Undressing the Moves:

An ethnographic study of

lap-dancers and

lap-dancing club culture

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August 2008

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

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Abstract

The lap-dancing club phenomenon is relatively new in the UK and as a result, in the last decade, it has aroused much public debate. Despite this, the study of this industry here in the UK has been neglected, with the body of research confined to the U.S and Canada. In spite of gaining some academic attention abroad, the literature, which has emerged from the research, suggests a narrow field of interest, concerned with exploitation, risk and dancer motivation. Further to this, there has also been a tendency to address dancer-customer interaction; the relationship *between* dancers has been ignored. Finally, the general approach of researchers has been to stress the negative implications of a lap-dancing career on the dancers; reflected in the deviant and implicit anti-sex work/exploitation frameworks which have dominated academic thinking in this field of study. Through the use of ethnographic methods the research on which this thesis is based redresses these issues.

The data for this research was generated in a UK lap-dancing club using extensive participant observation, estimated at over 2000 hours, along with in-depth interviews to supplement the core findings. The main focus of study was on the relationships *between* dancers and the culture with which they mutually engage. Through this exploration, some of the key areas of academic interest including dancer motivation, risk and exploitation were directly or implicitly challenged. Further to this, through delving into the relationship between dancers, an understanding of the way in which these relationships are used to cultivate and reinforce dancer status roles in the club was developed. In relation to this, a dancer hierarchy has been identified, comprising of three stages: *new girl*, *transition* and *old school*. Finally, the lap-dancing club culture, which is not only signified by some of the duties of the job, but also by the 'social' and 'emotional' rituals with which dancers mutually engage, is also addressed. Although the negative implications of lap-dancing club culture are acknowledged, the social fulfilment and subcultural attachment dancers have to their occupation is also emphasised. This research therefore starts to shift our understanding of the lap-dancing club phenomenon and reconstruct it within a UK context.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisors Professor Robert Hollands and Dr Elaine Campbell for offering guidance and support throughout this project. Both have encouraged me to develop my own ideas and continued to provide valuable feedback for my work. My thanks also goes to my close friends and family who have offered emotional support throughout this often stressful period, in particular my partner Pete who always been there for me. Finally, I would like to thank all the girls at *Starlets* who participated in this research; without whom this project would not have been possible.

Contents

Page

Glossary[1]

Commission-The overall fee paid by dancers to work on the lap-dancing club premises; this includes both start-up-fees and top-up-fees. Commission is sometimes referred to as the 'house fee' or 'club fee'.

Dirty Dancing-This refers to private dances deemed to break formal rules (see house rules) or the club's *tacit rules*[2] and often involves some level of sexual contact between dancer and customer.

House Rules-Formal rules of conduct intended for customers and dancers set by management and or club owners. These rules however are subject to change. These are written rules created and defined by the managers of the club, directing dancers' and customers' behaviour.

The Parade-This involves all dancers, working during one particular shift, parading round the stage, one after another, in preparation for the 'two-for-one' private dance offer. The parade will often take place at 11pm during every night shift.

Private Dance-This refers to the dance given to a customer by a dancer. A private dance involves a dancer dancing between a customer's legs whilst he is seated, during which the dancer will strip down to a g-string. One dance lasts for one music track, which is approximately three minutes.

Regular-This refers to a customer who frequents the lap-dancing club on a regular basis: daily, weekly or monthly, but with an expected pattern of attendance.

Stage Show-This refers to the dance performances which take place on stage. Each performance lasts for the duration of two music tracks (approximately six minutes). During the second track the dancer is expected to strip down to a g-strip or at least

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[1] The terms explained in this glossary refer to their use in *Starlets* during the time in which the research for this ethnography was conducted.
[2] This term is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

reveal her breasts. Dancers take it in-turns to dance on the stage based on a rota drawn up in the order these women enter the club to work for their particular shift.

Start-up-Fee-This refers to the amount of commission paid at the start of a shift; it can however be subject to an increase at the end of a shift (see top-up-fee).

Sit-Down-This refers to a customer paying to sit with a dancer for an allotted period of time. Customers are expected to pay for the company of a dancer from 30 minutes onwards, often paying by the hour.

Stripping-This refers to a none-commercial form of erotic dancing, often associated with stripping agencies or freelance erotic dancing.

Stripping Agency/Dance Agency-This refers to an agency through which erotic dancers find various stripping jobs; these might be in a number of different locations and venues. Erotic dancers working for these agencies pay the agent a percentage of their wage in exchange for stripping jobs.

Three-Track-Rule-This refers to the time in which dancers are allowed, according to house rules, to sit with a customer without the customer purchasing a dance or arranging a sit-down. If, after three songs, the customer has not purchased a private dance or arranged a sit-down with the dancer in question, she is expected to leave his side.

Top-up Fee-At the end of a shift the managers may decide to increase the commission, on these occasions dancers are expected to pay a top-up-fee.

Two-for-One-This refers to a dancing offer in which a customer can purchase two private dances for the price of one.

Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction

In the UK, lap-dancing clubs are part of one of the fastest growing leisure industries (BBC, 2001) estimated to be worth in excess of £300 million a year (Aitkenhead and Sheffield, 2001; Horton, 2006). Lap-dancing in the UK has become the generic term used to describe commercial establishments in which erotic dancing[3] takes place. Interestingly, it does not necessarily correspond to the definition of lap-dancing which originates from the US[4], but rather is more akin to table-dancing[5]. The commercialisation of erotic dancing has been marked by the gentrification of nightlife (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003) in which lap-dancing clubs, have increasingly become marketed as entertainment venues (gentleman's clubs) rather than sex establishments; this is reflected in their steady use by stag and birthday parties. Some lap-dancing clubs now offer entertainment for women by offering pole-dancing lessons to hen parties and by hosting 'women only' nights with male erotic dancers. As the lap-dancing industry has grown and become popular so has the attention and speculation it has generated, this will be explored in detail later in this chapter.

The first part of this introduction will draw attention to the way in which the lap-dancing industry has been perceived and portrayed. Following on from this, the impetus and importance of this ethnography will be discussed, thus highlighting its intervention into this particular academic field of study. Details of the way in which this thesis was conducted, and the nature of the research question will also be introduced; positioning this thesis into an epistemological and methodological context. Finally, the outline of this thesis will be presented by offering a brief synopsis of the chapters therein.

Lap-dancing: Victims and Villains

"…I think if you've danced, you feel like, I can do that, yeah [sic], the way I can express myself is through dancing…It's weird, it's like you can say something about who you are this way…" **(Karen, a lap-dancer)**

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[3] In the UK, non-commercial erotic dancing, commonly known as 'stripping' refers to independent peep shows, strip-o-grams, and private strip shows.

[4] In the US this style of dancing involves a dancer performing a private dance between a customers' legs in which some form of contact will often be made.

[5] Table-dancing involves a dancer performing a private dance for a customer near to where he is seated, often by the side of his table.

> "Using her body for financial reward increased the likelihood of a situation in which Marie would feel out of control; as her need to make money increased, so did the sexual demands of the situation." (Wesely, 1998)

The first quote is taken from an interview with Karen, a lap-dancer who participated in the research I conducted for this ethnography; in it she is describing lap-dancing as a way of enabling personal expression, providing her with the ability to convey 'who' she *is*. In contrast to Karen's sentiment, the second quote is taken from Wesley (1998); here the 'darker side' of lap-dancing is conveyed, this is in tune with the more dominant perspectives about this industry. Personal accounts, like Karen's, reflecting the fulfilling side of lap-dancing are rarely presented in relation to the popular and political discourses surrounding lap-dancing. It is often the unrewarding experiences of dancers that are conveyed, both in academic and media sources. Negative accounts are often presented in media reports and documentaries; citing ex-dancers who stress the sense of degradation and exploitation they experienced whilst working as lap-dancers (for a recent newspaper example see Bell, 2008; for a recent example of a TV documentary see *Amy: My Body for Bucks*, BBC Three, 2008). For many outside of the industry, lap-dancing remains a 'deviant' category; this is reflected in the display of public outrage in recent years over the increase of lap-dancing clubs in the UK (Corrigan, 2008; Summers, 2007; Jones et al, 2003). Those activists who have continued to lobby and campaign against the proliferation of lap-dancing clubs in the UK are often from Christian and Women's Rights groups. Their objections to lap-dancing clubs, although for different reasons, nonetheless unite them; this is reflected in the recent campaign to change the licensing regulation of these venues. In relation to this, it is argued by campaigners that the marketing of lap-dancing clubs should no longer be seen as one 'arm' of the leisure industry, but must instead be recognised as part of the commercial sex industry (Travis, 2008; Hargreaves, 2008). The widespread increase of lap-dancing clubs in the UK, through this 'loophole' of legislation, it is suggested, puts women at further risk of harassment and objectification (Object, 2008; Christian Institute, 2008). These views are regularly accounted for and even reinforced by the film and media industries, in which both sources have helped construct two dominant discourses; one, which vilifies and one which victimises lap-dancers and the industry in which they work.

A well publicised construction of lap-dancing, in line with ideas around victimisation, postulates that dancers only work for financial gain out of *necessity*, not for self-fulfilment. An example of this has been produced by the film industry in the movie *Striptease* (1996), in which Demi Moore plays a single mother struggling to support her young daughter. Frustrated by her situation she is 'forced' to work at her local strip club and despite her 'moral objection' she continues to dance in order to provide for her daughter. In addition, the portrayal of the lap-dancing industry, through use of deviant and anti-sex work/exploitation frameworks implicit in academic research, has tended to reinforce dancers as 'victims'. Although the discussions filtered through these frameworks are not without their value, they have, however, in one way or another, reinforced purely negative perceptions about lap-dancing. For example, although deviant frameworks[6] acknowledge the *label* of deviance impacts upon dancers themselves, at the same time, those using this framework rarely challenge the deviant label, and often unconsciously reinforce it[7]. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that the implicit anti-sex work/exploitation framework does also address potential problems encountered by women working in the lap-dancing industry. However, this framework limits the perspective one can take and neglects accounts such as Karen's, expressed in the opening quote. Further to this, dancers presented as victims are rarely depicted as actively seeking the risks associated with lap-dancing club culture for fulfilment, but are rather passive victims of the dangers these 'risks' pose. These are important issues and omissions, this thesis will address.

Interestingly, the discourse which suggests the villainous nature of the lap-dancing industry is reflected more in the portrayal of lap-dancing club customers than the actual dancers, or the industry owners[8]. This representation of customers is frequently negative in academic literature (Barton, 2002; 2006; 2007 and Holsopple, 1999; Wesely, 1998) as well as within media sources. In the early twenty-first century, in response to the sudden surge of lap-dancing clubs, various anti-lap-dancing club websites appeared, in which pictures of customers were posted as a way of shaming them. As these pictures were used without the permission of the

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[6] This is in line with Becker's (1963) concept of deviance.

[7] The ethnography does not place lap-dancing within a deviant framework; rather, it simply acknowledges that those who do not have any involvement with the industry often perceive it as 'deviant'. For further discussion see chapter 1, 4, and 7.

[8] Interestingly, the club managers and owners are rarely targeted with regard to dancer exploitation; they remain 'invisible' characters in lap-dancing club debate.

men in question, the threat of legal action led to these websites slowly disappearing. Occasionally however the dancers themselves are vilified; images of dancers are constructed wherein they are presented as money-crazed vultures, driven by their greed and strong sexual desire. This depiction is not reflected so much in the academic research concerned with the lap-dancing industry, but is a more prominent perception produced in film and some media accounts. For example, this is aptly illustrated in the film *Show Girls* (1995)*,* in which strippers are portrayed as 'sex-crazed', 'go-getters'. Objection to lap-dancing on a moral basis is reflected by groups such as the Christian Institute, who describe this occupation as "…morally wrong…" (Press Release, 2001). The alleged immorality of lap-dancing is sometimes subtly conveyed in the media; for example a report about Prince Harry's controversial and unseemly behaviour discussed his visits to lap-dancing clubs as a way of emphasising his sense of immorality (Johnson, 2006).

By only offering a simple set of stereotypes, these negative portrayals have limited public understanding of the lap-dancing phenomenon. While it is important not to deny the negative experiences of dancers, what is called for is a more balanced and grounded portrayal of the women who work in lap-dancing clubs. The partial accounts that have been produced, it could be argued, not only caricature lap-dancers and lap-dancing club customers, but also reinforce the deviant label given to this industry. The following sections will demonstrate how the research, upon which this thesis is based, addresses these stereotypes and limited accounts of lap-dancers and the industry in which they work.

Motivation and Significance of the Research

The original impetus for this ethnography initially stemmed from the aforementioned negative portrayal of the lap-dancing industry. In relation to this, before embarking on this project I had worked as a lap-dancer and stripper for a number of years and it was this experience that alerted me to many of the 'myths' and lack of understanding surrounding the industry, as my own experiences seemed to be in conflict with many of the popular preconceptions that circulated. My dancing colleagues would often express similar concerns about the negative manner in which they and the industry were conveyed.

The focus of my research would become a UK-based lap-dancing club called '*Starlets'*, in which I had already been working for approximately two years prior to conducting this ethnography[9]. My knowledge of and relationship with the dancers who worked there provided both motive and opportunity; it therefore made sense to conduct my research in this very environment rather than seek out a new setting which would not provide me with the same advantages. As an 'insider' and dancer I was already immersed in the world of lap-dancing; understanding the native language, so to speak, and having unlimited access I had an opportunity to generate what I believed to be meaningful data. On this basis I was in a position to readdress some of the misconceptions about lap-dancers and the industry. It is this insider role that has also contributed methodologically to the body of research available. Although some researchers in this field have generated data by working as dancers, with the exception of Holsopple (1999) and Rambo-Ronai (1992), most have entered the lap-dancing club setting having never danced or worked in the industry. This inevitably means these researchers must spend time learning the culture and gaining membership as 'dancers' and researchers, something that is not guaranteed.

In addition, it soon became apparent that despite the public debate lap-dancing had aroused, there was an absence of UK based research about the industry; much of this focus has been from various media sources rather than academic ones. Related studies had been conducted predominantly in the US and Canada, suggesting that there was a need for research to be conducted in the UK. Lap-dancing is still relatively new in this country; the first club of its kind did not open until the mid 90s (Doward, 2001). This industry originated in the US where the first lap-dancing club opened in the 70s (Beninger, 2004). It is perhaps for this reason that there is so little academic material on lap-dancing clubs in a UK setting. Prior to the 90s, with the exception of Burlesque theatre and the Soho peepshows, strip tease was confined to private parties, pubs and clubs, where strippers performed on stage for a fee and were not expected to offer private dances (Glasscock, 2003; Jarrett, 1997). This ethnography is therefore important, as it has been conducted within the UK, placing lap-dancing within a British context, and where, because it is still in its infancy, there are key differences in relation to the American and Canadian industries.

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[9] The names of the club and dancers/workers have been changed to preserve anonymity.

After a detailed exploration of the literature on which the research is based, it became apparent that there was a rather narrow set of paradigms and parameters for understanding lap-dancing as a 'culture'. For example, some of the key academic areas of interest include dancer motivation, exploitation and the psychological and physical risks confronted by dancers working in the lap-dancing industry. However, as previously suggested the deviant and anti-sex work/exploitation frameworks in which the academic literature has been implicitly discussed, has often been limited, emphasising only the more negative experiences and effects of lap-dancing. Further to this, although the dancer has been a primary focus in the research conducted, the relationship between dancers or the 'culture' of lap-dancing has been neglected, despite it being highly significant. The various gaps identified in the literature, became yet another important factor in providing a motive to conduct this ethnography. Consequently, this ethnography draws attention to the relationships between dancers and their mutual engagement with and co-construction of, lap-dancing club culture. In addition, through focusing on the relationship between dancers, it has been possible to make sense of the way in which these relationships are used to cultivate and reinforce dancer status roles in the club. The different power relationships between dancers, reflected in these status roles, have been explored with reference to Foucault's (1980) notion of power/knowledge. The complex nature of 'power' within the lap-dancing club is reflected through taking on this theoretical approach; for example it is demonstrated how the club's tacit rules are indicative of this knowledge/ power symbiosis, at the heart of dancer status. It is in relation to this that a dancer hierarchy has been identified, comprising of three different phases: new girl, transition and old school. What is particularly unique about this categorisation of hierarchical stages is that it is the first time in which this has ever been identified in relation to lap-dancers. With the exception of Liepe-Levinson (2002), the spaces within the lap-dancing club setting also remain unexplored, within the main body of research; in response to this, this ethnography provides rich descriptions of the various areas of Starlets and the significance these spaces hold for the dancers. Attention has been paid, for example to the changing room, manager's office, main floor and dance reception area, as these are all important areas in which the dancers interact with each other. As well as exploring entirely new data, it has also been possible to readdress and expand some of the key areas of academic interest, including dancer motivation, risk and exploitation. With regard to risk, there has been a tendency for research to explore the dangers risks associated

with lap-dancing pose for the dancers. In contrast, through the use of Lyng's (1990) theoretical concept of edgework, the way in which risk is actively pursued by the dancers as a way of gaining a sense of 'fun' and 'adventure' will be explored in this thesis. Although the negative implications of lap-dancing club culture are acknowledged and discussed, the social fulfilment and subcultural attachment dancers have to their occupation is also emphasised. This, for example, includes the exploration of how dancers engage not only with social rituals but also emotional rituals. The role of dancer's emotions has previously been explored in relation to Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour (see Barton, 2006 and Wood, 2000); however, the process of building and strengthening bonds between dancers through the use of emotional rituals has not. With this in mind then, this thesis offers new insight not only into the culture of and relationship between dancers, but questions and examines some of the previous research about dancer motivation, exploitation and risk.

An Overview of the Research

The research setting of *Starlets*, like many new venues of this nature, opened during the late 90s, and is part of a chain of lap-dancing clubs located throughout the UK (for example, two prominent lap-dancing club chains include *Spearmint Rhino*[10] and *For Your Eyes Only*[11]). Although there are other independently owned and operated lap-dancing venues, major chains have dominated the market in recent years. The way in which *Starlets* operates was similar to other chain operated lap-dancing clubs in that dancers worked at the club on a self-employment basis; i.e, it was expected that these women would pay a fee, known as commission, to work on the premises. Similarly to other mainstream lap-dancing clubs, dancers and customers were expected to work by a set of House Rules[12] imposed by the owners and managers of these venues. During the time in which this fieldwork was conducted, over 50 different dancers worked in the research setting. The duties of the dancers in *Starlets* included stage performances, private dances, both of which were semi-nude[13], and sit-downs[14].

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[10] Currently Spearmint Rhino own and operate nine lap-dancing clubs in the UK.
[11] Currently FYEO own and operate seven lap-dancing clubs in the UK.
[12] The Status of these rules is discussed in chapter six.
[13] Dancers during stage performances and private dances would strip down to a g-string. The licensing of *Starlets*, at the time this ethnography was conducted, prevented dancers from going fully nude.
[14] Definitions are provided in a glossary (p.vi).

As an ethnographic piece of research, participant observation was used as a core method to generate most of the data; however, a small number of in-depth interviews were conducted with dancers as a way of supplementing the findings already generated. It was through the use of interviews that I was able to produce *Karen's Story*, a case study that serves as a central thread across the data chapters in this thesis. The decision to use an ethnographic approach was based on two main reasons. Firstly, as an 'insider' already situated as a dancer in *Starlets*, I had the opportunity to conduct a very intensive, in-depth ethnographic study by observing and participating for some 2000 hours[15]. Secondly, the use of extensive participant observation, would enable me to generate data that other methods alone would not; for example, helping me make sense of the complex symbolic meanings dancers attach to lap-dancing and the culture associated with it. These methodological issues are discussed in more detail in chapter three.

As the focus of research is on the relationship *between* dancers, it was therefore inevitable that more of the fieldnotes, generated from participant observation, were concerned with the actions and conversations of the dancers themselves. Although customers and staff members, other than dancers, have been observed and therefore included in the study, they are discussed in relation to the dancers, and where their behaviour in some way involved or affected them.

Like most ethnographic research, although there was a broad research aim: to gain an understanding of lap-dancing club culture through the symbolic meaning dancers attach to it, it was not until I was in the field that more specific research aims were developed. These became:

- To develop an understanding of what motivates women to work as lap-dancers and in doing so make sense of the different meanings dancers attach to their occupation.

- To identify some of the key features of lap-dancing club culture.

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[15] This includes observations of dancers inside and outside of the lap-dancing club environment, made as a researcher.

- To understand the subcultural meaning lap-dancers attach to their occupation and how it is defined.

- To enhance our knowledge of the relationship between dancers; and to:

a) Understand the extent to which these relationships are important in lap-dancing club culture.

b) Understand the different power relationships between dancers and how they might relate to a dancer hierarchy.

- To develop our understanding of the space in which dancers work, and the way in which dancers engage with different areas of the lap-dancing club.

- To make sense of dancers' motivations for retiring from lap-dancing, and to gauge the extent to which dancers are likely to re-enter this career and the motives for doing so.

Thesis Outline

Chapter Two will critically review some of the key research areas concerned with the lap-dancing industry, both empirically and theoretically; thus identifying general strengths and weaknesses. This chapter provides an opportunity, by exploring the general gaps, apparent from the close analysis of the available research, to suggest ways in which this knowledge can be improved. The research under scrutiny has been discussed in relation to four of the most popular discussions to emerge including dancer motivation, dancer exploitation, dancing as a form of emotional labour, and the risks associated with dancing.

Chapter Three explores the methodological approach used to generate data for this thesis. There are four main discussions which form this chapter; the first examines gaining access to the participants at *Starlets*, and how my extensive 'insider' role provided me with valuable insight as well as opportunity, yet also demanded a shift in my role from dancer to researcher as I moved out of the former. Following on from this, the specific methods used to conduct this ethnography will be discussed, including the main use of participant observation and how a small number of in-depth

interviews were introduced to supplement this approach. The third section will consider the ethical implications of practising participant observation in a lap-dancing club environment; and finally the way in which the findings generated from this ethnography were analysed will be discussed.

Chapter Four is the first analysis chapter, which explores the lap-dancing club setting, and location of *Starlets*. As well as offering rich descriptions of the various spaces in *Starlets*, this chapter will develop an understanding of the significance of key areas in this particular research setting, including the main floor, dance reception area, changing room, managers' office and main stage; emphasising for example how dancers use and interact in these spaces. Finally, the dancers, as the main participants, as well as some of the other non-dancing participants, will be introduced.

Chapter Five is the first in which we are introduced to *Karen's Story*, which prefaces this chapter. *Karen's story*, as it will become apparent, is divided into three parts, acting as a thread across chapters 5, 6 and 7. Each part of her story relates to the focus of the analysis chapter it prefaces. In part one, for example, Karen talks about her entry into dancing. In relation to this, the main body of chapter five is concerned with the *entry strategies* dancers engage with when starting a career in lap-dancing; thus offering explanations of what *motivates* women to dance. The role of financial reward as a motive for dancing although acknowledged as significant is questioned; it is postulated that other emotionally driven strategies may be more relevant. Finally, the lap-dancing audition process will be explored providing accounts of some of the dancers entering *Starlets* for the first time.

Chapter Six explores the three key status roles identified for this ethnography, which lap-dancers take on during their careers; the three key phases of *new girl*, *transition* and *old school* dancer are discussed separately. In turn the different processes and characteristics of the three status roles will be explored. The role of *social* and *emotional rituals* as well as the club's *tacit rules* will be discussed, emphasising their significance in lap-dancing club culture and how they are used to cultivate and maintain dancer status. In relation to this, part two of *Karen's Story* prefaces this chapter and involves her providing an account of the time she spent working in *Starlets*, from *new girl* through to *old school* dancer.

Chapter Seven is the final data chapter with the main purpose to present and discuss the various *exit strategies* used by a dancer when ending her career as a lap-dancer. In a similar way to the discussion in chapter five, concerned with the *entry strategies* of dancers, it is argued that although practical strategies are initially provided in explanation, further investigation suggests dancers will often exit as a result of more emotionally driven strategies. Further to this, the main motivations for re-entering dancing after taking an initial retirement will be discussed; again the role of financial reward is questioned suggesting a sense of membership between dancers as a more meaningful incentive to return to this occupation. The final part of *Karen's story* which prefaces this chapter, relates to the main discussions presented as she talks about how she came to leave *Starlets*.

Chapter Eight concludes this thesis, acting as the ultimate discussion in which significant conclusions are drawn, relating to the various key discussions put forward in the previous chapters and how this ethnography has significantly contributed to the body of research already available. For example, by emphasising how this thesis re-questions some of the existing findings around dancer motivation and issues of risk. Further to this, the key findings, including the status of dancers and the subcultural characteristics of their occupation will also be highlighted.

Chapter Two

Frames of Understanding

Introduction

The academic interest of studying the stripping[16] industry, despite increasing exposure in the US and Canada remains modest in Europe, particularly in the UK, where lap-dancing clubs are relatively new. This chapter will therefore focus largely on the body of literature about the stripping industry which has originated from the US and Canada. Despite cultural and legislative differences relating to the regulation of strip clubs[17] between the US, Canada and the UK, important comparisons can still be made. This chapter will reflect on the main body of literature by focusing on some of the key pieces of work conducted, which represent the central themes to emerge: dancer motivation (the Lure of Money), power (The Empowerment Debate), emotional labour (Emotional Labour and Feeling the Strain) and risk (Risk-Taking: A Dangerous Occupation). Literature selected for discussion in this chapter, is either theoretically or empirically led, representing a good range of the material available about erotic dancing. What is also apparent within the themes of motivation, power, emotional labour and risk, is a tendency for the authors to explore the stripping industry with implicit deviant, or anti-sex/exploitation work frameworks. Although, it is accepted that outsiders consider lap-dancing a deviant occupation, this thesis does not, however, follow some of the assumptions made by ideas around a deviant 'career' (see Becker, 1963). Further to this, although it will be acknowledged in the chapters which follow that there are problems dancers face working in this industry, this thesis also does not adopt an anti-sex/exploitation framework. With this in mind, the literature explored in this chapter, which is discussed under the different headings mentioned, has tended, overall, to focus on the problems associated with this occupation, or conceived the industry more generally negatively, rather than offering a more balanced approach.

These two discourses (deviant and anti-sex/exploitation) have, individually, been host to a number of different theories supporting and providing explanations for the various material critically discussed in the following sections. The literature discussed

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[16] This is a generic term used to describe the occupation of different erotic dancers, including lap-dancers, and is regardless of the venue in which they work or the level of nudity involved. This term is commonly used in both Canadian and American academic literature concerned with this occupation. To be consistent with the literature presented in this chapter, the term 'stripping' will be used throughout.

[17] This is a generic term describing lap-dancing clubs or similar style venues where sexual titillation and the removal of a dancer's clothes is involved. This term is commonly used in both American and Canadian academic literature concerned with the stripping industry. To be consistent with the literature presented in this chapter, the term 'stripping' will be used throughout.

in the four thematically focussed parts, will be introduced and critiqued empirically and theoretically, where appropriate; this makes it possible to identify both the strengths and weaknesses of the material in question. In relation to the empirical evidence presented, the aim will be to reflect on some of the areas that have been under researched or misrepresented. With regard to the theoretical frameworks represented, this chapter will strive to evaluate the validity and use of those applied conceptually. Taking this approach makes it possible to identify potential empirical and theoretical gaps in the main body of literature and helps to set up the research findings of this thesis.

The Lure of Money

The career choice of stripping was largely explored in the early literature produced in the 1970s, when the popularity of regulated strip clubs was brought to academic attention (Boles and Garbin, 1974; Carey et al, 1974; Skipper and McCaghy, 1970). Stripper motivation has, to some extent, been an important theme in most of the contemporary literature (Barton, 2003; 2006; 2007; Boles and Garbin, 1974; Carey et al, 1974; Forsythe, 1992; Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998; Skipper and McCaghy, 1970; Wesley, 1998). Amongst the sources exploring stripper motivation there are three key pieces, which will be discussed: Skipper and McCaghy, (1970) Boles and Garbin (1974), and Forsythe and Deshotels (1998). These empirically led examples overlap in many ways, mostly in their use of a deviant framework and the interactionist approach influencing their methods of enquiry. They have been selected as key examples for two main reasons. Firstly, these pieces of literature are frequently referred to in any discussion about stripper motivation. Secondly, their conclusions about stripper motivation mirror others, making their work largely representative of the academic literature concerned with this issue.

Skipper and McCaghy (1970) provide a description of what they call 'an anatomy of stripping'[18] and the contingencies involved in the career sequence of strippers. The material in question is founded on empirical evidence generated from a combination of interviews and participant observation, conducted in several strip clubs in ten major cities across America. This piece is divided into two main sections; the first explores common characteristics between strippers, and the second, on which more

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[18] Refers to information about the nature of stripping, where it takes place, the numbers of women involved and various obscenity laws governing this occupation.

emphasis is placed, discusses the motives strippers provide for entering this occupation. Despite Skipper and McCaghy (1970) offering a more detailed discussion of stripper motivation, it is still necessary to make sense of the first part of their work, therefore placing the rest into some kind of context.

In the opening section of their paper, the physical, social and psychological characteristics of strippers are discussed. As part of this, Skipper and McCaghy (1970) argue that, of the characteristics they identified, there are three important factors shared by many of the strippers which, it is suggested, might relate to their involvement with the stripping industry. The first factor relates to sexual maturity; their findings suggest that strippers who participated in their research reached sexual maturity earlier than average. Secondly, many of the women came from broken homes where abandonment of a father figure was common and as a result, it is argued, strippers had little or no parental attention. Finally, there was an indication of early independence, demonstrated by strippers prematurely leaving the family home, or entering marriage early. In relation to these three factors it is contended:

> "…these described factors may make it easier for girls to view stripping as an acceptable occupational choice when other social factors converge making stripping a behavioural alternative." (Skipper and McCaghy, 1970, p. 398).

In the latter part of this paper, stripper motivation is explored through the use of Ginzberg et al's (1951) theoretical framework[19]. In the original work of Ginzberg et al (1951) it is argued that there are two important approaches to occupational choice. Firstly, the 'purposive'; this is a choice made on the basis of reward and access. Secondly, the 'adventitious'; this refers to occupational choices based on spontaneous and non-rational decisions; and is argued to motivate those choosing unskilled or semi-skilled occupations. According to Skipper and McCaghy (1970) it is the latter approach, the 'adventitious', that better describes the occupational choice process of strippers. In relation to this, they emphasise that stripping qualifies as an un-skilled occupation that does not require any training or talent.

Skipper and McCaghy (1970) argue that the career sequence for most strippers involved three contingencies. Firstly, they argue that these women showed that they

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[19] For a better understanding of this theoretical framework, see Ginzberg, E.S. et al (1951)

had a tendency towards exhibitionistic behaviour for gain. In support of this they found that 70 per cent of their participants were previously employed in jobs that required them to display their physical attributes; examples given include go-go dancers[20], artists' models, barmaids and show-type hatcheck girls[21] in nightclubs. Secondly, they suggest that there is evidence of an opportunity structure, making stripping an accessible occupational alternative, where women often enter this occupation by chance, more than by design. Many of the participants were previously involved with some form of show business, and during a period of financial instability, started stripping as a way of supporting themselves. It was also suggested that friends and agents of girls who worked as go-go dancers, bar maids, waitresses and show-type hatcheck girls would persuade these women to try stripping. Skipper and McCaghy (1970) are not, however, suggesting that stripping is the next logical step after pursuing these job types, but instead, that there is often more opportunity to do so. Finally, it is indicated that there was awareness amongst participants of the potentially high financial rewards offered by stripping.

In relation to this latter point, as an un-skilled job, the financial reward is arguably much higher than from some semi-skilled occupations; Skipper and McCaghy (1970) suggest that few of the strippers had a high enough level of education or training to make money at the same level in any other 'legitimate' career. The amount of money earned by the participants involved in this research did vary, and was dependent upon the type of stripper they were. In relation to this, three types were identified: 'headliners', considered to be the stars of the show; 'co-features', who were just below the 'headliner' status and 'line girls', who were at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy. Skipper and McCaghy (1970) suggested that 'headliners' could earn up to five times more than 'line girls'; however, the basic wage of the 'line girls' was still above an average rate of pay during the time in which this research was conducted. Of the three career contingencies, it is the final, economic one, that Skipper and McCaghy (1970) feel is the most significant, as the majority of respondents cited this as an important motive for stripping.

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[20] Dancers employed to dance in nightclubs.
[21] Title given to nightclub cloakroom attendants. The 'show-type', which prefixes this title, is indicative of this role in strip and burlesque clubs.

Skipper and McCaghy (1970) provided one of the first empirically based pieces of work exploring stripper motivation. It aimed to provide an accurate understanding of women's participation in the stripping industry and ultimately encouraged further academic discussion about this occupation. However, there are a number of problems with this work. Firstly, although insightful, it is now outdated as there have been several changes within the stripping industry since the research was conducted in the 1970s. For example, the occupational structure discussed by Skipper and McCaghy (1970), in which the status of 'headliners', 'line-girls' and 'co-features' related closely to the money they earned is rarely referred to in more contemporary literature, indicating that this structure is less relevant in American, where the research was conducted, to describe the various strippers working in a club. Further to this, the occupational structure they describe is not applicable to those working in UK-based lap-dancing clubs, where there is no *formal* dancer hierarchy. Secondly, in their discussion of the physical, social and psychological characteristics of strippers, some of the examples provided are inconclusive, as there is no way of comparing the participants with those in other occupations. It is therefore difficult to decipher if these characteristics can be linked to stripping or if they are merely incidental. Thirdly, it is argued that the three main characteristics[22] identified encourage women to view stripping as an acceptable occupation, without ever explaining the reasons for this.

Finally, their use of Ginzberg et al (1951) does not seem to appropriately match their findings. For example, in the first instance it is argued that the 'adventitious' explanation is more relevant than the 'purposive' for the majority entering the occupation of stripping. Skipper and McCaghy (1970) base this argument on the premise that stripping is an un-skilled form of labour. However, they later go on to argue that financial gain is at the heart of stripper motivation, therefore suggesting a more 'purposive' explanation. More generally, it seems that their explanation does not strictly lie with either the 'purposive' or 'adventitious' but somewhere between the two. This not only directs us to an underlying weakness in the way in which the occupational choice model is used, but also indicates that Ginzberg et al's (1951) two categories are limited. This is something acknowledged and addressed by Boles and Garbin (1974) in their research.

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[22] Refers to physical, social and psychological characteristics previously discussed.

Boles and Garbin (1974) followed the example of Skipper and McCaghy (1970) by examining the choice of stripping as an occupation. The research, on which the literature is based, in a similar way to the previous example was conducted using participant observation and structured and semi-structured interviews, carried out over a three-year period. Boles and Garbin (1974) refer to Ginzberg et al (1951) occupation selection model used by Skipper and McCaghy (1970), however, they indicate that although the 'purposive' and 'adventitious' approaches are useful, the empirical validity and the level of explanation provided needs to be readdressed. In order to do this Boles and Garbin (1974) offer their own alternative, which they claim is a compromise between the 'purposive' and 'adventitious'; they call it the 'equilibrium' approach. This model is based on two assumptions: Firstly, occupational choice is the result of interaction between certain predisposing conditions and various situational contingencies. Secondly, a continuum of rationality exists with regard to the occupational choice process.

In their discussion of the predisposing factors, Boles and Garbin (1974) refer to two main components: 'personal and social characteristics' and 'major tensions felt'. The first component overlaps with Skipper and McCaghy's (1970) dissection of strippers' 'physical, social and psychological' attributes, by considering the age, ethnicity, class, education, physical appearance and family background of the strippers concerned. Some of their findings in this area mirror those articulated by Skipper and McCaghy (1970).[23] For example, the age of strippers averaged around 19; most were first born, and had links with show business or stripping prior to their direct involvement. The second component discussed by Boles and Garbin (1974), the 'major tensions felt', refers to a 'major life crisis', which, they argue, is significantly reflected in their research findings. For example, all but one of their respondents had experienced a 'major crisis' immediately prior to their entrance into stripping, half of which were the result of a marriage breakdown, the remaining half claimed to enter this occupation because of a financial crisis. In relation to financial crisis, all of the participants, at some point, mentioned money as an incentive to strip:

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[23] Boles and Garbin (1974) seem to take a more sociological approach than Skipper and McCaghy (1970), as they consider areas such as class and ethnicity as well as others.

"…the occupation of stripping was selected with the knowledge that more money could be made stripping than would be possible in a more legitimate occupation." (Boles and Garbin, 1974, p. 119).

It was common for women to have already worked in show business as dancers, singers or actors before turning to stripping, often as a result of job-related crises. For example, when it became difficult to find work in their chosen form of 'show business', stripping was seen as a desirable alternative, as it would not only provide them with a good income, but was still considered as being part of 'show business'. In these cases stripping was often seen as a temporary job, until a more 'legitimate' form of 'show business' became available.

Finally, the situational contingencies discussed by Boles and Garbin (1974) fall into two categories: 'agents of recruitment' and 'timing of recruitment'. The first, 'agents of recruitment' refers to individuals who introduce women to stripping. Boles and Garbin (1974) found that partners or friends who had a connection with individuals in the entertainment world had introduced 75 per cent of the strippers to this occupation. The second category 'timing of recruitment' or 'turning point' makes the suggestion that the timing of recruitment into this occupation is very significant. Bole and Garbin (1974) argue:

"…it is necessary for recruitment agents to be available to predisposed girls at the time when they perceive the need to make changes and are open to new solutions. It is a further requisite for the agent to offer what the girl needs or believes she needs to alleviate the precipitating crisis." (p. 118).

Overall the 'equilibrium' approach described by Boles and Garbin (1974) offers a more balanced explanation than the one used by Skipper and McCaghy (1970)[24]. However, there are still problems that can be identified with their work in general. For instance, the material offered by Boles and Garbin (1974), is now somewhat outdated; as the nature and organisation of stripping has changed over time and therefore some of the discussions offered may no longer be relevant. Additionally, the authors argue that women often become strippers as a result of a 'major life-crisis'. However, despite providing examples of both marriage breakdown and

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[24] For a more detailed exploration of their theoretical framework see Ginzberg et al (1951)

financial difficulties, they do not attempt to clarify what they mean exactly by a 'major life- crisis'. Finally, although a new theoretical approach is offered, their work is still very similar to Skipper and McCaghy (1970). Although Boles and Garbin (1974) challenge Skipper and McCaghy's (1970) use of Ginzberg et al (1951), the main body of their work does not challenge the original approach. In relation to this, Boles and Garbin's (1974) extensive use of categories and sub-categories in their discussion only serves to disguise the similarities between their work and Skipper's and McCaghy's (1970).

Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) offer a slightly revised version of the explanations provided by both Skipper and McCaghy (1970) and Boles and Garbin (1974). This piece of research is again empirically led, based on research conducted in 18 U.S. strip clubs across Texas, Louisiana and Virginia; the methods of enquiry involved the use of observations and formal and informal interviews. The overall findings suggest that with regard to the strippers' entrance and continuation in this occupation, there were several relevant categories, some of which overlap with the factors discussed by the previous researchers.

Firstly, it was found that there was a tendency toward exhibitionistic behaviour amongst strippers. Similarly, Skipper and McCaghy (1970) argued that strippers were prone to exhibitionism; however, they did not relate this to attention-seeking or a sense of self-empowerment, as Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) appear to do so.

> "The women in the clubs seemed to derive a sense of satisfaction at the power they perceive they have over men in the clubs-the power to excite them sexually." (Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998, p. 82).

In relation to this, they further suggested that all the strippers loved the level of attention they received whilst working in this occupation. It was also claimed "…younger, inexperienced dancers got caught up in the attention and the perceived glamour associated with dancing." (p. 87).

Secondly, there is also an exact match between Skipper and McCaghy (1970) and Forsythe and Deshotels' (1998) findings with regard to the participants' previous work experience. For example, it was found that 70 per cent of the respondents had jobs

before stripping, in which the display of their physical attributes was an integral part. In relation to this, it is claimed: "…When an opportunity to strip arises, such past job experiences make it easier for girls to define stripping as a satisfactory occupational alternative." (Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998, p. 89).

Thirdly, Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) contend that there is an obvious opportunity structure where women are introduced into this occupation by the suggestions, advice and information given by friends, or from working in similar jobs. This, again, is reflected in Boles and Garbin's (1974) notion of 'agents of recruitment' and by Skipper and McCaghy (1970), who also emphasise the role of friends and agents in those becoming strippers. Further to this, Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) found that a sudden awareness of the ease and opportunity for economic gain was the most common reason given when participants were questioned about their entrance into stripping. As reflected in the work of Skipper and McCaghy (1970), respondents talked about a period of financial crisis mainly due to divorce or abandonment by a partner or husband. In relation to this, Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) argue that the lure of money was seen as a major incentive to remain in this occupation; one of their participants described stripping as a trap, drawing women in by the promise of money and a glamorous lifestyle. There was some variation between those who saw stripping as indefinite and those who saw it as a means to an end. Many of the respondents in this study realised that this career is limited by age; yet, many seemingly lacked a clear set of goals outside of this industry.

What is particularly significant about the role of money is that although this was the most frequently given response to the question of why strippers entered into this occupation, there were many indications that this was not always a logical answer. For instance, if women were using this career as a temporary way to make money, some would inevitably have firm plans for the future, this was not indicated in the research. Additionally, despite strippers' claims of financial dependence on this occupation, it was found that women still continued to work in this industry when they were financially secure. Similarly Boles and Garbin (1974b), found that although strippers expressed a definite preference for marriage and housekeeping roles, even after marrying financially successful men, the same participants would return to stripping after a short retirement. In relation to this, Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) argue that strippers:

"…reported that they missed the membership groups and participating in the subculture of dancers. Many dancers attempt to leave the occupation only to return after a short hiatus." (p. 90).

It is therefore suggested that stripping has far more significance than the economic explanation offers, despite strippers' responses. Finally, Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) relate stigma management to the strippers' continuance in this occupation. They explained this:

"Many of the dancers acknowledged the public's stereotypical image of the exotic dancer. They expressed feelings that the public as a whole misunderstood them and their occupation." (p. 88).

It is argued that strippers dealt with the stigma in two ways: Firstly, by detaching themselves from the job and not telling others what they did occupationally. Secondly, by focusing on the high rewards (financial) of stripping.

Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) offer a more recent account of stripper motivation and, although economic gain is cited as a chief explanation for strippers' involvement in this occupation, they nevertheless question this. It is pointed out that the explanation of economic gain is contradicted by the strippers' actions, indicating that the reasoning behind this job choice is more complex. However, despite this important acknowledgement, there are three main ways, in which their work can be criticised. Firstly, although Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) question the economic explanation for a woman's entry into and continued involvement with the stripping industry, and draw attention to subcultural membership as a more likely source of motivation; they do not however explore this in much detail. Secondly, although stigmatisation is cited as a contributing factor for strippers' continuation in stripping, the exact reasons for this are not made clear. Finally, the work of Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) overlaps with the other examples discussed in this section, and with the exception of their questioning of economic motivation; it does not seem to offer any real new or significant findings.

In conclusion Skipper and McCaghy (1970), Boles and Garbin (1974) and Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) all argue that although there are various factors influencing a woman's entry into stripping, the need for economic gain appears to be most significant. Despite this, they do not seem to go into as much detail about economic motivation as they do with some of the other factors discussed. However, it is important to return to Forsythe and Deshotels' (1998) acknowledgement of subcultural membership and attempt to explore this a little further.

The tendency has been to associate subculture with youth cultures (Clarke, 1976; Frith, 1980, Hall and Jefferson, 1976; McRobbie, 2000; Nayak, 2003; 2007; Thornton, 1995; Willis, 1978; Young, 1971). It is not ordinarily something that is connected to occupation, or widely used to explore female-based groups, with the exception of Cressey (1931), who applied the term 'subculture' to the taxi dancers[25] of the 20s and 30s; and later the work of Bernard et al (2003) and Forsythe and Deshotels (1998). Interestingly, Bernard et al (2003) and Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) are unique in their association of subcultural membership with the stripping industry. Although the term 'subculture' has been placed under scrutiny in recent years from postmodernists (Bennett, 2000; Malbon, 1999; and Redhead, 1993; 1998), others suggest that subcultural theory still has some value (Blackman, 2005; Greener and Hollands, 2006; MacDonald and Shildrick, 2006; and Nayak, 2003). The understanding of subculture is not static as suggested in its application to 'deviant' groups, and more recently, youth cultures. Therefore when using this term with consideration of its general approach, stripping cultures exhibit certain subcultural characteristics, despite the lack of use of this term in the available literature. Firstly, as subculture has been applied to groups that are formed outside of mainstream culture (Cressey, 1931; Becker, 1963; Whyte, 1943); as the deviant framework in which stripping has been discussed in this section would suggest, this occupation is, to some extent, on the fringes of the mainstream. In relation to this, it is argued by Bernard et al (2003), that female strippers form strong subcultural ties as a result of social stigma drawing them closer together. Secondly, subcultures are sometimes viewed as microcommunities, groups within groups who share similar interests (Nayak, 2003); the literature implicitly suggests a sense of community (see Barton, 2006) amongst strippers, and can therefore, in this way, be seen as a

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[25] Taxi dancers were employed as social dancers in the dance halls during the 20s and 30s. Men would request to dance with taxi dancers for a fee.

'microcommunity'. Thirdly, subcultures are argued to share common values, norms and ideas (Thornton, 1997); it is on this basis Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) stress the sense of membership between strippers. Finally, in this instance, it is the strip club that connects strippers; it is this space in which the shared common values, norms and ideas are created and engaged with. The significance of space in relation to subcultural identity is something previously discussed (Massey, 1995; 1998; Nayak, 2003; Skelton and Valentine, 1998).

Further to this, as will be discussed later in this chapter, Barton (2006) emphasizes the meaning of particular spaces within the strip club setting by demonstrating how the dressing room in particular is a place in which stripper unity and camaraderie is most apparent. The identification of subcultural membership by Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) and Bernard et al (2003) is significant as it serves as a catalyst through which the meaning of stripping shifts; raising questions about the different meanings strippers attach to their occupation, other than 'financial', and how this might lead one to rethink entry strategies into erotic dancing. Beyond this, by associating the concept of subculture with an occupation, it is perhaps demonstrating how in some instances, the boundaries between work and leisure are blurred. There will be a return to aspects of subculture in Chapter 6, 7 and 8.

The Empowerment Debate

The exploitation of dancers has been a popular theme to emerge from the body of academic literature concerned with the stripping industry. The replayed debate about stripper exploitation is ultimately one about power, and a focus that is perhaps inevitable as there has been a preoccupation with the relationship between stripper and customer (Bell et al, 1998; Boles and Garbin 1974b; Frank, 2003; Salvtin, 1971; Holsopple, 1999; Pasko, 2002; Price, 2000; Rambo-Ronai et al, 1989; Wesely, 1998; Wood, 2000). The issue of power is implicit in much of the available literature, where exploitation is believed to be at the root of industry (Boles and Garbin 1974b; Salutin, 1971; Holsopple, 1999; Pasko, 2002; Rambo-Ronai et al, 1989; Wesely, 1998). Although, overwhelming, the material listed has tended to suggest strippers are exploited by the customers, Bell et al (1998) attempt to challenge this in a short paper based on some research they conducted in various strip clubs in U.S. They argue: "None of the dancers (in their study) supported the view…that they were being singularly exploited as topless dancing" (Bell et al, 1998, p. 365). Other authors have

suggested mutual exploitation between strippers and customers (Boles and Garbin, 1974c; Enck and Preston, 1988).

This section, however, will focus on the work of Wesely (1998) and Pasko (2002), for the following reasons. Firstly, both pieces are principally concerned with the power relations between stripper and customer in the strip club environment. Secondly, although both reach similar conclusions about the role power ultimately plays in strippers' lives they nonetheless frame their discussions in different theoretical frameworks. Finally, their conclusions are largely representative of the body of work that discusses the role of power in strippers' lives.

Wesely (1998) positions her argument with an anti-sex/exploitation work framework, and explores how strippers negotiate both their child and adult sexual selves, and how this is intersected with feelings of power and powerlessness. In this piece it is asserted that the majority of strippers have been subjected to early sexualization of one form or another that teaches the women in question that the sexual body can be used as a tool of manipulation and empowerment. It is argued that strippers believe the only way in which they can gain power and control over their lives is through their chosen career. The overemphasis on the physical body, it is argued by Wesley (1998), can only have negative consequences for the women in question. It is with these sets of assumptions that Wesely (1998) concludes strippers' feelings of empowerment are in conflict with feelings of disempowerment, which are brought about by the objectification and negative treatment thrust upon them by the male customer. Thus, the overall effect is that these women are left powerless from their experience as strippers.

Wesley (1998) uses the concept of a phallocentric society as a theoretical backdrop to make sense of the power relations between strippers and customers. The notion of a phallocentric society was originally used by French feminists: Cixous and Clement (1986) and Irigaray (1985a; 1985b), and creates ideas that modern patriarchal culture is 'phallocentric', in which the phallus symbolically represents patriarchal male power; a society from which women are excluded. Further to this, it is argued that women have little control in legitimate arenas of power, including their lack of control in the shaping of laws, language, or the development of thought. In this way women are excluded from political, social, and economic realms that create and perpetuate

power relations. Wesley (1998) also draws on Irigaray's (1985a) contention that women are valued as commodified sexual objects:

"Women then engage in the market in the only way they are allowed access in a phallocentric culture: by substituting possession of phallic power with their sexualised bodies, their femininity, as an item of exchange." (Wesely, 1998, p1183).

It is further suggested by Wesley (1998) that this concept can be applied to the sex industry; stripping therefore reflects the ways in which women attempt to attain some form of power in a phallocentric society. For Wesely (1998) there cannot be a positive outcome for female strippers, as power here is wrapped up with patriarchal dominance.

There are numerous limitations in applying the notion of a phallocentric society in order to make sense of power relations. For example, it makes assumptions that strippers' behaviour is shaped by earlier heterosexual sexualization without considering explanations for strippers who have only ever been exposed to lesbian experiences (Barton, 2006). Additionally, it devalues these women by suggesting that the sexual use of their body is the only way in which they believe they can feel empowered; it does not take in to account other areas in their life which might serve this role. Finally, as power can only be seen as men repressing women, there is no scope for taking account of power relations between the strippers who work together in the same club environment.

Pasko (2002), in contrast to Wesely (1998) uses a deviant framework in which she explores stripper-customer interaction. In a similar way to Boles and Garbin (1974c)[26], Pasko (2002) argues that strippers carefully construct interactions as part of a 'confidence game' in order to maintain control over customers. It is suggested that strippers forge feelings of intimacy and emotional connectedness, in an attempt to fulfil customer fantasies. This results in strippers gaining power in their individual relationships with customers; however, Pasko (2002) asserts that this power does

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[26] This work focused on the role of 'counterfeit intimacy' between dancer and customer. Boles and Garbin (1974c) use the concept of 'counterfeit intimacy' to suggest that the interactions between strippers and customers are based on inauthentic relations.

not extend into mainstream society, where in fact a stripper's occupation leads to feelings of disempowerment. Pasko (2002) adapts Goffman's (1959) idea of the 'confidence game' from his work on impression management to help frame the power relations between strippers and customers theoretically. In this context the 'confidence game' is an act of trust development in order to acquire some kind of gain, usually monetary. For Goffman (1959) this act is performed by the 'confidence person' who manufactures a false relationship and develops rapport with victims or 'marks' for the purpose of exploiting them. It is imperative that 'confidence people' are likeable, skilled actors who are not afraid to take risks and understand their victims well in order to achieve their goal. There are a series of steps taken by the confidence person in order to achieve their ultimate goal: 'qualifying the mark'; 'cultivating the mark'; 'conning the mark' and 'cooling out'. When 'qualifying the mark', according to Pasko (2002):

> "…strippers 'work up' the emotional process of titillation and sexual desire-warmth, attention, lust, interest, attraction, availability, wanting…strippers seek to act authentically, not by pretending to be a sexual object but rather becoming one." (p.55).

This step involves sizing up and enticing the customer. 'Cultivating the mark' involves the stripper gaining the trust of the customer she has selected, which leads him to tip her on stage. This involves the stripper playing two roles: "…as sex object for the customer; and an impersonator of 'counterfeit intimacy'…" (p.56). Following this Pasko (2002) contends that the stripper will then go on to 'con the mark'; here she convinces the customer that, by spending money on her, he will receive sexual satisfaction. The final stage involves 'cooling out' the mark: "Strippers must shy away from their dance and yet make the mark unmindful of the con…" (p.60). It is through these steps that Pasko (2002) argues that strippers gain power over the customers. However, there are negative consequences to the con; dancers become emotionally strained and in addition may face isolation, stigmatisation and victimization outside of the strip club environment.

There are specific criticisms that can be levelled at the work of Pasko (2002). Firstly, although through the use of Goffman's (1959) 'confidence game' it is acknowledged that power relations shift between dancer and customer, there is little discussion or

explanation of why this occurs. Secondly, there seems to be little distinction between 'cultivating the mark' and 'conning the mark'. Finally, Pasko (2002) does not acknowledge the relationship between strippers, and how this might impact on and shape stripper-customer interaction.

Although Wesley (1998) and Pasko (2002) approach their discussions differently, both focus on power within the context of stripper-customer relations and draw on the same conclusions: that the feeling of power is shortlived and largely un-directional, never extended outside the strip club environment. Neither Wesley (1998) nor Pasko (2002) consider the possible power relations between strippers, or between strippers and management[27]. The power relations between strippers are, however, briefly discussed by Price (2000); it is indicated that 'house girls'[28] can help create and regulate club rules amongst strippers. Although this is not discussed in any great detail, Price (2000) nonetheless suggests that there is a need for further exploration of the power dynamics between strippers, and the overall influence that they have on the environment in which they work. This is something that will be taken-up in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

In relation to the theoretical approaches used by Wesley (1998) and Pasko (2002), both, although different in approach, understand the concept of power as 'power over'. However, there are problems associated with the notion of power 'over'. For instance, it provides a uni-dimensional explanation and does not take into account the potentially complex nature of certain power relations (Foucault, 1980). Those, for example, between strippers; where it is implied by the general literature addressed in this chapter, without close inspection of these relationships, that these women share equal roles in the strip club setting. In addition, it is difficult, using this framework, to adequately explain potentially positive outcomes of power. For example, although Goffman (1959) acknowledges the complex nature of social interaction and accepts that power relations shift and are not clear-cut, power is still portrayed as a repressive force. This is also something contended by Cixous and Clement (1986) and Irigaray (1985a; 1985b), who conceive power to be part of patriarchal domination: the notion of a phallocentric society can only account for power as a

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[27] It is important to point out that the relationship between managers and strippers was something later addressed by Wesely (2003).
[28] Price (2000) refers to 'house girls' as dancers who remain and work in one particular club; they are the club's regular dancers.

force that only benefits one set of people, making it rather static. Further to this, Goffman (1959) sets power as something enforced by those acting malevolently, for example, it is argued to be possessed by the 'sly' confidence person.

Unlike Cixous and Clement (1986), Irigaray (1985a; 1985b) and Goffman (1959), Foucault, does not believe that power is 'possessed' but is 'exercised'. Instead of one agent directly affecting another, Foucault contends that it is a case of many agents affecting one another, the nature of power is therefore more complex: "…power is not an institution, a structure, or a certain force with which certain people are endowed; it is the name given to a complex strategic relation in a given society." (1980, p.123). For Foucault (1980) power is ever encompassing:

> "What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it does not only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse" (p.119).

As it is implied here, power and knowledge share a symbiotic relationship; without one there is not the other. Knowledge/power is expressed through the dominant discourse as 'truth'. It is discourse that transmits, produces and reinforces 'power'; however it also undermines and exposes it. In this way it is possible to accept that discourse is therefore a tactical dimension of how power relations work between institutions, groups and individuals. From this it is possible to see that Foucault's understanding of power is far more fluid and dynamic than the examples discussed earlier. Because of the fluid and dynamic nature of Foucault's 'power', it can be used to explain any relationship within any society without making the assumption that imbalance and dominance are always at the root of relationships where power is a factor. Couzens Hoy (1986) argues this point by suggesting that:

> "…explanations based on the merely negative conception of power as repressive will fail to see that what also needs to be explained is how the kinds of knowledge necessary for controlling the human body and labour power has emerged." (p. 131).

Foucault's understanding of power then provides a more useful framework in which more complicated relationships can be understood, as well as moving beyond the very limiting explanations of power as repressive and a force of human domination.

Emotional Labour and Feeling the Strain

The bulk of the literature about stripping suggests, without necessarily directly referring to it as a form of emotional labour, that in one way or another, the role of emotions is meaningful in the work of strippers. It is therefore significant to explore some of the material that has been foremost in making these suggestions. However, first it is necessary to briefly make sense of the concept of emotional labour. The idea of emotional labour was first introduced by Hochschild (1983) to describe forms of work that rely heavily on the workers' emotions. Emotional labour is found in further theoretical thinking about emotion work[29] and feeling rules[30], previously discussed by Hochschild (1979) in her earlier work. Types of emotional labour, according to Hochschild (1983) are gender specific; and it is suggested that women in particular are more likely than men to be part of the emotional labour force.

The acknowledgement of stripping, as a form of emotional labour, is particularly evident in the work of the following authors: Barton (2003; 2006; 2007); Frank (2003); Montemurro (2001); Rambo-Ronai et al (1989); Rambo-Ronai (1992); Reid (1994) and Wood (2000). However, this section will specifically explore the work of Barton (2006) and Wood (2000) to illustrate the ways in which this theme has been discussed. Both Barton (2006) and Wood (2000) are the only authors from the body of material listed who not only acknowledge Hochschild's (1979; 1983) work but also make an attempt to use it in their individual discussions about stripping. These pieces are also interesting as both frame their discussions in different aspects of Hochschild's (1979; 1983) concept. For example, Barton (2006) is more concerned with the *consequences* of emotional labour, whereas Wood (2000) focuses on the *emotional systems* involved with emotional labour, and the way in which they are expressed in a social exchange between stripper and customer.

In this first piece of literature, Barton (2006) uses her empirically led research to explore what she calls the 'toll of stripping', approaching her discussions from an

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[29] Refers to the act of trying to feel.
[30] Refers to the social guidelines that direct how we think we should feel.

anti-sex/exploitation work perspective. When referring to emotional labour, Hochschild (1983) argues that certain forms of work, usually face-to-face and voice-to-voice, lead to higher levels of emotionality and ultimately exact a high cost from workers. It is on this basis that Barton (2006) believes stripping is a form of emotional labour. It is the high cost exacted from workers that fuels her argument that strippers experience psychological strain. She maintains that this is due to the strippers' ill treatment in the work place and a lack of self-belief: "…the more the stripper is treated poorly, the more she learns to expect such treatment; the more she believes she deserves it…" (p.90). For Barton (2006), there are several factors that can be attributed to the 'toll of stripping' evident in her discussion.

Firstly, the role of money is claimed to be significant; not only is it argued to be a central motivation for strippers continuing to work, despite the contempt they have for their job, but it is also claimed that money is something on which strippers begin to measure their own sexual desirability, and which ultimately influences their self-esteem. In other words, the more a stripper earns, the more regard she has for her sexual desirability, and vice versa. For Barton (2006) this can only lead to a warped self-image, which adds to the psychological 'toll of stripping'.

Secondly, Barton believes that strippers set boundaries to survive in the sex industry. Again this is associated with the role of money, it is argued: "The more money clients offer a stripper, the more temptation it is to stretch her boundaries." (p.95). For example, it is suggested that a stripper may consider being more sexual in her contact with a customer if it means she will gain financially; thus attempting to improve her self-esteem. However, as her boundaries begin to blur, ironically the more she begins to question her self-worth.

Thirdly, it is argued that strippers become disdainful of men in general, something which, according to Barton, is brought about by the workers pretending to be sexually aroused by men who physically repulse them, and from the abusive behaviour they sometimes experience: "…one client throws quarters at her (the dancer) on stage, another grabs her breast, one drunk pulls down her g-string…" (2006, p. 98).

Fourthly, it is argued that the relationships pursued by strippers are negatively affected by the nature of their job; for example, many claim to lose their sex drive and

find it difficult to meet partners who can cope with this, or with their job in general. According to Barton (2006), most partners make demands on strippers that are incompatible with their work; this causes conflict or ultimately leads them to distance themselves from potential relationships.

Fifthly, Barton (2006) suggests that the psychological toll can lead to the ill health of strippers; something she refers to as the 'toxic effects'. Barton (2006) explains how many strippers, particularly those in the late-career stage, would feel nauseous and fatigue before or whilst preparing for work. It is also suggested that some were more likely to develop flu-like illnesses.

Finally, Barton (2006) suggests that strippers cope with the 'toll of stripping' in two main ways: firstly, by avoiding sexual relationships with men, and favouring ones with women; and secondly, by developing bonds with fellow strippers. In relation to this last point, Barton (2006) refers to the dressing room as a social site, a place in which strippers are able to develop close, supportive relationships:

> "One way that some dancers relieve that stress is to take emotional responsibility for one another…they comfort one another if one of them has a bad night, makes very little money, interacts with an insulting client, or becomes distressed…" (P.134).

In this, following on from Forsythe and Deshotels' (1998) suggestion of subcultural membership, the sense of camaraderie and unity between strippers, indicated by Barton (2006) is, as it was suggested earlier, significant in developing ideas around stripping being subcultural.

Barton (2006) introduces some useful ideas in her discussion. For example, she draws attention to the emotional nature and effects of stripping, by emphasising the importance of bonds between strippers. Despite this, there are a number of criticisms that can be held against her work. Firstly, methodologically, Barton (2006) does not go into enough detail about the way in which she conducted her research, nor does she consider its limitations; this leads to questions around the validity of her research. Secondly, although Barton (2006) uses Hochschild's (1983) work to frame her discussion, she does not go into any detail about 'emotion work'. Thirdly, in her

discussion of the 'toxic effects', Barton (2006) blames her account of the strippers' ill health on the psychological effects of stripping, but does not consider other factors, for example, long shifts, unsociable hours or even lifestyle. Finally, there is a blurring between how the psychological toll is manifested and the ways in which strippers learn to cope with it, despite marking out her intention to talk about the two very separately.

The focus of this second piece of literature by Wood (2000) is around gendered power, in particular, on what she calls masculine power[31]. Unlike Barton (2006), her ideas are set in a deviant framework. Wood (2000) argues that the ways in which masculine power is created and enacted is through interaction between strippers and customers in the strip club. It is argued that these interactions are characterised by two related processes. The first is composed of the transformation of strippers into what she calls 'fantastical subjects', where strippers attempt to act out the customer's fantasies. For the second, Wood (2000) borrows Goffman's notion of impression management and the theory surrounding Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour; she contends that it is a combination of these two concepts that makes the first process possible. It is this second process that is of most interest here.

Although Wood (2000) acknowledges that impression management and emotional labour are separate concepts, she nonetheless sees them as part of a conceptual 'marriage'. For Wood (2000), impression management is part of the strippers' identity exchange with customers, and involves:

> "…elements such as costume, makeup, body adornment, choice of music for stage performances, facial expressions, ways of moving, and of course the information she (stripper) chooses to share with customers through conversation." (P.19).

It is suggested that part of the stripper's use of impression management must be understood in the context of emotional labour and the effect it has on the overall

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[31]Wood's (2000) definition of masculine power is consistent with an understanding of gender as being a product of culture and relations of power rather than with an understanding of gender as biologically determined. She does not necessarily mean that masculine power is an essential element of being a man or that possessing it is sufficient to indicate that one is a man; boys, girls or women might for example possess it. However, she does not make it clear how women and girls might experience masculine power.

outcome. It is argued by Hochschild (1983) that emotional labour requires the transmutation of emotional systems, in other words, the workers must take acts that are usually private and employ them in public settings. Wood (2000) applies this concept to work in the strip club:

> "In the case of strippers, for example, we see the transmutation of sensuality, something that is ordinarily applied to personal interactions, employed in a public setting for work-related purposes." (P. 23).

It is explained by comparing Hochschild's (1983) example of flight attendants with strippers which states: "While the flight attendant's job is to make passengers feel cared *for*, the stripper's job is to make customers feel cared *about*." (Wood, 2000, P.23). It is suggested that the fundamental difference between these two forms of emotional labour is that whereas the flight attendant cares in a maternal way, the stripper's affection is directed by sensuality.

The way in which impressions of interest and availability are conveyed to the strip club customer is not only through verbal interaction, but also non-verbal clues and gestures. The example Wood provides is smiling and eye contact; these are two gestures identified by Hochschild (1983) in a similar discussion about flight attendants. However, Wood (2000) argues that the physical gesture alone is not enough, and that to make it convincing the stripper must be emotionally and mentally directed towards the customer. If necessary strippers must suppress feelings in order to convey appropriate emotions in the context of emotional labour. This is where Wood (2000) touches on Hochschild's (1979) notion of 'emotion work'. It is further suggested that strippers do not just use 'emotion work' to increase profits but also to resist affirming masculine power; for example, by using various eye contact to make customers feel self-conscious during their interactions with the strippers.

Wood's (2000) work is significant as it draws attention to the ways in which emotion is a central factor in the interactions between customer and stripper. However, despite this, there are a number of criticisms that can be directed at Wood's (2000) work. Firstly, although the primary focus of her article is supposed to be about masculine power, with the exception of her initial clarification of the term at the beginning, the focus seems more concerned with a general understanding of

stripper-customer interaction and the strategies strippers engage with in the context of emotional labour. Secondly, when Wood (2000) discusses the transmutation of emotion systems, although she implies it involves a combination of 'emotion work' and social exchange she does not however consider the equally important role of 'feeling rules'; an aspect Hochschild (1983) explains is significant in this process[32]. Finally, although Wood recognizes that 'emotion work' can involve the suppression of emotions she does not then talk in any detail about the effects of this on the stripper.

There are two areas that have emerged from the discussion on emotional labour. The first, relates to the need for further exploration of Hochschild's (1979) concept of 'feeling rules'; and the second, to a more general exploration of the role of the positive production of emotion in the strip club as the work place. The notion of 'feeling rule' was not discussed in any detail by Barton (2006) or Wood (2000); for Barton, in particular, this could offer a meaningful explanation for the emotionally negative responses of dancers to their job, she accounts. However, to first reiterate, 'feeling rules' are social guidelines that direct *how* we want to *try* to feel. The basis of 'feeling rules' varies, and is in relation to the dominant ideologies held by a group or individual. It is also important to point out that as ideologies shift and change so do 'feeling rules' (1979; 1983). Hochschild (1979) suggests that we are constantly reminded of 'feeling rules' by 'rule reminders', examples of which might include: *"you shouldn't feel guilty"* or perhaps, *"you don't have the right to feel guilty"*. It is suggested by Barton (2006) that more often than not, strippers display negative emotional responses to their work and it is argued that this is a direct result of their ill treatment in the work place. However, by framing them in the concept of 'feeling rules', the strippers' reactions are as much a reflection of the social stigma associated with their occupation (Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998; Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000; Pasko, 2002), as they are, of their 'ill treatment' (Barton, 2006) having directed them to *feel* the psychological toll.

From the literature discussed in this section, it appears that although emotional labour has been thoroughly explored as a negative concept, with particular focus on the ill treatment of strippers (Barton, 2006) and the feigning of emotions (Wood, 2000), leading to the psychological 'toll of stripping' (Barton, 2006), there has been little discussion of the pleasure strippers derive from their job. Although it is important

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[32] The basis of 'emotion work' is influenced and directed by the types of 'feeling rules' adopted.

to acknowledge the emotional strain associated with emotional labour, surely it is equally important to consider the positive experiences of the workers. Barton (2006) briefly acknowledges the strong emotional bonds developed between strippers, but she does not attempt to explore the extent to which this relationship might serve to make the experience of strippers in anyway, pleasurable. Further to this, the role these bonds play in the social interaction between strippers is also an area that is not addressed. With this in mind then, the emotional unity between dancers, the role this plays in their social interaction with one another and the potential pleasures they draw from the experience of stripping, will be explored further in the empirical chapters to follow.

Risk-Taking: From Danger to Excitement

The risk associated with this occupation, has more specifically been reflected in studies exploring the emotional and physical dangers of stripping (Barton, 2003; 2006; 2007; Holsopple, 1999; Maticka-Tyndale et al; Wesely, 2003). The two examples, which will be the focus of the discussion in this section, include the work of Holsopple (1999) and Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000). These two pieces, in particular, have been selected as both are fundamentally centred on the physical and psychological dangers associated with stripping, and set their work in an anti-sex/exploitation work framework. The dangers of dancing are acknowledged and discussed across the general body of literature concerned with the stripping industry.

The work of Holsopple (1999) explores risk through making sense of women's experiences and views of working as strippers. Theoretically, Holsopple (1999) borrows her ideas from a number of sources (Hanmer, 1989; Hearn et al, 1994; Kelly, 1987; Prewitt, 1989; Ronai et al, 1989; Thomas and Harred, 1992), framing her work in relation to gender power dynamics. It is argued that strip clubs are organised by gender, for example, strippers (female) working for managers (male), and that they reflect the gender inequalities present in wider society. Violence, of one form or another, is understood to be a common method of control over women. In the context of the strip club it is suggested that male customers, managers, staff and owners use diverse methods of harassment, manipulation, exploitation, and abuse, in order to control women who work in this environment; this is referred to as a 'continuum' (Holsopple, 1999).

The research, on which this piece of literature is based, involved the execution of several methods, including observations, interviews and a survey. As the analysis was "…located within the context of men's domination over women" (Holsopple, 1999, p. 254), a significant part of the data reflects on the violence her participants experienced whilst working as strippers. Of the women involved in this piece of research, the vast majority reported as having either witnessed or directly experienced some form of violence, including: physical, sexual and verbal abuse, stalking and sexual exploitation. In relation to physical violence, it is argued: "Customers spit on women, spray beer, and flick cigarettes at them. Strippers are pelted with ice, coins, trash, condoms, room keys, pornography, and golf balls." (Holsopple, 1999, p.260). In addition it was also recorded that some participants were even bitten, punched, pinched and slapped. Customers, managers and other staff inflict verbal abuse, usually taking the form of name-calling; examples Holsopple (1999) refers to include, "cunt", "whore", "pussy", "slut", and "bitch". This form of abuse also involved threatening to physically hurt strippers; including threats of slapping, punching and even rape. Sexual abuse was manifested in customers grabbing strippers' breasts, buttocks and genitals. More serious forms of sexual abuse are also documented:

> "Customers often attempt and succeed at penetrating strippers vaginally and anally with their fingers, dollar bills, and bottles. Customers expose their penises, rub their penises on women, and masturbate in front of the women. Women in this study consistently connected lap-dances to the sexual abuse they suffered in the club." (Holsopple, 1999, p. 258).

Stalking, usually perpetrated by customers, was found to have taken on a number of forms, all of which varied in the level of seriousness. Examples included, making unwanted contact with strippers by sending gifts, writing letters and making telephone calls. Further to this, more contentiously, some participants reported being followed around outside of their working hours, and it is even claimed that some strippers had their property broken into in order to steal personal belongings such as underwear, hairbrushes and family photographs. Customers who continually stalked strippers would often excuse their behavior by claiming they were 'in love' with the stripper/s in question. Finally, Holsopple (1999) found evidence of sexual exploitation; this included strippers being forced or pressured to take part in sexual

acts in order to make money or maintain their job. The majority of strippers reported that sexual exploitation was often a product of customer propositions and usually related to making money rather than keeping their job at a particular strip club. Seventy eight percent of strippers reported being propositioned for sex by customers or pimps[33] everyday while they were working; sometimes managers or club owners set up this opportunity. With reference to this, some of Holsopple's participants admitted that they had been recruited into prostitution through stripping, and felt to some extent that prostitution was an extension of stripping:

> "Pimps season women first with stripping and then turn them out into brothels or escort services for more money. Tricks[34], sugar daddies[35], pimps, and drug dealers in the strip club seek to engage women in prostitution." (Holsopple, 1999, p. 262).

As a former stripper, Holsopple (1999) was able to bring a level of empathy and understanding into the field of research that other researchers, who are considered outsiders, might not be able to equal. The position of Holsopple can only be advantageous in generating meaningful data in this field of study, as this will be discussed in Chapter three. However despite this, there are a number of problems with her work. For instance, although she acknowledges the different types of violence strippers are subjected to, Holsopple (1999) does not explore the consequences and effects of these acts. Additionally, there is little discussion about the relationships between the strippers and customers; this makes it difficult to understand the context in which behaviours like stalking might have taken place. Finally, although this study suggests high levels of violence, of one form or another, in U.S. strip clubs, the findings are not necessarily representative of strip clubs in the UK, where legislation regarding club regulation is much stricter (Jones et al, 2003).

The second piece by Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000) examines occupational health and safety issues associated with stripping "…in relation to the social organization of strip clubs and the broader social, economic, and political context in which exotic dancing is located." (p.88). The specific context of health and safety is less commonly

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[33] Men who rent out women for sex with others.
[34] Slang for a prostitute's clientele.
[35] In this context 'sugar daddy' refers to a man who provides money or favour in exchange for sexual relations.

explored in literature about stripping than in other forms of labour. It is on this basis that Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000) parallel and compare their findings with work done on prostitution.

Similarly to Holsopple (1999), this piece is empirically led, based on a study conducted over a three-year period, in which observations and in-depth interviews were conducted with strippers at a number of Canadian strip clubs. Although empirically led, use is made of Chapkis' (1997) theory which categorizes stripping with other forms of sexual labour including escorts, call girls, phone sex work, peep shows, brothel work, exotic massage, street prostitution and pornographic modeling and acting. This is on the premise that all of these forms of labour involve the sale of a service to satisfy a sexual fantasy, produce sexual excitement or arousal and/or provide sexual satisfaction to the customer. In relation to Chapkis (1997), it is argued that sexual labour is situated within the social and political context of prescribed sexual and gender roles and the associated distribution of power in gender relations, where women take on a more passive role. Further to this, it is contended that sexual interaction is prescribed for women as private and intimate, monogamous and non-commercial: "Thus, while women are engaged in sexual labour…(they) are violating their gender role." (Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000, p.88).

In relation to the health and safety of strippers, the findings of the research in question brought five core areas to the attention of the researchers, which were associated with the risks to which strippers are exposed. These include the type of dance that strippers perform, the amount of money earned, the cleanliness of the club, appearance requirements of the strippers, and the stigmatization and the consequences of some of the coping strategies employed.

Firstly, in relation to the type of dance, it was pointed out that commonly three different dances are performed: stage dancing, table-dancing and lap-dancing. It is argued that lap-dancing is the most risk provoking of the types listed. Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000) describe lap-dancing as "…variously present or absent in strip clubs…In a typical lap-dance, the dancer sits on a man's lap or between his legs wearing little or no clothing." (p. 94). It is even suggested that despite legal prohibitions, their participants revealed that there is often physical contact between the customer and the stripper during the lap-dance, including oral sex and, in some

cases, voluntary or forced sexual intercourse. More often than not, strippers also described being subjected to verbal harassment and sexual contact, including having their breasts and genitals touched. On this basis, it is argued that the dominant health risks associated with the lap-dance include sexual assault, sexually transmitted infection (STI) and psychological and emotional stress.

Secondly, the amount of money earned was found to correlate to the health and safety of the stripper. For example, 'feature' strippers[36], do not have to rely on private dances to make money, as their income is wage, rather than tip based. It is therefore less common for a 'feature' stripper to make as much contact with customers as other strippers; consequently, they were not exposed to the same degree of sexual assault or STIs as others. As Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000) explain:

> "Dependence on tips from customers meant dancers had to cater to the fantasies and desires of customers in order to maximize their income. Dancers were regularly faced with balancing what they had set as personal standards and boundaries for interaction with customers against the offers of high tips and expensive gifts to comply with a customer's request." (p.98).

Thirdly, the lack of cleanliness of some of the clubs in which the strippers worked was an issue expressed by participants. In relation to this, these women were expected to perform nude or semi-nude, where their bodies were in direct contact with a variety of surfaces, including: the stage floor, stage poles, props and customers' clothing. It was suggested by the participants that club managers only kept minimal areas, such as toilets and dressing rooms clean. Health problems associated with lack of cleanliness included: complaints of skin irritations and skin blemishes.

Fourthly, the appearance requirements of the strippers, which involved maintaining their youthful looks, was another area Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000) considered problematic. As emphasis was placed on the strippers having large breasts, being slender and tanned, this resulted in the participants placing themselves under pressure to have a perpetual full body tan, diet, work out and even have surgical procedures, including breast enhancements. It is argued that these measures may have negative consequences for the women in question. Examples of long term

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[36] These are usually well known strippers or sex workers who travel from club to club performing strip shows.

health effects included, skin cancer from tanning and various disorders associated with leaky breast implants.

Finally, the stigma associated with stripping was recognized as a problem by the participants interviewed. Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000) argue that once a woman has been engaged in sex work, she is considered a 'sex worker' in every other aspect of her life, this includes people making assumptions about her sexual availability: *"The stigmatization and outcast status of exotic dancers was not something they could leave at work, it followed them everywhere."* (p.98). The stigma experienced by these women is not only argued to put them at greater risk of sexual assault, but the coping strategies devised by the strippers themselves are also argued to create various risks. For example, some of the participants admitted to using alcohol and recreational drugs[37], to dull the reality of the stigma, as well as making it possible to cope with the various types of harassment experienced. In relation to this it was pointed out that some strippers continued to be dependent on alcohol throughout their stripping career, despite claiming to be in control. Along with dealing with the general stigma associated with stripping, reasons provided for prolonged dependency included: "deal with nerves"; "loosen up"; "get that buzz" and "to pretend to be interested in the customer". After a career of stripping, some of the participants felt that the stigma associated with their work would cause problems with their role in the community and may prevent them from getting another job. As a result, "Women spoke of getting trapped in the social world and careers of sexual and erotic labour and often knew of others who had moved from dancing to other forms of sex work." (Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000, p.103).

Although, in a similar way to Holsopple (1999), Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000) were primarily concerned with risk within the strip club environment, what makes this piece significant and somewhat unique, is, that their study was the first of its kind to explore the health and safety of strippers, leading the way for future research with a similar focus. However, there are two main criticisms associated with the work of Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000), which relate to the speculative nature of the health threats they claim. Firstly, that some of the ill-health effects, such as skin blemishes and irritations, are linked to a lack of cleanliness within the certain areas of the club;

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[37]Examples of recreational drugs included marijuana and/or cocaine.

however, there is no hard evidence to suggest they are connected. Secondly, long-term ill effects from tanning, such as skin cancer, are again speculative, with no accounts of skin cancer provided in the research findings.

Both Holsopple (1999) and Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000) explore risk in terms of the problems it poses, hence there is an assumption that strippers are deterred and troubled by the high risks involved in this occupation. This relates, partly, to the theoretical approaches used by Holsopple (1999) and Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000), both of which set female passivity and disempowerment at the heart of stripper exploitation in the work place. For example, the risks associated with violence in the strip club, for Holsopple (1999), are inevitable and detrimental to strippers, as consequences of the 'continuum' of female oppression. However, despite strippers' acknowledgement of the potential dangers involved in working in this industry, many remain in this profession. Although stigma is argued to be a factor trapping women in the sex industry (Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000), it is overlooked that these women may derive a sense of pleasure from being involved in a high-risk occupation, and that it is this, to some extent, that might motivate strippers.

To make more sense of this, it is necessary to explore the work of Lyng (1990). The focus of his work provides explanations for voluntary risk-taking; it is argued that risk can be pursued as a way of deriving certain pleasures. The examples used by Lyng (1990) include: skydiving, scuba diving, rock-climbing, drug-taking and binge drinking. 'Edgework' activities, as he terms them, have one central theme in common: "…they all involve a clearly observable threat to one's physical or mental well-being or one's sense of an ordered existence." (Lyng, 1990 p. 857). In further explanation of this, it is argued that the 'edge' or 'boundary line' confronted by the risk taker or 'edge worker' can be defined, depending on the activity, as the following: life versus death; consciousness versus unconsciousness; sanity versus insanity; an ordered sense of self and environment versus a disordered self and environment.

To illustrate this, Lyng (1990) refers to binge drinking as negotiating the boundary between consciousness and unconsciousness and drug-taking between sanity and insanity. These aspects of Lyng's (1990) work are applicable to some of the risk-taking activities identified in the strip club environment, such as drug-taking and alcohol abuse (Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998 and Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000). It is

significant that Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000) account that these activities are engaged with as a way of transporting the stripper's consciousness away from the club; further to this it is suggested that these women use alcohol to "get that buzz". Another significant aspect of Lyng's (1990) work refers to 'edge workers' believing they have control over the risk-taking activity in which they are engaged. This often means that the risk-taker believes they have the ability to avoid the dangers associated with their chosen activity. In relation to this Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000) account how strippers believe they are in control of their use of alcohol and can limit the dangers of addiction. From the parallels drawn from Lyng's (1990) theory of 'edge work' with some of the findings from Maticka-Tyndale et al's (2000) study, it is possible to see, how the pursuit of 'risk' can be developed further from a sociological perspective, rather than merely focusing on the negative impact of risk.

Concluding Remarks

The literature, which has been central to this chapter, is from America and Canada, where most of the related research has been conducted. This indicates that there is an obvious gap where the investigation of British and European strip clubs is concerned. Further to this, with regard to the central themes which have emerged from the literature, it is clear that over and above the general assumptions about deviance, anti-sex/exploitation work frameworks producing a limiting portrayal of the stripping industry, there are several areas that need to be readdressed, or have been altogether neglected. The role of money is a significant theme that threads through many of the discussions in this chapter; the financial interest of stripping is envisaged as something that not only draws women to this occupation (Skipper and McCaghy, 1970; Boles and Garbin, 1974; Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998), but also encourages strippers to continue working in this role (Barton, 2006; Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998; Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000). It is suggested, overwhelming, that the pleasure derived from stripping is financial; as Barton (2006) and Holsopple (1999) argue, the need to make money can cause strippers to stretch their boundaries, resulting in exposure to various psychological and physical risks. However, the role of money is something that needs to be readdressed. As Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) have indicated, financial explanations for women participating in the stripping industry need further exploration. On this basis, it is necessary to delve further into the entry strategies of strippers, and in addition address the re-entry of women, after taking retirement from this occupation. It is also relevant to mention here, that the motives

surrounding the retirement of strippers have also been neglected; it is therefore also necessary to investigate the exit strategies of these women.

The risks associated with stripping, whether psychological (Barton, 2006; Pasko, 2002, Holsopple, 1999; Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000) or physical (Holsopple, 1999 and Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000), is yet another central theme apparent in the body of literature discussed. It is suggested that as well as various psychological and physical risks associated with the duties of the job, there are risks, connected with stripping, that emerge from the lifestyle habits of the strippers, including alcoholism and drug-taking (Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000); indicating a more voluntaristic element to risk. In relation to this, what seems to be absent from the various discussions addressed in this chapter, are the reasons for the strippers' voluntary engagement in risk; other than an explanation of financial gain, which, as it has been established, is somewhat problematic. The focus should perhaps temporarily shift from the impact of 'risk' to 'risk-taking', reflecting on some of the ideas offered by Lyng (1990).

In the exploration of stripper-customer interaction, the literature has tended to focus upon a perceived imbalance of power, and it is inferred that the stripper is often the victim of exploitation (Barton, 2006; Holsopple, 1999; Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000; Pasko, 2002; Wesely, 1998). The understanding of power within the literature, having been directed by a static concept of domination, means that it is necessary to embrace a more fluid understanding (Foucault, 1980), which might allow for the exploration of the more implicit role of power, say, for example, in the relationship strippers have with one another. In general, the literature neglects to consider stripper-stripper interaction and the power relations present between these women. In relation to this, the potential 'power' roles of the strippers in the strip club environment needs to be explored, making sense of how these roles might contribute to the status of dancers.

Further to this, as Price (2000) indicates, it is also necessary to explore the role that strippers play in the shaping of various club rules, and thus develop an understanding of the overall power these women exercise in the club. With regard to stripper-stripper interaction, it is also significant to mention that, the emotional bonds between these women (Barton, 2006), and the idea of stripper membership and subculture (Bernard et al, 2003; Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998) are both areas that

have been under researched and therefore need to be considered. Finally, the production of emotions, as part of work, is conceived negatively (Hochschild, 1983), so it is necessary to investigate how emotional roles can be seen more positively. In relation to the strip club, for example, it is necessary to make more sense of the bonds and membership between strippers and how they serve to benefit these women, and what, if any, role they play in providing this occupation with a subcultural identity. All these gaps and weaknesses will be considered in the chapters that follow, including: 5, 6, 7 and 8.

Chapter Three

Methodology: The Dancing Ethnographer

Introduction

"…It's a strange experience dancing and observing. In many ways it's as though nothing has changed, I'm still 'Rachela the dancer' doing what I always do, having a laugh with the girls, dancing for the customers, doing the stage shows, complaining to Deano (DJ), feeling tired...Although now I've got to stay switched on and tuned in to what's going on around me. Everything I do, say, hear and feel has suddenly been magnified and what was once just 'stuff', now has some kind of meaning attached to it…" ***(Fieldnotes: August 2004)***

This chapter will explore some of the significant methodological issues to emerge from conducting research in the lap-dancing club setting of *Starlets*. Firstly, the discussion of access will draw attention to the advantages of researching the field as an 'insider', and specifically how this is beneficial in gaining and sustaining general access to the setting in question. In relation to this, the importance of membership within the lap-dancing club setting cannot be disregarded, as it is an environment fraught with secrecy (Lewis, 1998), and suspicious of outsiders. Secondly, this chapter will explore how this ethnography was conducted. In this discussion, the decision to use participant observation, as a core method of investigation will be introduced, emphasising, for example, the advantages it offered me as the dancer-researcher in the lap-dancing club setting. As well as going on to explore the way in which participant observation was conducted and recorded, the emotional and intellectual experience of this method will also be discussed. This was something discovered when I experienced a feeling of inner conflict between Rachela the 'researcher' and Rachela the 'dancer'. It is this dual identity, the 'dancing ethnographer', that has been at the heart of the research process, working for and against me. In the examination of this personal conflict I will suggest how a reflexive and introspective approach throughout the research process was used to help make the most of this schizophrenic identity. Further to using participant observation, it will also be discussed how in-depth unstructured interviews were introduced to this study as a way of supplementing the findings generating from participant observation and as a way of producing the life stories of dancers in their own words. This was useful in developing the dancer case study that, in this instance, concerns Karen's story. This case study is something that binds together the experiences of the other dancers discussed in the data chapters later in this thesis. In addition this chapter will

conclude by discussing the decisions that led me to withdraw from the field as my research came to a close, and also what kind of experience this was for me having spent such a long period of time being involved in the culture at *Starlets* both as researcher and dancer. Following on from this, not only will some of the general ethical implications of using an ethnographic approach be discussed, but also how problems around informed consent, privacy, harm and exploitation were confronted and resolved during the execution of this study. Finally, the analytical framework, which informed my interpretation of the data, will be discussed.

Access and Trust through Membership

Although accessing the field is, to some extent, an issue faced by all researchers, certain groups pose more difficulties for the researcher negotiating entry than others. The groups in question tend to exist on the fringes of social acceptability, often considered 'deviant'. It is perhaps for these reasons that such groups are often out of bounds to outsiders; due to their closed nature the most successful way to gain access is through attaining membership. For example, the study of religious cults; in these instances access has been obtained by using existing members to collate data, or which involve researchers undertaking covert observation by often feigning their identity as believers (Lofland, 1977; Festinger et al, 1956). Other examples of closed settings might include those of workers such as prostitutes, pornographers and erotic dancers, all of which are traditionally seen as 'deviant' occupations.

In relation to erotic dancers, entry into the lap-dancing club environment for any individual would ordinarily be achieved as a staff member (dancer or otherwise) or as a customer. It has often been the customer route that researchers in this field have initially taken (Barton, 2006; Bindle, 2004; Brewster, 2003; Erickson and Tewksbury, 2000; Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998) in order to gain access. However, others have entered this field by becoming dancers or employing researchers to work in the lap-dancing club environment (Boles and Garbin, 1974; Enck and Preston, 1988; Dragu and Harrison, 1988; Frank, 2003; Holsopple, 1999; Manaster, 2006; Rambo-Ronai, 1992).

The difficulty of entering this particular research setting as an outsider is discussed by Lewis, (1998) who claim that: "…dancers are suspicious of talking to people. As a result dancers were difficult to recruit for our study." (p.17). This has led several

researchers to conduct covert style methods in order to access erotic dancers and their customers (Brewster, 2003 and Erickson and Tewksbury, 2000), to avoid arousing suspicion. Barton (2006), in a similar way to Lewis, (1998), acknowledges some of the problems associated with being an outsider in the lap-dancing club environment. Barton (2006) describes, for example, how she felt out of place as a woman and a non-sex worker in the clubs in which she conducted her research. This is on the basis that the lap-dancing club exists to fulfil male fantasies; therefore female non-sex workers are misplaced in this type of sex establishment (Barton, 2006).

In relation to this, in *Starlets*, during the time I spent in the field, I frequently observed dancers reacting negatively toward women, who were non-dancers, entering the club. These 'outsiders', as they were seen, would stir suspicion, leading dancers to maliciously speculate about the female customers' presence in the club. Women, who are not dancers or other staff members, are often seen as outsiders more than men because their presence in the lap-dancing club is far more unusual. Further to this, the negative and defensive reactions of lap-dancers to female customers is perhaps also motivated by two factors. Firstly, the lap-dancing club is a sexually competitive environment, where female dancers are not only competing against each other to arouse a customer's interest, but are also in sexual competition with other women who enter the club as customers. Secondly, many of the lap-dancers involved in this research indicated that they felt stigmatised by those who are not involved with the industry, and it is often women on the 'outside' who are seen as the source of their infamy. This is emphasised by one of the participants, Jan: *"I think other girls give you a hard time about this job more than guys, probably 'coz [sic] they're jealous."* **(Fieldnotes: February 2004).**

The more specific relationship between the lap-dancer and female researcher is not straightforward and therefore conflicts with a long tradition of thinking which highlights the advantages of women researching women (Bhopal, 2000; Oakley, 1981). With these issues in mind, it is therefore inevitable that a lap-dancer, entering the field as a researcher is less likely to face as many difficulties. I was fortunate in this regard, having already spent a number of years working in the stripping industry and more conveniently some of that time was spent working as a dancer in *Starlets*

before my research commenced[38]. Having the privileged role of an insider provided me with the essential prerequisites for conducting this research, having already secured full membership into the actual setting I had selected. As Becker and Faulkner (2008) point out, as an 'insider', "…you already know what it might take an outsider months to learn." (p. 15).

Having worked as a dancer I had shared the same experiences as others working in this industry. Further to this, these experiences were not just work related, as I had, in different ways, shared in the various social and emotional rituals, which take place in the lap-dancing club. More specifically, I had laughed, cried, bitched, fought, got 'out of it'[39] and bonded with the 'girls' at *Starlets* before embarking on my fieldwork; it is these experiences, which have sealed my membership as a dancer. I decided it was important to continue to work as a dancer in *Starlets* during all of my fieldwork, as it was not only an effective way of generating meaningful data but would enable me to maintain the trust I had developed with many of the participants. Trust is important in this environment as it encourages participants to act naturally, allowing access to most areas of their culture. For example, as an established dancer at *Starlets* I had good access to and the acceptance of other staff members including security, management, bartenders, waitresses and DJs; individuals with whom an 'outsider' would not have had the same relationship. The significance of having membership with the culture being researched has been accounted for by other ethnographers working in various fields (Armstrong, 1993; Hobbs, 1989; Holdaway, 1983).

The development of trust in such an environment can only ever be gradual; sudden unexpected entry by a researcher could be counterproductive. I witnessed this firsthand whilst conducing my research when a female academic entered *Starlets* in order to carry out a small study. She gained access through management but did not spend time getting to know her participants, the dancers, before carrying out interviews. Having later discussed this with the dancers who had agreed to be interviewed by her, I was informed by some that they deliberately avoided answering questions or provided inaccurate accounts of their experiences as dancers. The questions asked by the researcher were described by the dancers as, 'too intrusive';

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[38] Prior to conducting this research I worked at Starlets for approximately two years.
[39] Slang expression describing a deep state of intoxication induced by alcohol and or recreational drugs.

some even suspected the researcher was an undercover journalist or was working for management. In this case the researcher made the mistake of not spending time gaining the dancers' trust. Thankfully my trust and membership proved to secure my role as a researcher; in fact because of this, participants were not concerned with the details of my research; despite making them available, many seemed complacent. This is something I have mentioned in my fieldnotes:

> *…Some of the girls were really curious about my research and others didn't even seem bothered that I was there… Some girls seemed unimpressed as though the project did not serve any purpose…I know for a fact that some dancers were thinking: You don't need to spend months doing research to know about what we do! Or: Who cares!..* ***(Fieldnotes: January 2004)***

Despite the participants' complacency, I was prepared and expected to have to re-negotiate access if I was to get closer to selected groups of dancers who I had often avoided or naturally veered from during my dancing career. This 'layered access', as Sanders (2005) refers to it, is governed by different gatekeepers within the field. Although, as an established dancer you automatically have the respect and the trust, to some extent, of fellow dancers, it does not give you comprehensive access. Establishing closer relationships with *all* of the dancers who worked at *Starlets,* involved making myself more open to interaction with those whom, as a dancer I had sometimes found it difficult to communicate. This was not something that happened instantaneously, and involved spending time with certain dancers before I felt I had a good idea about who they really were and their place in *Starlets*.

The Ethnography

Although it is suggested that ethnography stems from the rejection of positivism within the social sciences, based on the notion that social phenomena are different in character from the physical phenomena (Hammersley, 1991); this, as Brewer (2000) suggests, is not straightforward. It is argued that there are in fact several types of ethnography, some of which are not necessarily isolated from positivism; the different types identified, include: 'humanistic ethnography'[40]; 'positivistic-scientific

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[40] Often associated with 'traditional' ethnography. It abandons more positivistic approach by rejecting hypothesis testing and deductive analysis.

ethnography'[41]; 'postmodern, reflexive ethnography[42]' and 'post postmodern ethnography'[43]. Although, the various types of ethnography interpret the use and function of this approach differently, ethnography is, unanimously, understood as a way of gaining closeness to participants to successfully engage with the culture under investigation.

It is important to point out that there have been two intellectual developments of ethnography; the first is associated with anthropologists such as Malinowski[44], Boas[45], Radcliffe-Brown[46] and Evans-Pritchard[47]; the second is associated with the work of the Chicago School (Brewer, 2000). Although both used participant observation in order to study a specific group's culture, it was the Chicago school that further developed ethnography, not only with regard to the types of groups studied, but also with the general ethnographic approach, carrying it into sociology. Significantly, the Chicago School brought ethnographic practice into the city[48] (Bulmer, 1986); the focus of study were marginalized and deviant groups (Barley, 1989), such as taxi-hall dancers (Cressey, 1932); members of slum neighbourhoods (Zorbaugh, 1929)[49]; and homeless people (Burgess, 1923)[50]. The tradition within the social sciences, for researchers to explore similar marginalized or deviant groups using an ethnographic approach continues to be popular, for example, see Hall and Jefferson (1976); Hobbs (1989; 2003); Sanders (2005); Frank (2003). The focus from an essentially observational based approach, through the Chicago School, began to incorporate several other methods, including informal interviewing, the collection of personal documents or other documentary sources (Bulmer, 1986). Ethnography

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[41] The 'thick descriptions' generated from an ethnographic approach is seen to have scientific value, enabling the 'scientific ethnographer' to capture the 'real' features of phenomena objectively and accurately (Silverman, 1997).

[42] Whereas, 'humanistic ethnography' and 'positivistic-scientific ethnography' share the idea that the data generated from this approach will provide, what Brewer (2000) refers to as an, 'objective truth statements', 'postmodern, reflexive ethnographers' argue that because there are several versions of reality, the ethnographer can only captures one of many. It is therefore important for the ethnographer to adopt a reflexive approach.

[43] Combines ideas of naturalist realism and postmodernism to ethnography; not rejecting the notion of 'truth' but equally offering a reflexive approach. Strives towards the idea of a systematic ethnography.

[44] Some of his significant works include: *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922); *Myth in Primitive Society* (1926); *The Scientific Theory of Culture* (1944)

[45] Some of his significant works include: *The Mind of Primitive Man (1911); Primitive Art (1927); Race, Language, and Culture (1940)*

[46] Some of his significant works include: *The Andaman Islanders (1922); Social Organization of Australian Tribes (1931); Structure and Function in Primitive Society (1952)*

[47] Significant works include: *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande (1937); The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People (1940); Theories of Primitive Religion (1965)*

[48] Often referred to as 'urban ethnography' (Gubrium, 2007)

[49] See, Zorbaugh, Harvey Warren (1929)

[50] See, Burgess, E. (1923)

continues to combine the use of several methods, including observing and interviewing (Fielding, 1993; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2004; Seale, 2004); as a multi-method technique, ethnography naturally lends itself to triangulation (Brewer, 2000).

However despite ethnography's multi-method approach, for most, the heart of this approach remains to be observation, as it enables the researcher, through close contact with the participants, to familiarise themselves with the groups' everyday actions and therefore make sense of the meaning that participants attach to their social world. On a fundamental level, participant observation, as the name suggests, involves the observation of the group/culture studied in their natural environment. However, this method not only involves the making of direct observations but also the usual everyday verbal interaction with the participants. More specifically in practice this involves:

> "…the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said…collecting whatever data is available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research…" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2004, p. 1)

As a dancer already situated in the field with 'insider' knowledge and access I had an ideal opportunity to observe as a participant. The advantages of being an 'insider' have been accounted for by a number of researchers (Armstrong, 1993, Becker, 1963, Hobbs, 1989, Holdaway, 1983) and touched on previously in this chapter. Hobbs (1989), for example, whose research was concerned with the relationship between the policed and the police in the East End of London, was benefited by his East End roots. This tacit knowledge provided Hobbs (1989) with a fundamental understanding of the social norms and values of the environment in which he was conducting research, thus improving his ability to generate data that might not have been recorded by an outsider.

Further to the opportunity to conduct such a close study of the participants, participant observation is valuable in many ways. Firstly, the closeness between participant observer and the participants means that participant observation is more effective at generating specific types of data than other methods. It enables the

researcher to make sense of complex phenomena that would remain hidden, or at best unexplained. Whyte (1984), for example, illustrates this very point when he reflects on the participant observation he conducted for *Street Corner Society* (1943); he argues that this method alone helped him gain information about patterns of activities and interactions, and importantly, an understanding of group structure and dynamics of the Norton Street Gang[51]. In relation to my own research, as a participant observer in *Starlets*, I was able to gather information about an informal dancer hierarchy, something that would not of been possible to identify outside of this environment or from just interviewing participants (see Chapter 6). Secondly, as Fielding (1993) suggests, ethnography is committed to the idea that:

> "…an adequate knowledge…cannot be fully grasped until the researcher has understood the 'symbolic world' in which people live. By 'symbolic world' we refer to the meanings people apply to their own experiences, meanings developed through patterns of   behaviour which are distinctive by comparison to the outside World." (p. 157).

In regard to my own research, this is about developing an understanding of the symbolic meaning of lap-dancing club culture. For example, making sense of the various *social rituals* dancers in *Starlets* partake in, which might include drinking alcohol and taking illicit drugs. Thirdly, there is an opportunity to make sense of subjective meaning in the field of study. In the lap-dancing club setting of *Starlets*, this relates to developing an understanding of the use and significance of the different areas in the club. Finally, as Whyte (1984) claims:

> "…participant observation opens up possibilities for encountering the completely unexpected phenomenon that may be more significant than anything the field worker could have foreseen…" (p. 27)

In relation to *Starlets*, although I had prior knowledge of daily routines and rituals of the dancers, it was not until I was actively observing as a researcher that I began to actually make sense of these phenomena. This was particularly significant when identifying how the *social* and *emotional rituals* dancers engaged with were used to

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[51] The gang with whom Whyte (1943) associated with as part of his ethnography *Street Corner Society*.

both secure and elevate their status roles in the dancer hierarchy identified (see Chapter 6). Further to this, the behaviour of a dancer would sometimes contradict her verbal accounts of certain phenomena. It was only through actually observing the dancers that I was able to make these discoveries and thus capture submerged meaningful data.

Conducting Participant Observation:

Most of the observations were made in *Starlets;* this was the most logical place to engage with, as it was the heart of the social setting, ensuring equal access to dancers, other staff members and customers. Whilst working as a dancer I used my work shifts at *Starlets* to conduct observations; on average I worked four out of the six weekly shifts available. The length of a shift was approximately six hours, often starting at 8pm and finishing at 2am, with the exception of the Saturday daytime shift, which was between 12pm and 3pm. As an estimate over 2000 hours were spent observing participants; this included observations inside and outside of *Starlets.*

Different shifts suited different customers and dancers so it was important to spread my observations over all possible shifts. The beginning of the week, Monday to Wednesday, was often the quietest period in the club, attracting smaller groups of customers, visiting in twos and threes, but often this period was of more interest to those who attended alone, many of whom were regulars[52]. As a quiet period it also gave me an opportunity to converse more freely with the participants. In contrast to this, Thursday to Saturday was the club's busiest period, drawing in those larger groups of customers and was associated much more with stag[53] and birthday parties.

Although most of the observations were made in the lap-dancing club setting, it was also important to observe dancers outside of this environment in order to gain a better understanding of their lifestyles and the role their work plays in their everyday lives. This was achieved by socialising with dancers outside of their work setting; ordinarily this might be problematic for a researcher who is not already immersed in the environment in which they are to focus their study. Part of this experience was aided by spending six months living with a dancer from *Starlets*, this was incidental and not planned as part of the research process but nonetheless insightful, as it

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[52] The term 'regular' refers to customers who attended Starlets on a regular basis.
[53] This refers to premarital celebrations of the groom and his male friends.

provided me with an opportunity to make important observations outside of the club. The dancer in question was very interested in my research and was keen to be part of the process, for her it was an opportunity to convey to the outside world her and her peers' experience of working in this industry. For some time she played an important part in the research process, almost as another set of ears and eyes, and by feeding back information she thought might be of use to my research.

Keeping a Field Diary:

Keeping a field diary enabled me to record what was happening in the field whilst conducting the participant observation; this involved making notes which included, descriptions of settings, various conversations and non-verbal behaviour. In relation to the setting of the lap-dancing club in which observations were made, maps were drawn of the club layout, making note of where various locations such as the changing room, main floor, dance reception and managers' office are situated. Although this is something I could recall and write about, it has been useful to refer back to a diagram (see Chapter Four). Beyond descriptions of spaces and events that had taken place in the field, it was also necessary to record feelings and personal impressions. In relation to this Lofland (2004) suggests, "The fieldnotes are not only for recording the setting; they are for 'recording' the observer as well." (p. 234).

The advantage of keeping a field diary was that I was able to revisit my observations at a later time without having to rely on memory alone. Writing about my observations and experiences helped imprint them on my mind, something that would aid further analysis at a later stage. In relation to this, it became automatic that after recording data I would spend time trying to make sense of what I had written about. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2004) suggest, it is important to regularly reflect and review fieldnotes; throughout the time I spent in the field I would re-read entries, something I found very useful. Firstly, I was able to see how effectively I was recording observations and if I needed to be more elaborate in my write-up. Secondly, this was a useful way of filling any gaps, for example, reading over my diary entries led me to remember events, which I had forgotten to record. Finally, it greatly helped with the on-going analysis process, something that is discussed in more detail later on in this chapter.

The fieldnotes I produced varied and were in accordance with what Burgess (1991) calls *methodological* and *substantive* fieldnotes. *Substantive* fieldnotes consist of a continuous record of the situations, events and conversations in which the researcher participates, whereas *methodological* notes consist of personal reflections on activities in the field. These were not produced separately, as I often combined the two, as the example taken from my fieldnotes demonstrates below:

…At the beginning of the evening I was surprised to see Sam had returned to work as a dancer at Starlets. Sam had worked at Starlets when the club first opened. She was one of the first dancers here. I was curious to discover what prompted her return and how she felt about the experience. Sam explained: "You know what it's like, something always brings you back. I moved back up here and needed to make a bit of cash. I did miss it though." I asked her what it was like being back after spending time away, she replied: "It's weird but not (weird). I feel like I've come full circle. It's (Starlets) changed so much. The dancing has really changed." We both agreed that there had been changes. Sam suggested that there were fewer customers, less money to be made and higher commission. <u>Note to self</u>: It's interesting how she commented on coming 'full circle'. There is something cyclical about a dancer's career; I'm starting to really think 'once a dancer always a dancer'! But why? It can't really be the money, after all, as many dancers have said, the money isn't particularly good any more…" **(Fieldnotes: June 2005)**

The data generated from participant observation was recorded using both a typed (on a PC) and hand written field diary. The typed diary contained more comprehensive accounts, whereas the hand written format was used to record less detailed observations. Having a hand written diary enabled me to quickly jot down and record ideas; this would not have been possible if I had only used the typed format. It is suggested that quickly jotting down ideas is very effective and important:

"A single word, even one merely descriptive of the dress of a person, or a particular word uttered by someone is enough to "trip off" a string of images that afford substantial reconstruction of the observed scene" (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973, p.95).

It was important to record the date and place, where possible, of the observations made; this served several purposes. Firstly, on a very practical level, by knowing where and approximately when observations were made, it would help put behaviours, conversations and events into some kind of context. Secondly, it would enable me to see if there was a significant relationship between an event and period. For example, it was possible to determine the frequency of different customer types on different days. In relation to this, I identified that Saturdays attracted more stag parties than any other night. I could also identify the shifts and even what time of year dancers were more inclined to work, and then attempt to deduce the reason for this. Finally, it enabled me to keep track of how I was recording data over time. In relation to this, it allowed me to see if there were any significant gaps in my diary accounts during any particular period.

The majority of the time it was not possible to make fieldnotes whilst in the field, although occasionally if a pen and scrap of paper was available I would make a few notes; home was often the most convenient place to record data. This is particularly common for covert researchers; for example it would have been impossible for Humphreys (1970) to make fieldnotes whilst acting as a 'watchqueen' in public lavatories in order to observe the casual sexual behaviour of gay men. As I discovered, the difficulties associated with note-taking is not limited to covert research; even when using overt observational methods the opportunity to make notes is not always available. It did concern me that writing fieldnotes at home might cause me to forget important data, particularly on a night when several interesting observations were made. I also feared that smaller but significant observations were at risk of being forgotten. However, it is impossible to record or even use all of the data generated in the field. The consolation was that over time significant behaviours would reoccur and would eventually be remembered and recorded. Although fieldnotes played an important role, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2004) argue, the researcher should not rely on fieldnotes alone:

> "The ethnographer acquires a great deal more tacit knowledge than is ever contained in the written record…One should not become totally wedded to the fieldnotes, as if they were the sum total of available information." (p. 185).

Experiencing Participant Observation: An Emotional and Intellectual Journey:

On a personal level, recording the behaviour of the participants was a strange experience for me, having worked alongside some of them for such a long period before embarking on my fieldwork. After all, I not only knew the dancers at *Starlets* in a professional capacity, but had also made friends with some of them. My decision to engage myself as a researcher in this familiar field was not made lightly as there were two main factors making me apprehensive.

Firstly, I found myself struggling with the ethical implications of involving people in the research with whom I had developed friendships. I was concerned that not only could I damage my relationships by presenting the dancers' stories in a way that caused their disapproval, but more significantly, that I was somehow exposing people with whom I had built trust. However, after much contemplation I concluded that as long as I was open with participants, as far as possible; anonymise them; and that I aimed to provide accurate and honest accounts, there should not be any reason for concern. Besides, research can never be conducted under completely ideal circumstances (Norris, 1993).

The second issue I was anxious about concerned my ability to step back and see beyond the dancers I had come to know and understand, in order to develop a deeper understanding of the culture. However, I soon realised that having established relationships with the different participants would be advantageous in understanding the best way to get closer to them. Thus helping me begin to develop a new understanding of the dancers at *Starlets*.

It is often said that ethnographic research is a 'messy business', which is both unpredictable and chaotic (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2004; Pearson, 1993). It was not until I was personally observing in the field that I realised exactly how complicated and 'messy' this type of research truly is. When I initially embarked on my fieldwork I was instantly confronted with the big question of where to start. From the onset I did not enter the field with a clear set of ideas about what I was looking for, other than to gain understanding of lap-dancing club culture through the meaning/s dancers attach to it, instead I allowed the data I generated to guide me. For such a long period this had been my place of work, where I socialized and to some extent it had helped form part of my identity. Before I had got to grips with

being a researcher, it was difficult to focus and because of this I was not certain what I should be recording. Initially I was drawn to the more dramatic events, rather than mundane everyday goings on. When one is both a member of and immersed in a social setting for a long period, the small things which are significant to those on the outside, lose meaning to the insider and regular events are easily taken-for-granted (Becker and Faulkner, 2008).

I was of course aware of the complex nature of lap-dancing and the sociological interest it arouses; after all, it is in part this which motivated me to conduct the research. However, working as a dancer is completely different from exploring the lap-dancing phenomenon as a researcher. I was no longer just a dancer, I now had to think like a researcher, something I found difficult to grasp. It is often the dangers of going 'native' in the field (Junker, 1960, Pearson, 1993) rather than the dangers of already being 'native' which are debated. Although I was able and willing to enter my social environment with new motives and concerns as a researcher, it would be impossible to have unwritten my past and my identity as a dancer: I would always be a 'native'.

In a similar way, after spending time as a dancer and then researching the industry, Rambo-Ronai (1992) articulates the difficulty of identifying the researcher from the dancer whilst involved in participant observation; she even goes as far as to argue that her identity was 'fracturing' during her fieldwork, suggesting that there is something almost schizophrenic about being in this position. In relation to this, it was important for me to be able to use the roles of researcher and dancer alongside each other. It was about learning to modify the dancer rather than suppressing her, therefore still ensuring natural interaction but having the ability to carefully observe and analysis my surroundings. It was necessary to be introspective about the experience, through self-analysis and discussions with others outside of the lap-dancing club; a similar approach was used by Rambo-Ronai (1992). As part of this process she found it useful to question the way in which she was conducting observations throughout her research and to take critical feedback from fellow academics not directly involved with her work. In relation to my own research, a significant revelation was made when visiting the research setting with one of my peers, following which we discussed my PhD in length. This discussion changed my focus helping me think about my research setting differently, leading me to recognise

phenomena I had taken-for-granted as a dancer. It was useful to get somebody else's perspective on the setting I was observing. After becoming comfortable with my role as researcher in the field I moved on from being overly selective to recording and internalising as much as possible, however insignificant it might have appeared to be at the time.

However, despite gaining some kind of balance between the dancer and the researcher parts of me, a struggle between the two was still occasionally apparent and inevitable. At times it was easy to forget why I was in the field and revert back to being a 'dancer'; this is something I have written about in my fieldnotes:

> *…I found myself slipping back into 'dancer mode' and ended up having a couple, too many, glasses of wine this afternoon. A customer offered me the drinks, I was feeling pretty low after a stage show; I'm not sure if it was paranoia but I thought a group of stags[54] were being critical of my performance. I guess this is what led me to accept an offer of alcohol. Thinking back I should have acted as a researcher and NOT a dancer, but I'm starting to find it increasingly hard not to. I'm starting to feel more like a dancer than a researcher and forgetting why I'm here! I need to take a few steps back and take a bit more control over the situation…(Fieldnotes: June 2005)*

This of course, not only reflects problems with having this duel identity of dancer/researcher, but also suggests the problems associated with being an established 'native' in the field of study. Conducting participant observation has been an emotional roller-coaster. Even in the early stages of the research process it became apparent that emotions are a powerful force in the field, this is something acknowledged by Blackman (2007); I was not only aware of my own feelings but those of the participants. Ethnographers have discussed the role played by the researcher's emotions during the research process, and relate this to the fact that an ethnographic approach involves working closely alongside participants (Barton, 2006; Kleinman, 1991; Rambo-Ronai, 1992). It is impossible and unproductive for the researcher to emotionally disconnect; and it is argued that: "…social and emotional involvement in the research setting constitutes an important source of data." (Punch,

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[54] Members of a stag party.

1986, p.13). The truth of this statement was made apparent after spending time in the field. Emotions can be used positively to help empathise with participants, and therefore enable the researcher to develop an understanding of the world in which participants live (Kleinman, 1991). Further to this, some emotional involvement can help establish rapport, create respect between the observer and the observed and lead to participants acting with more conviction (Blackman, 2007).

Throughout my fieldwork I experienced a mixture of negative and positive emotions from anger to excitement; inevitably it was my negative feelings that caused problems and that I struggled to resolve. As a dancer, my empathy and sympathy was mostly with the dancers. Customers and managers in particular were not considered part of the dancer circle and, the dancers, including myself, rarely empathised with them to the same extent dancers would with each other. Working as a dancer prior to becoming the researcher I had been caught up in the 'them and us' dancer motto. This specifically relates to the dancers' feelings towards management, and is something emphasised by Alicia, one of the dancers who participated in my research: *"They (managers) don't understand what we have to go through coz [sic] they don't have to do what we do, so why should they expect us to give a shit about them"* **(Fieldnotes: September 2004)**.

However, there were also dancers with whom I had never truly bonded due to personal differences, and as a result caused me some level of frustration. To my advantage, as a dancer I had rarely been confrontational, often dealing with difficult situations by avoiding the source of my frustration. However this posed another problem, as a researcher I could no longer avoid situations, it would have been unproductive; instead it was important to engage with and make sense of these situations. Guidance can be taken from Hobbs (1989), who describes similar emotional conflicts whilst in the field; his solution: "I kept quiet, let them talk, and later noted their remarks and behaviour." (p.11). Other difficulties arose during informal conversations with participants, when I became aware of my internal dialogue. For example, I would sometimes find myself thinking: *No, you're wrong, I don't agree with what you said* or *I'm not sure if I really like you* or *I'm not enjoying this, I want to go home.* I discovered that these feelings would change and fluctuate as they would during any other conversation I might have outside of the research environment. I sometimes found that my internal dialogue would direct my conversations with

participants and instead of allowing participants to freely express themselves, at times, I felt that I might have influenced the outcome of our conversations without even being aware of it. In response I initially attempted to control my internal dialogue as I felt the interests of my research would be compromised, but I soon realised that instead of restricting it, I could in fact use it. There were a number of ways in which I found my internal dialogue useful. Firstly, it has made me more aware of the limitations of research and of the difficulty of emotional disengagement and therefore the impossibility of impartiality. Secondly, by questioning what motivated my feelings, I was aided in the analysis process, leading me to ask further questions about the environment I was studying. Overall it has improved my skills as an ethnographer, teaching me that the experience is not just about listening and recording, but about acknowledging data in an emotional as well as intellectual manner, in order to prevent the participants' stories from being presented in an artificial way; thus giving them an edge of reality.

Interviewing the dancers:

Despite having recorded a number of informal conversations in my fieldnotes, interviews were carried out with dancers to supplement the data already generated and were conducted following the time spent observing participants in *Starlets*. Interviews proved a useful way of understanding the dancers' individual stories and were particularly beneficial in helping create Karen's Story by bringing her life, so far, into focus. In addition, rather than being used as a way to generate new data, these interviews were seen more as a way of backing up and emphasising the findings which had emerged from my field work as a participant observer. It is therefore important to point out that the use of interviews was by no means the basis for this study, as the body of data was generated from participant observation.

Despite this, interviews did give the dancers an opportunity *outside* of their working environment to talk candidly about their own experiences without distractions. For example, Sanders (2005) describes how interviewing participants *in* their work place can be disruptive, and in the case of her research which was conducted in a female massage parlour, this meant one interview would sometimes be conducted over a number of days. The drawback of interviewing in this way is that it can cause a lack of continuity and disrupt the natural rhythm of the interview. By interviewing dancers

outside of their working hours and in a more neutral environment this could be avoided.

Working as a dancer while conducting participant observation, a great deal of time was spent having conversations with customers. Although there was an opportunity to interview customers and non-dancing staff members, I was content that the data I had generated concerning them provided me with what I needed for this piece of research. Interviewing customers had two main drawbacks; firstly, arranging interviews would have been problematic, particularly for those who did not want to discuss the fact that they attended lap-dancing clubs; secondly, as a known dancer, customers might have been affected by my role, not taking the interviews seriously. This is an issue Frank (2003) acknowledged when conducting her research about strip club customers in the U.S.

Similarly, interviewing staff members, other than dancers, would also have had its drawbacks. Firstly, too much involvement from management might have caused them to re-think the nature of my research, something that might have had negative repercussions and led me to terminate my project prematurely. Secondly, particularly with regard to managers, giving an honest account of their own experiences would not necessarily be in their interests, as would the promotion of the company for whom they work.

In addition, I was concerned that interviewing customers and non-dancing staff members might complicate the research process and provide me with an excess of unnecessary data. After all, my research concern was with the dancers and their perceptions and understanding of the career they had chosen; I did not want to deviate from this.

In total, eight in-depth unstructured interviews were conducted with six different dancers: Karen, Linda, Lisa, Ruby, Stacey and Jan[55]. Two of the eight interviews conducted were follow-up interviews conducted with Karen. All of the interviews took place over a six-month period, with each interview of between one and two hours duration. All were recorded and conducted in a number of locations agreed or suggested by the participants, mainly taking place in their home or mine. Concerns

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[55] The names of all participants involved in this ethnography have been anonymised.

about interviewing in personal spaces, such as dancers' homes or mine, did not occur, as there was a mutual trust between participants and myself, which had been established before and during the observations were conducted in their working environment. The feeling of trust and informality was important to ensure that participants felt comfortable enough to be themselves in front of me and provide me with a glimpse into their personal lives. The importance of trust between participant and interviewer is articulated by Jones (2004):

"If we as researchers want to obtain good data it would be better that the persons we are interviewing trust us enough to believe that we will not use the data against them, or that we will not regard their opinions as foolish; that they are not trying very hard to please…" (p.259)

The nature of these interviews involved asking participants to give an account of their experiences whilst working as dancers, during which I made notes and formulated questions based on the information they gave me. All of the participants initially talked about how they started dancing, with the content of each interview uniquely reflecting the opinions, attitudes and experiences of the dancer in question. The use of unstructured interviews, in particular, was favoured for a number of reasons. Firstly, it enabled the dancers to give their own accounts, therefore providing them with a means to channel their own voice, without me, as the interviewer, directing the nature of conversation. As Gerson and Horowitz (2002) suggest, "…the telling of a life…allows interviewees to craft their own narrative around their own concerns, experience and perspectives." (p. 232). Secondly, the nature of the interview was far more natural, enabling the participant and myself to engage in a more informal experience that would inevitably generate meaningful and more truthful data. Finally, using unstructured interviews was far more in synch with the ethnographic nature of the research I was conducting, and is therefore often used as part of the process (Fielding, 1993).

All interviewees were advised about confidentiality and anonymity before the interviews commenced. Again I experienced the same complacency from dancers I had when informing them about my observational work; one participant Linda even claimed: *"I'm not bothered. I don't mind if people know who I am and what I do."* In this statement there was a sense of a desire for recognition, as a way of saying: I am

proud to be a dancer, I am not ashamed to take my clothes off for a living. Despite my admiration for this attitude, I explained that it was in her best interests that her identity remained anonymous.

Prior to conducting the interviews, I had felt confident that I would be able to easily sit back and allow participants to freely express themselves without my intervention. After spending a considerable length of time developing this skill, whilst observing in the field, I did not expect to take on a dominant role during interviews. However, during the first interview, in the latter part of which I asked questions, I found that I had to be increasingly careful in the wording of these. My opinions were becoming apparent in the questions I was asking, as they had when I initially conducted my fieldwork. For example, I might ask: *Did you mean…?*; instead of: *What did you mean by that?* It was then that I began to appreciate how difficult interviewing actually was. I learned that the only way to improve my skills as an interviewer was through practice and self-analysis; the same way in which I had dealt with similar problems confronted whilst observing in the field.

As the interviews proceeded, as one issue was addressed another occurred to me. For example, as I had found when conducting participant observation, I was often confronted with negative thoughts about what was being told to me in the interview by the participant. In response, I once again took an introspective approach, questioning the reasons behind my feelings. Following each interview I spent some time listening to the recordings in order to monitor my own performance as the interviewer and make improvements where necessary and possible. In addition I made notes and formatted questions around the central themes that emerged from the interview data for follow-up interviews were they to take place.   When the interviews were completed, I transcribed each in turn and produced a typed script of the interview for analysis.

The Case Study:

Although I had access to data from a fairly large number of participants, I thought it would be useful to focus in on one dancer, using her story as a case study, selecting one that would stand in as a narrative, and represent other dancers' general experiences working in the lap-dancing club. Selecting the ideal participant was not without its problems for a number of reasons. Firstly, I had to find an individual who

was willing to allow me to open up their life story as a dancer to close scrutiny. Secondly, it was important that the participant could reliably be involved in something that could be a long process. Finally, it was necessary that the dancer in question had spent long enough working in the industry and was therefore a well established member, having a meaningful experience of lap-dancing club culture.

Eventually, after discussing possibilities with a number of participants, one dancer was happy to be involved in the process. The participant who allowed me to use her as a case study, Karen, was an ideal candidate as she had worked as a dancer for over a decade and had returned to the industry after retiring on more than one occasion. From a research perspective, in order to gain access to Karen's life story, I not only conducted two unstructured interviews with her, but spent time observing her outside of her work setting. Previous to this I had worked with Karen for a number of years and it was perhaps for this reason that I was both excited yet apprehensive about involving her in this research.

Karen was initially reluctant about being involved with my research, claiming that the prospect of exposing personal details of her life was daunting. She explained that it might make her rethink her life and for her this was naturally anxiety-provoking. There are of course traditional arguments suggesting that respondents are at the mercy of the researcher and therefore particularly vulnerable (Gubrium and Holstein, 2000); the responsibility therefore rests with the researcher not only to protect the participants' rights but to present their stories a way in which they would want them to be told. Despite early reservations Karen agreed to tell her story and was eventually content to be the focus of a case study. Karen's story, in many ways, is representative of a number of the lap-dancers I have observed and interviewed; her career cycle is reflective of one that has come full circle.

Leaving the Field:

It is always difficult for ethnographers to know when it is time to conclude a study and stop collecting data as a participant observer. There is no specified length of time an ethnographer should remain in the field; this is because every research experience is unique, making the end difficult to predict (Taylor, 1991). When my fieldwork commenced I did not expect to spend as much time observing participants as I did; this was due to the fact that I was not aware of how much of my surroundings, in

Starlets, I had taken-for-granted. When my researcher eyes were opened, I became aware that this was probably going to be a lengthy process. There were, however, general factors influencing the time I spent observing in the field. Firstly, I was constrained by the time limits imposed by my PhD; realistically I had three to four years to complete the whole project due to ESRC policy. Secondly, I was aware that the observational methods I was using would eventually prove to be of no further use; it was therefore important to gauge when this might happen. I realised the moment had arrived when I had generated enough data from the use of this method and my findings became overly repetitive. In relation to this Taylor (1991) contends, "If you stay in the field long enough, you will see the same themes emerge again and again in every set of field notes…" (p.242). Finally, observing as a participant can be emotionally as well as physically draining, it was therefore important not to stay in the field without interest and focus, after all this would only prevent me from generating meaningful data.

Stebbins (1991) suggests that because of secondary involvement the researcher never truly leaves the field. Although there is a physical absence, emotionally and psychologically it is difficult and sometimes impossible to let go and say goodbye (Roadburg, 1980). The emotional impact on the researcher of leaving the field has been discussed to some extent by a number of ethnographers (Gallmeier, 1991; Roadburg, 1980; Stebbins, 1991; Taylor, 1991). My involvement with the social setting was meaningful from the onset of my fieldwork, as I had already been part of the culture prior to becoming the researcher. This inevitably meant that leaving the field was a deeply emotional experience for me on a number of levels as I was not just leaving the field as a researcher but as a dancer; a job I had internalised as part of my identity. However, I knew that I would more than likely return to the field, briefly, in a research or social capacity, but not as a dancer.

Staying in touch with research participants following the participant observation was important to me for two important reasons. Firstly, to make it easier to contact participants about being interviewed, although it was intended that interviews would not be held in the lap-dancing club; secondly, to inform participants about the development of my research. It is important for the researcher to ensure that there is enough flexibility in field relations to enable their return (Gallmeier, 1991; Kaplan, 1991). However unlike other researchers I did not have to carefully devise a plan to

stay in touch and re-enter the research setting; my position and friendships in the field helped guarantee access in re-entering.

Since completing my participant observation and interviews, I continued to return to *Starlets*. Although it was primarily in a social capacity, visiting with a friend as a customer, it was nonetheless useful from a research perspective. I visited more than once, a number of months after completing my participant observation and the subsequent interviews, so was able to see everything from a new perspective. It actually helped me make better sense of the observations I had previously made, by talking to the dancers again, and re-observing my surroundings. When I was immersed in the field and during the time I was conducting interviews it was sometimes difficult to see the bigger picture; I sometimes felt unsure about my progress and whether I was really getting anywhere with the data I recorded.

Ethical Considerations

Ethnographic research arouses debates about ethical conduct (Fountain, 1993; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2004; Lauder, 2003; Norris, 1993; Punch, 1983; Van Den Hoonaard, 2003), particularly with regard to the use of participant observation. As Lauder (2003) contends: "…[it] is fraught with methodological and ethical challenges…" (p. 186). Ethical concerns around informed consent, privacy, harm, exploitation and the implications for future research are those, which bring the validity of this particular methodology into question (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2004). Norris (1993) has argued that observational research will inevitably lead to ethical dilemmas; it is therefore necessary to carefully resolve potential issues. In response to this, Norris (1993) suggests that there are three approaches articulating the divided opinions about the use and validity of ethical codes of conduct.

Firstly, the *legalistic*, which maintains that researchers should adhere to a professional code of conduct, this means that informed consent, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality and open, non-deceitful forms of research are highly respected. The BSA guidelines for ethical conduct are somewhat reflective of this type of *legalistic* framework. Secondly, the a*ntinomian* is at the other extreme and advocates that the pursuit of knowledge comes before any ethical codes and restrictions. A famous example of this school of thinking can be identified in the way in which Humphrey (1970) approached his fieldwork around homosexuality. He covertly observed

homosexual casual sexual behaviour in public toilets and later questioned those involved in their homes under the guise of a different project, tracing participants through their licence plate numbers. Thirdly, the s*ituational* is a balanced approach between the *legalistic* and *antinomian*, and is under the premise that every research situation is different. The idea is that when conducting research it is impossible to be prescriptive about ethical measures, however it is nonetheless important to follow them as far as possible. The *situational* suits ethnographic research as it acknowledges the complex nature of using this method. It is the thinking behind the *situational* approach that has informed the ethical decisions I have made throughout my research. In a similar way to other ethnographers I was confronted with a number of ethical dilemmas whilst conducting my fieldwork, particularly those around informed consent, although there were other concerns around privacy, harm and exploitation.

It is expected that research participants should be informed about the nature of the research in an accurate way and therefore be in a position to give their consent before any study is conducted (BSA, 2007). Failure to inform participants, it is argued, inevitably leads to deceiving the participants in question (BSA, 2007). Problems with informed consent are traditionally associated with covert ethnographic research; it is for this very reason that overt methods were favoured. Despite opting to conduct overt participant observation, in this case I was still confronted with some problems around the issue of informed consent. As Weppner (1977) suggests, informed consent even when conducting overt research is not without its problems. He even goes as far to suggest that to some degree because of this, overt researchers will always be forced to conduct a proportion of their observations covertly.

It had always been my intention to inform all of the main participants (dancers) about my research, however I quickly realised that it would be difficult if not impossible to inform customers about my project. I did not anticipate having the same difficulties informing dancers and other staff members; this was always going to be easier as I had regular access to these participants. However, with the exception of regulars, customers frequently changed, I therefore only had limited access to *Starlets'* clientele and as a result was not able to inform every customer entering the club. Despite ethical codes (BSA, 2007) frowning upon not informing customers,

71

unfortunately some level of deception when conducting this research could not be completely avoided. However, as Punch (1986) argues "…some measure of deception is acceptable in some areas where the benefits of knowledge outweigh the harms and where the harms have been minimized by following convention on confidentiality and identity." (p.41).

Safeguarding the privacy of the dancers, and indeed the other participants, was an important concern during my fieldwork. Certain questions, common when conducting participant observation (Norris, 1993), aroused concern about the extent to which I could and would ensure the participants' privacy. As information was recorded I wondered if it was appropriate to use all the data I considered significant. In relation to this I was aware that participants valued their actions and interactions differently from me. For example, while some of the data recorded might not be of any particular importance to me, to the participant in question it could be regarded as deeply personal and extremely sensitive. Although the participants had agreed to be observed and were aware that their interactions and behaviours were going to be written about, I wondered how selective they wanted me to be. With this in mind, the problem which confronted me was in not knowing when I was actually breaching a participant's privacy. The solution was, where practically possible, to inform participants, throughout the research process about the behaviours and interactions which were of particular interest and that would be recorded. By doing this I was able to gauge, to some extent, if I was crossing any privacy boundaries with the data generated and that I hoped to use.

In relation to harm and exploitation, I was concerned that because the lap-dancing club is host to a number of socially unacceptable and sometimes illegal activities, such as drug-taking, I had to be careful not to place myself, or any of the participants, in a vulnerable position. By exposing certain activities this could cause problems for participants in a number of ways, affecting their relationships with others, or could even put their place of work in jeopardy. In addition to this, certain data could potentially place some of the participants in physical danger with others.

The solution to this dilemma was two-fold. Firstly, it was important to create a means of monitoring the data I was generating and planning to use. This simply involved frequently asking the question: will this information compromise the safety or cause

harm (physical, psychological or emotional) to those involved? Of course this is not without its problems, but nonetheless a useful way of guiding my decisions about data selection. Secondly, it was necessary to protect the identity of participants by changing certain identifiable features including names. It is however impossible to devise an ethically sound piece of research, especially where ethnography is concerned; as Brofenbrenner (1952) argues *"The only safe way to avoid violating principles of professional ethics is to refrain from doing social research altogether."* (p.453).

Data Analysis: Making Sense of it all

The process of analysing the data generated from my fieldnotes and the interviews I conducted was complex. It is recognised that the task of analysis is demanding because of the mass of data ethnographic research can produce (Fielding, 1993). Initially, when recording my fieldnotes, I attempted to analyse and process the data as I made diary entries, looking for reoccurring themes and generally trying to understand the meaning behind the data being generated.

Despite my initial methodical approach I soon found it difficult to dedicate myself to this as an ongoing process. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2004) suggest it is not always possible to systematically analyse data as it is being produced:

> "Fieldwork is a very demanding activity, and the processing of data is equally time-consuming. As a result, engaging in sustained data analysis alongside data collection is often very difficult." (p. 206).

Although I continued to revisit my fieldnotes and make some kind of sense of what I had written, I found it easier to approach analysis in two stages.

The first stage was a reflexive and interpretive process, which involved consulting my fieldnotes. This was important as it enabled me to understand the motives behind my observations and think about why I had selected certain activities, behaviours and interactions to write about in my field diary. From this I could monitor how effectively I was observing and if I was writing from a particular set of judgements. As previously suggested in this chapter the experience of writing and re-reading also helped me improve the way in which I wrote about my experiences in the field. The actual

analytical process involved simply reading through my notes, both typed and hand written formats, as often as possible. As I was doing this I would sometimes add notes, commenting on what I had written, as the example below demonstrates:

> *…Yet again the start of this shift was fairly quiet. A few regulars (they were attending almost 2 years ago on the same day) were discussing how quiet the club was: "I don't see how they're going to be able to keep it open if it stays like this" one of them told me. The two regulars in question were very different and seemed like an unlikely duo. One was quite young and seems like a reasonably average type of customer; the other however, displays characteristics of being a bit of a loner…* <u>Comments:</u> *Didn't go into enough detail about the customers. As they were long-term regulars I could have asked them about how the club closing might affect them.* **(Fieldnotes: Starlets, July 2004)**

However this stage of analysis was not always as regimented, after all such a process "…proceeds on an unconscious level." (Foote Whyte, 1943, p. 280). Throughout the research process this form of analysis would become automatic, without always having to make a conscious effort. In many ways this first stage was part of the observation process; it was not until the second stage that a more conscious level of analysis was embarked upon.

The second stage also included the analysis of interview transcripts and was far more structured and involved the identification of thematic patterns. The initial stage had aided this final process of analysis by having made me aware of the emergence of some of the core patterns. However, it was not until the final analysis in this second phase that I was really able to identify central themes; this was achieved in two stages. Firstly, I was interested in looking for reoccurring behaviours, which might then suggest the presence of a particular theme. Already being familiar with my fieldnotes, I was aware of reoccurring behaviours so was able to start highlighting the relevant areas using a colour code, where a colour referred to a particular trend. For example, drug-taking behaviour in the lap-dancing club was something I regularly observed and made note of as a reoccurring pattern, and therefore during this stage of analysis I highlighted any reference made to it. I was able to use this approach for both typed and hand written diaries as well as interview transcripts. After following

the same process for different patterns of behaviour I was then able to group certain trends together as part of a theme. Deciding on the themes involved 'reading between the lines'; to decipher the meaning behind the behaviour it was important to gauge its motivation from the way in which it was talked about and what role it played in the participants' lives. In particular, the taking of drugs, suggested an overwhelming link between it and risk-taking, it was on this basis that 'risk-taking' has been identified as a major theme. Eventually other themes were identified in this way.

Analysing the data manually rather than employing a computerised software package, proved to be time consuming, but nonetheless worked effectively. Firstly, as I was reading through my data very closely it was easy to internalise my findings. This helped me have a clearer understanding of how I would approach writing up the data at a later stage. Secondly, I was using a method I felt confident with and therefore did not have to spend time learning a new process that may not have brought me as close to understanding my data. Finally, data packages by their technical nature are unable to filter data in a social context.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has drawn particular attention to my positionality; and how my insider role has enabled me to gain access, understand participants and the environment in which they work, and more generally aid the generation of meaningful data. As an insider I was not only a member of a wider community of lap-dancers, but more specifically at *Starlets*, having already established myself as 'one of the girls' before I had even planned let alone executed my research. My relationship with the dancers and space in which I conducted this ethnography is perhaps closer than that of other insiders who have researched their own culture but not necessarily previously known the participants or the *specific* setting in which the study has been conducted. Despite obvious advantages, there are inevitably problems with being a 'native' researcher (Becker and Faulkner, 2007). The focus has more often been on the dangers of going 'native' rather than on the problems associated with being a 'native' researcher. In relation to this, it has been argued that my dual role as dancer-researcher caused a fractured identity; leading to an emotional and intellectual conflict between Rachela the 'researcher' and Rachela the 'dancer'. Although this was never going to be resolved absolutely, I was able to manage these identities, and rather than ignore the inner conflict, learn from it. Another significant issue

facing the 'native' researcher relates to the way in which phenomena is selected, observed and conceptualised. In this chapter I have suggested that my familiarity with the setting and participants led me to initially take some of my surroundings for granted, not realising their importance. This was partly reconciled by recognising the value in recording as much as possible, despite my initial impressions of the phenomena being observed. However, it was only after spending time in the field, adapting to my researcher identity, and re-learning my surroundings in this new role that I began to make better sense of taken-for-granted phenomena. What this chapter suggests then, is that as well as offering the anticipated advantages, the 'native' researcher is still confronted with resolvable problems associated with having a dual role.

Chapter Four

Starlets: Setting the Scene

Introduction

This is the first of four consecutive chapters in which the research findings generated from this ethnography will be discussed. These four data chapters explore the different key findings that have emerged from the time spent in the field; together they provide analytical insight into the career of the dancers at *Starlets*, from their initial entry, to their eventual exit.

This chapter focuses on the actual setting in which this ethnography took place: *Starlets,* and will set the scene for the club by exploring the various spaces used by the dancers and other participants. Understanding the spaces in which the dancers work and sometimes socialise, helps convey a more 'located' picture of lap-dancing club culture by placing the dancers' interactions into the context of the setting. The significant role of space in a cultural and social analysis is something emphasised by several authors (Massey, 1995; 1998; Nayak, 2003). Part of setting the scene for this ethnography involves describing some of the central areas in *Starlets* that are meaningful to the dancers, such as the *changing room*, *manager's office*, *main floor, dance reception and main stage*; these areas are represented pictorially in Figure 1 and Figure 2 (pages 83 and 84). Further to this, the various occupational roles within the club will also be discussed. An awareness of these different roles is important in order to make sense of some of the different behaviours and interactions taking place in the club.

The Setting: The Heart of the Action

> *…I went into Starlets, with Sarah, a friend of mine who had never been in a lap-dancing club before. She was surprised by how it looked inside, having expected somewhere seedy, full of naked women being mauled by customers. Sarah explained to me: "It's really different. It just seems so sexy…" This reaction is not unique, other customers and personal friends who visited Starlets for the first time had made similar remarks. Graham, for example, a customer, who came to Starlets as part of a stag party, described how it had exceeded his expectations: "(I) Thought it was going to be pretty rough in here. But I'm pleasantly surprised."…(Field Notes: October 2004)*

There are certainly preconceptions about *Starlets*, as suggested in the opening extract. Most of these ideas are based on conjecture from various public sources[56]. It is not uncommon for those environments, like lap-dancing clubs, which are surrounded by secrecy and mystery, to be assessed largely on the grounds of speculation. The setting of *Starlets* is no exception; as a lap-dancing club the 'true' knowledge of this space is limited to its staff and clientele. Understanding their intimate knowledge of this space is therefore an important aspect of this ethnography and something the following sections will attempt to develop. Ironically, other research in this area has often neglected to discuss the physical setting of the lap-dancing club in any detail despite its significance for social interaction, with the exception of Liepe-Levinson (2002) who includes discussions about location and use of décor in lap-dancing clubs.

The location of *Starlets*, for example, is indicative of its marginalized role in the night time economy of the city, as will be discussed below. In relation to the interior areas, these play host to a number of interactions between the various participants who are, in one way or another, part of the lap-dancing club setting. The way in which participants interact with, and make use of these areas, denotes the different meanings attached to the spaces in question. Beyond this, the décor also plays an important role: for instance in the creation of an ambience most likely to make an impact on the participants who use these spaces. The development of a better understanding of the setting will firstly, help identify the significance the different spaces in the club hold for the dancers; secondly, make sense of how the setting might influence and encourage certain behaviours, for example how the décor on the main floor might help arouse feelings of sensuality. And finally, as the setting of *Starlets* is the backdrop for this ethnography, it will provide the necessary context for the research findings discussed in the following data chapters.

Starlets

Starlets is situated just outside of the city centre, hidden behind tall buildings that frame the city. Located some distance away from pubs, other clubs and bars, *Starlets* seems out of place here on the edge of the city core; it is almost as though it is not meant to be part of the city's thriving night time economy, despite efforts to

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[56] This, in particular, refers to some media and film sources widely available to the public.

commercialise this industry, making it part of the entertainment city (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003). Outside the club, instead of the sounds of people engaged in the city's nightlife, all that can be heard is the drone of traffic from the nearby roads which carry vehicles in and out of the city. At night it is even quieter, with only the occasional rumble of a passing lorry and the hoot of taxi horns. *Starlets* remains hidden and a mystery for those who have not intentionally sought out its location, highlighting its exclusion from the thriving night time economy of the city.

In many ways its locality is also reflective of how it has been received by the community. There is an uneasiness about lap-dancing, and dancers are aware of this; as Princess, a dancer at *Starlets*, conveyed to me: *"I don't tell people what I do. I say I work in a bar, otherwise they just judge you"* **(Field Notes: December, 2003)**. Some of the other dancers at *Starlets*, who are all perhaps, reacting to the negative reception the club has been subjected to since it opened, echo this understanding of a need for secrecy about their occupation. Other research also acknowledges and demonstrates dancers' cognizance of the stigma associated with their job (Barton, 2006; Bell, Sloan and Strickling, 1998; Bradley, 2007; Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998; Lewis, 1998; Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000; Thomas and Harred, 1992). Dancers' denial of their occupation, as reflected by Princess, is something that has been accounted for by Thomas and Harred (1992), who argue that this behaviour is a common response amongst erotic dancers, as a way of managing the prejudice they confront. Stella, a dancer from *Starlets*, talked to me about the protesters who objected, for various reasons, to the opening of the club. Rather than appearing distressed or angry, Stella seemed amused by the actions of the protesters*: "They were all outside with their banners screaming "SLUTS OUT" while we were inside in the warm, drinking champagne"* **(Field Notes: January 2004)**. Bobby, one of the bouncers explained to me how some of the protesters tried to gain entry with cameras and tape recorders: *"Don't know what they thought they'd be getting. But we hoyed them out, daft cows"* **(Field Notes: January 2004)**.

However, not all reactions to *Starlets* have been negative; there are for example, people outside of the industry who seem to celebrate its uniqueness and sexually liberal ethos, imagining it to be a glamorous world filled with celebrities and businessmen making dancers wealthy. Jack, a taxi driver who occasionally drove me to *Starlets* seemed fascinated by the nature of the job: *"I bet the girls are rolling in it. I*

think it's great. I bet you're drinking champagne with footballers every night" **(Field Notes: June 2004)**. Jen, a dancer from *Starlets*, found encouragement from her mother, *"She thinks it's great, she tells all her friends what I do, they're all jealous!"* **(Field Notes: November 2003)**. Both the negative and positive reactions described are an indication of the interest *Starlets* has aroused amongst outsiders. However their understanding of the club, as it will become clear from the research findings discussed in this thesis, hold quite different meanings from those who participate in this enclosed world on a daily basis.

Starlets was once a social club, where locals and members drank, played bingo and may have watched strippers on a Sunday afternoon[57]. The building is old, unattractive and clumsy from the outside; head-on it looks as if it was built from mismatched Lego carelessly slotted together. There are several windows around the building which are blacked out by thick shutters. Above the main entrance is a large fixed sign upon which the name *Starlets* is written in bold silver lettering. Two large glass doors mark the entrance, through which the reception desk is just visible. During opening hours a member of the security team will usually stand guard inside, directly behind the glass doors. The reception is a small area (see Figure 2), where some of the bouncers congregate when they are not on the main floor policing the customers. Scott a taxi driver, who regularly drives some of the dancers, will, during a quiet period in his shift, often stand talking to the head bouncer Gordon, while waiting for potential clients. A receptionist sits behind the desk in the reception area collecting the entrance fees from customers as they come into the club, and answering the telephone for 'busy' managers. When Emma is working in this role she often seems serious and unfriendly, this is perhaps a reflection of the mundane nature of her job, and a reaction to the incessant teasing she encounters from the bouncers. Gordon, in particular would often play practical jokes on Emma, which seemed to provide entertainment for him and his security team on the quieter nights. However, the jovial atmosphere is curiously halted with the arrival of customers.

As soon as a customer enters the reception area it is no longer a playful space; the security team's demeanour changes, they become watchful, their faces sullen. The behaviour and strictly scripted 'welcome' by the bouncers is repeated verbatim as

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[57] It is common, in the North of England for social clubs to play host to 'Sunday strippers'. A stripper's spot usually involves a 6-9 minute striptease performance on a club stage.

customers enter the club. For example, before leaving the reception the customer is clearly told the abridged version of the house rules, *"No propositioning the girls. No touching the girls"*. The protection of the dancers, as indicated by DeMichele and Tewksbury (2005), is one of the main priorities of the bouncers in the lap-dancing club. Propositioning the dancers for any romantic or sexual liaison and making unnecessary physical contact is strictly prohibited in *Starlets*; as far as the bouncers and dancers are concerned these are the most important rules customers must adhere to[58]. A 'look', which signalled an unspoken understanding between customer and bouncer, would follow the verbal warning. Between the lines it read: *"don't mess with our girls, don't mess with our club and we won't mess with you"*. The physical presence of the bouncer alone is an important way of *"…notifying customers that boundaries exist regarding permitted sexual contact…"* (DeMichele and Tewksbury, 2005, p. 549) (for a general discussion of bouncer culture see Hobbs et al (2003)). Gordon disliked the customers at *Starlets* and it was not something he ever attempted to hide or deny, referring to them as *"perverts"* and *"weirdoes"*, scowling at them as they walked past him in the club. This contempt seemed to reinforce the bouncers' power in the lap-dancing club setting, encouraging customers to abide by the rules given to them as they entered.

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[58] This does not extend to managers and bouncers who are free to form romantic and sexual relationships with dancers.

(Figure 1) Starlets Upstairs
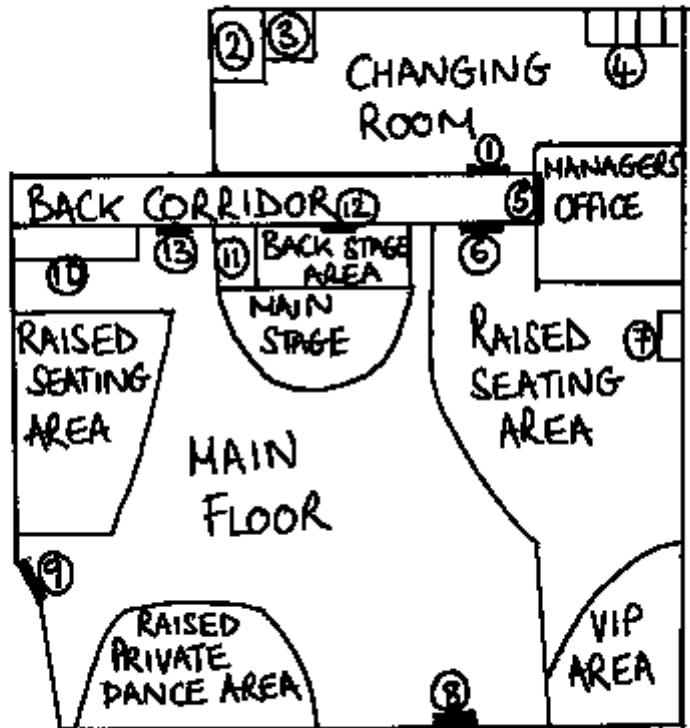
Key

1=changing room entrance   **2**=shower cubicle

3=toilet cubicle   **4**=lockers

5=entrance to managers' office   **6**=staff entrance to main floor

7=dj booth   **8**=customer entrance to main floor

9= customer entrance to main floor   **10**=bar

11=walk-in cupboard   **12**=backstage entrance

13=staff entrance to main floor

(Figure 2) Starlets Downstairs
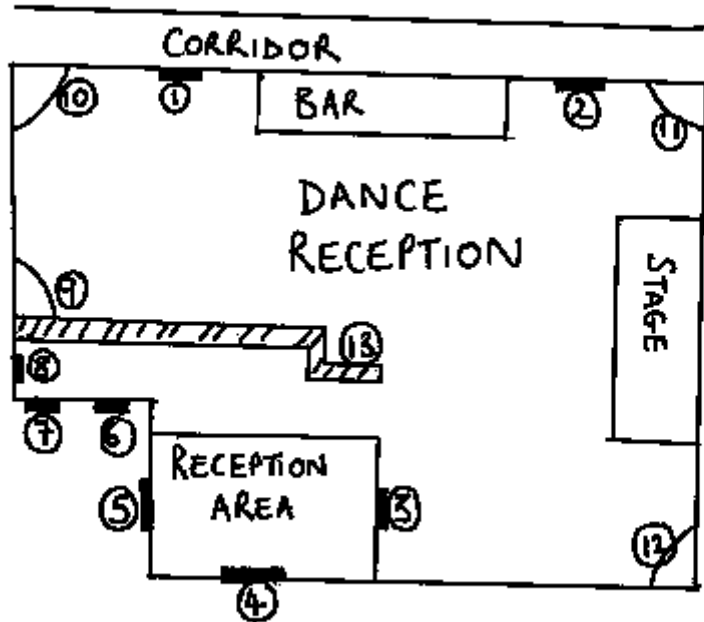
Key

1=staff entrance

2=staff entrance

3=customer entrance to dance reception

4=main entrance to club

5=customer staircase leading to main floor

6=ladies' washroom

7=gents' washroom

8=staircase to main floor

9, 10, 11, 12=small dance platforms

13=wall

The Changing Room:

> *…It's a Tuesday night and despite it not being the busiest shift of the week the changing room is almost full; there is the loud chatter of voices and an incessant hissing spray of canned deodorant as the girls prepare themselves for the main floor. There is an underlying mustiness in the air, soon masked by the aroma of burning hair product from those straightening their hair. Some dancers are sitting in their underwear applying their makeup; some are putting on their costumes; while others just stand around and talk. There is a general ambience of merriment in the changing room, a buzz of excited anticipation reminiscent of that generated by a group of girls preparing themselves for a night out…* ***(Field Notes: December 2003)***

When first entering the changing room (see Figure 1) it seems spacious. The white walls are tiled with large square mirrors bordered with bright lights, the reflections from which provide the illusion of a wide space. Around the walls and beneath the mirrors there is a built in dressing-bench that stretches around most of the room. To the left of the entrance there is a toilet cubicle and separate shower. In opposite corner of the changing room stand two four-storey cage lockers, intended for the dancers' possessions; most are locked and filled with the dancers' personal belongings while others remain open and filled with lost property. Despite the sophisticated West-End theatre design of the changing room, its physical appearance is rather worn and chaotic. The once brilliant white walls are now discoloured by makeup and fake tan; many of the lights around the impressive mirrors no longer work and there is a musty smell of cosmetics, fake-tan and sweat that permeates around the room. The toilet does not flush properly and as a result is often blocked, and the once pristine white plastic toilet seat is speckled with cigarette burns. Dancers' bags are scattered across the changing room floor while their costumes drape the randomly placed stools. Originally from the club's main floor, the stools, themselves, are a mismatch of leopard print and crimson and look in crude contrast to the worn dark-grey carpet sticky from the mix of spilt alcohol and crushed bronzing-powder.

The changing room is the 'home' quarters for the dancers, in the sense that it is a place in which they can relax, away from the customers and managers. It is not just

an area in which dancers prepare themselves physically for their work on the main floor and dance reception, but in a more symbolic way they are able to shed their everyday selves and begin the process of metamorphosing into their dancer persona ready for the customers[59]. As the only area in the club intended for the dancers, they are automatically given ownership of this space. Most staff members, and customers are not permitted into the changing room. Although, managers do have access to this space, they rarely enter without good reason. Dancers take advantage of this, finding refuge in the changing room when attempting to avoid management. For example, at the beginning of a shift, some dancers sneak past the managers' office and into the changing room to postpone paying the club start-up fee[60].

Further to this, as suggested by Barton (2006), it is in the changing room that dancers can develop close and supportive relationships and where they discuss issues concerning managers and customers with one another. For example, following a disagreement with a manager or customer, dancers will use the changing room as a place to freely voice their frustrations. In this way then, the changing room is an area in which dancers feel they can express themselves without restriction, as they are away from the surveillance or interruption of customers or managers; in this way then it also offers an escape from the realities of the club. Further to this, the relaxed nature of the changing room, compounded by its 'lived in' appearance, creates an ambience in which dancers are encouraged to talk intimately with one another about themselves, where comfort and reassurance is provided. For example, when dancers are unhappy or distressed, they will often retire to the changing room to seek comfort from their peers. The sense of ease dancers feel with one another is also manifested in this space in other ways; apparent from the liberal and open conversations that take place:

> **Charley:** *Have you seen my top (pointing to a stain)?*
> **Phoenix:** *What's that?*
> **Charley:** *Spunk[61] (laughs). I was giving Gav a blowjob before I came out and forgot to change my top!*

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[59] This type of emotional preparation is discussed in more detail in chapter 6.
[60] For each shift worked dancers are expected to pay a fee (commission) to work at Starlets. At the start of each shift dancers pay a basic start-up-fee; this will be topped up at the end of the night based on how many customers enter the club. The charge of commission varies and is dependent on the manager's final decision.
[61] Slang for semen.

Phoenix: *You dirty bitch (laughs)!*
(Field Notes: May 2004)

This conversation took place at the beginning of a shift, in the changing room, where, at the time, most of the dancers were getting dressed to work. Despite the way in which Charley and Phoenix publicly aired their conversation, it did not seem to cause embarrassment or disgust amongst those present. Instead many of the other dancers seemed amused, provoking them to laugh along.

It is perhaps a combination of all these factors, which, as Barton (2006) suggests, makes the changing room an environment in which strong bonds between dancers can be developed and are strengthened.

The Managers' Office:

*…Gerard[62] was swinging around in his chair in the office, waiting to collect the dancer's start up fees before they entered the changing room. I was standing behind Becks and Davina when he suddenly shifted sideways in his seat and spotted some of the other dancers sneaking into the changing room. Clearly thinking they were deliberately trying to avoid paying, he called out: "Err, ladies, are you not forgetting something?" The two dancers reluctantly joined the short queue behind me. As each dancer parted with her money, he'd write the amount paid next to their name that was printed on the sheet attached to the black clipboard next to the moneybox. Gerard always seemed particularly happy when collecting money from the dancers, especially when it was handed over without any fuss…***(Field Notes: March 2004)**

With the Managers' office (see Figure 1) being situated next to the changing room, dancers will sometimes press their ears against the dividing wall listening in on any arguments or heated discussions taking place in the office. The door of the managers' office is often open at the beginning of a shift; with one of the managers eagerly awaiting receipt of the dancers' club start-up- fees. The manager on duty sits in a swivel chair with a clipboard and cash box at hand, collecting money as dancers

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[62] Gerard and Ken are the managers of Starlets.

start their shifts. The office is small, just over half of it fitted with built-in work units, above which are several shelves stacked with paper, files and miscellaneous items. The coffee stained workbench in a similar way is littered with piles of paper, files, odd cups, glasses and car magazines. A desktop computer sits in the corner of the room with a chair in front of it; although it is intended for official club administration, Gerard and Ken (managers) can often be seen surfing the internet. A strong smell of stale tobacco smoke[63] pervades the office, impregnating the nicotine stained walls and the grey carpet which is discoloured and slightly sticky from spilled alcohol and other beverages brought in by managers and dancers. There are no windows in the room which is illuminated with a bright florescent strip light. The office floor is cluttered with various objects scattered about, such as promotion posters, boxes filled with fliers and other miscellanies. Across from the workbench neatly positioned in one of the corners of the room are two filing cabinets and a safe on which a CCTV television screen sits.

The managers' office changes between a public and private area, serving the staff formally and informally. The use of this space is complex in this sense as it shifts between work place and playground. For example, primarily the managers' office is a place in which business is conducted, including various administrative duties and where dancers and customers can be monitored from CCTV screens linked to the CCTV cameras that are strategically placed around the club, including dance areas, reception and outside the building surveying the car park and grounds around *Starlets*. This is an effective way for the managers to observe the behaviour of dancers and customers without being seen (Egan, 2004). Dancers would sometimes speculate about the purpose of CCTV in the club, Charley once joked: *"I bet he (Gerard) sits in there (the office) watching the girls and wanks[64] [sic] off!"* **(Field Notes: May 2004)**. In an official capacity the managers' office, as already mentioned, is where dancers visit at the beginning of their shift to pay the club start-up-fee, and at the end of their shift to pay any additional commission, known as a top-up-fee. In a secondary context when the office sometimes takes on a less formal role, it transforms into a more public, communal area, where dancers smoke[65], drink alcohol and chat with managers. Again, in a similar way to the changing room, the

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[63] This is prior to the smoking ban in the work place.

[64] Masturbates.

[65] Prior to the imposed smoking ban.

disorganised and cluttered appearance of the office helps create a relaxed atmosphere in these instances. It is, perhaps in part, this ambience that enables dancers to sometimes feel comfortable socializing with managers and other dancers in this space. The informal use of this area, behind a closed door, becomes a more private space. This is something dancers at *Starlets* are aware of and frequently discuss. Leanne for example explained: *"I've seen so much stuff going on in there (manager's office). Princess (a dancer) used to have sex with Gerard in there you know!" **(Field Notes: January 2004)**.* Other examples demonstrate how the informal use of the office is sometimes more a private affair; for example, during an interview, Linda explained how she had caught a manager taking drugs: *"…I walked into the office and saw the manager taking a line of coke…" **(Interview with Linda: March 2006)**.* The managers, who ultimately control this space, dictate the shift between private and public, work place and playground. In a similar role the changing room plays for the dancers, the office provides an escape for the managers away from stresses of the club.

The Main Floor:

> *…Some of the dancers went to the office to see Gerard about the temperature in the building. At the start of every evening dancers would sit on the main floor shivering, however, by the end of the night, after the heating had been on for some time, dancers would complain that it was too hot…I was sitting with Becks and Candy; we were three of five people sitting on the main floor. None of the customers had arrived yet; it was, after all, a Monday night, so it wasn't unusual, especially in January when Starlets was quieter, for customers to arrive later. Deano (the DJ) was late again and I had seen Gerard marching around looking frustrated, perhaps he was thinking of asking Adrian, the bar man, to step in for Deano again. This had not gone well with some of the dancers last time, as they did not appreciate the soft rock he insisted on playing all night. This time, however the dancers were spared, as Deano managed to turn up just before any customers arrived…**(Field Notes: January 2004)***

The main floor (see Figure 1) is situated upstairs in *Starlets*, directly above the dance reception, which is on the ground floor. There are four entrances to this space, two of

which lead from the back corridor. Staff members, including dancers, are the only ones permitted to use these entrances; customers are prohibited from using these doors as they lead to the managers' office and changing room. The other two entrances, both of which are intended for customers are at the opposite side of the main floor, one leading to the dance reception downstairs, and the other to the main entrance. The DJ booth is in the far corner near one of staff entrances. A small lamp hanging over the booth illuminates this area; above the booth the DJ's face can be seen peeping out. The brightness of this area is in sharp contrast to the rest of the dimly lit floor.

The walls of the main floor are papered in a deep crimson and dark blue on which several large mirrors and monochrome pictures are exhibited. Both the mirrors and pictures are bordered with elaborate gold or silver frames. The carpets are patterned in blue, crimson and gold, which complement the colours running across the walls. Small round tables are carefully positioned around the room, surrounded by stools upholstered with leopard print, crimsons and blues. There are three raised seating areas set around the edges of the main floor. Each of these raised areas has its own set of steps for access and is surrounded by bold brass rails; one of these areas is predominantly used for private dances, which dancers refers to as the 'dance area'. Framing the large open entrance to this dance area are two large blue velvet curtains, which are draped to either side. The VIP section is situated on one of the other raised areas and faces the side of the DJ booth. Separating the VIP area from the other seating is a brass rail. The surveillance cameras are positioned around the main floor, watching the dancers and customers. The air is filled with redolence of perfume and tobacco smoke, which becomes even stronger as the club gets busier.

The main floor is the chief area in which dancers conduct their business with customers, offering private dances[66] and sit-downs[67] for a fee. It is also a space in which dancers advertise their bodies through stage performances and their conversation through interacting with the customers. The dim lights, the deep crimson and blues, and the general décor of the main floor begets an almost palpable aura of sensuality and sexual desire. The lighting in particular helps create

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[66] This refers to a personal dance, each lasted one song track, approximately 3 minutes, performed in close proximity of a customer in exchange for a set tip.
[67] A sit-down involves a customer paying for 30 minutes or more with specific dancer/s to talk and be given private dances. The fee rate of the sit-down varies and is dependent on the length of time requested.

silhouettes of semi-naked slow moving bodies, adding to the sense of mystery about the dancers working the floor. The décor and lighting in *Starlets* is reminiscent of other lap-dancing clubs nationally and internationally, intended to create a sensual atmosphere (Liepe-Levinson, 2002). It is suggested that *"…three-dimensional landscapes of desire…"* (Liepe-Levinson, 2002, p. 51) are created through the use of interior decorations, seating and table arrangement. This sense of eroticism created is used to encourage customers and dancers to interact in a flirtatious manner.

The main floor, dance reception, and public washrooms of course, are the only places in which customers are allowed access. As well as the dancers and customers, other staff members, including waitresses, managers, DJs and security all have access to the main floor. As a result of this, and the persistent play of music, warm dancing bodies and the steady flow of alcohol, it is one of the liveliest spaces in the club. The energy felt throughout the main floor helps transform it into a social arena. It becomes a place in which dancers not only conduct their business but also socialise. As Nelly once commented: *"…It's like being out but making fuck loads of money!" (Field Notes: December 2003)*. The main floor was not only a social space during working hours, but it was common for dancers to spend time outside of those hours socialising in *Starlets*.

The Main Stage:

> *…Not all of the dancers are equal in their ability to dance on the stage. Phoenix however never fails to impress both customers and other dancers. Watching her from the main floor, it is impossible not to be impressed with her skills on the pole and her floor work. She struts onto the stage to Christina Aguilera's 'Dirty' thumping out of the speakers, her eyes fixed on the crowd. Phoenix makes use of the whole stage during her performance, it is possible to recognise that she has had professional training as a dancer. It looks as though she has spent time carefully choreographing her moves, but this is not the case; dancing is something that comes naturally to her. Phoenix falls into a handstand against the pole at the front of the stage and elegantly glides her legs down into the splits; across the floors she contorts her body around into the box splits, remaining coordinated and in time with the music…(Field Notes: December 2003)*

Along the back corridor almost opposite the changing room there is a white door with a glass panel, which leads backstage (see Figure 1). The paint on the door has become worn over time and is covered with black scuff marks left by the dancers kicking it open while passing through carrying their drinks, cigarettes and various other things. Inside the confined oblong space, that is the backstage area, it is large enough to fit only five or six people comfortably. At one end there is a full-length mirror and at the other a large walk-in cupboard filled with wires leading to a large fuse box. There are two stools from the main floor next to the entrance of the stage, dancers sit here and rest their feet against the opposite wall; there is evidence of this from the numerous scrapes, marks and holes left in the wall from the dancers' stiletto heels. The once white walls are, like those of the changing room and managers' office, nicotine stained, and there is makeup smeared around the full-length mirror. Dividing the backstage area from the main stage (see Figure 1) is a thick black curtain woven with silver threads, which glistens in the light from the stage.

Walking out onto the main stage, which is elevated off the main floor, it is possible to see all the customers and dancers scattered around the club. The stage is spacious with a single pole at each separate corner and open space in the middle for the dancers wishing to perform floor work. The floor is hard, cold, dusty and covered in marks from the dancers' shoes. The poles are brass, covered in hand and finger marks from the dancers using them during stage shows. The stage lighting, set above and around the ceiling has been positioned to best highlight the sexual and sensual nature of the dancers' movements on the stage, in the same way that the décor and lighting on the main floor is intended to arouse eroticism. From the stage floor smoke is occasionally pumped from the dry ice machine, controlled by the DJ, and again designed to make the atmosphere seem enigmatic and sensual; although this does not always suit the dancers who often remark that Trevor (DJ), who has a tendency to make the most of this equipment, is trying to choke them.

There are two stages, the main stage upstairs and a smaller more intimate one downstairs in the dance reception area; however, the latter is only used during Saturday afternoon shifts, and sometimes for auditions. The main stage is an area where dancers perform erotic dances for customers in the audience. Dancers, on a rota, take turns throughout the night to perform on stage, each performance lasts for approximately six minutes using two separate pieces of music; it is during the second

track that dancers remove their tops to reveal their breasts. While the dancers are on stage, customers are not permitted to approach them in any way; unlike in many American clubs, stage tipping[68] in *Starlets* is prohibited. Managers and some dancers see stage performances as an opportunity for the dancers to advertise their bodies and dancing abilities to customers. In relation to this, the dancers have mixed feelings about performing on stage, some seem to love the experience whereas others dread it, and during a performance, a dancer's attitude to the use of this space can be easily interpreted; some look involved, attempting to connect with their audience and dance erotically, whereas others seem uncomfortable and bored, avoiding customer eye contact. Janine always seemed excited about performing on stage, she explained: *"I love it. Getting out there. I could do it all night if they asked me" (Field Notes: November 2003).* Whereas Kerry made more negative remarks about the experience of dancing on stage: *" I hate it. I feel sick every time I go on. I can't wait 'til [sic] it's over." (Field Notes: May 2004)*. In relation to this there has been a tendency in the literature to emphasise this being the most negative experience of dancing (Barton, 2006; Wesely, 1998; 2002).

At 11 pm during every night shift in *Starlets* 'the parade' takes place, as the DJ announces their names, the dancers take it by turns to walk around the stage, advertising their bodies for the 'two-for-one' private dance offer that directly follows. As the dancers queue back stage waiting to take their turn on stage, the small backstage area becomes exceedingly overcrowded, this usually solitary area transforming into communal chaos with dancers spilling out of the doorway; all chatting, laughing and sometimes singing along to the parade song: *We Will Rock You* by Queen. There are mixed feelings about the parade, some dancers seeming nonchalant, others despising, what, for them, it represents: *"It's like we're cattle or something"* Stacey once commented *(Field Notes: March 2004)*. Other dancers would joke about the 'two-for-one' offer, comparing it to offers advertised by various supermarket and department stores, although this created a sense of amusement for the dancers, there also was an indication that they felt more like commodities; something suggested by other authors (Wesely, 1998; 2002).

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[68] This refers to the customers' action of tipping a dancer for her stage performance by either placing money on the stage or directly to the dancer during her stage show.

Dance Reception:

> *…This afternoon the club was busy with customers, by 2pm the dancers all looked sweaty and exhausted. At this point while most of them were   sitting at the bar smoking cigarettes[69] and talking, others were trying to get as many dances as possible before the shift ended and customers left. Stage performances were still taking place; but the customers seemed disinterested and were starting to make their way out of the club. Some were more interested in watching the screen than the dancers on stage; this was not unusual during a Saturday afternoon shift in Starlets. It was often the case that the football matches screened seemed to take priority over half naked lap-dancers…**(Field Notes: June 2005**).*

Walking down the spiral staircase with its showy brass banister, from the main floor, on the way to the dance reception area (see Figure 2) it is possible to feel the temperature drop from warm to icy cold. At the bottom of the stairs there is a short open corridor leading to the reception dance area. In this corridor there is the ladies washroom and gents' washroom and although these are intended for customers, dancers will often favour the icy cold ladies to the single cubicle allocated to them in the changing room; firstly there is never a queue and secondly this isolated area is an ideal place to snort cocaine, away from intrusion. Past the washrooms the corridor opens out into the reception dance area. A bar stretches across the back wall of this space facing where the reception area is situated. At each side of the bar is a door; both lead to the corridors that run around the back of the building, to the various staff areas. To the far left of the bar there is a long dark stage with a single brass pole at either end; behind the stage, its back to the wall, is a large television screen, on which football matches are played during the Saturday afternoon shifts. In sharp contrast to the dimly lit main floor, the lights in the dance reception are bright. Dancers tend not to favour the lighting in the dance reception, as Davina would often exclaim: *"It's awful. You can see all my cellulite!"* **(Field Notes: June 2004; August 2004)**. In contrast the dance reception stage area, itself, is always dark, sometimes making it difficult to see the movements of the dancer performing on stage. At the other side of the room, in each of the opposing corners a brass pole set on a small raised dais, on which there is only enough room for a single dancer. These are

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[69] Prior to the imposed smoking ban.

rarely, if ever used, and have just become part of the club décor. The walls are painted red, and with the glare of the bright light the décor seems much starker than that of the main floor. Unlike the busy backdrop of the walls on the main floor there are no framed pictures or mirrors. There is, however, both a cigar dispenser and a standard cigarette machine[70] mounted on one of the walls. The floor of the dance reception, unlike the main floor, is not carpeted.

The dance reception area, like the main floor, is a place in which dancers and customers can interact. Although the main floor plays a more central role for the participants at *Starlets* than this space, it is nonetheless important. During Saturday afternoon shifts, the dance reception is where dancers conduct most of their business. Although stage shows are preformed in this area during this shift, customers are also taken upstairs to the main floor for private lap-dances. The atmosphere in the reception area seems less mysterious and upbeat than that of the main floor. The music, for example, during the Saturday afternoon shifts is loud, the lighting bright and glaring; the crowds are not just there to watch semi naked dancers gyrating to music but to watch the football. Often dancers would complain about the lack of attention customers paid to them: *"I went up and asked him for a dance and he told me to get out the way of the screen, coz [sic] he couldn't see the game!" (Kerry, Field Notes: May 2005).* In many ways the atmosphere is similar to that found in some of the sports bars that play host to strippers during football matches. In a similar way, dancers during this particular shift at *Starlets* are permitted to collect money from the customers for their stage shows. The only time other than the Saturday afternoon shift that the dance reception is used is on Friday and Saturday evenings. However, during these last two periods, customers are only permitted to drink and talk to dancers; stage performances and private dances do not take place in this space on these occasions.

The Dancers

Over the period in which I conducted my fieldwork, *Starlets* hosted many different dancers. Although many of the different dancers were incorporated into my fieldnotes not all have been included in this research for various practical reasons[71]. However,

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[70] This was present when the research was conducted prior to the smoking ban.
[71] It was inevitable that only a proportion of my findings could be discussed in this thesis, therefore some of the participants who featured in my field notes could not always be included.

those who are discussed in this thesis are represented in the following table. These participants are presented in relation the three status roles, including, *new girl, transition* or *old school*[72] as this represents their position in the dancer hierarchy, an identification that is central to this thesis, discussed predominantly in chapter six.

Name of Dancer[73]	Status Role[74]
Annie	New Girl
Carmen	New Girl
Emerald	New Girl
Eva	New Girl
Kate	New Girl
Katrina	New Girl
Kristy	New Girl
Maisie	New Girl
Mel	New Girl
Melissa	New Girl
Paula	New Girl
Sam	New Girl
Simone	New Girl
Alicia	Transition
Bella	Transition
Beth	Transition
Crystal	Transition
Dana	Transition
Elle	Transition
Jen	Transition
Leila	Transition
Lotti	Transition
Kat	Transition
Kerry	Transition

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[72] These three stages are defined and explored in Chapter Six.

[73] The pseudonyms given to the dancers in the table reflect a mixture of stage and non-stage names. For example, 'Jan' was usually referred to by her everyday name, not her stage name. In contrast, 'Paris' was always referred to by her stage name, not her everyday name. The pseudonyms have been selected for each dancer to reflect this.

[74] This refers to the status roles dancers have been discussed in relation to in this thesis. It does not however suggest that during the time in which the fieldwork was conducted that their status did not change.

Sasha	Transition
Sandy	Transition
Terri	Transition
Tiger	Transition
Adele	Old School
Amy	Old School
Becks	Old School
Candy	Old School
Charley	Old School
Cindy	Old School
Davina	Old School
Dina	Old School
Eliza	Old School
Hally	Old School
Hazel	Old School
Jan	Old School
Janey	Old School
Janine	Old School
Jenna	Old School
Joe	Old School
Karen	Old School
Kelly	Old School
Kitten	Old School
Leanne	Old School
Linda	Old School
Lisa	Old School
Lucy	Old School
Mandy	Old School
Nelly	Old School
Paris	Old School
Phoenix	Old School
Princess	Old School
Ruby	Old School
Sally	Old School

Stacey	Old School
Stella	Old School
Tilly	Old School
Vienna	Old School

Other Occupational Roles at Starlets

In addition to the dancers there are several different occupational roles that make up the staff at *Starlets*. These include managers, bouncers (security), waitresses, bar staff, receptionists, hosts and djs. This section will briefly outline these different roles within the club setting in order to make sense of general occupation structure of *Starlets* and the various interactions dancers are involved with.

Managers:

> *…It was one of the club's monthly meetings which all the dancers who worked at Starlets were expected to attend. As usual this particular meeting was held on a Saturday afternoon, between 6pm and 7pm, after which dancers would start to get ready for the night shift. Gerard was the only manager present as Ken was away on holiday. There were a few absences but most of the dancers were present. I could tell from the expression on Gerard's face that he was not in a good mood. This became more apparent as he launched into an attack on the dancers: "Listen up, you're all starting to get a little shabby in your appearance. Some of you have been wearing the same outfits since the club opened. You need to put the work in to get money. I'm sick of girls complaining about not making any money when they look a mess!" This barrage of complaints went on for some time; most of the dancers were not listening to Gerard. This was not unusual, Gerard or Ken would be talking and the dancers would quietly mock, it had become a routine…(Field Notes: June 2004)*

In *Starlets* there are two main managers, Ken and Gerard, and two assistant managers Darren and Amy. Both assistant managers were introduced to the club towards the end of my fieldwork; previously Ken and Gerard were the only managers based at *Starlets*. The role of management in this club is to coordinate and regulate the general running of the club and all the staff. Darren and Amy were employed to

help Ken and Gerard fulfil this role more effectively, Amy in particular was introduced to manage the dancers and make decisions concerning their shifts.

The Bouncers:

…Tonight Bobby and Simon were taking it in turns to work on the main floor. As it was a Tuesday night and not expected to become particularly busy, one member of security was considered to be enough to keep an eye on events on the main floor…Simon was standing next to the dance area looking bored, he was chewing gum and kept looking at his phone. Then, all of a sudden one of the customers jumped up, clambered on to the stage and attempted to swing round one of the poles. Simon quickly alerted Bobby on his CB radio (security and managers use these to contact one another) as he raced across the floor to stop the very drunk customer. From the back entrance Gerard and Bobby then appeared, all three of them were now trying to pry the man off the front pole. Everybody on the main floor stopped what they were doing to watch, I could see some dancers laughing and others shaking their heads in disbelief. It looked like a fiasco, and I was not sure if the dancers were reacting to the customer or the over zealous actions of the bouncers and Gerard…. **(Field Notes: February 2004)**

There were a number of bouncers employed to work at *Starlets*, however the regulars included Gordon (head bouncer), Bobby, Chris, Simon and Phil. The role of this security team is to protect all staff members, particularly dancers, and to ensure customers conduct themselves appropriately without breaking club regulations (see Hobbs et al, 2003). This is echoed by DeMichele and Tewksbury (2005) who argue that the role of the bouncer in the strip club is *"To provide a safe environment for alcohol consumption and socializing…to enforce rules and maintain order…"* (p.539).

Waitresses and Bar staff:

…Most of the waitresses did not like the outfits they were expected to wear; Yvette had been complaining that it made her thighs look big. The outfit is not the more usual white shirt/blouse and plain black trousers/skirt, worn by waitresses in many other establishments, instead it is more in tune with the

sexually provocative nature of lap-dancing; in fact they resemble majorettes rather than waitresses. A black legless Lycra leotard is worn over shiny flesh coloured tights, over which a dark blue, majorette style jacket is worn. All that is missing is the hat and baton….(Field Notes: May 2004)

Before the bar was constructed on the main floor of *Starlets*, customers were solely reliant on a waitress service to purchase beverages. As customers were seated, each table would be allocated a waitress who would be responsible for taking and serving customers' orders. The use of waitresses in the lap-dancing club environment is a common phenomenon (Boles and Garbin, 1974). There are several waitresses based at *Starlets*, and the staff turnover in this area is high. Bar staff operate both bars on the main floor and reception dance area down stairs; the bar on the main floor is the only one in use between Monday and Thursday.

Receptionist:

…I was talking to Bobby in the reception area downstairs while Emma was seated behind her desk. It was a quiet night and she looked bored and miserable…we never really saw Emma, but Liz, who sometimes worked on a Saturday afternoon, would pop in the dance reception to talk to some of the dancers…(Field Notes: January 2004)

There are two receptionists, Emma and Liz, who are employed to tend the main reception situated in the entrance of *Starlets*. The nature of this job means that neither Emma nor Liz regularly interact with the dancers. The receptionists however have regular contact with managers and bouncers. In many ways their role in *Starlets* is quite an isolated one.

Host:

…Daniel would stand in the same place every Saturday and Friday night, somewhere between the two customer entrances. He looked like a member of the management team in his smart black suit. Daniel stood against the wall attentively, waiting for customers. Tonight he did not have to wait long, and I

*could see him on his CB radio, every couple of minutes, being informed of another customer about to enter, soon after which the door would open and in would trot a group, whom he would escort to their seats…***(Field Notes: May 2005)**

This role was introduced towards the end of my fieldwork at *Starlets*, and was employed only during Friday and Saturday night shifts when the customer turnover was expected to be high. Daniel, who also worked as a bar man in the club, acted as host during the weekend. In this role Daniel would escort customers to their table and indicate their presence to a waitress.

DJ:

*…Trev was bopping up and down to the music he was playing in the DJ booth with a fixed grin. He always turned the volume up high, so it was difficult to communicate with anyone on the main floor when he was working. His choice of music was always fast and furious; non-stop thumping remixes of various songs. Trev would often make the dancers laugh when he spoke over the microphone, but unfortunately they would be laughing at him not with him. Tonight he was particularly lively; and, according to Stella, he'd taken loads of ephedrine[75] tablets; she explained: "He's taken about eight! You only need one!" Trev, kept interrupting songs to talk over the microphone, and on this particular occasion he had most of the dancers rolling around laughing as he injected the word "shabba!" into the songs he played. By imitating Shabba Ranks[76] Trev was not however trying to be ironic, he is very serious about his role as DJ, and fancies himself as a bit of an MC…***(Field Notes: December 2003)**

There were two DJs, who were employed at *Starlets*, originally Deano and Trev; however Trev was eventually replaced by Manny. The DJs were responsible for all the music played in the club, when dancers were on and off the stage. Deano worked between Monday and Thursday, whereas as Trev, then Manny, were allocated to DJ on Friday and Saturday.

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[75] A drug used clinically for asthma, however it is taken recreationally for its stimulant effects. Recreational use of ephedrine is currently illegal in the UK.

[76] A Jamaican DJ and recording artist who was famous for UK hit 'Loverman'.

Concluding Remarks

Rich descriptions of the setting in which this ethnography is based have been provided, forming part of the foundations on which discussions about the research findings can be built in the following chapters. Complementing these discussions, descriptions of the different occupational roles within *Starlets* are also provided. Again this helps conceptextualise the different interactions between the participants involved in this piece of research. The various settings discussed in this chapter are central to this ethnography as they help locate the various social interactions that take place in the lap-dancing club setting. The changing room for example, as a place of private solitude for the dancers, plays a significant role in the bonds they develop between one another. It has become a place from which customers and other staff members are excluded, dancers can therefore interact with one another freely and in some ways are almost forced to find common ground. The main floor and reception dance area, in contrast, although equally significant, offer a different meaning. They are, for example, the only areas in *Starlets* in which dancers, customers and staff can simultaneously interact with one another. In these settings dancers conduct their business but are also able to socialise and act out aspects of the lifestyle with which lap-dancing in *Starlets* is associated; something discussed in the following data chapters.

The décor and various layouts of these settings to some extent influence the conduct of the participants; this is something echoed by Liepe-Levinson (2005). For example, there is an air of sensuality created on the main floor as a way of encouraging customers to spend money and for dancers to engage in flirtatious interactions. In contrast it has been suggested that informality and a relaxed atmosphere is encouraged in the changing room and manager's office by the cluttered and lived in appearance of these areas.

Now that the scene has been set, the following data chapters will begin to unpick some of the key findings that have emerged from this ethnography. Each of these chapters will be prefaced by a part of *Karen's Story*, which has been divided into three sections, each relating to the content of the following chapter, and which, in her own words, conveys her experiences as a dancer. This provides a thread across the data chapters, in light of introducing some of the participants' key experiences working as dancers, reflected in the findings. In part one of *Karen's Story: Starting*

Out, Karen describes how she moved from agency stripping into lap-dancing at *Starlets*. This opens chapter five, which will discuss the different *entry strategies* into an occupation in lap-dancing, and further to this explore the initial experiences of dancers auditioning for this role. Part two, *Karen's Story: Working at Starlets*; Karen talks about her various experiences at *Starlets*. This opens chapter six, which explores the three *status roles* identified in detail, highlighting the significance each phase has. In the exploration of this dancer hierarchy, from this emerges a discussion of the lap-dancing culture present at *Starlets*. Finally, in part three, *Karen's Story: Leaving Starlets*, Karen describes how she came to leave the club. This final part again reflects the theme of the chapter it precedes: chapter seven, which discusses the different *exit strategies* dancers engage in when leaving *Starlets*. Further to this, this chapter will also explore re-entry into lap-dancing following retirement, discussing the meaning behind this.

Part One

Karen's Story: Starting Out…

"…I started dancing when I was 17… how I got into this was, I was living in a flat on my own, and I hardlies [sic] had anything. Not even like the bare, bare essentials like (a) fridge, cooker, carpets, (or) anything like that. My mum had just kicked us [sic] out (of) the house. It was nearing to Christmas time, it's really cold, I'd just got sacked from my job, and I had nobody really. So I started hanging around with different people and then before I knew it I met this girl called Judith. And Judith was like a friend of a friend…I was in a shopping centre and she approached me and she was like: 'Hi, I was wondering if you'd like to dance. Coz [sic] I work for this 'Stars' dance agency[77], and they like need some new people to work for them'. So I took it from there on, and I was like: Yeah I might as well, don't know what the hell I'm getting myself in for but I might as well try. So I started working for the dance agency…but it got to a point where I thought: Oh my God, this is my life, this is it! So I thought: Right I need to make a choice. I don't think I was actually strong enough to think: Right, stop doing it, get an education, just get away from it, cut all ties. So I thought: Right I'm gonna [sic] stop working for this agency even though it was like supposed to be one of the best around here…So I stopped working for that agency and worked for another one… I guess the main reason was because me and Judith went our separate ways. I just realised after a while that she didn't really, she wasn't really that intelligent… she's never actually learned from her mistakes and the reason why I actually stopped hanging around with her was because, she was like you know…She turned out to be this little bitch really… So anyway moved on and anyway worked for this (other) dance agency…didn't like it there so moved to 'Glamour Girls' (dance agency). And yeah, the girls were a bit sleazy but it wasn't like I was going to be… obviously this is my third (agency) in 3 years, and I thought: Third and last, if it doesn't work out here, then that's it. Then you stop dancing… In the end I only actually worked there for 3 months and I met my boyfriend…Really got sick of it then. I didn't even think of dancing. I regained a lot of confidence to be quite honest and got myself on the straight and narrow. Got a job. God! 'Straight and narrow', you'd think I was a drug dealer! Or a pimp! Jesus, what am I saying! So got myself on the 'straight and narrow' and worked like in a normal job, in a call centre, and I was actually fulfilled working and like making an honest living. Waking up in the morning,

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[77] The 'dance' agencies referred to in this prologue are in fact stripping agencies.

it was hard at first; it was quite scary, coz [sic] obviously since leaving school I only had like one job, which I kept for like a year. I worked as like a clerical assistant for one year, packed that in and had little silly factory jobs 3 months here and there, a month off, doing nothing and eventually got into the dancing. But going from that (dancing) to like (call centre) you know, (it) was quite nerve racking but fulfilling… I like stuck in, definitely stuck in, never had any days off, (I) was there for nearly three and half years, I had 0.0 per cent sickness. I really, really liked it…I felt so proud of myself, like so happy and I was like, I would never dance again, never. And then me and my boyfriend finished, like I'd been with him for years. But just before we'd finished I was still working at the call centre and I was like: Look! I'm really, really skint and I'm gonna [sic] have to start working at Starlets…But my boyfriend didn't really want us [sic] to do it and he was like devastated, and he was like: 'No! No! No! You can't do this!' I was like the breadwinner, I was like the main one working and he was like doing his degree, and he'd packed his like part time job in coz [sic] I said to him: You pack your part time job in and I'll just support you, like I know it doesn't really matter, I know you would do the same for me. And you just study, you use your time studying…I got in touch with my friend Stella who worked at Starlets, and I was like: Can you put a good word in for me? And I was so nervous, I was like thinking: no I shouldn't do it, I shouldn't do it! Went back to dancing anyway after all that time, it felt really strange. In a way I think I'd missed the sort of, dunno [sic] what it was? I think most people have, I dunno [sic] a bit of an exhibitionist in them… I think in certain ways (when you dance) you are the centre of attention, you are the act, therefore everyone is looking at you, you have absolute control, so therefore it makes you feel good. Well it does…I think if you've danced, you feel like, I can do that, yeah [sic], the way I can express myself is through dancing…It's weird, it's like you can say something about who you are this way… But I guess maybe everyone does it for a different reason…God, I don't really know what it was…" **(Interview with Karen: December 2005; March 2006)**

Chapter Five

Becoming a Dancer at Starlets: Starting Out

Introduction

In the first part of Karen's story, which prefaces this chapter, Karen talks about how she moved from working as an agency dancer[78] to a lap-dancer at *Starlets*. Her motivation for entering this industry is complex, involving a combination of *practical* and *emotional strategies*[79]. For example, on a practical level, Karen was drawn to dancing, both as an agency stripper and lap-dancer at *Starlets*, for financial reasons. However, she also admits that there are other more emotive reasons driving her to dance: the need for attention and to feel in control. Despite this she still claims to be uncertain about what exactly led her to work as a dancer. It is Karen's tangled account of her entry into dancing that is significant for understanding stories of how the other dancers came to work at *Starlets*.

This chapter in many ways continues to set the scene of *Starlets* by introducing the dancers in this ethnography through the exploration of their *entry strategies* and audition process. It is important to consider the entry processes of dancers in these ways as it not only helps set up the following two data chapters, but also it offers new insight into the motivation for those initially entering lap-dancing. In the first part of this data chapter, the various *entry strategies* with which the dancers at *Starlets* have engaged will be discussed, something that other authors have previously explored (Boles and Garbin, 1974; Carey et al, 1974; Forsythe, 1992; Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998; Skipper and McCaghy, 1970 and Wesley, 1998). However, unlike previous material, and in light of Karen's story, it will be suggested in this chapter that dancer motivation is complex, based on a conflict between *emotionally* and *practically* driven *entry strategies*. Finally, this chapter will explore the lap-dancing audition process, providing accounts from some of the dancers at *Starlets*. This final section conveys not only a practical understanding of the audition process but the feelings dancers associate with it.

Entry Strategies

> *…There seem to be many reasons for entering an occupation in dancing, as I have discussed in previous field notes, but one thing I have noticed is that the dancers I have talked to about this, either struggle to provide a reason or, over*

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[78] Also referred to as 'agency stripper'.

[79] Refer to types of strategies as defined later in this chapter.

*a period of time, when re-questioned, contradict previous explanations. I discussed this with Karen (a dancer), who claimed: "I don't think it's straightforward, as in I need money, I need a job. It's hard to put your finger on" That makes sense, and is perhaps why dancers give me different answers when I ask them…***(Field Notes: December 2005)**

The motivation for entering a career such as lap-dancing, has, as previously discussed in chapter two, been accounted for by a number of authors (Boles and Garbin, 1974; Carey et al, 1974; Forsythe, 1992; Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998; Skipper and McCaghy, 1970 and Wesley, 1998). Despite these authors providing an over riding argument of economic motivation, Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) were the first to suggest that dancer's reasons for entering this occupation are more complex than first suggested. The research findings generated from this ethnography reiterate this clearly, and suggest that beyond superficial explanations of easy economic gain, there are in fact other more significant reasons for women becoming erotic dancers. As illustrated by Karen in the previous extract, and in her story which prefaces this chapter, dancer motivation is complex and not always clearly initially recognised by the dancers themselves, and for this reason contradictory explanations are often provided.

This section will discuss the various explanations provided by dancers working in *Starlets*. The findings suggest that the decision made by a dancer to enter a lap-dancing occupation, refers to various plans of action, which inevitably fulfil a specific need or desire and inevitably relate to the dancer's expectations about lap-dancing. The *entry strategies* applicable to the dancers at *Starlets* fall into two main categories: *practical* and *emotional*; within these strategies there are several different patterns of choice. *Practical strategies* include those that relate to economic factors, occupational association (for example, moving from stripping agency work to lap-dancing club work) and suitability of working hours. It is important to point out that the *practical strategies* tend to overlap with the findings generated by other researchers (Boles and Garbin, 1974; Carey et al, 1974; Forsythe, 1992; Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998 and Skipper and McCaghy, 1970). Alternatively *emotional strategies* include thrill-seeking and sexual attention. What is interesting about these two categories is that most of the dancers involved in this research primarily expressed a *practical strategy* for entering this occupation, however, what became obvious, was that

108

beyond this explanation, the behaviour and subsequent informal conversations with dancers suggested that *emotional strategies*, were equally, if not more applicable to the same dancers. Contradictions in behaviour brought some of those original explanations dancers had provided into question. It is important to discuss the different strategies presented by the dancers at *Starlets*, but to be aware that these strategies should not necessarily be understood in isolation from one another.

Practical Strategies

Some of the strategies dancers engaged with when starting their careers, have been labelled as practical. *Practical strategies* refer to decisions which are not based on emotional fulfilment, but fuelled by a desire to satisfy more practical and instrumental needs. In relation to this, there are three main strategies that have been identified, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Economic Motivation:

The potential and desire to make large amounts of money in a short space of time is something that was clearly accounted for as an *entry strategy* into lap-dancing. This is something that, as previously demonstrated in chapter two, other researchers have argued as a central motivation for women becoming involved with the stripping industry as dancers (Boles and Garbin 1974; Barton 2006; Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998; Lewis, 1998; Skipper and McCaghy 1970; Thomas and Harred, 1992). Initially, economic gain was the most cited reason for entry into lap-dancing at *Starlets*. As Ruby explained during an interview I conducted with her: *"…I think the money was definitely the main reason I got into it…"* **(Interview with Ruby: November 2005)**. Similarly Jan explained that the money was a deciding factor: *"…there's a lot of money to be made, even more than in stripping[80]. It's hard work but I'm here for the money…"* **(An interview with Jan: December 2005)**. Dancers rationalised this: *"I could be stuck working 9-5 for nothing or in here for less time and make more in a night than I would in a week"* **(Jenna, Field Notes: May 2005)**. However, despite the emphasis on a financial strategy, a high proportion of dancers admitted that making money in a lap-dancing club was not automatic, further to this, some of the dancers who emphasised economic motivation seemed to be primarily engaged with the social side of lap-dancing and making money did not always appear to be a priority.

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[80] Refers to agency stripping work.

For example, Karen, in her story, suggests it was financial difficulties which initially led her to work at *Starlets*, however, despite this, at a separate time, she explained: *"…you're going to work, having a laugh, having a good time, I'm not arsed if I don't make any money…just having a laugh, thinking I may as well just have a laugh…"* **(Interview with Karen: December 2005)**.

Although the extent to which dancers have adopted this strategy is questionable, this is not however, to suggest that money is not a factor for women entering a career in lap-dancing. Neither does it imply that dancers at *Starlets* are not in a position to make money, as there is evidence to suggest that a high income can be gained from lap-dancing, and that this is a source of pleasure for dancers at *Starlets*:

> *…At the end of the night, spirits were high as it had been a good night for everyone, including, dancers, managers and customers. Saturday nights are usually busy but tonight the customers seemed to be spending their money. It was, after all, the stag party season[81]. It had been a busy night for the dancers, this was reflected in the general mood in the changing room, the dancers looked tired but were laughing and joking more than usual. Kitten pulled a large wad of money from her garter and started counting it; similarly around the room other dancers were counting large amounts of money. Charley was talking to Phoenix, her voice drowning out any of the other conversations taking place in the changing room: "What a belter! I've not stopped all night"…***(Field Notes: June 2004)**

However, although there are opportunities to make a large amount of money over a short period of time, there are also periods in which dancers are faced with less financial opportunity. The money making potential is dependent on a number of factors, often outside of the dancer's control. This would include the time of year[82] and the type of customer present in Starlets, as reflected in the following extract:

> *…January is the worst month to work; this one so far has been no exception. Customers are limited, apart from Saturdays and even then they don't seem to spend much money. Not only are there fewer customers, but fewer dancers*

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[81] Stag party season, in *Starlets,* is often between May and August.
[82] In Starlets, January, February and March were usually the quietest months to work.

*…It's a Monday night and all the dancers were sitting around on the main floor for the first two hours drinking wine and playing 'who am I'[83]…everyone seemed to be in good spirits, despite the lack of money, but this probably had more to do with the free wine Gerard had supplied and the fact he closed the club at midnight…***(Field Notes: January 2004)**

The unpredictability of money making opportunities in the lap-dancing club again brings into question the reliability of the economic explanation offered by dancers, particularly for those who suggest that the money is something that keeps them dancing. For example, it is unlikely that dancers who claim to be solely motivated by money would remain in an occupation they are aware, is in fact, financially unstable. It could be argued that, the popular economic explanation offered by dancers, is a reaction to the social stigma which surrounds lap-dancing. In this sense it may be a justification which helps combat the stigma that dancers, as was suggested earlier in chapter three, are fully aware of. There is something more socially acceptable and fitting with the 'victim' discourse surrounding lap-dancing, about dancers working out of financial necessity rather than for pleasure; it therefore offers those who question this occupation a 'viable' explanation for women's involvement. However, it perhaps simultaneously creates and reinforces perceptions that women turn to lap-dancing out of financial desperation (Bindle, 2004).

Occupational Association:

This refers to those who start dancing due to an occupational association they have with lap-dancing; for example, this might be applicable to those who worked as agency strippers[84], podium dancers[85] and lap-dancing club waitresses. In these cases, previous association or involvement in the same or similar industries has led to a career in lap-dancing; the dancers in question having seen lap-dancing as an advancement or/and a convenient career move. To some extent this has been accounted for in the work of Boles and Garbin (1974), Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) and Skipper and McCaghy (1970), who have emphasised that association with or involvement in the industry is a factor in women becoming dancers. In *Starlets*,

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[83] A guessing game, where one person thinks of a celebrity and the other person or group has to guess who they are by asking questions that can only be given a yes or no answer.

[84] This refers to dancers who work directly for an agency rather than a specific venue. The agent will offer the dancer various strip jobs in a number of different venues, for which she is paid directly by the venue owner or manager. The agent takes a percentage of the dancer's wage.

[85] This refers to dancers who worked as paid dancers in various nightclubs. Podium dancers will often dance on a small stage or caged area elevated from the main dance floor of the club.

Phoenix for example, had previously worked in the stripping and glamour model industry before working as a dancer at the club. When she started dancing at Starlets, she was taking a break from glamour modelling, and lap-dancing proved to be convenient, providing her with what she wanted:

> …Image is very important to Phoenix; in the club this is apparent from the costumes she wears, the music she dances to on stage and the dancers she associates with. Phoenix is very in vogue… After leaving glamour modelling Starlets has offered her a similar lifestyle, something that stripping, as an agency worker cannot match[86]…**(Field Notes: June 2004)**

Like Phoenix, Jan had previously worked as an agency stripper. After working in this capacity in Spain, on her return to the UK she decided to audition for a job as a lap-dancer at *Starlets*. Jan explained that the club had just opened on her return from Spain and seemed like a logical option: *"…I was back and this club just opened so I went along for an audition. It was not too far from where I was and it was convenient…"* **(Interview with Jan: December 2005)**. Even Karen, as she explains in the first part of her story, before becoming a dancer at *Starlets*, worked as an agency stripper. It was her friend Stella, with whom she had previously worked at *Stars* stripping agency, who arranged Karen's interview and audition at *Starlets*.

When *Starlets* first opened many of the lap-dancers who initially worked at the club had previously worked for stripping agencies. Although there are different skills involved in stripping and lap-dancing, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, these skills are nonetheless transferable. It is therefore easy for agency strippers to enter a lap-dancing occupation. As Karen explained to me: *"It's easy for dancers who have never done anything else to just stick at this type of job. Look at Stella, what else is she going to do? She's been stripping since she was 16"* **(Field Notes: December 2005)**. The suggestion Karen is making here is that lap-dancing is not only a natural progression, but that some dancers do not have the transferable skills to go into any other occupation. This was demonstrated by Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000); some of their respondents felt confined to the stripping industry. This appeared to be true for some of the dancers at *Starlets* who had

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[86] For Phoenix, part of this relates to there being a higher proportion of wealthy high profile customers frequenting *Starlets*, as opposed to the majority of the clients she encountered when working for a stripping agency.

worked in the stripping industry all of their working lives and did not have the opportunity or desire to gain other skills or qualifications. Stella, for example, as illustrated by Karen, had worked for stripping agencies since she was a teenager; she not only lacked other occupational skills but also had left school with no qualifications. For Stella, working at *Starlets* as a lap-dancer was a more attractive option than stripping; as she explains: *"When you're stripping you've got men touching you, the customers are all horrible, at least here you're safe coz [sic] the bouncers look after you"* **(Field Notes: December 2003)**. Similarly Alicia who had worked for various stripping agencies for a number of years before working at *Starlets*, had expectations about how much better working as a lap-dancer would be:

> *…Alicia had previously worked at Glamour Girls (stripping agency), but had recently started working at Starlets…Alicia seemed so happy with her decision to leave the stripping agency and explained to me the difference it would make: "I don't have to go fully nude any more. I don't have to put up with men trying to touch me...and the money is so much better"…***(Field Notes: November 2003)**

Other dancers started after spending time working as waitresses in the club, Jenna and Terri both worked in this capacity before becoming dancers. Terri was a waitress at *Starlets* for almost six months before dancing:

> *…Terri had talked about becoming a dancer for some time before she actually auditioned. She was very friendly with most of the dancers and would often go out with them and the managers on a Sunday night. This close connection was probably what encouraged her to change from a waitress to a dancer…***(Field Notes: November 2003)**

In a similar way, Jenna, who only waitressed for a few months before becoming a dancer, also socialised with the dancers. When Jenna announced she was going to audition, her friends at *Starlets* were very encouraging. In some ways by becoming dancers it made it easier for Terri and Jenna to continue to socialise with their dancer friends whilst at work; waitressing had previously made this more difficult. Aside from this, as Terri pointed out, lap-dancing offered more opportunities: *"It's got to be more*

fun than waitressing…I've seen how much money you girls make…" **(Field Notes: November 2003).**

Flexibility:

This strategy refers to the flexible nature of lap-dancing, but more specifically to the working hours dancing at *Starlets* offers, and how this is something that attracts women to this occupation. The suitability of working hours was often applicable to those who already worked in another occupation during the day and/or were University and college students. This strategy was often secondary to others, particularly the economic, but nonetheless an important one that was often referred to. Ruby, for example, as a college student, started working at *Starlets* not only for the financial rewards but also found the working hours were suitable: *"… because I'm studying, like the hours that you do (at Starlets) are good, it's so flexible that you basically tell them when you want to work, and you can, if you've got an assignment due in, have a week off without any questions asked…"* **(Interview with Ruby: November 2005).** Dancers who also worked in different occupations during the day would fit lap-dancing in around their work schedule by working in *Starlets* during the evenings. Sally, for example, worked as a bank clerk during the day and as a dancer at *Starlets* during the evening. Other dancers, like Sally, expressed that the flexibility of the working hours was appealing about *Starlets*. Emerald, for example, who also worked as a dancer at *Starlets* in the evenings and a hairdresser during the day, explained: *"…I couldn't fit many other jobs around my hairdressing"* **(Field Notes: December 2003).** Although there were some restrictions, dancers were able to choose their shifts and were not restricted to the number of days they worked. This was not only advantageous to those for whom lap-dancing was a second job, but it appealed to dancers who were able to fit shifts around their lifestyle. In relation to this, this strategy is also applicable to those who are interested in pursuing an occupation that enables them to live their lives without the constraints of regular working hours and shift commitments.

Emotional Strategies

Two further strategies discussed in this section, thrill-seeking and sexual attention are based on the need to gain emotional fulfilment from lap-dancing. Emotional strategies do not rely on fulfilling any practical needs. This is something that has not been covered in the general literature around stripper motivation, where most

114

associate motive with more practical needs. As already mentioned these strategies seem to be equally if not more significant amongst the dancers working at *Starlets*.

Thrill-seeking: The pursuit of 'excitement' and 'adventure':

This strategy is applicable to those dancers at *Starlets* who were drawn to lap-dancing due to the sense of 'excitement' and 'adventure' associated with this occupation. The pursuit of 'adventure' and 'excitement' relates to preconceptions about the nature of the job and/or lifestyle associated with lap-dancing, both of which are often linked with various forms of risk-taking. Firstly, in relation to the nature of the job, by using flirtation and nudity to titillate men sexually, dancers are inevitably exposing themselves to an element of risk. Secondly, in relation to the lap-dancing lifestyle, it has been indicated by academic literature (Barton, 2006, Holsopple, 1999; Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000) and various media and film sources that there is an association with excess. More specifically the heavy consumption of alcohol (Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998; Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000) and drugs such as cocaine, both of which are linked with high-risk behaviour. It is from the pursuit of risk in this way that dancers gain a sense of 'excitement' and 'adventure'; in the same way someone who practices extreme dangerous sports might gain an intense emotional arousal. This strategy then can be understood through Lyng's (1990) concept of edgework, in which the pursuit of risk-taking activities relates to thrill-seeking. It is argued by Lyng (1990) that this intense arousal brought about by risk-taking is an effect of a conflict of negative and positive emotions simultaneously experienced by the person in question. This is something conveyed by some of the dancers at *Starlets*, who have accounted or displayed feelings of intense mixed emotions. For example, Melissa before she embarked on her first stage show performance explained to me: *"I feel sick but I'm excited. I can't believe I'm doing this… They're going to see my tits!"* ***(Field Notes: April 2004)***. Talking to Melissa I could sense her apprehension but at the same time she seemed exhilarated. It is reminiscent of the accounts described by those in pursuit of an adrenalin rush from skydiving and other extreme forms of activity (Lyng, 1990). In a similar way to Melissa, other new dancers have demonstrated that they draw a similar sense of pleasure from dancing on stage:

> *…I watched Kate dance on stage for the first time; I was sitting next to the stage with Kitten and a few other dancers. As Kate walked on the stage her*

face looked expressionless as she stared over the heads of the customers. I could see her hand shaking as she gripped the pole and when she walked around the stage. Soon she started to get into the music and something changed in her manner. Kate was still shaking but she started making more eye contact with the small crowd, including the dancers sitting at the front of the stage. Some of the dancers smiled as they could see she was starting to enjoy it…After she'd finished, Kate came back onto the main floor and sat down with the girls at the front of the stage, she was shaking but her face was beaming: "That was the scariest thing ever. But I loved it!"…(Field Notes: December 2003)

By interacting with customers in a sexually suggestive way both on stage, during conversation and private dances, the dancer, it has been argued, is placed in a vulnerable position by exposing herself to psychological and physical dangers (Barton 2006; Holsopple 1999; Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale 2000; Wesely 1998; 2003). This preconception of risk associated with lap-dancing is echoed in media reports and social conjecture, something prospective dancers, before spending time in the stripping industry might internalise. For example, Sarah and Julie, two female customers in *Starlets*, who expressed an interest in lap-dancing, asked about the risks involved. Along with their curiosity there was a sense of delight at the prospect of risk:

> **Sarah:** *Is it scary? Do the customers try and touch you?*
> **RC:** *Some try. But not all are like that.*
> **Sarah:** *I don't know what I'd do if anyone tried to touch me. I'd love to do it though. It must be exciting meeting all those rich men.*
> **(Field Notes: August 2004)**

Despite Sarah's acknowledgement of the potential risks involved in lap-dancing, she nonetheless seemed to draw excitement from the idea. As well as feeding her curiosity further, her acknowledgement of these risks appeared to increase her desire to dance. In a similar way Jane and Lucy, who visited *Starlets* as customers, previously having never entered a lap-dancing club, expressed the same expectancy about the 'fun' they thought could be gained from this occupation:

…I approached Jane and Lucy at the table where they were seated and asked them what brought them to Starlets. They explained to me that they were interested in becoming dancers and hoped to audition. I was curious to find out what had made them interested in this occupation, Jane explained: "I just think it must be great fun, everyone seems to be so friendly…" then Lucy remarked "And you must get to meet loads of famous people". They were looking at me expectantly, as though they wanted me to confirm what they were claiming….(Field Notes: March 2004)

Some dancers seem to draw a sense of excitement from the thought that they are engaging in a 'forbidden' occupation. Leila for example, who was from a strict Catholic background, explained: *"It's not the kind of thing that good Catholic girls are expected to do. That makes it feel good" (Field Notes: December 2004)*. Similarly Dana, who was from a similar background to Leila, explained that her parents were not satisfied with her decision to dance: *"It's against everything they believe in. They probably think I'm a slut" (Field Notes: March 2004)*. There was perhaps an element of rebellion in Dana and Leila's decision to become lap-dancers, and certainly in Dana's case she seemed to draw a sense of satisfaction from this.

Sexual Attention:

This strategy is relevant to dancers who demonstrated an attraction to lap-dancing based on the need for sexual attention. To some extent this has been accounted for by some of the earlier pieces of research about the lap-dancing industry. It was, for example, suggested by Skipper and McCaghy (1970) and Boles and Garbin (1974) that dancers demonstrated exhibitionist tendencies. Karen, in the first part of her story, suggests that lap-dancing is appealing to those who consider themselves to be exhibitionists. She goes on to suggest that dancing, by putting her in the spot light, makes her the centre of attention. This attention Karen talks about, is of course sexual by nature, and is something other dancers find attractive about this industry. For example, some of the dancers at *Starlets* openly expressed an attraction to lap-dancing based on the need to gain sexual attention. For example, in relation to this, Princess described how dancing made her feel: *"It makes me feel really sexy when I can see them (customers) getting off on me dancing…sometimes you'll catch their eye and there's something there… I start feeling horny" (Field Notes: February*

2004). Similarly other dancers have described the love of sexual attention from customers. As Leanne explained to me: *"I love it when you're walking out onto that stage, and you see them all watching you with their tongues hanging out. I don't care what people say, it does make you feel sexy"* **(Field Notes: July 2005)**. Sexual attention is perhaps important to dancers because feeling desired increases their confidence and self-esteem, Princess for example explained: *"If guys (in Starlets) didn't look at me like they wanted to fuck me I think I'd hate it. In fact I don't think I could do this job. It sounds stupid but I need it"* **(Field Notes: February 2004)**.

Other researchers acknowledge a desire for sexual attention or approval (Barton, 2002; 2006; 2007 and Wesley, 1998). Barton (2002; 2006; 2007) in particular suggests that as well as the incentive of money, the level of sexual attention dancers receive can also cause them to break personal boundaries in pursuit of more attention; this was not however something echoed by the participants involved in this piece of research. Dancers would often work within their own personal boundaries, making it clear to customers and other dancers that they were not willing to compromise, as Elle demonstrated: *"He (customer) kept trying to touch my tits! So I stopped dancing and told Gordon (bouncer)…"* **(Field Notes: March 2004)**. It is important however to point out that there is, of course, some variation in the personal boundaries dancers set for themselves, regardless of the house rules. In contrast to Elle, Charley was known to allow customers to touch her, although it was not something that was openly talked about, but neither was it something she ever denied.

Some of the dancers described that the sexual attention they receive is addictive, the more dancers are given the more they desire. Linda, in support of this, described how addictive attention can be: *"…You'll have nights when guys are saying how sexy you are and it gives you a real lift. It's kinda (sic) addictive. It gives you a buzz…"* **(Interview with Linda: March 2006)**. Karen echoed this in an interview I conducted with her: *"…it feeds like sort of an addiction…wanting to be adored, wanting to be loved, just showing your body off…"* **(Interview with Karen: December 2005)**. Other dancers have suggested that this need goes beyond just gaining sexual attention, as Princess explains: *"It makes you feel in control, when you're dancing for them (customers) and you can see they really want it"* **(Field Notes: February 2004)**. The sense of control a dancer feels over a customer is something echoed by Karen, in

118

the first part of her story. The role of power between dancer and customer in the lap-dancing club is something that has been discussed by a number of researchers in this field (Boles and Garbin 1974b; Frank, 2002; Salutin, 1971; Holsopple, 1999; Pasko, 2002; Price, 2000; Rambo-Ronai et al, 1989; Wesely, 1998; Wood, 2000). More specifically Pasko (2002), Price (2000), Wood (2000) and Wesely (1998), although offering slightly different conclusions, consider dancers use of their sexuality in the lap-dancing club as an attempt to empower themselves. However, they suggest that it does not last, while this research, in contrast argues that it acts as a motivation to stay in this occupation.

Getting in: The Audition

> *…Mel came into the changing room after her audition; she was still carrying her dress, which she was clutching against her semi naked body. Davina turned round and asked her how it went. "I was really nervous. But I got in" Mel confirmed. The other girls in the changing room remained cool about it and Davina simply said, "I told you it would be fine"…The other dancers started teasing Mel, Beth joking: "We' were all going to stand around the stage jeering and throwing tomatoes at you". Mel seemed amused by this and returned to putting her dress on. Auditions were usually straightforward and it was rare for prospective dancers to be rejected…(Field Notes: December 2003)*

Although dancers have expressed some variation in their experience of the audition process at *Starlets*, there are several similarities. Firstly, all auditions are held in the club and involve some form of performance either on the main stage or the one downstairs in the dance reception area. Secondly, the prospective dancer is observed during her audition by at least one member of the management team. Finally, if accepted, she is then asked to fill in and sign a dancer's contract, which, in theory, binds her to the house rules of the club[87], but does not prevent her from working in other clubs. Most auditions are arranged over the phone, however, occasionally, if the prospective dancer is in the club, as a customer for example, she might then attempt to arrange an audition with a manager. Women would regularly

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[87] The role and dancers' adoption of the house rules is discussed in more detail in chapter six.

visit *Starlets* in a customer capacity with the intention of becoming lap-dancers. However, not all of those who expressed an interest would necessarily request an audition.

Jan, as mentioned earlier, was one of the first lap-dancers to work at *Starlets* when it opened. She describes, in the following extract, the original auditions held by the club:

> *"…I went for the audition, and that was quite daunting because with it being a brand new club, there were loads and loads of girls there…so I went along…there was over 100, 150 girls, but they'd even been girls there before. It was staggered, during the day I actually done [sic] my audition, it was a chat in front of the house mother[88], at the time, the manager, and a guy from another club, we had to do a little chat and then do a lap-dance for just a random guy that they got while they watched and it was a bit like a judging panel. A bit like the X Factor coz [sic] there were three of them. They were sat there and they had their little note pads, the clipboards with the pen and paper, making comments, and you could hear the comments in the background…I got the job to cut a long story short…"* **(An interview with Jan: December 2005)**

The formality described by Jan however, was not a common experience for many of the dancers who joined *Starlets* at later stages. In fact, the audition process gradually became increasingly informal. It was even suggested by some of the dancers at *Starlets* that some women were recruited on physical appearance alone without auditioning. However, there was no evidence of this, but something often speculated about. In response to managers' decisions to recruit certain dancers, there would sometimes be discussions amongst dancers about the suitability of new recruits. For example, when Kristy started working at *Starlets*, many of the dancers criticised her physical appearance and ability to dance. Over the short period of time in which she worked at *Starlets*, she was criticised for making little improvement. It was on this basis that dancers questioned management's judgement and led to speculation about her recruitment:

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[88] Starlets originally employed a housemother who was responsible for the dancers, including the shifts they worked and the commission they paid. However, the role of housemother only existed for a short period of time.

Davina: Have you seen her on stage? I'm not being nasty but she looks possessed.

Phoenix: She can't dance and she dresses like some 80s glamour girl.

Charley: How did she get a job here? She must have been sucking Gerard off.

(Field Notes: November 2003)

The audition process often aroused anxiety amongst the prospective dancers at *Starlets*, as has been demonstrated. However, of those who had the experience of working in other lap-dancing clubs, it did not appear to provoke as much anxiety. Most of the auditions were held before the start of a shift, many of those auditioning would be in the changing room as the dancers prepared themselves for the shift ahead. At the weekend in particular, dancers would come from other clubs, simply to work over the weekend in *Starlets*. The auditions would take place directly before they were due to start a shift; however, their previous experience of lap-dancing and the audition process was visible from their calm demeanour:

…Katrina and Mazy had never worked in Starlets before, tonight was the first time I had ever seen them working. Both dancers had come from a lap-dancing club in Birmingham, where they were regular dancers…I was surprised by how relaxed they were considering it was their first night in a new club. As they were getting ready to go onto the main floor they laughed and talked as though they had been working in Starlets for years, this caused some of the regular dancers to glare at them…(Field Notes: September 2004)

In a similar way, Lisa illustrated the same relaxed manner, directly after her audition, however, unusually, she had never worked in a lap-dancing club, or been part of the stripping industry before working at *Starlets*:

…Lisa was one of Candy's friends and had never worked as a lap-dancer before joining Starlets. However I was surprised at how at ease she seemed, as she casually strolled in the changing room following her audition. She was not due to work that night, but talked to Candy as she changed into her

121

clothes. Candy was asking her how it went and Lisa appeared relaxed in her response "It went well. I'm starting at the weekend"… **(Field Notes: November 2003)**

Prospective dancers were not expected to demonstrate skilled performances on stage during auditions, as it was accepted that some new dancers were not necessarily from dancing backgrounds. Because some of the women auditioning to work at *Starlets* had previously never worked as dancers, these auditions could be based only on the visible potential demonstrated during the audition, as well as the way in which the dancer physically presented herself. It was expected that the appropriate skills would be developed over time; something that is discussed in more detail in the following chapter. The presentability of a dancer is important to the managers, as again, will be demonstrated in the following chapter. Managers are keen to emphasise this by monitoring dancers' appearance through their dancing careers. Ken for example, would spend time attempting to direct the way in which dancers dressed and presented their selves:

*…Sandy walked into the changing room; her face was contorted with frustration. As she approached the dressing table bench she began to rant about Ken: "He's a fucking wanker! He's told me if I come to work looking like this again he's going to send me home!" I asked her why and she explained that he was unhappy about the way in which her fake tan was applied: "He said I look unwashed! Fucking wanker!"…***(Field Notes: April 2004)**

This attention to the dancer's appearance was something Ken and Gerard made clear to some of the new dancers, directly after their auditions:

*…I was outside the office waiting to pay Ken (commission), the door was open, he had a new dancer in the office and was explaining some of the house rules to her…He looked disdainfully at her shoes: "You'll have to get some different shoes…it's important to look the part"…***(Field Notes: May 2005)**

<u>Concluding Remarks</u>

Some of the examples of *practical strategies* discussed in this chapter have frequently been acknowledged and accepted by other researchers as explanations for dancer motivation. It is common, for example, for economic reasons to be accounted in the available literature, reviewed in chapter two. In relation to economic motivation, although this was frequently offered by many of the dancers at *Starlets* as an explanation for their entry into this occupation, certain contradictory behaviour brought this reason into question. Rather than being a solitary explanation, it is more likely that economic motivation is part of a number of strategies simultaneously applied by dancers. It has also been brought to attention that by providing a socially acceptable explanation, such as the economic, dancers are able to combat the stigma associated with their chosen profession. Although there have been a number of similarities between the *entry strategies* identified in this ethnography and those accounted for by other researchers, this thesis, in addition, draws attention to emotionally led strategies applied by women entering a career in lap-dancing: including thrill-seeking and sexual attention. These two examples have not previously been considered or given credibility in the literature to emerge from other research. The need for sexual attention amongst dancers although not in relation to the entry of dancers, has been explored previously (Pasko, 2002; Price, 2000; Wood, 2000 and Wesely, 1998); in these discussions it is suggested that an underlying motivation for sexual attention is self-empowerment. To some extent these specific findings overlap with those considered in this thesis, as it is argued that the dancers' desire for attention is underpinned by the need to feel in control. However, thrill-seeking through the voluntary engagement of risk, in particular, has not been accounted for as a motive for women entering the lap-dancing occupation. The *dangers* of the risks associated with lap-dancing are often discussed, however, the voluntary engagement and pleasure of risk-taking is not considered. The work of Lyng (1990) has provided a basis for understanding the way in which the pursuit of 'adventure' and 'excitement' through engaging with risk draws women to lap-dancing. This theme is one which will be revisited in chapter six and seven, as the voluntary pursuit of risk for pleasure has proven to be a prominent aspect of dancers' engagement with lap-dancing club culture.

Part Two

Karen's Story: Working at Starlets

…What did I actually think about it (working as a lap-dancer) when I got there (Starlets)? It was a bit nerve racking…like on my first day, there were these girls who came in (the changing room), Ruby and Eliza…. Within a few minutes they came in, I had my bag on the side; this girl with brown hair she actually moved her bag and went somewhere else and the other girl didn't even speak to me. I was like: That is actually really strange. Do I smell or something?…I was like Oh my God! They (other dancers) actually think they're like it…I was like fucking hell who the hell do they think they are! But I thought: Just take it on the chin Karen... I don't think I come across like a lap-dancer … I think they're some girls who are like lap-dancer people who don't have to work very hard and they can just get dances, they're very, I dunno [sic], they're in demand. I don't think I am the girl who has that look. Like to me your typical lap-dancer has long blonde hair, nails done, you know that kinda [sic] thing…But like you do what you can, I might not be your 'typical' dancer but I still have to make money out there (on the main floor)…it would depend what mood I was in, how well I worked…you'd get there (Starlets) and think: Right ok am I gonna [sic] make any money tonight or am I not? Obviously you're like self-employed and you've gotta [sic] motivate yourself to dance… sometimes it's (a) battle…You're there and you try and psych yourself up: Ok, right tonight is gonna be a bit different…it's all in your mind, you pretend you've never worked here (at Starlets) and try and be enthusiastic, like you were the first time you worked. And it's like, you look at yourself in the mirror and you're like: Yeah I'm all right. But then you get out there (on the main floor)…and it's not as easy as you thought. Like you've gotta [sic] sit there and talk to them (customers) so it's actually not easy money. It's not money for nothing…You've gotta [sic] contend with the girls, the whole thing, so it can be draining. Emotionally draining. Some people can find it really easy…. there's some things I'll do for money and some things I won't, do you know what I mean…everyone has boundaries, depending on the person…but I wouldn't do something I didn't want to... Like I won't sell my soul…I wouldn't have a battle over some money with another girl over a customer… If there's like one guy who is say gonna [sic] give you £200 I'd just let another girl take it, I can't be arsed with that shit. I'd be like: You take the £200! Really seriously, honestly I'd rather go home with £10 than battle like that, but some girls are like that…After a while of being there (at Starlets) I was like: I think I'm

getting sucked into it more! Like the lifestyle and stuff. I'm thinking: Oh God Karen don't get ahead of yourself!… One of the girls asked me: "Oh would you and your boyfriend like to come to like a party? My boyfriend's got like some decks?"… I remember going home and saying to my boyfriend: Oh do you wanna [sic] go to Kelly's party? Her boyfriend's got decks. My boyfriend straight away is like: "Karen honestly I really can't be bothered, you go. I really actually don't want to go. Pretentious people, decks, oh my God" And I was like: God he's so boring. Like God I'm sick of this… But I didn't want to be like her, like she's in with the managers and stuff. You know she'd sit in the office and stuff. And speak to them and stuff and a few of the girls would do that… you'd see new girls starting and you know they'd start off really nice, sweet and innocent and within a few months you'd see them changing. Bit by bit… they get sucked in by it all. Like they'll come in one day…and they've spent £50 on beauty products and it's like oh my God can you afford that? And they get their nails done. It's like £30 for their nails and stuff…they'll go to an expensive hairdressers and get their hair cut, and next they're doing lunch and stuff…I 'd sometimes think this is all a bit too much. Do I really want to fit in with these people? But before you know it you're there doing it, the lifestyle and stuff…I think it was just a case of, well do you know what Karen: You're 25 now and you might as well enjoy yourself, if you can't beat em [sic] join em [sic]. Join them. It's acceptable stuff. Don't be silly. Enjoy yourself…But then it becomes difficult to separate the two (work and lifestyle), especially when you feel you need a bit of excitement in your life…I'd never ever tried cocaine before dancing. No, never ever. I used to think it was like a dangerous drug. I'd heard you could get hooked on it. I thought: Don't try it….but I'd tried speed. Me and my mate would just have speed and stuff, now and again if we were doing (stripping) jobs where you know you're gonna [sic] be like a few hours away from home. Just like on the night time, and I'd probably do like pills[89] and stuff like, like when I went clubbing and stuff…My friend who I haven't seen around for a while, Cindy, was working at Starlets would invite me to her place. I started going round to her flat…And she offered me a line of coke one night…I used to just go to work on a night and have a few glasses of wine, I never used to get pissed or anything, I would do all right and stuff. And then one day I thought: Oh God I can't just drink all the time, I can't, it's just not me… Erm, so in the end my friend (Cindy) asked me if I wanted a few lines, well a line. I was like yeah [sic] why not. I'll try it…and then it was like on a Saturday when it was really busy I was like: Can you get

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[89] Here Karen is referring to Ecstasy pills.

us [sic] some? And then it would just be a constant battle… And then it was like a case of, if I work Friday I'll have some, well if I work the Monday or Tuesday and Wednesday I may as well just get some then really…I'd be like: Shit, oh God how much have I done tonight? 60 quid, oh God I'm gonna [sic] have to give my friend 40 quid (for cocaine) and then, pay my house fee[90] and go home with nothing, it's alright I'm working like Friday. Tonight I'm gonna [sic] have to work really, really hard. And before you know it, it's like your lifestyle… I think I was like using that (cocaine) as a way of escaping really…but also for something to give me a little 'kick'…(Interview with Karen: December 2005; March 2006)*

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[90] Here Karen is referring to the commission.

Chapter Six

Dancing at Starlets: The Meaning of Status

Introduction

The second part of Karen's story which prefaces this data chapter, in which Karen revisits some of her experiences of working at *Starlets*, is indicative of some the themes to be discussed in what follows. Further to this Karen's reflection on the *social rituals* she partakes in, her use of cocaine for example, is a phenomenon that also emerges from data discussed in this chapter. Although the primary focus is on the hierarchy of dancers at *Starlets*, a significant part of this discussion addresses the various *social rituals*, which, it is argued, serves to aid the dancer in her progression from *new girl* transitioning through to *old school* status.

During the fieldwork conducted for this thesis, through focusing on the relationships between dancers at *Starlets*, it became apparent that there was a hierarchy of dancers, comprising of three status roles: including *new girl*, *transition* and *old school*. As previously indicated in this thesis, the power relations between dancers have been largely neglected in the available literature, with the exception of Price (2000) who only acknowledges a need for researchers to explore this area. The status roles identified are important as they enhance the 'originality' of the thesis, by offering unique insight into lap-dancing, but also they place the different behaviours, adopted by the dancers, into a new context. These status roles are acknowledged in various ways by the dancers, as this chapter will discuss, and yet they remain 'unspoken' stages in the lap-dancing club setting. Although the dancer hierarchy identified in *Starlets* relates to the ability of the dancers to immerse themselves socially with their peers and develop skills making them accomplished at their job; it is however more complex than this. For example, it is through the club's *tacit rules*, an implicit knowledge created, maintained and circulated amongst and by the dancers, that the different status roles are characterised and sustained. The *tacit rules* of the club, as it will become apparent later in this chapter, are also an important source of knowledge/power through which the club functions and reproduces. In addition, the *social* and *emotional rituals* in which dancers engage, play a significant role in enabling the dancers to advance through the hierarchy, as this chapter will go on to discuss. In many ways the dancer hierarchy, and the adherence of the *tacit rules*, relates to the maintenance of the club and to reproducing the way it functions. Thus, the dancer, by engaging with lap-dancing culture in this way, is working in the interests of the managers of the club in which she works. In relation to the three different status roles, this chapter will explore, in

turn, some of the processes involved in the *new girl, transition* and *old school* phases, along with which the culture with which lap-dancers engage, will implicitly be discussed.

Although each status role is distinctive, the *new girl* and *transition* stages are those periods in which dancers are continuously learning and adapting. The *new girl* is the lowest ranking of the three status roles and is in many respects an apprenticeship, automatically taken on by dancers when they initially enter the lap-dancing club setting as new dancers. On a fundamental level, through careful observation of those already established dancers and by being receptive to their guidance, the *new girl* learns how to dance and interact with customers. In addition to this she will become familiar with the club's *tacit rules* and the importance of social interaction with other dancers. Following this preliminary phase, the dancer moves into the *transition* stage. Although this in many ways is an 'invisible' role, it is particularly significant as it is a period in which dancers learn to become established. As a *transition* dancer, the basic skills mastered as a *new girl* are further developed; fundamentally this relates to the dancer's ability to dance and interact with customers. In addition, it is also a period in which the dancer becomes more susceptible to the emotional and psychological strains associated with lap-dancing, and yet starts to develop strategies to help combat these tensions. In terms of her relationships with others, the *transition* dancer begins to strengthen her bonds by actively engaging with the various *social* and *emotional rituals* practiced by her colleagues. Further to this, she begins to develop a deeper understanding and adoption of the *tacit rules*. Finally, the *old school* stage is the highest-ranking position in the lap-dancing club setting, within the dancer hierarchy, and brings with it privileges not offered to other dancers of inferior status. The *old school* status role is in many ways sought after by lower ranking dancers who are aware of the respect and influence those in this stage arouse. It is, after all, the o*ld school* dancers who are primarily responsible for the creation and maintenance of the *tacit rules* of the club, ensuring that these rules, as far as possible, go unchallenged. In this way they are able to maintain their high status position, by developing and maintaining tacit knowledge in their favour. They too, like transition dancers, are actively involved in *social* and *emotional rituals*.

Being the New Girl: An Apprenticeship

> *…Tonight two new girls started at Starlets, Annie and Carmen. It was their first experience of working in a lap-dancing club and it was clear to me they were feeling extremely anxious. I approached them on the main floor; where they were sitting close to each other looking nervous. I introduced myself and asked how they were feeling. Annie replied, with Carmen nodding in agreement "Really scared!" She went on, "We don't know what we're doing really. We've been watching the other girls on the stage and they are all so good." I asked them about what their first impressions of the club and how they found the other dancers. "Everyone seems really nice". However Annie didn't seem as convinced "We haven't really spoken to anybody but you yet"…*
> **(Field Notes: May 2004)**

The feelings of anxiety and a sense of separation from the existing dancers, as depicted in the opening extract, are common amongst new dancers. Throughout the period I conducted research in *Starlets,* I witnessed many *new girls* step out onto the main floor displaying the same sense of apprehension and awe displayed by Carmen and Annie. In her story, Karen also reflects on the sense of isolation being a *new girl* can cause. For example, Karen describes how two *old school* dancers, when she first started working at *Starlets*, were openly hostile towards her, making her feel like an outsider.

The label of *new girl*, which is commonly used in *Starlets* to describe those new dancers, suggests an acknowledged divide between dancers. These differences are apparent in the sets of behaviours associated with the *new girl* as a definitive stage. In the role of a *new girl,* the dancer is given her first introduction to the social and occupational experiences that are part of being a lap-dancer. Part of this involves readjusting not only to a new occupation, but learning about the work environment and those with whom the dancer in question will be expected to interact; this includes customers, other dancers, managers and staff members. In many ways this first stage serves as a lap-dancing apprenticeship, during which she learns those skills needed to advance both occupationally and socially in the lap-dancing club setting. On a fundamental level part of this involves learning how to increase the sensuality of her dance and to make improvements in her social interaction with customers. This is

usually achieved through the informal tuition of and by the observation of established dancers from the *old school* and sometimes *transition* stage. Although this is not a formal process, the apprentice dancer learns by example and relies on the advice of others. In addition to learning the basic skills of lap-dancing, the *new girl* also begins to develop an awareness of the *tacit rules* of the club. These *tacit rules* are important as they guide the lap-dancers' behaviour, help create and reinforce the different roles in the club and maintain a sense of order. These rules remain unspoken, acting as an implicit form of knowledge of which the dancers in the club learn to make sense, and, in turn, help to recreate. In order to develop a clearer understanding, the *tacit rules* are explored in more detail later in this chapter. Finally, during this apprenticeship, *new girls* begin to form relationships with other dancers. These relationships are important as they influence, to some extent, the progression of the *new girl* through the dancer hierarchy.

Under Scrutiny: The Trial Period:

> *…It was Melissa's first shift in Starlets; in fact it was her first time in the club since her audition. It was interesting to watch her and the other dancers' reactions as she entered the busy changing room. It was a Friday night, so as usual we were all struggling for space, and with everyone talking the noise level was high. Melissa entered the changing room and although many chatted; there was a noticeable reduction in volume. Most of the dancers were watching her, trying to read her face, sussing her out. I heard Kitten, who was sitting next to me, telling Candy: "She must be new?" and Candy responded, "Must be. She needs to do something about her hair though." This wasn't the first time I'd heard remarks like this when new girls had started…(**Field Notes: April 2004**)*

As soon as a *new girl* enters the changing room in *Starlets* for the first time, dancers will usually stop what they were doing to scrutinise her; Melissa was no exception. There are two main reasons for this; firstly, *new girls* are seen as potential competitors, as Lisa confirms, *"You can see them (dancers) checking out the competition. Others...(are) looking to see what's wrong with them (other dancers)..."* **(Interview with Lisa: November 2005).** Secondly, dancers try to establish whether the *new girl* will easily integrate with the others, and therefore not upset the 'balance'

131

in the club amongst the dancers. In relation to this, Charley, one of the more outspoken *old school* dancers, would sometimes make her initial impressions available to the other dancers by remarking, *"She's not one of us. She ain't got no chance"* or show her approval by saying *"She's one of us"*. It is important for a *new girl* to be considered *"one of us"*, to quote Charley, if she is to be accepted by the other dancers.

First impressions can be lasting and can ultimately affect the dancer's role, temporarily, if not permanently. Ultimately, *new girls*, as far as the more established dancers are concerned, are on a 'trial period'; albeit unofficial, which there is not a definitive timescale. It is those with greater status in the club, usually *old school* dancers, who conduct these on going 'assessments'. The following subsections explore the three main ways, in which *new girls* at *Starlets* are put under scrutiny and covers: physical appearance, dancing ability and interaction.

Physical Appearance:

This is inevitably the first aspect of the *new girl* that is assessed. It includes examining her body shape, hair, facial features and the dancer's clothing, both work and non-work attire. Comments in relation to all these areas have been made about *new girls* at some point during the period in which my fieldwork was conducted. In *Starlets*, it was observed that the dancer's physical appearance was one of the first principal talking points amongst the 'assessors'. This is reflected in the opening extract of this section, in which Melissa's hair is criticised by Candy and Kitten. *New girls* were often criticised for the way in which they presented themselves, particularly their hair and dance clothing. Established dancers are heard saying *"she's too fat/thin"* **(Phoenix: Field Notes: May 2004; Davina: Field Notes: June 2005)**; *"she looks like a tramp"* **(Lisa: Fieldnotes: February 2004)**; *"she might have a nice body but she's got a rough face"* **(Candy: Field Notes: February 2004)**. *Old School* and some times *transition* dancers would advise them on changes they should make. Some dancers would even lend *new girls* clothing as a way of improving their appearance. Although there is some variation in the style of appearance amongst dancers, as Karen points out in her story, there is a favoured 'look' in *Starlets*, which people often associate with lap-dancers: long bleached hair and long manicured nails. This is not an image Karen associates herself with, and this is something, she feels, works against her when she's trying to make money in the club.

Despite this, as Lisa argues, physical appearance is not necessarily considered the most important contributing factor to making money in the lap-dancing club: *"It's not really about how good you look, it's more about how you talk to the guys"* **(Interview with Lisa: November 2005)**. However, physical appearance is, clearly valued in the lap-dancing industry (Barton, 2006; Wesely, 2003). Karen, in her story, for example, describes how appearance can begin to take priority, as dancers will spend lots of time and money on grooming. She provides the examples of dancers frequently buying expensive beauty products and regularly having their hair and nails done, despite the extra costs.

The stress on physical appearance in *Starlets* was influenced perhaps by the pressure managers placed on dancers to look a certain way; this is something briefly touched on in the previous chapter. Both Gerard and Ken would often demonstrate this by comparing dancers' appearances and criticising the way in which they presented themselves. In addition, it was not uncommon for managers to punish dancers, through fines, for not meeting their standards. In relation to this attempt to manipulate and control a dancer's appearance, Wesely (2003) describes how lap-dancers in certain clubs in the U.S. are subjected to weekly weigh-ins instructed by management. Although these extreme measures were not taken in *Starlets*, weight was something that managers would nonetheless monitor. For example, Gerard, suspended Sandy, one of the dancers, for being underweight and she was only allowed to return after reaching what Gerard deemed, a 'healthy weight'. It is perhaps incidents like this that lead to dancers developing a preoccupation with physical appearance, which is then passed down from the experienced dancers to *new girls*.

Dancing Ability:

In *Starlets* it is common for *new girls* to be observed by the more established dancers during initial stage shows and private dances. This not only serves as a means of evaluating the *new girl's* dancing ability and determining what, if any, competition she poses, but more importantly to monitor if she dances in accordance with the *tacit rules* of the club. To aid this process, established dancers will sometimes question customers about *new girls* and the feedback received discussed with their peers.

In terms of the suitability of the *new girl*'s performance, established dancers will watch out for what they call *dirty dancing*[91]. For example, during an evening shift Charley and Phoenix were talking openly in the changing room about one of the *new girls* who had started working that weekend:

> **Charley:** *I was talking to Rick (customer) and he reckons she lets the guys touch her.*
> **Phoenix:** *Never! Sneaky.*
> **Charley:** *I tell you what; if I catch her I'll be having words.*
> **(Field Notes: May 2004)**

The house rules of the club attempt to prevent any type of sexual contact between customer and dancer. However, as it will be discussed later in this chapter, this ruling is complex and due to the *tacit rules*, does not apply to *old school dancers* in the same way as it does to dancers from other stages of the dancer hierarchy. This type of behaviour from a *new girl* is not considered acceptable and could potentially jeopardise her position as a permanent dancer in the club. It is necessary for a *new girl* to not cross this boundary. In relation to dancing ability, established dancers, through observation, are in a position to offer *new girls* guidance; it is therefore used as an opportunity to provide support and offer tuition, discussed in more detail later in this chapter

Interaction:

As far as the established dancers at *Starlets* are concerned, the way, in which a *new girl* interacts with both customers and other girls, tells them a great deal about her personality and what kind of competition she might pose. A dancer's interactions with customers is monitored in several ways: listening to conversations; watching body language and making a mental note of how long the *new girl* sits with individual customers. More established dancers might ask customers about their experiences with the *new girl* in question. Her interaction with other dancers, is gauged, more simply through personal experiences established dancers have with the *new girl*. The personality of the *new girl* is significant as it provides information about how

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[91] Private dances which involve some form of sexual contact; examples might include grinding on a customers lap, allowing a customer to touch the dancer's breasts, bottom or vagina or simply making repeated contact with the customer's body.

compatible she is with the existing network of dancers. *New girls* who are perceived as confrontational or to quote Charley: *"mouthy",* will often find themselves in conflict with some of the other dancers.

Culture Shock

> *"...When I first started doing it (dancing), because it was something new, I don't know what I felt like. I just thought: oh wow this is like, amazing. This is like definitely what I wanna [sic] do like forever, kinda [sic] thing. I was only like 18 when I started, just before my 19th birthday. So I was still like really young, although I was quite grown up for my age, being 18. I still didn't really know that much. Like even when I look at photographs of myself I think like: oh my God, like, I looked like that!? I was just really young and see like those other girls starting and I think you've got all this to go through…"**(Interview with Ruby: November 2005)***

The experience of working in *Starlets*, for new dancers, is as Ruby describes, difficult to convey. The *new girl* can be overwhelmed by feelings of excitement and apprehension, particularly for those who have never worked in this or similar industries (Barton, 2006). In these cases the lap-dancing club environment may be far removed from anything they have previously experienced. In *Starlets*, three areas, although with some overlap, can be identified in which *new girls* appeared to be affected. The first relates to the atmosphere of the overall working environment of the lap-dancing club. The second relates to the nature of the job, particularly with regard to income, partial nudity and displays of overt sensuality with customers. Finally, the third area relates to dancers' personal autonomy, by which is meant their freedom to manage working hours and the manner in which they can conduct themselves during working hours.

Inarguably, the atmosphere of the lap-dancing club is a highly sexually charged environment (Brewster, 2003; Liepe-Levinson, 2006). Part of this as already suggested in chapter four is created by the décor of the main floor. However beyond this, the sense of sexuality and sensuality is more obviously influenced by partial nudity and the flirtation between dancer and customer. Every dance performed, whether stage or private, despite the meaning for the dancer, is nonetheless an act

of eroticism, aiming to create a sense of sensuality (Barton, 2006; Boles and Garbin, 1974, 1974b; Dragu and Harrison, 1989; Wesely, 1998). With the flow of alcohol and potentially other intoxicating substances, there is also a sense of energy and excitement which helps ignite the atmosphere. Melissa, as a *new girl*, commented, *"…it's like being out with your mates, but not. You're making money on a night out type thing…"* **(Field Notes: May 2004)**. For many *new girls* this is not an environment they have previously worked in. Ruby attempts to convey how it can be a shock to the system: *"It's mad when you first walk in and all you can see are girls half naked. Looking dead sexy, talking and dancing…It's dark and there's R and B playing, it's hard to describe how it makes you feel…"* **(Field Notes: January 2004).**

The nature of a career in lap-dancing is in sharp contrast to the occupations that a dancer might previously have had. For example, some of the dancers at *Starlets* had beforehand worked in the following occupations: nursing; teaching; accountancy; banking and customer services. Even for those dancers who earlier worked as agency strippers there are still differences between stripping and lap-dancing that affect them. Although immediately before working at *Starlets* Jan had worked as an agency stripper, prior to that she had worked as a teaching assistant in a primary school. During an interview, I conducted with her, I asked how she felt the two occupations compared. In response Jan explained that although she considered both people-based, ultimately they are very different: *"…obviously two different ends of the scale…never thought that for a minute that it would be stripping that I'd end up doing…"* **(Interview with Jan: December 2005)**. The fact that Jan claims she had not, prior to stripping and lap-dancing, considered this type of occupation as an option, perhaps emphasises how far removed it is from other jobs outside of the industry.

The dancer-customer relationship is another area that can impact on the *new girl*; the process of interaction between them, which is often intimate, can be daunting for a new dancer. As Paula explains: *"I took my top off and just felt my face going red. He (customer) must have been laughing"* **(Field Notes: June 2005)**. In addition, the amount of money earned, for the time spent working, can initially, for the *new girl*, be overwhelming. For many girls, the reward for 30 minutes private dancing, in *Starlets,* equates to £100. As Lisa points out *"…you get the new girls coming in, totally*

*impressed by how much money you can make for such little work, it's not something they've ever experienced before…" **(Interview with Lisa: November 2005).**

Finally, working in the lap-dancing club offers dancers a level of autonomy they may not have experienced in previous occupations. As Lisa suggests, working in *Starlets* and other clubs is as much about engaging in a sense of fun as it is about making money: *"…I think dancing is more of a social thing than other jobs. Like I don't know many jobs where you can smoke and drink. You can get away with just sitting around and having a laugh. And half the time some girls have their mates come in…"* **(Interview with Lisa: November 2005)**. Ruby, describes how she became engrossed in the social aspects of the job: *"…when I first started it I did get caught up in the whole like thing, I used to go out drinking, ya [sic] know, meet all the footballers and stuff, on a night out and they'd buy us champagne and that. And I did get caught up in it…"* **(Interview with Ruby: November 2005)**. Lisa also suggests that *new girls*, routinely have similar responses *"…they have silly ideas about the whole glamour side of it. They just can't accept the money, the drink and social thing is part of the same thing. You see them spending money, not saving…you've got to make a few mistakes to realise what you're doing and what it's about." **(Interview with Lisa: November 2005)**. This is something emphasised by Skipper and McCaghy (1970); where new dancers have been found to engage with this occupation as a form of leisure rather than paid employment. In relation to this final point, it is through engaging in this social experience that dancers usually start to make sense of the lap-dancing club environment. Following a period in which they become absorbed by their surroundings and take advantage of the freedom offered; dancers soon become absorbed into the culture, taking it for granted.

<u>Forming Relationships with Dancers</u>

> *"…You've got your little cliques. Bit like school. You've got your pushy type of girls, then you've got your pretty popular girls, then you've got your girls that like, work really hard. I think it just depends on which group you fit into…"***(Interview with Lisa: November 2005)**

Lisa, in this extract describes how she envisages the social network of dancers who work at *Starlets*. Other dancers have made similar comparisons, alerting me to the

different social groups amongst the dancers. Successful social interaction between dancers is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it ensures the dancer has emotional support in the lap-dancing club environment (Barton, 2006) as trust between the dancers is established. Secondly, it enables the dancer to become in tune with the *tacit rules* of the club. Through connecting with other dancers, she will be guided by the behaviour and conduct of her companions. Finally, it helps secure her role as a permanent dancer in the club; this is related to gaining the trust and gradual respect of other dancers.

Those who isolate themselves find life difficult working in *Starlets*; Lotti, a dancer, for example, remained distant from the others and experienced a negative reception from her fellow dancers. Lotti was originally from Germany and although she spoke English well, her nationality seemed to set her apart from the other dancers. This sense of isolation Lotti experienced whilst working in *Starlets* was apparent as she often sat alone in the changing room and on the main floor. Other dancers acknowledged this divide by gossiping about her and not including her in conversations. An example of which was observed during a conversation with Candy, Kitten and Davina:

> **Candy:** *We never invited her (Lotti) out, she just turned up! We couldn't tell her we didn't want her there, so she just tagged along. Anyway, she just kept laughing at weird things.*
> **Kitten:** *Like what?*
> **Candy:** *I don't know. We were just talking amongst ourselves and she just kept laughing. So I got sick of it and asked her what was so funny? And she said: "You are so funny!" I didn't have a clue what she was talking about so I just ignored it.*
> **Davina:** *But then she took out this carrot and started eating it. In the middle of a (night) club! She is so weird!*
> **(Field Notes: June 2004)**

These discussions were not unusual and often aimed at dancers who were seen as 'outsiders'. Tiger, for example, in a similar way to Lotti, isolated herself from other dancers and had explained to me: *"I'm not here to make friends. I'm here to make money" (Field Notes: January 2004)*. Unlike Lotti, however, Tiger was far more out

spoken and confrontational, something which caused resentment and led to her being repeatedly taunted by the other dancers, some of whom used verbal, and sometimes more physical forms of bullying. On one occasion, Tiger was accused of stealing another dancer's customer, causing an argument, which erupted into a physical scuffle between her and Davina. Following this, Charley deliberately damaged Tiger's property, which she kept in the changing room, including a stereo and some clothing.

New girls, through observing negative relationships in the club and indeed from getting to know the different personalities, soon become aware of the importance of having a positive relationship with the existing dancers. In relation to this, Eva, a *new girl*, described to me her relationship with Charley: *"I was really scared of her at first. She's not the sort of person you want to get on the wrong side of. A few girls warned me about her, but we're friends now and she's been good to me."* **(Field Notes: June 2005).**

It is common for *new girls* to interact with a number of different dancers and groups until they find one they are comfortable with; this is usually as they enter the *transition* stage. Some *old school* dancers opt to mentor *new girls* in order to draw them into their group; this was the case with Eva who was guided by Charley and Leanne.

Tacit Rules

> *"…With like the rules, when I started at Starlets it was a case of working the rules out for myself and certain things dancers told me about...Truthfully, with the rules, it was a case of what I observed, what the girls have told me and the questions I've asked…the thing is, it's not that straightforward. Coz [sic] for example, it says in the club rules that you're not allowed to go down on your knees (during a private dance), but all dancers do…"* **(Interview with Stacey: December 2005)**

On a very fundamental level there are mandatory rules, known as house rules created by the club management team, which are put in place not only to maintain a level of control over the club and staff members, but also to ensure the safety of the

139

customers and dancers. House rules were created in order to guide a dancer's conduct in the lap-dancing club. These rules serve to ensure that dancers work effectively and that there is a sense of order in the club. To coordinate dancers' hours and to ensure this is maintained, rotas are also made available to the dancers. To seal this, dancers are all asked to sign a work contract before they are allowed to dance at *Starlets*. However, beyond this the club plays host to another set of *tacit rules*, which are complex and govern general conduct in the lap-dancing club environment amongst the dancers.

The *tacit rules*, although based, to some extent, on those created by management, are largely influenced and maintained by the dancers. They have evolved over time and continue to exist in a fluid state, as ideas shift and change with the influence of different dancers. These *tacit rules* are implicit in everything that effects behaviour in the lap-dancing club; they are significant as they override any of the mandatory rules created solely by the management team. For example, as it will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, despite house rules prohibiting all sexual contact between dancer and customer, the *tacit rules* have a different interpretation. For example, as it was suggested earlier with regard to 'dirty dancing', while lower status dancers are prevented from making sexual contact with customers, *old school* dancers are often allowed to do so, unchallenged by other dancers or managers. In a similar way to the house rules, not only do they govern the way in which dancers perform, but also how they should behave socially and interact with the different dancers and customers. Unlike the house rules they are not 'rules' in the traditional sense; for example, beyond influencing the conduct of the dancers in the club they help create and maintain the different *status roles* of the dancers discussed in this chapter. In this way unlike traditional 'rules', the *tacit rules* are a form of knowledge rather than a list of dos and don'ts that dancers adopt. What is implied by these rules is a symbiotic relationship between *power* and *knowledge*, as conceived by Foucault (1980). The complex relationship between the two, suggested in Foucault's ideas, helps explain the fluid and dynamic nature of the *tacit rules,* and how then they are the basis on which the status of dancers is devised and sustained, as it will become clear in the various discussions in this chapter to follow.

On first entering the *Starlets* the *new girl* is only armed with the house rules made available to her by management and is unaware of the extent to which the *tacit rules*

are at the heart of how the club is maintained. These rules are not made available but are learned over the dancer's career. The role of the mentor, discussed in the following section, is important in providing the *new girl* with her first meaningful introduction to these rules. Through following and watching the mentor's conduct the apprentice will develop some understanding of how to work and socialise in the lap-dancing club.

Learning to Dance

> *"…I remember watching the other girls, looking to see who was doing the most dances. So I took note what was working for other girls…I do think you do learn a lot from other dancers, but then again when you do start getting into it, you work out what works for you…"* **(Interview with Lisa: November 2005)**

There are many skills involved in being a successful lap-dancer, something that in the past has been denied by other academics researching this field (Skipper and McCaghy, 1970). For a dancer to be financially successful, it is important for her to understand how to interact with customers, perform both private and stage dances and how to manage their personal appearance. Although a proportion of dancers enter the lap-dancing club with some previous experience of dancing in nightclubs or indeed working as agency strippers, lap-dancing involves a new set of skills. Jan, a former agency stripper, explains*: "It's easier being a stripper because the job is already set up for you...You're not actually involved with the crowd, you don't have to speak to any of them. You don't have to please any of them…lap-dancing's different coz [sic] you've got to sit and talk to them (customers) first, and then you're not guaranteed your money, if they don't want a dance."* **(Interview with Jan: December 2005).** It is therefore, even for those who have previously worked as erotic dancers, a new learning process. Part of the learning process *new girls* experience is aided by informal tuition and from observing other more established dancers. This kind of tuition is important on the dancer's initial entry into the lap-dancing occupation and becomes less necessary after she moves from being the *new girl* to the *transition* stage. The tuition of *new girls* usually follows when a more established dancer befriends her; this dancer will often act as her unofficial mentor. As it was discussed earlier in this chapter, crucial areas, including appearance, dancing ability and interaction are all informally assessed by more established

dancers when a *new girl* first starts dancing. This informal assessment is useful for the *old school* dancer tutoring the *new girl,* as she then understands the areas in which improvements are required. When Eva first started working at *Starlets*, both Charley and Leanne befriended her, both acted as her 'mentors'. It was under Leanne's tuition in particular that Eva learned some of her basic stage skills. In relation to this, during an informal conversation with Eva I asked her how she felt about the stage shows:

> **Eva:** *I was really terrified at first. But I feel more confident and Leanne's helped me with the pole.*
> **RC:** *Do you think you'd have picked dancing up as quickly without her help?*
> **Eva:** *Probably not. She taught me to hang off the pole but I can't dance like her. She's amazing.*
> **(Field Notes: June 2005)**

In relation to private dances, sometimes the 'mentor' will ask her 'apprentice' to sit and watch while she gives a customer a private dance, others will demonstrate by actually dancing for the *new girl*.

Beyond learning the skill of dancing both privately and for stage shows, *new girls* must start to understand the art of flirtation. Learning how to interact with customers can be initially difficult for the *new girl* to grasp. Simone, on her first night at *Starlets* explained to me how she was feeling about this part of her dancing experience:

> **Simone:** *I feel really stupid just going up to them. I just go all quiet. They just look at me as if I'm weird.*
> **RC:** *Do you ask them for a dance?*
> **Simone:** *Not at first, I say hello and then don't know what to say.*
> **RC:** *Have you asked any of the other girls what you could do?*
> **Simone:** *Yes, but it's not easy making conversation with a complete stranger.*
> **(Field Notes: January 2004)**

Through watching, and listening to others, the *new girl* can gain a basic understanding of how to interact with a customer, for example, learning how to approach and make initial conversations with her clients. Ruby, in relation to this

suggests, *"It wasn't until I started watching other dancers who'd been doing it for ages, that I started to understand what I had to do."* **(Interview with Ruby: November 2005).**

Some *new girls*, although not from an erotic dancing background, are naturally better at interacting with customers than others. As demonstrated in the following extract taken from a conversation in the changing room of *Starlets between* Leanne and Eva, a few weeks after she started working:

> **Leanne:** *You seem to be doing well tonight.*
> **Eva:** *It's been really good. I've just got a sit down with that computer guy.*
> **Leanne:** *Eddie! He's really picky.*
> **Eva:** *Well I just batted the eyelashes and put on the charm.*
> **Leanne:** *Good for you.*
> **(Field Notes: May 2005)**

Although some dancers are naturally more flirtatious than others, this does not ensure the dancer is equipped to hustle[92] with the customer, although in Eva's case, her flirting was successful. The skill of hustling is developed over time and it is not until she reaches the *transition* stage that she starts to perfect her techniques.

Finally, in relation to the dancer's appearance, as it has already been suggested earlier in this chapter, *new girls* are often censured for the way in which they present themselves. Paula for example, was criticized in a number of areas, including her make-up, clothes and hairstyle. Leanne explained: *"She's starting to look better now she's bought a new dress, and I showed her how to put her make-up on."* **(Field Notes: May 2005)**.

These lessons are all guided by the *tacit rules* of the club; it is therefore important for *new girls* to learn by example from established dancers. In relation to these rules, as well as learning the correct form of conduct, it is equally important to understand behaviour that is *not* considered acceptable. The fluidity of these *tacit rules* however, make them complex and difficult to define, it is for this reason that *new girls*, may at times struggle to make sense of them. With this in mind, it is not unusual that

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[92] Persuade a customer to spend his money on private dances or sit-downs.

mistakes are made; this is common with regard to customer-dancer interaction. For example, private dances can become too intimate and the *new girl* in question may be accused of 'dirty dancing'. Although some of the *old school* dancers might engage in discreet 'dirty dancing' themselves, it is not acceptable for a *new girl* to engage in this kind of conduct; this will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter. During dancer-customer interaction it is also common for *new girls* to break the three-track rule[93]. However, by being corrected by other dancers, it is rare the same mistakes are made again, unless the dancer chooses to deliberately challenge the rules, and in doing so, the other dancers.

Transition: Becoming Established

> *…It was really interesting to observe how Kat had changed since she began working at Starlets six months ago. Initially she was quiet and kept herself to herself. In fact I always thought it was difficult to make conversation with her. A few months ago she started hanging around with Davina and suddenly became very confident. Kat seems more comfortable with the other dancers and the customers. In the past I had never seen her sitting chatting to customers, however recently Kat appears to have acquired a few regulars…*
> *(Field Notes: July 2004)*

As depicted in the opening extract of this section, Kat as a *new girl* lacked confidence and the skills to be successful with customers; however as time progressed, changes in the way she conducted herself became evident, signalling a new phase as a lap-dancer. In relation to this, it is apparent that after completing a successful apprenticeship as a *new girl*, dancers at *Starlets* enter a *transition* stage. In many ways this stage is about learning to become an established dancer. It is referred to as a *transition* stage, due to it being a period in which the dancer is considered neither *new girl* or *old school*; and as such is almost an 'invisible' stage and yet very significant. After all, it is a time in which dancers start to develop more advanced skills, both socially and occupationally, before reaching *old school* status. More specifically, *Transition* is an experimental stage in which a dancer will work on perfecting her skill as a performer and in further improving her interaction with

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[93] Dancers are permitted to sit with a customer no longer than three songs without dancing for him or arranging a sit down.

customers. It is also a period when relationships with other dancers become more stable, and it emerges who are the newly *transitional* dancer's allies in the club. In addition it is during this stage dancers become more aware of the emotional strain of dancing but learn to deal with the emotional and psychological pressures of working as a lap-dancer. Finally, it is in the *transition* stage that the dancer will make more sense of the *tacit rules* of her working environment.

Practice Makes Perfect: Seducing the Customer

> *"…Like you'll say to a guy, like you'll sit and chat to them and be "You coming for a dance? Yes?" and you'll like nod your head, you know different sales (techniques)…things like, the way you approach a guy, the way you walk over to a guy, the way you smile, it's just like different flirting things that you do…it's just we have different personalities and whatever suits you works for you…"*
> **(Interview with Ruby: November 2005)**

As already discussed, the *new girl* begins to learn how to flirt and interact with customers. However it is not until she reaches the *transition* stage that she begins to develop more advanced skills. During this stage the dancer attempts to execute more sophisticated techniques in order to make money[94]. Dancer techniques have in the past been accounted for by other researchers, such as Bell et al (1998), Boles and Garbin (1974)c; Enck and Preston (1988); Wood (2000). As suggested by Ruby in the opening extract of this section, different dancers are inevitably attracted to and attempt different methods. Such variation in the techniques used is perhaps dependent on two main factors. Firstly, the dancers they are personally associated with, and therefore influenced by, and secondly, the dancer's personal boundaries; in other words what she is willing to do in order to ensure a financial transaction. This contradicts Barton's (2006) claim that, *"The more money clients offer a dancer, the more temptation it is to stretch her boundaries."* (p.95). Although some dancers in *Starlets* were more willing than others to make sexual contact with customers, there was no indication that dancers were crossing personal boundaries to do so.

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[94] Although these techniques are commonly practiced, they are only utilised when a dancer chooses to spend time engaging with a customer. During busy nights in particular it is not uncommon for dancers at *Starlets* to keep this type of interaction to a minimum; in these instances dancers will often move from customer to customer simply asking: 'Do you want a dance'.

Amongst the four techniques identified in *Starlets*, there is some overlap, despite the different processes apparent for each. Firstly, they often rely on the feigning of emotions (Boles and Garbin, 1974c; Enck and Preston, 1988; Brewster, 2003; Hochschild, 1983), portraying dancers as sexually available as well as vulnerable. Secondly, these techniques manipulate the customer's emotions in order to extract money; the manipulation of customers by dancers in this way is something other researchers have accounted for (Bell et al, 1998; Boles and Garbin, 1974; Enck and Preston, 1988). Finally, all the techniques are based on flirtation.

The Ego Boost:

This strategy involves the use of excessive flirting to maintain the customer's interest; the aim is to make the customer feel special and wanted (Ronai and Ellis, 1989). Verbally the dancer in question will attempt to flatter the customer, typical examples include: *"I can't believe you haven't got a girlfriend!" "You're the nicest guy in here"*; *"You're not like all the other customers"*. Cindy, one of the dancers at *Starlets*, used to joke about how she would make customers feel important by becoming involved during conversations: *"I just always look like I'm fascinated by what they're saying. They're talking and I'm going: Oh really! Yeah that's really interesting! When really I'm not even listening to anything they're telling me." **(Field Notes: December 2003)***. Similarly other dancers would encourage customers to talk about themselves, and give the impression of being interested in the topic of conversation. I witnessed this first hand, during my fieldwork, when I was sitting with another dancer, Princess, and two customers. Watching her method of interaction, it became clear how focused she was, her eyes fixed on her customer's every move, agreeing and sounding interested whenever it seemed appropriate. Her technique was successful as Princess danced for the customer several times during that particular shift *(Field Notes: March 2004).*

The Bimbo Act:

This is a popular strategy employed by many of the dancers, sometimes in combination with the *empty promise*. In a similar way to the *ego boost*, it aims to make customers feel superior and gives an impression of the dancer being vulnerable; leading the customer to feel in control. This is of course untrue, and it is in fact the dancer who is in control during most of these enactments (Bell et al, 1998; Boles and Garbin, 1974c; Enck and Preston, 1988; Deshotels and Forsythe, 2005).

The *bimbo act* involves excessive flirting and includes displays of playful and almost 'childlike' gestures. These might include hair flicking, enlarging eyes, pouting, making physical contact with the customer during conversations and giggling; as part of this technique dancers will 'dumb down' for customers. The act is enhanced by the dancer's appearance; bleached hair, hair extensions and sometimes breast enhancements; in relation to this Wesely (2002) argues that lap-dancers are encouraged to look like 'Barbie Dolls' by managers and club owners. Becks, one of the *old school* dancers, for example, claimed to put on a *bimbo act* during her interactions with customers: *"I just look all wide eyed and giggle when they say anything. They think I'm thick as shit. But that's what they want." (Field Notes: September 2004).*

The Empty Promise:

As previously mentioned, this is sometimes used in combination with the *bimbo act*, but it can sometimes result in a more intense form of flirting. Examples might include blowing or whispering in the customer's ear, however more direct sexual contact has also been observed during private dances. For example some dancers will allow customers to make contact with their inner thigh, breasts, bottom and crotch. The *empty promise* involves making the customer believe he is going to have sex or go on a date which will inevitably lead to sex with the dancer in question. Adele described how she achieved this: *"I just tell him (the customer) I'll meet him back at the hotel and then never show up…if he comes in again I just make some excuse up and the same trick works again" (Field Notes: December 2003)*. The fact that he would often return to the club after Adele frequently 'stood him up' suggests not only the level of control she had over him through manipulating him sexually and emotionally, but also that this was a relationship he considered to be real and not feigned. This type of behaviour is echoed by Egan (1995) who states: *"…regulars engage in a fantasy wherein their relationship is perceived as real…"* (Egan, 1995, p. 88). Further to sealing the 'deal', some dancers will even persuade customers to pay money up front for sex, arrange to meet them and then not turn up; Princess admitted to doing this and justified her behaviour by arguing: *"It's not like I'm ever going to see him again. He can afford it…" (Field Notes: December 2003).* Although Princess rejects any issues about her safety in claiming she will never see the customer in question again, by doing this the dancer is engaging in high-risk behaviour. Beyond this the managers at *Starlets*, although aware that this type of

conduct occurs in the club, nonetheless regard it as a punishable offence. With the strict licensing laws governing the operation of *Starlets*, behaviour within the club deemed to be related to prostitution could jeopardise its future.

The Pity Plea:

This technique is often employed when the dancer is having an unsuccessful night. This strategy involves the dancer fabricating or relaying stories that will draw in the customer's sympathy, with the aim of making him/her purchase a dance out of pity. This strategy is not always successful as it can lead to customers complaining about the dancer's 'miserable' disposition, in these cases customers will avoid the dancer in question and even gossip about her to other dancers. It is something, I observed on a number of occasions during my time in the field. Eric, for example, a regular *Starlets* customer who routinely enjoyed private dances and was happy to spend time talking to dancers, did not like those with an unhappy disposition, as reflected in the following extract:

> **Eric:** *That Lass over there with the pink dress on is a bit of a misery.*
>
> **RC:** *Why's that?*
>
> **Eric:** *Every time I speak to her it's the same old moaning: "I'm having a really bad night! I can't afford to pay my rent! The commission's too high!"…It's the same story.*
>
> **RC:** *Do you ever have dances with her?*
>
> **Eric:** *No. Someone needs to tell her to smile!*
>
> ***(Field Notes: January 2004)***

Despite Eric's negative reaction, some customers would successfully respond to this technique, although this would often be a regular who over a period of time had grown to know the dancers in the club. Simon, for example, one of the older customers who attended *Starlets* on a regular basis often spent time talking to the dancers and would purchase many private dances from different dancers in the club. He was never rude or confrontational and happily parted with money. This was something many of the dancers used to their advantage:

> *…It was the end of the shift and there were only a handful of customers in the club, most of the dancers had given up and gone back to the changing room*

to get ready to go home. I spotted Simon sitting with Stella and I approached them both. Stella looked sad and was explaining to Simon how it had not been a financially rewarding night. As I sat down she put her arm around my shoulders, still looking sad: "Why don't we give you a double dance? We've had a rubbish night" Stella's bottom lip protruding, her head hung low and eyes gazing at him like a wounded puppy. He took one look at her face and agreed…(Field Notes: March 2004)

In this example Stella relied on a 'story' to convince Simon to engage in a financial transaction, this was given a sense of authenticity by her body language and an ally (me) to confirm her 'story'.

Strengthening Bonds to Establish Status

…All of the dancers were sitting around the main floor in their usual groups, chatting, laughing and drinking. It had been quiet all night and Gerard did not seem phased by the dancers' lack of drive to get dances and make money. The atmosphere was even more social than usual; most of the dancers seemed to have given up trying to make money and instead seemed more intent on getting drunk…(Field notes: February 2004)

The relationships dancers form with each other is important in the process of establishing status within the club. In relation to the *tacit rules* created and maintained by the dancers, it is necessary for *transition* dancers to ensure their eventual influence and input by developing strong bonds with other dancers, particularly those who are above their own status. The bond between dancers is strengthened not simply by the shared experience of working in the lap-dancing club (Barton, 2006; Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998), but through their engagement with various rituals. For instance, dancers par-take in a number of *emotional rituals*, in this way dancers are able to build bonds with one another; this sets their relationship aside from the ones they have with managers, other staff members and customers. Although *emotional rituals* vary, they often involve dancers airing their personal concerns about issues relating to their work or home life, discussing mutual experiences of working and socialising in the club, and readily offering support to one another when needed; examples of which are apparent in many of the field notes

included in chapters 4 to 7. *Emotional rituals* will often take place in the changing room, away from the customers and other staff members. As dancers have a high degree of ownership over this space, it is the most appropriate place in the club for them to engage in an emotional exchange. For example, it is common for dancers to retreat to the changing room to discuss any personal issues they might have with management, customers or another dancer. This type of process was suggested previously in chapter 4, in the discussion about the changing room.

The second significant factor in strengthening bonds between dancers comes from their mutual engagement in activities both inside and outside of the lap-dancing club environment; thus elevating the relationships between dancers. Sharing experiences, through lifestyle, for example, is an important way in which dancers are able to connect. *Social rituals* undertaken by dancers in the club, sometimes before, during and after working hours demonstrate a sense of commonality between dancers. Such rituals might include drinking alcohol and sometimes taking recreational drugs.

In relation to *social rituals*, at the beginning of a shift at *Starlets*, it is common for dancers to sit in groups on the main floor/or dance reception area, talking and drinking alcohol. The use of alcohol in the lap-dancing club environment is accounted for by a number of researchers (Boles and Garbin, 1974b; Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000; Montemurro, 2001). In order for the dancer to be connected and part of her chosen dancer group it is necessary for her to adopt most, if not all, of the group's *social rituals*. In relation to this, Lisa, during an interview I conducted with her described how her social behaviour changed after working in *Starlets*:

> *"…When I first started I never ever touched anything. And then just started taking it (cocaine) at work. Had a little bit of a dip where I'd like take it quite a lot at work...It was a lot of things that started it. But mainly, I think coz [sic] I started hanging with Charley; she'd give us it for free. I think a lot of it starts coz [sic] they (dancer) want to be in this circle, in this gang. It's kinda [sic] like you smoke to be in the cool gang. That sort of thing…"* **(An interview with Lisa: November 2005)**

This is not uncommon in *Starlets*; Eva for example, had never taken drugs before becoming a lap-dancer. However, according to some of the other dancers, this

changed a few months after she started dancing. During a conversation in the changing room, Hazel described to me the changes she had witnessed in Eva:

> **Hazel:** *She's (Eva) not the same girl.*
> **RC:** *What do you mean?*
> **Hazel:** *She was dead innocent, didn't smoke, didn't take drugs. She's the total opposite now.*
> **RC:** *In what way?*
> **Hazel:** *Since she's been hanging around with Charley and them lot she's always in the toilet taking coke. (Field Notes: July 2005)*

Similarly to Eva, Karen, as she explains in her opening story, never used cocaine before working at *Starlets*. It was after Karen increasingly became involved with the lifestyle associated with lap-dancing that she started taking cocaine regularly.

The use of cocaine, as a *social ritual* in the club, has become increasingly popular amongst the dancers. This perhaps follows the steep rise in its general recreational use (William and Parker, 2001), it has also been suggested that drug-taking is related to occupation (Measham, 2004), something that in part might account for drug-taking in *Starlets*. Although not all of the dancers at *Starlets* took drugs recreationally, many became desensitised to its use in the club:

> *…I was sitting in the changing room with a few other dancers, it was the middle of a shift, and some of the dancers had come in to have a break. Most of them were sitting together generally chatting when Charley, Phoenix and Eva walked in. They casually divided up 3 lines of cocaine on the dressing room counter, which they took in turns to snort away. The other girls in the changing room looked for a minute but then continued chatting. After Charley, Phoenix and Eva had left I asked Stacey who was sitting near me what she thought about it. She simply shrugged and smiled explaining to me "It's not the first time I've seen that and it won't be the last"… (Field Notes: July 2005)*

Cocaine, although popular, is not however the only recreational drug used by the dancers at *Starlets*; other examples include ephedrine[95], speed and ecstasy. In a similar way to cocaine, these drugs were used within individual groups of dancers. Ephedrine was perhaps second to cocaine in popularity; some dancers did not consider it a serious or potentially dangerous drug, despite clinical evidence to suggest otherwise[96]. Nelly, for example, once casually offered me some ephedrine after I had commented that I was tired, when I declined she responded by saying: *"Why? It's just like proplus[97]. It's not bad for you."* **(Field Notes: December 2003).** Again this perhaps reflects how de-sensitised dancers in *Starlets* are to drug-taking in general.

Outside of the lap-dancing club environment, drug-taking within certain circles is still commonplace. It was not unusual, for example, for dancers to arrange a 'cocaine party' after their shift ended at *Starlets*. For example, Charley and Phoenix, in particular, often arranged them with other dancers. They were sometimes heard speaking openly in the changing room about these events.

Bonding over *social rituals*, such as drug-taking, ensures the dancers in question maintain their popularity in the club and is a means of demonstrating their loyalty to other dancers in their immediate circle. This is compounded with the *emotional rituals* dancers engage with. In relation to the *tacit rules* of the club, it is necessary for dancers to begin to establish themselves in the club before they can be part of the rule-making process. In many ways establishing status is about gaining the trust of other dancers, therefore the forming of allegiances and providing proof of loyalty quickly aids the process. Taking part in *social rituals* is very much part of this as it not only shows that the dancer in question is of the same mindset as the circle with which she has chosen to associate, but that she can be trusted, particularly where drug-taking is concerned. As it will be discussed later in this chapter, cocaine represents more than a lifestyle choice; it is not only used as social currency in the lap-dancing club environment to buy dancers' popularity, but in addition it is also used as a bargaining tool with managers.

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[95] A drug used clinically for asthma, however it is taken recreationally for its stimulant effects. Recreational use of ephedrine is currently illegal in the UK.
[96] Adverse affects can include cardiovascular problems, brain damage and death in an over-dose situation.
[97] Non-prescription fatigue relief caffeine tablets.

Growing a Thick Skin

> _"…It takes confidence, it takes the ability to deal with people who are intoxicated, who are probably rude and definitely very different from yourself in most cases, also all kinds of different people…I guarantee you, you meet people who make you feel about two inches tall and it takes a lot to be able to pull yourself round from that…"_ **(Interview with Linda: March 2006)**

After the 'honeymoon' period of dancing, experienced as a _new girl_, in which, as Linda recalls, _"…you're caught up with the glamorous side of it…"_ **(Interview with Linda: March 2006)**, the reality of working as a lap-dancer becomes apparent. Of the dancers who took part in this research, many discussed the emotional strain the job can sometimes cause, particularly to those in the _transition_ or _old school_ stages. Even Karen describes in her story how dancing can be emotionally draining, affecting how much money she earned in the club. In _Starlets_ derogatory comments made by customers is one of the contributory factors most commonly held responsible for the psychological and emotional strain and is probably that most frequently observed and discussed by the dancers. This is echoed by other researchers concerned with the negative effects of dancing (Barton, 2002, 2006, 2007; Holsopple, 1999 and Wesely, 1998; Wood, 2000), and reflective of some of the theoretical thinking around emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983).

Linda, describing how customers would constantly criticise her weight, and call her _"fat"_, remarked: _"…God, I've had moments when I've hated myself…I've ended up getting into a lot of debates, a lot of arguments (with customers)…"_ **(Interview with Linda: March 2006)**. In relation to this, Jan explained: _"…if they (customers) are in a huff they'll take it out on you, they'll try and make you feel like crap…"_ **(Interview with Jan: December 2005).**

The second most cited cause of emotional and psychological strain is the number of shifts worked: specifically their length and timing, as Jan illustrates in the following extract:

"…We don't close 'til 4am[98] now … you come in at 10 and finish at 4. But really to be honest who wants to start getting ready for work at 10 o'clock at night. It feels like a night shift now, rather than a lap-dancing club; it feels totally different in the sense that how late it's continuing on. It really makes a difference on what time I'm getting home, on what time I go to sleep, coz [sic] you can't just go in and bang go to sleep straight away, you've got to wind down, from the music, from whatever gone on that night with the customers. If somebody's upset you a little bit in some sort of way, if something was said to you, you don't let it affect you really, but, when you go home and you lay down to sleep, you think "My God I remember what he said to me", so your mind starts ticking over…" **(Interview with Jan: December 2005)**

Financial pressures are also offered as a major source of stress; these include a dancer being unable to pay the set commission and not making enough money in general. Ruby, explained: *"…it's like you get a bit emotional and I used to just let it get me down. I shouldn't 'av [sic] but, when you go in and you're sat there and ya [sic] like: Oh no I used to be like close to tears some nights when I wasn't making any money…"* **(Interview with Ruby: November 2005)**. To further illustrate this, dancers were sometimes observed sitting in the changing room of *Starlets* tearful at the prospect of not making enough money to cover the commission. On more than one occasion dancers have been observed asking others to supply their taxi fare home. As Jan explains, *"…lap-dancing can be a struggle, it's not always that easy to make money"* **(Interview with Jan: December 2005).**

Management too is a source of discontentment amongst a high proportion of the dancers, something echoed by Wesely (2003). Many of the dancers at *Starlets* felt frustrated by the way in which the Managers treated them. In a conversation with Sasha, she described to me how the managers were becoming increasingly greedy:

> **Sasha:** *It's just ridiculous. I was only 5 minutes late the other day and Gerard fined me £10!*
> **RC:** *Did you try and get out of it?*
> **Sasha:** *No. It's not worth arguing with him. It would just make the whole thing worse. Then I'd probably get another fine.*

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[98] Shortly before this interview was conducted the closing time of Starlets changed from 2.30am to 4am.

RC: *It is frustrating.*

Sasha: *I'm sick of it. Gerard keeps putting the commission up just coz [sic] he's a greedy bastard and wants it to line his pockets.*

(Field Notes: August 2004)

Some dancers also believed that the managers lacked empathy and refused to be supportive when the dancers needed it. As Becks explained to me, *"They've got no respect for us. Ken came in (the changing room) the other night and shouted: 'You cunts better get your backsides out on to the main floor!'* ***(Field Notes: June 2004)***. Gerard too would verbally abuse dancers. For example, during one of the monthly meetings in which all dancers from *Starlets* were present, Gerard remarked: *"Remember who the boss is. As far as I'm concerned you're like dogs, if I say sit, you sit!" **(Field Notes: May 2004)***.

Finally, the excessive use of drugs and alcohol by some of the dancers was admitted as being a contributing factor to psychological and emotional upset. For example, Lisa told me how she was affected: *"…I'd like take it (cocaine) quite a lot at work. Went down to like seven stone...I was like taking a gram and half at work and then go partying straight after and take another two or three grams…my head was a mess, I felt and looked like shit basically…"* ***(Interview with Lisa: November 2005)***. This was not uncommon, some dancers claimed to have had breakdowns because of excessive drinking and drug-taking. Cindy for example explained: *"…I was taking coke every night, then in the day, and I'd just be watching TV and think "I want some coke!" It got to the point where I just couldn't function, I couldn't deal with life any more…" **(Field Notes: February 2004)***. The level of self-destruction described is something emphasised by Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000), who claim that dancers, in the research they conducted, were often negatively affected by alcohol, usually in the form of addiction.

The reactions to and coping strategies employed by dancers at *Starlets* varied, some were more positive than others. In relation to this dancers would initially prepare themselves before stepping out onto the main floor to work, by engaging in various rituals in order to help build their sense of self-belief and confidence. As Karen explains in her opening story, it is important for a dancer to get into the correct frame of mind before working the main floor, for Karen this means psyching herself up.

155

Altering the dancers mood is done in several ways. Primarily dancers attempt to do this through physical preparation; this preparation goes beyond the changing room, as many dancers will spend time and money on body maintenance, from hair extensions to cosmetic surgery. By investing in their physical appearance, besides making themselves more desirable to the customers, they are strengthening their own self-image. Wesely (2003) has made similar claims about dancers' level of body maintenance in American strip clubs, where she suggests that cosmetic surgery has become commonplace. As previously discussed, it is also perhaps the added pressure from management that encourages dancers to make more permanent changes to their bodies through cosmetic surgery.

Another way in which dancers attempt to build their confidence is through the use of recreational drug-taking and/or alcohol consumption, which also act as a pre-shift *social ritual*. Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000) have also suggested that dancers use alcohol and sometimes recreational drugs, in order to boost their confidence. Karen, as well as using cocaine socially, in her story, admits that it also provided with her escapism away from the stresses of lap-dancing and a confidence boost to work effectively. The following extract taken from my field notes demonstrates how commonplace drug-taking was as part of the dancers' preparation:

> *…Saturday night shifts are always chaos in the changing room, but on this particular night there were so many girls working it was difficult to find space to get changed. There was a queue of girls outside the changing room toilets, however, I was aware they weren't all waiting to use the toilet for the traditional reason. It was commonplace on a Saturday for many of the dancers to have a few lines of coke before starting their shift; when using the toilet after them you could sometimes see traces of white powder on the toilet lid…**(Field Notes: May 2004)***

The use of drugs and alcohol, as already discussed, can ironically lead to emotional and psychological upset. Nonetheless, dancers have described how it can also give them a temporary lift, something some of them feel they need in order to work effectively. Paris for example, admitted: *"It gives me that boost I need before I go on stage" **(Field Notes: November 2003)**.* Similarly, Davina explained how getting drunk stopped her worrying about how badly she was doing financially during quiet

shifts: *"I'd rather get pissed and enjoy myself than sit around feeling like crap coz [sic] there's no money to be made!"* **(Field Notes: July 2004)**. Again, the use of alcohol and drugs in this way has been reflected in the work of Maticka-Tyndale et al (2000).

Finally, part of the dancer's emotional preparation, through the use of *emotional rituals*, often involves developing a sense of superiority over the customers and managers. In relation to this, dancers will degrade some of the managers and customers. This is reflected in the following conversation that took place in the changing room between two of the dancers, Leila and Candy about Gianis, one of the club's regular customers:

> **Candy:** *What a perve! One of the lasses said when you dance for him he never looks at your body just your feet.*
> **Leila:** *He's got some kind of foot fetish. He likes girls who wear red varnish on their toenails.*
> **Candy:** *What about that fat smelly Greek guy? I danced for him the other night and I thought I was gonna [sic] vomit. He stunk of sweaty cheese!*
> **Leila:** *There are some right freaks in here!*
> **(Field Notes: February 2004)**

Part of the mockery aimed at customers is also related to the dancing techniques used, discussed earlier, in which trickery is used to seduce them into dancing. In relation to this, some of the dancers will often laugh about how gullible certain customers are, as illustrated in the following extract:

> *…I was talking to some of the dancers in the changing room, as we were all getting ready to go home. Adele had been on a sit down with Ricky, one of her regular customers for most of the night. She told us he'd given her £600 for spending most of the night telling him how much she fancied him. "He thinks I'm actually going to go on some date with him! I don't even like him, apart from being fat, he's the most boring man I've ever met!" Adele explained…(Field Notes: December 2003)*

Similarly, dancers, mock some of the managers, particularly Gerard who is disliked for setting high commission and the imposition of unreasonable fines. Dancers would mockingly impersonate his voice and ridicule his personal appearance: calling him *"ugly"*, *"slimy"* and *"goofy"*.

Over time confidence building and creating a sense of superiority is an important way of combating, at least temporarily, the emotional and psychological pressures associated with lap-dancing. Jan for example was very practical in her understanding of these pressures:

"…you've got to be secure in yourself. I think in this job that's something that can take time… you're putting yourself in a situation where not everybody is going to like you, not everybody is going to find you attractive, not everybody is going to find you sexy, and at the end of the day that's what you have to learn to accept…" **(Interview with Jan: December 2005).**

During the same interview Jan, in relation to the self-belief and confidence needed to cope with the emotional and psychological pressures of lap-dancing, described for example how she combats criticism from customers:

"…So I sat down with them (customers) and had just general chit chat …then one of the guys just came out and said to me "Well how old are you then?" Why does he want to know how old I am? Does it matter? I was 31 at the time, so straight away I told him. "I'm 31, why?" and his response, "Are ya [sic] fuck?" and his other three pals just looked like (shocked) and I looked and I said: "I don't lie about anything, I've got no reason to lie. I'm 31?" he went "Erm [sic] ya [sic] older than me and I'm 40." So I said "Oh and how do ya [sic] know that?" and he went "Well look at the lines there" pointing to my eyes, "I said what do ya [sic] mean" and he said "Well look at the lines there". This was my response: "Now look darling they're laughter lines coz [sic] I know how to smile, it's not your fault you're a miserable bastard is it" and I stood up and walked away…" **(Interview with Jan: December 2005)**

Old School: Achieving Complete Membership

…I had been standing at the DJ booth talking to Deano (the Dj) for about 15 minutes. As usual he was complaining about the new girls. "Some of these new girls are dogs. They can't dance, pick shit music..." Deano always seemed unimpressed with new dancers, although it was always short lived, as he often quickly befriended them. During his rant he continued "It's not like the originals, the old school dancers, like your Jans [sic], your Davinas [sic] your Charleys [sic]." Deano was always praising whom he called 'old school' dancers, I always got the impression he felt more secure with established dancers, in a sense he knew what to expect…(Field Notes: July 2005)

As intimated in this opening extract, *old school* dancers provoke a level of respect that other dancers cannot equal. Deano's remarks suggest a gulf between those of *old school* and *new girl* status. Being part of the *old school* is the ultimate stage the lap-dancer can reach. Attaining *old school* status only occurs after the dancer has learnt from the lessons she faced during the *transition* stage. Beyond being an accomplished dancer, both for private and stage shows, this means the dancer has developed coping strategies which equip her for the lap-dancing club environment; she is integrated within the social network of dancers through sustained engagement with both *social* and *emotional rituals* and most importantly is in sync with *the tacit rules* of the club. As an established dancer in the *old school* stage, the dancer has achieved full membership, giving her privileged status as a lap-dancer. Most significantly, this is a stage in which the dancer helps re-write the *tacit rules*. As well as taking part in the subtle re-creation of these rules, it is also the role of the *old school* dancer to help maintain and reinforce them, as they are constantly challenged. This more central role, which a dancer may now play in the creation and maintenance of the club's *tacit rules*, is therefore what most signals that she has gained *old school* status. Although not all of the dancers involved in this piece of research made a conscious effort to achieve *old school* status, it is a role to which some dancers aspire because of the respect it provokes from other dancers. As with the other *status roles*, no time limit has been placed on the attainment of this particular stage; neither is it inevitable that all dancers will reach this *old school* status before they retire from dancing.

159

> *…In Starlets it was always the more established dancers who were recruited by management to take part in various media projects with which the club were involved. This privilege, however, could cause resentment. For example: last week it was announced that a local band were making a music video and were looking for a couple of girls to be in the video, Davina was put in charge of recruiting dancers; she chose Charley, Phoenix, Candy, Kitten and Lisa. Crystal, who had been at the club for only a couple of months, complained to me, "They always get to do stuff. It's one rule for them and another for the rest of us!" However she did not confront the dancers in question about this. Crystal knew that it was not worth the probable consequences…*
> **(Field Notes: April 2004)**

The various privileges *old school* dancers have are connected with the *tacit rules* of the club and sometimes impact on the way in which other dancers of lower status conduct themselves. Despite *old school* dancers having various privileges, not all of the high status dancers necessarily use their position in this way. From the research conducted in *Starlets* here are some of the main areas in which the advantages of *old school* status have become apparent:

Territory:

In *Starlets, old school* dancers were often territorial about space, as Lisa suggests: *"Some people like to mark their territory…"* **(Interview with Lisa: November 2005).** This is particularly true in the changing room and main floor. As it was suggested in chapter four, both areas are central to the lap-dancing club. The changing room, for example, is the 'home' quarters for the dancers: a place away from the customers and managers; the only place in the club reserved solely for dancers. In this space *old school* dancers are able to maintain control over particular areas; they will, for example, allocate exclusive seating for themselves. Their position as enforcers of the *tacit rules* prevents others from using their seating, despite more formal rules set by the management which leave this space open to all. As it was suggested earlier, the *tacit rules* of the club have more meaning amongst dancers than the house rules. It is thus the respect for these rules and ultimately the *old school* dancers that leads to the cooperation of the other dancers:

…Paula was sitting in the changing room straightening her hair when Charley walked in, as soon as she saw her enter, Paula stood up and moved to another seat as she was sitting where Charley usually got ready. Unless she wanted to offend Charley, Paula was aware she was better to move…Charley always sat in the same seat, there seemed to be an 'understanding' amongst the dancers which prevented others using her space…(Field Notes: June 2005)

In a similar way *old school* dancers are sometimes territorial on the main floor; the *tacit rules* make it easy for *old school* dancer to control the main floor which is where the dancers not only make money but, as suggested earlier, is also a social arena in which dancers congregate sometimes drinking alcohol and relaxing with one another. Although these groups are often mixed, including dancers from all three stages of the dancer hierarchy, it seems to be the *old school* dancers who dominate their own group's site.

Customer Ownership:

On the main floor the dancers, according to the house rules set by the management, are equal and therefore do not have priority over customers entering the club. *Old school* dancers, however, unlike lower status dancers, through the use of the *tacit rules,* again are able to easily challenge this. More specifically *old school* dancers are given priority over both private dances and sit-downs with selected customers, as demonstrated in the following extract:

…Jan had alerted Stacey that Melissa had been sitting with Gary for half an hour without dancing. I approached Stacey to ask what was wrong. "Melissa has done it again! She knows he (Gary) comes in to see me. She can't be allowed to step on another girl's toes." Stacey explained. Shortly afterwards, both Jan and Stacey confronted Melissa about sitting with Gary. I wasn't sure what was said but Melissa kept away from Gary after that and later on I noticed Stacey was the one sitting with him…(Field Notes: May 2004)

In this example, two *old school* dancers Jan and Stacey challenged Melissa as a *new girl* with a positive result for Stacey. It was not uncommon in *Starlets* for dancers to

assert their ownership over certain customers in this way. However, not all *old school* dancers take advantage of this privilege, Karen for example, as she explains in her opening story, does not feel compelled to challenge others for customers in order to make money; likening this approach to selling her soul in the name of money.

Dress Code:

The dress code at *Starlets*, set by management, stipulates that all dancers must wear evening style dresses, no shorter than below the knee, before 11pm, after this time they are free to wear more revealing or themed[99] outfits. If these rules are not adhered to, dancers are often punished. Punishments varied, depending on the number of 'offences', from the managers issuing an informal warning to a dancer facing suspension. The latter is rare, but it is not unknown for dancers to be fined a small fee for persistently breaking dress codes. The dress code is often challenged by many of the dancers from different stages of the dancer hierarchy. However, unlike dancers from other stages, those who have *old school* status are less likely to be reprimanded for ignoring or challenging the dress code. Charley for example, never abided by the formal rule stating that evening dresses must be worn before 11pm, she would enter the main floor at the beginning of her shift wearing a bikini or similar attire, regardless of whether it was before 11pm or not. Interestingly, Charley, like some of the other late stage dancers, seemed exempt from punishment. Although not changing from an evening dress into a more revealing or themed costume did not breach the club's house rules, management nonetheless frowned upon it. Despite this, some of the *old school* dancers who wore the same outfit throughout the entire shift went unnoticed. Davina for example, went through stages in which she would not only wear the same outfit throughout one shift but also from day to day. Although the managers never reprimanded her for not varying her dance costumes, other less established dancers would be told off for the same offence.

Shift Patterns:

During my fieldwork in *Starlets* rules were put in place by management stating that dancers must work at least one Saturday night shift and two shifts between Monday and Wednesday, other than that they were free to work when they wanted. Every month shift rotas were completed and submitted by the dancers for the following

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[99] Nurse, college girl and dominatrix themes were popular amongst the dancers at *Starlets*.

month. Any irregularities would often be dealt with during the submission of rotas and followed either a telephone call from Gerard, or, if the dancer in question was present, her being questioned in the manager's office.

Although many dancers, including *old school* dancers followed this rule, some, however, challenged it. This might involve refusing to work any of the shifts stipulated by management, going on the sick, or not showing for a shift. For example, Phoenix, an *old school* dancer, on a number of occasions avoided working early week shifts and was known to call in sick or not turn in for a shift. However, despite persistent rule breaking, managers never punished her and she was only ever asked to explain her actions:

> *…Gerard and Phoenix were rowing in the office. We could all hear them through the changing room wall. I wasn't sure what it was about until I heard Charley laughing and explaining that: "She (Phoenix) was supposed to be in last night but she was at mine". Charley didn't seem concerned that her friend was getting told off. Everyone in the changing room knew that it was not unusual for Phoenix and Gerard to argue over this…(Field Notes: April 2004)*

Customer-Dancer Interaction:

As it has been briefly discussed earlier in this chapter, in *Starlets*, the house rules proscribe any sexual contact between customers and dancers at any point during interaction: this rule is a direct result of the strict licensing laws (Jones et al, 2003). The punishment for making sexual contact with a customer would involve a fine or dismissal from the club. Despite management being keen to punish dancers for breaking this rule, the harsher forms of punishment such as suspension or dismissal are seldom imposed on *old school* dancers. In fact it was not uncommon for contact between an *old school* dancer and customer to be overlooked. Although not every *old school* dancer attempted to make sexual contact with customers, this was not the case for all:

> *…It is obvious…some dancers frequently exploit rules around contact; particularly some of the more established ones. Charley, for example, will use her knee to rub a customer's penis whilst dancing. I have also witnessed her licking customers' ears and allowing them to suck her breasts. Other dancers*

are aware of this and yet no complaint has been made to management…(Field Notes, July 2005)

'Dirty dancing' at *Starlets* was condemned by most of the dancers. Despite pressure to make money, many dancers were in control of their boundaries, despite the claims of other researchers (Barton 2006; Holsopple, 1999). Dancers, who were aware of Charley's behaviour, would sometimes gossip about her conduct in the changing room but would have never considered reporting her. However the same dancers would not think twice about reporting a less established dancer for the same offence:

…This was Kate's third shift and unbeknown to her, her last. Phoenix, Davina, Charley and some of the other dancers had taken a dislike to her as soon as she'd started. Kate was dating Trev (Saturday/Friday night Dj); some of the dancers were claiming this meant she was getting away with too much…She (Kate) had been sitting with a customer for most of the evening getting progressively more drunk. Davina, Phoenix and Charley had been watching her all night and told Gerard she'd been dirty dancing. This resulted in him watching her from the main floor, after which he swiftly had her removed... **(Field Notes: December 2003)**

This extract demonstrates the way in which house rules are manipulated and used to the advantage of the *old school* dancer. It also, as with the other *old school* privileges discussed, demonstrates how the *tacit rules* of the club are enforced and shaped in favour of *old school* dancers.

Rule Enforcement

To reiterate, the maintenance of the club's *tacit rules* is mostly the responsibility of the *old school* dancers, who will employ different strategies in order to help enforce them. However, although *old school* dancers are the main contributors to these *tacit rules*, it is necessary for other dancers, below them, to cooperate in order for them to be effective and successful.

The maintenance of these rules is the key to the balance and order within the club thereby aiding management. Although dancers' primary intention is not to work in the interests of management, nevertheless, certain aspects of rule enforcement

164

inevitably benefit management. By maintaining these rules the various stages, which are part of the dancer hierarchy, are clearly defined and in doing so preserved. Further to this, the *tacit rules* help *old school* dancers secure their position as high status figures in the club. As discussed below, there are three main ways in which the *tacit rules* are enforced:

Monitoring:

The behaviour and conduct of all dancers, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is under varying degrees of scrutiny, the most vigilant applied to *new girls*. However, this is not as much of an intensive process with other dancers as it is when monitoring *new girls*. It is an effective way of making sure other dancers are in tune with and adhere to the *tacit rules* of the club. Monitoring is not only done by *old school* dancers, but *transition* dancers will often work in the interest of these rules and be mindful of rule breakers. These dancers will watch dancers with the same status as well as others. Dancers who challenge the *tacit rules* are often corrected or challenged in order to maintain order in the club. Persistent rule breaking, however, as already demonstrated, can lead to segregation or removal of the dancer in question.

Bargaining Tools:

There are two main bargaining tools used by some of the *old school* dancers in *Starlets*, drugs and sex. Drugs, usually cocaine, are offered to managers, in exchange for the dancers maintaining some control over certain behaviours present in the club. This is advantageous for the *old school* dancer who uses this tactic to gain control. Firstly, this means that management will tolerate her engaging with certain behaviours usually prohibited. Secondly, it also reinforces the *old school* dancer's privileged status. Further to this, some *old school* dancers will also use recreational drugs as a form of payment; something that for some has proven a useful way of avoiding commission payments. In relation to this, during a conversation with Candy it was discussed how cocaine was used in this way:

> **Candy:** *You know that Cindy doesn't always pay commission?*
> **RC:** *Why's that?*
> **Candy:** *You watch next time when we're all paying Gerard (manager). She sometimes slips him a wrap of coke.*

> *RC: I've never noticed.*
>
> *Candy: Only because they're careful. You watch next time she's in there at the end of the night.*
>
> *(Field Notes: November 2003)*

In a similar way it was suggested by some of the dancers that Charley would supply Gerard with cocaine and in exchange she was able to conduct herself liberally in the club. As the conduct of *old school* dancers such as Charley is overlooked they are therefore able to implement their own rules without interference from management. In a similar way dancers sometimes use sex as a bargaining tool. As Leanne suggests in the following extract, some dancers, despite their dislike of the managers, were willing to provide sexual favours in order to gain some control in the club:

> *…I sat at the bar and talked to Leanne as the day shift came to a close; the club was quite empty with only three or four customers remaining. We got into a conversation about Gerard and his relationships with other dancers. He'd dated a few dancers; Princess and a couple of European dancers who no longer worked at Starlets. Leanne suggested that some dancers were quite happy to sleep with Gerard despite the widespread dislike of him. "I've walked in on a couple of lasses shagging him in the office. I'm not mentioning any names, but all I'm saying is that they get away with stuff"…(Field Notes: June 2005)*

The Role of Respect:

Old school dancers' respected role is evident in the ways in which they have certain privileges, discussed in the previous section, unavailable or limited with those of a lower status. It is their revered position that allows *old school* dancers to proceed unchallenged in their role as rule makers. The role *old school* dancers play in the production and maintenance of the *tacit rules* is what ultimately gains the respect of other dancers, particularly those who are of a lower status. In many ways it is therefore a self-sustaining process; as the respect for a dancer grows, so does her role in the production of the *tacit rules*, and vice versa. As the following extract demonstrates, the role of respect, is as expected something managers are aware of and in Jan's case reward:

…Jan had been working in Starlets since the club opened; she was one of the few original dancers left. She was highly respected, particularly by some of the newer dancers, who I had often seen her comforting in the changing room, if they had for whatever reason been upset. In many ways Jan was like a mother figure for many of the dancers, even to some of the other more established dancers. The managers too have acknowledged this and offered Jan the unofficial role of housemother, although they are refusing to pay her. Nevertheless it just demonstrates her value in the club… (Field Notes: May 2004)

As this extract suggests being a respected *old school* dancer, is not just beneficial for that particular dancer, but can also be rewarding for the lower status dancers. For example, as a figure of respect Jan is seen as a protector and 'mother' to the dancers, whom they can trust and rely on. As suggested in the extract taken from my fieldnotes, the management are aware of this, and in giving Jan the 'unofficial' role of housemother, are able to use the trust and respect she has gained amongst the dancers to their advantage.

Concluding Remarks

Three definitive status roles have been identified and discussed in this chapter. Each phase refers not just to the dancer's ability to perform and interact with customers, but it is also reflective of her relationship with other dancers and overall status in the club.

Connecting and defining these three different status roles are the *tacit rules* of the lap-dancing club. It is these rules that guide the conduct of the dancer and override the formal house rules set by management. This also includes the way in which private dances are performed, how dancers interact with customers and the processes of socialisation in the club. These *tacit rules* are an important source of *knowledge* on which the club is able to function and maintain order. The meaning of *knowledge* in this sense can be understood through Foucault's notion of knowledge/power. It is suggested that power and knowledge share a symbiotic relationship; without one there is not the other (1980). This is reflected in the role of the club's *tacit rules*, as *knowledge*. Power, is implicit in the dancer's status, which is ultimately based on her understanding and adoption of the rules. These *tacit rules*

are therefore part of the process of power in the club. In return, they are put into existence by the dancers themselves as the dancers are involved with the creation and maintenance of this *knowledge*. From this it is possible to see how the two are engaged in a mutual sustaining process.

There are several ways in which the *tacit rules* are produced and maintained. However, it is ultimately through the relationships between dancers and the way in which these relationships are built and sustained through various *social* and *emotional rituals*, that *knowledge* is created and maintained. For example, it has been identified that dancers must become integrated with the mainstream social network of dancers in the club; otherwise they face isolation from others and are ultimately excluded from the production of *knowledge*. In addition to this, the role of *social rituals* such as alcohol and drug consumption is significant in the development of relationships amongst dancers. What it is also suggestive of the *social* and *emotional rituals*, with which dancers engage, is the subcultural meaning lap-dancing at *Starlets* holds for the dancers. Beyond being subcultural on the basis of being a marginalized occupation on the fringes of social acceptability, lap-dancing is a subcultural occupation connected by place (the lap-dancing club) and more significantly by the dancers' ritualistic engagement of activities performed as part of their culture. Although dancers are primarily connected through the shared experiences of working in the lap-dancing club and the various *emotional rituals* dancers par-take in, it is through mutually engaging in *social rituals* that further bonds are made. The basis of strong relationships between dancers, beyond empathy, is around trust and loyalty. These two factors are important as they ensure not only an understanding between dancers, but they limit the possibility of dancers challenging each other's status and prevent the disruption of the *tacit rules*. In addition, these bonds encourage an understanding of and provide influence for this *knowledge*. In relation to this, through a process of socialisation, enabled successfully by different *social rituals*, dancers are therefore able to improve their status in the club. As it has been suggested, these processes are beneficial for the management of the club.

However, beyond the role of *social rituals* in strengthening relationships, certain forms of these social currencies, drugs in particular, can be used in other ways to ensure the creation and maintenance of *tacit rules*. As was discussed earlier, cocaine is used, amongst certain dancers, as a bargaining tool with managers, and indeed

with other dancers, as a way of reinforcing their status and ultimately in the production of *knowledge*. The exchange of drugs for control protects the dancer's status and her role in the production of *knowledge* by giving her the freedom to control her own conduct and ultimately that of others working in the club. Further to this, in relation to power, Foucault (1980) suggests that knowledge/power are fluid and dynamic, this is again applicable to the *tacit rules* of the club which are subject to shift and change as there is a continuous input from different dancers as their status changes. For example, as new dancers enter the different hierarchical stages, their influence, even before they reach the ultimate *old school* status, will still be apparent in the way in which some of the *tacit rules* evolve. In other words as the dancer, adopts new knowledge, suggested as she progresses in status, she is also in a position to cooperate with and transmit this *knowledge*.

Part Three
Karen's Story: Leaving Starlets

…I got sacked…I'd had no sleep so I couldn't possibly face coming in (to Starlets). But I thought: I can't ring up? Should I ring Gerard or should I just ring the office? So I thought: right, withhold the number and ring. So I rang (Gerard) and was like: Hi Gerard you all right? It's Karen. I won't be in today coz [sic] I really don't feel well…Tony (Karen's partner) always used to be saying things like: 'you not going to work?' I'd be like: no I don't feel well. He's like: 'Karen they're gonna [sic] like sack you if you keep doing this'. I was like: I know. I'll do what I want. Get off my case. I started being a bitch to him over it…this one day I was actually really ill. I think I had like two grams (of cocaine) and I think it was like really strong…it must have been like poisoning, you know like the same sort of thing as alcohol poisoning. So anyway, I had two grams. One of them was supposed to be for Dana (dancer friend)…and I was like: yeah I'll keep it for you…the next morning I was supposed to be in Starlets, for like 12 or something. God I felt like shit, I was like for fuck sake man! Why did you [sic] do that, why? Why couldn't you [sic] just keep it for Dana? I was like oh shit I'm skint I've got no money, I thought: is it even gonna [sic] help if I had some more (cocaine)? Can I even be bothered to pick up the phone and like ring someone to get some? No I can't…I walked to the bus stop to get the bus to work. Oh my God I felt like shit. I had to wait for the bus. I rang Gerard and said I was too ill to come in. Well he was going off it! He totally went off it! He had a disgusting attitude on the phone. I wanted to kill him! I put the phone down straightaway! I was like: Oh my God he is a nutter! He's a knob…had to get a taxi to work in the end coz [sic] I was really late…I was still feeling really ill…my stomach was jittery and stuff…I felt like I was (moving) in like slow motion…I got to work, I walked up them stairs. I was like: fucking hell. I don't want to be here…I had to go to the toilet and I sat down. I knew I had to work but couldn't, so I go into the office to see Ken. I was like: look I'm gonna [sic] have to go home, I really don't feel well… Ken was like: 'if you leave you lose your job'. I was like: look I feel really bad. But I just left anyway before he could say anything. There was no way I could have actually worked…I rang Dana…went to Dana's and I just like lay on the couch just shivering and stuff, like really shivering…Ended up phoning Gerard, and he started being a twat on the phone…but it was out my hands, he just sacked me. I thought: fucking hell! That was it. Sacked…Dana was working that night and Gerard was being a right cock to her so she ended up just walking out. She just

left…I rang Gerard back and tried to get my job back…I was like: just give us my job back and I'll change. But Gerard was like: No! But they did us a favour, it doesn't matter, it was doing my head in anyway… Like after getting sacked from Starlets everything came to a head…ended up getting evicted coz [sic] I owed like £2000 in rent…I was actually becoming quite sick of my life at the time. Really sick of it. (I) Hardlies (sic) had any friends. I was just like friends with like dancers and stuff. Like just going to work and taking coke, socializing and stuff. And then, I think this is what actually saved us, the U-turn, was when I got evicted…I had to like get all my stuff and put it in storage. I was so, so sad that night…the night before I was like crying. Packed all my stuff and waved goodbye to it…I told Tricia (dancer friend) and I explained the situation and I was like: can I stay at yours tonight. She was cool with it. So I ended up staying with her for a bit until I got myself sorted…I was good, I didn't have any coke…I knew in the back of my mind what I had to do (pause) and that coke was what got me into this situation in the first place. I was like: I'm not getting it (cocaine) because if I get some coke when I go back to Tricia's I don't want to act like a tit and talk her head off. D'y [sic] know what I mean? Coz [sic] people would be like: 'oh she's a fucking coke head'…so I was like not having any for that reason… I got into a routine. On Sunday I'd go out with her (Tricia) and have a few drinks and then on Monday I'd go to Edinburgh. Work there…but then I started working at Blues (lap-dancing club). Still didn't have coke…the whole time I lived with Tricia, when I used to work at Blues, for the whole three months, I didn't ever go to work and buy coke. I thought: right get yourself on the straight and narrow and sort it out. I just stopped buying coke all together and that was it…but then I started taking it again, but not as much, just enough to keep me working…worked at Blues on Thursdays and eventually I'd buy a gram (of cocaine) when I got there, make £70, and have £30 for the following Friday to buy some more (cocaine)…it wasn't a problem, not like before…everything changed when I fell pregnant with Dylan so I stopped dancing…when I had Dylan I wasn't going to go back, full stop, that's it I thought. But I actually did go back for money in the end. Coz [sic] now I've got to think about him (Dylan). So started working at Jazz. It's ok there, the money's good coz [sic] the club's still new…you can make £300 in a night, £400 if you work your arse off…I know I can't do it forever, I want to go to college and make a future for me and Dylan. But I'll maybe dance to support myself through that…it's weird though coz [sic] Dana was saying: 'I was just walking past this lap-dancing club today, and I just thought to myself, God imagine when you're say 40 and you can't do it anymore!' I

*was like: I know the feeling. I felt like I was 40 or something. I got this sudden feeling where your heart starts racing, like an addiction thing…at the end of the day I think the addiction thing must be right…I think it's the fact that you are sort of morphing into a different life and…living on the dangerous side and you're doing things that the majority of people wouldn't do...it's like Mercedes (retired dancer), she has got a comfortable life but I know she'll probably go back (to dancing) somewhere down the line…(**Interview with Karen: December 2005; March 2006**)*

Chapter Seven

Leaving Starlets: The Last Dance?

Introduction

In the third and final part of Karen's story, which prefaces this chapter, Karen recalls how she was dismissed from *Starlets*, after her cocaine habit spiralled out of control affecting her ability to function reliably at work. Further to this, she describes how this set back did not discourage her from dancing in other clubs. After the birth of her son, despite Karen's effort to not return to dancing, she did. Karen acknowledges that there is something inevitable about the re-entry of dancers back into the industry, suggesting that a career in lap-dancing is cyclical. This chapter reiterates this, demonstrating the temporary nature, in many cases, of a dancer's retirement.

In light of Karen's story, this final data chapter will explore some of the *exit strategies* associated with the retirement of dancers from *Starlets*. Not only addressing the voluntary exit of dancers but also the dismissal of dancers from the club. Not surprisingly, the various *exit strategies*, in a similar way to the entry ones discussed in chapter five, are divided into *practical* and *emotional* types. The exit of dancers is an area that has only been briefly touched on by the available literature (Barton, 2006; Bradley, 2007), and has not been discussed in relation to various strategies. In order to highlight the cyclical nature of lap-dancing, as observed at *Starlets*, there will follow a discussion about the re-entry of retired dancers; offering various explanations for this phenomenon. Again as it has been indicated with the retirement of dancers, re-entry into a career in lap-dancing has only been addressed briefly in academic literature (Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998). Developing a discussion of both the exit and re-entry of dancers not only offers a new insight, but also will inevitably make clearer the role lap-dancing plays in the lives of the dancers themselves. The final part of this chapter will examine some of the occupational and educational plans dancers have outside of lap-dancing. This discussion, as it will become evident, emphasises how many dancers, despite their intimate relationship with lap-dancing, not only see it as a temporary occupation but also have other, very different ambitions.

<u>Leaving Starlets</u>

> *…Returning to Starlets as a customer, there primarily to observe, was a strange experience for me. I had been away from the club for a few months and on my return noticed several new dancers. There also seemed to be an absence of those established dancers who had been at Starlets during my fieldwork. I learned from Leanne that some of these dancers had moved to other clubs or simply left without explanation… It was good to talk to Nelly, Davina and Jan again; all of these dancers had been here when Starlets opened, and they were some of the most established dancers in the club …(Field Notes: February 2006)*

It is inevitable that lap-dancing rarely translates into a long-term career for the women who choose to work in that field (Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998; Reed, 1997); those at *Starlets* were no exception. There are a number of influencing factors leading to a dancer's exit from lap-dancing, which will be discussed later in this chapter. However, one factor, in particular, which prohibits women working in this profession throughout their lives, is of course age. As it was suggested in previous data chapters five and six, the physical appearance of a dancer is paramount as far as management is concerned. In relation to this point dancers themselves are aware of the implications of getting older for their lap-dancing careers; something Tilly, a dancer in her mid 30s, confirmed: *"I've got a few more years left, but you've got to be practical about it, they're not going to want me here when I'm in my 40s…" (Field Notes: December 2003)*. Although no age limits have been set in place at *Starlets*; looking youthful is something managers at *Starlets* are keen to promote, something indicated by the high numbers of dancers in their late teens and early twenties. Most of the dancers who exited *Starlets* during the time in which I conducted my fieldwork did so for non-age related reasons. The length of the lap-dancer's career varies and is dependent on a number of factors both inside and outside of their control.

Whatever the dancer's reason might be for leaving *Starlets,* doing so often evokes complex emotional responses; in which dancers can experience both positive and negative emotional reactions simultaneously. As dancers were often emotionally expressive about the process of leaving *Starlets*, this suggests they have an

emotional connection to their occupation. The various emotional attachments dancers develop in the lap-dancing club setting is something that has only briefly been acknowledged (Barton, 2006; Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998) however, this is a phenomenon that needs to be explored further as the data generated from this ethnography clearly suggests. It is argued that the study of emotions within sociology is significant as "…emotions are the "glue" binding people together and generating commitments to large-scale social and cultural structures…" (Turner and Stets, 2005, p. 1). Although Hochschild (1979) has explored the role of emotion in relation to *social rules* and later (1983) to labour, with regard to this later work on *emotional labour*, there is no discussion on the emotional attachment one might have to their job, but rather of the emotional strain and the management of those emotions.

Janine decided to exit her job as a dancer at *Starlets* after facing disapproval from her partner; similar behaviour has been observed by Bradley (2007). It was perhaps, in part, due to the circumstances of her retirement that Janine was very emotional and saddened by the prospect of leaving the club, as it is demonstrated in the following extract:

> *…It was Janine's last day at Starlets and at the end of the shift everyone was crowded round her. She was hugging some of the dancers who were all telling her to stay; they all seemed to disapprove of her reason for leaving…Janine became increasingly emotional about leaving; it wasn't long before her eyes were puffy from crying. She continued to cry and kept telling people how she didn't want to leave: "I'm going to miss you girls so much, I wish I could stay"…(Field Notes: January 2004)*

In contrast Adele was far more satisfied about her decision to leave:

> *…I remained in contact with Adele after she left Starlets; I met up with her a few months after she retired from dancing… I wanted to know how she felt now that she had left Starlets…Adele explained: "No I would never go back to dancing…So glad to get out of it…to be honest I don't like the thought that I ever did it!" However I wasn't surprised by her lack of sentimentality; before leaving Adele had faced several conflicts with some of the dancers…(Field Notes: November 2005)*

Adele's reaction to leaving *Starlets* was common amongst those who did not appear to feel part of the apparent lap-dancing subculture. Sandy, for example expressed the same contempt for lap-dancing after retiring from *Starlets*: *"I can't tell you how much better things are…it's like a weight has been lifted"* **(Field Notes: Sandy; April 2005)**. This sense of dissatisfaction with lap-dancing also included dancers who were dismissed rather than taking voluntary retirement. For example, Linda after being dismissed from *Starlets* was disparaging about the club and the people who worked there:

> *"…Starlets overall was an absolutely horrible experience for me because even now, if you said go back and work at Starlets, which is quite sort of glamorous and desirable, or go back to the Dog and Crown[100] and strip, I would choose the Dog and Crown any day because there isn't that sort of snobbiness that you get at Starlets. And you know what I detest. I hate, those girls at Starlets who call themselves dancers, we're not dancers we're strippers! We're strippers and I have no problem with going "I am a stripper"…"***(Interview with Linda: March 2006)**

In this extract Linda attacks the dancers at *Starlets* by calling them snobs, something she emphasises by drawing attention to their preferred choice of working title: 'dancer', as opposed to 'stripper'. Interestingly, there is some truth in what Linda contends: many of the dancers at *Starlets do* refuse to be called strippers, particularly those who have previously not worked for stripping agencies. For these dancers the name 'stripper' has negative connotations. This is something suggested by Sally's reaction after a customer referred to her as a 'stripper'; as she explained to me and some of the other dancers: *"I'm not a stripper, I'm a dancer! Strippers are dirty… Lap-dancing is far more tasteful…"* **(Field Notes: January 2004)**.

Unlike, Janine, Adele, Sandy and Linda, other dancers seemed less certain and had mixed feelings about leaving. Tilly, for example, who although she had not originally planned to leave until age so dictated, nonetheless, left prematurely to concentrate on the fitness training business she had built with her husband. For Tilly the prospect of ending her career at *Starlets* was something she felt positive about, however, she also admitted feeling sad about leaving the other dancers: *"I know it's time to*

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[100] A pub on the stripping circuit, in which agency strippers regularly worked.

leave…but it's difficult saying goodbye…" **(Field Notes: September 2004)**. Similarly, Becks who when she became pregnant left *Starlets* to become a full-time mother, conveyed a mixture of sadness and happiness about leaving the club. For example, talking to Becks a few months after she left *Starlets*, she said that although she was pleased with her decision to stop dancing she nonetheless missed the closeness she had experienced with other dancers: *"I don't miss the dancing so much, but my friends…It would be nice to be back for them"* **(Field Notes: March 2006)**. Even Karen who explains in the final part of her story that the managers did her a favour by dismissing her, goes on to admit that she found the thought of giving up dancing entirely, very difficult to accept.

Although these responses are different, what is apparent is the emotional impact that working at *Starlets* has on the dancers. More specifically these emotional reactions are somewhat indicative of the close bonds formed between the dancers. In some ways the manner in which leaving *Starlets* is addressed by dancers is rather reminiscent of the emotional reactions produced after the breakdown of a close relationship. Adele, for example, who had a poor relationship with some of the dancers towards the end of her career, was happy about leaving the club. However, in contrast, Janine who had closer, more positive relationships with the other dancers was less content about retiring.

Exit Strategies

> *…I hadn't seen Davina since I was last in Starlets…I was surprised to hear she was planning to leave the club in the next couple of months; Davina explained: "I've had enough of dancing…my boyfriend's in the RAF and I'm planning on going with him when he's posted away…" Davina went on to tell me how happy she was in this new relationship…although he was supportive of her choice of occupation, she explained that he was one of the main reasons she wanted to retire from dancing…***(Field Notes: February 2006)**

In chapter five the *entry strategies* employed by dancers at *Starlets* were explored. In a similar way the voluntary retirement of dancers, whether temporary or permanent, can be identified in relation to various strategies. This is an area that has not been given much attention by other researchers working in this field of study; the usual

focus has been on motivations around entering this occupation (Barton, 2006; Boles and Garbin, 1974; Carey et al, 1974; Forsythe, 1992; Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998; Skipper and McCaghy, 1970; Wesley, 1998).

From the opening extract of this section it is apparent that Davina attributed her eventual exit from *Starlets* to her relationship with her partner. This is not unusual, as it is evident from this research that relationships are sometimes a catalyst for dancers retiring from *Starlets*. Although not all of the dancers leave *Starlets* of their own free will, this section will focus on those who do; the dismissal of dancers will be discussed later in this chapter.

Following the same pattern as those regarding the *entry strategies* documented in chapter five, two similar exit strategy types have been identified: the *practical* and the *emotional*. Although there are inevitably differences between the *entry* and *exit strategies*, the general criteria for those described as *emotional* and *practical* in both entry and exit routes are the same. For example, *practical strategies* refer to decisions made that are based on a desire to fulfil a practical or instrumental need; whereas *emotional strategies* relate to decisions made which are based on a desire to satisfy an emotional impulse. More specifically, *practical strategies* include*,* change of career*,* childbirth and relocation; *emotional strategies* include the stresses and demands associated with relationships and the general psychological strain associated with the job. It is important to point out that these *exit strategies* do not necessarily lead to permanent retirement, for example it is not uncommon for dancers to re-enter this occupation, whether at *Starlets* or in another lap-dancing club. Returning to dancing after retirement is something that will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter.

In relation to the *exit strategies*, it is important to make the following points. Firstly, with regard to the relocation of dancers as an *exit strategy*, although it refers to the retirement of dancers from *Starlets*, it does not mean that the dancers associated with this strategy will necessarily exclude themselves from working at other lap-dancing clubs. Secondly, it is also important to emphasise the connection between the two emotionally driven strategies, relationships and psychological strain; both as it will become clear in the following discussion, are inevitably linked. Thirdly, in a similar fashion to the *entry strategies* discussed in chapter five, the *exit strategies* do

not necessarily work in isolation, as more than one strategy might be associated with a dancer's retirement. Finally, in relation to this, the *exit strategies* are as complex as the *entry strategies*; for example, as it was argued in chapter five, the reasoning behind entering this occupation is not necessarily as clear as some of the dancers conveyed, as their actions in relation to this would sometimes contradict their explanations. This was evident with the reasons provided for leaving *Starlets*. The following section will explore both the *emotional* and *practical strategies* for exiting.

Practical Strategies

Some of the strategies dancers employed when exiting lap-dancing have been labelled as practical. *Practical strategies* refer to decisions, which are not based on emotional fulfilment, but fuelled by a desire to satisfy more practical and instrumental needs. In relation to this there are three main strategies that have been identified including: change of career; childbirth; relocation.

Change of Career:

This refers to dancers who end their lap-dancing career in pursuit of another occupation. The nature of the career change varies, as reflected in the choices made by some of the dancers who left *Starlets* to pursue a new job. For example, Sandy, an *old school* dancer, who, after working in the club for two years, retired from dancing to work with a local community group which supported disadvantaged children; the skills for which she had gained on a course she was studying at college. This change in career was something she had planned. Sandy explained to me that she wanted a career that would provide her with security in the future: *"It's time to get out…I want a real job, a proper career…"* **(Field Notes: September 2004).** For Sandy, lap-dancing was not something she ever considered as a permanent career or one that had credibility, hence why she did not consider it a *real job*.

Jenna, another *old school* dancer, worked at *Starlets* for a couple of years before leaving to pursue a new occupation:

> *…I was talking to Davina about Jenna leaving Starlets… Jenna left the club to manage a new bar that had opened in the city centre, something that she had previous experience of before lap-dancing. Davina, who was still friends with*

her, explained that she was really happy in her new occupational role and was pleased to have left Starlets…(Field Notes June 2005)

Returning to bar management was a convenient change of career for Jenna as she already had the required skills having previously done this job. Although immediately prior to dancing, Jenna had waitressed at *Starlets*, it was never made clear why she had left bar management in the first place; although some dancers did speculate that she had been dismissed from this role, rather than her taking voluntary leave.

Following the departure of these *old school* dancers, Adele also exited *Starlets* in pursuit of a new occupation. Lap-dancing had provided Adele with financial support throughout the degree course she studied at University; having started dancing while she was a student. However, after completing her degree Adele had applied for various jobs and been successful in gaining a temporary, yet promising post working for a newspaper:

> *…It seems Adele has settled into her new position at the newspaper, after initially being taken on for a short contract, they have now offered her a longer one. She sounded so excited and happy about how things had worked out for her: "Work's going so well…the company's fantastic"…(Field Notes: November 2005)*

Finally, Sam, an *old school* dancer ended her career at *Starlets* in order to pursue a career in modelling. This change of career was initiated after meeting a photographer in *Starlets*, who helped create her portfolio. Like other dancers, Sam talked openly about leaving the club, some dancers in fact commented that she was 'bragging' about her career move, as one of the dancer's commented: *"She thinks she's going to be a big star…she's up her own backside" (Field Notes: November 2003).*

What appears to be evident from the examples provided in this section is that those who used a *change of career* to exit lap-dancing did so for jobs they considered more meaningful or more stable or permanent. For example, Adele and Sandy in particular, pursued occupations they had both worked towards and about which they felt strongly; not only does this suggest that their new roles carry more meaning for them, but that lap-dancing was something they considered as a means-to-an-end

and therefore more temporary. In a similar way, Sam in her pursuit of a career in modelling was choosing a job that offered her more meaning; again this would suggest that lap-dancing, for Sam, was a means-to-an-end. Tilly and Jenna, on the other hand, both left dancing to focus on occupations of which they had previous knowledge and for which they had acquired the relevant skills. Not only does this suggest a move of convenience, but also that both Tilly and Jenna, due to the nature of their preferred occupations, were opting for ones that, in different ways, offered more stability. Tilly for example, as a dancer in her 30s was aware that her age would soon prevent her from continuing to work at *Starlets*. With this in mind by focussing on her fitness training business, she was perhaps opting to pursue something that did not have the same restrictions. Finally, Jenna, by returning to a managerial role was choosing an occupation that offered her a more fixed income and therefore more stability.

Childbirth:

This refers to dancers, who end their careers, either permanently or temporarily, to give birth. For all of the dancers in this position, during my fieldwork, almost half saw retirement as temporary and some of those dancers did indeed return to work as lap-dancers. Re-entering a career in lap-dancing is something that will be explored later in this chapter. Although dancers inevitably do not have a choice about exiting dancing when they are pregnant, their jobs as lap-dancers usually remain open. With this in mind dancers can use childbirth as an opportunity to take a temporary or more permanent retirement from dancing. Therefore in the long run, this *exit strategy* should still be considered voluntary.

Mandy was the first dancer to leave *Starlets* due to pregnancy during the time I spent in the field. She did not talk openly about the circumstances of her pregnancy but neither did it appear to be something she regretted. Mandy was keen to return to dancing after the birth of her child:

> *…Mandy was sitting with Candy, Becks and myself on the main floor near the DJ booth, she had just told us she was pregnant and seemed so happy about it. We all congratulated her. Mandy explained that she planned to leave when her pregnancy started to show: "I'm going to dance for as long as I can… I've*

had a word with Ken and Gerard and I'm going to stop doing the stage shows soon"…(Field Notes: April 2004)

Due to financial reasons, other pregnant dancers plan to continue working until it is physically evident that they are expecting. However, in *Starlets*, it can be sensed that the managers are ever watchful for pregnant dancers; a dancer who shows her condition is not good for business, as it can be calamitous for the club's reputation. After all, all the visible signs of pregnancy are not in keeping with the desired dancer physique or the sexual availability lap-dancing managers want their dancers to advertise (Barton, 2006; Wesely, 2003). In relation to this, Ken's attitude towards Mandy seemed to change when she announced she was pregnant, and although she planned to stay for as long as possible, it was shortly after her announcement that she retired from *Starlets*. Approximately a year later Phoenix also became pregnant:

…I was talking to Davina in the changing room and was told that Phoenix was pregnant. Although this was not unexpected; Phoenix had apparently been trying for a baby for some time. As Candy later explained: "God yeah. I wasn't surprised. She's been trying for ages. Not sure if her boyfriend was expecting it though!"…(Field Notes: May 2005)

Like Mandy, Phoenix continued to dance for a short time after discovering she was pregnant. However, when Becks became pregnant she stayed at *Starlets* for as long as possible in order to save money in preparation for motherhood, but still left before her pregnancy was obvious. Despite having a good relationship with management, Becks was still subjected to the same disapproval other pregnant dancers faced. When the time came to leave the club, she was happy to go and focus on becoming a mother, she explained to me that although she intended to return to dancing, motherhood would be her primary consideration: *"I will probably go back and work part time, maybe on a Saturday afternoon" (Field Notes: February 2005).* However despite Becks' plans to return to work part-time, she decided not to lap-dance again soon after the birth of her son: *"I'm just happy being a mum…after having Scott, I feel differently about it…" (Field Notes: January 2006).*

Relocation:

This refers to dancers who leave *Starlets* to work in other lap-dancing clubs or simply relocate geographically for various non-work related reasons. It is not uncommon for dancers to relocate to other lap-dancing clubs either nationally or internationally. Relocating in this way is still significant as an *exit strategy*: firstly, the dancers in question are leaving behind the culture associated with working at *Starlets* and secondly, it raises questions about their reasons for leaving *Starlets* in favour of other clubs.

Exiting *Starlets* in this way is not necessarily a permanent relocation; some dancers work in other clubs for short periods of time and then return to *Starlets*. Ruby for example, on more than one occasion, worked in other lap-dancing clubs nationally and abroad, she would often spend two or three months working away in various clubs: *"…I worked there (Red Diva lap-dancing club) for a good few months until the summer and then I went to Ibiza and I had a few months off, then I got back into it (working at Starlets) when I got back from Ibiza…"* **(Interview with Ruby: November 2005).**

Some of the dancers who relocated to other clubs intended the move to be permanent. Stella for example, had started a relationship with another dancer who did not live locally and on that basis relocated to another club. Other dancers, including Dina and Lucy, planned to relocate abroad to work in various lap-dancing clubs; neither dancer had any fixed plans, however Lucy in particular indicated that she did not intend to return to *Starlets*:

> ***RC:*** *Are you coming back?*
> ***Lucy:*** *No. I want to dance over there and then try and get back into professional dancing. I've had enough of working here.*
> ***RC:*** *What about Dina?*
> ***Lucy:*** *Fuck knows. She's away with the fairies but she doesn't reckon she'll be back.* **(Field Notes: May 2004)**

Before working as a lap-dancer at *Starlets* Lucy had been a professionally trained dancer, her original entry into lap-dancing was intended to be temporary while she

waited between jobs; using lap-dancing as a career break was accounted for by Skipper and McCaghy (1970).

In contrast, Bella left *Starlets* to relocate geographically with her partner, her intention was also to stop lap-dancing and go back into nursing, something for which she had originally been trained. It was not however clear why she had left nursing to become a lap-dancer in the first place. Bella only worked at *Starlets* for six months and her departure was sudden, with, only a few dancers informed of her reasons for leaving:

> *…Sandy and I were sitting together on the main floor; I had noticed Bella hadn't been in Starlets for a few days, which was unusual as she worked most nights. Sandy and she were friendly so I asked her why she hadn't been working; to my surprise I was informed that Bella had in fact left Starlets and moved away with her boyfriend…(Field Notes: August 2004)*

Relocation, as an *exit strategy*, is not isolated as it is often associated with other strategies. For example, Stella relocated to work at another lap-dancing club to be closer to her partner, suggesting that her relationship was the driving force for her relocation. What is also apparent from this section on relocation is the flexible nature of lap-dancing as a form of employment. For example, as it has been demonstrated, dancers are able to relocate to other clubs with ease, both nationally and internationally. Further to this dancers are able to return to *Starlets* after a period of working in other lap-dancing clubs.

Emotional Strategies

In contrast to the *practical strategies* identified in the previous section, these ones are based on emotional decisions. Two of the strategies discussed in this section, relationships and psychological strain will be explored in this context. As already mentioned these strategies seemed to be equally if not more significant than the practical ones amongst the dancers working at *Starlets*.

Relationships:

This refers to dancers who end their career at *Starlets* due to the disapproval of partners, and/or the tension caused in those relationships by the very nature of the job. Although not all of the dancers who find it difficult to maintain their relationships

leave *Starlets* as a result, it is still a common problem, something reflected in the data generated from this ethnography.

The research findings clearly suggest that dancers struggle in many instances to maintain healthy personal relationships outside the club; this is something echoed in the work of Barton (2006) and Bradley (2007), who both also reported tensions between dancers and their partners over the nature of the industry in which they were involved. Further to this, Bradley (2007) describes how nearly all of the former dancers she interviewed reported that relationship difficulties were influential in their decisions to end their careers.

Of those dancers at *Starlets* who did confront romantic difficulties, some talked openly about their problems:

> *…Paris was still in a relationship with Dan despite his dislike of her working as a dancer. As a result of his jealousy she had become very cynical about men and their ability to cope with her dancing: "…Why can't I meet someone who doesn't care what I do"…(Field Notes: February 2004)*

Barton (2006) in a similar way found that heterosexual relationships are not the only ones in which jealousy about the customers arose, as she suggests, lesbian relationships are also affected. This is something also reported by some of the dancers at *Starlets*. For example, prior to dating Andrea, Stella had been in a relationship with someone outside the industry. Her partner had not prevented her from working, but neither had she approved of Stella lap-dancing; she explained: *"She's jealous! She doesn't like me dancing for men, like I'm going to go off with one when I'm gay!" (Field Notes: January 2004).*

This jealousy was not specific to dancers who had relationships with individuals outside of the industry; in some cases dancers who were in relationships with staff members were also confronted by difficulties. Vienna, for example, who was in a relationship with Bobby, one of *Starlets'* bouncers, found it increasingly difficult to work as a dancer due to Bobby's resentment about the customers. Other dancers knew of their difficulties and would sometimes talk about it:

Hally: He's really possessive…He doesn't like her dancing here.

Jan: She'll end up leaving.

Hally: I know that they argue about it all the time.

Jan: That's typical. He knew what she did when he started seeing her!

(Field Notes: December 2003)

Contrary to expectations, Vienna did not leave *Starlets,* but other dancers, including Sally and Janine, did exit the club as a result of personal relationships. For example, Sally, soon after meeting her partner ended her career at *Starlets*, her exit was abrupt and although she did not confirm her relationship as the reason for her departure, other dancers suggested this was so. Candy explained: *"Think it was her bloke…. he didn't want her dancing. Fucking hypocrite, he met her here!" (Field Notes: July 2004).* Significantly McCaghy and Skipper (1970) suggest that it is not uncommon for men to attempt to persuade the dancers with whom they are in a relationship to abandon their dancing career.

Like Sally, Janine met her partner while working at *Starlets*; he was a customer at the time. As their relationship intensified, she admitted that he was becoming increasingly possessive and raised objections to her working as a lap-dancer. Before she left *Starlets*, from the various conversations I had with her, it became apparent that the nature of her job was causing their relationship to fragment:

> *…I felt sorry for Janine, she'd been with Andrew for a little while but her relationship was not happy. Janine explained to me that he would argue with her about leaving Starlets: "He hates it. I don't want to leave but I don't want to lose him". She went on to explain that she felt helpless about the situation she was in. Those dancers to whom she was close did not approve of his attitude towards Janine and would often try and persuade her to leave him…*
> *(Field Notes: November 2003)*

Ironically, before meeting Andrew, Janine had always appeared to take pleasure from her job, and as a result had consistently been one of the highest earners in the club. The pressure she experienced emotionally from Andrew's disapproval became increasingly apparent in her lack of willingness to dance for customers:

*…Janine was sitting alone on the floor at the back of the changing room she looked depressed. Every night she was the same. I sat next to her and asked her what was wrong. She smiled and looked at me as though I should know: Andrew of course. Janine explained: "I can't go on like this…I just don't want to come to work. He hates it so much…****(Field Notes: December 2003)***

As Bradley (2007) argues, for dancers in this situation: "…they face particular challenges as dancers attempt to balance the expectations of their partners with the demands of their profession…" *(p. 379).* For Janine striking this balance became impossible. It was therefore inevitable that she made the decision to end her career and leave *Starlets.*

In contrast, although Angelica did not have relationship difficulties, she made the decision to leave *Starlets,* because of the effect she believed lap-dancing would inevitably have on her relationship. In a conversation I had with Angelica, she explained how she did not believe her job was compatible with relationships: *"…I don't think it's right. If I was a bloke I'd hate it if my lass was a lap-dancer…"* **(Field Notes: February 2004).** Interestingly, both Angelica and Janine returned to *Starlets* whilst in the same relationships; this will be revisited and discussed later in this chapter.

Psychological Strain:

This is an area of the lap-dancing experience that has been acknowledged by a number of authors (Barton, 2002; 2006; 2007; Deshotels and Forsythe, 2005; Holsopple, 1999; Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000; Wesley 1998; Wood, 2000). In the wider context of gender and work, the idea discussed is often understood in relation to Hochschild's (1983) work on emotional labour. Learning to cope with the psychological strain of dancing was discussed in the previous chapter. For example, emphasis was placed, by participants, on the importance of being able to adapt emotionally and psychologically in order to continue working as a lap-dancer. Although, as it has been suggested, dancers learn in various ways to cope by employing different strategies, there are inevitably those who are never able to 'grow a thick skin' or who may have periods in which the pressure of dancing becomes psychologically overwhelming:

…Paris admitted to suffering from depression, and because of this she drank quite heavily, particularly when she was at Starlets. I was sitting talking to her on the main floor; she was quite drunk but very coherent. We were talking about the emotional pressures of lap-dancing, something Paris often talked about. She wasn't happy, it was obvious, and she seemed to be very negative about lap-dancing in general: "So many dancers are on anti-depressants you know. It's this job, it gets to you in the end". I was aware of a few other dancers, Lucy and Cindy, who also claimed to be taking anti-depressants, but to what extent this was due to lap-dancing alone I was uncertain…(Field Notes: November 2003)

Not all of the dancers who were affected in this way would leave *Starlets*, some would cope by using drugs and alcohol to blot out the feelings of anxiety (Forsythe and Deshotels, 1997; Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000; Wesely, 2003); this is something touched on in the previous chapter.

This emotionally driven *exit strategy* is rarely given as a prime reason for leaving. For example, dancers will cite reasons for leaving which include relocation, career change and relationships, but will simultaneously indicate that they are struggling to cope with the demands of the job psychologically. In terms of relationships, where partners disapprove of a dancer's occupation, lap-dancing will inevitably become a psychological strain; therefore the two are intrinsically linked. This does not however indicate that dancers who find dancing a psychological strain are necessarily having problems with their relationships, but it is not unexpected or unusual when this is the case. Returning to Paris and Janine, two of the dancers discussed in the previous section, we find that both were affected emotionally by their partners' disapproval of lap-dancing, affecting their perceptions of their occupation and causing them to feel the psychological strain of dancing. In relation to this, Janine, for example, began to re-assess her career as a lap-dancer, believing that dancing was the catalyst for her relationship troubles rather than the relationship itself. This again can be related to the work of Bradley (2007), in which it is argued: "Many dancers report constant feelings of guilt associated with their work. Yet these feelings appear to be triggered by their partner's actions…" (p. 389). As discussed earlier, these conflicts inevitably led to Janine's departure from *Starlets*.

Other dancers were also affected emotionally by the nature of their job, but not directly as a result of a relationship. Sandy, for example, although excited in the pursuit of a new career, admitted that she was finding dancing emotionally difficult:

> *…Sandy and I sat talking about leaving the club; she was so excited…I knew from subsequent conversations that there was more to her leaving than pursuing a new job. For a few months now she had talked about how dancing would eat away at her, that it had started to knock all her confidence. I reminded her of how she'd been feeling and she explained: "I hate coming in now. It's like a black cloud over my head"…* ***(Field Notes: October 2004)***

Similarly, in my final conversation before she left *Starlets*, Jenna, who usually presented a happy disposition, talked about developing a dislike of lap-dancing: *"I'm sick of it…sick of the managers taking everything. Just need a fresh start…"* ***(Field Notes: April 2005)***. In these cases it seems that the psychological pressure induced by lap-dancing became a prompt for dancers to find ways out of the industry, through, in the case of Sandy and Jenna, a change of career.

In general, the social disgrace associated with lap-dancing for which the dancers are regularly stigmatised by the moral majority and various other sources within society, leads them to re-valuate their occupation, morally, socially as well as psychologically. As Karen explains: *"Society says it's wrong…you start to question what you're doing!"* ***(Interview with Karen: December 2005).*** As discussed earlier, the stigma associated with lap-dancing has been accounted for in some of the academic literature (Barton, 2006; Bell et al, 1998; Bradley, 2007; Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000; Thomas and Harred, 1992).

Dismissal

> *…Kate ran into the changing room crying, Gordon (head bouncer) was waiting for her by the door to escort her out of the club after she had gathered her clothes together. Some of the dancers stared at her with contempt and she collapsed on the floor and wept. Sally turned to her and screamed: "What do you expect, you fucking weirdo! Don't expect to get any sympathy from us". I felt sorry for Kate, even though she'd broken the rules and had been sacked*

(Field Notes: December 2003)

Although some of the dancers left *Starlets* of their own accord, others were forced to end their employment. Although there were a number of different reasons for the dismissal of dancers, most were due to rule breaking. However, the breaking of rules did not necessarily relate directly to the official house rules set by the club, but were often related to the *tacit rules* of the club. To reiterate, the *tacit rules* in general guide the conduct of the dancers, in relation to this they direct the behaviour of the dancers in the three different hierarchical status roles: *new girl*, *transition* and *old school*. Each stage has different rules to follow and is also subject to various restrictions and/or privileges. For example, it is more acceptable for an *old school* dancer to make sexual contact with a customer than a *new girl*, who as a consequence is likely not only to be identified as a 'dirty dancer' but also reprimanded by management for this behaviour. Other examples include the consumption of recreational drugs; although this has been somewhat normalised in *Starlets*, overt drug-taking is still more acceptable amongst *old school* and *transition* dancers than it is with *new girls,* who do not have the same privileges. This is conveyed in the opening extract of this section, which revisits the story of Kate, originally explored in chapter six, who was dismissed from *Starlets* after other dancers witnessed her 'dirty dancing' and suspected her of 'openly' consuming recreational drugs. Her *new girl* status prohibited these overt actions and as a consequence she was dismissed from the club.

However, regardless of a dancer's status in *Starlets* managers ultimately have the power to override her privileges, and although often choose not to, have on occasion done so in order to dismiss a dancer. For example, as highlighted in the final part of Karen's story, Gerard dismissed Karen for bad time keeping and poor attendance, which was a result of her heavy cocaine consumption. It is often the use of the various *bargaining tools* discussed in chapter six, which ultimately prevent dancers from being dismissed for overt drug-taking. Other dancers, including Vienna and Amy, were both eventually dismissed for drug-taking. In Vienna's case, she was caught smoking marijuana at the club and instantly discharged. However, Amy's

dismissal was far more dramatic and involved the use of cocaine. It had been rumoured that Amy had been selling drugs to other dancers on the premises, the managers had been aware of this for some time. Ruby describes the build-up to this particular incident in an interview I conducted with her:

> *"…I was in Ibiza in the summer, there was, like, 2 bag searches… I think what happened was, there was a few different people selling it (cocaine) then, at work, this certain person (Amy) used to get all the new starters on it and they would like, kinda [sic] buy it off this person and I dunno [sic] there was other people who would, like, bring it in…"* **(Interview with Ruby: November 2005)**

Ironically, both Vienna and Amy's drug-taking continued for some time and although previously overlooked, it was subsequently used as a reason to dismiss them both. This might suggest that there were other reasons for which the managers no longer wanted them to work at *Starlets*.

It was suggested by some dancers that managers would sometimes dismiss dancers for illegitimate reasons. In relation to this, Linda explained to me, during an interview I conducted with her, how Gerard had sacked her from *Starlets*: *"I got sacked in the end. They said, what was it, what was their excuse? I can't remember. I can't remember what the excuse was. But it was something silly…"* **(Interview with Linda: March 2006)**. Linda blames her awareness of the managers' own drug-taking for her dismissal. Despite her claim, other *old school* dancers, who had worked with Linda since the club opened, made other suggestions. For example, during one of my subsequent visits to *Starlets* Davina remarked during a conversation: *"They were horrible to her (Linda), Gerard said she was too fat, but she wasn't...Loads of guys loved her; she had the same sort of body as Marilyn Monroe…"* **(Field Notes: June 2006)**. Interestingly the hypocrisy Linda talks about in relation to the managers, is something Ruby also describes, when she refers back to the incident in which Amy was dismissed from *Starlets;* she argues:

> *"…They're all hypocrites anyways, the managers. Coz [sic] they're all on it (cocaine). Even if they don't do it in work. I don't know how they can preach to people when they're not like the best to judge; do you know what I mean… It's all lap-dancer politics..."* **(Interview with Ruby: November 2005)**

Ruby blames it on lap-dancing 'politics', without being explicit about what she actually means, however, as Linda suggests, dancers are sometimes targeted if they are seen to be a threat to the managerial set up or to an individual manager. This perhaps explains why managers will suddenly turn against an *old school* dancer dismissing her for activities that in the past she has been allowed to participate in.

In relation to this, some of the dancers who were dismissed from *Starlets* were removed following their sexual involvement with a manager. Although this is not always the case, managers are perhaps not always keen to work alongside dancers with whom they have been intimately involved and who, as a result, might have sensitive personal information that could be, used against them. Tricia, for example, after becoming pregnant following a casual relationship with one of the managers, was quickly dismissed. This was discussed by other dancers on more than one occasion:

> *Karen: You know why he sacked her, don't you?*
> *RC: I've heard a rumour.*
> *Karen: That she was pregnant. That's why.*
> *(Field Notes: December 2004)*

Similarly Eliza, after having a sexual relationship with a manager at *Starlets* was targeted by the manager in question, who, following the breakdown of their relationship seemed to closely police her behaviour in the club. Eventually, following a 'routine' bag search, Eliza, having been found with alcohol amongst her personal belongings, was dismissed. This is on the basis that alcohol consumed inside the club, purchased from elsewhere is forbidden. This relates closely to a suggestion made by Boles and Garbin (1974) that: "…Strip clubs are in the business to make money, which is realized through the sale of alcohol…" (p. 138). In relation to this point, the sale of alcohol is not only aimed at the customers but the dancers also. Ironically, Eliza was not caught consuming the alcohol in question; Beth, soon after it happened, commented: *"He knows we all drink stuff (alcohol purchased outside the club) but he just wanted rid of her… They've got history" (Field Notes: January 2004).* Common in amongst all these stories of dismissal is a sense of drama and intensity, this it is argued is a characteristic of the lap-dancing club: "…The

193

melodrama that goes down on a daily basis in clubs is often so predictable it seems rehearsed…" (Dragu and Harrison, 1989, p. 87).

Returning to Starlets

> *…After speaking to Davina, I spent about half an hour talking to Nelly. I hadn't seen her for almost 2 years. She'd left Starlets and had been working in various other jobs, it was rumoured that she was working for Veronica's agency (stripping agency). In some ways I was surprised to see her back at Starlets, mainly due to the fact that Nelly had made enemies in the club amongst both dancers and managers. Despite this she seemed nonchalant about the situation: "Nah, that's water under the bridge"…We talked about the club and how she felt to be back: "It's like I haven't been away… It's like having a school reunion being back… It's good."…(Field Notes: February 2006)*

It is important to point out that many of the dancers who retired from *Starlets* voluntarily, eventually returned to *Starlets* or were known to have sought employment in similar clubs. Significantly, this was despite the many claims made by retiring dancers that they did not intend to return to *Starlets* or work in other lap-dancing clubs. Similar patterns of behaviour are indicated by other researchers (Boles and Garbin, 1974b and Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998). According to Forsythe and Deshotels (1998): *"…Many dancers attempt to leave the occupation only to return after a short hiatus…"* (p. 90).

As demonstrated in the opening extract Nelly returned unexpectedly, she was not hesitant about admitting that she loved dancing and had missed the dancers at *Starlets*. As our conversation continued that evening she explained: *"Nothing's changed (here), it's just the same as it was when I left (Starlets), it'll never change" (Field Notes: February 2006)*. With this there was a sense of satisfaction about the lack of change at *Starlets*. In relation to this point, as discussed in chapter six, the need to maintain balance through reinforcing the *tacit rules* of the club suggests that there is a natural drive amongst dancers to prevent change. Further to this, Nelly likens returning to *Starlets* to a school reunion; although this reflects her sense of nostalgia it is also indicative of how her relationships with the other dancers have

194

made lasting impressions. As it will be discussed later in this chapter, the emotional attachment dancers have to one another is particularly significant in their being drawn back into dancing.

Returning to dancing was justified primarily as a way of regaining economic security and/or appeared to coincide with the breakdown of a romantic relationship between a dancer and her partner. However, beyond this, it has been indicated that there are perhaps other more complex factors influencing the return of retired dancers to *Starlets*. The following sections will discuss issues around regaining economic security, the breakdown of relationships and the other influential factors affecting the return of dancers, including thrill-seeking, the experience of membership and independence.

Regaining Economic Security:

Returning dancers often place emphasis on the economic strategy, discussed in chapter five, as an explanation for their re-entry into lap-dancing, and include both, dancers who had not planned to return, and those who had knowingly taken a temporary break. As highlighted in chapter five, the financial drive to dance is also accounted for by several authors (Boles and Garbin, 1974; Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998 and Skipper and McCaghy, 1970).

Mandy who had planned to return to dancing after the birth of her child, explained that now more than ever, the financial rewards of dancing were paramount, as she had a child to support: *"… aside from other things, I really do need the money now" (Field Notes: June 2005)*.

Angelica, as mentioned earlier, left *Starlets* due to the relationship she was in, and despite claiming that she did not intend to lap-dance again, returned only after a short period away. Ironically Angelica was still in the same relationship that had caused her to retire from dancing in the first place. Her reasoning for returning was due to financial pressures, as she explained to me when I asked: *"Needed the money…" (Field Notes: July 2005).*

In a similar way Janine stopped working at *Starlets*, claiming she would never return, however over a year after leaving the club she returned to work as a dancer:

*…I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw Janine getting ready in the changing room. I went over and gave her a hug and asked her what brought her back, she explained: "I know I said I'd never come back but I need the money, I'm only working Saturdays anyway". Later that evening I spoke to Gerard (manager) about Janine's return and he simply said: "I knew she'd come back, they always do."…***(Field Notes: May 2005)**

Sally was another dancer, who left *Starlets*, soon to return for the financial rewards lap-dancing offered. In Sally's case, she only left for a short period of time before returning. Like Janine, it had been rumoured by some of the dancers, as suggested earlier in this chapter, that she left Starlets due to issues within the relationship with her partner.

In a conversation with Ken (manager) in which we discussed the dancers who return to dancing after retirement, he provided his theory: *"They all say they're not coming back. But they get too greedy and as soon as they can't make the same money elsewhere, they're back"* **(Field Notes: June 2004)**. Managers were particularly cynical about dancers exiting lap-dancing; many were unconvinced by those who claimed they were leaving permanently. The belief that dancers were primarily money driven was shared among managers, bouncers and some customers. For example, customers, on a regular basis, would accuse dancers of being 'greedy' or 'money obsessed'. Some of the bouncers would gossip about dancers being unjustified in their complaints about the money they earned. Gordon (head bouncer) for example, once commented: *"You girls spend all your time moaning about how little money you make…It's all bull shit, you just like to complain."* **(Field Notes: March 2004)**. Interestingly there did appear to be a preoccupation with money amongst some of the dancers who would regularly either boast or complain about their earnings at *Starlets*. Despite this preoccupation, as mentioned in chapter five, the dancers' behaviour on the main floor often contradicts this apparent need for money. For example, it is common for many dancers to spend a large amount of time in social engagement with other dancers and customers, rather than striving to make money through private dances and sit-downs. As it was suggested in chapter five, this brings into question the role money actually plays for the dancers working at *Starlets*.

Breakdown of Relationships:

For some of the dancers, the return to Starlets will often coincide with the breakdown or end of a relationship. Although this is not directly offered as a reason by the dancers in question, it nevertheless appears to be significant. Boles and Garbin (1974) made similar findings with regard to initial entry into dancing; they argue that becoming a dancer usually overlaps with a sudden change in the status of personal relationships between dancers and their partners.

Along with Janine's assertion that her re-entry into dancing was financially motivated, her return followed the breakdown of her relationship with Andrew. This revelation was made following a conversation I had with Janine, in which the status of her relationship with her partner, Andrew, was discussed. Janine explained: *"We're still together but it's on the rocks... I got sick of him telling me what to do..." **(Field Notes: May 2005)**.* Boles and Garbin (1974) suggest that entering lap-dancing following the breakdown of a relationship was used to *"...punish a former husband..."* (p.115). In relation to this, Janine's return could be understood as a method of punishment directed at Andrew as a reaction to his negative treatment of her. In this way lap-dancing, something he despised her doing, was being used as a weapon, wielded with the intention of wounding him emotionally. Similarly, Sally's return to *Starlets* coincided with the end of her relationship with her partner; she did not talk about it openly, but some of the other dancers suggested that she had ended her relationship. It was apparent that re-entering a career in lap-dancing, was not as financially driven as she had implied to others, and perhaps, more related to the breakdown of her relationship.

When Stella ended her relationship with Andrea, she soon returned to work at *Starlets*; to reiterate, her purpose for leaving the club was to relocate and in doing so be closer to her partner. It was therefore perhaps inevitable that Stella would return to her family and friends if and when her relationship ended. Although there was an obvious sense of unhappiness conveyed in Stella's mood about the breakdown of her relationship, from her behaviour it seemed apparent that she was nonetheless happy to be working alongside the friends she had initially left behind at *Starlets*:

> *...Sandy and Stella were as close as ever...Sandy had been quite angry about Stella's decision to leave Starlets in the first place, but seemed to have*

forgiven her. I noticed both dancers were walking around the club arm in arm, working together as a team. It was good to see them laughing and joking with each other, especially after the way in which Stella's departure had disrupted their relationship…(Field Notes: June 2004)

Stella's reaction to returning, and the support offered by Sandy over the breakdown of Stella's relationship with Andrea is yet another indication of the close relationships present between dancers within *Starlets.*

The significance of the breakdown of relationships and the return of dancers to *Starlets* is something that will be discussed in the following section. The breakdown of a relationship is meaningful to the return of dancers and does not merely coincide with re-entry into *Starlets*. As the following section will discuss, although there is often cited a practical reason, for the return of dancers, there are other more significant motivations for re-entry into lap-dancing.

Returning: A Hidden Meaning

Although a return to dancing has largely been justified as a means of regaining economic security and appears to follow or coincide with the breakdown or end of a romantic relationship, it has been suggested that there are other factors influencing this decision. For example, it seems that under the surface, and, fuelling a dancer's decision to return after the breakdown of a relationship, is the need for them to reassert their independence. This could be achieved financially, through working as a dancer again, and socially, through re-engaging with the lifestyle associated with lap-dancing. Beyond this, and in relation to the adventure sought through the social engagement of dancer associated behaviour in the club, some dancers have suggested that they craved the excitement back in their lives. When Mandy, for example, after returning to *Starlets* following the birth of her son, admitted that beyond the financial rewards dancing offered her as a new mum, it also: *"…gets me away from being just a mum, I've got my friends here…I can have a drink and a laugh" (Field Notes: June 2005)*. On the other hand Stella, on her return to *Starlets*, expressed more of an emotional need: *"It's so good to see you all. I didn't like it down there. I missed all you girls" (Field Notes: June 2004)*. Like Stella most of the dancers expressed an emotional attachment to the other dancers at *Starlets;* in this the sense of membership between dancers is suggested. There were three main

198

factors that seemed to be important to the dancers at the club which influenced or played some role, not only in their remaining there, but in their return, namely: adventure, independence and experience of membership.

Adventure: the pursuit of risk

As already discussed in chapter five, entering a career in lap-dancing, from the data generated at *Starlets*, is motivated by the need for adventure, something obtained through participating in risk-taking activities associated with lap-dancing. The way in which dancers are drawn to and engage in risk-taking activities, as a means of gaining a sense of fulfilment, is a phenomenon allied with the pursuit of dangerous sports, previously discussed by Lyng (1990). In their search for adventure, after returning, many dancers would start to re-engage in some of the risk-taking activities with which they had previously been involved, including various *social rituals* such as alcohol and recreational drug consumption. For example, Lucy on her return to *Starlets*, after spending sometime working abroad, quickly re-engaged with the excessive behaviour she was famous for at *Starlets* when she initially worked at the club:

> *…Lucy had been working abroad and then spent some time in another local lap-dancing club. During our last conversation, before she left, Lucy claimed she was going to leave lap-dancing permanently… She was very drunk, and seemed to have fallen into the same habits she talked about leaving behind, one of which was the amount of alcohol she consumed…(Field Notes: June 2005)*

There are other ways in which some of the dancers create a sense of adventure other than just pursuing the risk-taking activities associated with lap-dancing. For example, for some, the very action of re-entering a career in lap-dancing is a risk in itself. This is particularly applicable for those in relationships, in which a dancer's partner objects to their occupation. Janine, for example, returned to *Starlets* knowing that her partner Andrew disapproved, and that this was potentially catastrophic for their relationship. Janine's return under these circumstances suggests, not only the level of importance she places on working at *Starlets*, but beyond this that she was willing to engage in this as a risk-taking action. Interestingly, it was not unusual for dancers at *Starlets* to become involved in high-risk relationships. The majority of the

dancers during the time in which my fieldwork was conducted were either in or had been involved in abusive or 'complicated'[101] relationships. In relation to this, Paris claimed: *"Ask any girl in here and they'll all tell you the same, that they're with some arse hole" **(Field Notes: December 2003)**.* Not all of the high-risk relationships were necessarily abusive; some were, for example, taboo or 'forbidden' for other reasons. These relationships might, for example, include customers, married men and/or criminal entrepreneurs[102]. Paris and Hally, for example, were in long-term relationships with married men. Both dancers claimed that these relationships were difficult to manage and were fraught with turmoil:

> *…Paris had been crying in the changing room most of the night. After our conversation it became clear she was having problems with her boyfriend. A very upset Paris explained: "It's ok for him, he's married, but he wants me to himself… He's so possessive. He keeps thinking I'm fucking other blokes when I'm not!"…**(Field Notes: December 2003)***

Ironically, despite her apparent unhappiness, Paris remained in this relationship, and inflamed the situation by simultaneously having short-term relationships with other men. Instead of improving her personal situation, it was as though she wanted to maintain a high level of risk. It was perhaps this, which attracted her to the relationship initially and which continued to make it thrive. In the spirit of Paris' high-risk behaviour, she would often engage in other risk-taking activities inside the club, including excessive alcohol and drug consumption. In relation to this, Jenna once remarked: *"She (Paris) can't just have a quiet drink and get merry she has to get so pissed she can't walk…" **(Field Notes: November 2003).***

Interestingly, of those who were involved in low-risk relationships, many of those were quickly ended, in favour of something more 'exciting'. For example, Karen, who considered her relationship with Tony to be low-risk and balanced, began to find it unexciting: *"…I think I got to a point in my relationship with my boyfriend where I was just like BORED… if you feel bored you need to do things to stop yourself from being bored…" **(An interview with Karen: December 2005)**.* It was following Karen's entry

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[101] It was common for dancers to refer to their relationships as 'complicated' and by doing so they were inferring that they were unstable.

[102] This term is specific to those involved with organised crime.

into lap-dancing that she finally ended their relationship. In a similar way, Hally, who had previously been in a stable relationship, ended it in favour of a high-risk one. Unfortunately it was not one she was in a position to easily control:

> *…Hally had been talking about Bert (her partner) to the other dancers…he (Bert) was abusive and most of the girls were aware of this, but many felt it was better not to interfere. After Hally had left the changing room Charley commented: "She's stupid for getting involved with him in the first place, I did warn her. If she wants to leave him she'll have to leave the country. Seriously"…(Field Notes: June 2004)*

In relation to thrill-seeking, in the third part of Karen's story which prefaces this chapter, she talks about how engaging with the lap-dancing lifestyle is not only about living dangerously, and something most would want to avoid, but that this, for her, is addictive.

Experience of Membership

The *experience* of membership between dancers has been emphasised throughout this thesis. Chapter six in particular explored the way in which bonds were developed, through engaging with various *emotional* and *social rituals*. It was also argued that these bonds are important in securing the dancer's role in the lap-dancing club, aiding her in the advancement through the dancer hierarchy, by building and maintaining her popularity with other dancers. The strong bonds developed between dancers are indicative of the *experience* of membership between dancers. In addition, this is suggestive of the subcultural characteristics of lap-dancing at *Starlets*.

After leaving *Starlets,* dancers will often comment on missing certain elements of their time at the club, this usually revolves around socialisation and friendship. Examples of which have already been presented earlier in this chapter. It was not unusual for dancers who left *Starlets* to re-visit as customers and thus continue to socialise with the other, working dancers. For example, both Becks and Phoenix, having left the club due to pregnancy, regularly visited *Starlets* and spent time socialising with the dancers on the main floor during this period *(Field Notes: September 2005, February 2005).* Re-visiting the extract earlier in this chapter, in

which Nelly talks about her return to *Starlets* and, her comparing it to a school reunion, clearly illustrates her sense of membership with the other dancers in the club. Implied in Nelly's extract is her need to recapture the same sense of membership she previously experienced whilst working at *Starlets* before her temporary retirement.

It is also necessary to re-visit some of the examples provided earlier in the opening discussion about the feelings dancers expressed about dancing; many, for example, reflect on their relationships with dancers at *Starlets*, claiming to miss them. When Stella returned to *Starlets* it was apparent in the way in which she appeared to physically cling to Sandy that the close bonds she had developed with some of the dancers were important to her. In general the data generated from the fieldwork indicates that the dancers are more concerned with leaving their fellow dancers than the club and indeed the job itself. To reiterate, Becks explained: *"I don't miss the dancing so much, but my friends…It would be nice to be back for them"* **(Field Notes: March 2006)**. This again emphasises the meaningful bonds present between dancers as members of a lap-dancing subculture. Significantly, in a brief discussion about the return of dancers following retirement, Forsythe and Deshotels (1998) support this by arguing: *"They (dancers) reported that they missed the membership groups and participating in the subculture of dancers…"* (p. 90).

Independence

From the data generated in the field there is a sense that the dancers at *Starlets* were keen to remain independent. For example, working at *Starlets* potentially helps assert a dancer's independence on a number of different levels: financially, socially and perhaps even sexually. Gaining independence in these ways could be seen as a method of self-empowerment, which they may then take with them out of the club and into their everyday lives. Although in a slightly different context, the notion of using activities within the club to gain self-confidence and create a sense of empowerment have been argued by other researchers, including Wesely (1998); Pasko (2002) and Price (2000). In relation to the desire for financial security, discussed earlier, the money earned in some cases gives dancers a more general feeling of independence (Bole and Garbin, 1974); providing them with the financial tools to not only live independently but to afford and execute a lifestyle of their own choice, without being dependent on others, such as partners, friends and/or family.

Although there were exceptions, which have been discussed in this chapter, some of the dancers retain a sense of independence by avoiding relationships; in support of this Barton (2006; 2007) recorded similar findings and argues that some dancers were strongly against relationships. A typical example was Janey, a dancer at *Starlets*, who was suspicious of men and reluctant to enter serious relationships: *"… I'm happy being single and just having fun, it's too much aggro [sic]"* **(Field Notes: March 2004)**. Similarly Sandy also remained single and in this way tried to retain her independence, as she reflected in a conversation about relationships: *"…I don't want to get too deep into things...I start getting jittery when things start getting too serious."* **(Field Notes: August 2004)**. Sandy had previously ended a relationship: *"It was too intense, he'd want to know where I was all the time…I don't want to be controlled"* **(Field Notes: May 2004)**. In a similar way Princess explained that she had set boundaries within her relationships: *"I've been in abusive relationships before, if they step out of line I won't take it any more…I am selfish but you have to be..."* **(Field Notes: April 2004)**.

Being Re-established

After spending time away from *Starlets*, even *old school* dancers, depending on the length of time they are retired for, on their return must re-establish themselves within the club setting. Although this process is not as lengthy or as intense as the initiation experienced by a *new girl*, it is nonetheless, a process that involves re-building and strengthening existing bonds. Further to this, it sometimes involves a re-learning of club conduct and to be reacquainted with the current version of the club's *tacit rules*, which as was suggested earlier in chapter six, are subject to shift and change. Sam for example, returned to *Starlets* after almost two years away. On her return she had to re-learn how to perform private dances within the context of the *tacit rules*; to which there had been several changes made during her absence:

> *…Sam was surprised initially about how much more contact was allowed with customers during private dances…"I remember when I first started there was a three foot rule, now you can grind[103] on their laps" she explained…***(Field Notes: June 2005)**

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[103] During a private dance this would involve a dancer using her bottom to gently make contact with the customer's lap.

Further to this, although Sam inevitably knew some of the established dancers, it was still necessary for her to re-build bonds. It was interesting to observe how some of the dancers who had not originally worked with Sam responded to her shortly after her return, Leanne, for example, who was now an *old school* dancer commented: *"She's stuck up, I think she's full of herself"* **(Field Notes: June 2005)**. Other dancers who, like Leanne, had never worked with Sam before, made similar remarks, it was as though Sam were now a *new girl* once more, and would have to overcome some of the hurdles which confront a dancer when first starting out on a lap-dancing career. In a conversation with Lucy, who returned after a year away, she remarked on the way in which some of the dancers treated her: *"They've got no fucking respect. I was here before they even started…there's one girl who doesn't even answer if you ask her a question…"* **(Field Notes: June 2005)**. Similarly Janine commented on the negative reception she felt she received from some of the 'newer' dancers:

> *…I asked her (Janine) what she thought of the dancers. Janine laughed and explained: "There's only a few of us originals left! I feel like a stranger…some of the dancers seem very rude and ignorant, there's not that class that used to be about"…(Field Notes: May 2005)*

Janine reacted to this isolation by focusing on making money, and did not, as she had before her retirement, socialise with dancers. As it was conveyed in chapter six, this detachment is something *new girls* will often initially experience until they are fully integrated into the dancing community at *Starlets*.

In contrast, when Mandy returned to *Starlets*, it was not re-establishing herself with the dancers she found difficult, but in gaining approval of the managers, Ken in particular. It was apparent that he was concerned Mandy had returned to work prematurely following the birth of her child, this caused tension between the two of them:

> *…Mandy was shaking with anger, she'd been arguing with Ken in the manager's office: "If he wants to be a prick I'll send my husband down to sort him out! Fucking arsehole wants me to take some time off 'til I've lost a bit more weight!" …This had been building for some time since Mandy had*

returned to work. Ken had never been keen on Mandy for some reason and I was given the impression that he was using her recent birth to make things difficult for her to return permanently…(Field Notes: July 2005)

Although Mandy eventually cooperated by temporarily leaving *Starlets* to 'get back in shape', her and Ken's relationship continued to deteriorate. However, unlike Sam and Janine, the other dancers quickly accepted Mandy and her original *old school* status was re-established. A practical explanation is that Mandy was not absent from the club for as long as Sam and Janine; more specifically, in the time Mandy was absent from *Starlets*, the *tacit rules* did not dramatically change, therefore making it easier for her re-learn them.

Dancer Ambitions: Hopes and Dreams

…Jenna and I were sitting on the main floor; she was telling me about her plans to go to college and study psychology. This was not the first time she had made educational plans; a few months earlier she had wanted to study law. Jenna explained: "You see those little girls on the news being raped and murdered and I can't bear it… I want to do something to help them… I'm going to be a criminal psychologist". Jenna seemed excited about this. However, I was not convinced and came to realise that what she called plans were in fact dreams…(Field Notes: August 2004)

As it was suggested earlier, for many of the dancers at *Starlets* lap-dancing was not considered as a long-term career. Dancers who do consider it short-term often do so because they have other occupational ambitions and/or are students. Kelly, for example, who was studying fashion design at University, did not see lap-dancing as a permanent position: *"I've been applying for jobs…can't see me dancing much longer now…" (Field Notes: December 2003).* Like Kelly, on a fundamental level, and in relation to some of the *practical entry strategies* discussed in chapter five, other students work as dancers as it conveniently fits around their studies, but also helps finance their general living expenses. Only a small proportion of dancers at *Starlets*, during the time in which this ethnography was conducted, did not appear to have any plans outside of lap-dancing.

Stella, who left school without gaining any qualifications, made plans to go to college to re-take her GCSEs. This was important to Stella, as she believed it would provide her with more career options outside of this industry. This is something Stella spoke to me about on more than one occasion: *"I can't do this (dancing) forever can I? I don't want to be like Jan or Mary[104] do I?"* **(Field Notes: July 2004)**. Sandy, Stella's closest friend at *Starlets*, was not, however, convinced that she would pursue this:

> **Sandy:** *She'll not go (to college) you know.*
> **RC:** *Do you not think? What makes you say that?*
> **Sandy:** *She gets these ideas in her head and then doesn't have the guts to follow them through.*
> **(Field Notes: July 2004)**

Stella, herself, had talked about lacking courage and being fearful of returning to education after many years away from it: *"I am scared you know. I've been doing this job for years and not known anything else…I'm scared I can't do it (study)"* **(Field Notes: July 2004)**. Stella was not just referring to her fear of leaving *Starlets,* but doubted her academic abilities, which ultimately affected her decision to re-take her GCSEs, and as Sandy had predicted, during the time in which I conducted my fieldwork, her plans did not come into fruition. It was perhaps ironic that Sandy did carry out her plan of action to study and, as discussed earlier, eventually left *Starlets* in the pursuit of a new career. Similarly Adele, as mentioned previously, managed to fulfil her occupational ambition by leaving *Starlets* to pursue a career in journalism. Princess, also, after studying psychology, left *Starlets* to work in a related career.

Other dancers at *Starlets*, who had not yet fulfilled their ambitions, talked openly about them. Even Karen, in the final part of her story, suggests that she wants to go to college to study, providing her with other options outside of lap-dancing. Ruby also, for example, who was, at the time, taking media studies at University, described how she was keen to find a related job: *"…I finish my, like, degree in the summer…I'll move away and hopefully I'll get a job in media, the thing that I'm studying now…"* **(Interview with Ruby: November 2005)**. It was not uncommon for dancers to be ambitious about pursuing a career either in the media or entertainment industry.

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[104] Both dancers Stella refers here to were considered by others in the club to be approaching an age at which they should retire.

Jenna, who, before leaving for a managerial role in a nightclub, talked about pursuing various careers, including her plans not only to study psychology as mentioned in the opening extract of this section, but also expressed a desire to study law and even talked about becoming involved with the media: *"I really want to be a kid's TV presenter… I've already been offered a placement working at a studio…"* **(Field Notes: September 2004)**. Despite her enthusiasm and the work placement she had been offered, Jenna did not take the opportunity she seemed so excited about. As far as a desire to be part of the entertainment industry, both Phoenix and Linda had claimed, at different times, to be in talks with various record producers about making a recording. For Phoenix, apparently, this was something already underway:

> *...I was talking to Deano at the DJ stand when he suddenly started talking about Phoenix: "She going to be a star, have you heard her new single?" I was slightly taken aback by what he was claiming, so I asked about it, Deano seemed smug about the fact that he knew an up and coming 'celebrity': "I'll put it (Phoenix's music track) on for you…she's been recording in the studio". He started playing her record; it was a dance track with female vocals, which it was later confirmed was Phoenix…***(Field Notes: June 2004)**

Although the track Phoenix had recorded was regularly played in *Starlets*, the excitement about her single soon seemed to disappear and her singing career was no longer discussed. In a similar way to Phoenix, Linda's ambition to join the music industry as a full-time artist did not reach fruition. Linda had talked about her plans to record with 'prestigious' music producers:

> *…Linda, Eliza and Cindy were sitting in the changing room talking about music producers; Linda seemed excited at the prospect of being a recording artist: "He's produced, like, Alicia Keys[105] and he wants me to work with him…I'm going to fly over to New York and record some stuff with him". I wasn't sure how genuine Linda or indeed this producer was…***(Field Notes: November 2003).**

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[105] An American R&B soul singer-song writer, with various hit records including "Fallin" and "You don't know my name".

Despite this Linda, never did not fly to New York to record a single and it soon was to be forgotten and something she never discussed openly at *Starlets* again.

To reiterate, while most of the dancers at *Starlets*, during my fieldwork, saw lap-dancing as a temporary job and had, other occupational plans outside of the industry, it is interesting to note that despite their various plans to leave *Starlets*, many dancers, remained in the industry longer than they anticipated. The reason for this is complex and a number of explanations can be offered. Firstly, ambitions outside of lap-dancing may form part of a dancer's fantasy, helping produce a sense of escapism rather than being part of a definite plan of action. Secondly, the various meanings dancers attach to dancing, as previously discussed, may ultimately be more important than pursuing other career options. Finally, some dancers, after spending years dancing, as demonstrated earlier with Stella, find it difficult to move out of the industry and pursue something entirely different.

Concluding Remarks

The discussion of voluntary retirement in which dancers engage with various *exit strategies* is framed in a similar way to the *entry strategies* discussed in chapter five. The complex nature of voluntary retirement is apparent from the identification of *practical* and *emotional strategies*, which, it has been suggested, are not isolated from one another. The findings indicate that although more practical explanations are given by dancers for leaving *Starlets*, these strategies in fact provide the *opportunity* through change of career or child birth for example, whereas the *emotional strategies*, more often seem to represent the actual underlying drive behind retirement.

The re-entry of dancers into lap-dancing, following a temporary retirement and their re-engagement with *social* and *emotional rituals* suggests that there is something cyclical about a career in lap-dancing. This return is also despite some of the ambitious plans dancers expressed in the final discussion of this chapter. There is inevitably some cross over between dancer's explanations around their re-entry into dancing and the *entry strategies* discussed in chapter five. The need for economic gain was as demonstrated in chapter five, commonly offered as an explanation for re-entering lap-dancing at *Starlets*, however, again, as with the *entry strategies*, it was suggested that other factors were more significant. With regard to pursuit 'excitement'

and 'adventure'; again the work of Lyng (1990) can be applied to make sense of the desire to re-engage with risk-taking activities through the various *social rituals* and with some of the actual duties of working as a dancer. Further to this, the experience of membership between dancers gained during the period in which they have worked together was found to be a particularly significant motive for dancers re-entering lap-dancing at *Starlets*; this is supported by Forsythe and Deshotels (1998). This is conveyed in the emotional bonds dancers describe having and wishing to re-kindle after an initial retirement. The experience of membership emphasises the subcultural nature of lap-dancing at *Starlets*, which was suggested also through the engagement of *social* and *emotional rituals* discussed in chapter six.

Chapter Eight

Concluding Discussion

Introduction

This final chapter will draw attention to some of the significant discussions made throughout the thesis, highlighting the overall research contribution made by this ethnography which challenges some of the current research discussed in chapter two. This will firstly involve drawing attention to some of the significant themes, which have become apparent from the literature discussed, and from the methodological approach used for this study. In addition, the specific key research findings to emerge from the thesis will also be discussed; and finally suggestions for further research in this field will be made.

Overall Research Contribution

This research has made both a methodological and empirical contribution, which will be discussed in this section. Firstly, however, some of the current research discussed in chapter two will be revisited, helping put the overall research contribution into context.

The literature concerned with the lap-dancing industry has tended to be presented in a deviant, anti-sex/exploitation framework; inevitably most discussions have been concerned with the problems associated with lap-dancing and its workers. In other words, the phenomenon has, in some way, been presented as having a negative basis. This for example, is particularly evident with the work presented on emotional labour (Barton, 2006 and Pasko, 2002), dancer exploitation (Wesely, 1998) and risk (Holsopple, 1999 and Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000). Even in some of the discussions concerned with dancer motivation, it was suggested that many dancers were from un-stable or 'disadvantaged' backgrounds (Skipper and McCaghy, 1970 and Boles and Garbin, 1974). Further to this, several gaps within the literature discussion in chapter two can also be identified. For instance, research has often emerged from Canada and the U.S, indicating that there is a need for more research in European and more specifically British lap-dancing clubs. Further to this, although dancer motivation has been explored in the literature, with regard to entering and remaining in a lap-dancing career, there has not been any exploration of dancers' retirement from dancing. In addition, although much of the available research considers the relationships between dancers and customers, it has neglected to focus on the interactions between the dancers themselves. In doing so, the research has failed to

acknowledge the power relationships between dancers, and more generally the lap-dancing club culture which dancers are at the very heart of.

As the overall aim of this ethnography is to develop an understanding of a lap-dancing club culture, participant observation was employed as the core method of enquiry. Extensive participant observation proved to be an informative way of understanding the complex culture of lap-dancers; further to this, it was a useful way of getting to phenomena other methods of enquiry (i.e questionnaires, focus groups etc) would never have detected. For example, it proved particularly insightful when identifying the status of dancers, including *new girl*, *transition* and *old school* positions. In addition, observing over an extended period of time, enabled me to make sense of how the women engaged with the space in which they worked, and how, for example, they interacted with each other, customers and managers. It was also an imperative way of developing a clearer picture of the meaning dancers attached to the various *social rituals* with which they frequently engaged. However, what made my overall methodological approach unique and superior over many other studies in this field was my insider role, as 'native-researcher'. More specifically, what was unique was the movement from 'native' to 'researcher' identity, the effect that had on the research, and learning to see through researcher's eyes. Further to this, *Starlets* was a place in which I had already worked before embarking on this research and had therefore been immersed in the dancer subculture; sharing in the *emotional* and *social rituals*, and having, in some way been part of the production and maintenance of the *tacit rules* this research identifies. Other researchers have tended to enter this field as outsiders, both to the club/s in which they conduct research and also having never worked as dancers. My position not only offered the expected advantages of access and a multifaceted understanding of the participants involved, but beyond this my closeness and empathy with the dancers in question was inevitably significant in generating meaningful data.

Key Research Findings

Lap-dancing as a Subculture

The research from this extensive ethnography provides additional, much-needed explanations of *why* lap-dancing has emerged as a subculture; and yet pushes on our traditional understanding of subculture. With the exception of Cressey (1932), whose research identified a work-based subculture, more frequently subcultures

have been synonymous with leisure-based groups. However, what this ethnography indicates is that lap-dancing blurs the boundaries between work and leisure. It is therefore possible to recognise that lap-dancing is more than just a mode of work. As well as existing on the fringes of mainstream culture, considered by outsiders as 'deviant'[106], three important factors contributing to its subcultural value have been identified, including the use of *social* and *emotional rituals*, the located nature of this subculture, and cultural membership.

The various social interactions, lap-dancers partake in, such as alcohol and recreational drug consumption, although not exclusive to this setting, are practised communally in the lap-dancing club setting amongst dancers, forming part of their cultural behaviour. In addition, this kind of social engagement is important for dancers who want to fully immerse themselves socially with the other dancers. The regularity of this social interaction, and specific pattern of behaviour of dancers sitting together on the main floor or dance reception drinking alcohol, and/or taking drugs, is also indicative of this behaviour being ritualistic, therefore the term *social rituals* can be applied (Hall and Jefferson, 1976). In a similar way, dancers on a regular basis, will communally par-take in emotional interactions which include: airing their personal concerns about issues relating to their work or home life, discussing mutual experiences of working and socialising in the club, and readily offering support to one another when needed. Again it is the regularity of these interactions that make these behaviours ritualistic, thus the term *emotional rituals* can be applied. In a similar way to the *social rituals*, *emotional rituals* enable the dancers to immerse themselves socially with other dancers; thus putting them in tune with each others 'norms', 'values' and 'ideas' (Thornton, 1997). Further to this, historically the formation of subcultures has been seen as a way of coping and resisting (see Hall and Jefferson, 1976), to some extent, the *social* and *emotional rituals* dancers partake in allow these women to cope with some of the negative elements of their job. Within the study of subcultures, although it is common for discussions to make sense of various *social rituals*, *emotional rituals* have been disregarded. Again, this demonstrates how the findings of this ethnography advance on subcultural theory, which neglects to take into account the *emotional* ritualistic behaviour of members of a subculture. This is

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[106] The ethnography does not place lap-dancing within a deviant framework; rather, it simply acknowledges that those who do not have any involvement with the industry often perceive it as 'deviant'. For further discussion see chapter 1, 4, and 7.

perhaps due to the fact that the role of emotions within sociology have often unwittingly been overlooked and considered less relevant (Blackman, 2007; Turner and Stets, 2005); despite arguments stressing the important role they play in binding people together, and "…their (humans') reliance on emotions to form social bonds and build complex sociocultural structures." (Turner and Stets, 2005, p. 1).

Lap-dancing is a 'located' subculture, as dancers are connected by and engage in *social* and *emotional rituals* that take place *within* the lap-dancing club setting. In reference to the broader literature about subcultures, although the significance of space has been acknowledged by some researchers (Massey, 1995; 1998; Nayak, 2003; Skelton and Valentine, 1998), it is by focussing in on the space of the lap-dancing club as being a fixed base for this subculture that this work again contributes to subcultural theory. Although all of the different spaces in the lap-dancing club are host to various ritualistic behaviours, the most notable areas include the changing room, main floor and dance reception. The changing room for example, although used as a place in which dancers engage in various *social rituals*, it is often the main space in which *emotional rituals* take place. As the changing room is reserved for the dancers, without interference or disruption from other staff members, it therefore enables dancers to relax and engage freely in an emotional exchange, aiding the bonding process. The main floor and dance reception, in contrast, as well as playing host to *emotional rituals*, are predominantly the location for *social rituals*. In these areas dancers socially interact, sitting around in groups, consuming alcohol and sometimes under the influence of various recreational drugs. Although drug-taking is often done out of sight, in for example a toilet cubicle or in the changing room, the main effects of these drugs are *experienced* communally on the main floor and dance reception.

The cultural membership experienced amongst dancers is based on the engagement of both *social* and *emotional ritualistic* behaviour. Engaging with the lap-dancing club rituals develop bonds between dancers, strengthening their trust of and loyalty to one another, but also, as previously mentioned, makes dancers in tune with the 'norms', 'values' and 'ideas' surrounding lap-dancing club culture. It is only by taking part in shared rituals that dancers are able to gain full membership in the lap-dancing club. It is this membership that also directly relates to the status of dancers, informed by the dancer hierarchy identified in this thesis. It is significant to mention that where the

role of emotions has been considered in the work place, as part of the literature about emotional labour (Barton, 2006; Hochschild, 1983; Wood, 2000), there has been a negative association with the production of emotions. In contrast to this, this thesis has also explored the positive impact of emotions through both the use of *emotional rituals* and sense of membership *experienced* between dancers.

Dancer Status

Researchers have not explored the status of dancers, identified in relation to a dancer hierarchy, before now. This is perhaps due to the fact that most have tended to ignore the relationship *between* dancers. Therefore the identification of the three status roles, *new girl*, *transition* and *old school*, and the position in the dancer hierarchy they inform, is a unique finding of this thesis. By focusing in on the dancers in this way, better sense is made not only of the different relationships they have with one another, but the overall role they play in the regulation of the club. The three status roles, including *new girl*, *transition* and *old school*, bring with them, different levels of power and influence in the lap-dancing club setting. These status roles are hierarchical and as they form part of the dancer hierarchy identified in this thesis. Each status role identified is also indicative of the different levels of membership experienced by the dancers: the higher the rank of status, the greater the membership. The *new girl*, as a dancer who has just embarked on her lap-dancing career has the lowest status in the club. It is a period in which she will begin to adapt to her new role and make sense of some of the fundamental rules of working and living as a dancer. Following on from this stage, once she has become an accomplished *new girl*, the dancer will move into a *transition* period. This is an 'invisible' phase, as *transition* dancers are considered neither *new girl* nor *old school*, often remaining 'nameless'. Nonetheless it is an important time for the dancer as she will not only develop the skills required to be good at her job, but fully establish herself with the other dancers, securing her role as an established dancer as she reaches *old school* status. Finally, the *old school* stage is the ultimate status role that can be achieved in the club as a dancer. It is now that a dancer is able to use her influence in the club, affecting her fellow dancers and to some extent management. Interestingly, what is clear about the status associated with these hierarchical stages is that they are initially informed by the dancers' involvement with the various *social* and *emotional rituals* in the club; as it was argued earlier, this is the basis on which dancer membership is built. Further to this, tied in with dancer membership, are the

tacit rules, which are significant in the way in which the club functions, is regulated and reproduced.

As a dancer develops her relationships through engaging with lap-dancing rituals and subsequently improving her membership of the dancer subculture, simultaneously she will develop a better understanding of and begin to adopt the *tacit rules* of the club, as she is continuously learning from those with whom she develops bonds. Therefore without mutually engaging in the various *social* and *emotional rituals*, it would be difficult for her to understand and internalise the *tacit rules*. As well as guiding the dancers' behaviour and conduct in the lap-dancing club environment, these unspoken rules are the basis on which status in the club amongst dancers is defined and maintained. The *tacit rules* of the club are an important source of *knowledge* which dancers adopt, maintain, and in turn help re-create. It is these 'rules' that take priority over the house rules intended for the dancers and customers. The *tacit rules* are not traditional rules in that they are not written down, neither are they a set of rigid 'laws', instead they are fluid, subtly shifting and changing over time with the input of different dancers. Despite subtle changes, through the process of membership, as it becomes more fixed over time, a dancer will internalise the *tacit rules* until she fully understands them. The better the dancer's understanding and adoption of these rules, the more likely she is to elevate her status in the club; the greater her status, the more influence she has over the nature of the *tacit rules*. This is in relation to Foucault's (1984) understanding of *power* and *knowledge* sharing a symbiotic relationship. Therefore *power*, which is implicit in a dancer's status, is in direct relation to the *knowledge* she has internalised, manifested through the club's *tacit rules*. When the *tacit rules* are related to the status of the dancers, including *new girl*, *transition* and *old school*, this hierarchical structure of dancers is reflective of the different levels of understanding, adoption and input of these rules. With *new girl* status having the least understanding and influence, in contrast *old school* status is the ultimate role in which dancers are able to not only re-write the *tacit rules* but use them to their advantage to help maintain their position. The *tacit rules*, by having more significance than the club's house rules, enable the dancers to counteract some of the control club mangers have over them; although as it will pointed out later in this chapter, in other ways inadvertently support management strategies. However, the *tacit rules* are still indicative of a way in which dancers are able to resist, to some extent, management control and exploitation.

Dancer Motivation

Although dancer motivation has, in some way, been explored by different researchers (Barton, 2003; 2006; 2007; Boles and Garbin, 1974; Carey et al, 1974; Forsythe, 1992; Forsythe and Deshotels, 1998; Skipper and McCaghy, 1970; Wesley, 1998), the same conclusions have been drawn: that money is at the root of dancer motivation. This thesis has questioned this, and although accepting that financial motivation is significant, it is argued that overall there are other more relevant rationales at play, such as the pursuit of adventure and excitement, and the *experience* of membership. *Entry strategies*, including both *practical* and *emotional strategies*, have been identified in relation to a dancer's initial entry into a career in lap-dancing. Further to this, factors that continue to motivate a dancer once she works in this industry, and her re-entry into lap-dancing after a temporary exit have also been explored. Overall, dancers, in relation to entering, remaining in and re-entering after a temporary retirement, *initially* offered more practical explanations, often financial in nature. However, as this research suggests, dancer motivation is in fact more complex than this. For example, it was found that the pursuit of 'adventure' and 'excitement', along with the *experience* of membership, were at the root of general dancer motivation.

In relation to the pursuit of 'adventure' and 'excitement', it is not only through the *social rituals* in which dancers engage that they are able to thrill-seek, but it has been indicated that the pursuit of 'adventure' and 'excitement' can also be gained from engaging with the job. This for example, includes stage performing and private dancing, where dancers, as partially nude women are placing themselves in a somewhat vulnerable position, something indicated by participants. In relation to the *social rituals* in which dancers frequently take part, including drug-taking and alcohol consumption, as this is often excessive, dancers are therefore not only putting themselves at psychological risk, but also physical risk. The dangers associated with the nature of the job and the social behaviour that accompanies it is something previous research highlights (Barton, 2002; 2006; 2007; Holsopple, 1999; Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2000 and Wesely, 1998). However, as dancers voluntarily engaging in *social rituals* indicates, 'risk' is not necessarily something avoided or minimised in the lap-dancing club setting, but that in fact it is often pursued thereby shifting our understanding of 'risk' in this environment. This has therefore shifted the popular focus of the dangers of 'risk', to risk-taking, through the use of Lyng's (1990) ideas

around edgework. Due to the popular, deviant and anti-sex work/exploitation frames of understanding in which lap-dancing has been explored, it is inevitable that previous research has focused on the *dangers* of risk. The idea of risk-taking in the pursuit of 'adventure' and 'excitement' reflects Lyng's (1990) concept of edgework, in which confronting danger becomes a source of pleasure. In this way it is argued that there is a blurring of boundaries between pleasure and pain, life and death (Lyng, 1990). It is however, the belief of the edgeworkers', in this case the dancers, that they are able to control the risks they pursue; offering protection from the danger yet still enabling them to benefit from the experience it offers.

In the lap-dancing club *experiencing* membership involves a sense of belonging, understanding and connection between dancers. As it has already been postulated, membership is derived from the sustained practice of *social* and *emotional rituals*. Although it is not the *experience* of membership that initially motivates women to enter an occupation in dancing, it nonetheless motivates them to continue dancing and re-enter following a short retirement. It was something that seemed to draw dancers back once they had *experience* of being part of the lap-dancing subculture, and for this reason is not relevant to the initial entry of dancers in this occupation. In relation to remaining in and the re-entry of dancers, it was common, for example, for these women to comment on the importance of 'friendship' and 'socialisation', rather than the job, which are tied in with the *experience* of membership.

As well as exploring routes into dancing, routes out of this career through the use of various *exit strategies* was also explored. Although dancers sometimes exit lap-dancing due to dismissal, more frequently they will leave voluntarily. The research suggests that there are two main types of *exit strategy* applied in the case of voluntary retirement: these are *practical* and *emotional*. Interestingly, in a similar way to dancers' entry into lap-dancing, *initially* more practical reasons for exiting were provided, often relating to child birth, relocation and/or change of career. However, what became clear was that there was often a more emotional subtext to the practical reasons given. For example, at a deeper level, it was common for these reasons to relate to the psychological and emotional strains associated with the job, or as a result of a disapproving partner. It is apparent that the various *practical strategies* gave dancers an *opportunity* to leave dancing, rather than being the root motivation. What is also significant about the retirement of lap-dancers is that it is

often temporary, despite some making plans never to return; indicating that there is something cyclical about a career in lap-dancing.

Lap-dancing Culture and Management Strategy

Although the overall culture of the lap-dancers to some extent resists and challenges the management strategies, it does however in certain ways inadvertently support and reaffirm the intended role and work of management in the lap-dancing club. This in some ways reflects Willis' (1977) arguments around working class 'lads'' 'counter school culture'. For instance, the emotional bonds developed between dancers through the various *emotional rituals*, help keep dancers working in the club and inevitably draws them back to work after retirement, thus solving the problem of dancer recruitment. In addition, although the strong bonds between dancers are significant, the *status roles* identified inevitably divide dancers, with the most obvious division apparent between *new girl* and *old school* groups. Interestingly*, old school* dancers who are most in tune with the *tacit rules* and highly respected, are those who are most effective at working in the interests of the managers, significant as they have the most influence amongst the dancers. For example, they 'police' the club by watching for 'rule breakers'; act as 'rule enforcers'; and take the lead in training the dancers to do their job correctly. More specifically areas such as appearance, for example, are both monitored and influenced by *old school* dancers, as is, amongst others, the three-track rule. Further to this, although the *tacit rules* take priority over the house rules, they do however in some ways reflect elements of the club's formal rules. A particularly obvious and significant example is 'dirty dancing' which is entirely rejected by the house rules and partially by the *tacit rules*. For instance, although 'dirty dancing' is often overlooked as far as the behaviour of *old school* dancers is concerned, it is still unacceptable amongst lower status dancers. This is reflected in the *tacit rules* and is a behaviour predominantly monitored and controlled amongst lower status groups by the *old school* dancers, who will sometimes inform managers of 'rule breakers'. In these ways *old school* dancers are unintentionally taking on the role and responsibilities of the managers in the club.

Future Research

Overall this ethnography has shifted the way in which lap-dancing has previously been explored by researchers. For instance, it has questioned both media-based and traditional academic paradigms. This has been done through my unique position as

native-researcher and the extensive period for which this ethnography was conducted. Further to this, it has offered an alternative to the implicit deviant and anti-sex work/exploitation frameworks, through pushing forward new ideas about subculture, power and questioning dancer motivations. With this re-questioning and the data generated, new ideas about the way in which the lap-dancing industry needs to be explored in future research have arisen.

For instance, the relationship between dancers and management/owners requires further exploration. Although this study did not focus on these sets of relationships there was an indication that as workers, dancers, had limited rights and at times faced unprofessional treatment. The suggestion is then that there is some evidence of managers/owners exploiting dancers; this needs to be addressed. Further to this, exploring the relationship lap-dancing club managers have with the club's *tacit rules* would also be a useful way of making sense of the extent to which these sets of rules both benefit and resist managerial roles and responsibilities.

Following on from the discussions in this thesis about dancer *exit strategies* and re-entry into dancing, an exploration of dancer's lives after dancing would be an important way of developing a better understanding of how dancers adapt outside of the lap-dancing club. With suggestions of stigma and the deviant label associated with this occupation, exploring the impact these have on ex-dancers is called for.

Finally, more generally further in-depth research into the UK based lap-dancing industry needs to be carried out. In addition, comparative studies between UK and American/Canadian lap-dancing clubs would be an insightful way of understanding the different ways in which this industry is regulated and culturally received by dancers, customers and those outside of the industry.

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