service providers under section 210 of the Canadian Criminal Code²². Strippers recognized that shared stigma afforded them a

measure of protection from having their stigmatic occupations revealed by customers outside the club:

I've danced for my father's boss. Why would he say anything? I have more on him then he has on me. It would hurt him more to tell my father then it would hurt me - cause I'd go straight to his wife. It's understood [that she would tell his wife if he disclosed], just like any, any married man. I would never go up to a customer, ah say, say, I was in the Library - I would never go up to a customer....and say "hey how's it going ne-ne-ne-na", and they would be like "oh where did you meet her?" You know. I would never (Debbie).

Management's Stigmatic Assumptions: Good Girls, Bad Workers

In the past, managers also often ascribed whore status to strippers. They presumed promiscuity, imposed sexual expectations on dancers and negatively sanctioned those who refused to participate:

The owner kept introducing his friends who had a lot of money - so I would go and sleep with his friends....and since I like to do sewing in the dressing room and not chat and drink that was really rough for him. He didn't like me, he even cut my contract short two days and the plane there was supposed to be paid and it wasn't (Marie).

As the industry changed from an entertainment to a service industry, the power of individual managers over workers was eroded. As a result:

Most managers they either have their wives or their steady girlfriends and they don't fuck around as much as back when, back when they had a different one each week, y'know, and, or they'd book one and know that the other one wouldn't be booked till the next week cause he'd already slept with that one so he couldn't get them all there in the same week cause that would be a big fiasco. So he'd space them out and stuff like that. And it was always just weird but nowadays I think it's just ah more of a business. People are looking at it more like a business than ah just something they get pleasure out of. I find girls are keeping their money, spending it a lot less then they used to, a lot less drugs (Rachel).

As Rachel noted, it was now *more of a business* for both strippers and management. In and of itself, this shift in labour relations did not remove stigma from strippers but changed the attributes ascribed to them. Management still operated on the presumption that strippers, because they were strippers, possessed “other undesirable traits as well” (Becker, 1963:33). The transformation within the industry from entertainment to service shaped the way stigmatic designations got taken up at the work site in the 1990s.

Within the club a specifically paternalistic discourse²³ that infantilized and delegitimated strippers as *workers* was operative. For managers, the administrative problems largely centred on the “*unreliability of girls*”. Not only were strippers always referred to as *girls*²⁴ - a rather obvious example of infantilization, but the discourse resounded with sexist, patronizing assumptions: *No shit, managing a club is like having ten girlfriends on PMS* (Craig). Another manager, my primary informant, described the experience of managing strip clubs:

After about a week you think, “well the scenery is nice but everything else is ah”. Like you have to be like a father: “no you can not have sex in the champagne rooms” “drugs are smoked upstairs, let me tell you again for the third time today.” I’ve never had to deal with that anywhere else (Mike).

Defining strippers in this way legitimated a particular approach to labour relations: *If, if you’re too nice to them, it doesn’t work. You have to be a bit mean sometimes* (Craig).

In general, if the women were no longer presumed to be morally suspect because of sexuality, they were now morally suspect for their lack of work ethic:

Honestly how many jobs do you get staff calling up and saying “I can’t come in to work I’m too tired” or “I got drunk last night”....or even “Im too high” they use that “I’m too high” jeeze. They are irresponsible - half of them only come in to work when they are broke. Ya, they only work when they want to (Mike).

With regard to dirty dancing, where state regulation intersected with the interest of management, we saw language that carried an understanding of dancers as juvenile not only in terms of their competence as workers but also as, periodically, unable to manage their sexuality²⁵: *sometimes during the day, when there 's no bouncer the girls they get carried away you know what I mean. They get into all sorts of trouble* (Mike).

In short, the discourse of strippers as inadequate workers was realized in interaction and in control strategies and was played out according to gender scripts. The tension between strippers, who perceived themselves as entrepreneurs, and managers, who saw them as employees, got taken up in a construction of strippers not as whores but as deviant women workers. This understanding allowed strippers' strategies of resistance to work, but at the cost of being dismissed in ways that supported stigmatic designations. Being defined as unreliable, juvenile and unprofessional had an impact on work relations. These assumptions afforded strippers an avenue to manipulate the labour situation and to use the imposed stereotypes to further their own interests. Managers, confined within their own particular understandings, did not appear to recognize the extent to which the women were enacting a script in order to manipulate: *I can 't leave unless I whine, play sick, play them good, what have you [emphasis hers]* (Debbie).

As we have seen earlier, occupational stigma and the stigmatic nature of the labour site undermined worker solidarity. Did the particular stigmatic designations produced by management have an impact on strippers' own identities as workers? It would appear that continual interaction in this environment had an effect. Strippers came to accept the invalidating constructs as either personally or collectively valid and so denied themselves

an “intellectually worked up version of their point of view” (Goffman, 1963:25).

Strippers, who otherwise effectively deconstructed stigma, at times inadvertently supported the in-club stereotypes that legitimated exploitation: *Well, if we don't come in to work they [management] know we're all bullshitting, that we drank too much the night before and that we just don't feel like going in* (Diane).

In sum, while dancers may have rejected stigma they nevertheless remained firmly embedded within such designations and sometimes, through projection, also legitimated these labels. This process further eroded solidarity and, in turn, restricted dancers' ability to challenge the stigmatizing class and gender discourses that rendered their behaviour suspect:

About the job? mmm [long pause] One thing, something I don't like when you're having fun, and they don't like it when you're having fun. It's like they don't like it when you're having fun. The managers, sometimes the girls too. They'll say like, "how come she's making so much money", even if you're just sitting with the guy talking, drinking having fun, y'know, they always find some ulterior motive behind it. Or "why is she making all the money" or and, ah, or.... You just, I just find whenever I have too much fun nobody likes it and it's like is my fault I like my job. I like to party with people. So what if I'm getting paid for it? I'm still doing my job - dancing on stage when it's my turn, I'm doing everything I'm supposed to be doing (Rachel).

Bad Girls/Nice Girls

The strip club was also a site where stigmatic designations intersected. Here contradictions abound. It is well established in the criminological literature that tattoos 'mark' an individual as disreputable (Grumet, 1983; Sanders, 1989; Layton, 1993).

Tattoos are assumed to denote the bearer's possession of other characteristics, including

being tough, cheap and unfeminine (Sanders, 1989)²⁶. These judgements were unquestioningly reproduced within the club. Explaining why three dancers were barred from the club, one manager carefully explained: *they were, with all those tattoos ah ..we don't want those kind of girls, we want nice girls*. Since managers regularly refused tattooed women employment, many dancers carefully concealed their body art and attempted to pass. Put another way, tattoos located a woman as part of the rough working class (McRobbie, 1981), an apparently undesirable class location, in a way that provided ground for her further marginalization as a worker. In light of the particular industry dynamics, this limited her employment options and made greater exploitation by managers possible.

Working with Stigma: Inverting, Subverting and Reproducing

Stigma in strip clubs shaped the labour process and labour experience of participants. While the stigmatic designations of the dominant discourse were contextually determined, they were largely a variation on a theme and not qualitatively different from each other. Ultimately strippers were labelled as deviant by the state, customers and management. These designations served to reinforce otherness and legitimated control. That these were resisted and inverted by strippers did not render them any less real, but did identify stigma as negotiated terrain and highlights the ways tensions around stigma help shape labour process.

In the context of the strip club, the ascription of moral stigma was reversed. Management shared with support staff and dancers an understanding of customers as, at

best pathetic, at worst morally suspect. Mike, who himself frequented strip clubs in his leisure time, noted: *A strip club's not like other places. Like any other bar you don't wonder about the customers. A guy comes into the strip club and you wonder "what does he want?. Is he ok?."* Because this inversion of moral stigma was still confined within a discourse of deviance, it implicitly reinforced the club as stigmatized labour site. In effect, it reproduced a moral/immoral dichotomy. Without transcending imposed definitions of the club that were fundamentally based on assumptions of morality strippers continued to be caught in a loop. In the short term inverting and projecting deviance onto customers was functional, it facilitated extracting maximum revenue from customers and legitimated an image of self as (relatively) moral. In the long term, because these understandings reproduced a stigmatizing discourse, they reproduced the strippers' own marginalization.

SUMMING UP

This analysis started from the position of subjectivity. The intent was not to impose an analytic framework but to start from the level of experience to garner an understanding of the ways issues around stigma was negotiated. Definitional problems notwithstanding, the above discussion suggests that stigma is a real dynamic in the lives of women working in the skin trades. For these workers, occupation at times takes on enough ascriptive importance to override other roles (Lemert, 1985). The research shows women carefully managing personal and social identity in an attempt to minimize the consequences of stigma. This suggests that it is not only stigma, but its management, that is socially determined.

We also saw that there is an interface between structural location and social interaction. The nature of the stigma and how it is taken up both changed contextually, so that as we moved inside the labour site, stigmatic assumptions played out differently. There stigmatization became much more complex and fluid. However, the internalization of workplace role expectations and the interface between identity, actions and labour force location that Thompson and McHugh (1990) suggest is not straightforward. If managers accept these, the women do not do so completely. Once again, we see the contestation of the taken-for-granted and the politics of the everyday.

Overall the findings support my contention that the implications of, and resistance to, stigmatic designations need to be analyzed at interpersonal and structural levels. Stigma, both inside and outside the labour site, had an impact on labour process, markets and experiences. In this way, we can expand the parameters of the discussion to expose the women's struggle to subvert stigmatizing, negative and controlling constructs that help shape the experience of class, gender and sexuality for working-class women employed in marginal labour sites.

ENDNOTES

1. Looking back to earlier discussions that identified supportive relationships outside of the labour site as important resources for the management of stress, it would appear that many women were denied this support.
2. The fact that I was hyper-sensitized to the issue does not invalidate my experience.
3. For example, the media always mentions the occupation of women who have worked as strippers.
4. The underlying support for the status quo and legitimization of the dominant discourse renders this approach incongruous in my view.
5. The term “career strippers” does not imply no other labour ambitions but a recognition of some commitment to the occupation.
6. Mindful of the need to consider the context out of which the information emerges, it is possible that I received ‘watered down’ version of their views. Informants were told of my labour history at the outset of the interview and may have been sensitive to what they thought my feelings might be, in spite of my reassurances to the contrary.
7. Jamie had also worked in the sex trades and her understanding was somewhat different. She told me: *I’d rather be hooking..it’s more honest, stripping is a scam.* Her account opens up an interesting area for investigation. However, her work history is clearly somewhat atypical. Both field work and interviews confirm that this dual career model is exceptional.
8. Goffman terms these markers “stigma symbols” (Goffman, 1963:44).
9. These markers overlap with indicators of ‘bad girls’, that is, the markers of working class female sexuality and sexual rebellion. Once again we see the intersection of strippers and disreputable working class cultural symbols (McRobbie, 1991).
10. This is based, in part, on my personal experience of identify management in both professional and social spheres. For example, in discussing the sex or skin trades with colleagues, students or those I instruct I carefully monitor my comments to ensure that I do not inadvertently out myself by sharing insider knowledge. In spite of my efforts I have occasionally been identified, but not threatened, by the ‘wise’.
11. I empathize - my parents will not see this thesis.
12. None of the informants disclosed abusive intimate relationships. This argument is ground in personal and professional experiences with abused women. The basic premise is clearly supported in the wide range of feminist literature which identifies abuse in North

America to be a strategy of control (Ptacek, 1988; Edwards, 1991).

13. In order to counteract stigma, the women must introduce their alternate perspective and try to ensure its acceptance. Their efforts are similar to the process of destigmatization that I am undertaking in relation to popular and academic knowledge.

14. In fairness strippers were, to some extent, drawing attention to the differences in labour. This is of course exactly (or partly) my argument stripped of its analytic and conceptual framework.

15. The irony is that in a time when economic vulnerability continued to be a powerful instrument of compulsory heterosexuality providing sexualized entertainment for men was stigmatized, but may also have afforded some of the women independence from either individual men or the patriarchal state (Silver, 1993:79).

16. This statement speaks to an investment in respectability framed in relation to children. This is consistent with working class parent's traditional willingness to make sacrifices so things are better for their children (Katz and Kemnitzer 1984:212).

17. This alone marked the site as deviant. Other labour sites are patrolled by relatively invisible inspectors. At the same time that the intent was largely symbolic confirmed by a tendency of police to patrol the floor and champagne rooms of a club all the while avoiding the brothel operating on the premise.

18. As previously noted, deciding where to work was also shaped by how 'out' a dancer was. Many strippers who invested in a non-deviant identity elected to work out of town to minimize the chance of running into acquaintances.

19. Marie's contention that she was not insulted was contradicted by her actions. Again, we see the tension between an intellectually worked up understanding and deeply ingrained presumptions of morality that permeate western patriarchal thought.

20. This was supported by observations as well as many informal conversations conducted during fieldwork both at, and outside of, the labour site.

21. As already noted, the work of boundary maintenance intensified stress and increased emotional labour.

22. As with prostitution (Lowman 1995), we see culpability differently assigned and considerable disparity in charging. Beyond that, of course, historically the charging practices were explicitly targeted at dancers. It was, as previously noted, with the appearance of lap dancing that prostitution laws were employed as a regulatory strategy.

23. Paternalism was largely only discursive. As noted previously the strategies were far too coercive to be paternalistic.

24. The use of the term “girl” was so ingrained that when, during field work, I referred to “women” I was either corrected or met with so many looks of incomprehension that I eventually gave up on the effort, went native, or used the unconventional but still understood term, “dancers”.

25. Without pushing this too far it is notable that Mike, as well as other male managers and owners, sometimes reverted to a particular gender script and ascribed an element of sexuality to the exchange between customers and dancers. Despite being fully aware that dancers were at work and not engaging in the pursuit in pleasure the language continued to obscure the fact.

26. We are of course also confronting class-sensitive criteria for beauty here.

CHAPTER NINE

WRAPPING UP THE WORK

In the end, this project was about contradictions. Everywhere I turned there were contradictions, followed by more contradictions. There were contradictions in the ways dancers understood the industry; in the ways they positioned themselves in relation to the industry; in the ways they experienced the labour; in their relation to the labour site; in how they defined themselves and negotiated identity; and in their relationships with each other. Of course, we all experience contradictions; and certainly many working class women's relationship to labour is deeply contradictory¹. But here on the margins these contradictions were brought into sharp focus. In the end, my analysis found its hold in the crevices between contradictions.

To freely adapt Dorothy Smith's (1987) wonderful analogy, these workers were not only *on* the margins they lived *in* the cracks or in the 'lines of fault' between discourses. As such, they inhabited contradictory spaces that need to be conceptualized in new ways. Informants were neither naive nor were they lying, rather they, too, were struggling to make sense within existing frames of reference that do not 'fit', that failed to take the complexities of their lives into account, and that dichotomized categorized in

alien and alienating ways. What is needed is to deconstruct, invert and pervert these established ways of knowing so as to open up “new ways of seeing” (Smith, 1987:9).

This is what I tried to do.

This last section of the thesis is divided into four parts. In the first we turn back to what we started with, the transformation of the strip club industry in the 1980s. Here we pull some theoretical threads of the thesis together to reconsider what this has meant for the way the labour is organized and experienced. Next, we look at the major theme of the study, stripping as work but not work like any other, and briefly consider the findings. Third, and consistent with the established feminist goal of improving the lives of women, we will consider possible policy implications. Finally, after four years of work, I end the project with more questions and directions for future research.

LABOUR IN TRANSITION: RETHINKING CHANGE

This ethnographic study occurred at a particular historical moment, when strip clubs had relatively recently undergone a fundamental change from an entertainment to a service industry. This proved to be a ‘moment’ that illuminated not only *that* “class (still) matters” (Phillips, 1987) but also illustrated *how* it matters. In the late 1990s, class continued to be a useful concept for understanding not only relations to labour but also the dynamic processes of class culture that have a real impact on how we experience our social and work worlds.

During the 1980s and 1990s the Canadian personal service industry, where working class women cluster, expanded exponentially as the manufacturing sector became increasingly peripheral. Throughout this period, in an exacerbation of the trends we witnessed for workers generally, working class women lost the labour market gains of the 1970s and were increasingly impoverished. In addition, the vanishing social safety net increased the vulnerability, economic need and family obligations of this strata sharply. As a result, these workers were situated to embrace work in the growing non-standard labour market including casual own-account work, as an income generating to fulfil there many social and personal obligations. The shift in the early 1980s in strip clubs towards a service industry that relied on freelance workers was consistent with these general labour market trends. While strip clubs may have be marginal, they certainly do not operate outside of the broader Canadian economy. What is of more interest, however, is the ways these shifts shaped the labour process, and workers relation to that labour.

On the one hand, the changing deprofessionalization definition of strippers labour can be seen as a de-professionalizing strategy that positioned club owners to reduce labour costs and implement contractual arrangements whereby workers received minimal pay and instead earned access to the setting where they could practice their trade. Over time, managers were able to further lower their labour costs by stopping or drastically reducing the 'schedule' system and instead met their staffing needs with the free labour of freelance workers.

While wages decreased, the work load and expectations on workers increased substantially. In addition to providing visible erotic labour, the workers were expected to interact with, and solicit customers for whom they provided a service. Furthermore, because strippers were providing a direct personal service in an erotic environment, the industry was increasingly equated with prostitution in the dominant discourse. All of these things speak to increased exploitation, decreasing quality of work life, and greater stigma.

When we step back, readjust our lens and suspend assumptions, we can also appreciate that there have been positive outcomes for the worker in the above-noted shifts and that the changes had an impact the industry in other subtle, but important, ways. We do this by considering class and the ways class culture gets played out within the labour site.

As a direct personal service industry, strip clubs became increasingly reliant on labour. With deprofessionalization and lower labour costs, a new industry standard of continuous stages and lots of 'girls' emerged. These changes in turn provided new employment opportunities and opened up the labour market with increased the demand for labour. They also conditioned the relationship between management and strippers in new ways that worked both to the advantage and detriment of the women working in the club. On the one hand, the freelance system and the limited commitment of workers to a particular labour site afforded dancers greater levels of autonomy and allowed them to determine, within particular confines, where, when, how and how much they work. Since the club no longer paid workers but exchanged labour site access for free labour, the ability of management to control labour was seriously eroded. This was exacerbated by a

managers need for a stable work force and his subsequent hesitancy to alienate the dancers on whom he relied. Furthermore, strippers became embedded in labour practices that allowed them to embrace definitions of self as entrepreneur which, as we have seen, facilitated resistance. On the other hand, strippers were positioned as both workers and entrepreneurs and as a result of their contradictory class location, traditional class solidarity and alliance were destabilized and the ability to resist collectively undermined.

The new organization of the labour also changed the labour expectations in another way. In the past, the nature of entertainment industry required dancer to work full time and travel as they worked 'the circuit'². These conditions effectively excluded many women workers who embraced other 'respectable' social roles: children, partners, school commitments, other jobs. In other words, those individuals located within the reputable working class or middle class. Today, strippers can opt to work as house girls; work full or part time; and either never, or only periodically, go 'on the road' in response to particular financial difficulties.

In real terms this, coupled with the impoverishment of women workers in Canada generally, opened up the industry to reputable working class women and women from middle class families whose eroding economic position has rendered morally suspect labour, increasingly attractive. These new workers needed to overcome their own stereotypical assumptions about strip clubs, however those that who effectively deconstructed the dominant discourse sometimes remained in the occupation for considerable periods of time. In turn, these new workers brought with them their own

class culture, and had an impact on the way social and labour relations were organized within the club.

What we saw was a complex interplay between market economy and labour structure shaping the labour process in marginal spheres. It was, at the same time, revealed to be a dynamic process since the labour process in turn shaped the class origin of the available employee base and then positioned them in a contradictory class location. As the industry opened up to new groups of workers these workers also reshaped the labour process. We saw a destabilization of traditional class alliances on these two axis as new practices emerged which shaped the experience of labour.

The shift in the class origin of the workers brings us back to the importance of culture and stratifications within the working class. As employees were increasingly being recruited from the reputable working class and bringing to the labour site their investment and fine moral demarcations of respectability, these stratifications became embedded in the industry structure itself. In the late 1990s, the markers of rough working class culture: practices (partying, drugs), appearance (cut-off jean shorts, tattoos), values (being 'solid') and language (talking tough) were either absent from strip clubs or limited to one token 'rough bar'. Not even the customers were allowed to sport the markers of rough working class alliance (wearing of colors, signifying motorcycle club membership, was strictly prohibited).

There was a particular irony here. As the dominant discourse increasingly defined stripping as immoral, the clubs and workers were progressively more committed to respectability. Furthermore, young women from the rough working class, who wore the

symbols with pride, were being marginalized within the industry. It was precisely those women, whose employment options were restricted who were the most exploited population of workers.

STRIPPERS' WORK IS WOMEN'S WORK

This study set out to examine the work strippers do as work. In order to do so the traditional focus on sexuality and deviance was suspended and instead the insights from labour theory were used as a point of entry. At the same time I argued that stripping was not work like any other, but a particular marginal labour, one that is sexualized and stigmatized. It was necessary, therefore, to expand the theoretical framework to create an analytic space in order to 'make sense' of all the nuances of labour process and what marginalization means to the workers. We did this by attending to the interactively realized meaning of experiences that emerged from particular structural and material contexts, discursive patterns, and everyday practices. This marriage of convenience between Interactionism, Marxism and discourse analysis (or of Goffman, Foucault and Marx) proved illuminating and furnished us with a lens that revealed working class women as active agents operating with the confines of oppressive labour and social relations.

As we 'normalized' the labour of strippers and made links to the 'reputable' work that working class women engage in, it became clear that far from being exceptional, in many ways the labour of strippers was organized in ways that were consistent with the trends we saw for working class women generally. This operated both at the level of organization already detailed and at the level of process.

When we looked at the work that strippers *did* we saw that, like her working class sisters, she performed stressful and sometimes dangerous labour that required vigilant application of complex skills - skills that were rarely acknowledged. As a worker she was oppressed and exploited³. And she resisted. In the tradition of working class women throughout history, within the confines of available options and structurally dictated constraints, she used collective and individual action as well as discursive strategies to realize a measure of control over the labour and assert her-self. To summarize we can legitimately identify strippers as engaged in labour that, though marginalized, is nonetheless organized and structured in a manner fully consistent with labour market trends and working class women's labour practices in the 1990s.

When we slip to another level of consideration and look at the sexual - the justification for the marginality - a number of interesting things emerge. Strip clubs are a unique 'immoral' sexualized leisure sites. The eroticism is important for the clubs as it attracts patrons who come to drink and watch attractive naked female bodies. A somewhat surprising finding of this project was that for the strippers, however, this eroticism has been transformed into context. In spite of the fact that the labour was explicitly marked with the symbols of sexuality, that the women self consciously presented a sexualized image and, more importantly, an image of sexual availability, this sexualization appeared to be primarily about following gender scripts and providing the appropriate atmosphere in which the illusion of intimacy could be played out. Put another way, by and large, the sexual was merely a superficial visual play that facilitated and legitimated the emotional labour through which strippers *made their money*.

We have seen that in the late 1990s, more than ever, strippers engaged in ‘women’s work’. Traditionally women were expected to provide men with nurturance, care and support. Strippers provided this service on the market on a fee-for-service basis. Suspending momentarily what it says about the state of alienation in advanced capitalist society that men were prepared to pay ten dollars for every four minutes (eighty-five dollars per hour if they took the flat rate) they spent in the company of a woman, we can appreciate that this is fully consistent with the move of capital into the types of services traditionally performed in the home (child care, food preparation). In the context of intimate relations this empathetic support is not perceived as particularly challenging, within the labour market this proved to be difficult, emotionally taxing labour that required both surface and deep acting and the implementation of complex skills. Like so much women’s labour it was obscured, even to participants, by the context in which it occurred and the taken-for-granted nature of the competencies. That is to say not only was the labour structured so that work was interspersed with social interaction but emotions do not ‘fit’ into the language of work, so that even the workers were sometimes not fully cognizant of this as *labour* activity⁴.

If I have done my job well, it should be clear to the reader that the work women performed in strip clubs, was *hard* work. In order to be able to undertake her business the stripper had to periodically appear on stage, dance and remove her clothes for a roomful (or worse *not* a roomful) of men *for free*. In order to *make her money*, she had to present herself as an attractive women, sell her service to an individual patron, retain his attention either by engaging in erotic or emotional labour while carefully maintaining physical and

psychological boundaries. In the champagne room, her naked body could well be inches from her client but she was continually being monitored by the manager, the doorman, other dancers and the police. Like a rape victim if she was touched, she was held responsible and sanctioned. All the while she had to cope with the particular stress of working in a leisure site as well as deal with the chaotic environment and interpersonal conflicts that abounded. When she left the labour site she still had to engage with the stigmatized nature of her occupation, manage her social and personal identity as well as cope with the stereotypical assumptions of her friends, intimate partners, and the state agencies with whom she interacted. In other words while we can legitimately make links to more reputable labour sites for almost every aspect of the stripper's work there are no other jobs that require this combination of skills and necessitates that the worker operate in such a complex and emotionally taxing labour environment. Furthermore, the implication of stigma means that the labour has far reaching costs in her personal life.

At the same time the implications of having a 'job like no other' were not all bad. Unlike most workers who provide traditional women's work on the open market, the stripper was well compensated for her labour. Furthermore not only did the job offer her freedom and autonomy seldom available to working class women, it allowed her to develop competencies that were useful outside the labour site - assertiveness, boundary maintenance and interpersonal skills. In addition her work may have left her frustrated and angry but it also may well have afforded her a broader vision, enhanced self esteem, good body image, comfort with her sexuality and confidence - all worthwhile attributes.

MOVING ON: POLICY IMPLICATIONS

We have transcended the traditional focus on sexuality and deviance in this project and come to see that while strippers engaged in hard, difficult and sometimes dangerous work within that context they exercised considerable autonomy and control. We can most certainly not define these women as victims in need of patronage or salvation. At the same time we can still consider what *realistic*⁵ strategies might be useful to mitigate against some of the more oppressive aspects of the labour process.

It was demonstrated in chapter seven that traditional labour organizing was not appropriate for this marginal, competitive, transient and stratified labour. Instead we saw that while dancers periodically resisted collectively for the most part strategies were individualistic as workers defined themselves as entrepreneurs and operated in their own interest. This approach, which was most effective for workers with considerable skill and organizational assets, was not only understandable but also conditioned by the contradictory class location of dancers. Unfortunately because these strategies were divisive, further eroded worker solidarity, and unintentionally supported oppressive discourses, gains were made by individuals at the expense of the collective. Furthermore it was precisely the most vulnerable, most exploited workers who lacked these assets and who were consequently most detrimentally effected not only by the work, but also indirectly, by the actions of their colleagues.

I was frequently frustrated during field work by the evident lack of sisterhood among the women. At the same time there was enough annoyance (although little action) expressed about the exploitation of other workers that I retain a measure of optimism.

The most viable model appears to be the approach adopted by sex trade workers. By forming associations such as COYOTE and Red Feather, sex trade workers are asserting a collective voice through which to address laws, myths and oppressive state practices that effect their ability to safely conduct their work. Though clearly still marginalized and stigmatized these organizations are increasingly assuming a political voice - particularly since feminist have started to fight with, rather than against, them. At a minimum these groups are listened to, though admittedly often not heard.

Such organizations adapted to meet the needs of strippers⁶ could go a long way towards mitigating some of the most negative aspects of the job - by providing a representative collective voice against fees, safety issues, and excessive fines. In addition these organizations could offer women in the skin trade a measure of emotional support through their very existence, through practices⁷, and by forging a discourse that supported rather than undermined the identity of workers.

A final note about what is *not* needed - more state intervention. We may complain about the lack of legislative protection afforded women working in the clubs, however, I fear that as long as stripping remains marginalized and stigmatized even allowing 'benevolent' agencies a measure of control will only result in more oppression. To date women's interaction with the patriarchal state has resulted in reforms that frequently increase rather than decrease the oppression of marginalized populations⁸.

MOVING ON: NEW DIRECTIONS, OTHER PROJECTS

This study has attempted to operate at two levels. At one level it was an ethnography of strip clubs in the 1990s. As such, it revealed some interesting dynamics and suggested a number of further areas of inquiry, including the need to consider culture in a broader sense. For example, a comparative study with Montreal would allow us to expand on the complexity of class culture and how it is manifest in relation to other cultural and linguistic dynamics. We can also ask about men. A more comprehensive examination might seriously explore the needs and expectations of men today to get a broader understanding of the ways alienation is gendered in modern industrial society.

At another level, I was also attempting to develop a grounded theoretical framework that would allow me to extend the analysis undertaken by symbolic interactionists in the 1970s by exploring the 'deviant' from a theoretical position informed by political economy and labour theory. In the end this approach, which started from the perspectives of strippers themselves, provided a useful point of entry and helped 'tease out' labour process and some interesting issues around class. It seems that this approach could perhaps be usefully be applied to other labour activity that operates outside of the state imposed legal and/or moral parameters. In particular the growing of marijuana, selling drugs and prostitution all seem viable areas for exploration.

Finally, we can reverse the approach. On the margins processes are clearer, in particular stigma and nuances of labour can more readily be stripped of their ideological rhetoric and exposed. Perhaps, we can apply some of the concepts developed in this project to shed light on working class women's experience of, and relation to, labour in more reputable sectors of the market.

LAST WORDS

I want to end this journey where it began: with women hanging out, women dancing naked on stage, women sitting at tables with men, and women talking or dancing in champagne rooms. Women working.

It's my job. I happen to like my job. Sometimes I don't like my job (Marie).

ENDNOTES

1. Speak to career waitresses, for example, and they will tell you that they love/hate their job; they feel autonomous/controlled; they are exploited and entrepreneurs; their work day is filled with stress and fun. These contradictions, which Paules (1991) in her otherwise outstanding ethnography failed to address, are clearly important if we are to realize any depth of understanding.
2. The labour of features in the 1990s is organized in much the same way.
3. Exploitation that workers experience in relation to labour practices of other working class labour sites. In other words exploitation is a taken-for-granted dynamic that is conceptualized as greater or lesser than slinging hamburgers at McDonalds for minimum wage.
4. During field work and in interviews I was continually amazed when dancers expressed empathy for *all the work bartenders do* when it seemed fairly evident to me that the strippers had the more taxing job. It was only during analysis that it became clear to me that, although dancers were well aware of the costs of their jobs, they did not conceptualize the emotional investment and expectations as *work*.
5. The realistic part is important, the eradication of class and gender stratifications are desirable but unlikely in the near future. This may be just as well for the women working in strip clubs: without gender scripts strippers would likely be out of a job.
6. Danzine fits into this approach.
7. For example, sex trade worker organizations circulate bad trick lists and undertake some counselling.
8. The examples here are innumerable. We need only to consider the individual and collective implications for women of the state's intervention including mandatory charging of suspected wife batterers, (Currie, 1990) and the 'battered woman's syndrome' (Boyle, 1994) to appreciate that we must be wary of 'unintended' consequences of increased oppression. This argument is well developed by Carol Smart (1989).

CHAPTER TEN

TALKING ABOUT WORK

Introduction

The following is a collection of unedited quotes extracted from the interviews that have been organized topically rather than thematically. This approach allows context to be made real and stories to be told. As noted in the methodology chapter this is a compromise that seeks to address the problem that plagues much feminist work: in spite of a political commitment to facilitating a forum for marginal voices researchers continue to appropriate those voices. This attempt to allow informants not only to speak but also to have the last word, does not rectify the problem but does expand the range of positions presented. This is not a comprehensive exploration but an attempt to blur the lines between the authoritative voices while affording the reader access to both objective and subjective dynamics operating within this particular marginal labour site.

These quotes serve a number of other objectives. First, they fill out the 'picture'¹ by addressing areas such as entry, lap dancing and features that were only briefly considered in the thesis but are interesting dynamics. Second, some of the contradictions that I grappled with throughout this project are, perhaps, brought into sharper focus.

Third, since the quotes emerge in the context of a particular interaction, extended quotes provide insight into interview dynamics. Finally, and most importantly, the informants were all interesting special women and I am concerned that my extracted quotes do not do them justice: here the reader can get a sense of the personalities and humor that made this an exciting and rewarding project.

Quotes have been organized into three, somewhat arbitrary, sections. The first is 'Working as a Stripper' is a collection of largely descriptive quotes about what the work entails including doing stages, making money, lap dancing as well as secondary 'offshoot' work like private dances and stags. The second, much shorter section, 'Working the Industry', is a collection of insider comments on the the strip club industry. The title of the final section 'Being a Stripper', is an intentional play on the dominant discourse that centers the stripper's labour location as ascriptive. Here quotes that explore the implications of particular labour location outside the work site are highlighted.

WORKING AS A STRIPPER

Stepping In

- Uh I don't know. I was hanging around this girl that was dancing and uh she kept asking me to go and uh go with her and go with her and I kept being too scared to go. And we'd go out and she'd always have money and I'd always be broke so finally, so then I called her and I said "I'm going to go with you on Friday night" - so I went with her and uh the first night I just table danced. They didn't make me go on stage cause I was scared shitless so I didn't go on stage I just table danced....like when I started I hadn't even been at a strip bar before so I had no idea about anything....nothing, nothing at all. I got up on the - it was the beginning of the night and I remember all the girls were sitting on the couch and this guy asked me to dance and I was thinking out of all these girls sitting here he has to ask me....it's like eight o'clock at night the bars not busy yet, it's Friday night or Saturday or something so I got up and danced and just looked at the girls and they kind of did little moves and things and tried to show me what to do so that was it and the next night I went back and I went on stage (Diane).*
- I owned a restaurant with my boyfriend and then ah, ah, then I went waitressing for somebody else and I was sick and tired to get ah sexual harassment. I used to work in offices before, before that and it was the same story. So I quit the job, I was on welfare for seven months and it was hard and I was ah looking for the ah, ah in the newspaper and I thought. "Ya." I saw those ah those ads and one day I decided to, to go, to try it y'know, but it was scary, I was twenty-nine years old and I didn't know what was going on there y'know (Tina).*
- Oh god, I was 18. I had about seven credit cards and I owed almost eighteen thousand in credit, and my friend was a dancer and I seen how much money she was making, and she says common just give it a try.... So I went to work with her one day, and I watched her for a while and I tried to go on stage, I came off and the owner says to me "I can't believe you've never been on stage before I want to book you here". I says "book me here I haven't decided if I want to be a dancer" he says "oh". About six months of dancing I had every credit card paid off and ripped up and put in the garbage and the money was so good I stayed (Jackie).*
- I started when my girlfriend and I moved from Toronto to Montreal we were going to learn to speak French. We only had like a hundred dollars between both of us - and two days later we were dancing - we were looking through the newspaper and saw all these things, making, you can make up to five hundred and fifteen hundred a week and all this stuff. Ya and we saw that ad and thought it was kind of cool and ya we could do this, we could do this....I was seventeen when I started (Rachel).*

Stepping Out

- *It's hard on your head after a while. I find I don't know, just the whole business is, ah, you loose your motivations. Yes, you can only take so much and then you don't really make money anymore. You just got a look on your face you really don't want to be there (Diane).*
- *I don't know, I don't know what's going to happen I'm scared [laughs]. I'm scared I don't know, I don't know if mentally I can go for a long run again, or physically I don't know what's going to happen. I'm gonna turn on 44, like next week ya [laughs]. [later on in the interview Tina adds] so I try to be careful, with my money, put my money aside cause I don't know what's going to happen next (Tina).*
- *I won't quit for anybody else - I'll quit when I'm ready to quit (Sally).*
- *I don't know right now, I don't know if after I want to try and get a waitressing job and keep working in bars or something. I don't know. It's kind of, if I was going to stop I think I'd like to, cause if I was gonna work in bars I might as well, I figure, I might as well dance. Ya so I mean if I was going to stop I'd probably just just think of something completely different to do. Try to find something or even start with maybe a job in ah, just maybe a normal job in a clothing store or something - just to start getting, getting back to normal, and then maybe from there, then think about well what am I going to do y'know as a career (Diane).*
- *I don't know if I could ever quit cold turkey. I can't walk away from the money (Debbie).*
- *It's addictive, It's an addictive job cause y'know if you ask, there's a lot of girls like that y'know that....I don't know I even remember saying to myself y'know a couple of years ago y'know people you meet and they've been dancing ten years or they've been dancing whatever and it's always "I'm not going to dance that long" (Diane)*
- *And even when I came back after I broke up with the cop, there I was like I'm just gonna go back, cause I had borrowed money to get my apartment and stuff so I owed this guy, my friend, actually my girlfriend's boyfriend, five hundred bucks, and I wanted to get a car and I'd already picked out the car, already signed the papers, I just had to go give him the down payment and everything so I wanted to make that money. So I, I made that money and I paid, first two weeks I had done those things I was just going to get myself on my feet and stuff like that, well now it's been, that was at least two years ago (Diane).*

Playing the Game: Making Your Money

- *Whether you're talking to him or dancing for them it's still eighty-five bucks an hour, and uh, and, then there's always the guys like here I have customers that you know that say "okay I want you to stay with me till the end of the night how much money do you think you'd make tonight" or "how much money y'know, I'll give you three hundred bucks and you stay for whatever till it's close" or something and sometimes like, if it's a dead night, if it's not busy in the bar and and you wouldn't make you know you're only going to make a hundred bucks that night, then it's worth your while even though you're gonna spend a long time with them, four hours or something and y'know y'know you wouldn't make the money table dancing any ways so you might as well just do that (Diane).*
- *I don't know, and some of them don't even, some of them just say, oh y'know, I mean not that I have a sickening body or anything y'know, they just say that they'd they find me talkable and really sociable and like the other girls they're some of them are snobs (Rachel).*
- *Normally we do like a hundred, it's hard to get a hundred a shift now...so just to get 10 dance in eight, ten hours it's hard. Even if you hustle, talk, talk, talk and that. The thing that I don't like it, which change then before I used to like it because we served, so it breaks the ice between the customer and I, and we weren't allowed to stay at the table and to talk in Montreal I'm talking about [in 1992]. And with those lap dancing thing, it's different - you have to go sit down with the guy and blah blah blah blah blah blah blah, and ask him - I hate that, cause you're never sure if you lose any of your time so guy after guy after guy after week after weeks, you don't want to talk to them [laughter]..[how do you ask?] would you like, I ask him "would you like to have a dance", something like that (Tina).*
- *I'm not afraid of competition but why should I compete when I can go to a place like the Club, work with a bunch of girls that don't look so good I know I'm gonna make money easy - well it's common sense if you use your brain. Just because you look a certain way doesn't mean you have to dance at The Blue Lagoon, they have twenty-five other girls that look just the same as you'd. So, so I've always chosen biker type bars or the more run down bars....where I stand out. You know that's an easy - cause I don't ask people for dances this is my way of making it easier for people to approach me (Sally).*

- *Oh god ya, ummm when you approach a customer "hey how are you today sweetie" then ah um I usually have a a usual spiel I I play on them you know like "has anyone ever told you you're really cute" na-na- na "I'd really like to dance for you" um uh, it all depends on who it is. If I've danced for them before I usually approach them and say "so do you want to see my pretty pink parts today" ah and I either get a "yes" or a "no" but I usually get a "yes". Um, I kinda look for a victim, someone that looks like their gullible and ahh any any anybody wants a table dance- it's getting them to think they want one. You know they want they want one but they - a lot of people don't have the guts to come out and say that they want one. Ummm I make it look like you know like I'm picking them up in a bar, ya well I ya sit across the room, you give them eye, just like, just like you would in a bar (Debbie).*
- *I, I never ever lead them on to that extent. I've never actually said "if you spend money on me I'll go home with you" (Ann).*
- *I had the stage to do and the doorman came to me a-and I said "no stage" I'm go b-by. If I was to go on stage at that time I was losing like three hundred dollars and we we don't have any pay for work now.. So ask me if I care y'know. He was like talking talking talking, that guy he is like 58 years old - he's looking for a girl y'know to take out on the weekend- a regular girl y'know — a girlfriend, but anyone will do [laughter] anyone because when h-h-he came a couple of days before that day and uh I had him for twenty dances okay. Ya, so when he came back, that day, I went straight to him "hi" y'know I want to make my money. And I but I had to go on stage, cause I was starting my night. So I went on stage and he took off with a girl - I was waiting for two hours, when is it going to be my turn y'know.....so as soon as the girl leave then I went to him and I make, and I make him a-a-a deal from 1.30 to 3 o'clock, I mean a fifty dollar um, discount. To be sure to be there till three you know what I mean. Hey, I have no pay to work so I'm on my own and my own boss, but it makes a story over there y'know - they were mad at me say ya ya ya ya ya, they could fire me but they need regular girls so they don't have any choice in a way y'know (Tina).*
- *We made a lot of money cause we finally discovered, it took us about a year to go from four hundred a week to over a thousand [asked what they discovered]. I couldn't pin point it, I couldn't pin point it. It's the way you walk, the way you look look at them - the way you move on the box but we were both the type to stay a foot and a half away from the guy, and you still make money - so I couldn't tell you - some girls have it, some don't, I don't know because I know that some girls will never have it - I've seen them dance for ten years and they still don't have it. They never learn or they just don't have it (Marie).*

- *Some of them are there for, like I find the older guys, they're there for communication - really to communicate. They look at you, but they don't look at you with sex the ways young guys do - ya ya like old guys do, but but not that same way - you know what I mean, they're more with the look of admiring rather than the look of attacking sort of thing, pulling your cloths off you know, it's different, they're too rude - that's why I don't dance for young guys - they got egos they're the first ones who are more bolder more more likely to just reach out and touch someone - you know what I mean, the older guys they're not like that they're they're past that stage. They don't have an ego they don't have something to prove you know what I mean - not all old ones are good (Sally).*
- *I find that the guys that expect that [sex] usually come out like within the first half hour, hour of talking to them they'll let you know that y'know will you go out with them outside the bar do you do anything else um, y'know they're usually like that but other guys are fine, are just, like a lot of them, a lot of them are alone, they don't, ah, you know they work they have a normal life and maybe they don't know really where to go to meet some people, or girls or something, or too shy or something so they go there and they spend a couple of hundred bucks and they sit there and talk to a uh girl that's nice to them and makes them feel good for a few hours and that's it, y'know (Diane).*
- *Well, either they're weird or they're just too shy. I, I get the weird ones sometimes y'know these, he's got a bustier underneath or the pantyhose, or he's's in women's shoes, y'know stuff like that I get, or people who want to buy my pee, can you believe that? I've had three customers that want to buy my pee! I mean, come off it [Laughter] I get a couple of those weird ones, nothing scary though. I just find it hilarious though, as long as they're not hurting anyone (Rachel).*
- *The customers weren't coming in for her anymore cause all she did was complain, complain, complain, about about her relationship, about not making money, telling all the customers that children's aid was coming to her house and stuff. She just tells everybody too much - way too much. They want someone to listen to their problems (Jackie).*
- *Getting money outta a man is a scam (Alex).*
- *No I don't like that (dancing for drugs)! No cause I know there's an ulterior motive behind it, and I'd rather not. And other times to I'd rather just buy my own stuff that way I know that if I want to get up and leave I can leave and I won't owe the guy anything, y'know. I just don't like owing people anything, that's the main thing I don't like being obligated to be somewhere or with somebody just cause they paid for something, y'know (Rachel).*

Public Performance: Doing a Stage

- *The crowds are, the crowds are dying, and I don't want to do, I don't want to give it my all anymore for a dying crowd (Debbie).*
- *Oh ya, the only reason I got, it's just because I got bored y'know and went from being, before I was wild, loving being up there, loving dancing whoo-who great this is y'know I loved it, I and I know this isn't even just me I know this from other girls too - like I loved, I loved to go on stage (Diane).*
- *I hate showing myself off for free (Jamie).*
- *I do a damn good show - like I said I do one of the best stages, because I I don't do the Montreal strut, I don't do the chicken walk. Okay the Montreal strut is when they walk, they do a little walk from corner to corner, and they kick a leg, and they do a little wiggle, and then they go back to the pole and they do a little round-about. That's the Montreal strut. There's no sweat whatsoever, they may get down on their knees, maybe once. Um then there's the chicken walk, is a girl who picks music that's way too fast for her, she has absolutely no rhythm, and she's just up there going nuts (Debbie).*
- *That one (cabaret) I loved it. I did so many I can't remember. I tried a belly dancing - that didn't go on very well, didn't go over. The belly dancing is not liked in the striptease bars - they don't like the music, you have to have that special type of music and I think... people don't have the ear for it - or culture (Marie).*
- *I don't like to feel naked in front of an aud, an audience - I don't like, I don't like that anymore. When I start I didn't mind. I was thinking that's the way it's going and with the years I start, even at five when the the last years that I work at five - I had those long things here, ah I start to work like that and I enjoy it, I enjoyed the teasing (Tina).*
- *You got to rush to go on stage and you're not ready, have half your makeup on and your hairs not done that's when you get off stage and everyone asks you to dance. Ya it's really weird how it works....Could be they think uh that's how she looks when she's half ready or something like that y'know maybe some people think well at least she's not bitching about it cause some girls really bitch if they're not ready y'know. Couldn't you put somebody else on they're screaming at the DJ and uh some men see that and they think well what a stupid bitch why doesn't she just get up on stage who wants to see her hair any ways [laughter] (Rachel).*

Private Performance: Dancing on the Floor and Champagne Room

- *The exchange of for uh, sexual favors. I do nothing sexual, I uh, I uh....well I can't say I don't do anything sexual I uh [pause] I uh show you what the possibilities are but I don't get into them - you know I show you what I'm capable of doing I let your imagination go with. Uh the, the difference between me and a prostitute is I don't actually do it. Whereas they have to do it to show you what they're capable of doing. I show you different ways - without actually doing it. I, I'm by myself (Debbie).*
- *No. It didn't appeal to it [table dancing] at all. I hated it, hated it but, ah, I wouldn't dance on the box. No, I danced on the floor, because there face was at my flippin crouch level you know. I hated it! I hated it! But then when champagne rooms came in - when it was both of them and someone asked me to dance for them on the floor - ten bucks same a the champagne room. Ya. Anybody even now - they ask me for a dance on the floor - ten bucks - you might as well take it in the champagne room (Sally).*
- *They just paid you the money and most of the time the guys want their change back. Or they have the money ready. They have the amount - they know exactly how many dances and you can see it, it's right there. They pull it out as you start dancing - so you know it's going to be one or two. Sometimes you can get a second one (Marie).*
- *We get ten dollars a dance in the champagne room, seven on the floor on the stools. If there are a couple of guys though I charge twenty. That's only fair. Not all the girls do that, I just found out (Sarah).*
- *We have six (champagne) rooms, ya, like, when was it, Wednesday, last Wednesday, we were a lot of girls and sometimes when have to wait, wait, wait and sometimes we losing money because ah, when the customer is ready to leave, almost ready to leave and I say "I can't" or sometimes we sit down there and watch ah....can you imagine when you are sixteen or eighteen girls, only six booths (Tina).*
- *I tried this club - because I thought it'd be better it's straight, more straight than, ah than where I am working because those booths are open. Okay and it's small room and you're not allowed to sit down on a customer. I said okay physically to me it's going to be harder for the back cause you're always like that when the guy ny ny. [ok you're lap dancing but you're not on his lap?]. That's right — so it's straight. Ya, ya you go like that you know....so it's hard on the back but it's straight (Tina)*

Dirty Dancing

- *Oh ya the Dig for instance - there's no door in the change room, there's no door in the washroom - but they have doors to the champagne rooms. He absolutely wants no drugs, no fuck all going on in that place. But there's rooms running upstairs for prostitution (Jackie).*
- *You know there's bad girls everywhere. I mean I remember there were girls back when, even back when we were doing those five dollar dances out in front of everybody that there was, that there would be some trying to sneak in a little touchy-feely here and there. I mean you can't tell a club, cause there's good and bad in every bar, there's sleazy and classy in every bar I think. Just how you disguise it or if you get away with it or something y'know, cause I've seen, I've seen some uh weird stuff (Rachel).*
- *It's, it's [the champagne rooms] like a cattle stall. When you go in, they're all open booths and it's a row of them and you have to walk by them to get to whatever one you choose. The further down you go the nastier the dancers are - cause the less people walk by....but now ah....it's supposed to be no contact. I still see some girls - rubbing but it's no where near as bad - there's no nipples thrust in the mouth what have you - whereas before there was you know a lot of munching going on (Debbie).*
- *A some of the girls sure make a lot of money, ah ya, I mean you're talking, like these chicks some of them tell me "oh ya last night I made six hundred, six-fifty" how in the hell can you make six-hundred and fifty dollars doing a straight dance? I mean you'd have to dance every friggin song. Non stop (Diane).*
- *If it's, I, mean if it's gonna benefit my wallet, pardon me, I'll do it except I will draw the line. I will not step over the line. To me, I guess to me prostitution is actual penetration or ah, ah, whether it be hold, holding his ah, genitals with your hand, your mouth or ah there, that's that's the line. Cause, cause I mean, I've had several people touch my chest, to me my chest is nothing - you touch me there and we'll have words that's the line. That's's the only thing private to me (Debbie).*
- *Ya I heard it's really bad. I'm not sure if it's lap dancing, but I mean if you're going to get into prostitution and hand jobs and blow jobs I mean you might as well forget the lap dancing [laughter] (Sarah).*
- *Ya before with five dollar dances on the floor they wouldn't do that [touching] you're right, you're right out in the open. Now everybody's hidden in a little corner somewhere - you know (Sally).*

Free Labour: Working for the Club

- *You have to sit on a stool. Your little dancing stool there you have to sit on that and all that instead of a chair, I mean what's the difference? The stool is lower, a lot lower, so you're like - the guys talking to you like this and you're looking up at him like that and it's....and what's the difference if I'm there or I'm over here sitting beside you or kneeling in front of you? I mean he - I mean if it's a matter of being touched or something he'd probably have more of a more of a, more of a chance got grab you while you were down than if you were sitting at the same level as he was y'know - it's - I never understood that concept and the thing about drinking at the table (Rachel).*
- *We're supposed to get them in - get them out. Get them in the champagne room, back out of the champagne room, back on to the floor. Get another girl to get back to the champagne room....we we we're supposed to encourage them to drink. I don't drink so a lot I get a lot of "well get him to buy you a drink" you know get him to spend some money on the bar. They don't care if we make money - they don't pay anybody that goes there. The girls that work there are all freelancers (Ann).*
- *But if you look at her the point of view from the boss, if she drinks a lot that means there's a lot of money going back to the cash. I've lost quite a few jobs because of that. I've been told, I've been told to drink by some managers in bars when I was doing my shows, feature shows, like in between the shows. And they'd say com'on go see the guy he's going to pay you a drink, I'd say "I don't drink and I don't want to talk with drunks" (Marie).*
- *That was the point [why her manager was annoyed] the other night with the guy. I make a lot of money because I wasn't drinking, he wasn't drinking - he took one beer when he came in....at 1.30 he was thirsty, I want to go to the toilet so I said "could you bring me a beer?" He said "do you want something?", I said "no." So I went to the bar, I took the beer for him. So he drank two beer and stayed there all evening, and I wasn't drinking either (Tina).*
- *Oh they don't care if we get drunk, that's more money spent on the bar, as long as we now it's as long as we keep it clean (Debbie).*
- *Everyday there's a new girl. Constantly somebody what's to try it. They don't always stick to it. I, I mean like I've nursed like a couple of girls. You know they tried it, they weren't sure they liked it so they wanted to try it again. You know you coddle them and if they like it [pause], you lie to them [why?] Makes my job easier - I don't have to do more than one stage (Debbie).*

Dancers Talking About Dancers

- *Um you can see um, girl wise. you can see who's fake. I mean whose really fake, who would carry that persona outside of the club you know. They'd come in and they're wearing you know top dancing clothes, like the long [indecipherable] gowns, the nice shoes, they've always got a new pair of shoes every week. I mean shoes are expensive, and ah they'll have like - they'll come in one day with a pair of white stilettos, the next day they'll come in with platform shoes and a completely different ensemble - but they you know go and get their hair done before they go to work and so on and so forth (Debbie).*
- *Especially in places where there was more than one feature, there was always one in the bunch who thought she was the main attraction. And maybe she was billed as the main attraction - the the star and the co-star and then you had the other two. In Montreal for a while there it went you had four features a night so it was kind of continuous shows only features - so there was star, co-star and the two regulars. So if one of the regulars had more applause than the star some of those stars would freak out and start complaining - "you're copying my moves and ummm you're copying my gestures, and you shouldn't do that" and stupid things like that, my song, you can't use that that's my song (Marie).*
- *I have very nice show girl costumes - those are show girl costumes now, um. If I was to show up in the club and wearing one of my show girl costumes I'd probably get the shit kicked out of me. There ain't no features at the Copacabana - they wouldn't last very long, they'd be eaten alive as soon as they walked in the door any girl that thinks they're too good for anybody won't last very long. Everybody - if you say "hi" to certain girls, they might say "hi" back, they might not, ummm. Your best bet is to wait for them to say "hi" to you first until your established into that club (Diane).*
- *When you are just a table dancer you don't get your own room so it's very freaky to arrive somewhere and have to share a room with someone you don't know. Like the girl could be just a total psychopath, a drug addict, a robber or whatever. You know what I mean. Or, just plain gross, dirty (Marie).*
- *Quite a few. A lot of them I wish I could see them again. But is ummm, it's very hard when you're traveling five hundred miles, you work for two weeks with a girl, you get very well, and but she has traveled four hundred miles to get to that bar in the other direction, so you're kind of separated. It's the geog geography (Marie).*
- *Dancers are a special breed of people I guess - they really are (Jackie).*

- *I have no respect for a dancer - I wouldn't trust a dancer as far as I could throw her (Diane).*
- *When I first came back I thought the girls where ah, tighter together. Ya - but, after a couple of months mmm -ya they stab you in the back. It's worse because the money is good (Tina).*
- *I don't have my mouth shut though - like I tell them. You're no better than I am or the next girl. In fact I think I look better than you do and I don't walk around with my nose in the air and my ass stuck out like I have a cucumber up there. Chill out. You're no better than anybody else, like the Barbie doll - like you know - I don't like most of the bars, most of the bars in Ottawa. Fuckin chicks who walk around - they think they're better than everyone else. I was stepped on all my life - as an adult nobody will ever step on me and get away with it - never I don't care who that fuckin person - could be the queen - I'll still tell them, "don't disrespect me if I haven't disrespected you" (Sally).*
- *It can it can get very nasty. It, it can be cause ah a lot of confrontations in the change room - a lot of confrontations on the floor, um, I had one problem with one girl I work with in particular, she um, approached my customers, and everybody knows, you have to, I mean, when you're a new-comer in a club there's always respect for the house girls. I'm a house girl between the hours of such and such a time I am a house girl, you know - one of them and when you approach my customer, which you know is mine, after you see me with with them - fine. If you go before I've had a chance to get to my customers, then yes I'll get in your face (Debbie).*
- *I talk to them in the bar, and y'know whatever but it's not every dancer I'll take into my home (Jackie).*
- *What is it? Ten years. I don't know? [pause] maybe, ah, maybe the jealousy between the girls. Always to ah, to have to cope with those fights in the dressing room - things like that. We had one three weeks ago. Y-a- I never said a word, mostly I never say a word, I've been there for a year now - nobody saw me angry in that place but one night - there was a fight between two girls about a top, you know, one borrowed a top from another girl, and this girl say, "if you like the top I'm gonna sell you for ten bucks." So she wore it all evening and when she quit at two-thirty she just put it in the back like that. So the other one had to look for it. The next day that same girl ask the top again, so the other girl say "ah if you gonna wear it for all evening you gonna pay it at the end of the evening" she says "ya ya ya ya." And then they start to fight at 3 in the morning, ra -ra, she didn't want to pay (Tina).*

Working Outside the Club: Stags and Private Dancing

- *I did one stag and I'd never do it again. It's - you're by yourself and you're in a room with ah that you've never been in before and you're expected to seduce anywhere from twenty to thirty men by yourself and, ah, no - it gets out of control it it gets out of hand too many times. A good friend of mine, um was raped repeatedly for four hours at a stag, while her door, well her bodyguard, her bodyguard was outside making a phone call and had to go run an errand - said he'd be back in fifteen (Debbie).*
- *It depends a lot a lot of them are usually just ah the client and the girl, they'll have you dance, they'll have you dance there for them. They'll mention ah "my friend is getting married such and such do you think you could come and dance" whatever and y'know and you just set up a thing, and it's usually between the girl and the guy,.... usually a hundred or a hundred and seventy five to go and do three songs or four songs for the guy in front of everybody. If they want you to stay on top of that and table dance then that's another ten bucks a song, and usually a couple of girls go and so. Ya, you try not to go alone I guess, I've never been alone (Diane).*
- *Ya and he used to come and see me at Tom's all the time and then I stopped working there and he still wanted to see me and then he asked me one time he said "well what would you think about, like just uh dancing for me" and he goes "and I'll pay you the same as I do at the bar - a hundred bucks an hour and you just come over and dance, and dance and sit and talk, and that's it." So the first time I just went over to his place and and I just went over, and I didn't, uh, dance or anything and I had a, I had a drink with him, and sat and talked to him and everything and then I left and that was it. So then the next time when I went, it was kinda funny I was telling Rachel, that it was a Sunday afternoon and the blinds were down and his windows when like this [hand movements] but they didn't shut all the way, and I was in the dining room and it was sunny and I was like "gosh it's awfully bright in here to be taking off my clothes." [laughter] Y'know I'm used to a dark bar the lighting is all soft you look, you seem to look a lot better, but ah, so I sat there for an hour or something and I talked to him had a couple of glasses of wine and after I talked to him I felt more relaxed....But I think that time I was lucky, uh it's lucky that you meet someone that, ah, a lot of the clients argue and he doesn't even try and touch me and he doesn't do nothing — nothing, nothing, nothing. It's like he sits in the chair, he sits in the chair just like this at the edge of the table like this, and I dance he puts a song on a CD. He went and got the same tapes like Celine Dion that I dance to at work, and he'll put it on and I'll dance one song and I'll put my robe back on, or whatever cover myself up and sit back down at the table with him and we'll smoke a couple of cigarettes have a couple of drinks talk some more and then I'll dance again. If I stay for two hours that's two hundred bucks (Diane).*

Expenses

- *Sears special. The one [bra] I'm wearing right now it's a, it's a Sears special I got it on sale for six bucks. The bra and g-string. I don't bother with the clips and so on and so forth - the men don't care - it's coming off. Why pay why pay fifteen bucks for the clips when you just take it off?(Debbie).*
- *I came off stage, everything is gone, all my costumes, my street cloths my boots, my shoes, my makeup everything was gone. I was only on the stage fifteen, twenty minutes - everything gone - fuck I was just devastated (Jackie).*
- *Ya sometimes I like, like you can call [drivers] and say I'm going to finish work at three, pick me up and the guys there and he comes in, picks you up and you leave. Y'know what I mean? And you're not walking through a parking lot, do I hear a car? Do I have to warm it up?(Ann).*
- *He's on time — he he's not just my driver for work - he takes me to my doctors appointments - he takes me to my lawyers, he takes me to court. H e does a lot for me and....I use him for all services (Sally).*
- *I went down to Toronto a couple of weeks ago....It was basically a trip for work stuff. I wanted to get a song before it came to Ottawa. Once a girl starts to work to a song it's hers. It's like an unwritten rule. Ya (Sarah).*
- *It wasn't an investment for me like for most dancers - I was a 38C in the chest and I had my son and I lost everything after having him. And I wanted it back. Ya I wanted back what was mine - cause I felt - I didn't feel um a, as feminine as I did before - lack of self esteem I guess. So basically I wanted back what I had but I went - but he put in a little bit smaller then I had. [any problems?] Nothing - I have, I've had them checked a number of times in the past couple of years, my ah, my sack is in the muscle, and none of the muscle has hardened, the scares are perfect everything. The doctor says the best job she's ever seen (Sally).*
- *Ya so I look, I don't, if I'm not tanned, or, if my tan lines aren't showing good when I go to work I don't feel good about myself. Y'know it's just like. I don't know, I guess it's just that I'm so used to it. Ya, I'm so used to being tanned that I go to work and if I'm not that tanned or whatever, I feel better about myself going in to work and being tanned and things like that y'know. Rachel doesn't have that problem though, for her it's her hair (Diane).*
- *If you're freelancing you pay to work there. It's getting really ridiculous now. That's thirty dollars right there, before we go to work to it's ten dollars for the drive, the babysitter, and then your drive back, a pack of cigarets (Rachel).*

Not a Job Like Any Other: Danger, Raids and the Bar Scene

- *In danger? Quite a few times [pause] oh ya sure. I'm working in this little place and there's three young guys who start - I don't know if it's just teasing or arguing - I can't remember, and I saw the blade of a knife - and I got this feeling that they would wait for me. Because of this association with the police [discussed earlier] I thought my best bet was to phone them. So I did phone, and I explained the situation. I made sure the three kids at the table didn't see and the cops said don't worry just walk out of there as if nothing happened, just tell us how far your car is and which street. So I told them the the door of the bar is about sixty feet from the corner and then you go about [indecipherable] and there's my car on that side. Okay so they said, "just go walk, don't run up to the corner and walk to your car and then sit in it lick your door and wait." So I did exactly that and as I'm walking out the door..... the three young punks they follow me. I had the right intuition (Marie).*
- *I've had a man try to treat me like a 6-pack (Ann).*
- *Last Thursday I wasn't working and everyone got stopped at three o'clock. At the lights they make a barrage, so, ya don't know - something is preparing I guess you know that feeling - feminine feeling (Tina).*
- *They took customers names and they put a couple of them in the paper. Imagine their wives (Rachel).*
- *So I did my shows there, it was two shows a night and the owner was I think a Greek and he kept introducing his friends who had a lot of money - so I would go and sleep with his friends. And since I like to do sewing in the dressing room and not chat and drink that was really rough for him. He didn't like me he even cut my contract short two days (Marie).*
- *I had an 88 year-old bite me on the ass - he drew blood on me he bit me so fucken hard....in the champagne room — it took two bouncers to open this old guys mouth and I was hitting on the head like this and he wasn't stopping....no....he was 88 - wasn't wasn't no young cock (Sally).*
- *When they raided, when they raided....every girl that was in the champagne room went to jail, for ten hours - they paid a twenty-five thousand dollar fine, the bar was charged five thousand dollars per girl. The customers went to jail as well, their names were printed in the paper, a - along with the girl's names - so those girls their career is shattered, um, they were given stipulations which they've all broken - but they're all back (Debbie).*

Not a Job Like Any Other: "It's Hard On Your Head"

- *I don't know, I think, I think, I don't know, the one thing, y'know I guys like saying all the time "oh you're so beautiful, you must be married, you must have this you must have that", I look at them and I think "fuck I have a hard time even keeping a fucken boyfriend let alone getting anywhere near getting married" and things like that. And your life y'know, it's just the way they think oh you're life must be so wonderful cause they look at you and they y'know. And y'know they think y'know that y'know you go on stage and you have guys freekin over you and stuff like that and at the same time, you don't really have anybody that really loves you for you, they love you for what they think that they see or something, they think they see this little star or something. And it's not, it's not like that. And I guess sometimes it gets a little depressing (Diane).*
- *The - fights, the drugs, the alcohol abuse, the, the, the mental abuse, the mental anguish, the frustration, it's, it's confusing, it's a very confusing job -it's ah a struggle day to day, ah I don't - getting myself to work is the hardest, getting myself to get there, once I'm there I'm okay. It's getting myself to get up, put on that smile and go to work - I couldn't be bothered (Debbie).*
- *And I find there's a lot, there's another thing, that's a lot the same about girls is that if you're working, and you've put a costume on, you can feel good about yourself, and you go out and sit for a few hours, and you're not getting any dances when you go back in the change room, and you put another costume on. And the longer you don't make money the more times you change [laughter] and the more makeup, you keep fussing with yourself and you it's almost like, and then, it's almost like, so then you're not smiling anymore and then you look bitchy so you're not, so even more you're not going to make money and it's just like a snowball effect it just gets worse and worse. And you get feeling like you're fat, you start feeling like you are ugly (Rachel).*
- *I don't dance anymore, cause it's not fun anymore, y'know. If I was to work a McDonalds I'd probably never eat a Big Mac again in my life (Ann).*
- *Because I'm a complete stranger. People feel more comfortable talking to strangers about personal things than they are with somebody, say that that they're married to. If something they're uncomfortable with they're comfortable to tell somebody who has no bias....But I mean when they sit there and they cry in front of you - I don't get paid enough to do this (Debbie).*
- *Sometimes y'know it just gets to ya. I just can't cope. I usually don't work for a couple of days, but ah that's hard too cause then I have no money, so I, so I go back to work. Ya sometimes it's hard, ah sometimes it's not bad (Jamie).*

Not a Job Like Any Other: That Can Be a Good Thing

- *Ya. Well now I'm waitressing for 3.75 an hour. Shit like that. And wearing a polyester uniform y'know with a hat. I feel like I work at McDonalds. I'm getting the acne to go with it, I don't know, just, being around really straight people (Alex).*
- *Well I guess, better than shooters. I did that too in a bar, and ah, seven dollars at tray, seven dollars a tray! There was like forty shooters on the thing, little test tubes. And they were just god awful to, they were just god awful, you couldn't even drink them. And you'd have to sell the whole tray before they'd give you seven dollars (Rachel).*
- *Well I liked to dance. So we had fun dancing - it was the dancing that was fun. There you go we doing what we like and we're being paid for it. Wow! (Marie)*
- *That would be one of the perks, another of the perks is that you can work 7 days a week, 2 shifts, you can do 2 bars if you want - one at day, one at night, or you can go in for only two shifts at another place - you can work in your hometown, if you live in a bigger city - or you can go 1000 miles away, or you can even go 500 miles, or 200 miles and keep going and going like I did in Newfoundland - I ended up touring for 8 months (Marie)*
- *That's right. Sometimes I want to party on a Saturday, I've got no money. So I go to work for four hours. I walk out I got money, how else are you going to get money. That's better than going to the bank and borrowing it (Jackie).*
- *You have to feel pretty good about your body and yourself in order to take your clothes off, but confidence and self respect are two different things (Sally).*
- *Um ya, [dancing] it's given me wisdom, it's given me strength, it's shown me the tough times and the good times. Y' know it's helped me a lot - a lot, it's helped me grow up (Sally).*
- *You have to act a certain way and when you get out on your own. It's a good slap on the face. The way you're mom and dad raised you, isn't the way society is going to treat you. You can't ask and receive, you have to prove you deserve it, you have to earn (Debbie).*
- *I sold shooters at Tom's.... Ya well ya at Tom's, and then I decided I was going to sell shooters, and then one night this guy offered me, I don't know a hundred bucks for one song, soo, and I'd already danced before obviously so just took the hundred bucks so I ended up not, so my boss said, "well maybe you should just dance cause you can't do both". So dancing again (Diane).*

WORKING THE INDUSTRY

There's Always Something New: Changes in the Industry

- *Ya, cause I remember before it was really bad like. When I first started dancing it was a big competition and the stealing and they'd rip off your costumes, and nobody could be trusted and no dancer could've, would've, been trusted back then. But now it's just like, and you always see each other anyway, you always run into each other, whether it's a year from now or a month from now you always see each other somewhere. So it's like everybody, you can pretty well trust each other now, everybody knows pretty well everybody, if I don't know anybody Diane probably knows her from - somewhere else. So I figure if I know three girls who dance, I figure through those three girls I probably know the whole circuit that dances. So like stealing and stuff like I was saying back then it was really bad like the competition and the girls were really bad back then but now I find the girls are pretty good they're all pretty nice and uh we all do our job, most of them are straight, there's not as much drugs as there was back then. Oh as far as cocaine goes there hardly any girls do that anymore most of them just smoke or drink (Rachel).*
- *Slowly things changed. At first things changed but it's a drastic change to to what's happening now. The sexual things, like you know, the champagne rooms are what's caused so much trouble, um, these bad girls. Customers won't get you to dance, they won't get you to dance - they'll get you for one dance and you're not like the other ones so fuck you - doesn't matter how cute you are, y'know..... Ya I've worked at clubs and made absolutely fuck all. Nothing, not understanding why all these girls are making money - and I know I don't look bad - how come I'm not making money- you know it's not easy. Today it's not what you look like it's what you do (Sally).*
- *I was off 1980 and 81, during that period features started going gross...that the girls had to start, well it was already nude - totally okay....It depends where like a few bars would hold back as long as they could but then their cash started dropping so they had to go along. That's when the money really started going down, when it turned nude.... cause now the interest was on nudity and not on beauty, or knowing how to present yourself. So now you started getting --- I don't want to be rough here but, but it's a fact, you started getting ugly girls dancing. Really, like to use an expression, as long as they could take it off they were hired. Now there were so many available, as dancers - not as features.Many places didn't want ugly dancers but some clubs really didn't care they said either you take the pay cut or you don't work here. So jobs started getting less and less (Marie).*

- *Now they want young girls. There's this dancer she, she looks like a kid - she wears glasses, and she looks like a boy, she's got no hair here - she looks like she's soo young. She makes a lot of money, but she must hate herself for doing that, she's feeding on how young she is, and she wears the little school girl skirt. And she says she's fourteen, she's actually eighteen (Jamie).*
- *[Compared to before] hardly a flow, yes yes, no tips. Well the thing going with the loonie didn't help either, cause you can't really throw heavy pieces of metal on the stage but you can throw a one dollar bill, and two dollars was okay but then they changed the two dollar too. And people will not go and throw fine dollars - they won't - you get a few loonies here and there but they're the exception (Marie).*
- *Now now it's Packed at Christmas. Christmas eve it was packed. Thanksgiving it's packed, uh, Easter they're open. The only time they closed was cause they got raided (Ann).*
- *These days though you have to use whatever you can to make money cause it's not like before. Before you'd walk into any dump and you'd make money, you'd make your money. Everybody was making money back then but there's so, but there's so many dancers now, so many girls and younger girls too, they're getting younger by the year there are some girls I know that are sixteen that are dancing here. They have identification papers that says otherwise though but still they're young, they're blond they have blue eyes, they're making a killing. I walk in some of these places and they just like the blonds I think, most places go for that look though y'know, the California-type looking girls but other places I've found I've made more than the blonds - depends where you are, how you feel about yourself, ya, how you portray yourself ya, how you talk too cause a lot of guys'll say "ah those fucking blonds they're just, just in it for the money and they're just sucking money out and they don't care about people." And, and then they'll say well "you you can tell that you like your job and you like people you like to talk," and stuff like that. And that's what I make my money making you know being an all rounded type person and not just being a pair of boobs you know (Rachel).*
- *The new girls who are coming in, the new girls come in seeing - "how come they're making more money and I'm not", well then you explain to them, because their doing this, and you know, well then they start doing that plus more because they want to make more money, than that girl. Before you know they automatically come in thinking it's a touchy-touchy lets go situation and it's with every guy. They don't think of ah, cops for one. A lot of these girls dance for young guys - the majority of undercover cops that come into bars - are young guys. Oh ya....they don't send older guys - they send younger guys (Sally).*

Industry Stratification: Some Places are Worse Than Others

- *The clubs that ask for girls that look a certain way - they're guaranteed to get the customers that are looking for girls that way. But whereas you go to a club like where I work and they have the variety. Men can try all types of different women. So it's for indecisive men and men who are looking for the stereotypical woman but are willing to accept anybody else (Debbie).*
- *Well ya, ah, when you go into the Blue, when you go into the Blue Lagoon, it is a strip joint. I, I mean it is for exotic dancing.. It's a place guys, where gentlemen go to have fun, for business luncheonst. The Copacabana is a place to go, to, ah. It's a second home - guys go there and hang out (Ann).*
- *Yes and no. Like I'll call up a bar I liked and see what happens....It's very limited now because of my age. Some bars think it's great, some bars, over twenty-five no way! (Marie).*
- *[Some bars] they can rely on their freelancers - but a club like the Princess - they can't rely even on the freelancers because there's not enough people that go there. There's not enough customers, there's not enough girls. Well one thing, one takes the other to draw in - the one ain't helping the other. Unfortunately you have to find the girls who are patient enough to wait it out, make your customers, and stay put. Like I've made all my customers there and I brought some of my customers from other bars. Otherwise I wouldn't stay at that fuckin club I can assure you (Sally).*
- *Only thing that was holding me back was my tatoos and my lack of tan lines. And it still does. There's only two clubs I can dance in Ottawa. Well I need tan lines. That's what I've been told by, like every club owner except one or two, I need tan lines and I need to cover up my tatoos. So I wear stockings but the ones on my shoulders are hard to cover (Jamie).*
- *A lot of the other bars that are straight now are lose, they loose a lot of business because of those other bars cause I mean if the guy, well here it's. There's straight bars and there's bars that touch and it's the same thing, if they're gonna spend ten dollars why, they're, they're looking at it, like well why spend ten dollars just to look, when I can spend the same ten dollars and touch? You know what I mean. So that affects the business too, like y'know it makes ah, it's harder and stuff and then ah, the bar I work is, is really straight but it's got such a good reputation and that, it always has nice girls, and it's always ah, clean, and it's y'know, and everything like that, and they always have lots of girls working that they're still busy. That it doesn't matter that it's a straight bar that's got a really good reputation and it's been there for years and years. And y'know it's a nice bar so that place it doesn't really matter (Diane).*

Managers: Some are Worse Than Others

- *Ya but he doesn't have any girls that he can say are regulars, for two of three years. The waitresses, the waiters, everybody is just in that place boom, boom boom changing all the time. Lenny is, ah, the most arrogant man I've ever met in my life (Jackie).*
- *They (management) want to keep you there. They're more comfortable when you're down. So they want to keep there. You know you make some changes and you try to better yourself than they have to look at themselves. Fucks them up. They're comfortable with where you are at (Alex).*
- *Where I work, they (managers) are a bunch of pigs - perverted old men, except for one - I like the weekend manager, he's cool, he's there to watch the football game - seriously (Debbie).*
- *They're used to saying "this is the way it's going to be," and girls giving in (Ann).*
- *Ok well those are those bars if you respect yourself they respect you and treat you fantastically. Like I've had my car stall on the way to work right smack in the middle of a bridge and I would, of course, give them a call and they "don't worry about a thing - we'll pick you up and we'll take care of your car." So they pick me up get me to the club on time, while I was doing my shows they would get my car repaired and when the end of the shift would be they'd hand me back my keys, "here your car's fixed - don't worry about it." Fantastic like that. But a girl who would not respect herself would get slapped around (Marie).*
- *Whoever did more made more or whoever was, but I find a lot of managers now, nowadays they have their little favorites and that's just, I don't know, that's not fair I guess what you'd call it, they should be like, everybody have a chance, not just who you like. Or they'll say like for instance, ah, okay I gained a few pounds, like ten pounds well okay, "we don't want her working here no more cause she's gained a few pounds" or ah, so what I still make my money, my customers are coming to see me, and I still do my job. Why should you throw me out just because I'm getting fatter or just cause I gained ten pounds? I meant that's not a reason (Rachel).*
- *We have a bouncer and we have a cooler. He (the cooler) does the talking. Uh with him you have to have, with him you even slack off on your respect for him and he'll make you suffer. He won't help you if you ever need it. I mean like if, if, you were to tell him to uh like joking around "fuck" psst your out of there (Debbie).*

Stripping, Prostitution, and Pornography

- *It [pornography] can be good - it can be bad. I don't believe in pornographic videos in the club because that gives them the impression - it brings men's hopes up. It's, it's not like some of the clubs I've worked in, it's not hard core porn, but ya it's soft core. Um unless one manager's in and then it's football, which I don't mind. Me I think it's perfect you have football, hockey, or you know, you put sports on the big screen - you have naked women and alcohol - where would a man be happy? They've got three of their favorite things in the same room. You take away the hockey, they're gonna stay home and watch the hockey game then they'll go out for the beer and the women, but if you put it all in the same bar you're gonna get clientele (Debbie).*
- *The pornography, I hate that. Before we had those nice playboy videos but now, ah, the guys are like that, you know, like the customers. And they ask you to dance and they're like that you know and they ask for more. I try to explain that to my boss - that - and it's two women (Tina).*
- *It cause some of the girls do. I'd say two girls out of ten do it. Not on a regular basis but once in a while. When it's been a slow night, or, or they just like the guy and ya, "I like the guy and I want to do it. Well I like the guy I want to do it and he wants to pay." I've heard some girls say that. And now it's getting more and more cause a lot of cities are cleaning down on the real prostitution so a lot of prostitutes are going to be dancers, so they're not arrested on the street corner cause they're working in the bar but they're just picking up their customers that way (Marie).*
- *That's it, that's all, and girls that are for sale have got a very large moral problem - got very low self esteem - and I think they're just - I think they're pathetic, in that sense. If they're good at what they're doing - I mean I see, I see girls with potential - like there's one girl there she ah she's beautiful, she's a very good dancer - she's got, she's got the sexuality about her - the way she talks, the way she walks, the way she smiles, and yet she'll go home with a customer for money (Debbie).*
- *You can tell though [who is a prostitute], um [pause]. Their easy approach, um, to customers - things they whisper in their ear. A lot of things are said very quietly, they usually keep, they usually keep to themselves - they come in, they have a very, they have a very serious look on their face, and they're a lot more aggressive - or rougher - their costumes aren't as glamorous, they aren't as clean - cause they wear them on the streets....[not in the clubs?] Not in the clubs-...not exactly - well there are a few I mean the occasional blow job goes on - hand job (Debbie).*

Features: The Elite Strata?

- Everybody always said "oh you should be a feature, you should be a feature" saying that. So then I started buying costumes you know. I'd buy a costume, I'd try to set up some shows y'know and then I got my pictures done and uh I knew this girl in uh, Brampton, which is near Kitchener, no near Hamilton, and she would put - she did my extension she'd put the extensions in my hair, my girlfriend and I, so she'd do our extensions and she'd made a lot of feature costumes so she made me feature - she made me costumes. And then I got my pictures done, and then she helped me set up a name and she was "kay we're gonna say you're from California and you're Miss Nude L A or something". Well most of those titles are made up. So we just started making up y'know and then Miss Bikini all these California things we made up y'know. And we sat and thought of a name and she called, we thought of Stacey, Stacey Jones so that's what we did and that was it and I had an agency and they -I gave my pictures and they booked me....I sold Polaroids after my show y'know they they'd, I had somebody take pictures for me, the guy would sit in the chair and I would just like have my arm around him, and my leg, and y'know smile and take my picture with him, sign the bottom and that was ten bucks. So I had to buy a pack of film which what costs ten or twenty bucks or something and I'd make like a hundred bucks off the pack - I needed at least two or three packs of Polaroids each show, by the end of the week I'd made more money from the pictures than I had made from featuring. Like when you just start featuring, you usually like, I got eighteen hundred, eighteen or eighteen fifty or something. Then there was other features that got like three thousand, it depends, it all depended on if you'd done pornos you got more, if you'd done magazines, if you'd done magazines you got more, umm, if you had won like a legitimate title Miss Nude Canada at Runway 66 where they held the contest, if you won that, everybody knew who won that cause it's a real popular thing (Diane)*
- Most of them are a bunch of table dancers that that make up titles, and get great costumes and probably daddy's rich or something like that and their probably just rebelling, rebelling against ah god knows what, but ah most of them suck.... But ya the features they don't, I don't feel that they're like taking away any business or anything, they don't table dance first of all, and ah, I find it great cause it takes time out of me going back on stage, cause if they have two shows a night to do that's about an hour each show so that's two hours....like by the time they get the feature on stage, like they usually, ummm, stop the dancers and then they'll put on this huge long break song to do all this announcement and ah but then, then, but her songs are longer so if you're in the champagne room dancing....you have to dance these songs that last six minutes each (Rachel).*
- A lot of them just go when it's these freaks of nature type things. [chuckle] Women who have like 55 double 'F', triple 'F' breast size, ah, that's when they fill up the bars. They like to see that's stuff, I don't know what it is (Rachel).*

BEING A STRIPPER

Managing Intimate Relationships

- *Umm, ya. It's like being in a relationship - sometimes they judge you for your past - don't judge me for my past. You weren't there. You don't know what the situations were, or what they were like, you judge me from the day you know me. If you're gonna judge me for my past than you better not be with me cause I'm not gonna be the person you want me to be - people change. They go in stages in life you know what I mean? (Sally).*
- *If they love you and stuff it's normal for them to want, not to feel great about it, knowing you go to work and take your cloths off in front of hundreds of guys, knowing that there's always guys making you offers and, y'know what I mean? Maybe them feeling a little bit insecure about that. Sometimes things like that can strain on a relationship y'know (Diane).*
- *It is a very hard life as a dancer trying to be in relationships and you should know that yourself. You know like there is no understanding - you can't make somebody understand that, yes, the odd time there's touching, and the odd time - if Gail found out that a customer had touched me - hell would come - just. That would be the end of the relationship. At certain times this is what you have to do. That's what I mean - people, people in general who don't know and don't understand the dancing world will never be with a dancer for a long term time. Until you quit dancing - then relationships will work- but in the business it doesn't work. There is no understanding - oh that girl is doing that - you doing that too there's always. Really Gail says that to me, "oh she does that - you do that?" Like if you have to ask me a question like that don't even fuckin bother. Don't. I mean I don't want to have to lie to her but I do what I have to, to, get through, this is part of the dancing business.. Are you kidding - she'd fuckin flip - it would be the end - if I wanted us to be split tomorrow, "hey baby I'm into lap dancing," that would be it (Sally).*
- *Yuk, that's what I think of men. Yuk. (Tina)*
- *I've never danced for him [boyfriend]. Nor would I ever. I don't like him to come in and watch me seduce other men - because the way I do it, it's not me, it's too vulgar, it's, and I don't know whether it will turn him on or not, and he'll expect me to do that - and I'm afraid of my two lives colliding. Fe doesn't like the fact that I dance, he doesn't mind that I'm a dancer - he doesn't like the fact that I have champagne room. To this day does not believe that I've not had a customer pay me to touch me in different ways - all girls do it as far as he's concerned (Debbie).*

Managing Social Relationships

- *I think the worst situation is when you are with your husband and you are meeting guys from their work with their wives. Like I never really felt bad saying it if I only met a guy but if I met the wife - like the first meeting [pause] like I've always been someone that's very direct - frank. So I would try to assess the woman's point of view and how she looked would be very important. Cause if she wasn't half decent looking woman then it would be harder cause I didn't want to hurt her, by her knowing, that I'm doing this kind of a job (Marie).*
- *A lot of women assume that strippers chase anything in pants (Ann).*
- *Oh ya quite comfortable with that [husband's work mates coming into the club]. It's their wives, but I feel uncomfortable because in a way I don't really care, like take me as I am or don't take me at all. But I didn't want to, like, maybe hurt my husband's work relationship like if the woman starts a fight and then the guy goes back to my husband and says, "well your wife shouldn't have told her, she doesn't feel good about it." It was more on that angle for, ah, I never cared what people think of me cause I consider - I know my worth, and if they can't see it well too bad they're losing out (Marie).*
- *No - I'm ashamed of it because I can't tell my mother - but - I'll tell my children because it was - it's not a mistake that I've made - it was ah, to me it was my schooling - school of hard knocks but it it smartened me up. It pointed me in the right direction - it ah - it made me see reality. You're your parents cover you from society (Debbie).*
- *I find I'm really shy about that too, like my landlord was saying, "oh you going to be there next Wednesday we're all going out the guys from the office we're all going there for brunch" and all this stuff, and that day I didn't even go to work, I didn't want see him I didn't want him to see my naked ass on stage, y'know. He's my landlord. It's not that he's a close friend or anything but he's still, I want him to have at least a little [hesitating] respect. Not that he will loose any for me but I don't want him to see me nude up there and say "ah ya she's one of my tenants." I don't want to be, ah, I want him to see me like that, people like that I rather they not see me, I don't mind if they know - just don't come and see me, y'know. I'm, I'm, maybe I'm a little shy too, I'm a shy person like....even friends of mine that I've known for years, they come to the bar, oh my god I feel so shy (Rachel).*
- *Some of the friends I do have don't know what I do for a living. Um my parents don't know what I do for a living - and I live with them. [why?] Cause I'm ashamed of what I do. Oh ya. I'm a, I'm a home wrecker (Debbie).*

- *It just depends who asks me. Things like that [potential landlords] I don't tell. See that happened to me once, I went and seen a place before I moved in here, in Alta Vista and I, I went and I just said to the guy instead of saying I was a dancer at the Choo Choo I said I was a waitress and he said, "oh, my friend is good friends," no he goes, "I'm friends uh good friends with the owner." And he told me who his brother was, who y'know Bob. Was it Bob? No, ya, somebody any ways, was his brother. And so ah, so ah, but then ah, basically I seen the place and I told him I had a son and there'd be no problem for me to pay the rent and everything was fine and ah he said "okay" and then, and then, I, he called me and said "well I'm ah, this student or something came before you and y'know he's more of a y'know, he even said a geek kind of thing, he'll be more quiet at night and I'll, and I'll feel more comfortable renting to him," and I saw the guy one time later on at the Choo Choo, I was on stage and I was like "well there it is" any ways, and I even told Gerry the owner, I said "I went and seen this place and this is ah who owns it, I want to rent it" and he said "oh no problem, no problem you'll get it" y'know. He knew the guy and stuff like that. I guess cause he was saying like he'd tell him, put in a good word for me or something. But I still didn't get it. Well, he probably knew, he knew. I think he knew when I said I was a waitress there that I was a dancer, he knew another girl and he mentioned her name and I was like ya then ah, I think he knew and just he didn't want to rent it to me, cause, well some places don't rent to dancers (Diane).*
- *I have this romance with this guy and I slept with him a couple of times, and it was always nice y'know and in the morning ah I remember one morning he left money on the table but he left like a hundred dollars and I'm wondering, "what that hell is this hundred dollars for" and I phoned him back and he says "oh that's for taxi - I didn't have any change," cause he usually just left like a twenty or something for a taxi the next day to go home, and he'd have to go to work and leave me sleeping, y'know. But then the hundred - I felt so bad like does he think he's going to have to pay me now and like this? (Rachel).*
- *Ya that happened to Carmen once, but I forget. Oh he's a famous football player, she was in Toronto and he picked her, uh she danced for him, they went and got a hotel room together and, uh, he was in the hot tub and stuff like that and Carmen told me she was going to do him, she was right into him y'know. She got along, she found him funny attractive. And then all of a sudden he pulled out, I don't know he put money or something. Ad she said "what's that" and he said "well that's for tonight" and she said you're a —. She was going to fuck him, no problem, but as soon as he pulled out the money she's like y'know. That was it, she was totally offended (Diane).*
- *It's hard for me to say I am a dancer cause people will assume right away that I do that, and I don't and I'm losing out but I still don't....So it's it's hard to say the way it is but ten years ago I didn't mind at all (Marie).*

ENDNOTES

1. Since this chapter is intended to expand the scope of the presentation every attempt was made not to replicate quotes. In a few cases excerpts have appeared previously in edited form. For a similar reason I avoided topics which have been developed at length elsewhere.

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APPENDIX #1

Interview Guide Non-Performing Participants

1. Pseudonym to be used.
2. Start off with a discussion about your yourself, your age, education, background.
3. Tell me about your work history.
4. How did you get into this work?
5. Tell me about your job.
What are your responsibilities and tasks?
How do you organize your work day?
What is the wage range of people in your position?
What do you enjoy/ not enjoy?
How is it different from other jobs you have had?
6. How is this establishment organized?
Relationship with other establishments?
7. Who is responsible for staff?
How is staffing coordinated?
What qualities are you looking for in performers?
How do you manage work relations?
8. What are the obligations of the performers?
What is a typical work day?
Has this changed over time?
9. To what extent do you feel that laws control the industry?
What are the implications?
Feelings about this.
10. How do you feel about the industry?
Is it stigmatized? Why/why not?
Why do you feel it is a popular form of entertainment?
11. How do the performers feel about the industry generally? Their jobs specifically?
12. What has changed in the industry?
What is the response by management? Clients? Performers?
13. Anything to add?
Questions?

APPENDIX #2

Interview Guide Preforming participants

Demographics

- pseudonym to be used
- address
- age
- occupation
- length of involvement in trades
- nature of work undertaken

Background

- family history
- parents
- perceptions of status (class)

Motivation for participation in research

Engagement in various skin and sex trades
understanding of differences
similarities
choices made

Discuss what work entails:

- hours, organization, tasks..
- obligations and responsibilities
- rights

How difficult is the job?

- why?

Income and hidden costs

Perceptions of autonomy

- how is autonomy constrained by management
- how do workers seek to undermine

Problems:

- work itself?
- hours?
- social implications?

Coping strategies for problems

Initial involvement in the trades

- previous activity
- process of entry
- motivation for entry

First contact with trade

- training
- how was work experienced at time (positive/negative)
- initial problems
- coping strategies

Initial perceptions of:

- industry
- co-workers (performers and others)
- management
- audience

Changes in perceptions of:

- industry
- co-workers (performers and others)
- management
- audience

Changes in the industry

- organization?
- work requirements

General feelings about industry and treatment of workers

- possible improvements
- viability of organizing
- any feelings of exploitation

Relative to previous employment

- tasks
- autonomy
- labour process

Reasons for career choice

- reasons for remaining in industry
- desire to exit

Long term goals

- personal
- career

Stigma:

- feelings of
- at labour site
 - negotiations around (resistance to)
- off labour site
 - negotiations around (resistance to)
- legitimacy of stigma

Any personal implications of career choice

- family, friends, partners

Laws and the control of the trades**Thoughts/feelings about research****Conclude**

- anything to add
- any questions

Any help with referrals

APPENDIX #3

INFORMED CONSENT FORM Research Participants

This research is an examination of skin-trade labour process. The existing literature on sexual presentations frequently focuses on the product without consideration of the industry as employment. This project seeks to rectify this through the analysis of 1) the structure of the industry and 2) the experience of participation in the skin trades.

This portion of the project is a preliminary attempt to determine the structure of the industry. The research will involve a series of structured questions presented in a face-to-face interview format. Questions will focus on the organization, structure and daily operation of the industry.

The interview will be tape recorded and will last between one and two hours. The interview tapes will be transcribed as soon as possible and upon request the full transcript will be forwarded to the participant.

Should you have concerns regarding the above-noted data collection method, no audio tapes will be utilized and I will take detailed notes throughout the interview. In this case the processed notes will be made available as soon as possible.

The tapes and/or original notes will be destroyed upon completion of the doctoral project. Until such time they will be in the sole possession of the undersigned researcher.

Confidentiality will be respected, all identifying names and places will be changed in the transcripts and in the final document.

The researcher is currently completing a PhD in sociology at the University of Carleton. The interview material will be used in the researcher's doctoral thesis. In addition the research material may be integrated into future publications.

Questions or concerns can be directed at the researcher (459-1459), the thesis supervisor, Heather Jon Malroney (788-2600 ext 2601) or the Departmental Chair Flo Andrews (788-2600 ext 2585).

The appended consent form is consistent with ethical research requirements and seeks to ensure that participants are positioned to give informed consent having been made aware of the research goals, methods, researcher obligations and participant rights.

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CONSENT FORM

The goals of the research have been explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that I retain the right to refuse any questions or withdraw from the project at any time.

I agree to participate in the interview on the understanding that the above-detailed criteria regarding confidentiality and use of interview material will be abided by.

I agree to have the interview tape recorded: Yes ____

No ____

Date: _____

Participant: _____

Signature: _____

Researcher: _____

Signature: _____