

**Precarious labour and disposable bodies:**  
The effects of cultural and economic change upon  
sexualised labour in lap-dancing venues in Scotland

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of my original work that has not been submitted for any other degree or award. All additional sources of contribution have been acknowledged accordingly.

The work was completed under the supervision of Doctor Margaret Malloch and Professor Gill McIvor and conducted at the University of Stirling, United Kingdom.

Billie Mary Lister

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## **Abstract**

Despite concerns regarding working conditions in Scottish lap-dancing venues being raised in the 2006 report published by the then Scottish Executive's Adult Entertainment Working Group, women's experiences of working inside these venues remains under-researched. This thesis provides an up-to-date snapshot of working conditions in the Scottish lap-dancing industry. The study utilised in-depth, semi-structured interviews with dancers which benefitted from the researcher's involvement in the industry. The inclusion of women's voices led to the conclusion that wider cultural and economic changes are impacting negatively upon working experiences in venues by adversely altering the dynamics of supply and demand. This means power is felt to be partially shifting from workers to owners, and to a lesser extent, customers. Participants suggest that venues have changed from being enjoyable working environments where money could be made relatively easily to ones where the work embodies the characteristics of precarious labour where competition is rife and projected income is far less certain.

A feminist and Foucauldian analysis assists in understanding and explaining these changes. The thesis suggests that simply improving working conditions for women may prove ineffective in the facilitation of a more satisfactory workplace, due to the overriding desire for profit held by both dancers and owners in an industry which has become less financially lucrative. Ultimately, the thesis reveals and explains how shifts outside the lap-dancing venues have affected dancers negatively in different ways, affecting relationships inside the

venue, and the actual experience of carrying out the labour. This thesis argues that these shifts have been assisted by the provision of State policy that fails to recognise lap-dancing as a form of labour and is not concerned with dancers safety at work.

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# Chapter One: Introduction - A changing industry

*“We are living in a pornified culture and we have no idea what this means for ourselves, our relationships, or our society” (Paul, 2005; 11).*

The above quote indicates the air of mystery that surrounds the impact of sexualisation upon society. This thesis uncovers current working experiences of lap-dancers in Scotland. One of the themes explored are whether cultural changes in attitudes towards sexuality have impacted upon women’s workplace experiences. The thesis also addresses economic changes which have affected the dynamics of supply and demand for sexualised labour, and maps the shifts which have occurred for female lap-dancers.

Sex work is a broad term used to refer to the provision of a variety of sexual services in return for payment or payment in kind (Willman and Levy,2010). Occupations vary greatly in terms of the type and nature of service provided and can include lap-dancing, prostitution and telephone sex. Categorised as a form of indirect sex work, lap-dancing involves close contact erotic dancing. The term ‘indirect’ is used here as this form of work does not involve physical stimulation<sup>1</sup>. However, lap-dancing differs from table dancing and stripping as the former involves dancing in very close physical proximity to the customer and involves the dancer sitting upon a customer’s lap. The dance can be provided in a private booth or a dance room, in the latter case they occur in the view of other customers who may also be receiving dances. The dance may

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Indirect’ sex work is used by Roberts *et al* (2010) to refer to sexual labour where genital-genital contact does not take place.

involve complete nudity although this differs across venues which, despite offering similar services, often adopt very different organisational practices (Grandy and Mavin,2011). Given the customer is typically male, this immediately presses us to consider the potential impacts that gender relations can have within a sexualised workplace.

Within this thesis, I predominantly use the term owner, which refers to the individual who owns, and thus is primarily responsible for, the operations which take place inside venues. However, dancers may be subject to the authority of a combination of owners (who may be off-site) and on-site managers. A management system may operate in chain based establishments. In smaller independents, it is common practice for the owner to also adopt a managerial role. When referring to the 'State', I adopt Connell's interpretation, using the term to refer to "the set of institutions currently subject to co-ordination (via administrative or budgetary means) by a state directorate" (Connell,1990; 138-139). In this case, the State refers to both local authorities and central government who are responsible for the regulation of venues.

Throughout this thesis, lap-dancing is referred to as sexualised labour, forming part of the indirect sex industry. This is because research participants did not consider themselves sex workers. Harcourt and Donovan (2005) and Mould (2008) have noted that individuals who work in the indirect sector are unlikely to consider themselves sex workers, and lap-dancers have been reported to have expressed sentiments of 'outrage' against the successful proposals to reclassify



their workplaces as sexual entertainment venues<sup>2</sup> in England and Wales (Hope,2008), a decision that could be considered to be an attempt to apply moralistic labeling upon the industry and those who work within it (Colosi, 2010b). Such a move is somewhat paradoxical considering the sexualisation of culture society has undergone in recent years (McNair,2002) and associated changes in social attitudes (Sanders and Hardy,2013).

In the UK, lap-dancers are considered to be self-contracted workers. This relieves owners of any obligation to honour employment legislation, yet this designation can be subject to debate due to the significant power venues have over workers (Holsopple,1999). This is exercised in the form of rules that are more constrictive in higher tier establishments<sup>3</sup> (Barton,2006) than in lap-dancing bars targeted towards 'working class' men (Trautner,2005). It can be suggested that these fluctuating levels of control impact differently upon women's experiences as dancers. This designation also means that some equalities legislation, such as the Age Discrimination Act, can be ignored. Since the 1970s, sex workers have addressed such issues in their own writings and have organised campaigns, demanding more worker-centred approaches to policy (Willman and Levy,2010). Recognition of these demands stimulated the initial interest for conducting the study.

Critiques against lap-dancing venues by pressure groups are prompted by what they imagine to happen inside them, with their arguments for differentiating

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<sup>2</sup> Hereafter, SEV

<sup>3</sup> Higher tier establishments are generally described as 'Gentlemen's Clubs', and include chain based establishments such as *Spearmint Rhino* and *For Your Eyes Only*.

them from other forms of public entertainment being framed by an ideological standpoint that the industry is one which constitutes a form of commercial sexual exploitation (Hubbard,2009). Scotland differs from England and Wales as it has not adopted the SEV regime, and literature investigating the industry in this country is minimal. In 2006, the then Scottish Executive published its findings from the Adult Entertainment Working Group<sup>4</sup> research that highlighted a number of issues in relation to working conditions in venues. AEWG's attitude exemplifies the argument that lap-dancing is exploitative, situating it in the same category as trafficking for prostitution, proclaiming that the industry, alongside prostitution, constitutes a form of commercial sexual exploitation (Scottish Executive,2006a). This also suggests that the State, whilst sanctioning its existence, fails to recognise lap-dancing as a form of legitimate labour.

In many respects, comparisons can be drawn between the lap-dancing industry and other forms of precarious labour (Agustin,2011). This is labour which is characterised by low job security, such as work done by freelance and temporary workers. Precarity in this context refers to jobs in which one's employment can be terminated with little notice, employment benefits are denied and little or no concern is reserved for health and safety. Informants' voices show that as the industry has changed, so too has its precarity increased. In the years following the introduction of lap-dancing venues to the UK in the 1990's, participants' experiences suggest that the industry enjoyed a financially lucrative 'boom' period. Today, as customer spend dwindles (yet has

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<sup>4</sup> Hereafter, AEWG.

not came to a standstill), power dynamics shift in favour of owners as they cling to the profit that can still be reaped from the Scottish industry.

Yet these shifts do not lead to a straightforward situation whereby owners retain *all* power. Participants reveal strategies of resistance they may deploy to counter an oppressive workplace. In addition, despite the identified falling working conditions and opportunities to earn money, women return to the industry. This is clear from the number of participants who had danced for some time, returning to work even when income fell and working conditions declined. This prompts us to explore the perceived benefits of the work. If all that was transpiring was declining conditions and income, one would wonder why women return. In Chapter Seven a number of benefits are revealed, in particular the continued potential to make instant cash, and the flexibility the work can offer. Indeed, a major attraction to the work for many women, as will be shown, was not so much the *amount* of money that could be earned, but rather, the instantaneous nature of payment which is unique to cash-in-hand forms of labour.

While the voices of workers can inform us of the perceived realities of the industry, they tend not to be included in policy debate (Sanders,2007) and are selectively utilised by groups wishing to eradicate the industry. Hubbard calls for more research that “looks objectively at the ways lap-dancing venues should be regulated to end exploitation” (Hubbard,2009;741). The women's quotes feature strongly within the findings chapters, for one of the principal aims is to understand the industry through lived experiences.

This thesis reveals that there is a relationship between a combination of outside dynamics, such as sexualisation of popular culture, the de-skilling of the industry and the economic recession with a reduction in the job satisfaction enjoyed by dancers and the working conditions under which they labour. By listening to women, I provide a unique, Scotland-specific focus upon their changing experiences at work which balances the fact that existing research to date tends to be centered on the industry as it exists in the US and Canada (Colosi, 2010b). Such studies have contributed to sociological understandings pertaining to sexualised labour, and its cultural, economical and political dimensions (Willman and Levy, 2010). They have focussed on a range of issues, such as working tactics, the extensive emotional labour performed by dancers, (Deshotels and Forsyth, 2006, Wesely, 2003, Egan, 2006c) and the 'techniques of neutralisation' (Sykes and Matza, 1957) they employ in order to deflect the immorality that continues to be imposed on them (Grandy and Mavin, 2011, Egan, 2003, Barton, 2002). In addition to a solely Scottish focus, over half of the research sample had been involved in the industry for five years or more. The contribution of longer-term dancers was instrumental in mapping the changes which have transpired in the industry.

Previous studies have located lap-dancers as being predominately women who possess little social capital (Carey *et al*, 1974, Salutin, 1971, Boles, 1972, Skipper and McCaghy, 1970). The findings presented within this thesis challenge this view. Dancers' biographies, which can be found within Chapter Five, reflect Colosi's observation that women's entry into the industry today is complex and

influenced by a number of differing factors (Colosi,2010b), and that “dancers come from all walks of life” (Woods,2007;2). The biographies reflect the shifting social status of the lap-dancers in modern Scottish society. Recent research has found that increasingly, lap-dancers hail from ‘middle class’ backgrounds, with women possessing social capital in the form of university degrees or other educational qualifications such as those obtained from college (Bradley,2008). Bernstein’s research conducted between the period of 1994-2002 noted that the sex industry overall has seen an increase in the number of women from more elevated socio-economic backgrounds entering the industry (Bernstein, 2007a, Hakim, 2011) suggesting that sex work now receives a degree of acceptance. Colosi has noted that gaining an understanding of the rules and regulations that govern lap-dancing venues highlights the economic, cultural and political significance this form of sexualised labour has (Colosi,2010b). It is important to afford attention to each of these categories for they all impact upon the way in which the industry is perceived and how it operates - and crucially, how operational rules and regulations affect dancers.

Direct quotes from interview transcripts in Chapter Five reveal the variety of different reasons women had for becoming involved in lap-dancing, and also introduces the reader to the participants. Western culture continues to foster a dichotomy in which sexuality is increasingly mainstreamed, yet attitudes about preferable forms of feminine sexuality continue to exist. Focussing upon the entry of women into lap-dance and their experiences within it assists in the contribution of an understanding of how women who work in a highly gendered form of labour are placed within a sexualised culture and the changes to the

work that cultural changes have brought about within the venue, with acts becoming more explicit as tolerance has grown for overtly sexual themes (Salutin, 1971). Definitions of desirable forms of beauty and sexuality also influence physical standards dancers feel they must conform to (Deshotels *et al*, 2012) in order to be profitable.

### **Considering lap-dancing in its cultural context**

Agustin has encouraged researchers to incorporate culture into their frames of understanding. She suggests situating the realities of commercial sexual services within a wider context, by considering their relationship with cultural phenomena such as entertainment, economics, urban space and sexuality (Agustin, 2005). Bradley-Engen, Ulmer and Schein argue that a cultural context is essential since “Clubs are embedded in larger social contexts; they both influence and are influenced by larger social, political, and economic institutions in their local communities and beyond” (Bradley-Engen and Ulmer, 2009;57, Schein, 1985). Caputi (1999) suggests that popular culture serves to interpellate citizens, and Lloyd (2008;2) argues that it has the power to influence human behaviour on a “massive scale”. This being so, an analysis of shifts in popular culture can help gain an understanding of the current nature of the industry. Despite the greater visibility that sex, sexuality and lap-dance venues themselves enjoy in Western culture, a combination of State sanction and public disdain continue to stigmatise women who work in venues (Colosi, 2010a, Bradley, 2007, Deshotels *et al*, 2012). The fact that this may be accepted in the workplace reinforces the stigma (Holsopple, 1999).

The thesis is influenced by Barton's research on the working experiences of US dancers. Barton emphasises that her research is dedicated to reporting experiences (Barton, 2006). To attend to women's experiences is not to deny the exploitation that can occur, but rather it acknowledges that sex work cannot be conceptualised as unitary experiences (Egan,2006a) which can easily be summarised. This also acknowledges the benefits that working in the industry might offer individuals. I aimed to offer the same opportunity to women in Scotland whose voices have been, as with many other debates around the nature of the sex industry, absent (Nagle,1997, Reinharz,1992). Considering debates can often influence policy reform, it is essential their voices are heard. This becomes especially important when we consider the fact that many of those who seek to understand the realities of this industry rely upon biased media reports rather than balanced academic research (Colosi,2010b). Barton suggests a more intelligent approach is to consider the contributions of both liberal and radical feminists, two accounts which have dominated discussions about the lap-dancing industry (Colosi,2010b). This allows for the adoption of a more encompassing approach to the frame of understanding rather than aligning perspectives with one theoretical stance. Staunchly radical and liberal approaches can fail to capture the complicated realities of sexualised work. This study considers these arguments, but also engages with socialist feminist theory. This considers the impacts of a multitude of factors affecting women resulting from a capitalist ideology which encourages consumption and patriarchal systems of power. Bernstein notes that economic and cultural

changes have served to transform the commerce of sex within the late capitalist marketplace (Bernstein,2007b).

Berg argues that to better understand phenomena, immersing oneself into that environment is key (Berg,2001). This thesis acts upon this advice, for I have personal experience of working as a lap-dancer in a Scottish venue. Thus, my own experiences of working as a lap-dancer in one of the venues featured in this study are also revealed.

### **Structure of the thesis**

The review of the literature follows this introduction and has been divided into three chapters. Chapter Two will contextualise the study and discusses policy in relation to the social control of the lap-dancing industry. Chapter Three addresses cultural and economic shifts and the partial mainstreaming of sexualised labour. Chapter Four discusses the theoretical arguments which provide frames for understanding the nature of the industry as it currently operates. Chapter Five documents the fieldwork journey that took place in order to collect the data which informs the findings, including dancers' biographies and a consideration of the impact of researcher involvement. Chapter Six is the first of three findings chapters, in which participants suggest that an increased cultural interest in erotic dance and sexualised themes, something which has been noted recently by other researchers (Deshotels *et al*,2012), the economic impact of the recession and the de-skilling of the industry have combined to alter supply and demand which has impacted upon the experience of the work.



Bernstein has noted that the expanding literature focusing on post-industrial cultural change has failed to address the changing nature of attitudes towards sexuality and how this might reflect and facilitate transformations in other categories (Bernstein,2007a), such as sexualised labour. This is one knowledge gap this thesis addresses. Chapter Seven acknowledges lap-dancing as a form of labour and examines current working conditions. The Chapter also addresses the reasons which see women returning to work and shows that this industry continues to present positive aspects despite negative changes. Chapter Eight is devoted to the complexity of power and concentrates upon exposing changing relationships, and how these have impacted on women - noting their agency and the strategies they can employ to resist punitive rules. Finally, Chapter Nine concludes the thesis and final arguments and justifications are presented which explain the combination of reasons for the dramatic changes which have occurred within this form of sexualised labour within a relatively short period of time.

## **Chapter Two: The social control of lap-dancing venues**

### **The nature of the commercial lap-dance and industry change**

Lap-dancing is often referred to as a form of adult entertainment (Frank,2003). However, the majority of consumers are male, being tended to by women who are stereotypically young, attractive and friendly (Frank,2003). These women perform nude or semi-nude close proximity lap-dances in exchange for financial compensation. In addition, dancers are usually required to dance on stage at varying points during a shift, primarily to promote themselves to observers who may purchase a private dance (Ronai and Trautner,2001). Such dances are generally performed in a secluded area (Deshotels,1997; Prewitt,1989), such as a booth or dance room or within the view of other dancers and customers. In Scotland, venues vary in the offering of this provision. The sale of private dances form a dancer's income as venues do not offer the security of an hourly wage (Holsopple,1999). This means that women are rendered completely reliant upon tips<sup>5</sup> and income from private dances (Bindel,2004, Holsopple, 1999), thus the work lacks financial security because income can never be guaranteed. This can also be attributed to house fees<sup>6</sup> or commission<sup>7</sup> which can vary across specific days of the week worked and the fact that there is no

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<sup>5</sup> Tipping refers to customers 'rewarding' dancers who they are attracted to for their stage shows by offering a tip which may be placed in the dancer's garter or underwear. Such a practice may lead to a private dance after the stage show, since the dancer is actively made aware which particular customer is interested in her.

<sup>6</sup> 'House Fee' refers to an agreed, upfront payment made to the venue prior to working a shift. Women retain all monies made after this.

<sup>7</sup> 'Commission' refers to a payment scheme in which the venue takes a percentage for each dance sold. In commission charging venues, women are often paid via tokens which are exchanged for cash minus commission percentage at the end of a shift.

way of predicting how many men will purchase a dance, with some choosing not to purchase dances at all, merely observing free of charge (Trautner,2005). UK based dancers generally work shifts that are between five and seven hours in duration, commencing between 18:00 – 20:00 and finishing between 01:00 and 03:00 (McQuaid *et al*,2005; 30). Shift patterns vary across venues, with some offering more flexibility than others. Despite workers' self-contracted status, owners dictate the duration of shifts. Thus, dancers are not guaranteed the power to stipulate working hours. This is something which has been viewed as one of the positive aspects of the work by women in other studies (Deshotels *et al*,2012, Sanders and Hardy,2011). Thus, work satisfaction can depend in part on the policies adopted by their workplace.

The first venue in the UK, a branch of the Gentlemen's Club chain *For Your Eyes Only*, was introduced in 1995 (Bindel,2004, Grandy,2005), and the sector was considered to be worth in excess of £300 million GBP by 2005 (McQuaid *et al*, 2005). The industry went on to witness significant growth (Myant *et al*, 2005), with the Scottish industry enjoying an estimated turnover of between £7.0 and £11.1 million annually (McQuaid *et al*,2005), By 2005 adult entertainment was established as one of the fastest growing elements of the UK leisure industry (Jones *et al*,2003; McQuaid *et al*,2005), suggesting an increasing demand for sexualised entertainment. This growth was assisted by the existence of licensing laws that allowed venues to open with relative ease.

## **The Scottish industry**

The AEWG was set up in 2005, with a remit to consider the scope and impact of adult entertainment in Scotland (Scottish Executive,2006a). Lap-dancing formed part of this investigation, which also addressed other forms of sex work. Topics explored included public attitudes to the industry, estimated economic impacts, and opinions from organisations such as Scottish Women Against Pornography and, to a far lesser extent, industry workers themselves, such as dancers, management, owners and bar staff. It is acknowledged that questions were posed to a small number of dancers regarding the nature of the work, however Vernon (2011) argues that the lack of a wide inclusion of industry workers rendered findings problematic, since the study was unable to provide the views of the range of individuals who are involved in and/or affected by the existence of adult entertainment provision in Scotland. The group uncovered a number of issues including the very high commission charged by owners for working space (Scottish Executive,2006b, Annex 7; 3) and fines for ‘unacceptable behaviour’ such as lateness and spending too long in the bathroom (Scottish Executive,2006b, Annex 7; 3-4). Clearly, other workplaces would not be able, legally at least, to treat workers in such a fashion. Such treatment also throws the self-contractual label dancers hold into obvious question. Other issues included exploitation and women feeling pressured to work longer shifts than they wanted to as a result of high commission and fining practices (Scottish Executive,2006b; Annex 7; 4).

The AEWG study was published in 2006. These issues continue to affect women inside Scottish venues, with policy being arranged in such a way that allows owners to afford blame to workers if questions are raised regarding venue operations. The City of Glasgow Licensing Board challenged the licenses held by the *Spearmint Rhino* and *Seventh Heaven* venues, with charges pertaining to a number of breaches of their non-Statutory code of practice. Owners have argued that they are not legally obliged to implement the code due to its non-Statutory status (City of Glasgow Licensing Board,2009a; 87). The transcriptions obtained from court hearings<sup>8</sup> investigating allegations of code breaches indicated a further need for research exploring venues operations and how they impact on women. Firstly, venues are seen to exploit women's self-contracted status by designating any breaches of the code solely as the dancer's responsibility, whose workspace is relinquished immediately upon breaches of venue rules and, apparently, those of the code (City of Glasgow Licensing Board,2009a; 71,2009b;122). It would appear that if it suits the needs of owners, codes set by local authorities can be selectively implemented. If dancers were considered employees, owners would be forced to comply with a variety of legal requirements such as the provision of notice under employment legislation. Venues would also be forbidden from partaking in age discrimination under The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 legislation, and would have to guarantee income by providing the minimum wage. Self-contraction offers no grounds for appeal; positioning owners in a particularly advantageous position. Sanders and Hardy's recent research

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<sup>8</sup> Thanks are attributed to the City of Glasgow Licensing Board, who provided copies of the two legal transcripts.

indicates that exploitative working conditions exist in UK venues (Sanders and Hardy,2011), suggesting that owners are exploiting their current position.

Covert inspections are commonly used by some local authorities (Eden, 2007) in an attempt to establish control over license holders, and when carried out in Glasgow the licensing board found two venues to be violating code rules on a number of occasions (City of Glasgow Licensing Board,2009a,58,59,60;2009b, 114,115). *Seventh Heaven* was found to be breaking rules one year after their initial inspection (City of Glasgow Licensing Board,2009a;89). *Spearmint Rhino* attempted to form a 'Clubwatch' group including all owners in Glasgow intended to watch over dancers and communicate information across other venues in order to weed out 'bad apples' – women who fail to comply with club rules (City of Glasgow Licensing Board,2009b;141-142). Should a worker find herself blacklisted by one venue, she would be rendered unable to hire workspace within another establishment in the city (City of Glasgow Licensing Board, 2009b). The presence of such a group may serve to further elevate the already substantial power owners enjoy, and women may find themselves excluded from the industry simply due to a personal vendetta - for venues are not run in a way which follows clear rules and guidelines, with sanctions often applied with little consistency. Such treatment does not exist amongst other legalised employment positions, and can be viewed as unfair, especially when one considers the practices under which women are hired and 'fired'. *Spearmint Rhino* admitted during their court hearing that dancers are selected for working space upon managers' positive judgment of their physical appearance (City of Glasgow Licensing Board,2009b;123) Such discrimination has also been found

to occur in other locations (Bradley,2007, Deshotels *et al*, 2012). Such value judgments, based upon rigid gendered constructions pertaining to physical attractiveness, help create a legal workplace which can classify individuals based on categories which are legally irrelevant in other workplaces<sup>9</sup> and also indicates that pressure is applied upon dancers to perform unpaid labour out-with the workplace in order to maintain an appearance that is acceptable to owners, such as regulating body weight via disciplinary diet and exercise programmes, engaging in regular grooming practices and so on (Deshotels 2012,Wesely,2006).

The Scottish Government's 2005 research, *Public Attitudes Towards Adult Entertainment* focused on public opinion regarding the existence of lap-dancing in Scotland and also included interesting input from ten dancers who worked in Edinburgh and Glasgow, yet failed to conduct an in-depth analysis of their experiences at work (Myant *et al*, 2005; Annex 7,pp1-7). Bindel's study conducted for Glasgow City Council, *Profitable Exploits: lap-dancing in the UK*, also included the voices of dancers. The study quotes only negative comments from dancers pertaining to the nature of the work (Bindel,2004). The journalist Lorna Martin published an article prior to the study's publication in which Ana Lopez, spokeswoman for the IUSW<sup>10</sup> and Hilary Kinnell of UKNSWP<sup>11</sup> argued that Bindel's radical feminist ideology would obstruct the objectivity of the study (Martin, 2004). However, it is also possible that the women spoken to had

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<sup>9</sup> I acknowledge that women's physical appearance is also subject to scrutiny out-with the lap-dancing venue, however other legitimised forms of employment cannot, at least publicly, admit to selecting candidates purely upon appearance.

<sup>10</sup> International Union of Sex Workers

<sup>11</sup> UK Network of Sex Work Projects

nothing positive at all to say about their work, although this is up for debate as many dancers who were interviewed for the study claimed their experiences had been misrepresented (Boynton, 2008). Bindel's research tactics have also been heavily criticised by Sanders *et al* (2008) who noted that there no evidence exists that formal ethical approval was sought for the *Big Brothel* study which investigated the off-street sex industry in London which was carried out by Bindel and Atkins (2008). The Profitable Exploits study itself could be considered ethically problematic due to the covert nature of the research - dancers spoken to in six venues were completely unaware they were conversing about their work with a researcher (Bindel,2004). Notably, Bindel's study was commissioned by Glasgow City Council, who strongly oppose the sex industry and deem the lap-dancing industry constitutes a form of sexual exploitation (Glasgow City Council,2009). It stands to reason, then, that research including any positive statements from women regarding the work would not assist in supporting their aim to eradicate venues in the city, or prevent further establishments from opening.

### **Scottish legislative policy**

Until relatively recently, Scottish venues were regulated under the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976 (McQuaid *et al*,2005), and were required to apply for an entertainment license. In 2011, venues were governed under the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, and the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 (Colosi,2010b) which came into force on 1st September 2009. This regime requires venues to apply for a premises license. In Scotland, local authorities



have fewer powers to control venues than those located in England and Wales (Colosi,2010b). Generally, a premise license is granted, unless no alcohol is sold in the establishment – however, this is highly unlikely in a lap-dancing business, which partially makes profit via the consumption of alcohol. In such a case however, a license is not necessary if the public entertainment is not clearly specified under Section 9 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982.

Glasgow City Council established a code of practice in 2007 that accompanied the 1976 Act and was intended to be used as a set of guidelines for license holders. This code pertains directly to lap-dancing venues, however its power is limited as it enjoys no Statutory basis (City of Glasgow Licensing Board Code of Practice,2007;1). There is no obligation for a local authority to draw up a code of conduct for good practice. For example, Dundee City Council have no guidance in place for venues in their jurisdiction (Woodcock,2010). The limits of Glasgow City Council's powers were exposed during an appeal made by Brightcrew Ltd<sup>12</sup>. In 2002, the Council moved to consistently object to all licensing applications for clubs, becoming the first local authority in the UK to adopt such a stance (Martin,2004). Despite this, the lack of a specific policy enshrined in law pertaining to venues means local authorities have limited powers and are reliant upon the co-operation of owners with regards to following codes. Glasgow's code stipulates requirements pertaining to how dances are performed, such as rules regarding no touching (City of Glasgow Licensing Board Code of Practice,2007), yet in reality this is ultimately up to the owner to supervise.

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<sup>12</sup> Brightcrew Ltd is the trading name of the *Spearmint Rhino* chain

## **The inefficiency of non-Statutory regulatory guidelines**

Brightcrew Ltd's appeal reveals the inefficiency of codes of practice, exposing that no legal protection exists to ensure a safe working environment for lap-dancers in Scotland. The non-Statutory basis under which codes are written effectively means that owners are not obliged to follow them in order to retain a license. This was evident in the outcome of Brightcrew Ltd's appeal<sup>13</sup> against the refusal of their application for a premises license under the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005. After Brightcrew Ltd appealed the rejection, the Licensing Board was forced to reconsider their decision by the court of session (Eassie, 2011). The reason the Board gave for refusal of the license was that *Spearmint Rhino* failed to satisfy criteria set out as the objectives of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005. Specifically, they argued that under Section 23 (5)(c), a license could not be granted because the venue failed to operate in accordance with the protection and improvement of public health, preventing crime and disorder, and the establishment was unsuitable for the sale of alcohol (Eassie, 2011).

The Board argued that several breaches of its code rendered it incapable of being fit to sell alcohol:

“In the Board's view, premises providing Adult Entertainment, involving a person performing an act of erotic or a sexually explicit nature, and which is provided wholly or mainly for the sexual gratification or titillation of the audience, could only be considered

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<sup>13</sup> The appeal was granted to Brightcrew Ltd on 12th July 2011, <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/opinions/2011CSIH46.html> accessed 5th January 2012.

to be suitable for the sale of alcohol where the Board was satisfied that its said policy on Adult Entertainment would be complied with - particularly in regard to the health and safety of dancers..." (Glasgow Licensing Board, cited by Eassie,2011;3)

What is particularly interesting is the concern they express with regards to the dancers' health and safety which was apparently not being considered by the license holder. The Board argued that no provision for a risk assessment was put in place, which relates to the "precise work activities required of dancers, the personal safety of dancers, and the use of chemicals which may come into contact with dancers' skin" (Eassie,2011;3). The Board's argument that the breaches of their code meant the venue was unsuitable to sell alcohol - the principal concern of the Act (McIlwraith,2011, Eassie,2011). The Board also argued that *Spearmint Rhino* failed to adhere to the code in relation to promotional paraphernalia, alcohol promotions, display of genitals during performances and dancer contact with customers (Eassie,2011). It should be noted that the drinks promotion, which was sent to a UK-wide mailing list and so was presumably permitted under other UK licensing regimes, was immediately withdrawn in relation to the Glasgow branch (Eassie,2011) - the chain was swift to comply with stipulations that are legally enshrined. Ultimately, Brightcrew Ltd were able to overturn the Board's ruling because the code does not pertain to legal licensing objectives - and items contained within the code, such as health and safety considerations, fall outside the powers afforded to the Board (Eassie,2011).

The legal challenge by Brightcrew Ltd exposes the lack of value that local authority codes have in relation to the operation of venues. The State's

objectivity in relation to venues which employ exploitative practices towards women, where, as we have seen, focus solely on their fitness to sell alcohol with no regard for workers' welfare, is also a practice that Connell argues is patriarchal, existing as an avenue in which predominately male interests of property owners can be preserved (Connell,1990).

## **Policy in England and Wales**

The acceptance of the existence of businesses who exist to profit from commercial sexual services does not extend to all groups in society.

Widespread opposition in relation to lap-dancing venues has been expressed by a variety of activist groups such as OBJECT, The Fawcett Society, The Scottish Coalition Against Sexual Exploitation, resident's associations, members of the public, and some MPs. The Fawcett Society and OBJECT are united in their opposition against the industry and were successful in mustering adequate support for their ideological and political agenda, which was to reform licensing provision. The Home Office announced its intention to re-classify lap-dance venues in England and Wales under the Policing and Crime Act 2009 (Braiden,2009). Venues can be explicitly controlled under Schedule 3 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 (Home Office,2009), thus they can now, if a local authority desires, be categorised in the same way as sex shops and cinemas. This allows authorities to judge whether they are 'appropriate' for the area in question, and also allows for the stipulation of a maximum amount of venues allowed to exist in a particular jurisdiction, which could be nil (Hubbard,2009). This theoretically allows local authorities to refuse

licenses to venues. The change in policy reveals the effects pressure groups can potentially have on Government, since the campaign orchestrated by OBJECT and The Fawcett Society was instrumental in the decision to re-license lap-dancing venues under Section 26 of the Policing and Crime Act 2009 (Colosi,2010b).

### **Challenges to industry regulation in Scotland**

MP Sandra White attempted to take advantage of the political action that occurred in England and Wales in order to radically overhaul legislative policies and to provide local authorities in Scotland with greater control over venues, providing them with more power in whether a new application is accepted or rejected. To do this, she pressed to amend the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill. The amendment, argued White, would allow citizens to have a greater say over what transpires in their communities (White,2010;Col27948). By introducing a dual licensing system, venues would be required to obtain an additional license pertaining directly to the provision to adult entertainment (White,2010;Scottish Parliament,Col27948). White's amendment would have permitted local authorities to stipulate the maximum number of venues permitted in their district - which could be, if they so wished, zero (White,2010; Scottish Parliament,Col27948). This would have given a local authority the power to completely eradicate the industry from its designated territories. Crucially though, and of interest to this study, is that White's amendment would have allowed local authorities to apply operating conditions to venues and be able to take action if they failed to comply (White,2010;Scottish Parliament,

Col27948). Depending on the nature of its implementation, it is this specific component of the amendment which could have potentially improved working conditions for women.

White's proposal was supported by the Scottish National Party, but failed to win the support of the Liberal Democrats (Scottish Parliament,2010;Col27949), Scottish Labour (Scottish Parliament,2010;Col27951) and the independent MP Margo McDonald (Scottish Parliament,2010;Col27951). Robert Brown, MP for the Liberal Democrats, argued that he was "not sure that there is any real problem with the current powers" (Brown, 2010;Scottish Parliament,Col27949). Brown failed to elaborate any further, however his concern does not appear to lie with the welfare of women - as noted, the AEWG report had already raised a number of concerns pertaining to issues around working conditions and exploitation against women in the industry. John Lamont, MP for the Scottish Labour party also argued against the proposed amendment, commenting that the "rigorous enforcement of the licensing regime, regular police visits and internal self-policing are what is required" in order to preserve safety and avoid exploitation (Lamont,2010;Scottish Parliament,Col27950). Clearly Lamont fails to understand that the licensing regime pertains to the suitability of an establishment regarding the sale of alcohol, and that the most rigorous monitoring of a venue's adherence to it would not automatically lead to an improvement in working conditions and reduced exploitation. By suggesting that venues should 'self-police' Lamont is effectively relinquishing any State responsibility for the welfare of workers to the owners, management, other staff and dancers and is also reminiscent of the neoliberal ideology which has

increasingly accompanied modern political standpoints since the 1970's (Smart, 2003). By placing onus with dancers to self-police, any problems in the work place is attributed solely to the individual failure to act (Bauman,2000). White's proposal attracted forty-five votes for and seventy-six votes against its enactment (Scottish Parliament,2010;Col27955) meaning Scottish venues were able to continue to operate under the Licensing (Scotland) 2005 Act.

This Chapter has focused upon detailing the nature of commercial lap-dancing in the UK and provided an overview of current legislation in Scotland and England and Wales. Specific detail has been afforded in order to draw attention to the inefficiency of codes of conduct, where they exist, and the lack of attention that is paid by policy to worker exploitation. The following Chapter addresses the wider issue of cultural change and the relationship identified shifts have with sexualised labour in venues.

## **Chapter Three: Striptease culture<sup>14</sup> and its impact on sexualised labour in lap-dancing venues**

### **The mainstreaming of lap-dancing themes within Western popular culture.**

The introduction of amateur pole-dancing competitions and fitness classes<sup>15</sup> has contributed to the argument that erotic dance has acquired a degree of social acceptance in UK popular culture. This suggestion gains currency with research that indicates that young people in Scotland are more accepting of lap-dancing than their older peers (Myant *et al*,2005), suggesting the formation of new social attitudes. For Bindel, “lap-dancing has invaded popular culture” (Bindel,2004;14). The terms 'mainstreaming' and 'sexualisation' are commonly used to refer to the ways in which sex has become increasingly visible in contemporary Western cultures.

Commercialised lap-dance is increasingly visible in mainstream media and has enjoyed workspace promotion in *Jobcentre Plus* establishments (OBJECT, 2009) and in publications such as *The Stage*<sup>16</sup>(Bindel,2004). Venues also frequently utilise the Internet in order to offer work, advertising via social

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<sup>14</sup> The term ‘Striptease Culture’ was first used by Brian McNair to describe the increasing fascination popular culture has with with overt displays of sexuality (McNair,2002)

<sup>15</sup> ‘Set up to bring pole-dancing to a wider audience’, *Heavenly Pole* is one example of a business which offers pole fitness classes in Glasgow <http://www.heavenlypole.co.uk>, and *Pole Hunnies* offers classes in Stirling and Central Scotland <http://www.polehunnies.com>. Examples of promotional flyers used to promote pole fitness to women are located in Appendix G.

<sup>16</sup> *The Stage* is a newspaper aimed at would be actors, and those who seek to enter the entertainment industry.



networks for dancers and their own promotional websites<sup>17</sup>. Scottish venues escape the regulation that restricts freedom to advertise which sex cinemas and shops are obliged to obey under Section 2 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, thus are able to advertise in public spaces. The freedom to advertise embodies an additional element in which lap-dancing themes are integrated into society and normalised. Advertising has been suggested to encompass part of individuals lives, a cultural factor that both moulds and reflects social attitudes of the time (Williamson,1978). As such, it would be foolish to underestimate the power advertisements can have and it is important to consider the impact they have upon conceptions of the industry. The sanctioning of such advertising, which has become increasingly overt in relation to sexuality and the objectification of the body (Rosewarne,2007,Ford *et al*, 2009,Nelson and Paek,2005) can unveil much about hegemonic attitudes pertaining to the existence of the industry and the individuals involved in it.

Once confined to the 'red light' areas of towns and cities associated with crime, prostitution, and other 'deviant' endeavours (Bradley,2008,Liepe-Levinson, 2002,Edwards,2010), Gentlemen's Clubs are now quite visible. Blending markers of status such as expensive drinks and gourmet food, they position themselves as an attractive option for middle class professionals and corporate businesses (Frank,2002). These venues have been successful in shedding their previously held reputation for being seedy and undesirable, enjoying their new status (Attwood,2009; Jones *et al*,2003).

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<sup>17</sup> The Glasgow based venue *Seventh Heaven* offers an example of work place promotion online: <http://www.seventhheavenglasgow.co.uk/contact.html>

## Portrayals of lap-dancing in popular culture

There has been a shift of popular opinion from women involved in lap-dancing being considered as automatically exploited 'victims' to empowered, "feisty, individual souls" (McNair,2002;90). This association was obvious in the portrayal of dancers in films which were released at the same time that lap-dance was introduced to the UK, such as *Striptease* and *Showgirls* (McNair, 2002, Bindel,2004). Popular celebrity personalities have engaged with pole-dance as a form of exercise (Bindel,2004, Polestars.net,2011<sup>18</sup>) and as a tool of self-promotion (Bott, 2006). The popularity of pole-dancing classes such as those offered by *Polestars*<sup>19</sup> can be understood to represent one component of the wider sexualisation of the High Street alongside the sale of commodities with an overtly sexual theme such as *Playboy* merchandise (Holland and Attwood,2009). Promoted as a form of exercise, pole-dancing in a class setting is an activity in which all able-bodied women who have the means to pay can partake. *Polestars* declares the activity is "an excellent way to boost your self confidence and feel really sexy" (Polestars,2011)<sup>20</sup>, connecting confidence to mainstreamed ideas regarding gender norms and femininity. Holland and Attwood's research involved liaising with women who were taking part in pole-dancing lessons. Their research clearly reveals the pleasure respondents derived from performing sexualised dance. Considering the viewpoints of students, the researchers found that the activity was something that evoked

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<sup>18</sup> <http://polestars.net/polestars-favorite-pole-dancing-celebs/> accessed 5th January 2012

<sup>19</sup> *Polestars* offers women a range of pole-dancing classes and parties, The activity, according to the promotional website, offers a 'serious work out for your upper arms, improving core strength and endurance' accessed 18th April 2009

<sup>20</sup> <http://polestars.net/pole-dancing-for-jesus/> accessed 5th January 2012

feelings of empowerment and pleasure (Holland and Attwood,2009). The pole-dance class has repackaged erotic dance as not only a potential form of income generation, but also as something which can be brought into the home in order to “thrill your man and improve your fitness” (Drury,2006). The dancing that is performed in the class is somewhat different in style and dynamics from that which can be found in a commercial lap-dancing venue. Clothes are not removed and women do not dance for payment, although revealing outfits and 'stripper style' high heeled shoes are worn (Holland and Attwood,2009). The absence of the commercial transaction where it is essential that women can both satisfy appearance norms and act sexually in a convincing manner alters the dynamics of this form of mainstreamed dance.

### **Easy money?: The ‘reality’ of lap-dancing labour from the perspective of popular culture**

Hakim’s text *Honey Money - The Power of Erotic Capital* suggests we can conceptualise lap-dancing as a form of work that can be profitable. Referring to erotic capital as a “nebulous but crucial combination of beauty, sex appeal, skills of self presentation and social skills” (Hakim,2011;1). Hakim goes so far as to suggest this is something individuals would be wise to exploit and that those who adhere to a host culture’s ideology of physical attractiveness are “more successful” in their private lives, as well as in the public sphere (Hakim, 2011;2). Hakim acknowledges that in a sexualised culture, one’s perceived erotic capital is becoming increasingly important (Hakim,2011) and identifies the sex industry as being especially worthy of consideration for it is the market where the full value of erotic capital can be exploited (Hakim,2011). Certainly, in

an industry where one's physical appearance is deemed key to being financially successful, Hakim's ideas are worthy of attention due to the fact that inside lap-dancing venues, women are obviously judged by customers, owners and other dancers upon their appearance, presentation and etiquette. Hakim notes that dancers tend to conform to cultural stereotypes and are "young...with slim and sexy bodies" (Hakim,2011;169). Hakim, who has no experience of working in the industry herself, proceeds to argue that venues enable men to "feast their eyes on lively beauties" (Hakim,2011;170) without requirements to spend large sums of money. She then goes on to suggest that men are willing to spend 'substantial' sums of money to sit in the company of women who possess a high level of erotic capital. Hakim fails to note that customers do not *have* to spend money whilst visually consuming dancers' bodies. Hakim is correct in her suggestion that erotic capital is important for success in the sexualised workplace, however her argument that the exploitation of this capital is automatically empowering is problematic, since what is considered to be erotic capital is decided situationally - and does not include all women in its appraisal of what is deemed acceptable standards of beauty, presentation and etiquette.

For Hakim, women who conform and thus possess this capital will be rewarded by being able to command large sums of money by providing commercial sexual services, arguing that higher earnings are the most obvious and important benefit to the work (Hakim,2011). Whilst this can be the case, she ignores the wider effects of capitalism and patriarchy which influence what counts as erotic capital and what does not, and the underlying power locus of prescribed appearance norms (Wolf,1991,Ramazanoglu,1989). Furthermore, it

is impossible to consider women's involvement in sexualised labour without also considering wider social structures such as poverty, local and national economics and gendered inequalities (Bernstein,2007b). Hakim fails to capture this, however, her recognition of the benefits the industry can offer women is reflective of some of the more accepting attitudes regarding its existence.

Feminists have argued that sexuality itself is a social construction, and throughout history has been specifically constructed according to the ideological project of maintaining male dominance (Ramazanoglu,1989). Butler articulates this sentiment well, arguing that gender is little but a performance, realised through "the repeated stylization of the body" (Butler,1990;33), in accordance with gender scripts articulated via popular culture. These performances are replicated and sold in the venue via the enactment of socially approved expressions of gender (Marques,2010, Deshotels *et al*,2012).

### **Exploring the relationship between sexualisation and pornography**

In addition to the visibility of lap-dance venues and a market in which sexualised products can be purchased with ease, pornography has become increasingly accessible. This has occurred partly as a result of advancements in technology allowing more people access to free material online. This wider access has resulted in ideas pertaining to sex and sexuality becoming more exposed to individuals. McNair argues that the evolution of pornography is connected to and has fueled the broader sexualisation of the mainstream, and suggests that it forms the 'totem' around which contemporary attitudes to trends in sexual culture revolve (McNair,2002). The growth that the pornographic

industry has experienced in recent years is significant, with a huge leap in the value of the industry in the US from \$10 million USD in 1972 to \$8 billion USD in 1996. By 2001, 10,000 pornographic movies were being produced and distributed in California alone (McNair, 2002). This indicates that the demand for pornography has increased, reflecting shifting attitudes.

MacKinnon has critically argued that the mainstreamed men's pornographic publication *Playboy* is directly connected to the mainstreaming of sex.

MacKinnon directs attention to the social acceptance the brand now enjoys, and accuses it of selling women's sexuality as "entertainment for men" (MacKinnon, 1987; 134). MacKinnon also relates the commodification of the female body as a 'sex object' to other commodities, and to the maintenance of an ideology that a woman is something to be 'possessed'. This is exemplified by Miki Garcia, who held the *Playboy* Playmate title of 'Miss January'<sup>21</sup> in 1973:

".....I was a puzzle. I was a deck of playing cards. This is what they call *Playboy* products.....By the way, a Playmate is a product. The term 'Playmate' is a trademark of *Playboy*" (Garcia, M 1985, MacKinnon, 1987; 134)

As the property of *Playboy Enterprises*, The Playmate's imagery is turned into a series of products to be marketed such as playing cards. Women are invited to send in images in order to be considered for the title of Playmate. The Playmate 'brand' bolsters the idea that women are promoted as existing as objects for men's enjoyment. Garcia was cited over twenty years ago, yet the ideology

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<sup>21</sup> A Playmate is a female model featured in the centrefold of *Playboy* magazine as 'Playmate of the Month' (PMOM). The PMOM's pictorial includes nude photographs and a poster, as well as a short biography and the 'Playmate Data Sheet', which lists her birthdate, measurements, and sexual preferences.

persists. Male interest magazines continue to provide 'gifts' which promote the objectification of the female body and today, 'regular' women are encouraged to purchase *Playboy* merchandise. *Playboy* has recognised the desire of consumers to bring lap-dance into the home and has promoted this by encouraging women to download a guide on how to perform a 'correct'<sup>22</sup> dance via their website. The influence of *Playboy* has also infiltrated some lap-dance venues, with Deshotels *et al* (2012) discovering that higher-tier venues favour women who they categorised as a '10'. When the researchers asked what was meant by this, they answered "a 10 is what you would see in *Playboy Magazine*" (Deshotels *et al*,2012;143). Thus, the *Playboy* imagery can impact on the physical standards women should strive to attain. By purchasing dances from women who represent a '*Playboy* look', customers reinforce this ideal, and by emulating the images, dancers themselves reinforce the *Playboy* definition of beauty.

A focus on *Playboy* allows a connection to be made between pornography, mainstreaming and women's objectification as some women willingly submit themselves to the male gaze<sup>23</sup> by mailing images to the magazine<sup>24</sup>, purchasing Playmate apparel, and so on. *Playboy* themselves hold the opinion that such is the popularity of their publication, it exerts a 'considerable influence

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.playboy.com/articles/party-girl-how-to-give-a-lap-dance/index.html> : accessed 13th June 2009.

<sup>23</sup> The concept of the 'male gaze' was introduced by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* in which she shows how in the media form of cinema, the gaze is present when the audience is put into the perspective of the desires of the stereotypical heterosexual male.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.playboy.com/pose-for-playboy> : accessed 9th August 2012.

on society'<sup>25</sup> But for radical feminists such as MacKinnon, such publications are far from the harmless fun they are often viewed as being. *Playboy's* ethos is that of freedom for both men and women. MacKinnon argues that on the contrary, *Playboy* simply presents women in relation to the role they are socially expected to honour in any case, which is to satisfy the desires of men (MacKinnon,1987).

Individuals are now more amenable to openly discussing sexual matters. This is reflected in popular culture, with porn stars emerging in the world of mainstream celebrity (Attwood,2009, Paul,2005). It has become commonplace to be afforded the opportunity to observe overt displays of sexuality from the production of music videos to advertising and cinematic themes which promote overt sexuality (Bradley,2008, Levy,2005). For Attwood, the mainstreaming of sex has infiltrated the body, with individuals striving to attain what she refers to as a 'porn look' (Attwood,2009, Levy,2005). Many women who perform in Gentlemen's Clubs have undergone breast augmentation (Trautner,2005), in order to boost their income (Deshotels *et al*,2012). Such modifications have long been associated with pornographic imagery (Turner,2005). Although freedom of expression via forms of bodily modification and talking openly about sexual matters can viewed positively, this current climate should also be viewed with some caution, as these behaviours can often be reintegrated to comply with conventional gender relations (Holland *et al*,2004).

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.playboy.com/articles/hugh-hefner-philosophy-manifesto-01/index.html> : accessed 13th June 2009.



Modern society has seen a shift in attitudes in which sex has come to be viewed as something individuals partake in and consume for pleasurable purposes, separate from procreation (Hubbard *et al*,2009). McNair argues that sex and sexual imagery now permeate every aspect of advanced capitalist culture (McNair,2002), supporting Horkheimer and Adorno's general observation that capitalism has succeeded in penetrating all aspects of life (Horkheimer and Adorno,1997). This is reflected in the gentrification of commercial sex (Attwood,2009), which has accompanied the mainstreaming of sexuality. Consider, for example, the popularity of the 'Rampant Rabbit'<sup>26</sup>. The popularity of commodities such as sex aids and other sexually titillating items emphasise the new interest in women as sexual consumers. The purpose here is to generate profit via providing individual pleasure.

The exciting, recreational components of sexuality have been seized by capitalist entrepreneurs, keen to transform desire into various types of commodity (McNair,2002). The fashioning of a desirable commodity is essential to the maintenance of the capitalist system (Lloyd,2008). Consumer culture provides an additional avenue in which sex and in particular lap-dance has been efficiently mainstreamed into popular culture. Because a common feature of late capitalism is that increasing amounts of entertainment have become preoccupied with commodifying public displays and experiences (Frank,2002, Murtola,2007), we can consider the growth of the industry to capitalism.

Castells has noted that late capitalism and its accompanying ideology of the

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<sup>26</sup> The Rampant Rabbit is a sex aid marketed at women and was featured in the popular HBOS TV show *Sex in the City* in 2009 and can be easily obtained across the UK in *Ann Summers* stores and online <http://www.annsummers.com/c/sex-toys/rampant-rabbits> : accessed 3rd August 2012.

value of consuming commodities has significant hold over individuals, for it “shapes social relations over the entire planet” (Castells,2000;471). The dramatic increase in the number of venues that opened in the US in the 1980’s, followed by the UK, is relational to consumer capitalism, together with the fact that women’s work within venues has become increasingly individualised (Frank,2002). This is attributable to a neoliberal ideology which has, according to Ong, individualised markets, shifting risk onto individual workers (Ong,2006). Ong’s observation is explicitly evident in the way the Scottish lap-dancing industry is regulated by the State.

### **The impact of popular culture and the shifting experiences of performing sexualised labour**

Featherstone has afforded attention to the relationship between popular culture and consumerism. He draws attention to the perspective of consumer culture in relation to capitalist commodity production which has inevitably resulted in a vast rise of material culture, shaped by the provision of consumer goods and sites constructed for consumption. The lap-dancing venue is one such site.

Featherstone notes the emotional pleasures that can be derived from consumption, which are celebrated within consumer cultural imagery and specific sites which generate bodily excitement (Featherstone,2007). What is sold in venues is relational to both of these observations. Venues act as a space where customers can take visual pleasure from bodies which are widely celebrated as desirable. The body is packaged as a commodity which effectively can be ‘rented’ for a period of time. To use the term ‘consumer culture’ is to emphasise that the world of goods and their principles of

structuralisation are central to the understanding of contemporary society. This, Featherstone suggests, involves a dual focus. Firstly - on the cultural dimension of the economy, the symbolisation and use of material goods as 'commodities' not just utilities and secondly - on the economy of cultural goods and the market principles of supply, demand, capital accumulation, competition and monopolisation which operate within the sphere of individual consumer lifestyles - and the commodities they purchase (Featherstone,2007,Jameson, 1981).

The previous paragraphs reveal a complex picture that leads Bradley to question if the mainstreaming of sexuality might have impacted upon the women who work inside lap-dancing venues (Bradley,2008). The promotion of erotic material as 'chic' (McNair,2002;60), as something fashionable and not to be hidden is reflected in the visibility of venues: *Spearmint Rhino* opened its first Scottish branch in Drury Street, a main street within Glasgow city centre in 2009. Thompson *et al's* study provides a comparative element which shows the changes that have occurred in the US lap-dance industry. Their initial research, conducted in 1992, discovered that rules were in place in venues that required women to wear nipple covers and underwear that obscured a complete view of the buttocks. (Thompson *et al*,2003). A decade later, the researchers found that in the same venues, women entertained in thong-backed underwear, with the requirement to cover nipples no longer in place. This suggests shifts in social attitudes regarding acceptable levels of nudity and also indicates that women are required to expose more of their bodies as part of the job. The venues featured in Thompson *et al's* study also offered provision for business lunches.

The upmarket status a venue holds is often reflected in the food provided, with delicacies such as crème brûlée offered in some clubs, replacing previous, rather less prestigious offerings such as a 'make your own tacos' service (Thompson *et al*, 2003). Some of these menus rivaled those found in top eateries in the cities where the venues were located, offering some insight into the newfound prestige that the upmarket segment of the market now enjoys. In the UK, high-end venues such as *Stringfellows* offer a quality restaurant service, and an Italian restaurant is situated within the Edinburgh based *Fantasy Palace*<sup>27</sup>. In Glasgow, *Forbidden* offers gourmet cuisine<sup>28</sup> under their 'corporate and VIP' service. The provision of restaurants assists in further normalising venues not only as a space for corporate events, but also as somewhere one can conveniently obtain a meal during office hours.

### **Introducing 'The Lad' - the 90's and cultural shifts**

The 1990's is a historical period which deserves attention due to the fact it was the cultural shifts that occurred during this time that created a climate that facilitated the entry of the lap-dancing industry into the UK. During this decade overt sexual themes emerged, becoming increasingly visible to the average consumer, with mainstream men's lifestyle magazines featuring for the first time semi-nude models on their covers and within the magazine's content (McNair, 2002). The images were accompanied by increasingly sexualised editorial content - a trend that has continued to endure. The emphasis was on the idea that these magazines were for the young modern man (Jackson *et al*, 2001),

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.fantasy-palace.co.uk> : accessed 5th January 2012.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.forbiddenglasgow.com/catering.html> : accessed 5th January 2012.

and were not to be associated with the 'dirty mac' stereotype, but with 'normal' heterosexual 'lads'. The opening editorial statement in the re-launched edition of *Penthouse UK* magnified the shift in changing attitudes, emphasising that sex now could be considered to be a pleasurable, self-indulgent activity rather than something that existed purely for the purposes of reproduction:

“.....sex is not the shameful or embarrassing subject it was for our parents. It drives our culture. It's on the net, the telly, cable and the catwalk. It's the advertising copy line for modern life...there is a growing feeling – shared by men and women – that life is short and ought to be fun” (*Penthouse UK* Editorial,1997; McNair, 2002;48)

This statement not only directs attention to changing attitudes to sexuality which were taking place, but also assisted in the positioning of sexualised imagery of women. These magazines have served the function of bringing soft pornography into the mainstream market (McNair,2002), resulting in the imagery becoming more socially acceptable to both sexes. *Penthouse* were keen to re-market 'top-shelf' pornography as something which women actively, not passively, engage in, depicting them as strong and confident and of desiring male attention (McNair,2002). This is supported by the fact that significant numbers of women submit their images to these magazines, often for no financial remuneration<sup>29</sup>. McRobbie refers to these images as 'ironic pornography' (McRobbie,2004).

Advertising effectively 'touts' sex as a method that women can use to empower themselves. The nature of this empowerment can be disputed as popular

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<sup>29</sup> An example of this phenomena is provided on the *Nuts* magazine website : <http://www.nuts.co.uk/mynuts> : accessed 9th august 2012.

advertising selectively focuses upon the disciplined body as the embodiment of femininity and 'sexiness' (Attwood,2009). The emphasis on this and the fact that popular culture often presents women and sex together as an apparatus for men's pleasure (Attwood,2009) allows us to question how empowering the current trend of mainstreaming sexuality really is. Relating this to the lap-dancing profession, it could be argued that the pressure to maintain a 'good body' alongside performing in a workplace designed to please men could be viewed as distinctively disempowering. For Bartky, the self-surveillance a woman must perform to satisfy a man represents a form of obedience to patriarchy (Bartky,1990). In addition, some feminist groups argue that the sexualisation of women normalises objectification of the body and also legitimates sexual harassment (Bell,2007). However, chains such as *Ann Summers* sell a range of lingerie sets and sex aids promoted towards the female consumer for the purposes of expressing her sexuality through indulging in pleasure. *Ann Summers* has tapped into a willing market, turning over approximately £150 million per year in the UK to a market of primarily female customers (Davidson,2006). This suggests that women are active and willing participants in the mainstreaming of a certain 'brand' of feminine (hetero) sexuality. McNair notes that cultural commodities are ideological, as they are products created by people and as a result can educate us about the society we occupy and appropriate behaviour (McNair,2002). This observation can be applied to lap-dance venues. To be 'sexy' (to men) is now a feminine virtue that can be observed obviously within popular culture, as well as inside venues. This message is instrumental in identifying the underlying ideology

underpinning shifting norms and provides a platform for enquiry pertaining to how these ideologies affect identities and behaviour.

The participation of women in a commodity-driven culture which promotes a singular form of sexuality has been subject to attack by writers such as Levy, who expresses concern over the proliferation of 'raunch culture' (Levy,2005). For Levy, raunch culture represents the idea that women themselves are participating and embracing the objectification and commodification of their own bodies by supporting a culture that celebrates and promotes a particular, narrow form of femininity via sexualisation. Voicing similar concerns in her analysis that women have become re-sexualised within popular culture, Gill argues that a shift has occurred from women being sexually objectified to becoming sexually subjectified. This means that women no longer perform purposefully to satisfy the male gaze with men being the sole beneficiaries, but rather have graduated towards a self-policing narcissistic gaze (Gill,2009). An ideology requiring that women police themselves physically whilst also actively participating in a sexualised culture is observable in popular magazines. The lap-dance venue is a space where women's bodies are subject to constant surveillance and evaluation, with staff and customers forming a constant and enduring gaze (Murphy,2003). Because the maintenance of a fit body is a process that is constantly enduring, dancers experience strain to maintain a standard that is acceptable to owners/management and customers. Barton articulates the pressure dancers endure succinctly when she argues that "if she doesn't look good or act sexy enough, she also may not be able to pay her electricity bill" (Barton,2006;92). Barton argues that women experience their

bodies in the way in which they are reflected back to them. In our culture, for all women, this is embodied within the expectations of media, culture, peers, parents and men (Barton,2002). As a commodity, the dancer relies upon her personal appearance to make money. As a result, she may feel physically inadequate should she fail to earn adequate money compared to her colleagues (Barton,2002). The dancer is subject not only to a culture that trumpets the benefits of feminine beauty – she must also actively satisfy its requirements to secure her income. The dancer may be an active agent in her choice to work in the lap-dancing industry, the cultivation of an acceptable 'look' is designed to appeal to the heterosexual male (Deshotels *et al*,2012).

### **The commodification of sexuality - who is benefitting?**

Arguments that women are now beneficiaries as a result of a more sexualised culture have been attacked by some, such as Gill (2009), who suggests this 'empowerment' is simply a new avenue by which women are re-sexualised. However, the attachment of autonomy and choice to the sexualisation thesis results in social actions which are very difficult to challenge and critique due to women's active involvement in the process. Critique of sex work has been hotly contested by bodies consisting of sex workers from all segments of the industry, including dancers, such as the NSWSP<sup>30</sup>. The thoroughly exclusionary nature of subjectification allows for scrutiny and critique. Although women's empowerment via sexuality is to be celebrated, this celebration does not extend

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<sup>30</sup> The Network of Sex Workers Projects was founded in 1991 and defends the idea of involvement in the sex industry as a form of work and describes itself as 'an informal alliance of sex workers and organisations that provide services to sex workers' <http://www.nswsp.org/page/history> : accessed 3rd August 2012.



to every woman, such as those who are not able-bodied, overweight and so on. Considering the lap-dance venue, Barton's research offers evidence of the anxiety women experience with regards to being physically 'good enough' to perform for men (Barton,2002). Goldman concurs, noting the "sense of terror" (Goldman,1992;123) women feel when confronted with 'losing their looks' with anxiety attached to weight and overall appearance (Goldman,1992). Appearance forms a pivotal part of the work involved in the lap-dancing industry. Like all individuals, dancers are 'vulnerable' to aging, and weight gain. Lap-dancers, in the course of their work, find their bodies 'policed' by staff (Bindel, 2004). Women who were spoken to at one Glasgow venue reported that eating disorders existed amongst some dancers, who also suffered from low self esteem, with some using narcotics such as cocaine in order to keep their weight at an acceptable level (Bindel,2004). Embodied here are powerful messages by which women are effectively forced to constrain and control their bodies in order to satisfy the requirements of the male gaze (Egan,2006c).

### **Capitalism, consumer culture and the 'McDonaldization' of the sex industry**

The second half of the twentieth century has seen the sex industry both expand and diversify and this expansion has been accompanied by an increasing emphasis upon consumption (Frank,2002, Murtola,2007). This blending of consumerism and new social norms that accept the visibility of some forms of sexuality has led to evidence of the 'McDonaldization' of the sex industry (Deshotels *et al*,2012), with some US chains such as the *Hustler* chain being a multimillion dollar corporation (Bradley,2008). Chain run Gentlemen's Clubs can

be regarded as a type of 'conveyer belt' service in which women are offered as a package in which dancers must meet a rigid, hyper sexualised ideal (Bradley, 2008) that is representative of the type of appearance promoted in *Playboy* (Deshotels *et al*,2012). This crafting of a product is similar to other unrelated chains such as *Starbucks Coffee* and provides an example of the body as a packaged commodity. Barton articulates the phenomenon well in her statement that "the strip club is largely a buyer's market.....the buyer has the right to buy whatever 'product' he prefers" (Barton,2006;12). Women are selected based on physical appearance, which is constantly admired, rejected and evaluated each shift worked (Barton,2006). The dancer as product has a shelf life, for those who are deemed too old, or as one venue manager put it, "...on their last legs" (Deshotels *et al*,2012;144), are unable to work in the industry.

Hausbeck and Brents consult Ritzer's McDonaldization thesis in order to understand the growth of the sex industry (Hausbeck and Brents,2002), and conclude that it has both resisted and embraced McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2006). The thesis consists of four principle arguments; efficiency, calculability, predictability and control via non-human technology (Ritzer,2002). In lap-dancing venues, as with other facets of the sex industry, consumer desire for easy access to young, attractive women and the lust for quick choices provides a need for the shoehorning of sexual relations into efficient units of consumption (Hausbesk and Brents,2002). In venues, private dances are timed generally to the length of one music track. The precise timing of dances satisfies Ritzer's first suggestion of efficiency, which dancers tend to acquiesce to - for to spend too much time with a customer is to potentially lose out on

other potential buyers - if the customer the dancer is with is not paying for her time outside of the private dance. Ritzer notices that the fast food model allows individuals a quick and easy way to satisfy the basic human need of food consumption (Ritzer,2006), which, in a society where individuals are constantly experiencing time poverty, can be very attractive. Sexualised labourers can also address the human need for intimacy, temporary companionship and desire within a society where people have less and less time to focus on developing relationships. Bernstein points out that in her text *The Time Bind*, Hochschild identifies that emotional meanings have moved, to something which can not only be addressed in the private sphere, but also as a commodity which can be traded in the marketplace<sup>31</sup> (Bernstein,2007a). Interestingly, this also allows for the framing of the capitalistic exploitation of emotional needs by the industry, with some patrons described by bar staff as being lonely, desiring only “someone to talk to” (Deshotels *et al*,2012;7). However, as we will see, the ability of dancers being permitted to capitalise on customers’ emotional needs often depends on owners, for in some cases they are able to charge for conversation in the context of a VIP<sup>32</sup> in Gentlemen’s Clubs. In lap-dancing bars, however, charging for conversation is not common protocol and so dancers may converse with customers for no financial reward.

The normalising of a specific form of sexuality in society can be considered in relation to it being a product of capitalism. Hugh Hefner founded *Playboy*

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<sup>31</sup> As well as in the sex industry, emotional needs are tended to in other aspects of the service sector such as counseling sessions.

<sup>32</sup> VIP services refer to a dancer being paid for conversation and/or dancing for an extended period of time. Such services tend to be exclusively offered in Gentlemen’s Clubs.

magazine in 1953 (Dines, 1995) partly in response to the need to kick-start the economy after World War II. Men had to be encouraged to spend, and this, alongside post-war cultural anxieties around gender roles and the erosion of masculinity (Fratterigo, 2009) were the needs that the magazine chose to exploit. This could be suggested to be a component of the overall capitalistic project that requires that consumer 'needs' are continually influenced by the media, so that consumption continues (Galbraith, 1963, 1969; Marcuse, 1968; Baudrillard, 1998; Klein, 2001). Other magazines which blend erotic images with a brand of lifestyle are *GQ* and *Arena*, brewing a potent concoction of commodified sexuality – *GQ* has been correlated to a decline in the manufacturing sector and the rise in the service and retail industries (Gill, 2003). Desirable lifestyles link the obtaining of commodities with the 'beautiful' young, and potentially available woman. Such messages are recycled and used in UK male interest magazines (Ticknell *et al*, 2003).

### **Good Girls perform for fun, Bad Girls flash for cash: The curious dichotomy of acceptability and stigmatising attitudes**

Despite lap-dancing being increasingly visible (Deshotels *et al*, 2012), paradoxically, the social status of women who actually work as dancers remains precarious (Holland and Attwood, 2009, Bott, 2006, Frank, 2002, Bradley, 2008, Grandy and Marvin, 2011, Egan, 2003, Barton, 2002). O'Neill has noted that those who receive money for providing erotic service have become a malleable cultural symbol used to simultaneously address social fears and desires (O'Neill, 2000, Marques, 2010). As observed earlier, the exclusion of the financial aspect reveals an activity which can be viewed as fun and even empowering,

according to those who take classes (Attwood and Holland,2009), however the tutor who Attwood and Holland conducted an interview with was happy to be open with others about her employment as a pole-dancing tutor – but not about her primary job, which was a dancer in a lap-dancing club, due to the stigma attached to paid dancing work (Attwood and Holland,2009). Pole-dancing students have also stigmatised those who perform for payment (Gomez-Ramirez,2007). Another lap-dancer in Enck and Preston’s (1988) research refused to allow her name to be associated with an article due to stigma, suggesting that when women strip for payment, negative connotations continue to proliferate. Pilcher (1990;80) has observed that although it is undeniable that there has been a shift in attitudes regarding sexuality, there continue to be strong social norms which regulate sexual behaviour - simply, despite the existence of more permissible attitudes, there still does not exist a moral “free for all”.

### **Ideological power: Social control, sexuality, gender and the mass media**

The mass media has been recognised as a cultural force that not only reflects, but also subtly assists in the shaping of individuals’ social reality (Gallagher, 1979, Bauman,2000, Grandy and Mavin,2011). The argument suggests that social attitudes and behaviours are learnt via a process of imitation and comparison with attitudes and behaviours presented by specific, influential individuals and groups, and by cultural forces – including the media. Should this be the case, a culture that sexualises women may also create docile bodies that emulate what is promoted as desirable in popular culture. Furthermore, the

media also manufactures an ideal type for women to model themselves upon. Men also consume media and receive constant reinforcement that reminds them what gender role women should be adopting and their overall position within society that conceptualises them as sexual objects. In many ways, media systems are reflective of the distribution of power and control (Gallagher,1979). In the sense that cultural agents or institutions contribute to the socialisation process within systems which are directed by political and economic imperatives, the mass media's role primarily serves the function of reinforcing definitions and identities set within a masculine framework.

McNair argues that representations of women in media previously served to reflect their subordinate position in a patriarchal society (McNair,2002). McNair suggests that the mainstreaming of sexuality via media channels such as art and culture reflects social change (McNair,2002) and has served to benefit women, freeing them to express themselves sexually (McNair,2002). Despite this claim, Attwood argues that media representations of sex continue to, paradoxically, promote sexual activity as an avenue in which women can please men (Attwood,2009) in accordance with stereotypical cultural norms of idealised femininity. Popular culture constantly serves to remind us that 'sexiness' is solely embodied by the cultivation of a specific kind of female form, one which is considered to appeal to heterosexual men – the physique which is slim, flawless and youthful (Gill,2009). This is the prototype which dancers claim must be upheld (Bott,2006), and additional, unpaid labour is undertaken to maintain this. Rachel, a UK dancer, provides an example of this by foregoing meals when she feels she is gaining weight (Bott,2006). Some dancers suffer

from eating disorders such as bulimia in an effort to maintain a specific body type (Wesely,2003). There is also a requirement amongst dancers who work in high-end venues to possess long hair, a cosmetically enhanced face, and to maintain constant vigilance over the removal of body hair (Bott,2006). This narrow definition of beauty that involves time and labour transcends across culture and populates the covers and content of mainstream male and female interest magazines. The merciless emphasis upon youth cannot result in work that could be considered as sustainable in the long-term, rather it offers a rather limited shelf life - women rarely continue to dance beyond their thirties (Bott, 2006). Older women who dance fear the aging process and often take desperate action in order to halt any signs of appearing older (Salutin,1971). There is also the inescapable fact that a long-term dancer may encounter problems obtaining alternative forms of employment due to the stigma that is applied to lap-dancing. What employment prospects do exist for women who are aging or do not (or cannot) maintain a look which satisfies the requirements of venues and customers remains a topic which is unexplored by the literature and adds to the precarious nature of lap-dancing labour.

### **Sexualised labour as a functional apparatus**

There are now a multitude of avenues in which a voyeur can observe the naked female. Options include pornography, seeing women naked as a result of participation within an intimate relationship (Frank,2003), popular cinema and so on. In order to understand why there continues to be a market for lap-

dancing, it is useful to turn to the theory of functionalism, and to consider that dancers do far more than simply physical work.

The Gentlemen's Club may go beyond its remit of providing entertainment for a predominantly heterosexual male audience (Frank,2003) for it concentrates on the facilitation of an environment where men are welcome to stay and enjoy the company of women for extended periods of time. As previously noted, in a society in which people are becoming increasingly individualised, time constrained individuals have less time to devote to relationships (consider the existence of commercial dating websites, for people 'on the go'). By commodifying intimacy, lap-dancing venues may perform an important role in a consumer society (Slater,1971), for individuals who are lacking emotional or sexual connections within other parts of their lives. This suggestion gains currency with the context of consumer capitalism, where anything can be obtained for a price. A single man can indulge himself in the attentions of an attractive woman who furnishes him with her personal and sexual acceptance (Frank,2003), which he may not receive outside the venue. Today's rapid pace of life, endemic within a capitalist culture, has assisted in the commodification of human emotion and intimacy (Giddens,1992). Recognising this, dancers provide an important service in respect of maintaining men's emotions.

Venues have been suggested to serve as a place where popular themes of appropriate forms of masculinity can be embraced. Connell defines 'masculinising practices' as actions that are governed by gendered regimes, endemic within everyday social relations, which have the effect of producing



masculinities within particular social settings and by certain social institutions (Connell, 2000). Venues also may help men to enhance their conceptions of their own financial power and status – which may be under threat (Faludi, 1993; Frank, 2003), due to the current recession occurring in the UK which has the effect of causing great financial anxiety within individuals and may threaten ideas about what it means to be a man (McDowell, 2003). The popularity of the stag party<sup>33</sup>, and its status as normal male behaviour (Frank, 2003) assists in the facilitation of ‘male bonding’. This is an environment they may not experience outside the venue. Interestingly, such parties are notorious in their treatment of dancers, with Frank finding that groups of men were far more likely to direct degrading comments at women and treat them as if they were not human beings with emotions (Frank, 2003). This phenomenon reveals insight into the hegemonic ideologies which exist outside the lap-dancing clubs pertaining to conceptions of how women should behave sexually and also how those who do not confirm to these ideals should be treated. The practice of degrading women in front of a group also assists in solidifying the customer’s status as male to his peers. Bizarrely, the men who featured in a study which was concerned with customers’ views were respectful in their treatment of lap-dancers when they were interacting with them on a one-to-one basis (Frank, 2003), suggesting that the act they put on in front of other men was related to widely held ideas about women.

I will not afford great attention to the potential exploitation of customers, for this is outside the remit of this thesis. However, it is worth noting that they could

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<sup>33</sup> The ‘stag party’ or ‘bachelor party’ as it is known in the US, refers to groups of men on a social night out, generally in advance of one attendee’s wedding ceremony.

also be considered to be exploited by venue owners. Bauman has noted that under capitalism, individuals are steered to desire particular lifestyles and commodities under the power of the mass media (Bauman,2000). This means that customers' seemingly free choice to visit lap-dancing venues may in part be orchestrated by what is ideologically associated with a masculinity in which the conquest of female sexuality is taken as a measure of success and esteem. Furthermore, the owner also capitalises on any need for emotional connection which may not be fulfilled elsewhere. The owner always benefits, as any visitor must pay them an entry fee regardless of whether a dance is bought, whereas women are not guaranteed to benefit from all customers.

The legal status of the venue offers a relatively safe and private space that men can use for relaxation (Frank,2003, Woods,2007,Liepe-Levinson,2002), providing them with an opportunity to escape from the stresses and strains of everyday life. Because customers do not have to perform in any way, the social interactions between men and women that exist outside do not apply in the same way to the customer-dancer relationship. Social norms and stereotypes about what is desirable and what is not evaporate in the venue, at least for the paying male customer; the same cannot be said for dancers who, as previously discussed, must labour to adhere to socially accepted standards of feminised beauty. One customer put it succinctly saying "There's no way you are going to get the cold shoulder...that's for sure...if you're bald, got a pot belly, some good looking girl's gonna come up and go, 'Hey, do you want me to dance for you?'" (Frank,2003;70). The venue allows men to escape the demands put

upon their physical self by society, for any man who provides custom is always desirable.

## **Summary**

This Chapter has addressed the sexualisation of Western culture and the underlying reasons that inform the generation of new attitudes. The Chapter has also looked at the ways in which the lap-dancing industry has emerged as somewhat more socially acceptable as a result of these shifts. Chapter Four considers theoretical perspectives which informs the generation of knowledge gleaned from participant's experiences, and provides arguments for the relevance of using socialist feminism and postfeminism in order to understand and explain the reasons for the shifts which have occurred in the lap-dancing industry in Scotland.

## **Chapter Four: Using theoretical perspectives to understand relationships within the lap-dancing industry**

Feminism was chosen as a theoretical framework which was used to assist in understanding women's experiences in the lap-dancing industry as it is focused on women's empowerment (Ramazanoglu,1989). Feminism has been instrumental in demonstrating how experiences can be understood by situating issues within a broader cultural context (Butler,1997), which was deemed useful considering the identified sexualisation of Western society. Foucault's work on power is also discussed, for his work is important in highlighting and understanding the complex nature of power relations. I now proceed to articulate the viewpoints of some branches of feminism. Socialist feminist theory was considered a particularly useful avenue from which women's experiences might be contextualised and understood due to its focus on both economic factors and gender relations.

### **Liberal feminism**

Liberal feminism is reformist in philosophy and so fails to seriously question the organisation of society (Ramazanoglu,1989). This is problematic since the way the lap-dancing industry is considered politically impacts upon the nature of the work. The theory is to be credited in its concentration upon the notion of women's ability as a group to demonstrate and maintain their equality with men within varying social structures through their own actions and choices. One of the liberals' political aims is to eradicate institutional bias and to campaign for

improved legislative policies. The liberal feminist then, might suggest that the formation of improved working conditions are what is required to address and correct the issues that can be found in Scotland's lap-dancing venues and that workers occupying the sex industry should be defined as "a labour(er) in a society permeated by class, gender, and racial inequalities" (Brock,2000;79). This acknowledgement that sex work is worthy of being viewed as labour must be credited, and reflects the opinions of many involved in the industry.

Liberal feminism's individualist assumptions have been attacked by critics, who argue that the stance ignores the underlying social structures and ideologies which disadvantage women - for example, in the case of lap-dancing, even if workplace regulations were to be improved and implemented, the influence of a wider patriarchal ideology and the over-riding pursuit of profit would continue to affect relationships inside the venue (Bryson,1999). In addition to this, liberal feminists have been critiqued for their tendency to argue on behalf of women who are in a position of power, to the detriment of addressing the situation of women of different ethnicities, cultures or social classes (Mills,1998). Mandell has also noted that the liberal ideology fails to address socially structured inequalities (Mandell,1995) such as patriarchy and capitalism. Liberal feminists have argued that the State fails to treat men and women in a neutral manner (Connell,1990). However, the enacting of fair policies for the regulation of venues by the State is unlikely to be enough to address the current imbalance of power that characterises them. This is because, as noted by more broadly by Foucault and also by radical and socialist feminists, power is not localised in one specific area, but also operates out-with it. As Connell notes, liberalism has

simply failed to grasp the character of gender as both an institutional and motivational system (Connell,1990), for the State plays a key role in establishing and regulating systems under which women are oppressed, for example, family/childcare provision and wage labour (Connell,1990). By taking into account some feminisms (McRobbie,2009), the State can appear to be gender-neutral (Connell,1990). Yet the failure of State actors to recognise the problematic nature in which lap-dancing venues are currently regulated as was demonstrated in Chapter Two can be considered to be a form of indirect oppression which allows owners to capitalise and exploit dancers.

### **Exploring the contributions of radical and Marxist feminism**

The ideas contained within radical feminist and Marxist feminist thought are directly concerned with power relations within sexual politics (Ramazanoglu, 1989). Marxist feminism is useful for conceptualising lap-dancing as a form of work, however socialist feminism goes beyond this, uniting the central elements of a Marxist understanding of power relations via capitalist relationships with the conception of patriarchy. In the view of socialist feminists, a combination of male supremacy and a capitalist economic system facilitates a climate in which women suffer oppression. Eisenstein argues that an adequate understanding must consider and highlight the mutually reinforcing relationships which exist between capitalist class structures and hierarchical sexual structuring (Eisenstein,1979). Rose notes that for Eisenstein, patriarchy operates across all facets of Western society - and although it is subject to shifts historically, its qualities endure, even if they take alternative forms (Rose,1986).

## Radical feminism

Radical feminists focus upon freeing women from what they consider to be the 'cage of femininity' (Tong,1989). For radicals, it is male domination via patriarchal systems, as opposed to societal conditions, which is responsible for the creation of oppressive gender roles and sexual behaviour (Tong,1989), and that it is sexuality via the dissemination of heterosexual norms which is the central locus of masculine control (MacKinnon,1982). Millet confronts a patriarchal sex/gender system, blaming this for women's secondary status as citizens to men (Tong,1989). Millet believes that ideologies that support patriarchy draw attention to and exaggerate biological differences between the sexes, which ensures that men will always assume the dominant or masculine role and women will occupy subordinate, or feminine roles (Tong,1989), hence the radical's disdain for normative femininity, which is imposed upon women as a tool of oppression by men (Walby,1990).

For the radical feminist, particular performances of femininity threatens to disempower women. In the venue, the performance of femininity can disadvantage women financially, as they undergo body work by purchasing commodities such as cosmetics and in some cases, undergoing procedures such as breast augmentation. These endeavours act to visually separate women and men in the venue, and assist in reinforcing the common ideology that they are 'naturally different', despite the fact that these differences, for example, long hair, slim waists and so on often involve unnatural labour in their construction (Conboy *et al*,1997). Using biology as an explanation for

oppression (Firestone, 1970), is somewhat problematic as such thinking (that men and women are 'naturally different') can easily be used to legitimate problematic customer behaviour and expectations upon dancers, for these supposed differences have been used to support male dominance (Caputi, 1999, Rose, 1986). Millet argues that patriarchal ideology is successful in exaggerating these 'differences', by considering masculinity as far superior to femininity (Tong, 1989).

Jeffreys (2009;3) considers lap-dancing as akin to pornography and a type of prostitution for it "involves the sexual use of women even when no touching takes place", encapsulating it as commercial sexual exploitation where power is exercised via the economic means of a male audience to gain sexual access to women. Jeffreys argues from a functional perspective that the existence and growth of lap-dancing venues in recent years serves the function of compensating men for 'lost privileges', thus allowing them a platform from which to reclaim power. She argues that venues are spaces that act to recreate gendered arenas for men which were attacked during second wave feminism (Jeffreys, 2009). This led to Feminist action addressing such obviously sexist practices, pressing for equal access to spaces such as public houses (Jeffreys, 2009). Jeffreys suggests that venues are a type of rebuttal against the advances that were made by feminism, for they provide spaces where men can network without including women - unless they are there purposefully to provide sexualised entertainment (Jeffreys, 2009). Jeffreys describes venues as locations of reasserting traditional forms of masculinity (Jeffreys, 2009). Jeffrey's arguments can be critiqued as they fail to seek to understand the wide



range of reasons for working in the industry, bulldozing all experiences into the binary category of gender exploitation. However, her argument that lap-dancing is indicative of a “harmful cultural practice” (Jeffreys,2009;10) allows for consideration of the potential impact of cultural change on the realities of working in the industry. Jeffreys argues that heterosexual desire is concentrated in power relations between the sexes and normally takes the form of eroticising the subordination of women (Jeffreys,1990). Jeffreys notes the move to relinquish payment for women’s stage performances and instead forcing them to pay for the right to work - however she fails to delve into an investigation of the changing economic and labour dynamics within an increasingly sexualised culture, despite acknowledging the active promotion of the industry (Jeffreys, 2009), instead focussing solely on dancers’ oppression. This represents a major weakness of radical analysis, for its binary analysis of gender relations stalls any consideration of understanding the changes under any other lens.

### **“The General Patriarch?”<sup>34</sup> : Exploring the role of the State**

The reluctance of the State to consider lap-dancing as a form of legitimate work leads to the idea that it does not equate to ‘real work’. Skeggs (1997) notes that the legitimisation of something is the key mechanism in the conversion to power. The ability to refer an activity as ‘work’ and to categorise it as skilled or unskilled has a gendered aspect to it, for female workers as a group are generally less powerful than male workers (Walby,1999) and are less likely to have a definition of their work as skilled viewed as such by an employer. Lap-dancing, due to the

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<sup>34</sup> (Mies,1986;26)

enduring stigma attached to the work and the State's refusal to acknowledge it as labour, can be considered to be disempowering with the job skills going unrecognised should dancers decide to apply for forms of legitimate work. As lap-dancing does not enjoy the symbolic capital that could be assigned to it if it was legitimated, women are denied access to benefits which are afforded to those considered employed by legislation.

A solely radical analysis can never consider sexualised labour to be work (Jeffreys,2009), which conflicts with voices of women who consider lap-dancing to be a form of labour (Vernon,2011). It would be inappropriate on both an ethical and explanatory basis then, to attempt to understand women's perspective using a staunchly radical viewpoint. Furthermore, radical feminists have been accused of making circumstances worse for women. Rubin charges them with applying condescending victim based stereotypes to women who work in the sex industry, with lap-dancers being labelled as victims of pornographers (Rubin,1993) and experiencing further societal stigmatisation arising from the constant suggestion that involvement in the sex industry is problematic. This only further problematises the complex issue of sex work, with Rubin arguing that increased stigma against the industry only serves to increase women's vulnerability (Rubin,1993).

It would be incorrect to suppose that all women who perform lap-dance are 'victims' who are automatically devoid of alternative options. Some women have acquired significant social capital and as a result, would be able to obtain alternate work if required. Dancers partaking in the AEWG research present

examples of this, possessing capital such as management experience (McQuaid *et al*, 2005). Those who view participation in the sex industry as a form of legitimate labour consider the benefits that the work can potentially offer, and do not automatically view it as something that is inherently exploitative. Sex work activists do not automatically view women as devoid of other choices. Groups such as the UKNSWP<sup>35</sup> seek to address any exploitative working conditions rather than campaign to eradicate the industry (UKNSWP, 2009), and their arguments are supported by those who are actively working in the sex industry.

### **Marxist feminism**

The critique of capitalism is most commonly associated with a Marxist analysis. Capitalism is generally considered to be an economic system whereby private actors are able to acquire, own and control property in accord with their own interests (Scott, 2006). It is essential in capitalism that there is a relationship between the owners of the means of production and those who sell their labour. Usually, formal employment is considered to form part of this exploitative relationship, however the relationship between self-contracted workers and owners can be relational to capitalism. The Marxist feminist, whilst acknowledging patriarchy, regards class inequalities as the explanatory factor behind women's oppression with patriarchy being the ideological 'off shoot' of class exploitation. For Marx, individuals are exploited by capitalists who accumulate wealth by paying workers a minimum amount. Marxist feminists

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<sup>35</sup> UK Network of Sex Work Projects

argue that capitalism embodies a system of power relations (Tong, 1989), and men's control over women exists only due to the after effect of capitalist control over labour.

Although self-contracted workers dancers are denied a wage, we can still understand the exploitation of their labour by owners - dancers are not guaranteed money from customers, and when they are, they are paid for the performance of the private lap-dance, and not for the often accompanying emotional work. The capitalist, or owner, obtains profit via dancers as a result of the provision of 'paying to work'. In addition, owners profit via the purchase of liquor and entry fees, which must be paid by customers who visit for the purposes of viewing women. The importance of the labour performed in terms of human energy and intelligence which is required to perform the emotional labour which dancers must engage in to earn is not acknowledged (Tong, 1989).

The Marxist analysis is not encompassing enough to understand this changing industry, for Marx was ignorant of gender dynamics - his focus surrounded capitalism and class exploitation and, as Eisenstein points out, the sole destruction of capitalist regimes would not automatically provide equality for women (Eisenstein, 1988). Labour such as lap-dancing is characterised not only by class and economic considerations but also around gendered and cultural norms, influenced by consumerism. A Marxist feminist analysis fails to adequately account for cultural changes and social norms which pervade popular culture and are often at odds with sexualisation. However such an

analysis is useful for understanding the alienation which some women experience as a result of capitalist demands - this is particularly obvious in Gentlemen's Clubs which strip women of their identity by placing demands upon how they express themselves via appearance and conduct, and also helps us to understand how women are increasingly alienated from each other as they focus upon income generation within an increasingly competitive environment.

It is also relevant to briefly consider Marx's concept of surplus labour in relation to the working relationship between owners and women. Surplus labour is the term used to describe additional labour which is performed in excess of the work necessary to provide a worker with their means of existence. So, in the case of lap-dancing, we can argue that the private dance encompasses a dancers' 'necessary labour' - she is paid directly for this work, and it forms her sole means of income - the means of her existence, to encapsulate Marx. Surplus labour tends to be viewed as additional, unpaid labour by Marxist economists (Morrison, 1995), and is the ultimate source of profit for the capitalist. We can then consider the unpaid forms of labour that dancers do then, such as body work, emotional labour and the unpaid public performance, as forms of surplus labour. The Marxist argument is that exploitation presents itself when the individuals who reap the benefits of surplus labour are different from the people who are performing the labour as he explains succinctly in *Capital*:

“The rate of surplus-value is...an exact expression for the degree of exploitation of labour-power by capital, or by the labour of the capitalist” (Marx, 1887, 2003; 203)

As property owners, owners are able to use their economic power to command the surplus labour of dancers, who have no choice but to work in an establishment in order to sell private dances specifically. Marx argued that workers add to the amount of value on their work in excess of the monetary value of his/her wages - this being their surplus labour. Here is the point where lap-dancing labour can be viewed as additionally exploitative, since unlike in waged labour, owners are not obliged to pay dancers for their labour - rather, women must pay them to hire the property in order to sell the products of their labour - their emotional and embodied work. This advantages owners as there is effectively no economic cost to them; unless the owner *chooses* to feed a percentage of the accumulated profit back into the maintenance of the venue. The notion of choice can also relate to economic power - owners can choose to provide a comfortable and safe working environment, whereas dancers must comply with payment of house fees and commission.

### **Socialist feminism**

Socialist feminism, also referred to as dual systems theory (Pilcher, 1999) considers both economic factors and gender relations, which it regards as playing an equal role in women's oppression (Tong, 1989). Dual systems theory has been used with abandon by a number of commentators - and with little consistency. Some authors employ varying terminologies to refer to capitalism

and patriarchy, such as 'mode of production' and 'mode of reproduction' (Young, 1980). It is for reasons of clarity that I avoid adopting the term in this thesis.

Socialist feminism is a complex theoretical component of feminism, featuring two separate and conflicting modes of understanding. As identified, one of these modes is dual systems theory. Dualism regards capitalism and patriarchy as relatively autonomous entities of domination (Rose, 1986) and when they combine, they produce systems which oppress women (Tong, 1989). The unified systems theorist believes that capitalism and patriarchy exist as one entity and cannot be understood separately (Tong, 1989). For example, Mitchell argues that the ideology of patriarchy will contaminate gender relationships no matter how fair they are designed to be (Mitchell, 1974). Lewis has pointed out that patriarchal ideology and capitalism are now thoroughly intertwined (Lewis, 1985), and so it is very difficult to consider one without also considering the other. Such considerations have occurred within the US lap-dancing industry - despite a successful campaign for a worker's union in San Francisco's *Lusty Lady* venue, which successfully addressed a host of problematic working conditions (Brooks, 2001), racist practices continued to endure. These practices served to financially disadvantage non-white dancers, by refusing them adequate opportunities to work in the more financially lucrative 'Private Pleasures' area. This, according to the female management, who were former lap-dancers themselves, was due to their expectation that men would not be willing to pay as much to see a Black dancer perform (Brooks, 2001). Here, cultural racism which is relational to white supremacy and desire for profit rose

above providing a fair working space for *all* dancers - and all shows that women are quite capable of oppressing each other.

Connell views the sexual division of labour as a contributory part of a gender structured system of production, consumption and distribution (Connell,1987). Capitalism was to a degree, born from the opportunities for power and profit created by unequal gender relations, and this, according to Connell, continues to be the case (Connell,1987). This argument supports considering patriarchy and capitalism as separate but complimentary movements, because patriarchal systems existed before the development of capitalism, albeit in a differential form as Abbott and Wallace note (Abbott and Wallace,1990). Hartmann has also argued that patriarchal regimes have predated capitalism (Rose,1986). Whereas previously, patriarchal ideology served to relegate women to the household, the merging of patriarchy and the requirement for profit under capitalism - bolstered by a sexualised culture - has resulted in the exploitative working environment that can be observed in venues. Eisenstein supports this observation, arguing that while patriarchy shifts historically, some universal qualities are maintained - even if they are radically re-defined (Rose,1989).

For Hartmann, the present situation of women in the labour market and the current arrangement of sex-segregated jobs is the result of a long process of interaction between patriarchy and capitalism (Hartmann,1979). Capitalism is considered to be a mode of production which grew from the established patriarchal order, in response to primitive accumulation which forged ripe conditions for the expansion of the scale of production. This occurred by



removing people from their means of subsistence (e.g. farm workers) and making them reliant upon wage labour, and by accumulating large amounts of capital via the growth of smaller capitals (Hartmann,1979). This statement requires clarification, and I will do so within the context of the venue. Marx also notes the phenomenon of many small capitals accumulating into larger capitals, commenting that "...every new accumulation becomes the means of a new accumulation" (Marx,1887; 690-691). In the venue, this can be related to the dancers who operate as 'individual and thus smaller' capitals - each contributing to the owners' overall capital (this is the large capital) by paying to work. The owner accumulates substantial capital via the process of collecting revenue from individual workers (smaller capitals). As noted previously, revenue is all collected from customers who pay entry fees to come into contact with workers. Marx refers to this as the centralisation of capital in contradistinction to accumulation and concentration (Marx,1887). The two most important processes by which capitalistic strategies develop are concentration and centralisation of capital (Bukharin,1972). The concentration of capital relates to the increase of capital as a result of the capitalisation of surplus value (e.g. the emotional labour and other unpaid work provided by dancers) and the centralisation of capital refers to the connecting of various individual capital 'units', or in this case, lap-dancers, who form one large unit (lap-dancers as a group) which owners profit from. In *Capital*, Marx discussed the property market and argued that... "Capital aggregates into great masses in one hand because, elsewhere, it is taken out of my hands" (Marx,1887; 690-691). In the venue, women's labour must be performed in the context of a venue purposefully designed and marketed for the sale of sexualised entertainment. Simply, the

individual dancer cannot accumulate her own capital by selling her sexualised labour alone - she needs the venue in order to obtain custom. Thus Marx's observation is relevant as we see the partial transfer of capital as the dancer has no other option but to pay to work in venues in order to sell her lap-dancing labour.

Hartmann suggests that the prior existence of a patriarchal ideology paved the way for a gender-unequal capitalist system. Hartmann argues that patriarchy shapes the form modern capitalism takes (Hartmann, 1979). Hartmann points out that Marxist feminists focus too greatly upon job segregation denoted by class, ignoring the effect of pre-existing patriarchal social relations (Hartmann, 1979). It is clear that lap-dancing venues are segregated by gender - and this is a tactic used by capitalists in the general labour market (Hartmann, 1979, Pilcher, 1999), alongside dividing people by age, class and ethnicity, yet the effect of culture cannot be ignored. Indeed, Hartmann calls upon the need to make basic changes at all levels of society and culture in order to facilitate equality for women (Hartmann, 1979). Eisenstein relates the actions of the State to a centralised locus of power, and challenges the belief held by Foucault that the State acts as a mediator between various conflicting sites of power struggles and competing discourses (Faith, 1994). Eisenstein argues that "without some notion of unity and centrality, we cannot conceptualise hierarchy or the inequality of difference(s)" (Eisenstein, 1988; 10, 19). But Foucault himself has noted that even "the State can only operate upon the doctrine of already existing power relations" (Foucault, 1984; 64). Even though Foucault believes

the State is there to act as a mediator, it cannot escape its connection to the bolstering of the power relations which exist within a society.

Power is analysed in socialist feminist thought via class origins and patriarchal roots (Eisenstein, 1988). Women's oppression occurs from her exploitation as a wage-labourer (however in the case of the lap-dancing industry exploitation operates on what can be considered more problematic basis, due to the omission of a guaranteed income), and also from the relations that define gender under the patriarchal sexual hierarchy. Eisenstein lists the role of mother, domestic labourer, and of particular relevance to the lap-dancing industry, women's role as consumers within a capitalist system (Eisenstein, 1988). Eisenstein believes that patriarchy and capitalism are separate entities but are mutually reinforcing (Eisenstein, 1988). However, socialist feminism exposes its weakness in declaring that there are only two types of labour in capitalism - wage labour, and domestic labour (Eisenstein, 1988), completely ignoring the provision of services.

### **Foucault and Power**

Foucault also offers ways in which power can be understood. In *The History of Sexuality*, he introduces new ways of conceptualising and theorising power, arguing that "We're never trapped by power, it's always possible to modify its hold, in determined conditions and following a precise strategy" (Foucault, 1980b; 13). Foucault's work allows us to consider that power is never static and is constantly subject to change. Women may employ a variety of tactics to

resist exploitation, such as the unionisation of workers at 'Starlet's' lap-dancing bar (Colosi, 2009). Foucault introduces a view of power that is multi-faceted, suggesting that it should be theorised from beyond the constraints of obvious locuses of power such as the State and class. Foucault acknowledges the juridico-discursive model of power, which views authority as disseminated via class, legislation, the economy and other macro-scale social structures in society, and accepts that these forms of power should not be discounted (Sawicki, 1991) - but for Foucault, power relations are also embedded within the microstructures of society (Sawicki, 1991). Because power appears to be completely dispersed across the micro-level, it is considered to be more coercive in nature than that wielded in an obvious fashion, such as power exercised by the State. Its dispersal assists as a form of camouflage, failing to acknowledge the attitudes cultivated which contribute towards oppression. As such, the power is not obvious. For Foucault, micro-power is more productive than obvious, repressive power, for it produces docile bodies. Consider how certain institutional and disciplinary practices have not only rendered individuals more mouldable to control, but have also served to empower them, one example being beautification rituals that lap-dancers and other women engage in (Dahaner *et al*, 2002). The woman who engages in beautification may well enjoy the process for individuals must engage and participate in their own domination, in order for control to be most effective (Sawicki, 1991). However, her appearance is ultimately controlled by the requirements of a male privileged society and by a globalised beauty industry. This power occurs during individual behaviour and norms in wider society which normalise some physical

appearances over others. The very fact that this domination is not obvious increases the grip of power over the individual.

Foucault suggests that power wielded from micro levels in society is actually more coercive than power wielded at the macro level due to the heterogeneous assembling of micro level power relations. Foucault reveals how micro systems of domination make possible macro systems of control such as the class state or the existence of patriarchal power (Sawicki,1991). Furthermore, Foucault thought that rather than systems of discipline being specifically created by those in power, they originate out with these groups – but are actively engaged with once their utility is discovered (Sawicki,1991). Returning to the venue, owners create disciplinary systems as a result of seeing the benefits they offer. The opportunity to possess this power arises from historical changes (Sawicki, 1991), for example the mainstreaming of the sex market, contributing to more women being willing to work in venues, resulting in a more disposable pool of workers and an economic climate in which some women may have few alternative options.

Disciplinary power can be observed upon the body of the subject. Cosmetic and other procedures designed to mould the body act as a type of ‘gender branding’, examples being women engage in beautification or punishing exercise regimes in order to achieve a particular type of feminised body. Discipline can also be viewed in gendered behaviours that are acted out, sometimes without prior thought (Danaher,2000). Behaviours show and reflect the allegiance to norms and expectations (Butler,1997). These behaviours are

endemic within lap-dancing venues, and particularly so in Gentlemen's Clubs where the maintenance of a hyper sexualised ideal is considered to be absolutely essential for making money from the work (Bradley,2008). Discipline as Foucault views it is articulated via the verb to perform, and also as the noun, which pertains to a set of required qualities which must be met in order to be recognised within a situation (Danaher,2000). Both variations of discipline occur in the venue – women perform according to hegemonic norms of femininity specific to the culture they occupy and tailor their acts and appearance, dependent on what they believe the customer is looking for. A dancer in Trautner's study chose to wear biker style outfits when working in the evening, as motorcyclists visited (Trautner,2005). This provides an example of women utilising stereotypes in order to attract customers.

### **Postfeminism, cultural change and the new Backlash**

McRobbie's (2009) work on postfeminism is useful for explaining the underlying reasons for cultural change and how these changes have impacted upon gender relations. McRobbie (2009) suggests that consumer culture has acted as a regulatory mechanism which obstructs the emergence of a new women's movement which might pose a threat to established power hierarchies and gender relations. Thus we can consider the possibility that the sexualisation of culture may have manifested new forms of oppression for women within venues. McRobbie's analysis argues that it is consumer culture which plays an essential part in the unravelling of feminist consciousness (McRobbie,2009). McRobbie critiques so-called progressive social change which, she argues,

operates under an illusion of positive progress whilst locking women into 'new-old' dependancies and anxieties (McRobbie,2009), and suggests that themes prevalent in popular culture operate in such a way that undermines the gains made by feminist thought (McRobbie,2009).

Norms of idealised femininity abound within consumer culture (McRobbie, 2009), and are amplified in the lap-dancing venue. McRobbie (2009) cites the British Medical Association who in 2000 noted that "today's young woman is expected to strive for perfection in all spheres...achieving and maintaining a feminine identity doubly compromises the mental health of females". The official acknowledgement that seeking a feminine identity can result in mental illness (McRobbie,2009) is, rather than viewed as societal influence which is potentially problematic, considered as almost acceptable (McRobbie,2009). McRobbie suggests that social regulation works to normalise this postfeminist phenomenon in order to divert questions being raised as to the true nature of women's apparent equality (McRobbie,2009). Viewing the lap-dancing venue this way allows for a critique of the existence of the workplace for it is a form of labour which openly involves subscribing to amplified cultural norms of beauty in order to earn money - even when these norms may threaten mental health. McRobbie provides an up to date take upon Foucault's panopticon. Using the Deleuzian term 'luminosity' (McRobbie,2009) she refers to a regulatory 'spotlight' which softens, dramatises and disguises the regulatory dynamics (McRobbie,2009) which pervade Western popular culture. I would suggest that the panopticon continues to present the most accurate way of theorising the regulatory power held over dancers in all regards - not solely appearance - by

owners, however luminosity is appropriate for considering the power popular culture and sexualised norms have upon women out with the venue, for it captures the underhand coercion upon the body which is tended to by engaging in beautification regimes.

It is within the commercial domain that processes of gender change are most observable. For McRobbie, femininity is something which is viewed as progressive but at the same time fosters 'reassuring' femininities. Underpinning these practices, McRobbie, argues, is the ideology that the battle for equality has been won, and that women as a social group have now become established as a population which is worthy of State consideration. Due to this, there now exists no obvious and apparent need to critique hegemonic masculinities which continue to prevail (McRobbie,2009). Operating under the facade that feminist thought is 'passé', no longer relevant and something today's young woman is actively aware of, there is the expectation that women should be independent and self-reliant (Budgeon,2001,Harris,2004) and thus actively support a consumer capitalist society, where individual consumption is necessary for its continued existence (Bauman,1992). McRobbie (2009) observes that a 'certain kind' of feminism is taken into account by the State in order to claim that the interests of women are being addressed within policy. This is observable within the AEWG report in the sense that it is dominated by women's groups who adopt an anti sex industry perspective. Although the opinions of some feminist groups are taken into account, not all are. It is interesting then, that policy considers the input of some feminist voices, thus satisfying McRobbie's observation that some types of feminism are 'taken into



account'. However, O'Connell-Davidson warns of the dangers inherent for feminist groups who choose to align themselves with agents of the State. Referring to prostitution, she observes that feminist groups which seek to abolish prostitution have been swift to fashion alliances with policy makers (O'Connell-Davidson, 2003). What is particularly relevant is her noting that abolitionist groups tend to ignore questions pertaining to supply and demand which affects all markets, and that markets (in O'Connell-Davidson's case, prostitution, and in this thesis, commercial lap-dancing) cannot be understood as divorced from the broader social, economic, political and institutional context in which they take place (O'Connell-Davidson, 2003) - the State in effect has a part to play in what is sold - and under what terms (O'Connell-Davidson, 2003). The State plays an important role in shaping the consumption of commercial sex and sexualised services by permitting or tolerating certain types of consumption and by endorsing, perpetuating or promoting the social divisions and status hierarchies that exist. We cannot ignore the fact that patriarchal structures inform economic and political power and agenda (Gamman and Marshment, 1988). For example, in the labour market, discourses which relegate women as the primary carer of children (Ramazanoglu, 1989) are but one factor which disadvantages women's options in the labour market and steers them towards particular forms of work over others. Furthermore, it is crucial to bear in mind that feminist political action against the sex industry is also action against working women who are part of the industry under attack (Ramazanoglu, 1989), and the agreed idea of a specific feminist political line can serve to instantly highlight the differences between women (Ramazanoglu, 1989).

## **Summary**

To summarise, this Chapter has discussed liberal, radical, socialist and postmodern feminist theories, considering ways in which they might be used in order to understand the changing nature of the Scottish lap-dancing industry. Foucault's contribution towards the understanding of power has also been addressed. Chapter Five documents the study's methodological design and subsequent fieldwork journey which took place in order to discover women's experiences at work.

## Chapter Five: Methodology

This Chapter outlines and justifies the methods and methodology that were utilised to identify the experiences of lap-dancers. In order to formulate an understanding, the interview schedule<sup>36</sup> was designed to address the following questions:

- How do women enter lap-dancing work?
- What were their motivations for beginning the work?
- What is the nature of the working environment for women in Scottish venues?
- Do women's experiences differ across venues and/or geographical locations?
- What are the women's perceptions of the ways they are viewed and treated by others in the venue?
- Has the nature and enjoyment of the work altered across time?
- Have changing ways in which Western society views sex and sexuality impacted upon women's identities as dancers and their experiences of working in venues?

In addition to the understanding obtained from women's voices, I also acknowledge and reflect upon the fact that my own involvement in the industry, which, although unplanned, assisted in the shaping of the findings and conclusions made by this thesis. Together with data collected from interviews, the observations I made and the experience gained whilst working was

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<sup>36</sup> An overview of topics addressed is provided in Appendix D.

instrumental in understanding the nature of the industry as it currently operates, and these experiences are revealed, where appropriate, in the findings.

Most interview analyses afford little time exploring individual biographies beyond each person's contribution to the research project as a whole, with the exception of life histories (Price-Glynn,2010). Including some biographical information on the dancers affords the thesis more of a participant-centred focus. Thus, I afford space within this Chapter to document each participant's story.

### **The fieldwork process**

The fieldwork process commenced in January 2010, upon receiving formal ethical clearance from the School of Applied Social Science at the University of Stirling. Four months into the data collection process I felt it was important that I gain a personal understanding of the reality of the work and as a result I became a lap-dancer at the venue I afford the pseudonym of Supernova. I worked there during 2010, leaving the industry in August of that year. I acknowledge that my involvement in the industry transpired into an unplanned component of the methodology and as a result ascribe space within this chapter pertaining to the impact this involvement had upon the findings and sample of participants obtained.

By involving myself in the work, I join other researchers who left the constraints of their offices behind, becoming actively engaged in the sex industry (Sanders,

2006a). Partaking in the labour allowed me to gain an intimate understanding of part of the industry, and provided me with valuable insight into working practices and terminology which may otherwise have taken months to learn (Colosi,2008). My experience of working in Supernova allowed me to become familiar with the working environment which existed inside this particular venue, and it was a consequence of my involvement that I found myself in the privileged position of being able to offer dancers the opportunity to take part in the study once I had ceased working as a result of the contacts I had made whilst there. These contacts impacted upon the research sample. Most of the participants have worked in Supernova, and the majority of them spoke in-depth about their working experience at this venue - although their transcripts also provide experiences of working in other venues. Although not part of my initial research design, my own industry involvement, the impact it had on the sample and the fact that, as a worker, I was able to observe and experience industry workings first-hand was central to my understanding. In order to show this I have, where appropriate, included extracts from a diary I kept whilst I was working at Supernova. Although I may be accused of facilitating sampling bias, every effort had been made to obtain a more far-reaching sample of women who were currently working at other venues in addition to Supernova, as will be demonstrated in this Chapter. On reflection, I am unsure a research sample would have been possible at all without my own industry involvement, as is shown in the attempts I made to recruit a sample before taking to the pole myself, which are documented in this Chapter.

## **Rationale supporting a feminist inspired methodology**

Feminist thought has been heavily influential in the construction of research design since the 1970's (Aull-Davies,2008). Stanley argues that feminist research is essentially 'research by women' (Stanley,1982). For Black, feminist research "insists upon the value of subjectivity and personal experience" (Black, 1989; 75). In addition, Smith has called for academics to design their research with women in mind – specifically, a 'Sociology for Women' in which findings are produced with which respondents can identify (Smith,1987). I have attempted to answer this call within the research design.

The overall flexibility offered by adopting a feminist inspired strategy was useful for the purposes of conducting this study and led me to opt for utilising a feminist standpoint epistemology. One of the central components that feminist methodologies are committed to is the uncovering and subsequent analysis of power relations. Standpoint theorists Smith and Hartsock view women's experience as critical to the production of knowledge of male power (Ramazanoglu and Holland,2002). Consistent with feminist social research (Wesley, 2008) I acknowledge that participants' experiences cannot be packaged neatly into uniform categories (Abbott and Wallace,1990), and instead unveil a complex, and sometimes contradictory, multitude of experiences, which provide a snapshot of the working reality for the women I have interviewed. I was also able to acknowledge the complexity of power relations, for example by considering power as a means by which women resist oppression at work - and also how they negotiate power with each other.

The feminist methodology this study subscribes to recognises the benefits inherent in understanding the world from the perspective of hearing others' stories. I decided that a study which aimed to uncover women's own experiences and emotions would best be served by a methodology which aimed to conceptualise women's own lived experiences at work, and uses their own interpretations of the meaning of their experiences in order to understand to the greatest extent possible what the reality is for them. Ramazanglu and Holland celebrate feminist research which embarks upon knowledge generation that is concentrated in understanding women's experiences (Ramazanglu and Holland,2002), and argue that these voices can be related to wider gender and power relations and the patterns of institutional dominance that permeate popular culture (Ramazanglu and Holland,2002), impacting upon human experiences.

Colosi's sample of lap-dancers appreciated the opportunity to allow their own voices and opinions surrounding their experiences to be heard (Colosi,2008). This is particularly relevant within an area in which binary arguments pertaining to women's experiences are portrayed by the mass media and groups such as 'The Christian Institute' (Colosi,2008) – specifically, by those who do not and have not worked as lap-dancers themselves. Even more recently, writers such as Hakim have enjoyed media publicity, discussing the 'realities' of the industry - despite never having experienced it for herself (Hakim,2011). When women's voices are heard, they tend to be selectively picked (Colosi,2008) and represent the ideological views of the groups presenting the information. Whilst this thesis

aims not to underplay problems inherent in women's working experiences, the aim was to create a platform in which *all* views can be voiced and to present findings in a balanced and accurate fashion. Thus, although the findings draw attention to changes which have impacted upon women negatively, positive sentiments pertaining to their carrying out the labour are also included in the findings. Shaver argues that, as with any line of work, the reality is that women experience a combination of experiences, some negative, and others positive. Treating women as a homogenous entity, common in many commentaries (Shaver,2005) masks the real lived experiences of individuals.

The interview technique, which is discussed in greater detail in the later stages of this chapter, reflects a commitment to feminist research methods. During her study of female hospital workers, Sexton wanted to discover the realities of the job for the women. To do this, Sexton, herself a feminist researcher, felt she needed to generate more intimate theories about the realities of this type of labour. She did this by treating her participants as actual people – not simply subjects under study. Participants were asked “Who are you?” “What do you do?” and “What issues trouble you?” (Sexton,1982; 5). These were all issues I wanted to discover more about. Thus, participants were also asked about themselves in relation to their working lives and crucially what, if anything, they wanted to change about their occupation.

Feminist standpoint epistemology is grounded in producing knowledge from experience so involves connecting feminist knowledge with the multitude of experiences felt by women and applying them to the lived realities of gendered



social relations (Ramazanoglu and Holland,2002). By grounding knowledge in the experiences and emotions of women, I provide an insight into what is 'real' (Ramazanoglu and Holland,2002). I use these realities to generate conclusions regarding the nature of the lap-dancing industry for women at the moment. However, like all methods of social inquiry, feminist epistemologies that are grounded in experience are subject to critique. Hammersley and Gomm have criticised the emancipatory character of such research, proclaiming that there is a need to protect 'the truth' from the bias that, for them, characterises research which has both practical and political themes (Hammersley and Gomm,1997). Hammersley and Gomm argue that "truth is the only value that constitutes the goal of research" (Hammersley and Gomm,1997: 4.12). I refute this argument by questioning Hammersley and Gomm's notion of truth by asking 'whose truth?' This study considers the notion of truth in relation to participants' voices. Harding (1993) believes that research queries should be grounded in the experiences of those who are ignored by dominant ideologies. Individuals and groups who possess power, such as policy makers and popular forms of media, dominate the production of accessible 'knowledge' (Harding, 1993), and so can be suggested to be proclaimers of 'truth' pertaining to a particular issue whilst failing to 'discursively appropriate' the truth of what is, as Smith argues "known in the doing" (Smith,1997;394-395). Here lies a further argument for justifying the existence of this study since women's voices are not given adequate commentary in the formation of official policy that impacts upon their experiences in the workplace. Furthermore, research grounded in experience can be scientific. The Marxist methodology of material dialectics (Ramazanoglu and Holland,2002) holds the view that all attempts to produce

knowledge of social life are political, but those who are politically committed can still produce scientific research by connecting ideas and experience to macro realities (Griffiths,1995, Stanley,1982). In this perspective, taking an objective stance, such as that trumpeted by Hammersley and Gomm, is problematic since attempts to remain objective obscures the real relationship that exists between knowledge articulated through experience and power. Marx, in his attack on capitalism, managed to produce actual, lived connections between observations of workers' lives, his own theories of labour exploitation and the underlying catalyst of profit generation. By blending theory and experience, Marx was able to unearth hidden social, economic and power relations which existed and impacted upon people (Ramazanoglu and Holland,2002).

I acknowledge the use of theory is essential in the production of sound social scientific knowledge, however to focus only on this at the expense of experience is to deny, and thus silence, women's voices. Thus, the findings are informed by participants, with theory used to gain an academic understanding of their experiences. I demonstrate the scientific element of this study by linking women's experiences at work to the micro facts of how the venues operate and the macro cultural and economic contexts which have facilitated the shift in working conditions. In order to gain an understanding of workplace shifts I am reliant upon knowledge that is historically available to me (Cain,1986). By speaking to women in order to gain an idea of the experience of work previously, I can then seek to understand the changes that have taken place both within the venues and outside them. Participants who have been dancing for a number of years were instrumental in helping to facilitate this

understanding. It is acknowledged that knowledge obtained from taking a feminist standpoint will always be partial in nature; although there can be opportunities for the formation of local, regional or even global knowledge, this form of understanding is not suitable for generating one universal discourse (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). This study generates knowledge that relates to the working conditions within the lap-dancing industry on a local (Scottish) scale – yet is relational to outside macro impacts outside the venue.

### **Recruiting respondents**

Initially, I had hoped to interview approximately twenty women who were lap-dancing in Scotland or had left the work within one year, using qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Interviews were chosen as a means of gathering data as I hoped they would allow women space and privacy to talk. Involvement within the time period of one year was deemed as sufficiently recent to accurately capture the experiences of working as they are currently perceived. I aimed to speak to women who had worked in venues across Scotland, as this would allow me to understand any differences in the nature of working realities across geographical location and also by the target audience each venue seeks to attract in terms of the social status of clientele. This number was chosen as it was deemed realistic for the purposes of the project and also takes into account the rich, in-depth data that can be obtained during semi-structured interviews. I allowed myself a period of ten months for data collection. The recruitment phase ended in December 2010, by which time I had obtained thirteen interviews with women who were either dancing or had recently left the

occupation. In addition, secondary interviews were conducted with four women, and I also was given the rare opportunity to interview the owner of a venue. The opportunities to engage in follow-up interviews and interview an owner arose as a result of the fact that, by this point, I was known as an industry insider. This opportunity to speak to the owner was taken up, for although the opinions of one individual cannot be viewed as representative, excerpts of the interview are used where appropriate to assist in the contextualisation of the findings.

Furthermore, knowledge pertaining to the opinions of owners in Scotland is limited and it can be argued that the insight provided by this thesis, although limited, may pave the way for further enquiries into the perceptions of owners.

The inclusion of the owner and follow-up interviews brought the total number of interviews to eighteen. Nine of the thirteen women interviewed had five or more years experience working in the industry, and eighteen venues were discussed during the course of interviews<sup>37</sup>. I maintain that every effort was made to promote participation in the study prior to my involvement, via a range of avenues which I now proceed to discuss.

### **Recruiting respondents: Utilising popular media**

In order to access my target population, I employed a number of methods.

Given the potential recruitment opportunities the Internet can offer (Aull-Davies, 2008) I designed and created a website which was given the address <http://www.lapdancingstudy.co.uk>. The website was designed to be user friendly.

Utilising a website was innovative as it recognised the popularity of Internet

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<sup>37</sup> Please see Appendix A for an overview of the venues.

usage in modern society and provided an online resource for women to discover more about the study and what would be asked from them. Critically, the website allowed me to introduce myself to potential participants and offer them information regarding my personal and professional commitment to confidentiality, such as emphasising that pseudonyms selected by the women will be used, with any identifying information omitted from the thesis. It was essential that it was made clear to potential respondents that their privacy and confidentiality would be protected, due to the stigmatising labels attached to the behaviours of those involved (Shaver,2005).

The website allowed women to submit an enquiry form via email. The form allowed them to provide me with their contact details, and provided space for any questions they might have wanted to ask that had not been addressed by the site's content. In addition, it offered the opportunity for women to view the informed consent form in advance. I also provided some information pertaining to what women would be asked about should they choose to take part. This, I hoped, would reduce any anxiety felt by those who were considering their involvement in the study. It was emphasised that participants were completely free to opt out of answering questions which they did not, for whatever reason, want to answer.

As a further promotional strategy, I placed advertisements in student newspapers in Edinburgh and Glasgow. I decided this would be a strategy worth pursuing considering that educational institutions contain an accessible population of younger women who may be working in the lap-dancing industry

in order to support themselves financially whilst studying. Additionally, recent academic and anecdotal research based in the UK have indicated that students may be increasingly more likely to consider working in commercial sex work, in order to fund their studies (BBC News Online,2002/2003/2010,Harrison,2009, Jenkins,2005,Roberts *et al*, 2010,Davis,2011). The advertisements encouraged a number of enquiries however the majority of interviews conducted for this study arose as a result of my own contacts that were obtained after leaving Supernova. Personal contacts out-with the industry communicated the website to two dancers they knew, who contacted me after viewing the website.

Community based websites concentrating around the industry also offered a potential gateway to accessing participants. I posted on a number of forums where dancers discuss their work, which also allowed me to transmit information regarding the study. Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain participants utilising this avenue, although it is difficult to ascertain exactly why. Reasons could include a lack of women using the Internet in this way, certainly, active usage by users based in Scotland appeared extremely low. Interestingly, my attempts to communicate the research were challenged by one forum user, who accused me of being a 'journalist' rather than a researcher. Although I went to great lengths to explain my presence, this provides an interesting insight into the suspicion that researchers encounter when attempting to research the lap-dancing industry, which Colosi has also noted (Colosi,2008).

I had also considered the possibility of approaching venues in order to promote the study, however, researchers who seek to simply enter lap-dancing venues

in the hope of gaining straightforward access often find that their efforts prove to be futile. Colosi reveals how some dancers at the venue she worked in greeted a female academic who wanted to interview them with suspicion – and even speculated that this ‘outsider’ may actually be an undercover journalist (Colosi, 2008). A similar situation presented itself during my own recruitment strategy. I made contact with a venue in Aberdeen in the hope of passing on information about the study to women. Although the owner was helpful, I was informed that women were suspicious of those claiming to be researchers, for fear their interview transcripts would be in some way used against them. These misgivings are understandable, considering that the Scottish research reports conducted by the AEWG and Bindel both employed covert methods (Scottish Executive, 2006a, Bindel,2004) which are fraught with ethical difficulties (Churchill and Sanders,2007) due to the importance of informed consent and individual’s right to voluntary participation.

### **Grappling with ‘messy’ reality of sampling a ‘deviant’ community**

No set of research methods can ever claim to be completely methodologically sound, and it must be acknowledged that assumptions and limitations characterise all social research processes (May,1993). Utilising a snowball technique is useful when one’s research sample is difficult to reach, or is considered to be involved in deviant activities, and involves making a connection with one person in order to filter information about a study to others (Palys,1997). Unfortunately, snowballing can be viewed as problematic as the initial contacts may well influence the sample obtained (Palys,2007). The actual

collection of the data is no exception, and the technique has been used by others researching deviant communities (Faugier and Sargeant, 1997). The opportunity to interview Felicity arose due to her hearing positive comments about the interview process from one of her colleagues, who I had asked to tell other dancers about the study. Problems regarding sampling are endemic with sex industry research, with enquirers constantly struggling with the actual size and boundaries of the population (Shaver, 2005). Because I had worked in Supernova, the contact details I had for dancers predominately come from women who worked there, who knew me and were comfortable passing on information about the study. As a result, this study has operated using non-probability sampling. Unlike probability sampling, there are no ways of estimating the chances of relevant individuals being included in the sample – there is no guarantee that every person relevant to the study has a chance of being studied at all (Burgess, 1991). Obviously, it was impossible for me to offer all lap-dancers across Scotland the chance to take part in this inquiry although I did attempt to ensure the dancing community was aware of the study by using the methods previously discussed.

A consumer of many published academic works would be forgiven for believing the research process constitutes a relatively smooth journey, with only slight overlapping between the various stages (Aull-Davies, 2008). This idealistic way of presenting findings may make for comfortable reading, however it does downplay the often chaotic, messy and unplanned nature of social research (Bell and Newby, 1977, Berreman, 1962). Unfortunately, researchers have been reluctant to report on the many issues that can present themselves when



conducting research on aspects relating to the sex industry (Sanders,2006a). Aull-Davies observes that researchers may have to respond to situations as they arise throughout the research journey – situations which may challenge the original research plan (Aull-Davies,2008). I experienced this first hand when recruiting participants; the original plan was to take a more detached stance, recruiting dancers via the recruitment avenues previously discussed. What transpired was that the majority of the participants were obtained via contacts I had made as a result of my own involvement - something that I never originally envisaged doing. Aull-Davis' quote reflects the nature in which my sample of participants was derived. My recruitment process could be viewed as an example of opportunistic sampling, where the researcher selects individuals based on their willingness to cooperate by taking part in the study (Burgess, 1991). The ramification of my utilising this option is that my study is more narrowly focussed around the working experiences dancers obtained at Supernova rather than being an overview of experiences derived from working in venues across Scotland. Despite this, the majority of my sample have worked in other Scottish venues, though they were keen to concentrate on their experiences of working at Supernova. On two occasions I conducted interviews with dancers who were working at another venue but had also worked at Supernova for an extended period of time. As noted previously, it was an unexpected benefit that I was able to speak to women who had worked in the industry for a significant period of time, enabling me to report upon the experiences of those who have actually worked through and experienced the shifts. Again this is an example of what can transpire during the fieldwork journey. Upon reflection, the inclusion of a high proportion of women who had

danced for some time was critical in the development of understanding the changes, for those participants who had not danced for an extended period, nor I, would have direct experience of the industry before the alterations. The participation of longer-term dancers allowed me to shed some light on the changes. The secondary interviews came about as a result of the rapport which developed between participants and myself during primary interviews, as a result of my own experience and understandings of the work helping to cultivate a feeling of understanding pertaining to the various issues which affect workers.

### **Contacting lap-dancers after leaving Supernova**

After leaving Supernova, I was well acquainted with a number of dancers, and re-contacted them in order to ask if they were willing to discuss their experiences in the context of a research project. Interested women were invited to ask questions - the fact I was already known as a dancer and acquaintance to the women meant they could informally ask me about what I was doing, and why. It was emphasised that even though they knew me through the workplace, they should not feel 'obliged' in any way to take part in the study. Women were given the opportunity to agree to be re-contacted for the purpose of secondary interviews and four of the participants took advantage of this. This was extremely useful, as it allowed me to hear about any subsequent changes that had occurred in the industry since the original interview.

## The Participants

I now proceed to document information about each participant. I have used quotes from transcripts to reveal the reasons why women chose to start the work, such information is useful for it introduces the women to the reader, giving the study a greater insight into women's lives. All but four participants identified their ethnicity<sup>38</sup> as White British or Scottish. The majority of participants entered the industry as a result of both financial need and curiosity about what it would be like to do the work.

### **Athena: Time spent in industry - 2 years**

Athena was seventeen when she first started dancing at Nebula. She was nineteen at time of interview, and was dancing at Supernova when fieldwork ended. Athena identifies as an ethnic minority and has also worked in Callisto. At time of writing, she continued to dance but migrated to Titan. She initially entered the industry due to the combination of losing a job, and a reluctance to move back home - and also due to curiosity:

**Athena:** "I just moved out of my house. I didn't want to move back to my parents, but I lost my job. I got sacked but it wasn't really my fault....and I was going to get my tattoo and I walked past Nebula and I thought 'hmmm, I'll give this a try'. I was like I want to get a job that is outside of social norms. I wanted to know what it was like to be a stripper"

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<sup>38</sup> For confidentiality purposes, I use the term 'ethnic minority' to indicate women who do not identify as either White British or Scottish.

Athena was studying for additional Higher qualifications at college and planned to remain in lap-dancing for the foreseeable future whilst studying for an undergraduate degree. Athena receives financial support from her family and lap-dancing presents a way to fund non-essential purchases. Thus, she does not remain in the industry due to financial need. Athena was in possession of Higher qualifications at time of interview.

**MM: Time spent in industry - 7 years**

MM identified as White Scottish and entered the industry at the age of eighteen. She was twenty-five at time of interview. She has extensive industry experience and has worked in eight Scottish venues, giving her experience of working in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow. She has no financial dependants and is currently studying. MM's entry into the industry arose in order to add to the irregular income she obtained via modelling work. She was approached by the owner of a lap-dancing venue in Glasgow whilst taking part in a modelling show and started working after taking up an invitation to visit the venue:

**MM:** "I was modelling at the time, I was working in Glasgow, and I was modelling for a show. And one of the people there was the owner of a lap-dancing club and he asked me if I wanted to work....I thought it would be a good thing as the modelling work wasn't regular..."

Lap-dancing was not MM's main form of income, but supplemented her formal employment. In future, she hopes to migrate into a well paid career that is related to her degree and then completely leave the lap-dancing industry.

### **Morag: Time spent in industry - 3 years**

Morag identified as White Scottish and was thirty-one years old at time of interview. She had prior experience of working in Ariel. She was dancing at the end of fieldwork and was still working in the industry when I spoke to her in June 2011, although she had moved from Supernova and was working at Titan. Morag has experience of working in lap-dancing venues in both Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Morag began lap-dancing at the age of twenty-eight due to a problematic financial situation, where she found she no longer could afford to pay for essentials such as food after taking a year long break from an undergraduate course. When her student support ceased, she required a new way to earn an income quickly in order to support both herself and her daughter, as she explains here:

**Billie:** “Why did you originally decide to start lap-dancing?”

**Morag:** “Well the definitive moment was when I was shopping in *Lidl*<sup>39</sup>. I had decided to take a year out from uni, between third and fourth year it was getting a bit intense, and I wanted to spend time with my daughter, and then I suddenly realised I had no student loan, no money to live on and I started shopping in a shop where I just felt that I couldn't get anything that I actually liked and I thought this is how bad its got, I cant afford to eat properly”

A member of Morag's family was in a relationship with a dancer at the time and it was via this connection she was able to enquire about the work and secure

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<sup>39</sup> *Lidl* is a discounted grocery store.

working space. Lap-dancing now provides Morag with her sole source of income for her and her daughter. Morag is educated to First degree level.

**Lisa: Time spent in industry - 7 years**

Lisa identified as White Scottish and left the industry in July 2010, after working within it for seven years between the ages of eighteen until twenty-five. She is educated to First degree level and was studying for a postgraduate degree at time of interview. Lisa has experience of working in eight venues, having worked in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen. Like MM, she contributes longer-term industry experience to the findings.

Lisa first entered the industry whilst working in a retail store where she met a colleague who was dancing at Callisto. It was via this channel she first started working in the industry. Like some of the other participants, Lisa's entry into the work was initially fuelled by curiosity:

**Billie:** "Why did you start dancing?"

**Lisa:** "I don't think it was money that attracted to me, probably there was a bit of that of course, but I think I just wanted to see what it was like. I wanted to give it a bash, see what happened..."

Lap-dancing became her main form of income whilst studying, due to the reluctance of her then-employers' refusal to provide part-time hours when she enrolled to study at university. Lisa took up a full-time position within the financial sector when she made the decision to take a year's break from her studies. Up until that point, dancing supported her financially. Lisa never

considered dancing as her only option and believed that, if she wanted to, she could easily find work elsewhere.

### **Sammy: Time spent in industry - 8 years**

Sammy identified as an ethnic minority and first began working at Supernova at the age of twenty-one and was still working there at time of interview. She has never worked in any other venue. She was twenty-nine years old at interview and had recently completed a postgraduate degree. Lap-dancing work supplemented her part-time employment. She first entered the industry due to a combination of financial need and curiosity:

**Billie:** “Why did you initially decide to start working as a dancer?”

**Sammy:** “Many financial, that was my main motivation, and just curiosity as well...I wanted to see what it was like, it was a world that was just so foreign to me so I was quite curious and interested about it and it seemed like a bit of an adventure really”

Before commencing lap-dancing, Sammy was working in legitimate employment when she heard about dancing via a colleague who was dancing in order to obtain extra money on top of her regular income. Sammy was able to use lap-dancing to help her supplement a grant and her other part-time work in order to be able to pay for living expenses whilst studying for her qualifications. Sammy plans to leave the industry once she secures a career which is related to her postgraduate qualification.

**Jamie: Time spent in industry - 11 months**

Jamie was twenty-seven at interview and identified as UK Scottish. She has a small amount of experience in the industry, starting work at Supernova in March 2010. She was working in the same venue at time of interview, which took place in January 2011. Jamie had previous experience working in other components of the indirect sex industry, having done topless modelling and webcam work, and this led to her considering lap-dancing. She was moved to enter the industry due to serious financial difficulties:

**Billie:** “Why did you decide to start working as a dancer?”

**Jamie:** “The reason I decided to start working was because we were in a dodgy situation financially, erm, we needed the money, erm, and I’d always thought about doing it in the past anyways. I’ve done modeling, webcam work, so. I always thought well it would be good to be able to do that (dancing) so anyway, we were in a really bad situation and I thought right, I’ve phone Supernova, and I went for an audition”

Her need to cover essential costs prompted her to enter the industry, due to her belief that money could potentially be made the first day. Jamie was solely responsible for paying for necessities for both herself and her partner. Jamie is educated to postgraduate level and hoped to leave the industry once she secured salaried work.

**Donna: Time spent in industry - 7 years**

Donna identified as White British and became involved in the industry at the age of twenty-six. She was thirty-three at time of interview. She decided to enter



the industry due to being unemployed, and also as a way to boost her confidence levels:

**Donna:** “Before it (lap-dancing) I used to be really shy. I only started working when I was twenty-six. I didn’t have a lot of confidence and I was in between jobs at the time. And I split up with my boyfriend”

Donna has experience of working in a number of lap-dancing venues across Scotland but was keen to talk about her more recent experiences in Titan and Supernova. Donna was studying at college at time of interview and was considering leaving the industry but would not rule out returning to dancing whilst studying for her First degree.

#### **Felicity: Time spent in industry - 10 years**

Felicity was forty-two years old at time of interview, identified as Caucasian, and first entered the industry at the age of thirty-two. Felicity has the longest period of industry experience in this study and at time of interview, was working at Supernova. She is divorced and the sole provider for four children. Felicity has experience of working in six venues, and has worked in Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Felicity started working as a result of financial need but also due to curiosity, after seeing a documentary about the industry on the television:

**Felicity:** “Well, I was skint and I saw a program on the TV about it and I thought, ‘oh I can do that’...I needed the money and I also wanted to try it!”

This then motivated her to reply to an advertisement for dancers which was placed in a popular tabloid newspaper. Felicity hoped to remain working in the lap-dancing industry on a part-time basis but aimed to solidify her future by starting her own business. She is educated to college level.

**Chloe: Time spent in industry - 2 years**

Chloe was twenty-five years old at time of interview and first entered the industry at the age of twenty-three. She identified as White Scottish. She moved into the industry as her job in the creative sector failed to provide adequate income to cover her own and her children's living costs, and also due to curiosity:

**Chloe:** "I mean there was part of me that was interested in it and wanted to do it but mainly it was financial need. And I'd heard there was the potential to make good money"

She was introduced to the industry by a partner. She was dancing at Galaxy at time of interview but has experience of working an additional four venues.

Chloe was the principal provider for two young children, and hopes to move on from the industry, however she argued she had little other options at her disposal, and valued the benefits lap-dancing offered in relation to managing childcare and the fact she could potentially make money quickly. She was educated to Standard Grade level.

I spoke to Chloe again in May 2011, when she told me she had given birth to a third child and had taken a break from dancing for the duration of the

pregnancy. She was planning to return, citing boredom and a need for money, due to the fact she was unable to rely on the child's father for financial support.

### **Samantha: Time spent in industry - 3 years**

Samantha was twenty-five years old at time of interview, and started working in the industry at the age of twenty-two. She identified as White British. She first entered the industry on a full-time basis after leaving a university course as a strategy to address her financial debt and the fact she was struggling financially overall. Eventually the income she made via dancing allowed her to re-enter university:

**Samantha:** "I ended back up at my parents, and within a few months of that I started lap-dancing. Because I'd dropped out of uni by then...I worked full-time as a lap-dancer for a year...I rapidly changed my financial situation, I got myself out of debt"

**Billie:** "Did lap-dancing allow you to get back to your studies?"

**Samantha:** "Yes, from a financial point of view...it kinda helped me re-establish my life"

She has worked in six Scottish venues. At time of interview she was working on an ad-hoc basis in Supernova, with her main source of income being provided by a legitimate source. Samantha has also danced in London and Paris, and has experience of working in venues in Glasgow and Edinburgh. She is educated to postgraduate level and continues dancing on an infrequent basis.

### **Tania: Time spent in industry - 7 years**

Tania entered the industry at the age of twenty-three due to financial need and was thirty years old at interview. Tania identifies as White British. Her curiosity about the industry was facilitated by her observation of workers from Pisces arriving for work as she worked in a nearby bar in the city centre where Pisces is located. She decided that she too could try dancing in order to make more money. Her sole reason for entering was entirely due to financial difficulties:

**Tania:** "I had rent arrears and financial difficulties. I was nearly one thousand pounds in debt"

Tania was working in both Supernova and Ariel at the time of interview. Tania is based in Glasgow and travels to Edinburgh to work in Supernova due to a lack of regular custom in Ariel. Tania has worked in seven Scottish venues, having experience in both Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Tania has no financial dependants but feels obliged to spend some of her income on a young relation. She is college educated and is currently studying for a First degree. Tania is unique in the sample as she was exceptionally unhappy in her dancing occupation and was anxious to leave the industry as soon as possible however she had resigned herself to remaining in it due to her financial situation.

### **Belinda: Time spent in industry - 5 years**

Belinda is twenty-eight years old and had amassed five years of working experience in the lap-dancing industry. Belinda identifies as an ethnic minority.

She spent a short amount of time working in Zeus before moving to Supernova, and has worked only in Edinburgh. Belinda first started working in the industry due to financial need and curiosity, and decided, after trying the work whilst on holiday, that it was something she could do longer-term:

**Billie:** “Why did you decide to first start working as a dancer?”

**Belinda:** “Well it was totally financial, well mainly, but part of it was curiosity as well. When I first moved up here, I was in a lot of debt at the time— through no fault of my own, just the stupidity of a silly boyfriend. He got me into a lot of debt”

Belinda has one child but was not the sole provider for the family, as her partner, whom she met after commencing dancing, was in a secure form of employment. Although lap-dancing supported her when she first began, it was now providing an additional income stream for her, her partner and their young child so that they are able to enjoy recreational pastimes. Because Belinda’s partner is the principal financial provider, the family are not reliant upon Belinda’s income. She appreciated lap-dancing as it allowed her freedom to choose her hours, removing the need to place her child in a costly childcare facility. Belinda argued that working in a full-time job would reduce the amount of time she could spend with the child. Belinda is educated to First degree level, and at time of interview was considering leaving the industry in order to add to her family.

### **Rebekka: Time spent in industry - 9 years**

Rebekka was twenty-eight years old at time of interview and danced in three Scottish venues between the ages of seventeen to twenty-five, after which she

moved onto an alternative career in a different segment of the sex industry. She identified as White Scottish. She spent most of her time working in Edinburgh based lap-dancing bar Galaxy, but spent a short amount of time in Capricorn and Titan.

Rebekka started working in the industry because she wanted to, as she explains here:

**Rebekka:** “First and foremost I did it because I wanted to, a lot of people aspire to be a doctor or a fireman – I wanted to be a dancer. And also for financial needs, erm, as well, because my Mother was a single parent, erm, so mainly for the reason that I wanted to take it off the list of what I wanted to do with my life, and secondly because I wanted to help out the family”

Whilst dancing, she assisted her Mother financially and also later a partner, who was not earning whilst she was dancing. Rebekka wanted to help her Mother, who was the sole provider for the family. Rebekka was introduced to the industry as a result of her membership with a modelling agency, who recruited lap-dancers for venues. Rebekka has now left the industry and would not consider returning in the future. Rebekka is educated to college level.

The biographies show that the women featured in this study have experienced working in a variety of lap-dancing venues located within the Scottish cities of Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee. No respondents reported working in the venues that currently operate in the towns of Paisley or Dunfermline. The biographies also reveal a number of different motivations for entering the industry. Due to the relatively small number of participants, I cannot claim that

this study is representative of the voices of all or the majority of women who perform this type of sexualised labour, however, the study does follow the trend for small scale, intimate research enquiries which have been adopted by others who seek to understand aspects of the sex industry (Sanders,2006b). The fact that over half the sample had spent significant time working in the industry in Scotland was essential in gaining an understanding of industry change, and forms one of the strengths of the data collected. Qualitative research is not noted for its ability to offer widespread generalisations (Ramazanoglu and Holland,2002), yet strength can lie in taking a close look at similarities and differences in women's experiences (Ramazanoglu and Holland,2002), in order to potentially collect evidence of common aims and interests with regards to experiences.

I am aware that the sample number may attract critique. However, the depth of the data collected must be emphasised, with interview time usually far exceeding the allotted time frame of one hour, with the longest interview lasting over three hours. The interviews were extended as a result of participants' desire to have their voices heard pertaining to their experiences at work. Thus, the findings, although not representative, provide a powerful starting point for academics seeking to explore the changing nature of sexualised labour.

Furthermore, I must underline the difficulties which are inherent in obtaining respondents who are part of a stigmatised industry, which have been acknowledged by others who have researched this area (Deshotels *et al*, 2012). Prior to my involvement in the industry it was exceptionally difficult to attract respondents - and even my status as an ex-dancer did not allow me to

freely contact all women I had worked alongside. The atmosphere in the venue could, at times, be volatile and there were some women who I would have not approached to request an interview - some dancers preferred to concentrate solely on making money and kept any conversation with other women to a minimum. Thus, I did not feel it was ethical to attempt to contact these women outside the venue as I had not spoken to them while at work. Such representative sampling issues are characteristic of all social science research techniques: however, not all people will be willing or able to partake, and this was an issue that Colosi also experienced whilst conducting ethnographic fieldwork as a dancer-researcher (Colosi,2010b). Riessman (1987) argues that there is a need for women to share cultural patterns in order to understand each other – simply, “gender is not enough”. I cannot deny that it was easier to recruit participants due to my own identity as an ex-dancer – this in part may have been related to the fact that interviews could begin from the basis of having a shared experience, and that participants found discussing their involvement in a ‘deviant’ occupation more comfortable when talking about it to someone who had also experienced the work.

### **Becoming Bailey:<sup>40</sup> Justifications, problems and benefits of my own industry involvement**

My journey into the industry was encouraged during an interview by a participant who felt that I could only really understand the nature of the work if I experienced it for myself. This participant facilitated my access into the work, by providing me with advice, such as informing me what could be expected from

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<sup>40</sup> ‘Bailey’ was my chosen pseudonym whilst working in Supernova.



an audition. Here, I include an extract from my diary which details the events which transpired next. Interestingly, the stipulations made by the owner were confirmed by other women I interviewed after I had left; namely, that he was not fond of tattoos and what he considered to be 'larger' women:

**Billie:** "I thought about my conversation with (the interview participant) for a few days and then decided to go for it. So I called at the weekend, and spoke to the manager who asked me a few questions, mainly did I have any tattoos, he doesn't like girls with tattoos. He asked me my dress size. Apparently he doesn't like women over a certain size....he told me to come in for an audition on the Tuesday..."

My industry involvement allowed me to immerse myself in the everyday and very often mundane occurrences that can arise during a typical shift at a lap-dancing venue, and was useful in that it allowed me to directly learn and experience venue rules and working conditions. This allowed me as a researcher to connect women's own lived experiences that they reported during interview with what occurs in the venue visually.

Sanders emphasises that the onus is always upon the researcher to actively engage with individuals and build relationships. This can only be achieved by making the commitment to spend a significant amount of time in the field (Sanders, 2006b). Expecting participants to volunteer for the study initially using only the website and promotional methods was, on reflection, somewhat unrealistic. My experience as a dancer taught me that this is an exceptionally competitive environment where working conditions and reduced custom render it increasingly difficult for women to make money. Simply, women have more

pressing issues on their minds than contacting a researcher. Dancers have reported stigmatising attitudes from other women who are not involved in the industry (Colosi, 2008). As someone who had actually experienced the work, I believed this would be the greatest possible step I could take to ensuring an open, non-judgmental interviewing environment. Those involved in the industry tend to greet researchers with suspicion (Lewis, 1998), as I found myself when contacting the aforementioned venue in Aberdeen, which I did prior to my industry involvement. This has made it problematic for researchers such as Lewis who, as an outsider, found it difficult to recruit participants for a study concerned with dancers. My previous academic enquiries exploring street based prostitution were greatly assisted by my engaging with gatekeepers – harm reduction agencies allowed me to access women involved in prostitution, and also proved useful as they helped me to cement my credibility as an ethical researcher with women (Sanders, 2006b). I cannot claim the same luxury with this study – there are no support services for lap-dancers that I could have approached in order to access participants.

### **Bailey's (Billie's?) impact: Acknowledging the impact of my own experience on the construction of knowledge**

Although there is an assumption that when engaging in social research we are investigating something which is removed from the Self (Aull-Davies, 2008) - there is the argument, rooted within the principles of both ethnography and some feminist research methodologies, that we cannot realistically conduct research upon phenomena that we exist in complete isolation from (Aull-Davies, 2008). For Aull-Davies, "All researchers are, to some degree, connected

to, or part of, the object of their research” (Aull-Davies,2008;3) and the actual clarifying of the research question reveals what the researcher personally cares about (Ramazanoglu and Holland,2002).

I have already discussed why I entered the industry, however I will briefly reflect upon my own experience of performing sexualised labour at Supernova. My experiences allowed me to relate to what was discussed in the interviews and by becoming a dancer, I made a direct impact upon the research collected, thus inevitably affecting the knowledge attained from the findings. My involvement meant that participants responded in ways which would not have occurred if they were talking to someone divorced from the industry, as the following extracts show:

**Billie:** “Is there anything you do try to get a guy to buy a dance from you?”

**MM:** “Well, I’ll say ‘oh it will be a sexy dance’...you know the patter”

**Lisa:** “You know like they can start acting all big in front of their pals if it’s a stag group?”

**Billie:** “Yeah, I saw that a lot...”

Here, when MM says “You know the patter” - as an ex-dancer, I knew *exactly* what she was relating to, having engaged in this ‘patter’ myself on many occasions. One of the common tactics used by dancers to encourage custom is to explain the benefits of a lap-dance, for example, it will be a ‘sexy experience’. My personal understanding of this would have been devoid had I not experienced it for myself. Lisa’s excerpt shows the commonality dancers have

regarding experiences with stag groups. As an ex-dancer, she expected I could relate to her experiences with problematic groups of men - which I was able to.

The following extract reveals how I was able to directly relate to a sentiment expressed by Sammy, where she discusses how she behaves after leaving work:

**Sammy:** “As soon as I take my make-up off, take my extensions out, I feel different, I feel this sigh of relief and I just feel different straight away. Do you know what I mean?”

**Billie:** “Oh yeah. First thing I do when I get in is get all the make up off and crawl into the most unsexiest but comfy pair of pajamas I can find...”

**Sammy:** “Yeah, and I feel so much more attractive in those clothes than I do in my work stuff!”

Such interactions were common during interview, and I argue these allowed for a more comfortable, and therefore more ethical interview experience for participants. Furthermore, I was able to share some of my own sentiments during interview, where appropriate, as can be seen in the above extract. This meant data collection did not involve the sole collection of knowledge without me actually giving something back in terms of my own experiences in the industry.

Reflexivity, in its broadest sense, concerns the researcher utilising themselves, as well as their participant’s voices, as part of the construction of knowledge. Because my own position affected the research sample and so being reflexive is argued to be critical in gaining understanding of the methodological benefits

and drawbacks my involvement brought (Sanders,2006b). Proceeding without being reflexive is unrealistic, for this would suppose that the research was conducted in some kind of clinical vacuum, with no dynamics between researcher and participant. A reconsideration of reflexivity as being something which could add to, rather than burden social research has been growing since the 1970's (Aull-Davies,2008). Churchill and Sanders suggest that taking into account reflexivity can contribute to the creation of a more ethically sound research methodology (Churchill and Sanders,2007). By adopting a reflexive role I seek to acknowledge and understand my own relationship with research participants, the fieldwork setting and how my own experiences assist with the creation of the epistemological framework of the conclusions. In essence, ones epistemological stance connects a researcher's own concepts of knowledge and its underlying ontological grounding (Churchill and Sanders,2007). In the case of this study, I postulate that women's experiences are evidence of their own social realities whilst at work.

The personal history of the researcher also impacts on the subject chosen for empirical investigation. My interest in the lap-dancing industry stemmed from previous research projects exploring the impacts of Scottish policy change on a different segment of the sex industry. Furthermore, the relationships nurtured with participants were developed via my social interactions in the field. Whilst in the field, for example, relationships were built as my colleagues and I swapped tips on the best methods to employ whilst on shift, and warned each other about unpleasant or time-wasting individuals who would sometimes frequent the venue - and also swapped advice on who would be likely to buy. I recall on

my first day at Supernova, one dancer informed me that one particular individual tended to only buy dances from 'new girls' - and that I would be wise to approach him. I am also able to report upon some general observations regarding dancers' working lives without breaching confidentiality by referring to specific dancers in the venue, such as daily rituals performed in the changing room which included the religious application of tanning products and other cosmetics. By working alongside the women, I was able to think more in-depth about the subject matter and refine my questions in order to create an appropriate interview schedule.

Stanley and Wise recognise the impact their own involvement on the construction of knowledge when they conducted research on the existence of obscene telephone calls. As part of the work, Stanley and Wise experienced taking the calls and admit that this shaped and influenced the way they theorised about and understood gender relations between women and men (Stanley and Wise, 1993). What is particularly interesting is Stanley and Wise's admission that their involvement impacted upon their views of the phenomena which had altered after they had experienced taking the calls for themselves. Before I became a lap-dancer, my ideas and frames of reference arose from, initially, popular culture and then academic work. Reflecting now upon my short dancing career, I admit that my experiences have served to help form understandings in relation to explaining working reality. Indeed, I admit my own involvement made me more inclined to view situations from the point of view of dancers. This was a problem Colosi also acknowledged in her ethnography of lap-dancing (Colosi, 2010b).

By adopting a reflexive stance, I acknowledge that, like with any form of social encounter, it is impossible to control the interactions that led to the recruitment of participants in this study. Okely points out that “The specificity and individuality of the observer are ever present and must therefore be acknowledged, explored and put to creative use” (Okely,1996;28). Steier views the research process as one in which the researcher and participants work together in co-constructing understandings of a particular phenomenon (Steier, 1991) . My own involvement in the work meant that it was inevitable that a shared understanding could potentially develop during interviews. Often taking the form of a conversation, the interview process took on an atmosphere befitting a relaxed ‘chat’, albeit guided by my interview schedule, about the realities of a working environment which both myself and the participants had experienced. Engaging in the interview process can be stressful and emotionally charged (Coffey,1999, Punch, 2011). During my time as a dancer, I was involved in an activity that was, on occasion, emotionally difficult. As Lofland and Lofland remind us, “...the norms of scholarship do not require that researchers bare their souls – only their procedures” (Lofland and Lofland, 1995;13). Stanley and Wise complain of researchers’ resistance to provide an in-depth analysis of the fieldwork site and their own involvement within it (Stanley and Wise,1993), and Punch (2011) has remarked that fieldwork is sanitised when written up. This is certainly the case regarding the reluctance of researchers to reflect upon their research experiences when researching the commercial sex industry (Sanders, 2006a). I address these concerns by taking a more reflexive approach.

## **The influence of ethnography - 'Dancing academics'**

My decision to dance was inspired by others who have conducted academic research into lap-dancing whilst they were working in the industry (Frank,2002, Egan,2006b, Bremner,2006, Colosi,2008, Wahab,2003). Egan chose to work as a dancer during her time conducting a research postgraduate study into lap-dancing in the US (Egan,2006b). Wahab (2003) worked in a peep show, as a dancer, allowing herself to be exposed to its culture. Indeed, a whole host of researchers have become involved with the research group of interest in order to better understand group dynamics (Sanders,2006a). Despite this, however, there continues to be a limited amount of published work that explores researchers' experiences of working in the direct and indirect sex industry (Sanders,2006a), and the methodological demands of the topic (Sanders, 2006b). Considering my industry involvement has had an impact upon my obtained sample and my research relationship with participants, it is essential I reflect upon my experiences, in order to understand and acknowledge how they affected the generation and production of knowledge. My decision to take up lap-dancing was also influenced by the work of the Chicago school, who must be credited in their work which encouraged academics to leave their desks and enter the urban worlds of 'deviant' populations (Heap,2003). The Chicagoans and those who follow in their footsteps have influenced some sex work researchers who have made the decision to understand phenomena through small scale, often intimate methodologies (Sanders,2006b). Following the Chicago school, the research tradition of ethnography is predicated upon the



active involvement of the social researcher in the production of social knowledge through the direct participation in the social realities she is seeking to understand (Reinharz,1992). As with many ethnographic lines of inquiry, this research enquiry began in a rather unfocussed manner, eventually concentrating upon the findings that I present in subsequent chapters. Passaro (1997) adopted a similar approach. By deliberately entering the field in an unfocussed manner, she allowed knowledge to effectively 'present itself' and the end result was a project concentrating on the experiences of homeless men (Aull-Davies,2008). Although I began with an unstructured approach, my research journey ended in the production of a study whose concentration was primarily centred around the realities of working in a specific venue and how these have shifted. I then used sociological theories in order to assist in formulating an academic understanding the nature of the industry as it currently operates. The usual route the ethnographer takes is one of complete discovery, using a specified set of questions and general area of enquiry. From this, questions are refined and theoretical concepts are developed as fieldwork proceeds (Aull-Davies, 2008). This route is reminiscent of my own research path.

Blending feminist-inspired research with an ethnographic influence is one of three goals which are frequently mentioned by feminist researchers, which are to firstly, document the lives and activities of women, secondly, to understand experiences from women's own viewpoints, and finally to conceptualise behaviour as an expression of social contexts (Reinharz,1992). In the case of this work, I suggest that my enquiry is more aligned with the second and third

afore-mentioned points. The reason for this is that by immersing myself in the lap-dancing arena I hoped to gain some kind of understanding of women's experiences by virtue of being involved myself. By working, I believe it is possible to relate behaviours and experiences as part of a wider social context that cannot be divorced from workplace experiences. The interviews and my own reflections allow the reader some insight into the realities of lap-dancing labour for workers. Although the bulk of the findings are derived from the data obtained from semi-structured interviews, it must be acknowledged that my own involvement contributes to the data collected - for example, the knowledge I give of the geography of Supernova<sup>41</sup> only exists because I worked there and saw its interior personally.

### **Ethical considerations**

The protection of any research participant is of the greatest importance. This study operates under the doctrine of informed consent in accordance with ESRC ethical protocol. Informed consent is essential as it allows for the protection of an individual's autonomy that is their right to determine whether or not they wish to participate (Kent,2000). It is essential that participants are given as much information as possible in advance in order to allow them to make an informed decision, including any risks that their involvement may potentially involve to them (Bulmer,2001). In addition, it is essential that participants informed of the reasons why the research is being carried out (Churchill and Sanders,2007). These reasons were given both online and

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<sup>41</sup> Please see Appendix A for information pertaining to the geography of Supernova.

verbally at time of interview. Two copies of the consent form were signed both by the participant and me, with one being provided to the participant for them to keep for future reference. I provided full contact details for both myself and my academic advisors in the event that a participant needed to re-contact me, for example should they have wished to withdraw their data before the thesis submission date. For both ethical and safety purposes, I ensured that all travel expenses participants incurred were reimbursed at the time of interview. Finally, I gave participants confectionary at the close of interview in order to indicate my appreciation of the time they had taken to speak to me.

Although more visible within popular culture, those who work inside lap-dancing venues continue to run the risk of attaining what Goffman calls a spoiled identity (Goffman, 1963) as a result of stigmatising attitudes which persist regarding lap-dancing work. This is reflected in the public outcry that has arisen in response to the increasing numbers of venues across the UK in recent years (Colosi, 2008). The deviant label applied to women who work in this industry (Skipper and McCaghy, 1970; Salutin, 1971; Boles and Garbin, 1974, 1977; Enck and Preston, 1988; Ronai and Ellis, 1989) must be taken into account when assessing the ease with which a social researcher can gain access to the research population, and called for the need for a stringent plan to be put into place to protect participants to the greatest extent possible.

## Addressing stigma

Although lap-dancing is considered to be legitimate in a legal sense, there are still strong connotations attaching deviant labels to lap-dancers. The impacts of these and the potential risks participants take by getting involved with research must be carefully considered (Sanders,2006b). Reflecting upon the fieldwork experience, I now firmly believe that the only chance of gaining the trust of women was by taking a risk myself, and embracing the deviant identity of 'the stripper' by becoming one of them. Reflecting on an extract from my diary, I was acutely aware at the time of the potential risks my involvement might bring on a personal level:

**Billie:** "You can't not notice that guys tend to get hard-ons very quickly when you are dancing for them...it's a strange thing to do. But I'm glad I did it, I'm glad I'm doing it and its really good for my research in that I get to experience for myself what this is like. But at the same time I'm like shit, what if my parents and other folk find out...I know people have problems with this kind of thing"

The risk to myself inevitably exists at both a professional level and personal level (Coffey,1999), with researchers fearing moral condemnation from their peers (Punch, 2011). Even those who simply take an interest in sex work research suffer stigmatising attitudes from others (Barton,2001) which Goffman terms as 'courtesy stigma' (Goffman,1963). Courtesy stigma considers the fears that academics may be tainted by the myths and stereotypes that plague the deviant groups they research . The intellectual community itself has been accused of 'academic prudery' (Ashworth *et al*,1988), with Sanders arguing that, although concerns about the safety of researchers and their participants

by ethics committees are real and valid, this is often used as a disguise in order to protect the reputation of academic institutions (Sanders,2006b), who perhaps are reluctant to be associated with the research and its findings. Coffey and Weitzer highlight the gender bias present in hegemonic attitudes pertaining to those who work in the sex industry. Coffey also notes that “sexual reputation is a gendered social concept” (Coffey,1999;83, Weitzer,2000) – and so revealing a deviant identity could be potentially damaging to myself as a female, postgraduate researcher. Despite these professional concerns, I put forth the argument that, as Sanders has also acknowledged, those who have never been involved in the sex industry can never truly understand its implications (Sanders,2006a), and that my own involvement was conducive to gaining an in-depth understanding of the nature of this form of labour and developing relationships with dancers.

There were concerns that my status as a Ph.D student would impact upon perceived power relations during the interview, and I hoped that my previous involvement in the industry would in some way help to diffuse these dynamics, which, unfortunately, are unlikely to ever be completely eradicated (Maynard, 1994). By attaining membership of the deviant group, Colosi suggests that accurate information is more likely to be attained as it is easier for trust to be built between researcher and participant, resulting in more valid data as participants are more likely to behave ‘naturally’ in an interview setting (Colosi, 2008) with someone who is ‘one of them’. This also goes some way to facilitating a more non-hierarchical relationship in the interview setting, which can offer resulting data that is more valid (Oakley,1998).

Although I did not offer formal tokens of appreciation to participants, I did engage in informal 'research bargains' with two participants. Sanders shows how in some cases, research bargains must be reached with participants. In her case, harm reduction paraphernalia was distributed to women involved in prostitution, earning Sanders the title of the 'Condom Lady' (Sanders,2006b) amongst women. Such help allowed her to become known to the women she hoped to speak to. In relation to this study, I bargained in exchange for interview time, offering my services as a portraiture model to one participant and the other involved a psychology experiment. Bargaining provided an ethical way for me to give something back in return for the women telling me about their experiences.

As interactions with participants developed during interview, women posed questions to me about my own background and how I came to do this study. Oakley advises that the most effective and ethical studies are conducted by researchers who are prepared to invest some of their own personal identity in the relationship (Oakley,1981). Certainly, this goes some way to resolving potential imbalances of power. I felt it important that I give some part of myself in return for collecting the women's stories. However, I was careful not to place too much focus on myself – for this could potentially bias respondent's statements. Instead, I made it clear that if women wanted to ask me anything about myself, for example, my reasons for getting involved in the industry, they should not hesitate to ask once the interview had concluded. I was able to relate to dancers' experiences as they spoke about them. Although I was

careful not to engage in offering my own opinions during interview for fear of eliciting biased responses, the fact I could empathise with dancers sentiments undoubtedly assisted in the construction of a more ethical interview process.

Oakley also prompts the feminist researcher to believe the interviewee's words (Oakley,1981). Clearly, this is controversial as social interaction often involves a degree of deception (Reinharz,1992) – which may be heightened when the topic under conversation constitutes something that is considered deviant by the majority of people. Despite this legitimate concern, I have conducted this study with a belief that respondents have been open and honest in their verbal accounts. There is the argument that believing the interviewee is a both a feminist and humanist approach to engage in, and also, as an ex-dancer myself, I hoped that this would reduce the chances of respondents falsifying some of the information provided, as they were talking to someone who had also been directly involved and so would be more likely to be perceived as open to accepting experiences and feelings that may be viewed as 'odd' or 'deviant' by someone alien to this form of labour.

### **Using the semi-structured interview**

I decided to use the interview technique in order to discover experiences, for this is the principal means that feminists have used to achieve the actual participation from respondents in producing data which actually reflects their lives (Reinharz,1992). Interviews include free interaction between the researcher and participant and can include opportunities for clarification and

discussion. A benefit of open-ended techniques is that they allow for the exploration of individuals views of their own social realities. The interview offers the potential to reveal rich data regarding respondents' experiences, opinions, aspirations and feelings (May,1993).

There are a number of interviewing styles, and I present justification for engaging with a semi-structured technique over others. The semi-structured interview - a style that involves the usage of some probing, facilitating a degree of rapport with the interviewee and articulating of the aims of the study to the respondent (Silverman,2006) was selected as the most effective avenue from which to explore women's experiences for the purposes of this study.

The open-ended (unstructured) interview was considered an option as the technique can provide rich data (Noaks and Wincup,2004) and permits the respondent to talk freely and ascribe meanings to their experiences and feelings (Noaks and Wincup,2004). The research doctrine of emotionalism views interviewees as active subjects who construct their own social realities, and research that aims to understand these experiences would be best to utilise the unstructured interview (Silverman,2006). Although this would be ideal for the purposes of answering the research question at hand it was essential that I took practicalities into consideration. Interviews of this nature can be exceptionally time consuming and the lack of a structured interview schedule makes it difficult for the researcher to keep the respondent focussed upon the research questions if they proceed to talk about issues which are completely irrelevant to the principal topic under investigation. There was a great risk of



this occurring, since I was generally familiar as an ex-work colleague to my participants, and social dynamics would have made it possible that the conversation could shift onto irrelevant topics. Time was also a factor. As the aim was to take up no more than one hour of participants' time, the utilisation of an unstructured interview would have presented a poor tactic for the gathering of relevant information within a relatively short timeframe.

The semi-structured interview presented itself as a viable alternative to the unstructured interview. This type of interview shares some features with the unstructured interview, such as the need to gain and maintain trust from the respondent, the requirement to establish rapport and also considering how to present oneself to respondents (Fontana and Ferry,2000). The semi-structured interview however, offers a degree of control owing to its use of an interview schedule, yet allows for some deviation from the schedule with the researcher at liberty to probe beyond the answers provided (May,1993) in order to obtain further information - or ask about responses provided which were perhaps not previously considered. As an ex-dancer, this flexibility was useful, for I could pose questions regarding issues I knew of as a result of my experience. The semi-structured interview also allowed me to ask a participant for clarification on issues discussed, clearing up any misunderstandings which could potentially bias the research, and has been credited with being advantageous as it frees participants to respond more on their own terms than a standardised interview would (May,1993). The semi-structured interview technique also does not restrict answers (Barbour and Schostak,2005) which is the hallmark of the structured interview that makes it completely unsuitable for a study that is

concerned with the articulating of personal experiences. The semi-structured interview permits the interviewer to follow up on particularly exciting pieces of information while still allowing the participant “space to talk” (Rapley,2004;25).

The structured interview has been subject to critique from feminist researchers such as Stanley and Wise who argue that their use assists in the creation and maintenance of a hierarchical relationship between researcher and respondent (Stanley and Wise,1983) due to the fact they provide little or no freedom for respondents to articulate themselves in their own words (May,1993). A great strength of open-ended questioning techniques is that they permit, and indeed encourage responses that have been considered by the participant (Bryne, 2004). Thus, the structured interview is not useful for a study that aims to understand lap-dancing from the viewpoints of those who engage in it.

Data was collected by using a digital recorder. This reduced background noise and made it easier to copy and transcribe interview content (Branley,2006). Recordings were then downloaded onto a password protected computer, replayed, so that the transcripts become more familiar to me. The recording also preserved important sequences of conversation (Silverman, 2006), such as pauses, sighs and other audible, non-verbal cues that also provide information about a person’s feelings. However, respondents were always given the opportunity to have the recorder switched off at any point during interview. Obtaining permission to record, however, is advantageous as it allows the researcher to afford the respondent their full attention and allows for building rapport via positive body language. Note taking was used as a contingency plan

in the event of any equipment failure, a common issue during research interviews (Letherby,2003) - or as an option should a participant withdraw their consent for an audio recording to take place. The taking of notes, however, is not ideal as full attention cannot be dedicated to the respondent due to the labour of writing that inevitably breaks eye contact that can help create and maintain rapport whilst also reminding the participant of their importance to the researcher. Also, note taking results in the potential omission of important data relevant to understanding feelings such as pauses, sighs, and overlaps (Silverman,2006). Fortunately, I was never asked to terminate the usage of my digital recorder.

Recorded interviews were transcribed personally, rather than utilising a transcription service. Engaging with the voices captured allows for an improved transcript (Sacks,1992), and allows the researcher to grasp a better understanding of the feelings expressed by respondents. Perakyla points out that the repeated listening of recordings allows for the collection of information that may have been inaudible upon the first listen of the data (Perakyla,2004), and also for the noting down of not just what was said, but the way in which points are articulated. Silverman provides a useful glossary of transcription symbols (Silverman,2006), which are used during the transcription process in order to ensure that people's behaviours during interview are being perceived accurately. I also used transcription symbols when transcribing recordings, and, taking Silverman's advice, I underlined words spoken with emphasis (Silverman,2006). This helped ensure I understood the context in which the comments were made and so assists in the reporting of data that accurately

reflect women's feelings and actions. Women were interviewed in locations that were selected by them, my only stipulation being that they were interviewed somewhere where privacy could be maintained. This allowed participants to talk freely and also protected them in relation to confidentiality issues.

### **Analysing the data**

The interviews were transcribed in full and categorised into themes which were then inputted into the *Nvivo* package. Certain themes came through strongly in the interviews and these are explored fully in the findings. Rather than searching transcripts using key words, I went through them by hand, ensuring themes were reflective of the sentiments of all participants. I then provided the opportunity to participants to report back on my interpretations, in order to ensure I was interpreting their feelings correctly. Because research has the potential to impact upon public opinion and policy alterations, it is only ethical that women's voices are properly interpreted. It is for this reason that my research participants were encouraged to view their own transcripts and also provided with feedback on my analysis of their data in order to ensure their voices are articulated correctly. Indeed, Gillham suggests that respondents should be afforded the right to have the opportunity to review what is written about them (Gillham,2005). I re-contacted participants in order to clarify individual analysis of their words and was able to conduct secondary interview with four women, to allow an opportunity to read their transcripts and also enable them to inform me about any changes in the industry since interview. By allowing women to look over and comment on their own transcripts, I hoped to

make the research in some way the property of the participants' as well as my own. O'Neill's call for researchers to ensure that women are 'active participants' in the social constructions of knowledge (O'Neill, 1996) influenced my decision to utilise this strategy, in order to hopefully address power relations.

## **Summary**

This Chapter has documented the research process which provides the findings which will now be presented across three chapters. Chapter Six concentrates upon dancers' views on cultural and economic shifts and the effects these have had upon the nature of their work. Chapter Seven addresses dancers' perceptions of lap-dancing as a form of labour, both acknowledging the benefits it can continue to offer and noting its increasing precarity. The Chapter identifies similarities with legitimated service work and specific issues pertaining to health and safety. Chapter Eight is concerned with the complex and often confusing nature of power relations within the industry as it has changed, with dancers relinquishing an element of the perceived power they previously held to owners and to a lesser extent, customers as spending behaviour has altered. In addition to this, the Chapter also acknowledges the fact dancers can also exercise power over owners and each other.

## **Research Findings**

## **Chapter Six: Supply and Demand - Considering economic impacts and ‘Striptease Culture’ on the lap- dancing industry in Scotland**

This Chapter addresses the sexualisation of popular culture. Participants suggest that the cultural shift towards a society in which sexual services can be more openly traded in the marketplace has contributed to an increase in the number of women auditioning for work. Whilst supply has increased, demand for private dances has fallen, with participants suggesting this is partly due to the fact that sexualised entertainment can be sourced more easily and cheaply elsewhere. Commenting upon the US market, Bradley suggests that lap-dancing has become increasingly competitive, arguing there is “more money to be made”, and more women are competing for this money (Bradley,2008;509). Women suggest that in Scotland, the opposite is happening. This shows that what occurs in one geographical location cannot automatically be assumed to also transpire in other spaces.

### **The visibility of lap-dancing in Scotland**

The visibility of venues allows customers and non-paying voyeurs easy access to women. Nebula’s owner was specifically attracted to its centralised city based location, due to its close geographical proximity to hotels. He hypothesised this would help attract businessmen who could potentially visit the venue whilst on business. Upon purchasing the lap-dancing bar in 2008 he swiftly rebranded it to an upmarket Gentlemen’s Club:

**Owner:** "...we wanted it to be a Gentlemen's Club"

**Billie:** "What were your reasons for that?"

**Owner:** "...we just felt a nicer place maybe would attract business men who were staying at the Royal Oak<sup>42</sup> or staying at other hotels in the area"

Partnerships between some venues and other businesses show support for the acceptability of the industry. Nebula enjoys positive relationships with hotels who recommend it to tourists and businesspeople. Facades of venues make it obvious what is offered inside, such as silhouetted imagery of nude women. Titan uses cycle rickshaws featuring their branding which are used to locate potential customers and provide transport to the venue. The rickshaw's branding presents another indicator of the growing acceptability of the industry. The public arena of city streets are "great theatres" of acceptable and desirable forms of sexuality and styles of masculinity and femininity (Connell, 1987; 133). Advertising plays a significant role in adding value to commodities (Klein, 2001). Venue branding, which consistently show imagery of slim, young women on their promotional paraphernalia<sup>43</sup>, support dominant ideologies and blend them with commodity culture - by viewing imagery, individuals can imagine that the services paid for in venues will be provided by women who have desirable bodies. Because decisions about the purchase of products or services are strategically important in the pursuit of profit, they are not left to chance (Smart, 2003). Thus, venues influence consumer demand towards a particular 'type' of

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<sup>42</sup> Author selected pseudonym pertaining to a hotel located in close proximity to Nebula.

<sup>43</sup> Please see Appendix E for examples of flyers used to promote Scottish venues.



appearance (Galbraith,1969), and, in the case of Gentlemen's Clubs, by enforcing norms via rules dictating dancers' appearance and behaviours.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the performance of the dance itself has been embraced by women who do not work in the industry as a form of 'keep-fit' (Attwood,2009). Nebula offered pole fitness classes to the public, taught by lap-dancers themselves. Although performed for 'fun' rather than as a form of work, pole fitness is generally associated with sexualised labour and erotic performance (Holland and Attwood,2009). In Scotland, poles can commonly be found within regular nightclubs<sup>44</sup> for visitors to use. The public were offered the opportunity to explore Nebula during August 2011, where, as part of a popular festival event, a free of charge lap-dancing photographic exhibition was held during the hours of 14:00-16:00. The venue also ran a programme of striptease cabaret acts which were performed nightly throughout the festival<sup>45</sup>. Nebula's placement as an officially endorsed festival location and its decision to open to the public reflect attitudes that are somewhat more accepting of the industry. Finally, the offering of hen parties in Hades, Nebula, Titan, and Zeus invites groups of women as well as men to visit lap-dancing venues for pleasure, which is a further indicator that stripping has become more socially acceptable among some groups in Scotland.

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<sup>44</sup> The establishments *Banshee Labyrinth* in Edinburgh and *Lourenzos* in Dunfermline are two nightclub venues which currently provide poles for dancing on/around. The placement of pole-dancing within the context of a regular night out can be argued as a further indication of its normalisation within Scottish and UK culture.

<sup>45</sup> Please see Appendix F for examples of flyers used to promote both the photographic exhibition and the cabaret entertainment.

Participants noted changes inside their workplace. They specifically referred to the increasing number of women who were auditioning and also argued that a greater exposure to stripping themes outside the venue had resulted in customers losing interest in purchasing lap-dances for it had the effect of eroding the mystery from the experience - and indeed, the requirement to pay for sexualised performances. Participants suggested that the normalisation of the industry was one explanatory factor for increased numbers of women auditioning. Nebula's owner reported that up to twenty women were making enquiries regarding lap-dance work each week. Participants argued that these factors had combined to devalue the allure of lap-dancing for customers:

**Rebekka:** "More erm, women want to work now, it's less of a big deal isn't it?...when I started (in 2000)...there was less dancers so there was a fair bit of competition when I left" (Rebekka left Galaxy in 2006)

**Chloe:** "Well, I think it has become more of a generally acceptable thing rather than a risqué thing...it's less shocking now to come to a bar....these young guys are surrounded by music videos, porn and all that so it's not as dodgy to go to a bar now...people used to make huge amounts of money, and that doesn't happen anymore"

**Lisa:** "Well that's me going back nearly seven or eight years... there's so many girls going about in short skirts and stuff...you see loads of girls in clubs pretending to be a stripper so...there's nothing special...It's not like before, (guys thought) "oh, let's go and see the strippers"...sex is everywhere now. Like before maybe sexiness was more subtle and lap-dancing would be this overtly sexy thing but now, there's no difference"

**Felicity:** "There's a lot more girls who are willing to get into it now too. There are always girls asking to audition...these days, we are very expendable" (Supernova)

**Billie:** "How do you see the future for lap-dancing venues in Scotland?"

**Owner:** “Well, its lost its allure. And also people can get images downloaded on the internet for free. They don’t have to go to a strip club now. They can see pictures of naked ladies just like that, you know. Yeah, times have changed”

**Jamie:** “There’s a lot more girls auditioning. We just aren’t getting the customers through the door, I think that’s why its harder to make money now, in general. And I think as well lap-dancing’s not so much of a big deal to people anymore...you know, lots of girls will do it now, there’s a lot of competition, I hate to say it but guys have more choice...I think the more girls that are on in a way, the less power we have” (Supernova)

This increase in supply of workers coupled with a decline in paying customers constitutes one of a number of factors which have assisted in driving down women’s earnings, creating a form of work which is increasingly precarious.

When lap-dancing was introduced to the UK in 1995, the industry and the women who worked within it enjoyed a ‘boom’ period. Speaking to longer-term dancers who have had experience of working during this time assists in understanding the shifts. The number of women typically on shift when Rebekka commenced work at Galaxy in 2000 in comparison to when she left in 2006 shows an increase of women working in the industry:

**Billie:** “When you worked at Galaxy, how many women would you say worked on shifts?”

**Rebekka:** “Well the old answer, it was about six during the day and night. The new answer, during the day it was still six but at night it could go up to seventeen, can you imagine seventeen dancers in that tiny space?”

**Billie:** “Why do you think it has gotten harder to make money?”

**Rebekka:** “...well venues are taking on too many people - more than their customer base can support, standards slipping significantly because the clubs want large numbers of dancers so

they can make more money, less money coming from customers. All of these things mean things get watered down”

Sammy notes the work was previously more predictable and profitable:

**Sammy:** “It used to be more predictable. Back then...I made a fucking killing out of it”

Lisa, who has seven years industry experience, reflects upon the shift in supply:

**Lisa:** “There are more girls on day shift now. It used to be just three or four girls on day shift and now you can have over ten” (Supernova)

Samantha reflects on the changes that took place when a venue she enjoyed working in, Apollo, was taken over by Poseidon. Clearly, it would appear that the owner was taking advantage of an increased supply of dancers in order to profit from fees. Samantha also reveals the impact policies can have on women’s experience of performing the work:

**Billie:** “When Apollo got taken over, how many women were put on shift in Poseidon?”

**Samantha:** “Too many. It was ridiculous. On a weeknight they would be fifteen, sixteen, seventeen women on. There was no capping with the commission there. Its not fair...If there are too many girls, no one is happy...”

Nebula is one of two venues in this study which operated on a commission basis as opposed to an up-front house fee and was unique in their policy of placing a limit upon the number of women who could work. In all other venues, there was no such limits placed. One of my own memories of working in

Supernova was the recollection that women were very keen to obtain the rota from bar staff at the beginning of shift, in order to ascertain how many others were scheduled to work so that they could gauge the level of competition. In the changing room, women would generally ask 'who was on' in order to decipher the chances of the shift being financially lucrative. All participants found the lack of willingness to place a limit upon the number of women permitted to work frustrating, and argued that the competition which resulted eroded the atmosphere in the venue, making it harder to sell dances and resulting in a reduced take home pay:

**MM:** "I mean at Galaxy...you're not normally told 'oh, there's too many girls on, you can't work'. So sometimes you'll get twelve girls on at daytime"

**Chloe:** "Titan had far too many girls...there would be girls sitting about doing absolutely nothing..."

**Jamie:** "You don't know how many will be on until you turn up to work. Which is annoying, it makes me feel pretty crap and insecure...you want to know in advance what your chances are going to be. If I come in and see there's seven lassies on the day shift I think, 'fucking hell, this is going to be hard'" (Supernova)

**Athena:** "On average I was making one thousand, one hundred pounds per week for Wednesday, Thursday day and Friday and Saturday night. I used to make on average two hundred pounds each day shift. Five hundred pounds on a Saturday night. I don't make anywhere near that now" (Supernova)

**Felicity:** "I hated it there...when there are tons of girls on its really difficult to make money...most nights you would barely make your commission" (Titan)

**Billie:** "What was the atmosphere like there?"

**Felicity:** "Awful, girls bitching about each other all the time....when there are no customers the atmosphere can get tense"

**Sammy:** “It’s a lot less stressful when there are less on. You will make some money when there are less on. The job now is a lot more stressful than before when there were less girls. I mean you’re chatting to one guy but you have to be aware of what’s going on around you...noticing when the next one (potential customer) comes in...its like a race to the customer...” (Supernova)

Jamie expressed concern that she might even lose money as a result of competition:

**Jamie:** “...I’ve done Saturday day shifts and I’m competing with twelve other lassies...I am shitting myself because I might not make my thirty quid back” (Supernova)

The owner also noted that a lack of customers impacted upon women’s experience at work:

**Owner:** “There’s no guarantees anymore. It used to be on a Friday or Saturday night you would always make good money. And at the end of the month, when people get paid, there used to be a surge...that’s not the case now.”

**Billie:** “Do you think this is affecting the women’s enjoyment at work?”

**Owner:** “Of course. They’ve got bills to pay, mouths to feed. Commitments”

Women suspected that owners were reluctant to place a limit on numbers due to the financial benefits that could be reaped from fees:

**MM:** “There is not a proper cap...of course its good for them because the more girls on, the more twenty pounds they get” (Galaxy)

**Lisa:** “I think he (Supernova’s owner) just started getting greedy. With recession and stuff he was losing money – he used to make all of his money on the door (via entry fees). That place used to be jam packed...I think he wanted to make money back through commission<sup>46</sup>”

**Samantha:** “...they have as many women working as possible so they can cane in as much commission...it was extortionate. Ninety-eight pounds on a Saturday night. Even on a week night it was forty-five quid” (Poseidon)

**Athena:** “...it’s in their interests when you think about it...the more girls that are on, the more money they will make. And the customers like it when there are lots of girls. Like at Callisto, there were more girls than there were customers...there’s more variety for customers...and with Supernova well everyone is paying at the start of the night”

Opening hours of some of the venues have been reduced, indicating a fall in demand, as Nebula’s owner notes:

**Owner:** “Times have changed. There’s a lot of competition too with clubs. There’s seven clubs, I think they are all feeling it. They all used to be open every night. Hercules is only open Friday and Saturday now. Callisto closes one night a week. Titan closes one night a week. Zeus closes some nights. So yeah, there’s less customers”

In May 2011, Supernova decided to open only from 12:00-01:00 on Friday and Saturdays, and from 19:00-01:00 during the rest of the week. I have experience of working on the week and Sunday day shifts and it was generally extremely quiet, and it was not uncommon to be sitting for a number of hours without earning money. Dancers would often complain how poor customer spend was, and overall workers (including myself) were lucky to leave most day shifts with at least fifty pounds. Because dancers did not pay commission to the venue on

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<sup>46</sup> Dancers tend to refer to commission in relation both to house fees and commission percentages. For ease of reader understanding, I distinguish between the two payment practices.

these shifts, it is plausible to hypothesise that the owner was losing money, hence his decision to close the venue during non-profitable hours.

### **The devaluation and de-skilling of the lap-dancing industry**

The commonplace nature of sexual content and the demystification of lap-dance culture appears to have devalued the monetary value of the lap-dance. Although not a common theme amongst all lap-dancing venues in Scotland, Supernova reduced the prices of dances from ten pounds for a fully nude performance to five pounds during the daytime shift in order to retain dwindling custom in 2007. Galaxy initially began this trend, with Supernova, which is situated in close proximity to Galaxy, swiftly following suit. This, according to participants, was due to the fact that both Supernova and Galaxy were competing for the same customer base:

**MM:** "...they (Galaxy) changed it (approximately in 2006) because the day shifts weren't busy..."

**Athena:** "...there is not much we can do because Galaxy offers five pound dances all the time, so why would they (customers) pay more if they can get it across the road for only five pounds?"

**Billie:** "What are your feelings regarding the five pound dances at Supernova?"

**Sammy:** "If we charged ten pounds a dance – well, you know how quiet it is now, we got away with it before because it was just... busier. More custom, and there was less girls as well...if it was ten pound dances all the time, no one would come at all..." (Supernova)

**Owner:** "If it was ten pounds no one would go" (Referring to Supernova and Galaxy)



Galaxy and Supernova were perceived by participants to be lap-dancing 'bars', as opposed to Gentlemen's Clubs, and suggested to attract a 'working class' clientele. These venues were unique as they were the only establishments in this study that operated during the day-time as well as being part of the night-time economy.

The findings also suggest the industry has undergone a process of de-skilling. In these extracts, dancers note that currently 'anyone' can become a lap-dancer as opposed to previously when obtaining the job was difficult, with an emphasis upon performance rather than simply nudity:

**Rebekka:** "You were, er, encouraged to make your shows as individual as possible and actually make a show rather than swaying about on stage for two songs, not engaging with the audience, that's how it ended up. There's less of an emphasis on a show now, and more of an emphasis on nudity" (Galaxy)

**Morag:** "It was notoriously hard to get a job there, so it was regarded as a compliment if you got a job there to you as a dancer. You had to be a good dancer, have stage presence. He lowered that standard for whatever reason, maybe he thought I'll take on anyone as long as their not fat" (Supernova)

**Sammy:** "There were maybe about fifteen girls in total working there when I started and those girls had been working there a long time. I think it was more difficult to get in than it is now" (Supernova)

**MM:** "...in the past it was hard to get a lap-dancing job. But now they are taking anyone. Callisto would take on anyone. But Supernova and Galaxy were a lot more selective. It was quite hard to get a job there. Most people who auditioned didn't get the job, and places like Supernova were doing really well"

This de-skilling, also recently identified in the English industry by Sanders and Hardy (2013) may also contribute to the increased supply of dancers, as more women audition and owners become less selective in relation to skill. Although there continues to be a focus on appearance, as Morag notes, longer-term dancers suggest that an absolute requirement for women to be skilled *performers* appears to have diminished. Reflecting upon my own audition, the owner appeared to be more interested in ensuring I was aware of the rules and, presumably, ensuring I was of an 'acceptable' appearance - indeed, when I initially enquired about the work via telephone I was asked my dress size before being invited to audition, rather than any previous industry experience. Before the audition, I had never danced and as a result possessed no skill whatsoever. Despite this, I was permitted to work.

The devaluation of the labour can also be reflected in the changing policies of two venues featured in the study. Galaxy and Supernova once offered a fixed rate of pay. These venues are unique as previously they paid women for public performances and these payments could be seen to reflect the value owners once attached to women's labour and also rendered the work far less precarious in nature. Previously, house fees did not exist at Supernova and the fee was thirty pounds per week at Galaxy – presently, fees are charged at both venues. Rebekka and Sammy worked in Galaxy and Supernova respectively whilst these policies were in effect:

**Rebekka:** "It was easier to make money purely because you were paid to go on stage...you could quite easily pull in a grand a

week...when I started your job was to go on stage twice, for each of those shows you were paid forty pounds..." (Galaxy)

**Sammy:** " We got paid twenty pounds per stage show. We never paid commission – ever. And there were less girls working there, so you'd do about two or three stage shows a night so you were guaranteed forty-sixty quid..." (Supernova)

MM's excerpt reveals the significant increase in costs for women who work at Galaxy in comparison to previous years:

**MM:** "Before it was only thirty quid for an entire week. Now it's twenty quid per day shift Monday to Thursday, thirty for the night shift. Friday's thirty pounds day, fifty pounds night. Saturday is forty pound day, fifty pound night and Sunday it's twenty pound day, thirty pounds night" (Galaxy)

Guaranteed payments could be topped up by any money they made selling private dances. Although these practices were not representative of the entire industry in Scotland, the changing policies of Supernova and Galaxy, together with a decline in custom, could be viewed as disempowering to women and provide further evidence of the passing of the profitable 'boom' period. Even if one does not consider the unique policies employed by these two venues, participants argued that the industry previously offered a more 'guaranteed' source of income for them than currently. It is worth suggesting that the reason behind the decision to terminate the policy of paying for performances was related to the fact that because there is a greater supply of potential workers, there exists need for venues to pay them. In order to ascertain this for certain, however, there is a need to involve owners who once employed these policies in research.

## **Macro factors: The impact of recession**

The combination of the impact of the recession and the migration of more women into the industry show how this form of labour is subject to and impacted by dynamics pertaining to supply and demand which affects conventional labour, such as the drop in custom which has been partly caused by the recession, according to participants:

**Billie:** “It is harder to make money now?”

**MM:** “Oh yes. We are in the middle of a recession. People are losing their jobs, and of course that will affect us. Redundancies. There is less money about now you know...if there is an event on, you can make money, like at Christmas, when people are spending. But day to day, they don't have the same volume of customers who spend especially since the recession, when guys do have money they don't spend it on dancers...I think (the reduction in spend) shows the climate, clubs are getting more competitive, because there is a lack of money going round in general...the people who do still come in to Galaxy just don't have money. Even regular customers who come in aren't buying dances, they are just buying drinks...there aren't any customers that girls can actually have dances with”

This was reiterated by many of the participants:

**Morag:** “It's far harder now...because of the recession”

**Tania:** “Since the credit crunch guys aren't into spending how they did...one of my regulars came to see me and he said “I won't be back”...when I asked why he said he had just been made redundant...”

**Lisa:** “Ariel used to be an amazing club because you could make so much money and I loved it there because of that...but Glasgow got hit really bad with the recession. During the week (before the recession) you could make two hundred pounds easy...and when I worked there, the commission was less than what it is now”

**Billie:** “When did you find you were starting to make less money?”

**Lisa:** “Well I’d say about two years ago, during the week it dropped dramatically, but at the weekend you could still make your money but you had to work harder for it. I think its a combination of less customers coming through the door and more girls dancing”

**Belinda:** “Well, before I started, I would hear that girls would leave shift with between five hundred and a thousand pounds easily. But it has dwindled down” (Supernova)

**Belinda:** “Zeus used to be very busy with lots of guys, and this was a couple of years ago...I’ve heard from other girls its gone dramatically downhill since then”

**Sammy:** “...the business has changed. There are not as much punters coming in, there is a lot more competition” (Supernova)

Interestingly, on my first day working at Supernova, I asked the first dancer I met in the changing room what the money making potential was in the venue. She also blamed the recession for reduced customer spend as this extract from notes I made after my first shift indicates:

**Billie:** “And so I asked Pippa<sup>47</sup> for advice and she said well it’s okay, but it can be quite quiet at the moment, which she put down to the recession”

In this extract, Nebula’s owner reflects on the impact that a changing economic climate has had on two of his core markets - traveling businessmen, who are less likely to come to Scotland at all, and stag parties, whose spending habits have changed:

**Owner:** “That market has depleted because of the recession, you don’t get so many conferences in Edinburgh now, you don’t get so

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<sup>47</sup> Pippa is an author allocated pseudonym for a dancer who did not participate in this study.

many people coming up for business 'cause it's expensive to fly. People do business conferences online now. So you're not getting the same amount of businessmen coming up to Scotland because the dynamics have changed"

**Owner:** "In the past you'd get a stag group coming in. Say twenty girls. The girls would get twenty pound a head no problem off them to do a private stag show. So there's four hundred quid just like that. And after that the guys would stay and get individual dances so they would be spending more money. Now you'll have twenty guys coming in. They'll buy one drink. They won't pay twenty pound a head for a private show. Now, we have it so that stag will go free, best man will go free, then maybe do eight pounds a head (for the rest of the group) to get the work. And then they'll leave. So you're not getting them staying, you're not getting them spending, people are on a budget now"

## Summary

The cultural and economic shifts appear to have impacted upon supply and demand for lap-dance in Scotland. Participants also suggested that because overtly sexual themes were more socially acceptable, more women in general were turning up to audition for work - with the process of de-skilling having the effect of permitting 'anyone' to become a dancer, rather than it being a prerequisite that one must possess a degree of dancing skill. The more overt themes of sexualisation outside venues also, women suggested, contributed to a reduction in demand as the experience of obtaining a lap-dance had lost its novelty and mysterious nature, as Lisa put it. In addition, it would appear that the recession has also impacted upon the industry, with customers having a reduced disposable income to spend on what could be considered to be a costly source of entertainment. It would seem that a combination of factors have resulted in the Scottish industry witnessing a market by which supply far exceeds demand. This in turn has had an impact upon relationships which are

discussed in Chapter Eight. The following Chapter broadly discusses the industry in Scotland as a form of work, exploring women's experiences, and current problems regarding health and safety.

## **Chapter Seven: Understanding the nature of contemporary lap- dancing labour in Scotland**

This Chapter discusses lap-dancing as a form of work and thus acknowledges its advantages as well as perceived disadvantages. Researchers such as Egan and Sanders refer to lap-dancing as a form of sex work (Egan,2004, Sanders, 2004). The principal point of the term 'sex worker' highlights that, for many individuals, selling sex or sexualised services is just 'another occupation' (Quan,1991). Conceptualising lap-dancing as a form of labour is useful as it enables us to understand work in relation to wider forms of social power (Grint,2005), noting how these impact upon the activity.

Participants suggest demand has fallen for private lap-dances. Although Gentlemen's Clubs have established themselves as a significant fixture of the U.K.'s night-time economy (Chatterton and Hollands,2003), the 'boom' experienced in Scotland and the current drop in demand is indicative of the short shelf life that characterises the industry (Bott,2006). The work's unpredictable characteristics are spread across a number of issues, and quotations from interview transcripts are used to articulate dancers' viewpoints. Some of the workplace rules and regulations discussed in these findings were considered by dancers to be exploitative, and as a result, I consider 'exploitative practices' to be stipulations made by owners and/or management which dancers feel are problematic. In order to balance the discussion, and show why, despite lowering working conditions and reduced opportunities to



make money, women remain in the industry - the positive aspects of the work are also discussed.

### **Understanding the concept of work**

It is important to understand the different meanings individuals ascribe to work, beyond the State's narrow definition of it consisting only of paid, formal employment. Individuals are categorised as being either economically active or inactive (Grint,2005). This fails to recognise that unpaid activities such as domestic housework, and non-formal activities such as cash-in-hand jobs are also 'real work'. Grint argues that one of the contributory factors as to whether or not something should be considered as work is dependent upon how those involved interpret circumstances and activities (Grint,2005). Not only did participants consider lap-dancing to be work, they also used language relating to labour and a manager-employee relationship, rather than their true status as self-contracted workers as can be seen in the following excerpts:

**Felicity:** "...It's not worth losing my job over"

**Morag:** "But my Boss hates tattoos..."

**Athena:** "...I'm like it's work, I can't be arsed getting ready"

When I was on shift, and in interviews, the question "when are you next working?" was often asked during conversation. Supernova's owner clearly considered women to be 'at work'. I recall being apprehended when he noticed I was talking to my partner who had paid a visit to the venue whilst I was working. Telling me not to allow him to visit again, he reminded me that I was

there 'to work, not talk to my boyfriend'. In addition, Nebula's owner also considered dancers to be working when on his premises. Women refer to chatting to potential clients as 'working the floor'. It is clear then that dancers consider what they do to encompass work

### **Returning to the pole : Why dancers remain in the industry**

Despite being less financially lucrative, women continue to lap-dance. Thus, it is worth exploring why women continue to do so. Sexualised labour cannot be conceptualised to be the sole result of economic and/or physical compulsion – it can also be considered something that has arisen as a choice, albeit within sometimes very narrow constraints. Suggesting that cultural change is the *only* factor for women's entry, then, is too simplistic. Bradley (2008) has noted that modern lap-dancers are more likely to be equipped with social capital such as educational qualifications. Thus there has been a move to considering that women who work within the industry are doing so as a choice rather than out of 'need'. Bradley suggests that this means dancers 'could' choose to pursue other careers and that sexualised labour can be framed as choice. In this study, all the participants aside from Chloe had qualifications in excess of Scottish Standard Grades, with others possessing First degrees, college certificates and postgraduate qualifications.

Dancers identified a number of benefits which were specifically correlated to their work. These were; flexibility, financial benefits, opportunities to socialise, pleasant experiences with some customers, and the enjoyment derived from

performance. Each of these will be discussed showing that lap-dancing can remain an attractive form of work. In order to fully articulate dancer's voices, I provide quotes pertaining to each benefit, and full responses to when participants were asked what they enjoyed most about their job. By doing this, the reader should be able to obtain a firm understanding of the benefits as dancers perceive them.

**“...and at the end of the day, you know, it's all down to making money...”<sup>48</sup>: The benefits of instantaneous cash**

The majority of dancers initially became involved in the industry due to the perception that high amounts of money could be made - quickly. Despite the reduced opportunities to leave shift with large amounts of cash, the *potential* to earn without having to wait for a pay-day was cited by *all* dancers as one of the main benefits of the work. Dancers who were not working in the industry on a regular basis would sometimes return in order to make some quick cash, for example, although Samantha once danced full-time, she now strategically works during periods when she believes customers will spend, such as during events such as rugby matches, a tactic adopted by some other dancers. This tactic allows Samantha to top up her regular salary:

**Samantha:** “During the holidays I do the odd shift when the rugby is on in Edinburgh...I'd figured out that lap-dancing during certain events was more lucrative...I don't dance much these days, but when I do I come out with a decent amount of money. It's like a cash machine”

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<sup>48</sup> Quote extracted from an interview with Belinda

**Morag:** “A lot of girls try to organise shifts around pay-days...and also rugby, football anything like that”

Rebekka has now completely left the industry, however she reflects on how she used to ‘dip in’ to the work on occasion, as a convenient way to fund travel expenses:

**Rebekka:** “Because I live in London now, I sometimes, when I used to visit Edinburgh, I would dance the odd occasion, just to fund the journey”

The instantaneous, cash-in-hand element of the work was considered to one of the great advantages of working in the industry - more so than the money that could be earned overall, which could not be guaranteed. What could be usually guaranteed, however, was that at least *some* money could be taken away, as Jamie notes:

**Jamie:** “What I like about it is I like getting the money cash-in-hand...unlike other jobs that I’ve had where I’ve had to wait to get paid and stuff. I mean the good thing about working in there is you will usually get something...I’ve had bad days where I’ve come out of there, after seven hours, with twenty quid. But generally I will get about fifty...its quite nice to know you are more than likely going to come out with something... you know I have money in my wallet now that I wouldn’t have if I hadn’t worked yesterday... where else can you go to work and come out the same day with cash?” (Supernova)

**Felicity:** “Yeah, my earnings have definitely went down, but they are still good enough to warrant booking in a couple of times a week, and I get them straight away” (Supernova)

Morag notes that although uncertain, the potential to make money in venues is always present:

**Morag:** “I enjoy the potential that’s there to make good money, although you don’t know if you will or not, it depends...you can never tell...but you can”

**Tania:** “You’re going to come out with something. Even if it’s just ten or twenty pounds”

**Chloe:** “Its difficult to project what you are going to make. You have good weeks and bad weeks...I generally try and keep going, especially if it’s a bad shift. If I’m so tired I need to sit down I will, but when I’m there I’m there to make money”

Cash-in-hand had a motivational effect on dancers, and many spoke of the ‘high’ they got when they were experiencing a financially lucrative shift. In the following extract, Sammy reflects on her first shift at Supernova, comparing the money she earned instantly there to what she was used to working in a regular job:

**Sammy:** “I was just so buzzing that I’d just been paid eighty pounds cash-in-my hand when I was used to working for five pounds an hour”

**Felicity:** “You know where you’re on a roll, you just want to get the money out of them, it’s great when it’s like that!”

**Jamie:** “...you always get the money off the guy first before you start the dance. I like seeing the money there in my purse...it keeps me going...I am addicted to cash-in-hand...although it’s getting harder and harder...”

**Billie:** “When you worked at Titan, did you like to go to the VIP area?”

**Rebekka:** “I did. Normally the people who could afford it, it was one hundred pounds an hour in your hand, not to be sniffed at...it was a very very nice experience to be paid so much money”

Instantaneous cash was the reason why long-term dancer Lisa, who was not dancing at time of interview, argued she would never rule out returning in future, and the option provided her with some sort of security, knowing money might be made if she experienced a 'tight spot' financially:

**Lisa:** "I've got too much on with uni and that at the moment. It's just another distraction. But I know I can go back whenever I want, and there's instant cash there. You know, if you find you're skint"

## **Flexibility**

Dancers clearly valued the flexibility the work can potentially offer, and considered it to be a far more flexible labour option than conventional forms of employment. Although many venues stipulated working hours, all of them allowed dancers to choose which days they worked, and how many:

**Morag:** "Its the kind of job where there can be the chance to make a lot of money very quickly so you can take time off, sometimes I might work a lot then take a long break so I can have time with my daughter"

**Jamie:** "It's good that Supernova have the day shift option, I like to have my evenings"

**Sammy:** "I like the freedom of the job, the fact you can choose when you work, how much you work, how hard you work. I actually find that quite empowering..."

**Belinda:** "I decided it would be better for us for me just to do the dancing because I could work two or three shifts a week at Supernova which means I didn't have to put (the baby) in nursery...I like the freedom of it and that you can possibly make good money as well. And I get to spend time with my family"

**Felicity:** "I like being able to work when I need the money. Take time off when I don't need the money"

**Samantha:** “Apollo were brilliant, they would let you have late starts if you had commitments as long as you didn’t do it too often. Most clubs are absolutely rigid on start times”

As Morag and Belinda note, the work allows them to spend time with family, and, in Belinda’s case, save money on costly childcare provision.

## **Performance**

The majority of participants enjoyed the physical act of pole-dancing - even though it was something they were not explicitly paid to do:

**Morag:** “I like the show aspect of it”

**Rebekka:** “My favourite aspect of being a dancer was the dancing. I found it very therapeutic, you can just get lost in yourself...I used to dance to really emotive things like *Red Hot Chilli Peppers*, *Scar Tissue* or *Massive Attack*. I chose. I really really enjoyed getting on stage and getting lost in it”

**Jamie:** “I like dancing. At Supernova you get to pick your music. I adopt music. I use the lyrics to er, convey emotion and stuff on stage. I always dance to the same songs”

Interestingly, and despite it being part of the labour that is unpaid, Felicity also enjoyed preparing herself cosmetically for work:

**Felicity:** “I like the pole dancing part of it, the physical part of it. I like doing a job where I’m also keeping fit you know. And I like getting dressed up, dolled up, you know”

Reflecting on my time at Supernova, I was struck by the enthusiasm many of the women had for performing on the pole, with many using a quiet shift as an

opportunity to hone their skills. This was something I never partook in, due to my personal fear of the pole in this venue, which was elevated on a high platform. However, many other women embraced it, using pole practice as a way to not only improve, but also to speed up a slow shift.

## **Social Benefits**

Dancers appreciated the social aspect of the work. Quotes reflect the friendships that could be made in the industry, and some women often socialised together outside work. Colosi has also noted the importance of socialising amongst dancers, and how friendship ties can also operate as important support networks for dancers whilst at work (Colosi,2010b). Here we see the enjoyment dancers could derive from companionship:

**Morag:** “We do go out together, you know all your friends are in work and you have a laugh, sometimes it doesn’t feel like work because you’re having a laugh...it’s like a job where you can have a drink, hang out with your friends” (Supernova)

**Rebekka:** “Erm, early on in my Galaxy career, it was actually fun. It was, erm, liberating, and emancipating, it was fun, it was creative...the dancers socialised together, the dancers socialised with their partners and other dancers, so it was fun”

**Felicity:** “Most of my social life is spent with other lap-dancers. My daughters play with Morag’s daughter all the time, and we met though lap-dancing”

**Jamie:** “I’ve met a really good friend who’s on the bar. I would like to stay in touch with her if I leave” (Supernova)

However, this workplace should not be automatically considered to *always* constitute ‘one big happy family’ - participants noted that as the industry



became less lucrative, although friendship alliances existed, general relationships were becoming strained due to competition. These dynamics are explored in Chapter Eight.

## **Customers**

Although unpleasant customers could impact on dancers' enjoyment, women also indicated that there were many men who they enjoyed interacting with. Indeed, in some situations, it was customers who made shifts more enjoyable for women. These excerpts question assumptions which tend to portray *all* customers in a negative light (Bindel,2004), and instead, show that in some cases, they can add to positive work place experiences:

**Morag:** "Some guys will be very funny, will have a laugh, and are also interesting to talk to...and now and again guys have handed me fifty quid just for chatting for ten minutes, they understand this is my job"

**Rebekka:** "I've had some exceptional conversations with some exceptional people...I've actually been on holiday with them, we all just went on holiday to Tenerife...Some of them (customers) were incredibly nice so it was a joy to sit with them"

**Tania:** "I had a lovely kind man who used to come and see me, he was much older than me...I left that club though to work in another but I always remember talking to him when I think about working there" (Ariel)

In addition to enjoyment derived from the company of customers, Samantha reveals the pleasant feelings she experiences due to men being attracted to her:

**Samantha:** “I’ve actually had some fucking brilliant times with customers, absolutely hilarious laughs, you know and don’t get me wrong, it’s a huge boost to my ego to have eight or nine men eating out of the palm of my hand...just knowing that they like me, they fancy me, it’s nice, its enjoyable, they are into me, I like that!”

I conclude this discussion using quotes, taken from each transcript, which give explicit reasons for the reasons why each participant returned to work, thus capturing the multitude of reasons dancers work in this industry:

**Billie:** “What did you/do you enjoy most about working as a dancer?”

**Rebekka:** “Well, the money, while it was there, and I found it very expressive, though dancing...it was a way to express myself”

**Jamie:** “What I like most about it is getting the money cash in hand. I really, really like that...it’s quite nice to know you are going to come out with something, more often than not, even if it’s just twenty quid...and when you are making money, you can get on a bit of a high, on a bit of a roll. And its quite nice if I have done well and I can come out and buy myself something nice the next day. I’ve been able to buy a few things I couldn’t get by not dancing”

**Athena:** “I like the money and I like the hours. It gives me time to spend with Ricky<sup>49</sup> and when I was at college I had loads of time to revise and stuff...I saw my friends at college doing normal jobs and I was like ‘How can you do those jobs and then find the time to revise on top of that?’ That would be so stressful! And I could just take time out from it anytime I wanted as well”

**MM:** “There can be a certain amount of fun. It can be a more laid back and enjoyable atmosphere than working in an office. You do get to meet people from all different places. So you are making money but it can be a big part of your social life too”

**Chloe:** “I’ve had lots of interesting conversations. I meet people from all different backgrounds and I like that. And I think if you are in a tight spot financially, it obviously easier to make some quick money in this job, rather than another job. Where you have to wait a month or three weeks to get paid”

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<sup>49</sup> Ricky is an author selected pseudonym for Athena’s partner.

**Samantha:** “The flexibility, and because I only work when I know it will be good, I usually come away with a couple of hundred quid”

**Belinda:** “Oh, my friends, definitely, the people I have met there....lap-dancers are so colourful, you don't come across people like that in everyday life. And obviously, there's the money. There's certain things we wouldn't have had without the dancing money, holidays and things like that”

**Lisa:** “I think it was a combination that I could get a good laugh - and the money. I think there was also the power thing - it was a kinda boost to my ego in a way. You were like ‘yeah, so many guys give me their money tonight - haha!’ I mean, I wouldn't pay the money!”

**Donna:** “The stage. The performance. When I do a dance its like an art to me...it's a performance”

**Morag:** “I like the show aspect of it, I enjoy the good potential for making money, the laugh you have the atmosphere when its good, the party atmosphere, you can forget you are at work because you are having fun”

**Tania:** “The only thing I like about it is the money. I liked working in Ariel best before the economic downturn and before the owner started overstaffing it with dancers”

**Felicity:** “I like the freedom of it, and I like being able to work when I need the money. Take time off when I don't need the money...I like doing a job where I'm also keeping fit you know. And I like getting dressed up, dolled up, you know. I never get the chance any other time....and it's quite empowering you know, getting the money out of these guys. The job itself is great, it's the way it is run, that's the problem for me”

**Sammy:** “I do still like it, when you get a busy night and you're on a roll you do get that adrenaline and its like you're all pumped up, so there's that slight addiction to that adrenaline and obviously, the money...but today it was so quiet I actually went for a sleep on the wee ledge...”

Clearly, women's reasons for remaining in the industry are not as clear cut as simply arising from pure financial need, but rather, they arise from a range of factors. This presses us to consider that, as female participation in the labour market often involves low paid, part-time, insecure employment (Dex,1984,

Rubery,1994, Deshotels *et al*,2012, Smart,2003, Beck,2000), and due to the impacts of the recession on the employment market, lap-dancing still can present an alternative option to women - offering flexibility and a potentially superior income stream.

## **Stigma**

Lap-dancing occupies a curious position of being more visible and acceptable but yet also enduring social stigma, and this was something participants spoke of during interview in detail. Bradley notes uncertainty as to whether the mainstreaming of lap-dancing will result in greater social acceptance for it as a form of work (Bradley,2008). Participants voices suggest that acceptance for sexual themes has not been accompanied with acceptance for lap-dancing as work:

**Jamie:** “ It would cause a lot of problems if my family found out about this. Also...it might affect my employment prospects, because people judge...I’m always worrying I’m going to get found out to be doing this”

**Tania:** “My sister refuses to speak to me...I tell most people I work for a cosmetics agency”

**Billie:** “Do you tell people you do what you do?”

**Sammy:** “Interestingly, when I first started I would tell everyone, because I was like, whatever, and then I realized that, people judge. So now I need to know people very well before I tell them. The longer I’ve done it, the less likely I have been to tell people, because I have realized the implications of telling them”

**Billie:** “Do you your family know about your occupation?”

**Athena:** “Ohhh no. Its not even that I would not like to tell them, I was thinking of telling them the other day...they wouldn’t understand, they would think I am a prostitute or that I have AIDS”

**Billie:** “Why haven’t you told your parents?”

**Belinda:** “In a way my Mother would almost blame herself. She would think she would go to hell, all this sort of thing. I couldn’t ever tell her, I couldn’t do that to her”

**Lisa:** “I never told folk from uni but it was never anything I went to a great extent to hide...”

**Billie:** “What about your family?”

**Lisa:** “No, that’s the one area I keep this away from”

**Morag:** “I’m usually very open....no one connected to my daughter like school or whatever knows, because of the stigma. I am not ashamed of what I do, my whole family know what I do, and my friends know...but I realise I have to watch what I say to some people because it might hinder me getting a job in the future”

**Billie:** “And what are their (friends) opinions of what you do?”

**Felicity:** “Some people are very judgemental. Some guys are like ‘woah’, and think you might be easy or something”

**Donna:** “My Dad knows but he’s not happy about it. He doesn’t speak to me much anymore, because I’m dancing”

Dancers’ income could be made unpredictable by the exploitative practices employed by some venues of extracting varying amounts of commission, which could fluctuate across shifts. Not all venues included in this study engaged in such practices. However, in Ariel, commission was utterly impossible to predict since the owner decided it would be based upon the number of customers who came to the venue on any one shift. The freedom owners have to change working conditions on an impromptu basis is indicative of the power they hold over the amount of money women are able to make. The very fact they do this

at all is indicative of a recognition that there are an adequate number of women who will accept this and remain at the venue:

**Morag:** “They would multiply or divide or whatever however many guys were in the club in relation to the amount of girls in the club and would charge commission...sometimes girls were paying £150 commission...just because there are more guys in the club doesn't mean they are spending money! It was just them being greedy...some girls will put up with it, it was too much of a risk I thought” (Ariel)

Such practices also existed at Poseidon, who were able to monitor dancers and alter commission for those who were deemed to be making money:

**Samantha:** “The commission at Poseidon was extortionate...they would put it up! If they knew you had a good night they would personally charge you more!”

In Titan, commission charges increased during the fieldwork period. When I interviewed Rebekka, she informed me that commission was charged at a rate of between forty and fifty pounds per night. Rebekka danced at this venue during the early 2000's. In May 2011 a similar practice of changing commission rates had emerged: Morag informed me that commission on a week night was now sixty pounds, with this rising to one hundred and twenty pounds at the weekend which 'sometimes' was one hundred and forty pounds, depending on how busy staff decided the venue was. As Morag notes, however, the number of visitors present inside a venue does not automatically equate to greater income for dancers - all that is guaranteed is additional profit for owners due to a greater amount of entry fee payments being made, and that dancers will need to sell more dances in order to make a living.

Sporadic applications of fines could also impact upon women's money making potential. Swift alterations to rules and a lack of communication meant that women could never be completely sure if they were breaking a rule or not, with fines reducing the money made from a shift:

**Rebekka:** "Capricorn was the worst. Because if someone didn't like your behaviour, you got fined. And what that person didn't like changed from night to night. So, if you were dancing too far away, you got fined. You danced too close, you got fined. And how far away changed"

**MM:** "I've worked in a club that would fine you if your lipstick didn't match your nail varnish"

**Billie:** "Where?"

**MM:** "In Poseidon for a while. And one week you were allowed to wear see through underwear and another week you weren't and if you were caught doing either or they would fine you. So those people who didn't hear the rules were fined"

**Felicity:** "At one point we had to wear 70's costumes. I mean, how are you supposed to make money with a 70's wig on? She (manager) said if you don't do it you'll get a forty pound fine" (Persephone)

**Belinda:** "You would just get sent home or fined if you were late. If you didn't turn up for your shift they would fine you" (Zeus)

Predictability of income could also be affected by other exploitative practices.

Athena reported that the practice of keeping any tips<sup>50</sup> behind the bar enabled management at Callisto to retain these, if they decided to:

**Athena:** "...one thing that annoyed me was that if you got a tip from a customer you would always hand it in and if it was a tenner

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<sup>50</sup> Callisto allowed dancers to take tips if a customer offered - however they were not permitted to solicit them using a jug or any other method.

you were to swap it for a token (thus enabling Callisto to retain a percentage) like it was a dance and if it was under a tenner you would just put the money behind the bar. And one night I went to go and collect a five pound tip. And the Boss was like “oh I don’t know what you’re talking about, I gave you that” and I knew he didn’t”

There are currently no regulations preventing such exploitative practices occurring which means the fairness of a working environment is decided by owners who are empowered by the current lack of workplace regulation. Felicity, Lisa and Jamie reflect on the haphazard nature of management:

**Billie:** “Do you feel the treatment you receive from managers differs from place to place?”

**Felicity:** “Yes. And most of the time its really shit. There is no management Supernova for example, just gossiping...”

**Lisa:** “I think some people might get away with more than others. It’s not a regular workplace regarding the way its run and the way things are dealt with...” (Supernova)

**Jamie:** “Its just really badly run, there are no rules and no guidelines...”(Supernova)

### **Similarities between lap-dancing and the service industry**

Ehrenreich’s ethnography of the service industry highlights some similarities lap-dancing shares with such forms of work. Direct comparisons include language used between workers, appearance regulations, shift patterns, general rules and regulations and surveillance of workers. Ehrenreich (2001) and Toynbee (2002) suggest these industries operate in a way that serves to deter employees from organising against repressive employment regimes. The selling of sex and sexualised services represents one of the main aspects of



the commodification of sex which has become more prevalent and noticeable in recent decades. Social relations have become commodified in a way that is then sold under market relations (Smart, 2003). The sexual element is simply part of the process. Lap-dancing labour can involve unpaid emotional labour, “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (Hochschild, 1983;7). Such labour must also involve the performer being able to essentially ‘mask’ their emotions – which may mean pretending to enjoy something they may despise (MacDonald and Sinanni, 1996). This is particularly acute within lap-dancing, which relies on customers accepting this ‘feigned intimacy’. Certainly, I admit I had days when I was reluctant to approach and engage in chat with potential customers - yet engaging in believable stage management is essential for success as a lap-dancer, for it was very rare to be approached by a customer. A participant in Bindel’s research found the constant obligation to provide emotional labour was the most difficult part of the job (Bindel, 2004), yet this is precisely the part of the work which is unpaid. All dancers in this study spoke of an obligation to perform emotional labour, and often found this difficult:

**Rebekka:** “You had to be able to read a customer...it could be very, very draining. Sometimes you had to work exceptionally hard”

**Morag:** “It’s mentally exhausting constantly having to constantly speak to people you are not really interested in...they want to tell you all their problems in life, so you become a bit of a mental health worker”

**Jamie:** “Sometimes you get guys who want to talk about problems...if they are droning on and on and its clear they want a counsellor instead of a fucking dance then you have to make your excuses and go”

**Athena:** "...you get these ridiculous stags who are like 'oo I don't really want to get married because theres this other girl I really really like...it felt more like I was a counsellor than anything"

**Chloe:** "You have to look like you are 'into it'...it's a performance...you have to make out you are attracted to this other person"

**Felicity:** "...It's more than just taking clothes off...You're always keeping in mind you are there to make money but you don't want to come across that way..."

**Donna:** "Well, chatting, counseling...constant shaving and stuff before work"

Sammy's quote below indicates her awareness of not only the emotional work that goes into securing lap-dances - but also its inevitable commonalities with 'chance' - she also alludes to incorrect perceptions held by outsiders, suggesting that the work is a form of 'easy money', requiring very little skill or effort (Campbell,2008):

**Sammy:** "I think people think we sit around and guys pick who they fancy – it's not like that...It's about how willing you are to go up to customers, chat to them, how much energy you put into that...and sometimes it's just random fucking chance a lot of the time you will spend time talking to someone for ages, about their problems, and they'll not buy a dance"

**Donna:** "It's luck, its pure luck, because sometimes, guys will never dance with the first person who talks to them, you never can know"

**Owner:** "When girls approach too quick and the guys say no they won't get another shot of them. It's about getting them at the right time. But it can be pot luck"

**Morag:** "...you get the ones who take up all your time but also don't want to pay you, so you go through all the palaver of talking to them, trying to get a dance out of them in the end you aren't even getting money out of them"

**Chloe:** “What I really don’t like is when guys say not just now but then the next second they go with someone else and I just wish they would be honest and say in a nice way ‘I’m not into you’”

**Jamie:** “You would be potentially chatting away for half an hour and after all of that they will only buy one or two dances. And then you will chat away to a guy and they’ll say ‘maybe later’ and then they’ll go with someone else”

On reflection, I could personally relate to these sentiments. I found it was quite common to spend a significant amount of time with a potential customer in conversation, to discover they were ‘only there for a drink’.

Surveillance was used sporadically in order to ensure that dancers were adhering to rules. In Zeus, women were tightly monitored by the female manager who observed their behaviour via CCTV in her private office. Workers who did not behave in an acceptable manner were made to watch replays of footage in order to see the ‘error’ of their ways:

**Belinda:** “She kept an eye on everything. In her office, she had a camera on every single room...if you did anything even slightly wrong she would haul you up and make you watch the footage and have a go at you...”

Nebula’s owner had a vested interest in dancers’ financial success, since he retained a percentage from each dance sold. He approached dancers who failed to secure lap-dances in order to ascertain the reason why they were not attracting customers, and to see how he could assist:

**Owner:** “If she’s not making money I sit down with her, look at her approach to the customers, look at her appearance. That’s all

monitored, if I noticed that a girl doesn't make as much money as she should – then I'll have a word with her..."

Like Nebula, Poseidon also monitored earnings:

**Samantha:** "...they were counting how many dances you did. And they knew if you had been in the VIP room because you had to tell them"

These excerpts reveal the surveillance that is exercised in venues, as income is actively and closely monitored. This practice is commonplace in venues where commission is paid, such as Callisto. It was also well known in Supernova that the owner was able to observe his premises via CCTV - which could be viewed off site. Thus, dancers and staff could never be completely sure if they were being observed or not.

The social hierarchies and internalized norms of the service industries are present in the lap-dancing venue. Ehrenreich, writing on her own experience, felt that she was "in no position, as a first-dayer, to launch new topics of conversation" (Ehrenreich,2001;22), and this mirrors my experience when I first started the work. On my first shift, I recall I spent around four hours talking to a customer - purely so that I would have at least someone to talk to, as women were not forthcoming in making conversation. Looking back, I realise this behaviour would not have helped my relationship with dancers as I eventually discovered that it is not considered appropriate to spend excessive amounts of time with customers in Supernova! Here I include an extract from my diary,

written during the first month of working as a dancer to highlight the isolation I experienced when I first started work:

**Billie:** “I spend most of my time during the seven hour shift sitting at one end of the club while all the other women sit opposite at the bar, chatting away, waiting for customers to come. I’m finding it a bit difficult to get people to talk to me...the last time I tried to initiate a conversation I was completely blanked. I have heard one of the women is spreading some rumours about me. I think they think I’m a bit odd as I’m quiet...”

Fortunately, I was eventually accepted into the group. The second excerpt was written after I had spent a full two months working at Supernova:

**Billie:** “Most of the women chat to me now...but its been hard to develop friendly relationships with women. It almost felt like I had to demonstrate that I wasn’t going anywhere, I was going to stick around, despite the fact no one was talking to me”

These notes reveal it took some time to be accepted by other dancers at Supernova. I witnessed similar patterns with other new dancers who started at the venue, who were initially treated with disdain by seasoned workers. Here, Athena reflects upon her first days working at Callisto:

**Athena:** “I didn’t think I had a problem with them but one of the girls who was a bit friendlier said “oh other girls think you are a bitch but I quite like you” and I was like “oh, I didn’t think anyone had a problem with me?” But people were obviously talking about me”

Participants were wary about speaking about problems when they first started working. Morag was concerned about acting ‘out of turn’ when her possessions were stolen from Supernova’s changing room:

**Morag:** “I didn’t complain. I was quite new and didn’t want to rock the boat...I wasn’t sure if complaining was appropriate”

During audition, Tania was unsure about the appropriateness of asking questions about work. The exploitation she experienced mirrors the practices found in Roderick’s (2008) research in which one participant had to pay the owner to audition:

**Tania:** “I know now that Pisces’ policy is to keep your earnings from your first three nights of employment and that I probably would have been given more shifts if I’d dared to ask at the time”

My own experience and that of other dancers suggest that when they first start working they are isolated until they are able to ‘break in’ to the dancer sub-group. Lewis (1998) has noted the socialisation rituals dancers undergo in order to integrate into the workplace. As with other forms of service work, dancers must wait until they are accepted into the group, although in an industry which increasingly pits women against one another in competition, this task is not easy (Smart, 2003). Newcomers are immediately viewed as obstructions to others’ financial gain.

In previous times, women enjoyed more choice in relation to who they danced with:- however as demand falls, women are increasingly obligated to dance for more problematic customers, and in doing so undertake the necessary emotional labour required to do this. Here, Jamie reflects on her dancing for a customer who she did not want to, in case her identity as a lap-dancer was

discovered by her family. She felt she had no choice in order to make money on a particularly poor shift. Her excerpt also alludes to the stigmatising attitudes which continue to exist in society, and the impact they can potentially have on the job:

**Jamie:** “I remember once I did a dance and the guy mentioned that he worked in a division of my Mother’s work. This was after I had chatted to him for a while. Once he told me that I made excuses to go away...But he came and asked me for a dance”

**Billie:** “Did you dance for him?”

**Jamie:** “I did. I had not made any money all day, but I honestly thought I would throw up...I did feel ashamed as it would kill my Mother if she found out...”

According to Tania and Chloe, some customers could be very unpleasant on weekend shifts, however they felt obligated to engage with them in order to generate an income. Chloe eventually found dealing with stag parties to be so difficult that she finally stopped working in the evenings:

**Chloe:** “I really can’t stand stag parties...I stopped doing nights because I hate stag parties so much, it is the worse part of my job, but they are the ones who spend at the weekend. I don’t like doing Saturday afternoons either because of that...a Saturday night in Supernova is complete hell. There’s actually nothing worse than that”

**Tania:** “If I don’t approach customers, I don’t make any money. That said, I find a lot of men who come at the weekend get off on turning you down and insulting you...theres not a lot of choice but to dance for them though, it’s not like there are a lot of nice guys coming in on a Saturday night”

**Felicity:** “The guys at the weekend really rude. I can say I get insulted every Saturday night. And they can say some really nasty stuff. I don’t know, its like they think you have no feelings” (Supernova)

**MM:** “Sometimes, if you are having a shit shift, you will need to take whatever you can get, you know?”

**Billie:** “How do you mean?”

**MM:** “Well, if you haven’t made much, you might find yourself dancing with someone who’s a bit of a prick, you know, rather than just telling him to fuck off”

## **The Gentlemen’s Club**

Although all venues offer varying workplace experiences, Gentlemen’s Clubs shared some common characteristics. The patrons of such establishments were considered to be far more demanding of women in terms of their requirement for greater periods of emotional labour than those who visited lap-dancing bars. Dancers were aware of the class based divisions regarding the markets different sorts of venues attempted to attract:

**Samantha:** “...there are the high-end ones, I mean Poseidon is looking for high-end businessmen. Supernova is anyone, its rough and ready...at the high end clubs have been a lot more fussy about my behaviour and my dress”

**Tania:** “Apollo and Ariel are perceived to be more upmarket establishments...Galaxy, Supernova and Callisto are more down market”

**Billie:** “Regarding Supernova, what would you say the target audience is?”

**Morag:** “More working class definitely. Just regular guys they maybe have some trade or skill. You know, builders, joiners, locally come in maybe on their lunch break or the evening...”



According to dancers, the layout and atmosphere in bars such as Supernova meant that customers did not expect the same degree of conversation prior to buying a dance:

**Lisa:** “At Supernova you could sometimes get away with walking round and saying “Hi, would you like a dance?”...at Gentlemen’s Clubs I suppose you couldn’t get away with that...just the dynamics of it, there’s no comfy seats or VIP areas”

**Morag:** “In Ariel you have to sit and chat to the guys, you have to stroke their ego and make them feel good. You *have to*”

**Samantha:** “You can’t sit at the bar all night. You’ll make nothing...especially in places like Poseidon, you know, Gentlemen’s Clubs. They want to sit down with you for a bit and have a long chat...”

**Felicity:** “In Gentlemen’s Clubs I’ll sit with them for ages because that’s what the other girls do. Like that’s the way. And there tends to be more competition as there’s tables to sit down and make conversation with guys...At Supernova its very different as you know. They still want to talk. But you don’t have to chat as long”

**Billie:** “It seems that in Gentlemen’s clubs, there is far more emphasis on chatting”

**Felicity:** “Definitely. Oh yeah. You are trying to get all of their money out of them”

**Sammy:** “I don’t want to work somewhere with VIP’s. In Supernova they often want to chat but not for as long. But when your money is completely relying on you clicking and you are not clicking it can get a bit stressful”

**Billie:** “Do you think you have to get on with them in Gentleman’s Clubs?”

**Sammy:** “If you want to make anything, yeah. At Supernova its not as focussed on talking”

The owner also noted that as a Gentlemen’s Club, customers were expecting an environment where they would be welcome to stay:

**Owner:** “Nebula is a Gentlemen’s Club, so we have to make sure the customer is comfortable when he comes in, make sure he has a nice environment to relax in for a while. If the girls do their job right, spend a bit of time with them, show interest, the guys will go away having a good experience”

Lap-dancing bars tend to be less ‘comfortable’ than Gentlemen’s Clubs. For example, in Supernova, there was a lack of comfortable seats, which often resulted in both customers and dancers being forced to stand. Venues marketed as Gentlemen’s Clubs offer comfortable sofas and tables, essentially inviting customers to sit for extended periods of time. The design of such establishments is paramount in the creation of an environment where women are obligated to spend longer periods chatting, a design that allows owners to control the customer-dancer dynamics within the venue (Egan,2004) and essentially how women perform their work. That said, it must be emphasised that overall, women felt they had to ‘work harder’ in both bars and Gentlemen’s Clubs to secure dances, but this pressure was more pronounced in the Gentlemen’s Club.

### **Lap-dancers as a cost and asset to venue owners**

Women can be considered to present both a cost and an asset to those who own venues which are well maintained. Women attract customers to the venue who pay entry fees and purchase drinks. Dancers represent a cost when venues are well maintained, with an adequate heating and air conditioning system and contain quality facilities specifically for the women. Findings suggest that in some venues such as Supernova, Galaxy and Callisto, women are positioned more as an asset to owners than as a cost, due to the lack of

attention paid to maintenance and providing adequate facilities. Interestingly, Gentleman's Clubs, such as Apollo, were more likely to offer some kind of facilities than were bars, although the fees they charged were far higher - and they were considered to be more restrictive in terms of rules and the high requirement for emotional labour. Generally, venues vary considerably with regards to facilities provided:

**Rebekka:** "Facilities depend on where you are working. Titan had showers and a tap. In Galaxy, they had the equivalent of one toilet cubicle for about ten ladies"

**Morag:** "I think if you are making money you don't really care...in any workplace you will always bitch about some kind of injustice. There are a few things that piss me off – I wish there were better changing facilities, they are so small...they have a sink and a microwave and a hairdryer someone left but that's it. It's not fantastic" (Supernova)

**Billie:** "What facilities do Galaxy provide?"

**MM:** "We have a shower now. But I wouldn't use it, it is where they (staff) take their dirty mop and bucket and throw rubbish in..."

**Tania:** "Apollo, Ariel, Galaxy and Titan had showers. That was about it really. There's nothing in Supernova, you've seen it yourself. And it's filthy..."

Samantha's reflection on the favourable standards in Apollo indicate that this venue actually engaged with local authority recommendations and was an improved workplace because of it:

**Samantha:** "Apollo was the best. Showers – I mean I could go there from my other job...chill out...there was a kitchen where you could make yourself your dinner...Callisto was horrific. It was appalling, it was disgusting – it stank...there was nowhere to actually put your stuff. No proper lockers. Apollo had proper lockers. Apollo obviously took the council list of standards and

actually took them seriously, like the 1.86 metres that are meant to be allocated per dancer in the changing room”

**Felicity:** “They’ve all been fairly awful. Especially compared to some of the international places I’ve danced in. They have huge changing rooms, they’re amazing. DVD’s to watch, all of this. You can justify the commission a bit more if there are those things”

Items considered to be essential for the job such as sanitary products, were always bought individually by dancers. None of the women reported that any venue they had worked in had any provision in place for ensuring they returned home safely after working a night shift. Dancers varied in their opinions of how important it was that facilities were provided:

**Felicity:** “It is (important) because we are paying to work”

**Samantha:** “Oh its absolutely essential (that facilities are provided). But you know, what can I do about it, there’s not much action I can take, I haven’t got a union, I’ve got no rights with them as an employee to say well these things should be better”

**Rebekka:** “Legally the venues are not expected to do anything. They are under no obligation to do anything regarding providing us with anything”

**Athena:** “Well considering we had to get changed in the public toilet, I was pretty pissed off (about the facilities in relation to the commission charged), yeah, we didn’t have our own changing room. And that’s illegal, you know. But the owner didn’t give a shit. We were told we had to get changed in the public toilet...and it was smelly, cold and horrible...” (Callisto)

**MM:** “The licensing people came in and said our changing rooms were too small. And cold. And that they should have been more facilities in place for us...they blast out freezing cold air and we are standing in our underwear” (Galaxy)

**Belinda:** “All I care about is having somewhere to get changed, somewhere to go to the loo which is clean, and an air conditioning system and heating system that works...I don’t know. It’s not the best facilities in the world. But compared to other places, the commission is not high” (Supernova)

**Jamie:** "...there aren't any facilities like what they have in some other places, so they (other dancers) say. But here (Supernova) is the cheapest place to work and really that's the main thing, I mean we are here to make money and I can put up with stuff if I make it (money)"

**MM:** "I would rather work in a club where there was a good standard of security rather than facilities. As long as you're making money that's more important" (Galaxy)

Felicity's excerpt indicates her willingness to accept what I argue are exploitative practices so long as she was still managing to earn money:

**Felicity:** "She (manager) was always fining us"

**Billie:** "You lasted there for a while"

**Felicity:** "Well, I'm there to make money, and I was still worth my while...I have to remain pragmatic about these things"

The focus on making money was far more important to all dancers than facilities and unfair rules. This is one of the factors which helps explain why dancers tolerate inadequate conditions - making money transcends any desire for change. What I argue are unsatisfactory practices in some of the Scottish venues show similarities with other employment relations although it is clear that owners are able to take advantage over the lax regulations under which they operate. Because women's grievances in this study were very much aligned with the ways in which venues were run suggests a similarity with conventional employment relations, and as protocol is established by owners we can then question the validity of the label of self-contractual work.

As noted earlier, dancers consider the owners to be 'The Boss'. Yet some women were somewhat cynical about their self-contracted status, arguing that it was something owners could abuse:

**Belinda:** "Well sometimes it's like we are self-employed when it suits him" (owner of Supernova)

**MM:** "I do think that if they expect us to go on stage they should be paying for it we are supposed to be privately employed and we are paying them to work there...I think they take advantage of the fact we are self-employed. But they will also treat us like staff, for example, you will flyer<sup>51</sup> or you won't have a job. You will go on stage or you won't have a job...they say if you don't like the rules, you know where the door is"

Jamie was resigned to the fact that, as a self-contracted worker, she would be foolish to expect any sort of duty of care from Supernova's owner:

**Jamie:** "Because we are self-employed, he's not really obligated to do anything for us or anything...the licensing thing he has up in the bar, there's nothing about looking after the girls"

Although the lap-dancing bars tended to allow women to express themselves in forms of dress more so than Gentlemen's Clubs, women were still expected to wear an outfit deemed suitable for working in the lap-dancing environment. When I auditioned at Supernova, I wore a 'normal' outfit comprising of a mini-skirt and bandeau style top. After being told by the owner I could return, he informed me that I would need to buy a dance outfit in order to 'look the part'. In Titan, women were also made to follow rules regarding what was suitable music

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<sup>51</sup> 'Flyering' refers to the practice of women giving out leaflets and coupons in public which are designed to attract potential customers. Venues differ in whether or not women are paid for this work, however participants expressed concern over privacy issues due to the public nature of the practice.

to dance to and what was not. Dancers are, however, especially vulnerable due to their lack of unionising and the stigma that continues to follow them.

### **Dancer strategies: Monitising cultural stereotypes**

Both legitimated service industry workers and self-contracted lap-dancers face increasingly powerful demands upon their delivery of a satisfactory embodied performance in which emotional connections are a critical part of the service exchange (McDowell, 2009). Workplaces are constantly evolving, adapting to the wider demands of the market and are embedded within wider social structures, attitudes and assumptions about gender and sexuality (McDowell, 2009). Because the lap-dancing venue is somewhere where overtly sexual displays of behaviour are acted out by women, dancers perform sexualised heterosexual gendered stereotypes - they 'do gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987), creating performances which they believe customers will be attracted to in order to sell them private dances. These perceptions of what is sexually alluring are connected to the messages drawn from popular culture. Dancers in this study embraced cultural stereotypes, using them as a strategic way to extract money from customers:

**Chloe:** "I had a bunny girl outfit too..."

**Billie:** "Did you ever put on a persona to go with the outfits?"

**Chloe:** "Yeah, what you wear affects how you act a little. When I was a bunny I was more cute and girly. It went with the outfit..."

**Tania:** "I act as slutty as possible...PVC, red lace..."

**Billie:** "Why do you act out these themes?"

**Tania:** "After trial and error I realised these made me the most money"

**Rebekka:** " I never dressed up as a nurse or anything that that but I did do the secretary look, yes it was a generic look but it worked quite well, I think the secretary look was one a lot of men liked"

**Billie:** Why did you go for that look?

**Rebekka:** "Well it was financially lucrative"

**Jamie:** I wear the short stripper skirt and bikini top which is tartan. My other outfit is tartan and PVC. I'm doing the young Scottish tart thing. And a lot of stag parties that come from all over like that"

**Lisa:** "I also had some outfits that used to make me more money ...I used to have a police one...then I had suspenders and stockings. I always seemed to make money making a matching bikini set"

Belinda and a colleague employed innovative sales tactics, eroticising lesbianism with ethnicity in order to sell lesbian shows:

**Belinda:** "...me and Sarah<sup>52</sup> used to wear these coffee and cream pants all the time...we came up with the idea because we often said to guys anyway do you want a coffee and cream dance? And yeah, it worked quite well, it was a way to sell lesbian shows. And that's the way to make the best money"

Nebula's owner also appreciated the financial benefits that cultural stereotypes could bring - so much so, that the club ran specific fantasy night where dancers were required to embody a 'fantasy' theme:

**Billie:** So these nights you put on, lingerie nights, fantasy nights, do they (customers) enjoy women dressing up a certain way?

**Owner:** "Yes, very much so...they get to be close to something they might have been fantasising about forever, you know?"

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<sup>52</sup> Sarah is an author selected pseudonym for a dancer who was not a participant in this study.



## **Making money : ‘Up to the girls...’**

Price-Glynn notes that when a customer enters a venue, they are paying for a multitude of services (Price-Glynn,2010). Nebula’s owner acknowledged this, arguing that customers are paying for an ‘experience’ which, in his opinion, was partly provided by the surroundings and bar staff:

**Owner:** “A customer is coming in for an experience. We have to give him the best experience possible so that when he leaves he feels satisfied...we give them a nice environment to come into. Then, it’s up to the girls...”

The statement that the rest of the customer’s experience is “up to the girls” is indicative of the individualised responsibility placed upon women with regards to their pleasing customers and thus their capacity for earning money.

Customers pay to sit inside the venue (in comfort if they visit a Gentlemen’s Club), view performances, consume drinks (Price-Glynn,2010), and enjoy a homosocial environment (Woods,2007). The venues featured in this study offered no payment for dancers’ public performances, nor did they offer a percentage of door fees. Participants argued that the principal reason for customers entering the venue was to observe or talk to women. Considering that nudity is the main aspect which differentiates these places from regular bars and clubs, we can argue that women are the reason owners have a business at all:

**MM:** “...a lot of these bars, Galaxy for example, there would be no customers if it wasn’t for us. They don’t have a pool table, they don’t have a TV for watching football...we (dancers) are the reason they come”

**Felicity:** “All they (customers) really want is...to chat to them for a bit, I act interested in what they have to say...you make them feel special”

**Jamie:** “At the end of the day the guys are coming to see us, even if they don't spend money on us”

**Rebekka:** “I mean the point is they are not there to think about their tax return...yeah it a sexual experience they are coming for...”

Nebula's owner acknowledges that the presence of a variety of women is the reason why customers visit:

**Owner:** “If he has in his mind he wants a girl with a big bum, or big boobs, or whatever, and if there's no one here, he will go to the next club...till he finds what he wants”

As is standard in capitalism, the profit generated from the collective efforts of all workers goes directly to the owner (Price-Glynn,2010). This was particularly obvious in lap-dancing bars such as Supernova, Galaxy and Callisto, which spent very little in recycling profit back into venues for the benefit of dancers. Price-Glynn found a similar scenario in a US lap-dancing bar (Price-Glynn, 2010). A reluctance to spend on the venue allows the owner to retain the maximum amount of profit. The owner of Supernova was especially resistant to spending any money on the maintenance of the venue. Whilst I worked there, the air conditioning and heating system failed to work, resulting in freezing temperatures during day shifts. In addition, the toilet plumbing system failed to work, resulting in a strong smell of excrement penetrating the venue on a number of occasions. Other dancers who worked at Supernova noted other issues:

**Felicity:** "...they should have lockers...for the first six months I worked there, he had these curtains and they were minging.<sup>53</sup> They were actually falling down, you had to keep tucking them in to keep the private area private...it was ages till he replaced them. There was no stool for ages (to climb onto the dance stage), then he took a chair from downstairs and had us use that. He's so cheap...I don't think he gives a shit about the dancers"

**Donna:** "I think it needs to be warmer, in Winter. The bars in the booths need to be cleaned every day...he doesn't seem to like spending any money on the place unless he really has to. All it is to him is a business..."

**Sammy:** "It is dirty and disgusting down there (in the changing room)...but (the owner) doesn't give a fuck at all"

Sometimes, the owner's reluctance to spend money resulted in a highly unsafe working environment for dancers, which is now afforded attention.

## **Health and safety in Scottish lap-dancing venues**

From my research it is clear that the lax attitudes shown to issues of health and safety indicates a lack of value placed on dancers by owners. A situation currently exists where women are effectively paying to work in establishments which are not always sufficiently maintained, and can act to the detriment of their health and safety. It must be clarified that this section pertains overall to dancers' experiences of working in Supernova and Galaxy, although women did speak overall about the lack of consistency of provided facilities in terms of their existence and quality across other venues. This analysis of health and safety may not be representative of the industry overall in Scotland, but it is important that the issue is afforded attention, and it is worth considering that such

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<sup>53</sup> Scottish slang term, meaning 'dirty'

disregard in relation to dancer wellbeing could also occur in other venues. Despite the lack of regulation which monitors the treatment of workers in this industry, to date, no academic enquiry has taken place which uncovers health and safety issues for women working in Scotland's lap-dancing venues. The following work seeks to contribute to this gap in knowledge, using dancers' voices to articulate their feelings with regards to health and safety. In addition to the preservation of dancers' health, unsafe working conditions also could obstruct their ability to earn money.

Participants identified threats to their health and safety, which breach Sections 3, 3:1 and 4-4:4 of the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974; 3-5), legislation which contains stipulations which can be attributed to self-contracted individuals who hire premises and/or equipment in order to labour. Owners are currently breaching legislation due to their failure to attribute due care and attention to issues such as hygiene, temperature and maintenance of tools women use at work. The AEWG included health and safety provision in their recommendations, yet respondents indicated that these were not being addressed by owners. The AEWG attributes responsibility for health and safety to owners (Scottish Executive, 2006a; 62; 4.4).

Samantha provided paperwork<sup>54</sup> at interview which was issued to her when she began work at Poseidon, however the contract she was made to sign failed to address health and safety, with the concentration being upon dancer conduct. There are no stipulations in relation to other aspects of the job which might

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<sup>54</sup> see Appendix C

pose a risk to dancers. When I obtained working space at Supernova, there was no mention of anything relational to preserving my own health and safety, and that of fellow dancers, staff or customers. The practice of giving out any form of advisory paperwork to dancers was not commonly reported, however in Nebula I was given a list of rules and regulations<sup>55</sup> by the owner during interview. Again, the guidelines fail to mention any health and safety issues. I now proceed to document a number of issues that were revealed during interview, and that I identified myself whilst working:

The lack of quality CCTV can pose a threat to health and safety. All venues discussed employed a system apart from Titan, however Galaxy and Supernova were criticised by dancers due to the poor quality of the CCTV image which resulted in it being impossible to identify what was happening between dancers and customers in private booths:

**MM:** "...they have the lighting dimmed down a bit but you can't see - there really is no point" (Galaxy)

MM reported problematic behaviour arising from a customer whilst working in Galaxy which was dismissed by staff due to the captured images being too dark to ascertain what was happening:

**Athena:** "...it's not that good, no. I mean you can't even see who it is" (Supernova)

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<sup>55</sup> see Appendix B

As Athena reveals, the CCTV provision at Supernova is unfit for purpose. CCTV only covers private booths, the outside area of the venue, the dancers' changing room and the owner's office - there is no coverage of the main stage and venue. Whilst I worked in Supernova, it was very common to observe live images of women dancing in private booths whilst sitting at the bar area, and it was indeed impossible to identify who was in the booth, as all that could be seen was the body of the dancer. Due to the 'top down' positioning of the camera in the private booth, it was difficult or impossible to identify customers' or dancers' faces. One would question then, if an assault were to occur, whether legal action could realistically be taken against an alleged perpetrator.

Interestingly, the AEWG suggest the use of CCTV at a minimum but fail to expand upon the *quality* of the CCTV provided (Scottish Executive,2006a). This means venues are able to use inadequate forms of CCTV, and still comply with recommendations. Nebula's owner appeared to take CCTV provision seriously, arguing that his venue would be 'shut down' if it was not provided. It would appear though, that different venues have different priorities, since Titan has no CCTV provision and CCTV provided in some of the other venues was almost useless due to poor quality equipment and lighting:

**Billie:** "And why do you have CCTV?"

**Owner:** "For the girls' safety. And its also part of the statutory requirements – well, part of the licensing recommendations"

**Billie:** "You aren't legally obliged to have CCTV?"

**Owner:** "Er, well if we didn't have CCTV we'd be closed down... they say if you don't do the recommendations you will be shut

down. Well they say we will withdraw your liquor license which effectively means they will close us down”

Despite his commitment to CCTV provision however, his adherence to licensing recommendations failed to extend to the covering of genitals, as we observe in this excerpt:

**Billie:** “At Supernova, there was a rule that you had to keep underwear on at all times?”

**Owner:** “Yeah, that is in the recommendations. We should be doing that but nobody is”

Because the covering of genitals was something that was identified by the owner and many dancers as a move which resulted in the loss of income due to competition with other venues who were ignoring the recommendations, concern for profit transcended the need to adhere to recommendations.

Nebula’s owner’s comment that the local authority had threatened the removal of the liquor license is interesting for he believes that if he fails to adhere to some of the recommendations his venue will be ‘closed down’. This leaves us to question why other venues are able to ignore some of the recommendations - as the owner of Nebula does with regards to genital exposure - and adhere to others as they decide. Titan, as noted, has no CCTV provision, and Galaxy and Supernova operate private booths despite this being deemed undesirable by the recommendations, due to a concern that such booths would lead to or constitute prostitution (Scottish Executive,2006a). It would seem that a lack of scrutiny surrounding the activities of the venues by local authorities has

resulted in some owners exhibiting complacent attitudes, and may simply indicate that Nebula's owner is more unique in his adherence to this particular section of the recommendations.

Workplaces are required to be adequately ventilated (HSE,2007). Women argued venues can become uncomfortably warm on night shifts due to the number of bodies that can amass. In small venues such as Supernova and Galaxy, this problem is especially acute, and was noted by dancers:

**Sammy:** "It's awful, awful, awful! But he has had the same air conditioning system in there since I first started eight years ago and there were problems with it then...he will not spend money on it" (Supernova)

For Jamie, the temperature of Supernova was so extremely cold that she was forced to wear a heavy sweater over her dancing costume whilst working which, she argued, prevented her from obtaining dances since potential customers could not see her body due to the sweater:

**Jamie:** "But the worst is the cold. There's been times where I've been sitting with a jumper on all shift as I can't bear it...and of course you make less money, because guys can't see you. And when (the owner) comes in to bring in the deliveries he will also switch off the heating"

**MM:** "They blast out freezing cold air and we are standing there in our underwear...our health and safety is null and void I would say..." (Galaxy)

**Lisa:** "The heating and stuff like that, if you are paying commission you should get something back for it"



During my time at Supernova, I and other dancers experienced a particularly harsh winter in which snow was a daily occurrence. During this time, I had no choice but to spend shifts wearing an outdoor coat and scarf. Despite the freezing temperatures in the venue, no provision was made by the owner to improve the inadequate heating system despite constant complaints from both dancers and staff. Furthermore, it was common knowledge in Supernova that the owner would switch off the heating when he visited the venue, as he often did to supervise the beer kegs which were delivered to the venue on a regular basis.

The HSE emphasise the importance of a clean workplace (HSE,2007).

Irrespective, an unhygienic atmosphere was reported across venues by many of the dancers:

**Sammy:** “It is dirty and disgusting down there...nothings cleaned properly...I don't think he (owner of Supernova) has much respect for women...”

**Donna:** “The bars in the booths needed to be cleaned every day. I went through a stage of getting really OCD about my hands touching the bars. I was cleaning them myself...It was gross. He doesn't seem to like spending any money on the place unless he really has to” (Supernova)

Dancers reported inadequate sanitary and changing provision in venues. The HSE specify that suitable and sufficient sanitary conveniences and washing facilities should be easily accessible, and that these provisions should be separate for men and women (HSE,2007). Whilst working at Supernova, it was a common occurrence that the female toilets were rendered out of use due to

faulty pipes. Athena reported that in Callisto, women were required to get changed into their work outfits in a toilet which could be used by customers. Not only could this be considered a risk to dancer security, but also contravenes the requirements that changing facilities should be provided for workers who must change into clothing for completing the work (HSE, 2007).

Jamie and MM reveal inadequate toilet facilities at Supernova and Galaxy. Whilst discussing the situation, which was frequently a topic of conversation amongst staff and dancers during my own time spent in the venue, Jamie noted that the ceiling of the venue was close to collapse:

**MM:** “There’s a toilet. Which is broken. And our changing room also doubles as a lap-dancing room” (Galaxy)

**Jamie:** “Sometimes we have our own toilet. Sometimes we don’t. The place is urgently needing refurbished as the ceiling is about to fall in. I don’t think he wants to lose out on money” (Supernova)

It was also common for necessities such as toilet paper to be in minimal or even no supply at Supernova. This led to dancers being made to purchase their own ‘wet wipes’.

Dancers argued that owners and staff were more concerned with retaining customers than they were with looking out for the safety of dancers, and they were more likely to be permitted to engage in undesirable behaviour:

**MM:** “One guy had a dance with a girl and he came, not because she was doing anything but because he was so turned on...she pressed herself against him and got cum on her legs. So she said to a member of bar staff and they just went “big deal”.The guy

wasn't chucked out...they know they can get away with it because there is no enforcement from management"

**Lisa:** "They used to deal with arseholes well, any shit and they would be out. But I think now...the guys are always right. Before, it was the girls were always right. Now you just have to deal with it, it doesn't matter what's happened..." (Supernova)

**Donna:** "I just don't feel safe at the moment from arseholes...I think they should get decent bouncers who will protect us" (Supernova)

**Sammy:** "I don't think customers get kicked out quickly enough when they touch girls. That really bothers me. It never used to be like that" (Supernova)

Participants also suggested that there should be a member of security in the venue area, as well as outside for the purposes of dancer protection. In this except, Sammy discusses a customer whom she slapped when he attempted to lick her breast during a private dance. On this occasion, the customer was fearful of a doorman being called for fear of violent repercussions:

**Sammy:** "His friend was like "don't get the bouncers" And I thought to myself don't worry, I won't because I'll probably get kicked out before you will!" (Supernova)

The customer's fear of sanctioning at the hands of the doorman suggests that an adequate security presence can deter customers from acting inappropriately.

Because dancers are unable to work if they sustain an injury, hurting oneself at work can result in a woman being divorced from her means to generate an income:

**Jamie:** “If we hurt ourselves, we have had it...we have to use a wobbly stool that’s broken to get on stage. And it would be hard to find another job with an injury” (Supernova)

**Lisa:** “If you hurt yourself, you had better make sure you have some savings to fall back on!”

At Supernova, the owner failed to provide a first aid box. This meant Belinda was unable to work for a period after suffering a cut, resulting in potential loss of income:

**Belinda:** “I’d obviously cut myself on something, so I said to the bar staff don’t you have a plaster at least? He said “no we don’t”, and that was it. So I had no choice but to just sit around until the bleeding stopped, I couldn’t work...”

The continued use of an unsuitable stool, as highlighted by Felicity is an example of common injuries that can be sustained:

**Felicity:** “...And the stool you used to go onto the stage...it wasn’t sturdy and it was a total death trap...one day Morag was getting up on stage and she cut her foot, fell down, bruised herself and nothing was done about it” (Supernova)

Despite this incident, the stool continued to be used for some time. A reluctance to maintain workspaces indicate that the health and safety of dancers are not high on owners’ list of priorities. The HSE specify that self-contracted workers are solely responsible for the provision of first-aid (HSE,2009). Despite this, dancers did feel such provision should be made available. This is understandable considering the lack of maintenance that often goes into the venues which they pay to work in which can then result in injury. Furthermore, although owners are not legally forced to provided provision for sustained injury,

they *are* obligated to ensure certain equipment is maintained (HSE,2007) in order to preserve the health and safety of people in the premises.

### **Health and safety: Why is it being ignored?**

Clearly the health and safety of women working in some Scottish venues are being compromised. I suggest this may be due to a preoccupation with profit and a lack of industry regulation. MM succinctly notes that when venues are not being observed, they are likely to neglect requirements pertaining to working conditions. This appears to be the case when addressing these would involved owners spending money, for example, on replacing unsuitable furniture.

Considering that some women working during the non-contact period argued they were losing money, and that not all venues were following the recommendation, the decision to return the display of genitalia is unsurprising:

**MM:** “Well there was regulations that were adhered to when the licensing folk kept coming in, you know with the contact rules and keeping the pants on...but then they stopped coming in all the time and they thought, ‘why are we keeping this up?’”

Interestingly, owners did pay more attention to particular rules around a more ‘moral’ issue, that is, the explicitness of the performances during a period of political interest in potentially re-licensing venues after MP Sandra White pressed for lap-dancing venues to be re-categorised under the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 as sexual entertainment venues. Once this interest ceased, as MM notes, Supernova reverted back to its original policy of allowing women to reveal their genitals. The power of the authorities held little

threat over Galaxy, who proceeded to ignore the will of policy makers and allowed women to display genitals whilst other venues in Edinburgh were not allowing this practice. There was no evidence, however, that any closer attention was paid to the health and safety of dancers during this period, indicating that policy were more concerned with the nature of the service provided than the wellbeing of dancers.

Although theoretically there are obligations that owners should adhere to with regards to the health and safety, the reality is that because this is a form of labour which is so divorced from mainstream work, owners are able to ignore their obligations. I would suggest that the power currently enjoyed by owners quashes any requirement to adhere to working with dancers to create and maintain a safe and, for the dancers, more profitable work place. The lack of regulation which currently pervades this industry means that owners are often free to collect fees from dancers without utilising some of these monies to ensure an environment which is clean and safe to work in. Interestingly, the owner of Nebula, emphasised the importance of a clean and safe workplace in order to create the right atmosphere for customers. My own visit to this venue, which took place when I interviewed the owner on the premises, showed a workplace which was certainly far cleaner than Supernova, although his fixation with fostering the 'right kind' of environment was connected to his desire to ensure Nebula was perceived favourably by target customers. Furthermore, Nebula's system of charging commission as opposed to the more commonly used house fee system made it more in his own financial interest that dancers sold dances on shift. In the other venues, aside from Callisto, once the house

fee was paid at the beginning of shift, the success of women financially over the duration of their time there was of little economic importance to owners.

**... “It would need for all the girls to actually give a crap about it...”<sup>56</sup>  
Dancers and union action**

Sexualised labour has traditionally not been associated with trade union organising (Gall,2007). The unionisation of individuals involved in the sex industry can be viewed as an avenue by which women can reduce exploitative practices and offer the opportunity to transform working conditions through collective will (Gall,2006). The action taken by the San Francisco-based *Exotic Dance Alliance* (Ms. Mary Ann,2006) is indicative of the importance and potential power that a union can bring to change problematic working conditions, by ending the self-contractual status of dancers in California (Price-Glynn,2011).

The majority of participants, although dissatisfied, were resigned to accepting their working situation. Only Morag and Donna referred specifically to the benefits of collective action to address working conditions:

**Donna:** “It would be better if we stuck together. It would be good if we could have some kind of trade union...”

**Morag:** “...we could turn things around if we wanted to, make Supernova a much nicer environment...”

Felicity and Jamie’s comments exemplify the collective sentiment succinctly:

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<sup>56</sup> Excerpt from an interview with Felicity

**Felicity:** “Well, like any job, you don’t want to rock the boat. At the end of the day the management have most of the power, and it’s not like we can go on some sort of protest about it...It would need for all the girls to actually give a crap about it, which they aren’t going to do...you have to be realistic. I mean, they (owners) are going to do as little as they possibly can”

**Jamie:** “I think at the end of the day there’s not much you can really do about it. Because we are self-employed, he’s not really obligated to do anything for us or anything”

### **Summary: Work or exploitation?**

The industry as it currently exists places dancers in a situation whereby they can be exploited by owners. Considering the dynamics of capitalism, Hodgeson (1982) suggests that under a capitalist business enterprise, it is impossible for there to exist fair or equal distribution of capital based on the private ownership of the means of production. He argues that equal distribution could only occur under the self-contractual arrangement of workers so that labour-power would apparently cease to become a commodity with the workers offering specific services instead. For Hodgeson, this would no longer equate to a capitalistic arrangement (Hodgeson,1982). Labour-power relates to one’s capacity to work, and labour itself embodies the actual activity of work (Hodgeson,1982). In lap-dancing, it can be suggested that dancers hire the right to produce their own labour-power from the owner of the means of production (the owner of the venue). Hodgeson would suppose that a self-contracted worker does not operate under capitalism; however, this can be challenged. I suggest this industry is currently operating under a capitalist regime which is supported by a State ideology of neoliberalism which applies to the way the industry is currently



regulated in Scotland. Although women are self-contracted, the provision of paying to perform labour-power is a characteristic of capitalism, because without the existence of the venue, women would have no alternative options under which they could sell their labour independently. This is especially problematic in Scotland, which, because it is a smaller country with less venues, women have reduced workplace options. Thus, by owning property and charging for the use of this, owners are positioned in an infinitely more powerful position. Normally in a capitalist, free market economy competition would offer alternate options to labourers; however, the small number of venues in Scotland does not afford workable alternatives to women - simply, moving to other venues is not always possible. In this industry, the laws of supply and demand dictate that because, as noted in Chapter Six, more women are willing to work in the industry, their labour has become more disposable. The next Chapter specifically addresses relationships as they currently exist in Scottish lap-dancing venues, and discusses identified changes as dancers perceive them.

## **Chapter Eight: Complex and contradictory - Changing power relations**

This Chapter explores the power relations which exist in venues. Using participants' voices, I show how power is exercised over dancers using various methods by owners. Owner power is not total, however, for dancers also exercise power over each other, customers and devise strategies to resist oppressive rules put in place by owners. Power is exercised via various avenues and I will discuss each in turn.

### **Power exercised through appearance**

The regulation of physical appearance emerged as a powerful disciplinary tool over women's bodies and minds. As well as being a tool of control, however, dancers engage with common sexualised stereotypes regarding appearance to their own advantage, engaging with them to sell dances to customers as was noted in Chapter Seven. Barcan (2002) argues that in modern culture, individuals are constantly surrounded by sexualised images of youth and perfection. An obsession with satisfying appearance norms was rife throughout all venues although interestingly, in bars appearance was more regulated by dancers over each other than the application of overly stringent rules.

Gentlemen's Clubs were more likely to regulate appearance via the application of strict rules. Belinda, who has experience of working at Gentlemen's Club Zeus, emphasised that appearance had to be deemed as suitable at all times by management:

**Belinda:** "...and your hair, nails, make up *had* to be immaculate"

In the Gentlemen's Club, appearance was also used as a means of financially exploiting workers, with fines being applied in some establishments as punishment for non-compliance with rules:

**Tania:** "In Apollo, Titan and Ariel you used to be expected to wear long dresses during the week and to change into a short dress after 12pm. At the weekends it was a short dress or a two piece like a bikini. You would get sent home if you didn't have these things"

**Chloe:** "Management at Titan have very definite ideas about what sorts of looks are acceptable and which were not. Like long dresses during the week and all that sort of thing. I actually found that quite annoying. They are definitely more into and pay more attention on how you look"

**Samantha:** "They said they prefer the use of hairpieces and accessories, you should look elegant at all times" (Poseidon)

**Felicity:** "When I worked in Persephone they made you wear long dresses up until a certain time"

MM was suspicious of the focus on appearance in Gentlemen's Clubs, suggesting that this was a tactic they could employ to make more money from dancers:

**MM:** "The appearance obsession in Gentlemen's Clubs is sort of a money making agenda. With the fines. So for example if your toenails don't match your fingernails, they will fine you for that"

The process of labour which dancers actively undertake can be described, from a Marxist viewpoint, as the reproduction of the worker. This refers to the

essential tasks one must engage with in order to maintain his/her physical existence as a worker (Morrison, 1995). The traditional Marxist method of conceptualising this is relational to obvious needs such as food and shelter however I argue it is not implausible to maintain that this extends to the maintenance of an acceptable physical appearance, since participants argued a positive customer appraisal of their appearance was essential to financial success. For Foucault, various 'happenings' are 'written' on to the body, influencing the way we act out our bodily selves (Danaher *et al*, 2000). The idealised female body is shaped in lap-dancing venues to varying extents by disciplinary procedures perpetuated not only in discourses within popular culture, but also within the culture of this industry. Although not all women I came into contact with via interview or at work had undergone breast augmentation, I observed that the majority prepared themselves extensively for work, applying an array of cosmetics such as self-tan, and facial make up. Women would generally arrive well in advance of their shift beginning so they had sufficient time to engage in these rituals. This labour is performed for no payment – rather, the women were spending considerable amounts of their own money on the cosmetics.

Appearance was a site of great discussion and anxiety amongst dancers at Supernova. Interestingly, appearance was maintained by the continuous purchase of commodities. Only one of the participants, Chloe, took no interest in such rituals, preferring to remain natural. Chloe's statement indicates a relationship between what is considered to be physically desirable to men

within popular culture and how this is transferred onto expectations placed on dancers:

**Chloe:** “Some clubs have a very definite idea of what a stripper ‘should’ look like. Very Barbie girl, very well turned out. Very fake looking”

Participants believed that women who conformed to a stereotypical ‘stripper look’ would be more likely to make money, particularly over the weekend:

**Morag:** “On a Saturday night, some girls do still make between four and six hundred pounds, but a lot of these girls are more commercial...they are more popular, they tend to have blonde hair, fake breasts and stuff. It’s all *Nuts*<sup>57</sup> magazine types that come in on a Saturday night. That’s what they are looking for”

**Samantha:** “Well, there will always be some women who make more than others. Always. Like the ones with the boob jobs, it’s to do with the way they look...”

**Lisa:** “Some girls get a boob job done so they will make more money”

**Athena:** “Katie<sup>58</sup> always does well cos she is the ultimate Barbie”

Frank reports that it is well known that a dancer’s income would be highly likely to increase should she make the decision to undergo breast augmentation and notes that women who adopt this very stereotypical ‘stripper look’ were especially popular with groups of men on Saturday nights (Frank, 2002).

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<sup>57</sup> *Nuts* is a mens magazine which is released on a weekly basis in the UK.

<sup>58</sup> Katie is an author selected pseudonym for a dancer who was not a participant in this study.

Participants acknowledged that appearance presented a barrier that would prevent them from remaining in the industry indefinitely, or was a factor that could obstruct their money making potential and that the sexualised body can be perceived as a 'product' which is subject to approval:

**Sammy:** "You get to a point where you get too old, or you change"

**Belinda:** "I'm not going to be able to do this for much longer... your looks just go away by the time you're thirty-five"

**Tania:** "I feel I make less money than I used to, because I am ageing"

**Jamie:** "I suppose there is a bit of pressure to look okay. To look young. They are obsessed with looking young in there" (Supernova)

**Felicity:** "Well I definitely invest more money on myself with hairdressers and stuff than before. If I was younger I don't think I'd make as much an effort"

**Sammy:** "When I first started I hated my tits as they are saggy and I compared them to others girls who were younger than me or had tit jobs but now I've embraced them as I get so much positive feedback from customers..."

The following excerpt was centered around a discussion of Donna's wish to eventually leave the industry. In the conversation she refers to herself as a commodity that can 'expire' and highlights the importance of looking youthful:

**Donna:** "...It's not that I'm past my sell-by date...and I do look younger than I am"

Salutin writes of the 'fear' dancers have of aging, describing the natural and inevitable aging process as their 'worst problem', and how dancers will work upon their bodies in order to create the illusion that they are still what is

deemed to be sexually attractive (Salutin, 1971). Participants expressed concern regarding aging process, and in Supernova, discussions circulating around the perceived benefits of Botox injections and lip ‘fillers’ were commonplace. Reflecting on my time as a dancer, I recall women becoming very excited over an offer that was being promoted in a local store, offering Botox and lip fillers. Within a fortnight, some women had taken advantage of the offer. The cosmetic effects brought by the procedures were met with great approval from other dancers.

With regards to obtaining work, the industry is different from other forms of labour for women can actively and obviously be discriminated against if they are considered ‘too old’ by owners, who have the power to choose who can work. In Supernova, Sammy managed to obtain working space for an older friend however the owner was initially reluctant to allow her to work due to his opinion that the woman was ‘too old’:

**Sammy:** “...he almost didn’t let her in...I had to say “oh trust me, she’s a great performer” he was like “how old is she?” and I was like “thirty-five” and he said “she looks it, is she not a bit old for starting this?”

Morag’s words echo the ageist sentiment exhibited by the owner when discussing the comments a colleague had received from him when she auditioned:

**Morag:** “My Boss said she was very good on the pole but too old to be dancing. He said to her ‘do you not think you are too old, you don’t have anything special’”

Because the market for lap-dancing is influenced by cultural norms, the industry is a form of labour that is considered available as an option for only a select age group, although, as we see here, older women can be found in the industry, so long as they are considered to look 'good' for their age.

The physical attributes of the body providing a service are part of the exchange that occurs at the point of sale. A well-presented, preferably slim body produced through a Foucauldian disciplinary regime of exercise, adornment and self improvement is viewed as essential within many, if not all, forms of service employment (McDowell,2009). Nebula's owner had quite specific issues with the physical presentation of the dancers who were working there when he arrived to take over ownership:

**Owner:** " I took one look at the girls and thought 'they have to change...one was almost obese. One was like a skanky twelve year old drug addict. I hate that look"

Skeggs has noted that value judgements are made about women solely on the basis of their appearance (Skeggs,1997), and the owner's quote exemplifies this observation. During interview, the owner was enthusiastic about having 'all types' of women working, so that customers could be furnished with more choice. However, the above except suggests that particular 'looks' which, for this owner, correlated with behaviours such as illicit drug use were in actual fact not welcome in his venue.



For Supernova's owner, Belinda's apparent lack of muscle tone would discourage customers from buying dances from her:

**Belinda:** "When I first started he said to me that in order to make money I would have to tone up quite a bit. When I started, I was a pretty generous twelve (laughs). But it actually didn't bother me at the time"

Belinda has danced at Supernova for five years. Although the original comment did not upset her, over time her feelings about herself began to change. Here she acknowledges the changes working in the industry have had upon her sense of Self:

**Belinda:** "...the longer you work there the much more paranoid you get about your weight and your body image. In fact my feelings about that were probably more positive before I started dancing, and I was bigger..."

Sammy reported that to feel secure about one's physical body in this industry is a rarity:

**Sammy:** "There is a massive obsession with fat, wrinkles, Botox...but I've succumbed to it myself, I've had Botox...I suppose if I didn't work there, I'd be like "Botox, what the fuck?"... I'm more natural than most because I don't go to sunbeds, I've not had a tit job, none of that shit...I'm quite comfortable with my body, which is not that normal"

In these excerpts, Sammy and Donna talk about other dancers who have difficult relationships with their bodies. Here, Sammy talks of a dancer in Supernova who had quite severe issues with regards to her body image:

**Sammy:** “Emily<sup>59</sup>, she was like ‘oh look at that flab’ and I was like ‘yeah, its skin, so you can bend over and touch your toes’. She takes a lot of fucking slimming pills and shit. She’s got issues man!”

**Donna:** “...when I hear the girls say they are fat I’m like, yeah right!”

**Billie:** “Yeah, a lot of the girls seem to be concerned about that”

**Donna:** “Yeah, a lot of them take diet pills. I think working in this job makes them paranoid about being overweight...”

Because there are a multitude of ways in which the body can be worked upon and manipulated, Giddens (1991), Shelling (1993) and other commentators have argued that the body has become a significant site of anxiety for people in the postmodern era (McDowell,2009), and is another aspect of popular and capitalistic culture which impacts upon this form of work; if your appearance is a problem, it can be fixed – for a price. This is evident for dancers, as they regard their appearance as paramount to their success in earning money. Bauman has identified the costs associated with manufacturing a certain gendered identity, noting that as long as an individual has the means to purchase the “obligatory paraphernalia...selecting who you want to be is a viable option” (Bauman, 2004;84).

Frank has noted the fantasy appearance that dancers work to create, which is assisted by the layout and lighting of the venue (Frank,2002). I recall one conversation on a quiet shift as I sat with a colleague, Selina<sup>60</sup>, who was chatting with a potential customer who appeared to be showing little interest in

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<sup>59</sup> Emily is an author selected pseudonym for a dancer who was not a participant in this study.

<sup>60</sup> Selina is an author selected pseudonym for a dancer who was not a participant in this study.

actually buying a dance. It was a typically quiet day shift as there were no other customers to approach. During the conversation the man commented on how dark it was inside Supernova, and asked Selina why this was so, to which she replied “Well, it’s so you don’t see what we really look like”. Once the customer had left, I asked her why she made that comment, to which she noted that she believed he was a time-waster, so decided just to be ‘honest’. Selina’s interaction with the customer and her comment to me alludes to the fantasy figures that are manufactured not only by dancers, but also owners who dictate the actual appearance of the venue, such as lighting. Thus efforts of both dancers and owners work together in order to create the illusion of fantasy in the venue.

### **Power relations between dancers**

Scholars have noted that women also oppress each other (Ramazonoglu, 1989). Thus, there is a need to consider dancers relationships with each other. Dancer power was discussed in interviews, and was also observed by myself in Supernova. Pilcher also notes that there are inequalities within genders, as well as between them (Pilcher, 1999). As well as self-policing and owner control, dancers also exerted power over each other. One way they did this was by making comments regarding each others appearance:

**Sammy:** “A few girls have commented that I should get an uplift and liposuction before as well because I’ve got quite saggy tits. Not because they are being nasty...If there’s a problem, you can fix it with surgery...”

**Jamie:** “Other girls will tell you if your outfit is nice or not. If you’ve put weight on...when you aren’t at work you still need to think about keeping yourself in check, hair removal, all of that...you become more aware of your appearance, girls are constantly talking about weight, hair, Botox”

MM, Sammy and Chloe’s sentiments allude to the importance dancers place on appearance with regards to being a good dancer, with Sammy regarding Leanne’s appearance as not presenting a particularly attractive option for customers. Morag notes that dancers often wonder why others who are considered ‘less attractive’ manage to make money at all:

**MM:** “You have girls like Cindy<sup>61</sup>, who has hair extensions and she’s in the gym all the time...she does look hot, she looks the part”

**Sammy:** “I was really surprised he (owner) let Leanne<sup>62</sup> work.... she’s not got a good figure, she’s not pretty...she’s not got a lot to offer. Can you imagine getting a dance from her - in those tiny booths?”

**Chloe:** “I mean most girls will try and look nice anyway, because they will make more money if they make an effort. You have to be attractive though”

**Morag:** “...you’ll get lots of girls who will bitch saying ‘how can they (other dancers) get dances when I can’t’, especially if they consider them to be less attractive than them”

In Supernova, dancers would often offer others advice on ways to lose weight or ‘tone up’. These discussions would take place during quiet shifts, and these conversations all served to ensure the regulation of physical appearance.

Dancers were influenced by others opinions at Supernova. I recall there was a discussion regarding healthy foods, which resulted in women coming to work

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<sup>61</sup> Cindy is an author selected pseudonym for a dancer who was not a participant in this study

<sup>62</sup> Leanne is an author selected pseudonym for a dancer who was not a participant in this study

with pots of cottage cheese for lunch, after it was decided amongst the group that this was a healthy, low fat lunch option. Women would openly comment upon each others' appearance, and would assess the appearance of auditionees. I recall a comment made to me by a fellow colleague who said "Your tits are quite big for someone so skinny". I also remember another dancer who would constantly inform me that I 'should' put on weight. These comments were completely unsolicited, as I tended to avoid actively engaging in these discussions, but I use these experiences as direct examples of how casual comments which would be deemed inappropriate or offensive in other work contexts, was part of the cultural norm in the venue. The comments were made as part of normal conversation - and were not designed to cause upset as Sammy notes. Rather, the culture inside venues is so concerned with the importance of appearance these discussions were considered normal.

Connell notes that organisational control both secretes and depends upon ideologies (Connell,1987). Women's ability to police each other in terms of appearance, for example, derives from gendered ideologies. Although women effectively policed each other it could be suggested that their power was not total, and indirectly was a project which ultimately benefits wider cultural ideologies. So, power operates dually - women oppress each other yet also allow wider popular culture to control their bodies as a group. This also benefits owners, whose business model relies upon the presence of women who are deemed to be culturally attractive. Connell's comment that journalists have replaced religion as ideologists of sexist gender norms seem appropriate to point out (Connell,1987). Focussing on the domination of men over women,

Connell suggests that journalists are part of a collective project by which men's power is upheld and women's subordination is sustained (Connell, 1987). The action of women within the venue thus brings what is learned outside into the context of lap-dancing labour, effectively offering customers a selection of 'idealised bodies' to choose from. Yet women also use these gendered strategies to advantage themselves financially, as I have noted. Thus, it is too simplistic to suggest the complex interplay of appearance norms as purely a way for men to dominate women. Rather, women may use them to dominate each other, and also often engage with norms to extract more money from customers.

Dancers also policed the venue via rules which, in some cases, were imposed by the group as opposed to arising from owner authority, although the application of rules could often depend on who the rule breaker was, as Morag's quote indicates; friendship alliances can assist those who may engage in rule breaking. Jamie claimed she tried to avoid 'dancer politics', attempting to focus solely on making money, however other participants spoke of the importance of policing others - especially in relation to dirty-dancing. Dancers used the fact CCTV was observable by all in Supernova in order to ensure others were not dirty-dancing in booths. Suspicion was often aroused by customers spending too long with a particular dancer, as Felicity's excerpt reveals:

**Felicity:** "None of them (other dancers) were making money, and I was, I was getting repeat dances. So the others were like 'oh

what is she doing?' So they were all sitting there watching me on the camera"

**Jamie:** "There are a lot of dancer politics, it is a bitchy atmosphere, although I try to avoid all that crap. As I say I'm there for the money..."

**Billie:** "If women see other dancers breaking the rules, do they tell the manager?"

**Athena:** "If it's touching or soliciting with customers then yeah..."

**Morag:** "if it's a friend who's broken a rule, you might not say anything. But if its somebody who you don't really have any kind of close relationship with then you would report them"

**Billie:** "Why were they watching you?"

**Felicity:** "They must have gotten it into their heads I was dirty-dancing. But I wasn't. And the CCTV showed that"

**Morag:** "Most girls in Supernova abide by the rules because the other girls will be watching and listening"

The regulation of venue rules can also be enforced, on occasion, by other dancers:

**Morag:** "...And then, my friend came in late the other week, she has never been late and she was late for the first time by one minute and she was sent home. The bar guy was going to let her work but another girl no one likes was like "oh you are not going to let her get away with that are you?" (Supernova)

Athena and Sammy's quotes reveal that women can also police the workplace themselves if behaviour deemed inappropriate is exhibited by a dancer:

**Athena:** "If its just something minor we sort it out amongst ourselves. (Supernova's owner) doesn't get involved with the dancer politics..."

**Sammy:** “The girls can negotiate between them, the only way you find out if you’ve broken a rule is if you get into trouble”

Dancer hierarchies can also be manufactured and influenced by venue policy, for example, if a head dancer<sup>63</sup> is chosen to oversee the workplace. Head dancers enjoy a position of power over others which is afforded to them by the owner. The practice is not used throughout the industry. In this study, head dancers were found only in Nebula and Callisto. Although the owner of Nebula appreciated the role the head dancer played in assisting him in running his business, all participants spoken to who had worked under the authority of one were very negative about them, arguing that the head dancer could abuse her elevated status in the venue. Here Athena notes that the head dancer in Callisto was given privilege in first access to customers:

**Athena:** “There was this unspoken etiquette that none of the dancers should speak to the customers until she had spoken to them first”

In Nebula, one dancer was ‘sacked’ when the head dancer decided her attire did not conform enough to a fantasy themed evening the venue was running:

**Athena:** “One girl was wearing this wee teddy sort of thing and she was trying to say she was a ballerina, but the head dancer didn’t think she looked enough like a ballerina and she ended up getting sacked for something ridiculous like that”

**Chloe:** “There were two head dancers at Nebula who started to fine people for wearing chipped nail polish and all that sort of stuff”

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<sup>63</sup> Head dancers are responsible for managing other dancers at a venue, in terms of regulating behaviour, recruitment and the creation of rotas. Head dancers typically enjoy a reduced house fee / rate of commission.



Lisa was the one dancer in this study who had experience of being a head dancer. As a result of this role, she received an improved rate of commission:

**Lisa:** “I got better commission when I was head dancer. My drinks were free. That’s about as much as I got!” (Ariel)

At Supernova, it was common knowledge that one dancer paid no house fees due to her status as the owner’s girlfriend. Although this individual was never known as a head dancer, she did enjoy ‘perks’:

**Jamie:** “(The owner’s) girlfriend doesn’t pay commission and is allowed to just come off shifts and not risk getting charged for it!”

Finally, Sammy reported that at one point during her time at Supernova, the owner decided to utilise the services of a head dancer. This arrangement was eventually terminated as, according to Sammy, it caused more problems in the venue than it solved:

**Sammy:** “He’s (the owner) has had head dancers before and it just caused way more trouble than it solved – people who were friends with the head dancer would get favours, the head dancer would always be a fucking cunt...you would find they would become a cunt because of all this power, so he just stopped it, he was like ‘fuck it, bar staff will deal with whatever, you text in your shifts, and that’s it”

**Billie:** What was the head dancer’s job at Supernova?

**Sammy:** She was to create the rota, and dealt with auditions. And she was supposed to deal with any shitty politics. But it didn’t work out like that, it created more politics than ever, it just helped bring about a lot of favoritism”

Although using head dancers was not common in the venues, it was clear that chosen dancers could use this to dominate and advantage themselves over others. All of the dancers in this study were very much opposed to the presence of a head dancer, due to the problems they caused. This was the case even for participants who had never operated under the authority of a head dancer. Amongst these participants, there was a concern that the head dancer might abuse the authority given to her.

### **Dirty-Dancing<sup>64</sup>**

Some participants sanctioned others for engaging in dirty-dancing for a variety of reasons which were morally related, and a concern that if one worker offered a more explicit dance, she might either take all the custom, or it would set the trend for other women being expected to operate the same way.

The dancers who participated in this study generally considered women who engaged in dirty-dancing with disdain due to their argument that if such a service was provided by some dancers, they would all be obliged to follow suit:

**Rebekka:** “If people were seriously overstepping the mark with regards to doing something sexual then yes, I would say something. Because word between men gets around, then we would all be expected to do it”

**Lisa:** “I was working in Titan, there was dirty-dancing...guys were asking girls to put their nipples in their mouths and one guy asked me and I was like ‘no!’ and they would be like ‘oh well I’m not

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<sup>64</sup> The term ‘dirty-dancing’ was commonly used by all participants to refer to a dance style which was deemed to be ‘inappropriate’. Such dance styles include the practice of ‘grinding’ (rubbing of a customer’s penis through clothes) and the insertion of fingers into the vaginal and anal canals.

getting a dance from you then'. Girls had started doing that so that's what they would see, and new girls would start doing it, as they thought that was what they had to do"

**Morag:** "A lot of guys ask you to do things you are not supposed to...if you are a girl who did do something you are not supposed to, and if you do that with all the customers, all the guys would go to you and none of the other girls would get dances. So then they (other dancers) will watch you and the girls who are not prepared to do those things will obviously make less"

However, dirty-dancing is an area which provides an insight into the somewhat messy way dancers can consider their job and what behaviours are and are not considered acceptable. For example, Samantha contradicts herself when discussing dirty-dancing. In the first extract, she discusses why she reported any dancer she felt was engaging in dirty-dancing when she danced at Apollo:

**Billie:** "Why did you always let the manager know about dirty-dancing?"

**Samantha:** "Cause its just not on. You can't have others girls taking money for doing more, because the guys will just start expecting that all the time"

However, Samantha then admitted when she worked in Poseidon<sup>65</sup>, she had exposed her genitals for extra money. Her reasons for doing this were in order to rebel against the punitive rules which were in place at this venue:

**Samantha:** "I admit the last time I worked in Poseidon I flashed my genitals for extra cash. Because well, fuck them, if they're going to make me jump through all their rules, I'm gonna break a few aren't I? I guess it was kinda personal rebellion, if you like. And if I think I can get away with it, I will. Because you want to get repeat dances"

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<sup>65</sup> Poseidon's rules required women to provide topless dances only - the display of genitals was forbidden.

This contradiction may be explained by the fact Samantha was happy working at Apollo, which she cited as the best workplace she had experience of working in. When Apollo changed management in 2009 and was renamed Poseidon, Samantha complained about the unfair rules and high rates of commission, indicating her sentiment 'fuck them' in relation to breaking their rules.

Sammy also indicated that she engaged in performances which would be considered to be dirty-dancing. She was unique in her belief that her behaviour would not obstruct other women from obtaining dances:

**Sammy:** "...I dry hump the guy like really hard, so he's getting a cock rub through his trousers. I suppose I'd only have a problem with dirty-dancing really if it impacted on the rest of us making anything..."

The participants had varying views regarding women who dirty-danced:- however there was concern that those who engaged in the activity effectively 'stole' the customers. The contradiction evident in Samantha's interview is interesting as it indicates she is prepared to 'sacrifice' her work ethic in order to rebel against unfair rules. Other dancers also 'admitted' to dirty-dancing themselves, despite sanctioning others. The below extracts illustrate views pertaining to morals, obtaining all the available custom and altering customer expectations, and also the fact that potential dirty-dancers are policed by the actions of other workers. Undoubtedly, the observable CCTV in Supernova which was positioned behind the bar assisted dancers in their endeavours,

however in other venues women also kept a close eye on others and would commonly report inappropriate behaviour:

**Jamie:** “There was one girl who got sacked for dirty-dancing, she gets referred to as a ‘dirty slag’ whenever her name is mentioned. And they all look down on girls who work in Titan as apparently they are really filthy there”

**Billie:** “Did you ever do dirty-dances?”

**Lisa:** “No. There’s no need for it. It’s a tenner at the end of the day. I noticed it first at Titan... maybe girls grinding on a guy too long and towards the end guys were asking girls to put their nipples in their mouths and one guy asked me to and I was like ‘no!’”

**Morag:** “I have a friend who went there (Titan) and he said he had dances from five different girls and every one put her nipple in his mouth. And a friend who works at Supernova went into Titan with a group of male pals for a laugh. She got a dance and had the nipple thing too”

**Billie:** “Does dirty-dancing bother you?”

**Lisa:** “ Well yeah. ‘Cause if that’s what you wanna do that’s fine but don’t do it here. I remember a guy who came to me at Supernova and he had been at Titan and he said I want you to do this that and the next thing and I was like ‘no’...I don’t want to be thought of in the same category as those girls...it’s dancing at the end of the day. That’s all it should be”

**Rebekka:** "If people were seriously overstepping the part with regards to doing something sexual then yes I would (report). Because word between men gets around, then we would all be expected to do it"

**Morag:** “If you are a girl who has decided to do something you are not supposed to, and you do that with all the customers and they like that they will stay for longer, and that looks suspicious because the guys all go to her and none of the other girls will get dances. So then they (other dancers) will watch you. There is a curtain separating you from the other booths, that you can peak through”

In the below extract, Morag provides an example of what transpired when dancers are suspected of dirty-dancing in Supernova:

**Morag:** "One girl got fired for letting a guy lick her arsehole. She totally admitted to it, she used to be a porn star, and all the guys were going to her, and spending ages, so we all checked out the camera. We were wondering how she was keeping them so long - and no one else was getting a dance!...another girl got sacked, she had been dancing ten years but she took in a guy who was a regular and he was licking her all over and he was giving her about one hundred and fifty quid and so the girls got suspicious and checked the camera..."

The following quotes reveal the sentiments of dancers who were opposed outrightly to dirty-dancing, and felt women should not provide dances of an overly explicit nature:

**MM:** Titan, I worked there briefly but it was dirty – women were fingering themselves even though it was supposed to be a Gentleman's Club.

**MM:** "I've saw things (in Galaxy) and thought 'you shouldn't really be doing that'. But the customers will generally be the first person to tell you if things are going on"

**MM:** "The girls who let guys lick their nipples for that extra tenner, the guys are happy, the next guy in the group will get a dance with her, because they get more of a feedback from the customers, oh she was brilliant, and the rest of us don't get anything!"

**Rebekka:** "I did hear customers say that erm, they were ladies who were going, not necessarily performing sexual acts, but going very much further than they should have...like putting their fingers in themselves...wasn't not fair on the rest of us" (Galaxy)

**Billie:** "Do you ever dirty-dance?"

**Felicity:** "Sometimes they might offer you a bit more money to let them do something. And I just say no – it's not worth losing my job over"

Not all dancers were opposed to dirty-dancing however, as these excerpts reveal. Here, Sammy became overly intimate with a customer due to her own sexual attraction him. Her words draw attention to that it is possible a dancer might enjoy the work from the point of gaining sexual pleasure. Her experience also shows the surveilling that takes place from other dancers:

**Sammy:** "I got pulled up by a couple of girls because I was clearly getting off with a customer. I totally went for it, I was just fucking getting off with him during a dance. It doesn't happen often, getting a guy you like but I just got carried away and got off with him and I got pulled up by girls because they could hear"

Chloe's except reveals that on one occasion she dirty-danced purely for her own pleasure:

**Billie:** "Have you ever dirty-danced for a customer?"

**Chloe:** "Yes I have. At Titan. And I wanted to...I was just really horny. But yeah I did more than you are supposed to, and what I'd normally do in a dance"

**Billie:** Were you offered any extra money for giving a dirty-dance?

**Chloe:** No. I was more than happy to do it, I didn't want or expect any more money for it.

**Jamie:** "...yeah, I put them (underwear) inside me and the customers liked it...they couldn't believe it actually and they usually stayed for ages, but I had to stop when (bar staff) checked the CCTV. I don't think its a big deal to be honest. It's not like he was touching me...I mean, if you've been in there all day and made a fiver, and if you think the guy might stay a bit longer if you go a bit further with him, like dance really dirty, you're going to do it...if the guys going to stay a bit longer and you've hardly made any money then you will"

Attitudes towards dirty-dancing reveal differences amongst the way dancers conceptualise their work. Some of the experiences show that being intimate with customers can even be pleasurable for workers. Although the topic of dirty-dancing deserves far more attention that can be afforded to it in this thesis, it represents an example of the complex nuances and contradictions that can present themselves when discovering women's views.

Dancers also attempt to establish control over each other as they compete for dances. Competition can also result in disgruntled women arguing internally, with other workers. Tania's quote refers to her experiences in general, Samantha and Donna's pertain to incidents in specific venues. The following situation arose when Donna approached another dancer's regular:

**Donna:** "I asked him for a dance...she was like was miles away and then she started screaming at me saying "that's my customer!" (Supernova)

**Jamie:** "She (colleague) has stolen customers from me twice. I was really fucking pissed off, I was talking away to a guy and she just comes in and drags him up the stair!"

**Tania:** "There is so much jealousy and rivalry I have learned to keep away from the other women I work with..."

**Felicity:** "...there is a lot of jealousy, if some girls see someone is making money"

**Samantha:** I was speaking to a customer, she (colleague) came up to me and said don't you ever steal a customer from me again...it turned into a bit of a cat fight" (Poseidon)

Jamie and Belinda's extracts show the importance of appropriate etiquette at work, and Belinda goes on to reveal deteriorating relationships between



women. At Supernova, it was expected that dancers would refrain from spending too long with a customer, in order to enable others to attempt to secure custom:

**Jamie:** “Some lassies do hog the customers, and some do steal the customers, but generally it is not considered appropriate”

**Belinda:** “It’s better to just wait for the next guy than talk when another girl is talking to a guy. That can cause a lot of trouble”

**Billie:** “With the girls?”

**Belinda:** “Yeah...there is a lot of bad feeling...I get on with pretty much everyone in the club. But recently I’ve noticed...the atmosphere has really gone down, its changed an awful lot...I don’t know exactly why it is, maybe the lack of money going about”

Long-term dancer Donna also notes the shift in dancer relationships, and Chloe’s excerpt underlines a focus on income rather than cultivating a pleasant working environment:

**Donna:** “I don’t think people are as nice, and there’s a lot more backstabbing...it can be very bitchy...it never used to be like that” (Supernova)

**Chloe:** “They were very confident strippers, and very, very money minded. Out to make money all the time, which is fine, but they were so unfriendly” (Titan)

**Belinda:** “I got a really bad feeling about the place as soon as I walked in. There was just a horrible atmosphere. I don’t understand how so many girls get like that” (Titan)

**Billie:** How do you mean?

**Belinda:** “Just really stand-offish and wary of other girls”

Jamie spoke of the sanctioning she received from another dancer as punishment for approaching a customer too quickly:

**Jamie:** “We were having a bad day one day and one girl went totally mental at me in front of the others for approaching a customer too soon, even though he is a long time regular and everyone knows he buys a dance off a few people anyway. But I think she was just getting stressed out because there were no customers...but I’m really conscious of approaching people too soon now”

The verbal attack made on Jamie by a colleague served to ensure she thought twice before approaching a customer too quickly in future. Morag shows that via surveillance, dancers discipline each other, establishing boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. As the industry has changed, so too have the women’s relationships with each other - although bonds do still exist as was noted earlier. It is important that dancers more negative treatment of each other is acknowledged. It would be incorrect to suppose that owners are the sole oppressors, although it could be argued that competition for dances can encourage women to oppress each other rather than press for industry change which might reduce competition - for example, caps placed on the amount of workers permitted on shift.

Colosi notes that an unofficial code of conduct was established in the lap-dancing sub-culture of ‘Starlets’ (Colosi,2010a,b). Such a code refers to acceptable and unacceptable behavioural practices within the venue. In Scottish venues, women effectively policed each other through comments and sometimes sustained campaigns of bullying behaviour, which tended to be

concentrated towards quieter women, or women who were especially successful at selling dances. However, friendship alliances were beneficial. Dancers would commonly assist those they enjoyed a positive relationship with in a number of ways, such as the lending of dance outfits and cigarettes. It was also very common for dancers to team up with friends in order to sell the financially lucrative lesbian shows (as Belinda indicated in Chapter Seven) or to recommend other friends to a customer who refused an initial request to dance. The opposite was often the case for women who were disliked, and at Supernova, it was quite common for unpopular women to be ridiculed whilst on stage by other dancers. Unsavoury critique would often be vocalised to customers in relation to the unfortunate individual who was on stage, as dancers attempted to prevent those they disliked from making money.

Interestingly, dancers appeared to get along better when customers were spending. I witnessed the benefits of positive customer spend when working on a Saturday day shift. I recall it was a 'rugby day' and we were all making money, and on this particular shift, dances were being sold by all. The relations between women that day were very good, and on reflection I enjoyed the experience, for customers were generally pleasant and dancers were happy to relax and chat - even those who were normally very abrasive and unfriendly to women they usually did not associate with. This suggests that dancers' experiences at work were strongly connected to and thus controlled by the number of customers who were present and spending money. Lisa and Tania note the change in atmosphere during a profitable shift:

**Billie:** What do you think it's like when the guys are spending?

**Lisa:** "Great! No one cares – everyone is making money, no one is going that bitter way, 'oh why is she getting a dance when I'm not'..."

**Tania:** "When you are on a good shift it can be pretty good. There's no time for bitching and everyone's happy. They are making money. It gives off a good atmosphere"

It was customers, then, who were ultimately in control of the overall atmosphere. Longer-term dancers commented that in the past, when money was easier to make, they had viewed their jobs as something which could be fun and enjoyable - akin to a 'night out'. However, the changes the industry has undergone have served to strain relationships between women as the priority became competing for dances. Here we see the effect demand for dances has upon overall job satisfaction in terms of the relationships they share with each other.

### **Dancer strategies: Resistance**

Despite the identified shifts which have enabled venue owners to establish more power over dancers, women showed signs of resistance against perceived injustices which Samantha's dirty-dancing indicates. The examples below show how other dancers innovate around rules that are imposed on them. Here, Athena and Lisa discuss rules which were in place at Supernova which required women to require to strip nude on the pole, for no payment. This rule was retracted during the period that the licensing of lap-dancing clubs was politically potent - and was never reinstated. Women believed this was one benefit to arise from the short-lived political involvement:

**Billie:** "...Supernova used to be complete nudity even on the pole, didn't it?"

**Athena:** "Yeah I hated that. All the girls used to wait till the last second to take their pants off but I always never timed it right so it felt a bit awkward up on the pole with my fanny out"

**Billie:** "When you first started, was it fully nude on the pole?"

**Lisa:** Yeah. I used to just take my pants off and hide round the pole - I thought, 'you aren't getting that for nothing'. I mean, that's what you should be paying for in a private dance. Then I found that if I climbed up to the top of the pole and just sit there they wouldn't get to see anything either. They would see bugger all. The most they would see is the front of your butt"

In addition to adapting their body work so that customer's views would be minimalised, dancers also spoke of how they might strategically avoid paying commission. The following extracts show the steps some dancers take to avoid paying what they perceive to be high commission. In venues where women were not required to pay house fees or commission at the beginning of shift, and where dances were not monitored, they were able to 'con' owners out of the full rate of commission. MM strategically informed management she had 'not made enough' in order to evade paying the full fee. The haphazard staffing system present in Ariel permitted MM to return to the club to work another shift without questions being raised as to where the rest of the money owed was:

**MM:** "There have been times where I have worked in clubs and the fee has been one hundred and fifty quid or something and I've made like five, six hundred quid and have been like 'oh I can't afford to pay it' and only pay about sixty or seventy and say I'd pay the rest next time I was in. But the next time new staff were on so it didn't get paid and I've racked up four hundred, five hundred and just never paid it back - the fees can be astronomical, total exploitation, stupid. At Ariel, they can say one

minute 'its one hundred and twenty quid on a Saturday now', and then if it gets busy, they'd be like 'oh it's one hundred and fifty now' And I was like 'oh I've not got the money, here's seventy' and I thought, 'fuck you'. They didn't know I'd made an extra five hundred quid"

**Chloe:** "At Liquorice they decided to put the commission up. I was in a really bad mood about something, and I tried to get into it and couldn't and only got one dance and it was something like fifty pounds commission and I was supposed to go back and pay it and I never did. I never went back there after that"

As well as working to resist owner control, some dancers also used available opportunities to obtain more money from customers via 'dishonest' means such as over-charging and keeping money, if the opportunity presented itself:

**Morag:** "I've over-charged myself, we all do it if we think we can get away with it, if someone hands you a certain amount of money, and they'll get up before there time is over and we'll just let them without get up without saying...some girls constantly overcharge and some of us just take the odd chance if we think we can get away with it"

**Jamie:** "I mean certainly you can be dishonest. For example, a customer give me a tenner for a five pound dance and he thought it was a fiver. Well, I never corrected him! I mean to be totally honest I think if you think you can get away with getting more money then you are going to do that"

**Chloe:** "Some dancers at Titan charge twenty, but the general advice was well you should offer a ten pound dance too. A lot of the girls would say 'I don't do a ten pound dance'. So some girls were giving a ten pound dance for twenty pounds. So they would make loads of money"

### **"Soon": Supply and the empowerment of customer choice**

It is not only through the visible inscriptions on the body we can uncover evidence of shifting power relations. Both Bourdieu and Foucault have revealed that the body is a practical, direct locus of social control, and regulated by the

norms of cultural life (Bordo, 1993). These norms are amplified in the lap-dancing venue, where the physical body is used as a primary tool for extracting money from customers. Interestingly, the actual bodily movements of dancers reveal shifts in power relations. Previous etiquette in Supernova, for example, involved dancers sitting back and waiting for men to approach them. The approaching customer could then be rejected if the dancer did not want to dance for him/her, although this would be highly unlikely as the selling of dances is ultimately how money is made. Today, women must actively approach men and ask them for a dance, facing the possibility of rejection:

**Lisa:** “Back then there was so much money in the club. Day shifts, you couldn’t move, night shifts, during the week, packed. On a Wednesday night you could make three hundred pounds just fanning<sup>66</sup> about...even if you didn’t actively work you would still come out with a big wad of money” (Supernova)

**Lisa:** “I used to sit on the wee step and wait for guys to come to me but – it used to be you could do that and make your money” (Supernova)

**Sammy:** “Now, very rarely do I get asked if I want to dance. When I first started it was mainly guys going “Are you free for a dance?” (Supernova)

**Jamie:** “It’s all about approaching guys. It’s very very rare that a guy will approach you”

**Chloe:** “You won’t make anything if you sit on your arse all night. I mean I’ve had the odd request – once at Nebula, but I tried that again and it just doesn’t work. Generally, you have to get out there, you have to speak to people, keep going”

**Morag:** “You have to be active. There is one girl who just sits on her bum most of the time, she expects customers to come to her. She doesn’t make anything...”

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<sup>66</sup> Slang term, used to refer to wasting time. Here, Lisa is describing how money could be made whilst not actively working and engaging in other non-money making activities such as socialising with other dancers.

Women in Supernova and Galaxy complained of men who wanted to ‘chat’ - and sometimes for lengthy periods - without paying. Unlike Gentlemen’s Clubs, charging for conversation is not expected by customers in bars. Many women engaged in conversation in the hope it would lead to payment in the form of a dance. Reflecting upon my own experiences, I recall men who, when asked if they wanted a dance, would reply “soon”. These individuals would press to talk for longer, and expected conversation to flow for some time before being willing to pay for a dance. In general, women found such customers irritating, and this behaviour contrasts sharply with women’s experiences during the lap-dance ‘boom’ period, when dances were sold quickly, easily - and customers directly approached dancers. Indeed, the Saturday day shift I reflected upon earlier was reminiscent of the satisfaction women derived from the previous nature of the industry, when such shifts were far more common. The fact that such shifts still occur, albeit on an infrequent basis, is one of reasons women return to the work.

**“But sometimes you do feel like a bit of meat<sup>67</sup>”: The dancer as a sexualised product**

The opinions of customers were important to women. Morag’s quote indicates not only the importance of age, but also the power customers can potentially have over women’s self-image. Unlike Morag, Sammy rationalised feelings of being perceived as overweight by reminding herself that it is not always ‘your night’, rather than undertaking a dieting regime:

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<sup>67</sup> Excerpt from an interview with Belinda



**Morag:** “Guys always think I look younger than I am. If they started thinking I am older though, I would worry. I had a mole on my head, and it was more like a bump, because it was pretty light but I remember I was working at Ariel and a guy said ‘what’s that on your head, is that a wart or something?’ So I was upset...so I had it removed”

**Sammy:** “Some guys want a wee blonde, so sometimes I feel like a bit of a heifer<sup>68</sup>, but I’m like, oh whatever, it’s not always going to be your night”

In this quote, MM talks about how important it is that potential customers find dancers attractive. In the same vein, she alludes to a lack of customers coming to Galaxy:

**MM:** “They’ve got to think you are smoking hot...but if only four people come in you won’t make money”

Athena and Belinda believed the time would eventually come when customers would no longer want to purchase dances from them:

**Athena:** “I plan to get a degree I can use when I’m older and ugly and can’t do this anymore”

**Belinda:** “I’m not going to be able to do this for much longer, you know what I mean, so, your looks just go away by the time you’re thirty-five, so you might as well make the most of it”

Belinda felt offended when a regular customer made a negative comment about her appearance after she decided to colour her hair. This quote is interesting as it not only shows the power this customer had over her sense of Self but also

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<sup>68</sup> Slang term, used in this context to mean physically large.

caused her to articulate the fact that she sometimes felt like nothing more than a commodity to be selected (or not, as the case was with the regular):

**Belinda:** “He said (regular) “you used to be a tidy dark, now you’re a dodgy blonde. What’ve you done to your hair?” and I was like “oh! I just wanted a change!”...but sometimes you do feel like a bit of meat”

When a customer rejects a dancer, he/she effectively denies them the opportunity to make money on that occasion. Rejection also can affect their emotional well being. Dancers spoke of their upset at being rejected by men, with their rejection often having the effect of the dancer questioning her own sense of Self:

**Chloe:** “You get used to it though (rejection). I think some of the rejections hurt me more when I first started. I had nights where I thought “I can’t go on like this, it’s too upsetting...”

**Samantha:** “I find that I can’t seem to handle a lot of rejection....you think something is wrong with you, its degrading! It brings me down”

**Jamie:** “You sometimes feel quite dirty, if you haven’t made much money”

**Morag:** “I hate it when other girls are making money and I’m not. I think what is wrong with me, am I ugly?”

**Tania:** “you get no financial reward for that (being rejected) and it’s the most grueling part of the job for me”

**Donna:** “It’s quite hard sometimes – see if you’re having a bad day and you’re not making any money and everyone else is, and you speak to a guy, and he doesn’t want you, and then he goes for a dance with someone else. And you wonder ‘what’s wrong with me?’....it makes you feel a bit dirty...unwanted. And you feel like you are not pretty enough...”

Outside the venue, culture encourages individuals to consume in order to establish meaning in their lives (Smart,2003). This being so, it is plausible to assume women's belief that customer rejection will be less likely to occur if the woman in question has 'invested' in herself (and consumer culture), by buying into appearance norms, as is endemic within worker culture in this industry. Being chosen by a customer avoids women from wondering "what's wrong with me", as Donna puts it. To emphasise this point, Jamie used the money she earned to save up for an expensive item of jewellery. Bauman notes that in a capitalist society, not all can participate in the relentless cycle of consumption. Those who cannot afford to (such as dancers who are not selected), are burdened with feelings on inadequacy (Bauman,1998), such is the importance consumption has upon individuals and contemporary social life (Smart,2003). When she did make extra money on top of her living costs, Jamie enjoyed consuming and used this to both empower herself and boost her confidence after a difficult shift. The attraction of consumption works to ensure Jamie returns to Supernova again and again - the consumption of commodities assists in the maintenance of exploitative working conditions of the part of owners:

**Jamie:** "I deal with (a bad day) by spending what I've made. On clothes, or make-up, or something like that. If I've made enough. That makes it worth it. I did save up for a necklace. A very expensive necklace. I thought well, if I can get that, I have something special that I can keep, I feel good when I wear it..."

Jamie's comment that she "feels good when she wears it" is instrumental of commodity fetishism, where powers are ascribed to commodities (Lloyd,2008). In this case, the purchase of an expensive necklace empowered Jamie, making

her feel 'good', thus, not only does her behaviour ensure she returns to the venue, but it also supports the wider capitalistic goal which is to encourage consumption. Interestingly, when she was able to, Jamie used money customers gave her in order to empower herself via consumption, yet this does not alter the fact that customers wield principal power, since spending practices and general dancer self-esteem are dictated by customer choice.

For dancers, self-worth and self-esteem was directly relational to how much money they made on shift – how many dances were sold. It is in this context that we can understand the financial and emotional control customers can potentially have over women. Many women who consider themselves as sex workers describe feelings of contamination as a result of the work they do (McDowell,2009). Women I spoke to reported feeling 'bad' if customers refused to take them for a dance, with a direct connection being established between their personal self-esteem and the amount of money earned:

**Rebekka:** "Some people are respectful, they will say "no" or "not just now" rather than some who will say "not with you". That affected the way you felt about working there"

Sammy and Lisa alludes to a problematic shift in the way customers sometimes treat dancers, with Lisa noting a trend towards management becoming more complacent when dealing with problematic customers:

**Sammy:** "They have started getting a bit fucking cocky. They say things like "why would I want a dance with you?"...they have more control than previously and that makes me feel uncomfortable... because I've always felt that girls are more in control"

**Lisa:** They (staff) used to deal with them well, any shit and they would be out. But I think now....the guys are always right. Before, it was the girls were always right, the guys couldn't get away with being cheeky. I don't think the guys used to be as cheeky anyway but it wasn't tolerated. Now you just have to deal with it"

**Chloe:** "Some people can be horrible. A Saturday night in Supernova is complete hell. There's actually nothing like it"

**Athena:** "If I haven't made money I hate being there..."

It must also be clarified that the findings indicate that not *all* customers behaved in a problematic manner - only that dancers noted that such behaviour was increasing. Given the extensive industry experience over half the participants had, this observation is significant.

### **Disposable bodies**

The first set of excerpts show that women consider themselves to be disposable in the eyes of management. These quotes are specific to working conditions in Supernova and Galaxy, but are telling as these venues were once considered to be the best places to work in the city, due to their policies of paying women and their quickness to eject problematic customers from the venue:

**MM:** "In Galaxy they say if you don't like the rules, you know where the door is"

**Sammy:** "...it's better to shut up. I used to say things to him if something bothered me and I found out quite quickly that I am better just to shut my mouth, because I'm disposable...he wants me to turn up, do my job and get customers coming back again" (Supernova)

Lisa spoke of the change to the timing of dances at Supernova, which is unique as it operates a 'key' system, where dances are timed rather than the usual practice of dancing to one or two music tracks. Lisa was the only dancer in the study who was working in Supernova when this change took place, yet she reports on the collective sentiment of all the dancers who opposed the change. When the owner made the decision to extend the time women spent dancing in the private booths, women challenged him:

**Billie:** "Were you ever told in advance about any change with the lights and the time?"

**Lisa:** "No. We weren't happy about it. When it was mentioned we were told you can either like it or go...it was like, you couldn't complain about anything because it was a case of, well if you are not happy, go somewhere else"

The following excerpts relate to the perceived attitude the owner of Supernova had towards workers:

**Sammy:** "Lap-dancers needs are kinda secondary because we're disposable. Like, there is ten other girls just fucking itching to take your place – and he knows that...when girls start to speak out, they get sacked...I've realised that over the years"

**Jamie:** "He knows if we leave others will come in our place. I've heard him say to bar staff "just tell her to fuck off then" when he wants to sack someone"

**Lisa:** "I think that he is just looking after his wallet. I think that's all it is – he makes money off the customers and they are just seeing the girls as a bit of an obstruction to that really. He is quick to sack girls now if they are complaining about stuff and trying to get guys kicked out"

Samantha's experience of working in Poseidon indicates that this establishment evokes a similar attitude towards the disposability of their dancers as

Supernova and Galaxy:

**Samantha:** "I was appalled by the attitude shown towards their dancers. Constantly having to do as we are told and adhere to their way of doing things and it's like if you don't like them you can just fuck off"

An excerpt from the owner's interview, in which discusses what he decided to do when he took over operations at Nebula, is indicative of an attitude that workers can easily and quickly be replaced:

**Owner:** "I had to change the girls. Their attitude was wrong..."

### **Self-contracted?: Owner and State power over income generation**

Imposed stipulations upon how women conduct their work can have a powerful impact upon their earning capacity. Although considered to be self-contracted workers, women's bodies and money making strategies are controlled and constrained by the rules applied by the venue they work in. These strategies can also be affected by policy. When fieldwork commenced, I spoke to women who expressed great disdain for the then recent enforcement of one of the rules in Edinburgh City Council's code of conduct. The specific rule forbade close contact dances and the display of genitals (City of Edinburgh Council Licensing Board, 2007; 40). These rules were adopted at Supernova when fieldwork began. Due to a fall in the number of customers prepared to pay for these

'tamer' dances, the 'new rule'<sup>69</sup>, as it was commonly referred to by participants, was eventually withdrawn due to the negative effect that it had upon profits made by both women and the venue itself. When I started working at Supernova, dancers were once again providing close contact dances including full genital exposure, however the covering of genitals on the public pole remained in effect. At this point, political interest in relicensing the industry had lost momentum. Interestingly, Supernova and Galaxy both provide lap-dances in private booths, something which is advised against within Council guidelines (City of Edinburgh Council Licensing Board,2007). This was not, and has never been, adhered to by either venue, however, during the existence of the non-contact rule dancers at Supernova were forced to dance three metres from customers, which was deemed problematic by women considering the very small space offered by private booths. I can confirm that Supernova's booths were very small and one would wonder how such a rule could be realistically enforced. Participants who worked at Galaxy during this time period informed me that they were not made to adhere to the non-contact rule by owners, and Supernova workers conducted their own 'research' in order to find out if the rule was also being adhered to by Galaxy:

**Morag:** "A lot of girls are concerned that girls in Galaxy don't comply with the rules when we are and we feel it is unfair that we are made to comply with these rules that we never asked to be implemented and the club across the road are doing what they want...girls have told me"

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<sup>69</sup> Known as the 'new rule' by dancers, this refers to a non-contact rule which was in place during the political debate pertaining to the re-licensing of lap-dancing venues in Scotland.



Due to a combination of a drop in income and frustration over being unable to work properly, Chloe moved from Supernova to Galaxy. Her experience confirmed Morag's suspicions.

**Chloe:** "They brought in these new rules at Supernova which I didn't like so I went to Galaxy...there you were just left to your own devices in the private booths...a lot of the guys go to Galaxy, they know they don't get a proper dance at Supernova"

Women generally spoke negatively of being made to alter their working style, and argued that the rule simply directed their customer base towards Galaxy. As the following comments show, women were upset not only by the reduction in their autonomy to make money, but also by the way the rule made them feel about themselves: women spoke of feelings of embarrassment and humiliation over the restrictions to perform to the best of their ability. In addition, because both venues offered private dances for five pounds during day shifts, dancers relied upon customers buying more than one dance to make money. The fact that fewer customers are paying than in previous times made it increasingly important that they could be persuaded to stay in the booths for longer. Some dancers found this proved problematic whilst the rule was in place:

**Chloe:** "It was terrible! And I had my regulars too. I made my money from them buying a few dances in a row. Well no one wants a dance like that more than once...they would just get one dance. And during the day at Supernova it's only five pounds so normally they'd buy more..."

**Morag:** "...its kind of humiliating when most guys say you're a shit dancer...I've always been complemented on my dancing style. The look on guys faces now, it's like 'is that it'. Some of the guys are quite happy, but you don't get repeat dances now and in the

past I'd have no problems at all and I could easily get someone to stay for up to six"

**Billie:** "How did the new rule affect you when it was in force?"

**Felicity:** "I thought it was ridiculous, there was absolutely no need for it. It made things more difficult to get lots of money out of guys, because they weren't buying repeat dances. It was difficult to keep them in there"

Dancers commonly use sales tactics as a method of encouraging customers to pay for a private dance. At Supernova when in private booths myself with customers, I frequently overheard women on the day shift asking customers if they would like a "sexy ten" rather than a five pound dance, which would mean the customer would be purchasing two dances under the impression that spending ten pounds would obtain a more intimate dance. Morag felt very strongly that she was restricted from being able to utilize her sales strategy of up-selling dances by promising a 'sexier dance' if the customer stayed in the booth with her longer, as she was restricted in what she could do:

**Morag:** "Before you could say "oh it's ten, twenty or thirty for a dance" and they would say "what's a thirty pound dance" and you could say "oh you will get a sexier dance for thirty" and they would go for it but you can't say that now"

Sammy was unique in her willingness to perform nude on stage again - all other participants appreciated the fact that local authority intervention meant that only paying customers would observe them completely nude:

**Sammy:** "I would be happy to get fully nude on stage again...to get back custom, because Galaxy are doing it and that is our main competitor...some guys aren't aware that it's back to the way it was before (full nudity in booths) and they ask about private

dances and I say “fully nude” and they are like, “oh, fully?” ...for a while there we were keeping pants on during lap-dances...when customers see us keep our pants on stage they assume we are still doing it in private dances”

This example shows that local authority guidelines are often applied sporadically and at the will of owners, with no consultation made with dancers. Although self-contracted, none of the women who were interviewed who had worked in Supernova during the enforcement of the rule were given a chance to voice their own opinions pertaining to the prescribed change. Nebula’s owner also spoke of the problems inherent in keeping the new rule in place, from a business perspective due to the reluctance of other venues in the city to comply:

**Owner:** “Me, (and the owners of Supernova and Callisto), don’t mind the girls keeping their pants on, as long as it was the same everywhere. And that’s the problem. If they’re going to enforce it, enforce it...Galaxy never did it, that was crazy”

Despite the overwhelmingly negative comments in relation to the rule, the majority of women appreciated the fact that as a result of the political intervention, they were no longer made to strip completely naked on the public stage. This, they argued, prevented the increasing numbers of non-paying voyeurs frequenting the venue and being presented with the opportunity to observe a dancer completely naked without having to pay. Keeping genitals covered on the public stage meant that dancers would only work to full nudity in the event that payment was received for a private dance. Morag and Donna sum up the overall sentiment succinctly:

**Morag:** “We don’t get fully nude on stage anymore so the guys who don’t pay a penny of your wages don’t get to see you”

**Donna:** “It was too much. Its much better now. I’m so glad you don’t have to take your pants off on stage anymore. The customers aren’t paying to see that”

A comparative situation presented itself in Glasgow, where at one point, according to Tania, Apollo lost its customer base to Picon, Ariel and Persephone who, unlike Apollo, were providing more explicit, close contact lap-dances:

**Tania:** “When I was at Apollo, custom started to dwindle as guys went over to Picon, Ariel and Persephone as they were allowing us to make contact and hoped to get round the guidelines about us not showing our genitals by telling us not to remove our underwear fully”

These sentiments indicate the important of consistency in relation to cross venue competition and the enforcement of any regulations, as dancers suggest customers will often migrate to venues which permit full nudity.

Lisa and Donna, both long-term dancers, were in the minority of participants as they were happy with the rule and, unlike other women, claimed they actually made more money, which they attributed to skilled performance. Lisa was very positive about the termination of dirty-dancing and suggested that women who could dance ‘properly’ would continue to make money:

**Lisa:** “I think if you actually knew how to dance you were okay. I think the girls who did actually grind on the guys the whole time made more money but they couldn’t do that with the new rule”

**Donna:** “I was absolutely fine with the new rules – I didn’t find it difficult because I’m a good dancer. I still made money, even when the rules changed”

The new rule also again reveals the importance of appearance to dancers, who believed there would be an even greater focus and requirement to ‘looking good’ due to the omission of dirty-dancing:

**Lisa:** “When there’s no contact guys are going to focus a lot more on your actual moves-they’ll probably look at girls’ figures, and if you have made an effort that day...I did feel with the new rule that I had to make more of an effort with my appearance...my hair needed to be perfect, my tan was done, and all of that. It was more obvious to a guy”

**Chloe:** “Some girls got quite bitchy, they were like ‘oh well, guys are only going to pick girls who look good’”

To an extent, dancers’ capacity to make money is dependent upon the fluctuating policies of owners and also by local authority recommendations, and whether these are adopted by venues. The temporary introduction of the non-contact rule highlights the additional pressure workplace changes can apply upon workers as well as possible benefits.

## **Changing Relationships**

The following excerpts from women who have spent a lengthy period in the Scottish industry show in their own words the extent of the change in the relationships between management, owners and dancers inside venues:

**Rebekka:** “It was us against them, it was more the managers and the dancers against the public. Now it’s like the management

against the dancers. Things got a lot a lot less friendly” (Talking about her workplace experiences towards the ending of her time at Galaxy).

**MM:** “I think they just don’t care. I think they are letting customers practically do what they want, I think they just want to cash in... they work on the premise now, that the customer is always right” (Venue operations in general).

**Sammy:** “When I first started working in Supernova (2002)...I just felt I had a bit more power and a bit more freedom and the customers were the lesser beings in the place and because there were less dancers we were a tighter knit group. Now that’s diminished, and the customers have power over us. That really bothers me”

**Lisa:** “To them (owner and staff) the guys are always right. Before, it was the girls were always right...” (Supernova)

Both women and the owner identified a change in customer behaviour in relation to spending practices. Dancers identified changes in their relationships with some customers. This change in customer behaviour and attitudes has impacted upon women, with participants reporting that the job had become far harder, and that although customers would still visit venues, they would not spend money on lap-dances with the same abundance as in the past, and, when they did, they tended to spend less – or simply preferred to chat, or observe free stage shows. In either case, dancers noted that such visitors failed to acknowledge that women were at work and were there to make money:

**Morag:** “You get a lot of guys who just want to chat. And you get a lot of them that say “oh, it’s all about the money” when you ask them to dance. They forget it is your job...they have to buy a drink as it is free entry. You will get a lot of guys who will just buy a coke. Then they will just wait until a dancer comes on the pole so they can watch that for a free show”

**Chloe:** "...and there are definitely the ones who come in with no intention whatsoever to buy a dance and just want to watch the free stage show"

**MM:** "Even regular customers who come in aren't buying dances, they are just buying drinks"

**Owner:** "...sometimes you'll get a whole group of them come in, they won't have any drinks or they might have one coke between them and they'll just watch the stage for ages"

I suggest that the changes in the industry have served to empower not only owners, but to a lesser extent, the customers who frequent the venue. This is because women are now expected to deal with more instances of problematic behaviour than previously, when difficult individuals would be swiftly ejected by security staff. Currently, the focus is more upon retaining customers in the venue as opposed to removing any problematic individuals. Rebekka and MM's statements about their experiences at Galaxy indicate that venue policies allow customers to treat dancers in a way that was not acceptable in the past:

**Billie:** "When you left Galaxy for good, were there any new rules?"

**Rebekka:** "You were asked to be a bit more liberal if a client stepped out of line, in years gone by perhaps if one of the customers touched you, he would be out of the door immediately, but then it would be after two or three times, nowadays I've heard on the grapevine that they don't get thrown out at all and they (dancers) are just asked to put up with it"

MM, who was working at Galaxy when she was interviewed for this thesis in 2010, confirmed Rebekka's suspicions. As a long-term dancer, I was keen for Rebekka to comment upon any changes she noticed around customer behaviour during a brief opportunity I had to speak to her again over the

telephone in June 2011. The following excerpt from the conversation highlights the changes in both customer and management attitudes:

**Rebekka:** “It appeared to me the over the seven years I danced in total, the more common and more accessible became the less respect we got from both management and customers. There were quite severe acts of disrespect from customers that we were being asked to turn the other cheek to by management. And the more customers realised they could get away with bad behaviour, the more badly they behaved...”

**MM:** “There has been an element of girls bending the rules in the past but they were sacked and now they are not. They are not bothering. In Galaxy for example, security are standing at the door, bar staff aren’t paying attention, if they grab someone, guys aren’t told off for it...”

MM argued that Galaxy had the policy of allowing ‘anyone’ access to the bar, and allowing them to behave in any manner they chose. When she decided to complain about an incident of problematic behaviour, MM was asked to leave for that shift, with management retaining the commission she had paid to work for the entire shift:

**MM:** “They are letting anyone through the door. And they work on the premise the customer is always right, I was in a situation where a guy was trying to take photos of my arse...the management stood up for him and I was sent home that night... and some clubs, you can’t say anything back to them, you would just get sacked”

Morag’s report regarding the termination of a fellow worker’s space from Supernova reveals that the priority is customer spend rather than dancer welfare:



**Morag:** “One girl got sacked – a guy pinched her bum and she started shouting and ended up slapping him...the bouncer was like “oh right you had better leave then”. But it was a party of forty guys who were all together and they all left. And the girl was told not to come back by my Boss because of the business they lost”

Due to the fact that doormen were obligated to consider customer spend, ejecting problematic customers could be difficult. She felt that complaining to doormen was futile, and preferred just to generally ‘put up with’ difficult customers:

**Morag:** “If a guy has overstepped the mark the bouncer will just warn the guy or say “oh well the guy said that you said blah, blah, blah and it should be like that” so they don’t get chucked out. I don’t really complain anymore. Bouncers don’t do enough. But they have to think about the money. If they are the only guys in spending money they will want to keep them in” (Supernova)

Donna argues that when men choose not to buy dances, dancers become exploited:

**Donna:** “But it’s when they get to watch the stage shows, and they don’t pay us, and they don’t come for dances – that’s exploitation...they (customers) can sense when you are stressed out (about not making money). It is exploitation when that happens”

Because of the shifts that have resulted in reduced spend, it could be suggested that there is an element of male empowerment– for visitors, who are predominantly male, are still able to observe dancers at work and in states of undress without paying for the pleasure. A number of participants indicated that men could ‘sense’ when dancers were upset over the lack of customer spend, and were more likely to behave problematically as a result:

**Donna:** “And I think the guys can sense your anxiety when you are not doing well and you just feel like shit don’t you? But it is upsetting. And sometimes you do end up in tears...they can sense you are stressed out, and some of them take advantage of that”

**Jamie:** “They’ll drag their feet buying dances...especially when its quiet! They take ages to take you up the stair...or they might say, well ‘why should I go with you when there’s all these other girls?’”

**Tania:** “a lot of men get off on turning you down...”

### **Explaining customer behaviour – episodic sexuality**

When discussing the behavioural change noted among some customers it is at this point useful to consider Giddens’s term ‘episodic sexuality’ which refers to sexualities that are gendered, masculine and compulsive in nature (Giddens, 1992). We can see this replicated via the poor treatment of dancers reported by some participants – although again it must be emphasised – not all women thought all customers exhibited problematic behaviour, they only identified an *increase* in such behaviour. Indeed, Giddens’s concept of episodic sexuality is best used to understand behaviour from groups of men in lap-dancing venues. Every woman who participated in this study was highly critical of the behaviour men exhibited when in stag parties, and disliked providing services for them – although they could transpire to be financially lucrative, if a dancer was fortunate enough to please one of the group. Such satisfaction with service often resulted in the entire group buying dances. Jamie’s excerpt reveals both this and also strong, public displays of masculinity:

**Jamie:** “What you find with stag parties is you will get in there and dance for one guy and if he likes you he will go down and

recommend you to his pals, and then you'll do the whole lot of them. It's quite funny really, very often they will come down the stairs after the dance and the rest of the guys they are with shout and cheer"

**Billie:** Like egging each other on?

**Jamie:** "Yeah, like this is a really cool thing I've just done, getting a lap-dance"

I suggest that the behaviour of men in groups reflects episodic sexuality due to the very gendered, masculine and compulsive behaviours that I observed whilst working and women reported in interview. As well as the notion of episodic sexuality, Connell draws our attention to the effect cultural norms around gendered behaviour can have upon the way women are treated at work. He suggests that normative definitions of masculinity and femininity differentiate men and women and offer a standard code that effectively 'speaks' to men and communicates to them what appropriate displays of masculinity are - and how they, as men, 'ought' to be in accordance with social norms (Connell,2005):

**Morag:** 'Big groups of guys can be quite intimidating...they can say very disrespectful things...and you have to practically beg them for a dance...some of them are very nice, but most of them are pretty bad..."

**Lisa:** 'When men get in a big group they have that 'man mentality' and there is always one who wants to be wide<sup>70</sup>... someone always wants to be the 'Big Man'..."

Reflecting upon my field notes, I myself recall a memorable Saturday day shift when a stag group entered Supernova. After ordering drinks, I overheard one individual asking his peer "Which one do you want?", referring to the large

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<sup>70</sup> 'Wide' is a Scottish slang term used to refer to behaviour that is perceived to be rude and offensive.

collection of dancers who were working that day. The owner of Nebula also acknowledged the provision of choice:

**Owner:** “At the end of the day it’s the guys choice who they choose for the Stag. They might say I want that girl, and that girl”

There was a very common, overt theme of masculine privilege and choice and choosing amongst groups of men, which was not obvious in single men’s interaction with dancers. This reveals that dancers experiences at work are affected by *who* they dance with, especially since positive working experiences were reported when customers were pleasant in their interactions with dancers. Due to the current situation whereby demand has fallen and supply has risen, dancers find they are less likely to be able to be selective with regards to who they dance with.

### **Owner power: Rules and regulations**

A characteristic of this industry is that rules are constantly subject to change, with little or no communication made with dancers. All the dancers reported that rules were applied sporadically and with a distinct lack of communication. The owner of Supernova went through phases of applying punitive rules. I suggest this was a way in which he could assert power over dancers. Foucault argues that for power to be effective, the wielder of it must on occasion demonstrate his/her authority. Dancers were never sure of when the rules would change, which helped the owner to ultimately retain control. The following excerpts reveal the extent of the changing rules at Supernova:

**Belinda:** “Yeah, there have been some really strict ones in the past, such as not being allowed to go out for a cigarette” (Supernova)

**Sammy:** “Well, (the owner) goes through these stages of implementing these really strict rules and creating this really tense environment, and then he goes through stages of not giving a shit..then when people start taking the piss he goes all strict again...” (Supernova)

**MM:** “...there were things like you are not allowed to read a magazine, you’re not allowed to play the machine...and there was these other really shit things, like you’re not allowed to eat, you’re not allowed to go out on shift – and they were really strictly enforced. And then they would change, and there would be another thing” (Supernova)

MM was recalling these rules from her time spent working at Supernova in 2008. Furthermore, the rules are not applied consistently, leading dancers to speculate that favouritism was occurring at work:

**Morag:** “They have this rule where you get sent home if you are a minute late. I think sometimes there is some favouritism going on. I was late once...I texted them to tell them, and I was one minute late...and they sent me home. But a week before, I heard there was a girl who was an hour late for work because she was in the hairdresser and she was allowed to work, because she was friendly with (the owner’s) girlfriend”

**Billie:** “If rules were broken and staff found out, how was it dealt with?”

**Rebekka:** “If depends who the person was. If the management likes the dancer, sometimes nothing was done. But if they didn’t like them things were done...if they didn’t like them they would be straight out the door...” (Galaxy)

**Sammy:** “It all depends on who’s on, who sees it, what mood (the owner) is in, there’s so many factors, there’s no consistency” (Supernova)

**Belinda:** “I saw a few girls allowed to going out for a smoke...but it was very much one rule for one and a different rule for another in there” (Zeus)

**Tania:** “I feel it is unfair when you are fined for missing a shift and are genuinely ill” (Ariel)

**Lisa:** “... It’s not a regular workplace regarding the way it’s run and the way things are dealt with” (Supernova)

The lack of urgency applied to the rules when a high rate of commission is being paid by dancers indicates that rules are applied when they suit the interests of owners:

**Morag:** “But if it’s a night where you are paying seventy pounds commission, they always turn a blind eye to that” (lateness).

On other occasions, Supernova’s owner invented new rules as he saw fit, which dancers were not aware of and could materialise at any time, as is shown here. The conversation is in relation to a style of dance which was deemed inappropriate by the owner, who sent the worker home despite there being no prior rule being in place:

**Morag:** “...apparently when she was lying down the guy was leaning over her – he was just looking down, nothing dodgy was happening so, even though there is not a rule that says you can’t do that the Boss heard and said “oh I don’t like that” although she wasn’t doing anything wrong by the rules and she got sent home”

During the enacting of the non-contact rule in Supernova, dancers were given little prior notice of the change. Chloe found out about the changes not via a formal channel, but through discussions with other workers:

**Chloe:** “He (a member of bar staff) basically said to us we would have to be careful of what we were doing: nothing too explicit. That’s all he said. So I thought ‘oh well, I can just dance the way I normally do as long as its not too filthy. And then two weeks later we were told you cannot have any direct contact and you need to keep your pants on. And this wasn’t told to me direct – I heard it from another girl”

This example mirrors the poor communication of rules in general in Supernova, and other venues. Here Chloe and Morag discuss the learning of rules in other venues they have worked in:

**Chloe:** “We are just left to learn as we go and we will be pulled up if we break a rule”

**Morag:** “When you start dancing, you don’t get issued with any rules and regulations, you just have to find out on the job”

Nebula is unique in that it offers a copy of rules and regulations for dancers to keep, however it focussed more on general manners and etiquette which impacts upon the atmosphere for customers as opposed to rules regarding dancing styles:

**Chloe:** “We were given a wee booklet thing. It told us what we were allowed and not allowed to do. But it was less about dancing and more about general stuff, for example there was a bit about not bitching and just general manners and stuff, nothing on how dances should be provided”

Other Scottish venues were guilty of altering rules and policies when it suited them financially. Poseidon recorded all dances and VIP sessions sold per shift and would inflate the rate of commission payable if they knew a high amount of money had been made by a particular dancer:

**Samantha:** "...if they knew you were having a good night they would personally charge you more!"

Like Supernova, Nebula is an example of strict rules appearing at the will of the owner. The power wielded over bar staff as well as dancers is symbolic of control owners attempt to exercise over workers. Financial rewards were claimed from dancers in the form of fines for a transgression of the smoking rule:

**Athena:** "Nebula didn't have any ridiculous rules at first but then things started changing and you had to get a smoking pass...so only two girls could go out for a fag at once. At one point the bar staff had to get a poo and pee pass because they were apparently taking too long on the toilet. And they would fine you if you went out without a smoking pass"

In Nebula, a dancer was relieved of her workspace due to her allowing a customer to touch her. Despite this transgression, she was permitted to come back to the venue, despite a violation not only of venue rules, but also of local authority rules which are in place for the city Nebula is located in:

**Athena:** " Well when Krystal<sup>71</sup> first started at Nebula she actually got sacked for a while but she was allowed back. God knows why, because this customer would come in all the time and she was always flirting with him and stuff...and she would let him grab her all over and that. They saw it on the CCTV..."

Due to the elevated power they now enjoy, owners can exercise the requirement for subservience. For example, Supernova's owner was swift to

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<sup>71</sup> Krystal is an author selected pseudonym for a dancer who did not participate in this study.



eject women who were unhappy with the changes he made at his venue pertaining to the timing system, as noted by Lisa earlier. The excerpt below demonstrates Nebula's owners' desire for docile, controllable bodies to work at his venue, rather than a staunch need for skilled performers:

**Owner:** "We don't employ everybody. Girls don't have to be amazing dancers. In fact, I prefer new girls. But you can tell within minutes of meeting somebody if they're gonna be fitting in or not...there was a beautiful woman who was in the other day...but she was arrogant. She just wouldn't listen to me. So she was no good"

In order to be suitable for what the owner perceives to be 'employment' at Nebula, women are required to obey instructions. Although he highlighted the applicant's physical appearance in a positive way, as is a requirement in this industry, this owner also required subservience. Millet argues that intimidation is a key characteristic of patriarchy (Millet, in Tong, 1989; 96) and ensures that women will conform to stereotypical performances of femininity: and if they dare to reject performances of submissive behaviour, men will use coercion to accomplish what social conditioning has failed to achieve (Tong, 1989). Nebula's owner ensure non-compliance is punishable by denial of opportunity to work; while the owner of Supernova dealt with women who complained about changes to the work by threatening the 'sack'. Customers are able to deny women their income via the power to choose to spend. At Supernova, dancers can be removed from shift, with no refund of their house fee. Here, Donna was accused of engaging in dirty-dancing, and was ejected from the venue:

**Donna:** “He (member of bar staff) said I’d done things I hadn’t done...I was intimidated, I was sent home, I was made to feel like some kind of whore, a disgusting person who had done this thing I hadn’t even done...I don’t feel protected in the club at the moment. I feel intimidated by both doormen” (Supernova)

## **Explaining power shifts**

Power operates across a varied spectrum, it being wielded by owners and staff over dancers, customers over dancers, dancers over other dancers and dancers over customers. Thus, power in this workplace is difficult to forcibly concentrate, however what was acutely apparent across interviews was a feeling that women had become less empowered in their jobs than previously, when fewer women were working and customers spent more money in the venues. I suggest that the lap-dancing venue is currently a workplace in which power is relatively (but not completely) concentrated in favour of owners. This problem is especially particular to Scotland, I suggest, partly due to the reduced choice of alternate workspaces dancers have.

Foucault examines the dynamics through which power relations are engendered (Foucault,1984). Unfortunately, he failed to articulate the centrality of gender within power relations (Faith,1994). Yet Foucault’s work provides us with one component under which we can understand power relations inside the lap-dancing venue. Foucault is to be credited with unveiling the almost organic nature of power, noting; “individuals are simply vehicles of power, not its point of application” (Foucault,1980a;98). Although in the lap-dancing venue, it is clearly the owner who has the power to regulate staff and dancers, contingent and associated with the inadequate legislation under which venues currently

operate allows this. Customers potentially exercise power over dancers due to the dynamics of supply and demand which has resulted in more competition for them.

Blau's concept of power is also relevant to explaining the current power imbalance within the venue. Blau argues that power is the "ability of persons or groups to impose their will on others despite resistance through deterrence either in the form of withholding regularly supplied rewards or in the form of punishment, in as much as the former as well as the latter constitute, in effect, a negative sanction" (Blau, 1964; 117). In Blau's analysis, power is considered via social exchange theory which suggests that all social relationships are formed by the use of a subjective cost-benefit analysis and the subsequent evaluation and comparison of alternative options. Ultimately, people are motivated by the returns they expect from others (Radtke and Stam, 1994). In the context of the lap-dancing venue, owners are able to relieve women of their working space, or issue fines in order to force them to comply with rules. Customers are empowered in the sense that they are able to refuse supplying women with their means of income. Customers are also empowered to exhibit problematic behaviour towards dancers due to the reduced likelihood they will be punished for such behaviour. This, it could be suggested, is due to a fixation with profit over worker welfare. For Boulding, power is clarified as being "the ability to get what one wants" (Boulding, 1989; 15) - power is associated with individuals and the personal resources they have at their disposal. Here, it is clear that owners are able to obtain what they require such as a wide variety of dancers and a customer base. Although customer spend is dwindling, dancer numbers are not

and this allows owners to reap the financial benefits of house fees, entry fees and the purchase of drinks. Thus, venues which retain commission from each dance sold such as Nebula can also benefit, although perhaps not to the same extent as venues who utilise the house fee system. For Felicity and Sammy, the owner's lack of care for Supernova was translated as a lack respect for the women. This is indicative of owner attitudes that women's labour are disposable.

## **Summary**

To summarise the complexity of power relations in venues today, it is useful to consider Deshotels *et al* (2012), who conceptualise power under three separate components - individual, organizational and institutional. For them, individualised power relates to dancers' ability to earn money and control their actions whilst at work (Deshotels and Forsyth, 2006). Organizational power in the venue concentrates on the power to control customers. Material institutional power relates to the ability to control resources and rewards, with ideal institutional power concentrating on cultural impacts, ones' ability to influence ideological discourses (Deshotels *et al* 2012). Although dancers have never been able to control ideological perceptions surrounding femininity (indeed, this wields power over them), they were previously able to possess some control over their own individualised power and have some degree of power over customers, which has been relinquished as dancer numbers have grown and customer spend has fallen. Although dancers have always been dominated by owners in relation to material institutional power per se, it is only since the end of the 'boom' period that owners have begun to exercise this power more

acutely. Looking outside the venue, dancers' ability to control resources and rewards are limited because they must reproduce dominant definitions of desirable femininity if they are to obtain financial reward from customers (Deshotel *et al*, 2012) - they are limited in how far they are able to control their commodified bodies, and must subscribe to ideological norms. Despite this, dancers are not completely dominated and engage in strategies of resistance in an increasingly competitive workplace.

This Chapter has identified and explained the shifting power relationships which characterise lap-dancing venues in Scotland. The following Chapter concludes this study, and sums up the variety of contributing factors which have served to alter the nature of sexualised labour in lap-dancing venues in Scotland.

## **Chapter Nine: Conclusion - Explaining the shifts in Scotland's lap-dancing venues**

The main argument of this thesis is that lap-dancing, as a form of sexualised labour, has shifted dramatically in accordance with cultural and economic change outside venues, which have impacted on working experiences inside them. Dancer's voices suggest the dynamics of an increased supply of women being willing to work coupled with a reduced demand for paid dances has resulted in shifts in the nature of the work. However, explaining the changes which have taken place in Scotland's lap-dancing venues is not straightforward due to the various contributory factors which were identified in the findings chapters which have led to the work becoming increasingly precarious. These are concentrated around the impacts made by changing dynamics relating to supply and demand.

The changes can be partially related to the neoliberal and, I suggest, effectively patriarchal ideology favoured by policy makers, which combine with cultural and economic shifts which have impacted upon the market for lap-dancing. The increased supply of women into the industry and the de-skilling of the work which has accompanied this has resulted in women resembling throwaway products comparable, to put it crudely, to the way in which one purchases a meal for a child from a fast food establishment, where the customary toy provides short-term pleasure - then is swiftly disposed of (Smart, 2003). Despite this, women recognise the continued benefits the work can offer in comparison

to legitimated forms of work, which ensures their return. Thus, to suggest the industry is completely problematic as a labour option is incorrect as benefits can still be reaped from the work albeit to a lesser extent.

### **Focusing on popular culture**

One of the outside shifts addressed by Chapter Six was related to the sexualisation of society. The effect that popular culture has upon the way lap-dancing venues operate and what is expected from dancers cannot be underestimated, with culturally dominant images of female bodies reflected in the idealisation of a body which is young and stereotypically feminine (Grogan, 1998). The potential effects popular culture can have are formidable - the penetration of images and information we are constantly bombarded with is so strong that it is enshrined within the fabric of everyday life (Abercrombie, 1996). These patriarchal ideologies have been blamed for their assistance in producing and maintaining gender inequality (Pilcher, 1999). Patriarchal ideologies embedded in popular culture are intertwined with capitalism since their realisation generally involves purchasing products in order to construct the desired appearance, as dancers do with abandon. By subscribing to the dominant norms in order to satisfy customers' perceptions of what 'attractive' is, women effectively disadvantage themselves financially, and in some cases, emotionally, as they buy into consumer culture in order to satisfy perceived customer desires.

We can also connect sexualisation to patriarchy and the control over women's bodies in lap-dancing venues. This thesis suggests that the transfer of power from women to owners arises from changes in the economy which have altered the spending behaviour of customers. Simultaneously, changing cultural and economic factors have resulted in more women presenting themselves as available for the work. The State, seen as a patriarchal institution by Walby (1990), further exacerbates poor working conditions due to its failure to act. The failure of the State to identify sexualised labour as legitimate work is a social issue (Walby,1990). Workers who hold high esteem and power are far more likely to have their jobs categorized as work. This means there is a complete ignorance with respect to the multitude of skills required to work as a lap-dancer, which women themselves were well aware of and have also been acknowledged by others such as Bradley. For her, lap-dancing labour is increasingly characterised with “diligence, constant effort, and substantial commitment” (Bradley,2008;512). Owners have sought to accumulate profit in a time of changing spending habits by pursuing profit rather than investing in facilities for women in the workplace (by providing adequate attention to health and safety).

The increased pressure upon individuals overall to adopt an idealised look may apply pressure upon dancers to remain ‘one step ahead’, obtaining almost unachievable levels of ‘perfection’. For Bauman, consumer societies are volatile and temporary – objects of consumer desire must not only be instantly available, but must also bring instant satisfaction – which quickly falters. One suggestion this thesis has made is that this has occurred within Scotland’s lap-



dancing industry, with the deviancy, mystique and individuality of overt sexuality previously offered by dancers waning due to the greater prevalence of sexualised themes freely available elsewhere. Consumers must be constantly presented with new temptations in order to be kept in a state of “constantly seething, never wilting exaltation” (Bauman, 1998;26). However, there remains a need to validate this idea by conducting research with customers, and perhaps ex-customers of lap-dance venues in Scotland.

### **Power: complex and contradictory**

During the period when demand for dances was high and fewer women were working, longer-term dancers considered themselves to be empowered, recognising the enjoyment and financial reward they gained from the work. Today, dancers reveal that in conjunction with cultural and economic shifts outside the venue owners and to an extent, customers are in a somewhat more powerful bargaining position. The research suggests that lap-dancing in Scotland now involves labour of a highly precarious nature due to a reduction in customer spend and an increase in dancer numbers. Participants suggest this has arisen because lap-dancing themes have become somewhat more socially acceptable in recent years. Yet this acceptability is far from total, with the State failing to recognise commercial lap-dancing as a legitimate form of labour, and women working in the industry continuing to suffer stigmatising attitudes.

The reduction in spending and increase in dancers has resulted in women becoming increasingly viewed as ‘disposable commodities’. This is shown by

owners' new found willingness to tolerate problematic customer behaviour as the thirst for profit transcends concern for dancer welfare. The practice of de-skilling and allowing large numbers of women to work on shift benefits both owners, who enjoy the payment of fees, and customers, who are able to choose from a wider variety of bodies. Dancers have increasingly become "the object of the process by which (they are) turned into a commodity and reduced to a mere quantity" (Lukacs, 1971; 166).

Dancers have never been able to wield ideal institutional power (Deshotels *et al*, 2012) because they do not control ideological discourses, however when the industry was at its peak in Scotland, the findings suggest they did possess a degree of individualised and interactional power as, due to the smaller number of women working in the industry and greater numbers of paying customers, workers were able to enjoy the attentions of paying customers who would approach them - this itself could be considered as empowering and certainly made the work far easier. Today, women generally must always approach men. Material institutional power, the power to control resources and rewards (Deshotels *et al*, 2012) is especially unique in the Scottish context, for opportunities for cross-venue migration are reduced compared to England and the US, where there are a greater number of lap-dancing clubs. This means women enjoy less choice of places they can work. This is empowering for owners as they are able to eject workers who do not comply with their rules, in the knowledge that there is a plentiful supply of women who are prepared to dance. This situation is unique to Scotland as a geographical location in the UK.

Despite the identification of problematic working conditions, there continues to be a large number of women who are willing to work in venues, due to the identified benefits the industry can continue to offer. Marx explains in his thesis *Capital* that employers have a monopoly on the means of production, which means workers can either choose to work for them - or not work at all (Tong, 1989). Thus, we can question the element of what really is choice in a set of limited alternative workplace options. A dancer commented to Price-Glynn, who studied a lap-dancing bar in the US, that "Girls can go anywhere - there are clubs everywhere" (Price-Glynn,2010;153). Dancers in Scotland are not furnished with the same range of options - there is only one venue in the country which allows women to work during the day for a reduced house fee of twenty five pounds per shift and a relatively small number of venues overall. At time of writing, there were eighteen venues operating across the country. Gentlemen's Clubs, which charge higher house fees and are only open in evenings, are far more prevalent in Scotland. A lack of choice for women means that leaving a venue to go elsewhere may not be a financially desirable, or even possible, option. Because owners have the monopoly over the workplace, they are potentially able to force workers to labour under exploitative conditions (Tong,1989).

Dancers are unable to control levels of commission charged, and are unable to request facilities at work, despite their financial hiring of the workspace. The owner is also able to decide whether or not apparently self-contracted dancers can solicit for tips and can dictate how women can go about their work.

Ultimately, the owner enjoys principal control of the majority of resources and rewards.

### **Using theory to assist in understanding industry changes**

A socialist feminist analysis is useful as women's experiences in the industry are relational to both work and to patriarchal ideology. But the changes have more to do with gender relations - during the lap-dancing 'boom' period which occurred between its arrival in the mid 1990's through to the mid 2000's, it was men who approached dancers in order to obtain lap-dances, and also fewer women presenting themselves as available for the work. Therefore, we must also consider the current economic climate, and the accompanying reasons for greater numbers of women presenting themselves as available for the work, as these factors have contributed to shifts in supply. By using a socialist feminist analysis, I contribute to the theory by using it to partially understand women's experiences. As we now occupy the age of the service sector (McRobbie, 2009), there is a requirement for people to sell services rather than having a complete reliance upon production. Thus, it is timely to expand socialist feminism, recognizing sexualized labour as legitimate labour and seeking to render it less exploitative. My findings and the literature lead me to argue, as have Phelps (1975) and Eisenstein (1988), that patriarchy and capitalism are separate entities but reinforce each other in the context of lap-dancing labour. The Marxist argument is that power or powerlessness derives from ownership and control of the means of production - so oppression is the result of capitalist organisation and is based on lack of power and control (Eisenstein, 1988).

Although some women working in the industry possess cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications, and in greater numbers than they did in the past, it is nevertheless plausible to suggest that owners continue to occupy a considerably more powerful position than dancers, due to the fact they are guaranteed income from customers and also due to the fact they own the place of work and as a result can 'hire and fire' at will.

Women's voices reveal that the changes in the lap-dancing industry have arisen from a combination of factors, some of which are aligned with patriarchy and others with capitalist ideology, such as the sexualisation of popular culture and commodification of intimacy. The sexualisation of popular culture is in part attributable to capitalism, for involving oneself in this culture often involves spending money. Furthermore, the sexualisation of culture predominately revolves around bolstering a particular form of hypersexualised femininity, which can be seen both on the street and in the venue, which is, I would suggest, a type of theatre in which themes of idealised femininity are performed by dancers.

For Marxists, workers are exploited by capitalists who create surplus value for the Bourgeoisie (Eisenstein, 1988). If we consider this in terms of the service industry of sexualised labour, profit is derived from women's bodies, which customers pay to view. The concept of alienation is also relevant for understanding the changing working environment for women, for the very structure of capitalist economy effectively forces workers to view each other as competition (Tong, 1989). The division of labour, that we see occurring between

owner and women is an absolute requirement of capitalism. However, as the industry becomes more precarious, women are increasingly separated from *each other* in the venue as a result of competition. As such, we see a process of 'divide and rule' (Stone,1974) which is associated with capitalist strategies for profit. Owners engage with working practices which serve to force women to compete with each other. The self-contracting guise that women work under pits them against each other in competition (Price-Glynn,2010) and impacts upon the working atmosphere in the venue.

The attitude that women are 'disposable' dehumanises them and reduces their bodies to commodities. When conceptualising the body as a commodity it is worth considering Marx and Engel's words "All that is solid melts into air..." (Marx and Engels, 1848). The depreciation of dancers is seen in venues' lack of care for them and their refusal to pay for their labour. On a larger scale though, it would appear that the industry in Scotland has become devalued as lap-dancing becomes considered less risqué and socially taboo. Featherstone and Lloyd observe that when a commodity is easy to obtain, it becomes less desirable (Featherstone,2007, Lloyd, 2008). This is an example of the de-commodification of a mass object. We can consider a similar situation has affected the working relationship between owners and dancers - as women have become more amenable to doing the work, there is less need for owners to treat them well as they can easily be replaced.

## **Considering workplace differences in Gentlemen's Clubs and Lap-dancing bars**

The findings suggested that all venues shared characteristics pertaining to appearance norms and the fact that the work was becoming harder as a result of shifting supply and demand. However, Gentlemen's Clubs appeared to be far more regimental over appearance than bars, and they used a fining system to ensure compliance. Dancers noted that in the Gentleman's Club, there appeared to be an absolute requirement to be able to 'click' with customers if money was to be made. In the lap-dancing bar, although women were expected to converse, and for greater periods that during the 'boom' period, the duration of the conversation tended to be shorter. There was less rigid attention placed on appearance norms, which interestingly, were more regulated by the dancers themselves than owners. This demonstrates that dancers can effectively police venues themselves, reducing the need for an owner to stipulate rigid appearance requirements.

## **Neo-liberalism and the State**

Neoliberalism can be described as "a modified or revived form of traditional liberalism, [especially] one based on belief in free market capitalism and the rights of the individual" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). It has been argued that neoliberalism is essentially a re-organisation of capitalism (Campbell, 2005). The findings of this thesis suggest that the neoliberal attitude evident through State policy has combined with the capitalist pursuit for profit to produce the work environment which currently exists for dancers in Scotland,

creating a climate which is beneficial for the principally male audience of owners. The ideology of 'individual responsibility' is also key to neoliberalism (Martinez and Garcia,1996) and is evident in the State's attitude to the work - by classifying dancers as self-contracted, it essentially relinquishes any form of duty of care for women, despite the findings of the AEWG and my own research identifying a range of problematic working conditions.

The defining characteristics of neoliberalism include the 'rule of the market', in which the State distances itself from controlling the activities of free enterprise, with no regard for any damage this may cause (Martinez and Garcia,1996). The licensing regime under which the State currently controls the industry is in part contributory to the power owners currently enjoy. A further characteristic of neoliberalism is deregulation (Martinez and Garcia,1996), whereby we see a reduction of State regulation upon anything that might obstruct the pursuit of profit. The failure of the State to define lap-dancing as a form of work effectively permits owners to operate an unsafe workplace as they concentrate on securing the greatest amount of profit, which is instrumental of capitalism. The current practice of deploying regulation at-a-distance favoured by utilising the licensing system has also been identified as financially beneficial to the State (Hubbard,2009).

Commenting on the rise of a neoliberal ideology and the transition from a solid to a liquid modernity, Marques (2010) asks why, in a society which trumpets the benefits of individual entrepreneurial action, the sex worker has failed to be included in definitions of individualisation. The worker, whether belonging to the



direct or indirect industry, can be defined as both entrepreneurial and as one who exploits (yet also supports) consumer culture (Marques,2010). Lap-dancers do this by exploiting a society in which the body is sexualised and commodified, and by partaking in consumerism, buying into beautification rituals, fashion garments and, in some cases, undergoing cosmetic surgery procedures for the benefit of bolstering their value as a commodity. Under the principles of neoliberalism, which champions the ideology of 'individual responsibility' (Martinez and Garcia,1996) dancers could be considered to be active agents who take advantage of the demand for lap-dances, yet their labour and entrepreneurialism is denied recognition by the State. This is indicative of the stigmatising sentiments which continue to attach themselves to sexualised labour despite the visibility and legality of venues in the UK (Sanders and Hardy,2013). In the case of lap-dancing, it could be suggested that by refusing to conceptualise sexual labour as legitimate work, the State, acting as "the general Patriarch" (Mies,1986;26), effectively empowers predominately male property owners to the detriment of women.

Overall, my research findings show that power has shifted in favour of the predominantly male audience of owners. This suggests that gender relations are not only shaped on the micro level of daily social life but also at the macro level, with the State controlling the practice of gender (Radtke and Stam,1994) - not only via inadequate regulation of the industry, but also in other ways such as the emphasis that childcare should be the domain of women. This reduces women's options and is that reason why some women, such as Chloe, choose to work in the lap-dancing industry. The operations as they currently exist

confirm Radtke and Stam's (1994) observation that gender relations are power relations and that power is never fixed, as Foucault notes, but always subject to change (Faith, 1994). The dynamics of power within the venue are affected by macro changes related to gender, culture and capitalism out with the venue which impacts on supply and demand. Connell argues that the State is instrumental in contributing to unequal gender relations and that gender is an aspect of social institutions as well as being part of the personal sphere (Connell, 1990). By using women's voices, this thesis has shown how the State has assisted in allowing venues to operate in such a way that is beneficial to owners.

### **Partaking in their own domination? : The role of dancers**

To an extent, it can be suggested women partake in their own domination as a group. This is due to the fact that they continue to return to work despite the fact the work is more precarious than ever. I would suggest that this behaviour is due to the fact that lap-dancing can still *potentially* offer superior income to many other forms of service work, offering women instant cash - workers considered the accumulation of income to be more important than any facilities provided by venues, despite the fact they were hiring workspaces. Although they acknowledged and complained about the way venues were run, participants who were currently working in the industry at time of interview returned to work again and again, hoping that this shift would turn out to be a profitable decision. Furthermore, dancers overwhelmingly believed that there was little point in attempting to change the industry, due to their resignation to

the fact that owners held the greatest amount of power. Dancers' power over each other also assists the owners, for example, their policing of appearance benefits the owner as what is promoted in flyers and other promotional items promises potential customers they will be able to obtain contact with bodies that are deemed attractive in accordance with dominant gendered ideologies.

Dancer sub-culture reinforces this via the policing of appearance through chat which is considered to be normal and completely inoffensive.

Interestingly, women were aware of and expressed concern regarding exploitative practices - yet they were willing to forgo facilities, expressing greater concern for basic issues such as cleanliness and heating. Despite issues being discussed, women were willing to 'put up with them', so long as they were making some money. As identified, money was a primary motivator for the participants in this study, although they also acknowledge a considerable number of other benefits associated with lap-dancing. Although the majority of the women held qualifications that would theoretically allow them to work elsewhere, the lure of potentially obtaining instant cash served to keep them returning to venues. In the venue, and reflecting consumer culture in general, the pursuit of financial gain is key, and this, I would suggest, places owners in an advantageous position as the State allows them to consider workers as self-contracted. The opportunity to obtain cash in hand, plus the *potential* to make a large amount of it, keeps women returning - despite the industry being less lucrative than in previous times.

The vast majority of women in this study resigned themselves to the current situation, due to the power owners had to control their working life. This could be attributed to patriarchal relations that sanction a licensing regime which benefits owners due to an emphasis on community safety rather than working conditions. Although friendship bonds exist, the need for money within a competitive arena can serve to alienate dancers and allows for the formation of a hierarchical structure amongst them, with any potential companionship being “constantly threatened by rivalry and suspicion” (Heelas and Morris, 1992;13).

Connell (1987) has argued that the sexual division of labour can create a supportive base for women. He provides the example of industrial employment, in which the widespread exclusion of women from career grades provides a platform for shared experiences with little structural reason to be in competition with each other. Connell optimistically suggests that this could offer the potential for workers to provide self-definition or resistance (Connell, 1987) against exploitation, however such romanticism does not extend to self-contracted sexualised labour. Rather, the denial of a wage and individualised responsibility for financial success has resulted in the onset of strained relationships as women compete and prioritise obtaining limited resources over resisting problematic working conditions. Although Morag and Donna were enthusiastic about women working together to improve the working environment of Supernova, in general women resigned themselves to the fact they were increasingly perceived to be disposable. Sammy expressed fear that she might be ‘sacked’ by the owner for complaining about problematic behaviour by a member of bar staff. The fatalistic attitude with regards to

working conditions and lack of consideration of what a union could offer is interesting considering that all the women in this study considered what they did to be a form of legitimate work, which is a standard prerequisite of union organisation (Gall,2007). Dancers' preoccupation with earning money in a competitive environment is inevitably empowering to owners, who are not pressurised into altering workplace regimes.

### **Moving forward**

I conclude this thesis by reflecting upon my main research findings and suggest avenues for further research, for, in a changing industry, it is important that close attention is paid to the way in which working conditions in the lap-dancing industry develop. The sex industry, previously considered marginal, has come to occupy a central position in the development of capitalism (Poulin,2003), and its operations are subject to change in tandem with cultural and economic shifts. As was shown in the example of the non-contact rule, operations inside the venue can also be affected by regulatory actions. Thus, it is important to afford attention to any future changes made by policy that affect the way the industry operates.

As discussed in the methodology, I set out to discover women's experiences of working inside Scottish venues - and it is their voices which effectively highlighted the key issues. My own involvement was, as acknowledged, instrumental in grasping an understanding of the current situation. The thesis offers a variety of explanations in order to understand shifts which have

assisted in the creation of an exploitative form of labour rather than occupying one rigid perspective, which is often offered by those adopting a radical stance. Simply, this industry is far too complex to categorise women as staunchly oppressed or otherwise as a result of their involvement in the sex industry - for the women in this study, it is other factors which have contributed to their oppression, and not the fact they are involved in the industry itself. I believe the study has succeeded in providing a snapshot into the reality of the industry for women, and paves the way for more studies which can help gain a deeper understanding of the way cultural and economics changes have impacted upon the indirect sex industry. Clearly, there is a need to discover the perceptions of other actors, such as owners, staff and customers, ideally tracing their perceived experiences and attitudes as the industry has changed. I have identified the fact that customers and voyeurs in venues have gained an advantage over workers in the sense that they are able to exercise more power over them. However, in Chapter Three I briefly identified that it would be problematic to take a binary stance and categorise *all* customers as complete benefactors when considering the context of a more individualised society, where human emotions are increasingly commodified in the market - leading to the possibility some men may be seeking out and paying for something in lap-dancing venues which they cannot obtain freely. We can then consider them to also be victims of exploitation by owners. If we consider that commodities and the market are social constructions (Lloyd,2008), we might also consider men as a group to be constructed by the wider ideologies of capitalism which steer them towards the need to identify with and thus consume particular stereotypes of femininity. In order to explore this in-depth, there is a need to involve

customers in research. Certainly, research involving customers is currently underdeveloped (Woods,2007), and there currently exists no dedicated studies which uncover views of Scottish customers. Discovering their views will assist the academic community in grasping a more robust understanding of the different dynamics which work together to impact upon how the industry responds to changes that take place outside it.

The nuanced nature of the work was exposed during interviews, and brought to the fore that although power has shifted - simply arguing it operates solely in favour of owners does not reflect the reality of the workplace. Women's voices indicate that power is constantly negotiated, and although the changes in supply and demand have served to alter dynamics, women are active agents in the workplace - constantly negotiating power with each other and, where possible, with owners as was revealed by strategies employed by women to rebel against repressive rules. The phenomenon of dirty-dancing revealed a number of interesting nuances and showed that women differ in their sentiments regarding it, with Sammy and Chloe enjoying the experience with particular customers. What also became apparent was the fact that customers were able to provide an enjoyable experience for dancers at work, which was reflected in some of the stories participants shared regarding pleasant conversations they had with them. This also suggests that arguing that customers automatically exploit dancers, common in many radical commentaries, does not resonate with women.

Finally, I argue that this thesis is important as it highlights the importance of local markets, state regulation and working conditions by concentrating on one specific geographical location. In the case of the industry in Scotland, I would suggest that the principal benefactors of recent changes are owners. Evidence presented in this thesis suggests that owners are willing to comply with any stipulated protocols so long as they are not regarded as an obstruction to the pursuit of profit - such as the lack of expenditure on health and safety issues such as heating which was identified in Chapter Seven. The State's neoliberal focus on the individualisation of responsibility to owners of premises and their according lack of attention to women's welfare allows them to continue to operate in an exploitative manner. In order to address this, it is crucial that further research is concentrated in this area, so that recommendations can be put forth that might address the varied exploitation that dancers currently experience.



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## **Appendices**

## **Appendix A: Overview of Venues**

This appendix details brief information pertaining to each of the eighteen lap-dancing venues that are featured in this study as they operated during fieldwork. I also provide information pertaining to changes that transpired after my own involvement in the industry had ceased, such as Supernova's decision to close during the day. This information was obtained during secondary interviews.

As much information as possible is given regarding the working arrangements and environment of each establishment. I offer the greatest amount of detail in relation to Supernova, due to my involvement there.

The greatest amount of information is provided pertaining to venues in Edinburgh, due to the fact that participants spoke at length about the venues they had spent most time working in, which were predominately Edinburgh based.

### **Edinburgh Venues**

#### **Supernova: Lap-dancing bar**

Supernova operated during the day as well as in the evening, and was open to the public from 12:00-1:00 each day. Since fieldwork concluded, the owner took the decision to open from 19:00 only due to a dramatic reduction in day-time custom.

Supernova offered fully nude private lap-dances inside booths which were electronically timed. Dances were priced at five pounds from 12:00-19:00, Monday-Friday and then were ten pounds from 19:00-01:00. All dances were priced at ten pounds during Saturday and Sunday. Stag shows and close contact 'lesbian' shows were also offered. The owner's decision to close during the day brought the option of obtaining a dance for five pounds at this venue to an end.

Supernova operated a house fee policy and was the only venue where shifts could be worked at no cost; Monday-Thursday day shifts were fee-free. A £30 fee was payable for shifts working Monday-Thursday evenings, and Friday day shifts. A Friday night shift cost sixty pounds. A Saturday day shift was priced at thirty pounds which increased to seventy pounds in the evening, and Sunday day shifts were fee-free. Sunday evenings are charged at thirty pounds.

Supernova was small and dark, containing five private booths and one main stage where topless shows took place. Minimal seating was provided. Women were rotated on the pole and required to dance on stage for the duration of two songs. The venue offered a small changing area which contained mirrors, a microwave and a clothes rail. Aside from soft drinks, no other facilities were provided for dancers on shift.

The establishment was very rigid with regards to certain rules, such as timekeeping, and the order in which women were required to dance on stage. The venue was owned and managed by a male. Fines were payable should dancers fail to turn up for shift without providing twenty-four hours notice.



Dancers were required to perform at least one unpaid topless pole dance on stage during shift. Income was accumulated via the sale of private dances.

Dancers were permitted to make physical contact with clients however the clients were not permitted to touch dancers. CCTV was present within each booth, with it being common knowledge that the owner was able to view all workers from his home as well as on screens present in the venue

During the late 1990's and the early 00's, dancers were paid for their public performances and were not charged commission.

### **Galaxy: Lap-dancing bar**

Galaxy was open from 14:00-01:00 daily, offering fully nude private dances in booths for five pounds. Respondents noted Galaxy as an exceptionally small venue which did not contain a pole. Topless dances were provided for voyeurs on a stage which was surrounded by mirrors.

Fully nude private dances were priced at five pounds at any time during the week, and ten pounds during the weekend. When fieldwork ended, Galaxy offered the cheapest lap-dances in the study sample, due to Supernova's decision to close to day-time trade.

Galaxy operated a house fee policy, and charged twenty pounds per dancer to work during weekdays, which increased to thirty pounds in the evening. On Fridays dancers paid thirty pounds to work the day shift and fifty pounds to work at night. Saturday day shifts were charged at forty pounds which increased to seventy pounds at night. Sunday shifts were priced at twenty pounds each for both day and night shifts.

Galaxy was similar to Supernova as it paid women for their promotional performances during the late 1990's through to the early 00's. During this time, women were only obliged to pay thirty pounds per week to work in the bar.

### **Nebula: Gentlemen's Club**

Nebula was rebranded and opened as a Gentlemen's Club in 2005, having previously been run as a lap-dancing bar. It is located in a central location in the city, and opened from 19:00-01:00 Monday-Thursday and 15:00-01:00 on Saturday and Sunday. During a festival held in Edinburgh each August, the venue remains open until 05.00.

In Nebula, lap-dances were provided in full view of others. Lap-dances were performed to full nudity, and unpaid performances on the pole are topless only<sup>72</sup>.

Nebula operated on a commission basis. Dancers were paid with tokens that were exchanged for money at the end of each shift worked. At time of fieldwork, commission was charged at 40%, with the dancer retaining 60% of each dance sold. Dancers also receive a percentage for any alcoholic beverage they sell to a customer.

All customers who entered Nebula paid a fee of five pounds to gain entry to the venue were provided with a complimentary drink.

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<sup>72</sup> Please see Appendix B for Nebula's rules

Nebula is a large, comfortable venue, with an array of couches. There are three poles which are surrounded by mirrors for public performances. Private areas are provided for VIP services and the venue ran a fantasy night.

Nebula capitalized upon the increased popularity of lap-dancing themes and ran a 'pole-dancing academy', where female members of the public can learn how to dance. Lessons were taught by lap-dancers themselves.

### **Titan: Gentlemen's Club**

Titan is the only venue which also contains a restaurant. It operated on a house fee policy, and charged dancers sixty pounds to work a night shift from Sunday-Thursday. On Friday nights an eighty pounds fee was payable which increased to one hundred and twenty pounds for Saturday and Sunday night shifts. A conversation with Morag, a participant who was working at Titan during a secondary interview, reported that fees for Saturday and Sunday night shifts could rise to one hundred and forty pounds, dependent upon management will. Fully nude dances were provided at ten pounds each.

### **Callisto: Lap-dancing bar**

Callisto opened six evenings per week and operates on a commission basis, the amount paid by dancers was determined by their willingness to work during the week. Dancers who were unwilling or unable to do this were charged 50% commission and dancers who were able to oblige were charged 40%. Each dance was priced at ten pounds each.

### **Zeus: Gentlemen's Club**

Zeus operated in the evenings. Customers are charged a entry fee of five pounds and the venue opened from Monday-Thursday between 19:00-01:00, on Saturdays between 20:00-01:00 and on Sunday between 18:00-01:00.

### **Hercules: Gentlemen's Club**

This venue reduced its opening times from 14:00-01:00 daily and at time of fieldwork opened for business on Friday and Saturday evenings between 19:00-01:00. Hercules was opened by the popular celebrity Jordan in 2005.

## **Glasgow Venues**

### **Poseidon: Chain operated Gentlemen's Club**

Poseidon was located in the centre of Glasgow, and prior to fieldwork was taken over by another lap-dancing chain, however none of the women featured in this study worked in the rebranded venue. Poseidon operated on a house fee basis, and workers were charged forty-five pounds to work during the evenings from Monday-Thursday and ninety-eight pounds for weekend shifts, however this was subject to alteration. Unlike many venues, dances purchased at Poseidon could be paid for using a credit card. Dancers who were self-contracted at Poseidon were obligated to read and sign a 'code of conduct'<sup>73</sup>. Again this is a practice that was not replicated across all venues featured in this study.

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<sup>73</sup> Please see Appendix C for Poseidon's rules

### **Apollo: Gentlemen's Club**

Apollo was taken over by Poseidon in 2009.

### **Ariel: Gentlemen's Club**

The venue was open daily from 21:00-03:00. In addition to the usual offerings that are synonymous with a Gentlemen's Club, such as a VIP option, Ariel also provided a waitress service.

### **Persephone: Lap-dancing bar**

Persephone operated as a bar which one participant had experience of working in. It was taken over by a Gentlemen's Club, which no dancers in this study had worked in.

### **Pisces: Gentlemen's Club**

Pisces operated on three floors and provided VIP facilities in addition to private dances. Pisces was located in a secluded area of the city.

## **Aberdeen Venues**

### **Chaos: Gentlemen's Club**

Chaos took over operations from Selene and was centrally located close to other businesses. The venue opened Sunday-Thursday between 20:00-02:00,

Friday between 20:00-3:00 and on Saturdays from 15:00-03:00. Customers paid a six pounds entry fee and dances were priced at ten pounds each.

### **Capricorn: Lap-dancing bar**

Capricorn opened from 20.30-02:00 Sunday-Thursday and 20:00-03:00 on Friday and Saturday nights.

### **Selene: Gentlemen's Club**

Selene is no longer trading under this name, having being taken over by Chaos.

### **Hades: Gentlemen's Club**

Hades operated from 21:00-02:00 from Tuesday-Thursday. On Friday it is open 21:00-03:00 and on Saturday between the hours of 20:00-03:00. Hades offered VIP facilities and also pole-dancing lessons for female members of the public. The venue provided a restaurant service.

### **Gaia: Chain operated Gentlemen's Club**

Gaia opened in 1998. It operated from 21:00-02:00 Sunday-Thursday and from 20:00-03:00 on Friday and Saturday. Private dances were priced at ten pounds. Visitors to the venue were required to pay a five pounds entrance fee between Sunday-Thursday, rising to six pounds for visits on Friday or Saturday. Gaia provided a weekly fantasy night.

## **Dundee Venues**

### **Aphrodite: Chain operated Gentlemen's Club**

Aphrodite opened in 2004. It operated from Sunday-Thursday from 21:00-02.30 and on Friday and Saturday from 20:00-02:30. Aphrodite offered a VIP service. Private dances were priced at ten pounds. Visitors were required to pay a five pounds entrance fee anytime between Sunday-Thursday, increasing to ten pounds on Friday and Saturday. Aphrodite also ran fantasy nights. The venue claimed to specialise in stag parties and offered free admission to those who arrived with more than twelve people in their party.

## Appendix B: Nebula Rules

### IMPORTANT - PLEASE NOTE

1. PLEASE BE ON THE FLOOR READY TO WORK FOR THE START OF YOUR SHIFT. YOU SHOULD START AT 7PM UNLESS YOU HAVE PERMISSION FROM THE MANAGEMENT TO START LATER.
2. DO NOT GO INTO THE BAR AREA.
3. PLEASE GO ON THE STAGE WHEN ASKED BY THE BAR STAFF.
4. PLEASE DO NOT USE CANDLE WAX ON THE MIDDLE POLE.
5. TRY NOT TO SPEND MORE THAN 15 MINUTES WITH A CUSTOMER, EXCEPT IF HE BUYS YOU A CHAMPAGNE COCKTAIL.
6. CUSTOMERS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO BUY A DRINK BEFORE BEING APPROACHED, UNLESS IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THEY ARE NOT GOING TO BUY A DRINK I.E. THEY SIT DOWN ON A COUCH.
7. CUSTOMERS MUST BE SEATED WITH THEIR ARMS ALONG THE TOP OF THE COUCHES.
8. KEEP YOUR DISTANCE WHEN DANCING FROM THE CUSTOMERS, ONE ARM LENGTH AWAY FROM HIS FACE.
9. NO STANDING ON THE COUCHES IN FRONT OF THE CUSTOMER.
10. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES USE YOUR PHONE ON THE FLOOR WHEN CUSTOMERS ARE PRESENT.
11. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES EXCHANGE PHONE NUMBERS WITH CUSTOMERS. NO EXCUSE...INSTANT DISMISSAL !!!
12. PLEASE KEEP THE CHANGING ROOM TIDY.
13. PLEASE TIDY THE COUCHES AND THE VIP ROOM AFTER EACH DANCE.
14. DO NOT PRACTICE ON THE POLE WHEN CUSTOMERS ARE PRESENT.
15. ALL GIRLS MUST DO THE MIDNIGHT STRIP ON FRIDAY AND SATURDAY.
16. WE HAVE FIXED PRICES FOR VIPs, STAG & LESBIAN SHOWS; DISCOUNTS CAN ONLY BE GIVEN AT THE DISCRETION OF BAR STAFF.
17. NO LOANS WILL BE GIVEN. NO MONEY NO DRINKS.
18. DRINKS MUST NOT BE TAKEN INTO THE DANCE ROOM OR CHANGING ROOM.

REPEATED FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THESE ABOVE RULES WILL RESULT IN £5.00 FINE.



## • Rules and regulations

### **Conduct**

- Under no circumstances should you attend work under the influence or the carrying of any illegal substance. This will result in instant dismissal from the club.
- Alcohol is not permitted to be brought into the club unless you have permission.
- Any valuables and any money over £10 should be handed to the bar at the beginning of your shift, this can be collected at anytime throughout your shift for food/drink and the remainder will be returned at the end of the night.
- No loans will be given. No money no drinks.
- Dancers should be polite to all costumers, other dancers and bar staff at all times.
- You must be on the floor ready to work for the start of your shift. You should start at 7pm unless you have permission from the management to start later.
- Do not go into the bar area.
- Keep the changing room tidy.
- Under no circumstances use your mobile phone on the floor when customers are present.

### **Customers**

- Customers should be asked to leave the dance rooms when the dance is finished.
- Never ignore customer after a dance unless he is busy.
- Anyone offering or requesting drugs must be reported to a member of staff at once.
- Friends, boyfriends and girlfriends are not allowed in the club unless approved by the manager.

### **Presentation**

- Nails must be clean and tidy, no rough edges or chipped nail varnish.
- Personal hygiene must be maintained throughout the evening.
- High heels must be worn at all times, unless lap dancing.

### **Dances**

- Standing on the sofas is prohibited.
- Costumers should be allowed to buy a drink before being approached, unless it is obvious that they are not going to buy a drink i.e. they sit down on a couch.
- Do not spend more than 15 minutes with a customer, except if he buys you a champagne cocktail.
- You will be required to dance on stage when asked by the bar staff.
- Do not practice on the pole when customers are present.
- All girls must do midnight strip on Friday and Saturday.
- Every Friday and Saturday night - or another night when a DJ is present - £10 will be deducted from your commissions.
- Dances should last approximately 5 minutes.
- Customers must be seated with their arms along the top of the couches.
- Keep your distance when dancing from the customers, one arm length away from his face.
- Tidy the couches and the VIP room after each dance.
- All money collected in the dance room must be shown clearly to the camera and must be converted into tokens at the bar.
- All tips £10 and over must be declared and exchanged for tokens.
- It's the dancer's responsibility to keep hold of her tokens throughout the evening.
- At the end of your shift the tokens must be counted and handed to a member of the bar staff before payment.
- In the event of the customer using his credit card on dances, you will be paid your commission within the next 4 working days.
- The length of the stag or lesbian show is dependant of the number of customers present.
- Dancers must not whip the stag unless you have his permission.
- All dancers will be required to leaflet from time to time.

#### Prices and commissions

• We have fixed prices for VIPs, stag & lesbian shows; discounts can only be given at the discretion of bar staff.

• Each lap dance valued at £10.00 equates to 1 token.

• Each lap dance valued at £20.00 equates to 2 tokens.

• Each lesbian show valued at £30.00 equates to 3 tokens.

• Each stag show is valued at £10.00/£20.00 (public/private show) per member of stag party – except the groom and the best man.

• VIP rooms are available at following rates:

15 minutes	/ included 2 drinks	£60.00	-	5 tokens
	/ lesbian show (2 dancers)	£140.00	-	6 tokens each dancer
30 minutes	/ no drinks	£100.00	-	10 tokens
	/ 4 drinks	£120.00	-	10 tokens
	/ 1 bottle of champagne	£150.00	-	11 tokens
	/ lesbian show (2 dancers)	£280.00	-	12 tokens each dancer
1 hour	/ no drinks	£200.00	-	20 tokens
	/4 drinks	£240.00	-	20 tokens
	/1 bottle of champagne	£250.00	-	21 tokens

• Customers can also purchase a champagne cocktail for you at £10.00 for which you will receive £5.00 at the end of your shift.

• Dancers can sell one of these bottles of champagne to a customer and receive extra tokens

Moet	1 token	Veuve Cliquet	1 token
Bollinger	2 tokens	Don Perignon	3 tokens

#### Safety

• All areas of the club are covered by CCTV.

• Drinks must not be taken to dance rooms or changing room.

• Any dancer found exchanging phone numbers, making arrangements to meet customers out of work or offering "extra's" will be stripped of all tokens and escorted from the club.

• Under no circumstances should you allow a customer to touch you.

#### Discipline

• Dancers will be fined £5.00 for the following incidents:

- Using mobile phones on the floor when customers are present
- Taking drinks into the dance room or changing room
- Not informing management of cancellation of the shift before 3pm
- Leaving the floor for a break without informing staff
- Standing on couches
- Failure to keep the changing room clean
- Discussing their commission with customers
- Not doing topless show on stage
- Being late
- Using candle wax on the middle pole

• Repeated failure to comply with the rules and regulations will result in disciplinary action.

**This agreement contains all the rules and regulations of your employment and supersedes any previous agreement or understanding relating to your employment at** \_\_\_\_\_

**Manager** Print Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Dancer** Print Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Manager** \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix C: Poseidon Rules

## APPLICATION FOR LICENCE TO OCCUPY SPACE

FORM MUST BE COMPLETELY FILLED OUT. PLEASE PRINT.

Club Name: Spearhead Blues Adult Cabaret  
Club Address: [REDACTED]  
Stage Name: [REDACTED]  
Real Name: [REDACTED] National Insurance Number: [REDACTED]  
Entertainer Licence Number (if applicable): [REDACTED] Date of Birth: [REDACTED] Age: [REDACTED]  
Address: [REDACTED]  
City: [REDACTED] Post Code: [REDACTED]  
Telephone Home: ( [REDACTED] ) [REDACTED] Mobile: [REDACTED]

### Previous dance experience:

	Club Name	City	Manager	Telephone
1.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
2.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
3.	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

### In case of emergency notify:

Name: [REDACTED] Relationship to You: [REDACTED]  
Full Address: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Post Code: [REDACTED]  
Telephone: ( [REDACTED] ) [REDACTED]

I found out about this club via: [REDACTED]

I warrant, represent and certify the following:

I have never been arrested and/or convicted for the possession or sale of any illegal drug. I have never been arrested and/or convicted of any charge in relation to acts of prostitution nor have I engaged in any act of prostitution. I understand that violations of law could occur if I were to handle a customer or if a customer was to handle me. I agree to refrain from handling customers or allowing them to handle me and from performing in such a manner that would be considered obscene or otherwise illegal or unlawful and I agree to comply with all rules of the club which have been adopted to ensure compliance with all existing national and local laws. I understand that if these rules are broken, my Dancer Performance Licence will be terminated upon proper notice.

I am eighteen years of age or older. I agree that my giving false information on this application will be reason for immediate termination of any Dancer Performance Licence executed in furtherance of this application. I understand that I will not be an agent or employee of the club, and that the club is not responsible for unlawful acts committed by me.

I understand that I am solely responsible for the payment and withholding of applicable income and other taxes and national insurance contributions due on the income that I earn while performing at the club, and that the club will not be held responsible for such amounts. I further understand that the club will make no such tax/contribution withholding from the income that I earn, and that I will not be issued any taxation forms or documents from or by the club.

[REDACTED]  
Performer Signature

[REDACTED]  
Date

ATTACH COPY OF PHOTO IDENTIFICATION

## CANCELATION OF SHIFTS

Any Dancer wishing to cancel shifts must give a minimum notice of twenty-four hours. Any dancer failing to do this will be charged the commission of the shift missed

Dancers name

Stage name

Manager



## CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ██████████ GLASGOW

THE FOLLOWING APPLIES AT ALL TIMES AND MUST BE READ SUBJECT TO ANY VARIATIONS AGREED WITH STATUTORY AUTHORITIES ATTACHED

### A. General points and dancer attire:

1. Dancers must always sign in with the Club Management prior to commencing each shift;
2. At any time, dancers arriving or departing the Club must be fully dressed in clean, neat and smart attire. Dancers must endeavour always to arrive at and depart from the Club quietly, particularly during the evening and early morning;
3. Dancers are to arrive within adequate time to ensure that the dancer is ready on the main floor commensurate with the dancers shift or as designated by the Club management;
4. Except in an emergency, the use of mobile phones in public areas is prohibited;
5. After arriving at the club and entering the dressing room, dancers are to change into appropriate attire as required by the Club and remain so dressed unless providing a stage or table dance performance. On leaving the premises, dancers' attire should be as indicated at (2) above;
6. Dancers' appropriate attire shall include:
  - (a) Floor length elegant gowns and high heel shoes as approved by the Club management. The Club reserves the right to specify what is and is not appropriate on continual basis;
  - (b) Shoes must retain a minimum of a 3" heel and be worn at all times while in any public area of the Club;
  - (c) Dancers' hair and make-up must be presented professionally. The Club encourages the use of costume jewelry, hairpieces, gloves and related accessories - remember style and elegance is the desired intent;
  - (d) At all times, other than during a table dance or stage performance, dancers must remain clothed whilst in the public areas and;
  - (e) Dancers must fully dress at the end of each performance.

## **B. Dancer conduct:**

1. Dancers may never give out any personal information, including telephone numbers, or contact details away from the Club. Dancers may provide a customer with days and shifts they or other dancers work at the Club;
2. Dancers may never accept any telephone number, address or other contact information from any customer, except in the form of a business card, but may not make use of that information to contact the customer. Before leaving the premises, dancers must permanently surrender all such cards to a member of management (without copying any information);
3. Dancers are never to be in the company of customer except in an area open to the public within the Club (excluding toilets);
4. Dancers are never to enter or be in a roped-off V.I.P dance area, only a floor supervisor or manager may open such a roped-off area;
5. During the performances of a table dance:
  - (a) Customers must be seated in an upright position against the back of the booth with their hands by their sides before a dancer can commence a table dance, customers must remain so seated during the entire dance;
  - (b) Dancers must not sit on or straddle the customer;
  - (c) Floor work is prohibited and may only be performed whilst performing stage shows on the Club's designated stages;
  - (d) Dancers may not perform any act that clearly simulated masturbation, oral sex or sexual intercourse, including the insertion of any object, including their own finger into any genital opening. Dancers may not touch their breasts with their mouth, lips or tongues;
  - (e) Dancers may not intentionally touch a customer at any time during the performance except as stated in (b) above, or unless absolutely accidental by a third party or object;
  - (f) Dancers may not use language of an inappropriate, suggestive or sexually graphic nature at any time;
6. Customers are not permitted to dance at any time. Customers must remain appropriately clothed at all times. Neither customer nor dancer may remove any of the customer's clothing during a performance;
7. If a customer attempts to touch, or speak to a dancer inappropriately, the dancer must immediately stop the performance and explain the relevant rules. If necessary, ask for assistance from the floor supervisor, who will take appropriate action, which may include escorting the customer out of the Club;
8. Dancers are never to intentionally touch the genitals or breasts of another dancer or to knowingly permit another dancer to intentionally touch their genitals or breasts;
9. Dancers are never to engage in an act of **prostitution** (the receiving of gratuities or payments for any form of sexual favour or offer as such);
10. Dancers may not accept a customer's offer of payment in return for sexual favours (**Solicitation**);
11. Dancers must not engage in communications that could be deemed as acts of prostitution or solicitation, even if the dancer has no intention of carrying out the act;

- 12 Dancers are never to intentionally meet any customer outside the Club
- 13 Dancers are never to agree to meet a customer outside of the Club
- 14 Dancers must never engage in any unlawful activity within the Club
- 15 Dancers may never leave the premises during a shift, except in case of an emergency and then only with the express permission of the duty manager. In that event, dancers must sign out before leaving the premises. If dancer leaves early, for any reason, the dancer will not be re-admitted during that shift;
- 16 Dancers will either leave at the end of a shift in a nominated taxi, or a member of security will escort them to their car or off the premises;
- 17 At the end of the night shift, dancers must not leave the premises until after the customers have departed and then have been cleared to leave by the manager;
- 18 Dancers may only consume alcohol in moderation;
- 19 Dancers must never consume, possess or under the influence of any unlawful drug or substance, unless it is personally prescribed medication by a registered GP;
- 20 Dancers are never to invite or knowingly permit dancer's spouse, boyfriend nor anyone else with whom dancers are romantically involved to enter the Club;
- 21 Dancers are required from time to time to participate in promotional activities and offers as designated by the Club manager;
- 22 Dancers are required from time to time to participate in stage and podium performances as designated by Club staff;
- 23 Whilst performing on stage or podium, dancers may not perform any act that clearly simulates Masturbation, oral sex or sexual intercourse, including the insertion of any object, including their own finger into any genital opening. Dancers may not touch their breasts with their mouths lips or tongue;
- 24 For the purposes of safety and standards, the Club may employ the use of closed circuit cameras and radio communications throughout the premises and;
- 25 Any dancer found to be in violation of any of these rules, without exception, will be subject to the disciplinary procedure.

#### **Performances**

Performers should only perform in open areas within the licensed premises which should at all times be appropriately stewarded and covered by CCTV cameras. Performers genitalia should be covered at all times. There should be no touching between performers and patrons at any time during the a performance, the only contact allowed being the hand to hand payment of money at conclusion of the performance. Performers remaining in the public areas before, following or between performances should be suitably clothed at all times with no exposure of breasts or genitalia. Any advertising of performances out with the licensed premises, including newspaper advertisements, flyers or other promotional material or notices at the premises, may only depict performers suitably clothed as aforesaid. Performances involving the removal of clothing should not be visible from out with the premises.



**CODE OF CONDUCT FOR [REDACTED] GLASGOW**

**ALL ENTERTAINERS MUST READ AND ACKNOWLEDGE  
PRIOR TO WORKING ON THE PREMISES**

1. Performers should only perform in open public areas within the licensed premises which should at all times be appropriately stewarded and covered by CCTV cameras.
2. Performers' genitalia should be covered at all times.
3. There should be no touching between performers and patrons at any time during a performance.
4. The only contact allowed being the hand to hand payment of money at the conclusion of the performance.
5. Performers remaining in the public areas before, following or between performances should be suitably clothed at all times with no exposure of breasts or genitalia.
6. Any advertising of performances out with the licensed premises, including newspaper advertisements, 'flyers' or other promotional material or notices at the premises, may only depict performers suitably clothed as aforesaid.
7. Performances involving the removal of clothing should not be visible from out with the premises.

Print: [REDACTED]  
Sign: [REDACTED]  
Date: [REDACTED]



**OBEY THE CODE!  
COMPLY WITH THE LAWS!  
USE COMMON SENSE!  
ANY BREACH OF THE ABOVE RULES  
MAY RESULT IN THE DANCER BEING EXCLUDED FROM  
THIS CLUB AND OTHER [REDACTED] CLUBS  
WORLDWIDE. ANY BREACH MAY BE REPORTED  
TO LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES  
FOR POSSIBLE PROSECUTION!**

**[REDACTED] HAS ZERO TOLERANCE FOR;  
PROSTITUTION, SOLICITATION, UNLAWFUL DRUGS  
& UNLAWFUL CONDUCT!**

The signing of this document signifies that you, the dancer, have read and understood the  
CODE OF CONDUCT FOR DANCERS, and that you agree to comply with the  
Glasgow Code of Conduct and accept the obligations under it. This document is in no way designed  
to restrict your own artistic performance or freedom of expression

[REDACTED]  
Dancer's Signature

[REDACTED]  
Date signed

[REDACTED]  
Dancer's Printed birth name

[REDACTED]  
Dancer's stage name

Witness  
[REDACTED]  
Printed Club Managers name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Witnessed

# DANCER ASSESSMENT

## Step 1: Preliminary Interview with Manager covering:

Previous experience as a dancer  
Most recent employer  
Reason for leaving (if applicable)  
Any previous convictions for drugs or prostitution  
Knowledge and understanding of Spearmint Rhino brand  
Dance audition

## Step 2: Formal Procedures

Proof of address – 2 forms of ID to include utility bill and photo ID  
Request for data protection statement if applicable  
Explanation of House Rules and Code of Conduct in detail – signature required  
Completion of Dancer Performance Licence and Licence to Occupy Space – signature required  
Explanation of Disciplinary Procedure  
Polaroid photo to be attached to front of envelope  
Tour of venue for familiarity of fire exits and explanation of evacuation procedures

## Promotional Opportunities

I am interested in the following:

TV    Events    Newspapers and Magazines    Flying    Online    None

## Step 3: Induction

Explanation of stage and podium requirements  
Working schedules  
Changing room etiquette  
Payment and charging  
Explanation of House Rules and Code of Conduct in detail  
Explanation of additional conditions as part of the PEL and/or Liquor Licence  
Explanation of Disciplinary Procedure  
Customer Relations and Conflict Management  
Arrival and exit procedures for the premises  
Fire Safety – Health and Safety  
Incident reporting  
Mystery shoppers and their function  
Advice on obligations to statutory bodies as independent contractors  
Additional dance tuition if required – 'School of Excellence'

## Induction Completed:

Manager's Signature

Dancer's Signature

Date

## Step 4: Monitoring and Evaluation

Experienced dancers will initially accompany new dancers  
Ongoing evaluation and supervision by Club Management to ensure compliance of the above

## Appendix D: Overview of topics

Dancers were asked a questions pertaining to their experience of working in the Scottish industry. Questions were categorised into the following sections, with participants asked to comment upon anything that was not covered in the schedule:

**Biographical:** General biographical information was collected in paper form, however participants were also asked if they did any other form of work in addition to dancing, and if so, their reasons for this.

**Entering the industry:** This section was designed to explore the reasons why participants originally became involved and when they first started working. Women were asked how they found out about the work, and if they had ever taken a break from dancing, and any reasons for this. Ex-dancers were asked if they would ever consider returning to the industry, and their reasons for this.

**Venues, labour and working conditions:** Women were asked about the venues they had worked in, and their experiences in each one. Questions explored the prices of dances, standards expected of dancers by owners, and which venues they enjoyed working in most, and why. Addressing attitudes to the labour, women were posed questions pertaining to what they thought their work involved, and any working routines they adopted. If they had danced in

multiple venues, they were asked which they enjoyed working in most/least and why.

**Exploring working conditions:** Dancers were asked if any training provision was given for new starts, and their opinion on this.

**Rules and regulations:** Dancers were asked to elaborate on the rules and regulations they have to comply with in each venue they had worked in, how these rules were communicated, and how any transgressions were dealt with. In addition, women were asked if they or other dancers were likely to report any observed rule-breaking to owners.

**Additional labour:** This section addressed if dancers were required to take on any other kind of work aside from providing dances, such as promotional work for venues.

**Facilities provided by venues:** Dancers were asked if venues provided any facilities such as drinks, shower rooms and lockers. Women were also asked to elaborate on anything that they felt should be provided by the venue.

**Fees:** This section addressed dancers views on fees and the different systems venues had in place for collecting monies, and what might occur should a dancer be unable to pay for a shift.

**Auditioning experiences:** Dancers were asked what they had to do exactly in order to obtain work at the venues they had worked in.

**Personal opinions specific to the work:** This section addressed dancers personal opinions about their job. Women were asked what they enjoyed most and why, and any negative aspects and why they felt this way, and if any negative experiences affect them in any way. Women were also asked how they defined what they did, whether they considered it to be a form of work and their opinions on the sexual entertainment venue label attached to venues in England and Wales. Women were also asked about how easy they found it to make money, and were asked to compare this with their experiences when they first entered the industry.

**Working strategies:** These questions were asked in order to discover women's strategies for financial success whilst at work. Prompts included adopting a particular persona using behaviour and fashion. If they employed tactics, they were asked to give their reasons on why they employed these methods.

**Relationships with colleagues:** Questions explored the nature of relationships dancers had with others in the venue, and how these relationships affected their experience at work.

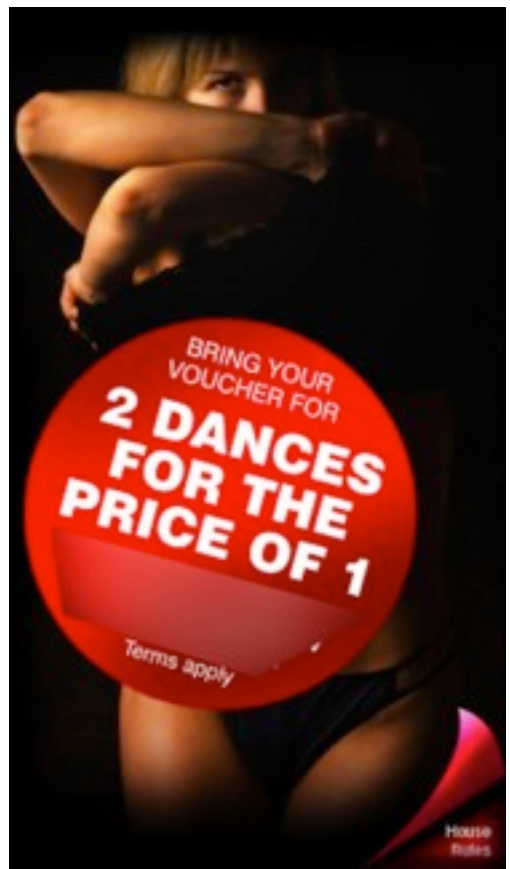
**Experiences with customers:** Dancers were asked about how they were treated by customers, and whether this had altered in any way since they

started working. They were also asked if customers varied in their behaviour towards them, depending on if they were in a group or alone.

**Stigma:** Dancers were asked if outsiders were aware of their work, and if they were aware, their opinions about the work. If outsiders perceived the work negatively, dancers were asked how they felt about this.

**Appearance/ Bodily integrity:** This section was designed in order to explore if working in venues had any impact upon how dancers perceived their bodies, and if any pressure was placed upon them to appear in a particular way. As well as exploring the nature of presentation at work, dancers were asked if they engaged in any body work outside the venue for the purposes of looking acceptable whilst at work.

## Appendix E: Venue Promotional Material





## Appendix F: Nebula Photo Exhibition and Cabaret Promotional Material





## Appendix G: Pole Fitness Promotional Material

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