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Harley J. Paulsen  
*Portland State University*

Ericka Kimball  
*Portland State University*

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**Exotic Dancers Experiences with Occupational Violence in Portland  
Oregon Strip Clubs**

By Harley Paulsen  
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Kimball

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## Introduction

The impact of occupational violence against exotic dancers is unknown due to the lack of research done in this field of study. Although there is no exact number, it can be said with great confidence that this issue is worldwide. In the United States alone, there are over 4,000 strip clubs, each employing between 10-500 dancers with every state having a strip club. Because the numbers are in constant change, and because there is no documentation to determine the number of dancers working in strip clubs, the scope of the issue is unknown, although undoubtedly high. The Bureau of Labor and Statistics does not monitor the amount of strip club establishments, or the amount of occupational violence occurring in them. With lack of representation and understanding of occupational violence against exotic dancers in strip clubs, the exposing of it becomes increasingly important to the safety of dancers. Without a way to see or measure a problem, there is no way to see or measure improvement. Therefore, this study explores exotic dancer's experiences of occupational violence in Portland, Oregon strip clubs. This study will add to the increasing literature about where violence occurs, who the perpetrators of violence are, and how the working conditions in strip clubs can be improved.

While exotic dancing is a form of artistic expression to be celebrated, serious safety concerns are involved with the career of stripping. The importance of focusing on occupational violence is evident in the historical dialogue of work place violence and invisibility of sex work, and particularly exotic dancing. According to the United States Department of Labor, over two million workers reported being violated while at work each year ([www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov)). Due to the stigma of being a sex worker, many dancers choose not to report violence in fear of being rejected, not taken seriously, or even blamed for it, therefore statistics on occupational violence against exotic dancers is unavailable (Spice, 2007).

Exotic dancers experience a variety of health and safety issue related to working in strip clubs. Jobs that include the exchange of money, working alone or in isolated areas, providing services and care for people, working late at night, and working where alcohol is served increases the likelihood of violence ([ohsa.gov](http://ohsa.gov)). The environment that exotic dancers work in, typically includes many of those identified factors, if not all of them (Egan, 2004). Additional concerns include the use of illegal drug use while at work and how this could be cause for a myriad of health issues such as addiction, disease and overdose (Spice 2007). Spice found (2007) that sex workers who used various drugs such as cocaine, methamphetamines, and intravenous drugs contributed to the risks of acquiring HIV, cardiovascular and neurological diseases. Another issue academics have focused on is the high risk of sexually transmitted diseases involved in sex work and exotic dancing. Furthermore, strip club environments (social and physical) may allow for the increased likelihood of STD's to exotic dancers, caused by pressure from club owners and clients to engage in unprotected sex, rape, and lowered inhibitions from drug use (Sherman, 2011).

Adequate amounts of research on exotic dancers revolve around the mental health concerns of doing such work (Kuntze & Harlem, 2009, Krumrei-Mancuso, 2017). Some of the mental health issues associated with sex work and exotic dancing include depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Anklesaria & Gentile, 2012). More often than not though, mental health issues related to sex work are studied around the work of prostitution. For example, Krmrei-Mancuso (2017) studied 88 women who engaged in prostitution and found that the act of the work itself was not likely associated with mental health issues, but factors such as violence, poverty, and feelings of self-transcendence. Likewise, stigma played a major role in sex workers issues with mental health concerns due to feelings of distrust and isolation (Kuntze & Harlem, 2009).

Drug use, mental health issues, and STD's are interrelated, due to the fact that if a dancer is experiencing or engaging in one of the risk factors, there is an increased probability of them engaging or experiencing another one (Spice, 2007). With the history of research on sex work and exotic dancing focusing on these three main health concerns, one might assume that this line of work comes with serious side effects. However, the connections between occupational violence (e.g. sexual assault, rape, harassment) and these health concerns are rarely studied. The research is clear that people who experience sexual, financial, physical or verbal abuse have a higher risk for substance use as a coping mechanism (Sherman, Lilleston & Reuben, 2011). Escaping abuse, or enduring abuse may require a dancer to get high before the shift starts in order to feel as though they can manage the toll. In order to gain economic empowerment, or to fight against financial abuse, a dancer may engage in illegal sexual acts and behaviors in order to compensate for monetary loss. With drug use, unsafe sexual practices and occupational violence occurring, it is no surprise mental health disorders emerge. In large, the importance of understanding how occupational violence affects exotic dancers is enormous in being a key element to reducing drug use, sexually transmitted diseases, and improving the mental health of dancers.

This paper uses the terms sex work and exotic dancer interchangeably, as the exotic dancer's work involves sexually explicit behavior. When the term sex worker is used, it is meant to explain the job of a stripper, or exotic dancer, and not prostitution or any other form of sex work. This is imperative, as exotic dancers are typically left out of the narrative, seemingly to be not quite as high risk enough as prostitutes and not accepted by society as legitimate work. Occupational violence is used in the study to mean any verbal, physical, sexual or financial abuse perpetrated against the exotic dancer while in or related to the work place setting. The work place setting includes but is not limited to the parking lot of the strip club, private dance rooms, bathrooms, patios, stages and the vehicles they may have come and gone in. Much violence occurs to women and sex workers outside of the work place, such as public transportation and their homes (Decker, Nail, Lim, Footer, Davis, Sherman, 2017), but this research will be focusing on the violence experienced while at work in strip clubs.

## **Literature Review**

Women's sexual labor has a long history and has taken place in all areas of the world. The risks associated with sex work depend vastly on the place, the time, and the type of work that is being done. The research on prostitution and other forms of sex work is complex, due to the sexualization of the work, the power dynamics of the dancers, clients and club owners, as well as the multifaceted individuals doing the work. Understanding the complex experiences of sex workers in academic research has become more popular with time but is still missing imperative aspects. One of these understudied areas of sex work research includes occupational health and safety issues in strip clubs; where the violence occurs, who the perpetrators are, and innovative ways to prevent it from happening. Literature from places such as Canada, the United Kingdom, and Mexico have been large contributors to better understanding how violence occurs in the work of stripping and prostitution (Katsulis, Lopez, Durfee & Robillard, 2010; Cruz, Hardy & Sanders, 2016; Tyndale, Lewis, Clark, Zubick & Young, 2000). For example, Tyndale, Lewis, Clark, Zubick and Young (2000) examine occupational violence in Canadian strip clubs through the perspective of a broader social context and how physical structures may be affecting dancer's safety. Structures such as the location and existence of cameras, the required attire and appearance of the dancers mandated by house rules, cleanliness of the performance areas in the club, and scheduled work hours all contributed to the violence experienced by the dancers in this study (Tyndale et al., 2000).

It is imperative to note that when faced with violence and abuse, sex workers have incredibly unique and innovative ways to avoid the violence and or manipulate it in a way that is survivable. This concept is best understood through a study that explored the ways sex workers subtly, or not so subtly fight back and avoid the abuse and violence in their everyday work environments (Katsulis,

Lopez, Durfee, & Robiollard, 2010). Katsulis et al. (2010) found that sex workers in Tijuana, Mexico practiced risk avoidance most commonly by carefully selecting the location or business of their work, distancing themselves from law enforcement, and working with third parties such as pimps or hotel staff. Based on the research of risk avoidance and precaution seeking practices by sex workers, it is clear that exotic dancers understand the violence they encounter and are in constant resistance against it.

Because of vague laws and regulations in the United States regarding the management and development of strip clubs, most employers, clients, and dancers do not know what is legal and illegal in this work (Hanna, 2005). This lack of understanding may be allowing for mistreatment, abuse and violence to occur in strip clubs, while concurrently failing to hold perpetrators of this violence responsible. Additionally, exotic dancers are most often considered independent contractors rather than employees yet experience high levels of control and discipline without the benefits of legal employment (Cruz, Hardy, & Sanders, 2017). Cruz et al. (2017) state that false self-employment may be contributing to the unsafe working conditions of exotic dancers and could be improved by pursuing licensing agreements between clubs and authorities. In contrast, a research study based in England and Wales described the political focus of monitoring strip clubs to be instead harmful for the lives of exotic dancers (Colosi, 2013). Colosi (2013) states that with the increase in licensing and monitoring of strip club locations, these establishments typically become criminalized and cause for the decline in strip club establishments, therefore ostracizing sex workers even more.

Addressing the problem of workplace violence includes various types of preventative measures. For example, a study in Baltimore, Maryland suggests that one of the most important aspects of preventing occupational violence is to create an environment where dancers and their clients have shared feelings of trust and control (Lilleston, Reuben, & Sherman, 2012). Lilleston et al., (2012) states that trust and control can come from the built environment, such as strategic placement of mirrors and the management styles of the club owners. Another study suggests that violence-related support outside of the establishment as well as access to health care are key components of addressing work place violence in strip clubs (Decker et al., 2017). Decker et al. (2017) believes managers should take the responsibility of connecting dancers to resources in order to initiate internal support and accountability by employers and their establishments.

As we can see, sex work and occupational violence can be incredibly complex, and the solutions to minimizing or eliminating violence against exotic dancers is crucial to the health and well-being of these workers. All of these studies contribute to the literature on occupational violence experienced by sex workers, yet the research is most often located outside of the United States, focuses on aspects of sex work such as the physical structure of the strip club or is limited other forms of sex work such as prostitution. My research intends to add knowledge about the ways in which exotic dancers in the United States experience occupational violence, and use innovative ideas articulated by the dancers themselves to overcome these health and safety issues.

This study is conducted in Portland, Oregon which claims to have the most strip clubs per capita with over 54 clubs in the city and counting (pricenomics.com). The city of Portland is an ideal place to conduct this research considering the city has some of the most tolerant laws and regulations on strip club establishments and how they are managed (McGrath, 2013). McGrath's (2013) study indicates that strip clubs in Portland have gone unregulated, allowing for poor management, leading to oversight of the health and safety issues experienced by exotic dancers. Through personal and anecdotal evidence, strip club establishments in Portland tend to differ from other states such as the dancer's ability to get fully nude, client's ability to touch dancers during private dances (with consent), and no requirements needed to work, such as permits or registration. Exotic dancers are not considered employees, but instead independent contractors, allowing for little to no adherence to the Occupational Safety and Health Division, nor the Bureau of Labor and Industries (Cruz, Hardy, & Sanders, 2017). With such vague laws and lack of benefits that employees receive, anecdotal evidence as well as personal experience by the researcher suggests that exotic dancers

are at risk of experiencing various forms of violence while at work with limited resources to turn to for help. This study aims to explore exotic dancer's experiences of occupational violence in Portland, Oregon strip clubs. This study will identify possible gaps and variables in the discussion of occupational safety in regard to exotic dancers and be of use to help shape regulations and laws for the betterment of Portland, Oregon strip clubs.

In addition to better understanding occupational violence experienced by exotic dancers, this study also intends to shed light on SESTA and FOSTA (Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act and Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Trafficking Act). Both were recently passed on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018, a law intended to curb sex trafficking while also removing all platforms for sex workers to advertise themselves on (H.R. 1865). Many exotic dancers have used these platforms as a way to promote their business by posting photos, staying in contact with customers, and updating times and dates of their work schedule and performances. These safe spaces were also used for sharing tips and creating an online community of support. Due to the passing of this bill, one of Portland, Oregon's largest platforms for exotic dancers to advertise themselves on (Xoticspot) has been removed. The effects of this bill are unknown at this time, but the anticipated outcomes are that women who sell sexual services will have to use word of mouth, and other dangerous forms of advertisement to promote their work. Additionally, safe spaces to share tips with one another and to build community will be removed (Cunningham, DeAngelo, & Tripp, 2017). This bill has also affected this study as the recruitment and advertising of the study was made incredibly difficult. In conclusion, this study will also be exploring the safety concerns exotic dancers have with SESTA and FOSTA.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### Feminist Theory and Male Gaze

This research was written and conducted through a feminist theory lens in order to encapsulate the multifaceted individuals in this line of work, and their intersecting identities that contribute to their experiences with violence in strip clubs. More often than not, women of color and women in ostracized jobs are marginalized in the fight against violence, and feminist theory is used in this study to elevate those voices. Feminist theory, as Ferguson (2017) states, is "an intense political passion over the best ways to understand and improve the lives of women" and "flourishes best through scholarly practices that cast a capacious net across fields, think interrelationally about power and resistance, and seek alliances with others who are both critical of prevailing conditions and imaginative about collective possibilities for freedom, justice and joy." This definition of feminist theory aligns directly with the aim of this research in regards to serving as a platform for exotic dancers with diverse backgrounds to speak out and be heard, to add literature about a population of workers who are often left out of academic dialogue, and to help inform policies and end stigma around sex work in order to prevent violence and hold perpetrators accountable.

In addition to framing this work in a feminist lens, this researcher and the participants involved in this study also understand the conflicting reality of the male gaze and sexual empowerment. As empowering as stripping and sex work in general can be for women, it is consequential that negative aspects of the work be taken seriously. The male gaze, first coined by Mulvey (1999), is an act of gendered looking in a voyeuristic and eroticized perspective. As an exotic dancer, the majority of strippers use this male gaze as a way to increase their sexual attractiveness, therefore increase their income. For example, embodying the "ideal" feminine persona and look by not only acting docile and sexy, but also constructing a "feminine" visual using lingerie, makeup and exotic dancing. And although some may view this as degrading, others, like Glpka (2017) state that "participants positioned themselves simultaneously as its objects, and as arbiters of the objectifying relationship" (p.98). And while exotic dancers may be in control of representing normative sex appeal and beauty and choosing when to portray this, they may also be experiencing negative social perceptions and dehumanization when on stage due to the way men

treat these dancers, as if appearance is their primary basis of their worth (Gervais, Holland & Dodd, 2013). Because of this, the male gaze may increase risk for violence against these women while also diminishing society's empathy around violence against sex workers. However, like Baxter (2003) states, "individuals are capable of positioning themselves as powerful, and these moments of powerfulness mark opportunities for transformation" (pg. 39).

### Power and Patriarchy

Strip clubs historically involve intense power relations between dancers, clients, employers and the greater community. Patriarchal systems that make up the business of exotic dancing and the ways our community views sex workers contribute to the violence dancer's experience. Anecdotal and personal evidence suggest that the overarching majority of strip clubs are owned, operated, regulated, and profited largely by men and constructed largely for the entertainment of men. And in spite of this, dancers are able to engage in resistance strategies in order to deal with the structural inequality inherent in this industry (Lewis, 2005)

Additionally, marginalized labor such as stripping has always been deemed as unethical, unladylike, and deviant. Even with the rise in sex work research and the rising numbers of strip clubs around the United States, identifying oneself as an exotic dancer is still incredibly stigmatizing and could cause one's safety, security and reputation to be put on the line. Exotic dancers are not only stigmatized, but the actual strip clubs themselves are as well. Because of this, strip clubs sometimes experience unfair zoning policies, forcing dancers to work in more distant areas that may be less regulated than other businesses, consequently allowing for violence to occur (Hubbard, 2012).

Stigmatization of sex work is used as a form of protection for abusers so they may not be held responsible for their unethical and abusive behaviors. Instead, exotic dancing should be celebrated and recognized as a form of legitimate work and protected as such.

### Personal Experience

I have experience as an exotic dancer including two years of dancing in Portland, Oregon strip clubs where I experienced physical and sexual abuse while at work by both clients and employers of the establishments. These experiences inform the research questions and study design. Although I understand and acknowledge biases in this study due to the positionality to strip club establishments and exotic dancers, I believe it aids in the quality of the research. Because of the unique position of being a researcher and a dancer, I believe I was better able to understand the experiences and work that the participants were discussing, therefore allowing dancers true experiences to be shared.

## **Methods**

The purpose of this study is to examine exotic dancer's experiences of occupational violence within Portland Oregon strip clubs. Occupational violence in this study is defined by any verbal, physical, sexual, psychological or financial abuse in or around the work place (strip clubs) by clients, employers, or law enforcement. In this mixed methods study, small-scale in-depth data was collected from July 2018 - August 2018 in Portland, Oregon.

### Recruitment

Study participants were recruited through Facebook and Instagram. A post describing the study along with a link to the electronic survey was posted to "PDX Exotic Dancer Community" and "Survive the Club" pages along with a post on the researchers personal Facebook page.

### Survey

Data were collected through electronic surveys then conducting individual face-to-face interviews. The survey included questions about the types of violence experienced, who perpetrators of violence are, structural safety measures, experiences of fear, and report of violence to law enforcement. Participants are then asked to provide contact information if they want to participate in a face-to-face interview.

### Interview

The participants who chose to do a follow-up interview verbally consented to the interview, which was documented on the audio recording. After the transcription of the audio recording, all audio recordings were destroyed in order to reduce any risk of breach of confidentiality. The semi-structured interviews included questions about the dancer's experiences with violence in the work place, when they feel most safe and unsafe at work, how often they experienced fear and their opinions about FOSTA/SESTA.

### Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to document frequency, percentage, and number of experiences and types of experiences. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes of experiences. The coding approach included familiarization of the data, coding important and interesting aspects of the interviews, generating themes based on these codes, and interpreting those themes. Throughout this process, constant comparison occurred in order to establish and refine the themes.

## **Results**

Of the 33 participants who took the survey, 32 reported "yes" to experiencing some form of violence while at work. The person who reported "no" to experiencing violence was omitted from the survey after this response because they did not meet the inclusion criteria of the study. These results are based on a 32-participant total (N=32).

Over half of survey participants identified as European American 69% (n=22) and 13% (n=4) identified as multiracial. Additionally, African Americans comprised 9% (n=3) of the study, 6% (n=2) identified as Native American and 1% (n=1) identified as Asian American. The majority of the participants were ages 25 to 30 (59%, n=19). Ages 18 to 24 (19%, n=6), 31-35 (16%, n=5) and 36 to 40 (6%, n=2) made up the rest. Lastly, when asked how long participants have been dancing, the majority indicated that they had been dancing between 4 to 8 years (31%, n=10). Many (25%, n=8) had danced for 2 to 4 years; 22% (n=7) had danced for over 8 years; while only 16% (n=5) had danced for 6 months to 2 years and 6% (n=2) had danced no more than 6 months.

The most prevalent form of violence reported by participants while at work was sexual assault, with 84% (n=27) reporting they had experienced unwanted groping, rape, forced or coerced unwanted sexual acts. The next most common forms of abuse reported by participants while at work included verbal abuse 63% (n=20) meaning any name calling, threats, criticizing or aggressive outbursts, harassment 59% (n=19) including stalking, intimidation, and racial discrimination, and physical assault 53% (n=17) involving hitting, slapping, witnessing a homicide, and being hit by objects. The most infrequent form of violence reported at work by participants was financial abuse with only 34% (n=11) reporting they had experienced someone else having control of their money or belongings and using it against them. One participant reported experiencing "other" form of violence, which they identified as "grooming". This response was followed up in an interview that will be discussed further.



After better understanding violence experienced by the participants, we wanted to better understand who the perpetrators of violence were. Not surprisingly, client violence was reported most extensive by 94% (n=30) of the participants. Again, not remarkable is the next large majority of abusers in strip clubs against the participants were club owners 25% (n=8). All other perpetrators of violence included other dancers 22% (n=7), security 13% (n=4), DJ's and bartenders 9% (n=3), booking agents 6% (n=2), and cooks 3% (n=1). And although participants in this study reported to have never (n=0) experienced violence by law enforcement, this may be due to 91% (n=29) of them never reporting violence to law enforcement, therefore preventing the interaction in the first place. One participant 3% (n=1) reported violence to law enforcement, while two others 6% (n=2) reported "other", one stating they "only call when I am a bartender and not a dancer", and the other stating they "do not report violence to law enforcement because I have witnessed blatant discrimination from police".

The participants were asked to choose the structural safety features that were used in the clubs they had experienced the LEAST violence at. Of the 32 participants, 81% (n=26) said cameras in the private rooms, 78% (n=25) stated bouncers, and 56% (n=18) chose cameras in parking area. In addition to these, participants also included cameras in the main dance area 50% (n=16); pat downs 28% (n=9), one-drink minimums 22% (n=7), and dress codes 13% (n=4). Three participants 9% (n=3) stated "other" to this question but did not included any description.

With violence being experienced in various forms and perpetrated by multiple people in the work place, it is startling to know that only 6% (n=2) of participants had received resources such as therapy, counseling, or other services for violence they reported experiencing at the club. Twenty-seven (84%) of the participants reported to have never received resources and 3 reported receiving resources for non-job-related violence.

Of the 32 participants who reported experiencing violence while at work, 41% (n=13) reported they rarely experienced fear of encountering occupational violence. Additionally, 38% (n=12) of participants reported "sometimes" experiencing fear, 13% (n=4) "never" experiencing fear, 6% (n=2) "often" experiencing fear and 3% (n=1) "always experiencing fear while at work.

Table 1. Survey Sample of participants experience with

Occupational violence and demographics

N = 32

Sample % (n)

Demographics

Age

18-25 18.75% (6)

25-30 59.38% (19)

30-35 15.63% (5)

35-40 06.25% (2)

40+ 00.00% (0)

Ethnicity\*

African American 14.63% (6)

Asian American 07.32% (3)

European American 63.41% (26)

Native American 12.20% (5)

Other 02.44% (1)

Years dancing

< 6 months 06.25% (2)

6 months to 2 years 15.63% (5)

2 years to 4 years 25.00% (8)

4 years to 8 years 31.25% (10)

8 or more years 21.88% (7)

Occupational Violence\*

Sexual Assault 84.37% (27)

Physical Assault 53.12% (17)

Harassment 59.37% (19)

Verbal Abuse 62.50% (20)

Financial Abuse 34.37% (11)

Other (grooming) 03.10% (1)

Safest clubs\*

Cameras

In private rooms 81.25% (26)

In parking area 56.25% (18)

On main floor 50.00% (16)

Bouncers 78.12% (25)

Cover charge 21.87% (7)

Dress code 12.50% (4)

Pat-downs 28.12% (9)

Other 09.30% (3)

Fear of work violence

Always 03.10% (1)

Often 06.25% (2)

Sometimes 37.50% (12)

Rarely 40.63% (3)

Never 12.50% (4)

Other 00.00% (0)

Reporting violence

Yes 03.13% (1)  
No 90.63% (29)  
Other 06.25% (2)

Perpetrator\*

Clients 93.75% (30)  
Club owners 08.25% (8)  
Bouncers 12.50% (4)  
DJs 09.30% (3)  
Law enforcement 00.00% (0)  
Other dancers 21.87% (7)  
Cook 03.12% (1)  
Booking agent 06.25% (2)  
Bartenders 09.37% (3)  
Other 00.00% (0)

Counseling for violence

Yes 06.25% (2)  
No 84.37% (27)  
Other 09.38% (3)

\*All that apply chosen

The following interviews were coded, and themes were found throughout the participant's stories. The four prevalent themes that emerged include diverse forms of violence experienced by the participants, perceptions of when dancers felt most safe/unsafe and how those translated into societal, structural and policy level recommendations. And lastly, their experiences with FOSTA and SESTA. And although these participants live very contrasting lives in regard to ethnicity, education, wealth, and sexuality; they all shared similar knowledge and shared experiences of occupational violence in strip clubs, which is shown here.

#### Diverse forms of violence

***There is always something. From the way someone says something to you, from the way someone grabs your butt, or touches you without tipping. Or says something mean to you and says you aren't worth any money. There is always some sort or traumatic interaction that happens. You always prepare yourself for it cause it's something you know is gonna happen. You are protecting yourself the moment you walk in cause you know anything goes, anything can happen. (Participant 7)***

#### Sexual Assault

Sexual assault was reported as the most common form of abuse experienced by dancers in this study. Sexual assault was most often described as happening due to clients and employers feeling as though dancers were objects to be violated in any way they desired with little to no feelings of repercussion. For example, this dancer illustrates what it feels like when people apathetically violate her at work:

*People feel like they have a right to my body. Whether that is grabbing me and pulling me, or grabbing my butt when I walk by, or grabbing my nipple and pinching me. (Participant 9)*

Other dancers described scenarios of sexual violence occurring in the private dance rooms. The dancers expressed feelings of wanting the sexual abuse to end, while also being cognizant of how they avoided it in the first place, and how they were able to escape once it happened. It is as if fear of financial loss, gendered expectations of anger and the assumption that dancers are free to be violated all played a role in how they experienced this violence. For example, participant 5 expresses the way her clients view her as automatically accessible:

*Well, I personally feel as though sexual and physical abuse is something that I experience most often. Every time, or nearly every time I give a lap dance some type of sexual abuse occurs, whether that minimal unwanted groping or full on sexual assault like sticking their fingers inside of me or grabbing my neck. (Participant 10)*

While participant 7 points to how some dancers walk the line between setting boundaries that make them feel safe, while also allowing certain acts to occur in order to reduce the likelihood of losing a potential client:

*A lot of the handsyness happens in the lap dance. It is confusing for them cause they get to touch, and but even when I set specific rules, they feel like they are in a private room with you, no one can see, and they can get away with more things. It's all about seeing what they can get away with. They just go straight for in between your legs, or they go straight to licking your nipple. It's all about learning how to stay away from that while not scaring them off. (Participant 7)*

Additionally, participant 4 reveals in her experience how difficult it can be to verbally or physically defend oneself in a private dance room when violence is occurring. In her case, past trauma and rightful fear stunted her ability to escape this abusers grasp, and instead an outside entity had to be the cause of his dismissal:

*We did three dances in total, we get into our first dance, and he is acting pretty chill, but getting a little handsy. And then he starts getting a little aggressive and I tell him he needs to calm down. He calms down and it's all good, and we get into the second song and then he pulls out his genitals and stuff. And I told him to put that away, that we can't do that. So, he calms down and we finish the second dance and I'm like okay, I wanna be done. He is holding me at his point. And I told him your dances are over. And he grabs and holds me by my waist, holding me down so I can't get up. One of the other ladies walk by so he lets me go, and I go to walk away, and he grabs me again. I tell him I want to go, I want to go. And at this point I am very very scared cause I am new to this. I've only been doing this for about two months. So, this was a first for me, and I've had things in my past happen to me, so I was triggered. And I was shut down, and I couldn't yell or scream. I just felt stuck trying to get out. And finally, another dancer came in and got us apart and called the security. And honestly, when he pulled me back, he put his face all over my genitals, and so he was trying to be nasty, and he pulled his genitals out and it was just really uncomfortable. (Participant 4)*

The following two participants described experiences of violence that occurred outside the strip club walls, but that began in the work setting. These are important to include in order to keep us thinking about how occupational violence sometimes seeps into sex workers everyday lives. For example:

*I was sexually assaulted. I was outside of work, but it was the bartender of the club I was working at. We were hanging out, and we were buddies since we worked at the same place. He was really nice all night, and he fed me tequila shots all night. I trusted him. But to the point where I was blacked out. I was on my period and had a diva cup in. I woke up to him having sex with me. And there was just blood everywhere. I pushed him off of me. I ran to the bathroom, cleaned up, figured out my shit, and came back out. He was there, waiting for me to be ready. I chose not to report it, because I was protecting myself because he is associated with the ownership of the club. And I am not above the assumption that I wouldn't be listened to. I wouldn't be protected. It would be pretty bad. Sometimes people don't believe us, like oh we are dramatic. I still run into him and I am fine, but that still doesn't mean that that wasn't what it was. Rape. The #metoo movement is important because we need to reconstruct the way we communicate. We need to reconsider what consent means in the club, and it's like people think because we do what we do, we are just ready to go, but that's not how it is. (Participant 7)*

*I met this guy in the club who ended up unwilling being my pimp. Yea, he would come into the club and sell a bunch of drugs, and tip me like twenty's on stage and I was just getting out of a relationship with this guy. He started hanging out with me and introduced me to really cool people, but then started promising me false things. Then it all went down from there, to the point where I almost killed myself, but my mom called the cops, and they pin pointed where I was. And that actually got me in trouble, and she put me in a very abusive situation because the cop showed up at his house, and he is a dealer, and when they left, he was very mad. Like I was raped by him and thought I was pregnant from that. (Participant 9).*

Lastly, it was clear that no place in the strip club was free of sexual abuse. This participant's abuse occurred on stage, which also happens to be the majority of dancers "safe place" in the club. In

addition to this abuser intruding into her safe space, this dancer was also made to feel "crazy" by the people around her as if her abusers' actions were excusable:

*It was in the club. I did a trick, where I landed with my vulva near him and he shoved a dollar bill into my junk really hard. It hurt for like over an hour. And the bouncer took his side; cause there was this group that was the only group in there at the time, so he chose their money for the club instead of my safety. Everyone just ignored me cause I was "crazy" cause when he shoved the dollar onto me, I went up to him and hit him cause that's self-defense. And I think we should be allowed to do that! Apparently I was just crazy or overreacting. (Participant 6)*

### Verbal Assault

Of all the various forms of violence experienced by participants in this study, employees of the club were most often the perpetrators of verbal assault. Some dancers, such as participant 5, bore witness to verbal assaults hurled to other dancers by club management. She also experienced what seems to be a moment of objectification by the owner, to which she seemed outraged by:

*Let's see, I've had the owner of the club come up to me once and dance for him and grab my face and tell me "you make my guys happy and I will be happy". That was disgusting. I know that this same owner texts some of the girl's horrendous things like saying they are worthless, or good for nothing except to strip. Luckily, he didn't come in very often while I was working and that was nice. I didn't have to deal with him. (Participant 5)*

Further, verbal assaults experienced by participant 3 expressed how victim blaming and slut shaming language made her feel unsafe:

*To me what has felt more violent is the way people talk to me. Customers and some of the things that bartenders said like slut shamey things like make it feel like wow, if something violent were to happen to me with your perception of slut shaming, would you have my back? Or would it have been "my fault"? Yea, stuff like that. Like oh she's such a slut, I heard she was doing extra she's such a slut like you know, that's why she's A, B or C. Even from female bartenders. It's gross. It makes me almost more afraid, cause it's the presumptive. Cause it's like if you can say this, what are you physically capable of doing? (Participant 3)*

And finally, this dancers experience with verbal abuse suggests that violence can escalate rapidly. This abuser began with verbal assaults, quickly turning to sexual assault. And if it weren't for the lackadaisical manner security and other employers responded to the verbal abuse, further abuse may not have been experienced:

*Security guards would just say "get used to it, you're a stripper". Get used to clients saying verbally abusive things like calling you a whore or telling you to suck their dick or whatever. Well a guy sat down a stack of twenties at my rack, and so I got naked and whatever and showing him things and whatever. And then he said, "do you have kids?" and I said "no" and then he said, "well then why is your pussy so floppy?" And then he proceeded to try and swipe money up my vagina, and I told him that wasn't okay. And when I tried to tell the security guards, they said it wasn't their problem and they didn't do anything about it. (Participant 10)*

### Harassment

Attitudes regarding harassment seemed to be less of an immediate harm done compared to other forms of violence but did have long-term effects. The few participants who did experience

harassment, most often experienced it in the forms of racial discrimination and physical and electronic stalking.

*I did notice though that the girls who the owner harassed and verbally assaulted always seemed to be women of color. Oh! I also know of so many clubs who discriminate based on skin color and whether or not they want to hire you. Like a girl will go audition for a club and they will tell them "oh, we already have a black girl here, no thanks". Like what the fuck? How can this be okay? And why are we letting people get away with that? (Participant 9)*

*And I haven't ever had a pimp before, but he definitely was, and I didn't realize it. And now he stalks me. And he showed up at the club I was working at, and it's dangerous if I don't talk to him. So, I started talking to him and it was just so dangerous, and I changed my number and it's been over a month now, so yea. (Participant 10)*

### Physical Assault

The following excerpts from participants describe the feeling of being left to fend for oneself when it came to physical violence. With the lack of structural safety features and the lack of human body protection, these dancers dealt with prolonged physical violence that could have been intervened:

*This one guy kept trying to touch me, so I started to get up, but he slowly started to put his hand around my neck. I smacked his hand away and told him no, and thankfully he let me go. But it really did trigger me. And it was really scary and gross. And then he refused to pay me for the dances that we already did. (Participant 7)*

This participant describes the lack of support by staff, even in the presence of cameras:

*Like this guy tried to choke me out once and no one did anything. I mean I could have tried to walk out but I was trying to like fend him off. And nobody saw me even though they should have cause they had cameras. And then I tried to push him, and I was, but he wouldn't stop. (Participant 2)*

And although the previous participant experienced physical violence despite the cameras, this participant implies in her experience that the presence of cameras may have helped prevent this incident from occurring by instilling fear into the abuser of being held responsible for his actions:

*Well. I personally feel as though sexual and physical abuse is something that I experience most often. Like this one time that I remember the most, I was giving a dance, and when it was over, he asked me for a hug. So, I leaned over and as I was about to give him a hug, he bit my face and wouldn't let go. I was scared to pull away cause he was biting me so hard he almost drew blood, and he didn't let go for what felt like ever. And mind you there are no cameras in these dance areas, so it's not like he is scared about that or anything. So then when he lets me go, I smack the shit out of him and everyone in the club hears it and me run out crying. It was still really scary ya know? Like how could someone just bite my face while I am at work? (Participant 5)*

### Financial Abuse

Financial abuse can be one of the most complicated forms of abuse, as shortage of money can compromise a dancer's ability to set boundaries and not give into coercion. Based on the participants in this study, financial abuse typically only occurred when a power differentiation presented itself. For example, participant 1 and 2 were taken advantage financially by security. Security was able to financially abuse these dancers since they had something to withhold in

exchange; protection and promotion. Fortunately for participant 6, she was able to decline work that she did not want to engage in. She was only able to do so because she has “never needed the money bad enough”; therefore, he had no power over her.

*I've definitely experienced like financial abuse from security. Like degradation and not being able to say anything or always concerned about tipping them enough in fear of them not protecting you if you don't. Or like promote you. And that's like financial abuse for sure. (Participant 1)*

*Well financial abuse happens to me all the time. I mean at my old club I had issues with the bouncers. I was back there and when I got out the bouncer was like oh you were back there for this amount of time. Well we weren't going by time we were going by songs and he made us pay anyway and all this stuff. Because technically I am an independent contractor, I can charge whatever the hell I want, like this is what I said we are doing, this is what we did, so this is what I owe. So that was pretty fucked up. They take 30% of our dances, and then we have to pay like 40\$ stage fee, and then you tip out and everything. But then, what sucks at this club is you have to report all of your dances to the IRS. So, then I owe the IRS money, so it's like how much am I really making? And people being like oh yea, I will only give you money if you suck my dick. And I'm like no, cause that's not what this is. (Participant 2)*

*I have definitely had men hold money from me for better attention, or to like try to buy me basically. But generally, I've never needed the money bad enough to go along with it, so I'm just like nope, no thanks. (Participant 6)*

### Other

Two dancers reported that they had experienced violence other than sexual, physical, verbal or financial abuse. These experiences of violence are important to note, as they may not happen as often as other forms do, but they do have serious implications when experienced. In participant 8's experience, a drug-facilitated assault at work was the most traumatizing experience in her 8 years of dancing. Here she explains the experience and how it affected her:

#### Drug facilitated assault

*The night I got drugged, it's really weird cause usually I drive in on my own but that night I asked my boyfriend to drop me off and pick me up. When he came to pick me up, I was nowhere to be found. He told my friend he couldn't find me anywhere and the security guards were like maybe she's in a dance. And they didn't really help him at all. And so, my friend went down in the dressing room and she found me passed out on the floor of the dressing room. I am just thankful that that night I had him come get me cause he said when he was putting me in the car and I was passed out, the guy who drugged me was like "hey, I can take her if you don't want to handle her". And I woke up the next day like what the fuck? The last thing I remembered was ten thirty at night and I was at work. It was so scary. I am just glad that night nothing worse happened. (Participant 8)*

Moreover, participant 1 identified a crucial experience of violence that many do not discuss, being “grooming”. Grooming is executed by mixing positive behaviors (such as buying a pair of heels for the participant and complimenting her attire and looks) with elements of abuse (controlling behavior and withholding money and desired work schedules).

#### Grooming



*The way I started dancing was that I started working at a 24-hour diner, and the guy who owned it managed all the strip clubs. He cut my hours when I turned 18. I made a lot of fucking money on those nights and he took those away from me. And he was like I'll buy you a pair of shoes and you can take it out of your paycheck, and you can work for me. It was definitely being like you are cute, you just turned 18, and he was gassing me up telling me I could do it. And at the diner you had to wear fishnets and short shorts and it was just encouraged to be like, ready for that, you know? (Participant 1)*

These stories express the idea that violence is complex and nuanced. Whether exotic dancers are experiencing fear within the strict boundaries of the strip club, or whether they are experiencing violence outside of these walls, these voices need to be heard. Based on these interviews it is clear that violence looks, feels and is experienced differently by exotic dancers. And although this may be the case, they all share a common shared experience of facing some form of it at some point. The goal is to better understand these experiences by listening to the dancers who are living it and to believe them when they tell us.

#### Perceptions of fear

***Treat us like people. And like artists. And people who deserve respect. Because we respect ourselves in other ways that people don't even understand or know how. Cause a dancer, or anyone in the sex industry position; we are still people in the end. Just respect me and treat us like humans. That's all I ask. Don't define me by what I do for a living. (Participant 8)***

#### Societal

When participants were asked about how they perceive fear, the majority of participants stated that objectification towards the dancers may be a key element of violence to occur. The dehumanizing behavior abusers portrayed towards dancers made these participants feel as though their experiences of violence were acceptable and not suitable for sympathy or understanding. The following four participants explain how this form of treatment is harmful to exotic dancers and causes fear of experiencing future violence:

*I mean honestly, it's not the occupation, it's the people. It's the concept that we are objects. It's the fact that we don't have a name, we don't have an identity to them outside of us being sex workers, and they are just able to dehumanize us. In a utopic world, there wouldn't be sexual violence against anyone. (Participant 1)*

*Just care about dancers as people. And just people in general. People who don't work in the industry just see us as worthless scumbags, like whores and prostitutes that don't deserve respect and like that's all we are. (Participant 8)*

*Hmmm that is a good question. Um, first and foremost, I would say sex workers are humans just like anyone else. Like just treat us how you would want to be treated at work. You would want to be heard, respected, and any boundaries that are in place or expectations of the work place need to be followed. Why do we have a culture of slut shaming and victim blaming with the walls of our own establishment? I would say there also needs to be cameras in sensitive areas of the club like the private dance areas. And there needs to be an overall adherence from higher ups that all clubs are following certain protection measures. Like why is the club outside of the city so much less safe and less put together than the club downtown? And people of color and poorer people are forced to work at these clubs for various reasons, and they end up being way worse safety wise. Lastly, I would say that if we changed the way we view sex work in general and held people*

*accountable for their fucked-up behaviors, we wouldn't need to discuss this. Like sex work is real work, emotional labor is real labor, lack of clothing does not equate to I want to be violated, and sexuality does not make us less than. (Participant 5)*

This participant directly states how people in all forms (community members, club employees and customers of strip clubs) can help reduce the fear of being violated by simply acknowledging the multifaceted individuals in this line of work and by becoming cognizant of the way they behave in strip clubs:

*Hmmm. Fucking like, just raise your fucking kids' right man. Like, that's about it. Raise your kids to treat humans like humans. Any sort of job whether its goddam McDonalds, or if like someone is giving you a lap dance. I mean sex work is work. Work is work. We all do things under the crippling weight of capitalism. Like we would never even think of doing if we didn't have to like pay money for shit. (Participant 1)*

### Structural

The following statements explain how physical settings can cause fear and violence to transpire as well as deter violence. Participant 9 and 6 point out how cleanliness and maintenance of the space these dancers are working in affect their health. If workspaces are not taken care of, health issues can arise. Here are their experiences with health hazards, to which they believe is a form of violence:

*Dancing can be really scary, and we are so alone. The laws don't protect us. And club management is not our ally. They never will be. They like to spend the money we give them on other shit than fixing the clubs up like they should be doing. There was a hole in the stage, and I had a huge massive staph infection from the stage. And I was hospitalized for 4 days. It's a filthy job. I've had a staph infection from another club before. This one was so bad I got bursitis as well, so it was in my elbow. So, the flare up flared up the staph, and I was on an IV drip for 3 days and I was out for a week and a half. And they use the same mop to clean the bathroom as they do the stage. And to me, this is all violence. Maybe not directly, but indirectly. I am still being harmed. And it's just such a hazard. (Participant 9)*

*I think the money that we pay in stage fees should be going to the stage and dressing rooms. Which is what it is technically supposed to be going to, not going to the bar. Strippers are what is making the bar money and I have seen just so many bars run down cause nobody takes care of them and they are just money takers. And anytime I see a club with pole that's just like wobbly or the floor that has jagged edges on it and trips the dancers and is a hazard when we are wearing 8-inch heels, it just makes me so angry. The structure of our rooms and the clubs are so gross. Everything needs to be taken better care of cause it's gross and not safe to be in. (Participant 6)*

Both of these participants experience fear every time they leave work, and state that even in the presence of security (which has been shown throughout these interviews to at times be abusive), exotic dancers are still on edge. Those experiences are shown here:

*At night I feel most unsafe. It's just dangerous at night. I've had guys come in and grope me, verbally harass me, not pay me. And once it's tense it's unsafe. I feel super unsafe in the parking lot. 100%. I always carry a knife. I always have someone walk me out. But I've also had a bouncer walk me out and assault me. Yea, that's the most unsafe spot in the strip. Because they know you are leaving with money. So, it's just a hazard. Also, drunk drivers. I've walked out and someone almost hit me cause they were drunk. (Participant 7)*

*When? Um I don't know probably when I am leaving and walking to my car. And even when there is a bouncer with me, I still get sketched out. Like I make sure no one is following me, I mean you never know. I am really conscious cause that's when I feel the most unsafe. (Participant 2)*

*Mostly after work in the parking lots because it's really late, sometimes security walks you out, but it's still scary. Like I had this guy at the bar once tell me my license plate number. I just looked at him like he was a psycho and left but I felt scared about going home all night. Like why the fuck did you memorize my license plate number? We are also walking out with a lot of money and the sexual fantasy of me dancing is over, but maybe not over for someone else and maybe it can go badly. One club I worked at the bouncers wore bulletproof vests cause the parking lot and sometimes the inside would get shot up. I stopped working there as well because I didn't feel safe at all. Like how are you about to walk around in a bulletproof vest, and I am walking around in a bikini? Like that just didn't feel right. (Participant 10)*

Lastly, structural safety features such as cameras were stated to be some of the best ways to prevent violence, and when absent, the biggest factor in ensuing fear. Cameras were expressed in various ways to be a deterrent to violence, and to make abusers feel as though someone or something else is witnessing their behaviors. Some participants stated that although they think cameras are necessary, fake cameras in the rooms might be more helpful to present themselves as safety features while also protecting the privacy of the dancers:

*Clients definitely push boundaries and make you feel unsafe in the lap dance room a lot of the time. So, like, when I feel most unsafe is when there isn't another line of defense between me and the person, the aggressor. Ummm honestly, I feel most safe when I am in a populated, visible by everyone area. In relation to like different places, places that I felt most safe was clubs with alarm buttons. The cameras in the lap rooms didn't even work, they were fake, but they were right there and still helped. (Participant 1)*

*I feel most safe when there are a lot of cameras. Cameras in the room. Unfortunately, when this situation happened, there were no cameras and that's where men feel most comfortable to be aggressive and I feel most safe when there is security and cameras everywhere. They might try some things here and there, but it's less likely cause they know that they are being watched. (Participant 4)*

*I feel unsafe without cameras. I mean granted there is a lot security and a lot of people watching us, at the same time, everyone is busy. What if she hadn't been in the dance room, then what would have happened? It could have been way worse if there wasn't that other dancer in there with me. And cameras could have prevented that from happening. (Participant 4)*

*Honestly, the moments I feel most unsafe at work is when I give private dances at a club that is notorious for clients treating dancers like garbage or where there are no cameras. A lot of coercion and pressure to do things you don't want to do happens. But in general, the private dance rooms. That's when I get sexually violated the most, that's when clients know they can get away with things they couldn't have in the larger setting. (Participant 5)*

### Policy Level

A handful of exotic dancers stated that decriminalizing full-service work (prostitution) would limit the amount of sexual violence and coercion done within strip clubs. All participants supported the right to do what people chose to do with their bodies in regard to sex work but expressed sharing facilities with women who offered full service, exposed them to financial and sexual abuse. Here

they explain in further detail:

*And girls do things they aren't supposed to be doing, which creates this expectation for other girls who aren't doing those things to do it also. And it fucks with our money. Cause then the guys only go to the girls who do that and go somewhere else. And it's like, it's a fucking strip club. (Participant 2)*

*I feel like when I work at a club where management supports full service, the clubs goes downhill, and my safety is compromised. That's not to say that full service is a bad thing, I am just saying that doing full service in a strip club puts women who don't do those services at greater risk of being sexually assaulted and or coerced into something they don't want to do. (Participant 5)*

*I feel like things have gotten really melted. Like the laws and stuff. I started dancing in 2010, and the laws are very different. When I started working at this club, the laws had changed in Oregon where it was up to the dancer's discretion if we wanted to be touch or grazed in any way, as long as we weren't touching the nipple or anything like that. And I feel like that just opened a door for so much more sexual abuse. (Participant 8)*

*And so, what it feels like is that prostitutes who work in strip clubs just ruin it for strippers. I don't judge the girls who do it, cause I'm just like do what you like. But go to a jack shack, or like do it on your own time. But don't come into a strip club and make that our problem. Cause it fucks with our money. (Participant 8)*

Secondly, participants expressed their concerns with involving law enforcement when they experienced violence. These were never first hand, though they all stated that their fear came from knowing other women who had been abused, taken advantage of, or not believed by law enforcement. The combination of word of mouth experiences and victim blaming culture is expressed in these participants' stories:

*Absolutely not. Like these women and dancers are getting arrested for things like a nipple slip, accidentally touching a customer, or some other minor things. And laws change based on which state you are at. There are rules at certain clubs in other states where if a guy touches you, you get fined! And there are cops who fuck full-service sex workers and then arrest them. There is a cop who frequents the strip clubs here. I know he parties and does drugs with them, and I used to get dances with him, and I was like no. I don't know him well and how am I supposed to take you seriously? It was straight abuse of power. It's so inappropriate. (Participant 7)*

*Because I am a sex worker and it's just like part of the job title, and I don't think they would be concerned. And honestly, I have heard stories of cops not protecting sex workers. Or cops taking advantage of sex workers and that is really scary. I haven't had that experience, but you know I fucking read about this shit and I care, ya know? (Participant 1)*

#### Perceptions of Safety

***The only sanctuary in the strip club industry are the dancers. Like we are the only thing that each other has. We are on our own. Cause at the end of the day, your bartender, club owner and what not, they are not here for us. At the end of the day we are protecting our selves (Participant 7)***

Based on this research there are a variety of ways that make exotic dancers feel safe and protected during their time at work. Those include but are not limited to structural safety features, control of the environment, clean working areas and more. But what really seemed to matter to the

participants in this study was the behavior of the employees of the club they worked at. Behaviors that proved to be most supportive to dancers was validation of the experiences of violence, active monitoring of cameras and private dance rooms, and strict actions taken when someone violates them. The following are statements by participants stating when they feel most safe at work:

*I mean, have really good bouncers who like watch the cameras and are active and like paying attention to what is going on. Because that has been a really good thing for me to experience. Um, I feel like it prevents a lot of things from happening. Also don't be a sketchy bouncer and turn a blind eye if you get paid or whatever. Cause it also sets up the expectations for clients and ruins everyone else's money. Um, and I feel like always always always back the dancer, back the sex worker, like take their side. Cause they are the ones who are the victims. (Participant 2)*

*Well, this one-time security came over, got all his information, and took a picture and 86ed him. And that made me feel very comfortable, especially being that that club had a bad reputation. It's very very good of them to step up and show that they don't allow their girls to be harassed or abused. And the very next day I worked, and I talked to the owner of the club and she made sure I was okay and checked on my wellbeing and let me know that he would never be able to come back into our club. (Participant 4)*

*Well the second job I was mentioning, that was a place where their bouncers dress like swat, they pat you down like when you come in for real, they do have a dress code, there are cameras in all the dance rooms and there is a lot of staff.*

*Cause all it takes is one second and that camera is not gonna mean shit. All it takes is one second for someone to fucking hit you, all it takes is one second for someone to slip a finger in your vagina, so it's like ya know I feel like when someone is watching out for you that's more powerful then all of the structural shit. Just having physical human check ins with each other. I think that what makes it feel safer is that it's such a smaller community that the dancers inherently are just checking in with one another. So, I think that like in terms to your question finding ways to just be checking in with one another, whether it's your bartenders or whatever it is and that doesn't happen in our industry cause it is very every person for themselves. (Participant 3)*

*I feel most safe when I feel like the employers around me treat me like I am important and that my safety is important. So, when they are diligent with their jobs, not fucking with my money, and believe me when I tell them that someone is acting up. I feel most safe when there are cameras in the private rooms, whether those are fake or real, and when things like drugs, prostitution and getting really sloppy drunk are discouraged. (Participant 5)*

*Honestly the couple of niche clubs. They will do anything for you, and they believe you and it's like they literally fight for a safe place. There are a few clubs that are older based that they stand behind that. They don't let minors in, they don't let drugs in and they don't let prostitution in. I feel safest around the people who view my work as a job. And to me the safest feels is when your DJ, your bartender, your security guards and even the customers have your back. Because if you are allowing for things to happen, I don't care what it is, then that's when it becomes bad and unsafe. (Participant 8)*

#### FOSTA/SESTA

***FOSTA has affected my mental health, it's affected the way I advertise, what I advertise, and I honestly don't trust anything. Like I can't work on the Internet at all anymore. And I can do nothing. I am just working at the club and working with***

***regulars constantly just looking over my shoulder. I have lost both money and safety because of this. (Participant 1)***

Most participants had opinion about the negative impacts of FOSTA and SESTA. The critiques of these bills included removal of social media platforms that promote their business, therefore making it extremely difficult to maintain financial stability. Second, participants expressed concerns about full-service sex workers practicing inside of strip clubs. These participants in the study stated that the influx of full-service workers in strip clubs is due to these bills removing safe platforms for those to perform and advertise safely. The following excerpts from Participants 6 and 7 express these concerns:

*I don't have Xoticspot anymore because they shut it down. But uh yea, now people can't just find where I am working easily, and Instagram was for a while, the hash-tags stripper or anything that had stripper in it was just banned. I know a few sex workers at several levels and it's just become a lot harder for any of them to make money and it's just become a lot harder for them to get themselves out there. And from what I have heard rumors of is because we can't find other avenues or forums, it's being brought into strip clubs. Where girls are offering extras cause it's the only place they can operate out of. And that's really specifically what strip clubs are not supposed to be for. I am like, I think one hundred percent prostitution should be decriminalized and I think that we should legalize it like brothels would be great. And all the customers who were or are receiving that are coming into strip clubs expecting that. And occasionally finding it, but if they don't, they just make the rest of us feel uncomfortable. (Participant 6)*

*I feel absolutely less safe because of this. 100% unsafe. I can't say that enough. Everyone is getting hit with it. Because I have a sex-working job, I get affected. Our bank accounts can get frozen. It's the littlest things, like someone writing the wrong thing on Venmo and getting your money locked. I had a friend running a fundraiser for SWOP (sex workers outreach program). And she had to warn people who sent money to not post anything about sex work, or stripper, or exotic dancer or any of that. Cause it will be flagged. It puts people who are seeking full service into the strip clubs. We have customers coming, wanting other things that we do not provide. They want more. So, we get solicited way more. Which can be really traumatic. And it changes the work environment. When extras are being brought into the strip club, you get solicited, and it's unsafe. Even Xoticspot being a useful tool for us, and a legal way for us to show when we are working. It's our business. But the super ridiculous censorship of this law is taking away our freedom of speech. Back page has shut down and it messed up all the tools that have kept us safe. We aren't protecting these workers by doing this. It's such a scary chapter. We just had a sex worker who was murdered, and now we can't reach out to people anymore. We can't keep each other safe if we can't reach each other online. (Participant 7)*

Furthermore, participants expressed feelings of isolation and being silenced. Those who were interested in staying in touch with other dancer's online and building community were unable to do so. And due to this, these dancers stated that they are being silenced causing imperative, expressive, and helpful communication to be severed:

*Oh, I fully feel less safe because of this bill passing. Well actually this is gonna sound silly, but I am working on a book and a blog and then those laws passed and they now have the power to remove all of my work and fucking not have me put it online ever again and it would be illegal if I did. Uh and that's like my legacy of work. So, like nobody wants our voices to be heard. So that's why its super important for me to get my project out there, um so to me right then and there, we don't want to know about your experience. Good go ahead and die, basically is what it feels like. Like we want you to die, please stop doing this.*

*But ya know I also get really worried about my friends who do full service and who do it more frequently than I do. But in regard to stripping I personally haven't seen it change anything for me as a stripper yet except for our online resources. (Participant 3)*

*My opinions about FOSTA and SESTA is that it is an unthoughtful policy put in place that does nothing to help people who are being trafficked and instead hurts those who are wanting to promote their sex work. For me personally, I used Xoticspot, which is an online source for dancers in Portland to post their schedules and have their own page with a biography and what not. It was just a platform to promote our services as exotic dancers. Like who I am, where I am working and when. But when this passed it was shut down with a whole bunch of other networks like craigslist and whatnot. I don't know, I feel like our community is already so hard to connect with and our work is so individualized it's frustrating to see all of our platforms being erased. I'm not full service so it's not affecting me like it is other people, but it's like losing a community that we already didn't really have. Now we are even more isolated. (Participant 5)*

## **Recommendations/Implications**

Based on the surveys and interviews, the researcher believes there are considerable ways to improve strip club safety. Too often policies that affect sex workers lives are created without the input of sex workers themselves. Three key recommendations' that were identified through this study included societal support, responsible club management, and better policies that address occupational violence in strip clubs.

There are several ways community members and society can assist in ending violence against sex workers. First and foremost, nearly every participant stated that believing sex workers and their experiences with violence is a key element to reducing violence. This suggestion challenges the way many people view sex work, violence and the people in this line of work. Simply stated, participants in this study asked to be treated and respected like humans, to have their work legitimized, and to stop blaming women, sexuality and sex work for violence perpetrated against exotic dancers.

Second, the results of this study support the idea that improved management of strip clubs could prevent violence and abuse. Implementing structural safety features in the club, such as real and fake cameras, emergency buttons in private dance areas, and cleaner work environments may deter violence from occurring. Other suggestions included stricter rules for employees, such as never leaving a dancer alone in the club, having security that actively watch and monitor cameras, and always intervening when any abuse occurs or is reported.

Lastly, participants reported policy level recommendations that if followed, could potentially reduce exotic dancer's experiences with occupational violence. For example, multiple participants stated that prostitution and full-service sex work within strip clubs make them feel unsafe due to the possibility of losing money and possible coercion by clients and employers. Decriminalization of full-service sex work would allow other businesses to open allowing for those workers to move into that space, while leaving strip clubs a place for exotic dancers to perform. Among other things, participants stated that FOSTA and SESTA be reconsidered; due to this bill removing all online communities for dancers, as well as discarding their ability to safely promote their business. Lastly, all participants reported they had experienced violence in the work place, yet nearly none of them had received resources to help cope with this trauma or report violence if they had wanted to. It is recommended by participants in this study that there be a better effort by law enforcement to protect and treat sex workers respectfully while also offering other options to report violence

outside of law enforcement.

Changes take time, but the researcher believes that these changes can be implemented and are feasible. It is also necessary to note that violence looks different for everyone and therefore makes it difficult to create universal laws to protect people in this industry. Though we do believe that listening to individuals who are most affected is the best way to promote effective change.

## **Limitations**

As in any study, this research contains limitations to the methodology that was used and the results that were found. First, the methodology of the research should be taken into account when interpreting the results, as the surveys were posted online, and to social media pages which exotic dancers typically use. This means that any dancer who did not have access to Internet or devices such as phones were not able to participate in the survey. Additionally, this means that those who do not participate in online communities of sex work and are not "out" with their line of work were also not able to participate in this study as they would not have been exposed to the opportunity to do so. Second, this study was comprised of mostly younger, white participants. Future studies should place attention to diversifying the research in order to include a wider understanding of peoples lived experiences. Additionally, this study is not generalizable to the entire exotic dancing population as the sample was so small. Future research should attempt to incorporate a larger sample size in order to be more representative of the dancing community. Next is the inevitable bias by the researcher in both creating the survey and interview questions, collecting the data, and interpreting the outcomes. Although the researcher was able to connect with the participants and created an environment of confidentiality and safety, it is inescapable that the researchers own background and biases about the subject of this study shaped the outcomes of the research. Lastly, the participant's interviews showed that limiting violence to the imaginary boundaries of the strip club was unrealistic. Many participants in this study described violence that started within these constraints of the strip club to affect them in their everyday lives outside of work. These false boundaries of occupational violence may not adequately represent the full extent of violence experienced by the participants.

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