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“...power is understood to be a contested, negotiated social resource that is constantly being enacted during interpersonal encounters.”

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WORKING IN THE FANTASY FACTORY
The Attention Hypothesis and the Enacting of Masculine Power in Strip Clubs

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Using ethnographic data, this article argues that interactions between strippers and their customers are vehicles for the conveyance of attention and the enactment of masculine power in addition to being locations of erotic entertainment. Rejecting the anti-sex-work feminist argument that erotic entertainment serves men by objectifying women, this article argues instead that interactions in strip clubs rely on dancers as interactive subjects rather than as sex objects. Using Goffman's notion of "impression management" and Hochschild's notion of "emotional labor," this article presents an analysis of strip club encounters that fits into a feminist-interactionist framework.

Feminist objections to sex-work tend to be framed in terms of men's objectification of women (Barry 1979; Chapkiss 1997; Griffin 1981; MacKinnon 1987; Roiphe 1993; Phelan 1989; and others). Prostitution, pornography, sex shows, nude dancing are all venues for men to gaze at women's bodies. This argument regarding the objectification of women in this way assumes a sort of power wielded by men, against women, that keeps women oppressed, beaten down, submissive, or alternatively keeps them buying into a male-dominated system of sexuality and commerce.

Previous sociological research on stripping and strip clubs has focused largely on issues other than gendered power. The most common approach to research on stripping has been framed in terms of "deviant occupation" studies, examining the career paths of strippers and the shared characteristics of strippers as workers in a deviant setting (McCaghy and Skipper 1969, 1972; Skipper and McCaghy 1970, 1971; Boles and Garbin 1974a; Carey, Peterson, and Sharpe 1974; Forsyth and Deshotels 1997, 1998). This work frames the stripper as a subject, not as an object, as argued by proponents of the feminist anti-sex-work perspective mentioned above. A second way to depict the stripper as subject, rather than as object, is to examine the actual lived experience (Ronai 1992). Carol Ronai (1992) places her own subjectivity as erotic dancer and researcher in the center of her analysis of the work of stripping.

This article fits more closely into a third approach to the study of stripping, that which places the interaction between the strippers and

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customers at the center of analysis (Boles and Garbin 1974b; Gonos 1976; Ronai and Ellis 1989). While descriptive of these interactions, the article's focus is on questions of gendered power, taking issue with the objectification thesis of the anti-sex-work feminist characterization described above. Rather than understanding power as a monolithic social force oppressing women, in this article, power is understood to be a contested, negotiated social resource that is constantly being enacted during interpersonal encounters. This power is relational. It is in the service of men but in a manner more insidious than the power described by the anti-sex-work position of MacKinnon (1987) and others. This article will first describe the characteristics of this power and will then explain how the enacting of this power creates a source of reinforcement for traditional notions of masculinity. Finally, it will illuminate the creation and enacting of this masculine power (so called because of its connection to traditional notions of masculinity) through specific types of interactions between dancers and customers in strip clubs. These interactions are characterized by two related processes. The first is composed of the transformation of dancers into fantastical subjects through interaction with customers, where the customers might imagine backgrounds and lifestyles for the strippers with whom they interact and the strippers work to anticipate these imagined backgrounds and present an image consistent with them. The second is composed of the "impression management" (Goffman 1959) and "emotional labor" (Hochschild 1979, 1983) on the part of the dancers that makes that subjectification possible.

METHODS

The data for this article were drawn from ethnographic research I engaged in from 1996 to 1998. My primary method of data collection was participant observation; I spent 110 hours as a customer in two New England strip clubs. I participated in interactions with strippers, buying table dances, tipping at the stages, and also in conversations with dancers at my table, where I revealed my interest as a researcher. This afforded me the opportunity to interview dancers as another method of collecting data. Twelve dancers participated in individual open-ended interviews. A third source of data was created as I carried on informal conversations with customers in the clubs. Although no customers I

approached would consent to formal, recorded interviews, many were willing to talk to me informally in the club setting. All were informed of my interest as a researcher, and all participants of interviews and conversations were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. Data were analyzed in the style of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

A NOTE ON SUBJECTIVITY AND RESEARCH

Being a clothed woman in a place where women are supposed to be naked and being a customer in a place where customers are supposed to be men raises important methodological questions. These questions fall into two categories. The first category contains questions about how the researcher affects the environment she studies. The second category contains questions about how the researcher's identity affects the collection and interpretation of data. An entire article could be devoted to these questions, but here I will only address them briefly.

Women who visit strip clubs where the customers are men and the dancers are women, whether or not they are researchers, affect the environment they have stepped into. During my initial visits to Michael's, I realized that my presence drew the attention of customers away from the dancers at times. I discussed this with Diana, a dancer there. She related to me a similar experience.

I checked out Michael's before I worked here, and I found that I walked in and they [customers] were looking more at me than at the girls on stage. Because you're there and you're not a dancer, you're more fascinating.

Men who came to the strip club to interact with women were also interested in interacting with me. Customers who came to the club only to watch naked women dance, on the other hand, seemed discomfited by my presence. I was not the only woman customer to enter the clubs. Occasionally, other women would come in. Some were accompanied by men. Others were friends of dancers. A few came to see feature performers. All seemed to draw a bit of attention from the other customers in the club. I minimized the intrusiveness of my presence in two ways. First, I stayed for at least two hours for each visit. I noted that after I had

found a place to sit and had been part of the crowd for about an hour, people stopped noticing me. I blended in. Second, I visited each club frequently. This allowed me to become familiar to the regular customers and to the staff, so that my presence was less remarkable. When customers did remark on my presence and interact with me, I would answer questions honestly and politely and inform them of my research interest. Several fruitful conversations with customers about their impressions of the clubs were conducted this way.

Addressing concerns about how my identity as a woman-feminist-clothed-researcher-customer would affect my data collection and analysis was stickier. I have confidence in my data and my analysis for the following key reasons. First, I encouraged myself to experience what the other customers might have found enjoyable about the setting. I bought table dances and tipped dancers and kept my "sociological imagination" (Mills 1959) open to what was fun or erotic about those experiences. I followed up on these observations by comparing my own responses to those that dancers told me about in interviews. Second, I paid close attention to my personal feelings about the clubs and the people I encountered in them. Whether positive, negative, or neutral, I wrote about these feelings in my field notes, and when analyzing my notes, I was able to reflect on how my understanding of the research environment might be affected. Third, I allowed my interviews, my observations, and my conversations with customers to all inform each other as I progressed in my research. This provided me with ways to check my own interpretations against those of the dancers and other customers, as well as to check what was reported by dancers and customers against what I witnessed myself in the clubs.

THE ATTENTION HYPOTHESIS AND MASCULINE POWER

At table-dance clubs, in addition to dancing on stage for tips, dancers sell nude dances performed at the customers' tables but where there is no physical contact between the customer and the dancers. It may seem obvious at the start that the magnet attracting the men to bars that charge more than five dollars for a beer is the sexiness, the live nude girls. It is pay-per-view in which the view is of breasts and hips and legs and bottoms all belonging to sexy women in various stages of undress: perhaps

clad in tightly clinging gowns, or sequined bras and panties, or then again clad only in skin lit by strobes and black lights. This article argues below that eroticism is only part of what draws the men. Close observation indicates that this eroticism is a vehicle for the conveyance of something more: (attention) If not for the direct attention a dancer and customer can pay each other, there would be little difference between this type of erotic entertainment and erotic videos. It is the possibility of interaction that sets them apart. The attention, I observe as I watch customers stand a bit straighter when the dancers on stage notice and approach them, seems to be as necessary, perhaps more necessary, than the nudity. The customers have paid money to come in and pay more money to watch women strip, but they also pay to be seen by the women. They too receive recognition and attention. The following observation notes demonstrate some of the types of attention routinely given to customers by strippers.

I notice that several of the dancers lean far forward when receiving a tip and seem to whisper to the customer, closing out the distractions of loud music and other customers.

One element of tipping that is very ritualized for many dancers is putting themselves in a position to look up at the customer (she slides her back down the pole to sit on her heels). This not only seems to acknowledge the customer by altering her position to better speak to him but also reinforces his importance by voluntarily putting herself in the "inferior" position.

I witnessed several "missed opportunities" tonight where tips were not collected because the stripper failed to notice the customer or the customer failed to get her attention. In three different instances, customers stood in one place, money in hand, even though the stripper had her back to them, and did not move around to where she could see, despite the fact that she was not dancing for another customer at the time. That seems to indicate that it is very important to the customer to have the dancer acknowledge him, rather than having to work to get her attention.

I argue that this attention is most valuable when it allows for two things. First, it must allow for witnesses; that is, it must be visible to the other customers and dancers that fill the social space within the strip club. Second, it must allow the customer to imagine the personality and history of the dancer who is attending to him; that is, she must not impede his imagination by telling him details of her life that will jeopardize his ability to see her as a sexy, sensual, and most important,

available, woman. When these two things occur, they make available more than simple attention. They create a possibility for the enacting of masculine power.

The term *masculine power* requires both definition and context, as notions of power and of masculinity and femininity are themselves problematic. I use the term to indicate two specific pieces of a socially constructed puzzle that when assembled according to our cultural expectations, produce a collage of characteristics we most often attribute to men or that we count as most appropriate or fitting when exhibited by men. My use of this term is consistent with an understanding of gender (the division of human beings into "men" and "women") as being a product of culture and relations of power rather than with an understanding of gender as biologically determined. I do not imply, through calling this power masculine, that it is an essential element of being a man (i.e., not all men need possess it, nor does any man need to possess it at all times), nor do I imply that possessing it is sufficient to indicate that one is a man (i.e., it might be possessed at times by boys, girls, or women). Terms such as *masculinity* and *femininity* often are used to highlight differences between men and women, while minimizing differences among women and differences among men (Rubin 1976; McCall 1992). Masculine power, then, is power that differentiates men from women, ordinarily being attributed to men, and when acknowledged in women, it is downplayed, de-emphasized, or construed as unfeminine.

I will now describe these two pieces of that socially constructed masculinity that I have grouped together under masculine power. These two characteristics can best be described as being desirable to women and being able to financially take care of a woman. I emphasize that this power is masculine because it is affirmed for men, by men and women, in a very heterosexist environment that caricatures modern socially constructed standards of masculinity and femininity (i.e., that men should be providers of economic security for women, that they should be desired by women, and that women should be providers of emotional and sexual security and should be desired by men). It is important to recognize that these traits (being desired by women and having money) are culturally linked and that this is evident both inside and outside the strip club. Outside the strip club, men might be seen as more desirable to women if they can potentially take care of a family.³ Likewise, women might be seen as more desirable if they can keep men feeling good about

themselves. Strippers who participated in interviews underscored these points. The most sought-after customer in the strip club is very likely going to be the one most willing to spend his dollars. The following passages, taken from interviews with dancers, illustrate the way they categorize and evaluate customers based on the customers' willingness to spend money. Lynne describes how dancers warn each other about customers who are not spending money.

You definitely classify them. If somebody's cheap, you say "Those guys are cheap," and you tell the other girls in the dressing room. . . . Or, "Hey, these guys are tipping me really well, go over there," or "Go talk to these guys. They've got money."

Becky describes the customers she finds most frustrating.

Lately, I've been finding a lot that they just come in, just to watch, and they don't tip. I don't know if they don't understand, or if they just don't care, that we're there to work. . . . They just want to see what they want to see, and a lot of them don't even pay for it.

yes! The best paid stripper is likely to be the one that is best at creating and conveying feelings of intimacy, interest, and desire for her customers. Strippers I interviewed often conveyed a sense of needing to make customers feel desired in order to sell dances and to keep customers tipping. Diana discusses her frustration about not making as much as some of the other dancers.

Sometimes I get irritated because some of the other girls do really well and I don't understand why, because I think I have a better body; but . . . it seems like they're better with humoring the customers and eye contact and stuff.

Lynne describes her start at her first table dance club.

! I was watching some of the girls who were not very attractive, and they were making killer money, and I thought, "How do they do that?" and I would ask, and they'd say, "You just ask." And I was like, "What do you mean 'you just ask'?" and I couldn't comprehend it for awhile. But then I understood that they [customers] want to be approached and asked [for dances]. They want you to come to them. They don't want to have to ask you.

Delaney describes how she approaches selling table dances.

I probably walk by and smile and try to engage 'em in a little conversation beforehand, because I realize I'm not the most beautiful girl in there. . . . But I'm flirty, and you have to flirt with them and make them feel special. And then, they're like "wow . . . cool."

"Approaching" customers, "humoring" them, and "making them feel special" are all ways that dancers describe their attempts to give customers a sense of being important or desired, and this feeling of being important or desired, according to the strippers interviewed for this study, seemed an important factor in keeping the money flowing.

Several possible criticisms of this attention hypothesis seem likely, and I will address them here. At first, it might seem that this affirmation of desirability is undermined by its connection to money. It is the customer's money, not his self, that the dancer desires, and we can see this when we watch a stripper dance for one customer, attend to him, take his money, and then move on to the next customer. However, three things keep this relationship between money and attention from devaluing the possible affirmation of power and desirability available through the interaction. First, the giving of money need not be associated with a purchase transaction. Several other ways of framing the situation (Goffman 1974) exist and are used by customers in strip clubs. Dancers I interviewed reported that customers often use reward frameworks ("Here, take this, you deserve it") or gift frameworks ("Here honey, let me help you with your bills/tuition/etc."), as if the fee being paid is not a contractual arrangement but rather given out of good will. This latter framing mechanism, the gift frame, can also be seen as a sort of providing frame: the customer understands himself to be contributing to the dancer's financial security rather than as taking part in a fee-for-service interaction. The second reason this relationship between money and attention is less problematic than might first be assumed has to do with its explicitness. Trade and exchange underlie many types of social interaction between men and women. Often, we try to minimize the visibility of these exchanges or frame them in ways to make them seem less strategic. By keeping the exchange visible and explicit, the transaction becomes simply a part of the social setting, taken for granted and placed in the realm of social convention rather than in the realm of intentional purchase or sale. Finally, as indicated above, the giving of money to a woman for something she has provided lends power to that

great when

money. Money has value only as long as it can be exchanged for something else. By making the object of that exchange the actions of another person, the money now has not only value but power. If a customer's everyday interactions with women undermine his sense of financial power (either because he just accepts that his earnings are not sufficient to support himself and his family or perhaps because the women he meets are self-reliant where money is concerned), then the affirmation of his money's value might compound the value of the attention he receives, rather than detract from it. The interaction thus provides a twofold service.

I think it matters

That the dancer moves on to another customer need not detract from the affirmation made available during an individual customer's interaction either. I argue that the power being affirmed is relational, that is, it is created when the attention being purchased is noticed by others and momentarily distinguishes the customer being attended to from other customers who are not receiving the attention of a dancer. After a visit to Dream House one night, I made the following note.⁴

By her nothing your own Mom

Customer in blue shirt, there with two friends, seemed very taken by blonde dancer in red costume. He hadn't approached any other dancers yet, and he was gesturing to this one and seemed to be talking about her to his friends. Finally, he approached the stage to tip her. She pulled his face into her chest and ran her hands through his hair. She danced in front of him for a few moments, looking in his eyes. He ran his hands along the outsides of her thighs, and when he did, he looked over at his friends with his eyebrows raised and his head motioning to the dancer, presumably as if he were proud of his achievement and wanted to make sure they saw.

Yes

Here, the dancer becomes a symbol that is exchanged with witnesses in return for recognition of the customer's (temporary) desirability and financial power. This ("I have her and you don't") (or perhaps "she wants me, not you") argument is in some ways a very microlevel parallel to Bourdieu's (1984) argument about distinctions (in cultural tastes, possessions, and displays) as the root of class identification. Rather than illuminating class differences or one-upmanship though, my observations of strip club customers illuminate the distinctions made by men on an interactionist level. In the strip club, the symbolic capital being collected and displayed is not the stripper herself but rather the attention of the stripper as she performs for a tipping customer or does a table dance for a customer who has, or will, pay the fee. Another way to understand

the production of status by women for men is suggested by Collins (1992). He argues that wives and girlfriends increase the status of men through the Goffmanian elements of their housework and paid employment when this labor is aimed at creating a designated impression for outsiders (the impression of a clean, orderly home or a friendly, efficient office, for example). Strippers increase the status of men through labor aimed at creating a designated impression for the men themselves—the impression of being interesting, sexy, and desirable. *Nice*

FANTASTICAL ACTORS

Great

Interviews with strippers and conversations with strippers while at work at the clubs, have made it clear that from their experience, they believe customers want them to be fantastical subjects. My choice of the word "subject" rather than "object" here is intentional. This means that during the interaction with the customer, the stripper does not so much become a one-dimensional sexual thing upon which the customer may act, but rather, she becomes, through the customer's assumption of her history, personality, and desires, a fantastical actor whose job it is to turn attention and action toward him. During an evening of observation, Jeff, a customer with whom I talked informally, explained that he believed that a lot of dancers lied about why they strip: "Well, every woman in here has a story about being in school or having a kid or, you know, some reason they need to do this, but I think those are just stories." It was his belief that most strippers "came from troubled homes," and this, he said, caused him to "respect their decisions to be strippers," since they had to deal with adversity from childhood. However, it was also important to him that the strippers be working in the clubs "because they wanted to be." When I asked him what he meant by "wanted to" he explained that they had to like the work. They could not be doing it for primarily strategic and economic reasons, or through any sort of pimping. *

It seems that some customers, at least then, need to create an imaginary subjectivity for the stripper (a subjectivity that the stripper helps support), perhaps so they can imagine a life for her without the danger of his imagination being hindered by any obstructing reality. The following excerpt from a conversation with a stripper during an evening of observation illustrates, in her words, the paper-doll nature of this

subjectification: "I have a husband. I go to school," says Diana while trying to explain to me her disgust with a certain customer. He had seen her wedding ring (she wears it at work) and had said to her, "You're married? Now I can't even look at you!" I ask her, "Do you think they imagine you exist only within these walls?" "Exactly," she says. "It's like they think we're paper dolls. We're here to be played with, to be dressed and undressed and then put away 'til next time . . . Other than that, we have no lives, nothing outside the club." Diana's allusion to paper dolls illustrates a sentiment held by many dancers that customers make up their own ideas about the strippers' lives, much as children make up stories about their dolls. Another dancer puts it this way:

Paper
Dolls

If I tell him I'm married and have a child, he's not going to think I'm sexy anymore. Men come in to see sexy, erotic, women who they think are party girls. Motherhood they can get at home.

good

Some elements of a dancer's history are more threatening to the interaction than are others. For example, being seen as a mother is not as threatening as being seen as a wife, presumably because mothers can be single and thus available. Jasmine responded to my question about customers' perception of dancers by telling me that rather than forgetting that strippers have lives outside of the clubs, she thought customers assumed the strippers' lives outside of the club mirrored their images inside the clubs.

Jasmine: I think that they think we're pretty wild outside. I think they think we all have a wild life. I don't tell customers that I'm married because I don't want it to affect how they feel. But I always tell them that I have a child. I'm like "Oh yeah, I have a daughter." And I have no problem with them thinking of me in those terms.

Interviewer: Has telling a customer that you have a child ever affected the way he's treated you?

Jasmine: Sometimes, it's funny, because if it's someone that's a parent themselves, they want to talk about their kids. . . . It brings it more personal and in a very nonthreatening sort of way.

Not all dancers experienced the same acceptance of their maternity. Sapphire told me

It's that
to humanize
them as
a stripper

I have seen a reaction before, where they seem grossed out when the subject of kids got brought up, and they see you as having no kids at all. . . . They really believe that most of the women in there don't have kids and aren't married. But it's even worse about the kids, because they're thinking you're so young and they're fantasizing about your body.

By treating the dancers as paper dolls, the customer can maintain consistency within his interaction frame. He can construe the dancer's attention as being honest interest and indicative of potential availability on her part as long as he does not acknowledge that she might have somebody waiting at home for her. Men then appear to go to strip clubs to watch the beautiful women of their fantasies swing their naked bodies around brass poles, dance seductively to a deafening beat, and caress their breasts and thighs as if in the middle of a very private moment; but also, they go to talk to them, to interact beyond simple voyeurism, in a world removed from the reality of complex, multidimensional identities and lives. One of the most important elements of this fantasy world is that the women occupying it are understood by the men who visit it to be single and thus possibly available. During my own visits to the clubs, I witnessed a great many incidents in which customers asked strippers out on dates or offered them money to come back to a home or hotel room after work. It is important that the dancer seem potentially available because then, the interest she shows to the customer might seem more personal. Michelle, a stripper, explains,

If for a moment you can look at him as if he's the only man in the whole room, you can make him think maybe, just maybe, you are really attracted to him. You want him to feel that way.

This might sound exaggerated. After all, surely these men know that the women are simply there to earn money and that none of it is personal. But stripper after stripper, in interviews and in casual conversations, tells me, "What do they come in for? They come in because they think they have a chance with you." The following statements, made by three different strippers during individual interviews, demonstrate that they often use this assumption to their advantage by constructing interactions with customers so that the attention they give leads the customer to

think that something intimate is happening (or might happen later) between just the two of them.

If you can look at a man in such a way as to suggest that he's got your attention and that there's something going on between the two of you, that it's not just a casual glance around the room and you happened to glance at him . . . you suggest that "I would do anything to be with you." They love that. (Michelle)

Every day, you have to plot and scheme. You have to find that new way to try and make these men think you have an interest in them. They'll say, "Oh, you're so nice. Can I take you on a date?" And you say, "Well I don't even know you. I'd have to get to know you first." So you get them to buy a table dance so they can start to get to know you. The key thing is to keep them interested enough to think they might have a chance, but not too much of a chance. . . . You've got to be able to string it along. (Lynne)

Diana was more ambivalent, responding to my question about why men want table dances.

I think it's more of an intimate show, that he has you for a few songs and that maybe for some men, "I can get with her. Maybe I can work her a little bit and get with her" or "Maybe I can get a date or get her to come home with me, give her a little extra money for this or that."

Ronai and Ellis (1989) note similar strategies used by the table dancers in their research. Dancers used what they imagined to be elements of men's fantasy lives to keep them interested in buying dances.

By talking "dirty" and acting "like a whore"—for example, telling stories about kinky sex in her life outside the bar—a dancer could keep a customer "going," eager to buy the next dance, ready to believe the dancer might have sex with him later. (p. 283)

The important thing here is not so much what the customer wants (sex, a date, etc.) but what he is willing to, or needs to, believe to see his goal as attainable. Does he need to believe that the stripper is single? Is it enough to know that she engages in kinky sex? Strippers present themselves in the ways that they imagine will most meet the customers' expectations. They do this most often by concealing the elements of their lives that would contradict or seem inconsistent with their images as wild or as party girls.

Also, Bostonia cannot treat the Dancers as sluts, who, ect. Men give these women "fake" respect. Thus they act like they are into it, but we act as if we are into them — no one really wants to date a stripper!!

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The strippers are not the only parties involved in the construction of these interactions, of course. To suggest that would be to accept the same argument made by feminists about the objectification of women, although operating in the opposite direction: it would be an argument about the objectification of men. The work of stripping is indeed interactive, not unilateral, and so, the customers must also play a part in the exchange and impression management that we have been examining. The next section of this article will focus on the tools used by strippers and customers to manage impressions and negotiate interactions, interactions that serve two very different sets of interests and in which the parties' very definitions of the situations are conflicting.

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT: IDENTITY AND EXCHANGE

For the dancer, impression management 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 chooses to share with the customers through conversation. Sometimes, these elements present an inconsistent image to the customers. For example, Ronai and Ellis (1989) noted that music could interfere with the rest of a dancer's image, where customers were concerned. One customer commented about a dancer, "That girl has a great body, but every time I hear her music [heavy metal], I get the creeps thinking about what she might be like" (p. 278). Dancers I interviewed usually chose music that made them happy or to which they felt most comfortable dancing. The rationale was that if it made them feel sexy, they would look sexier or more attractive to the customers. Delaney, a dancer at Jonathan's, explains this in terms of "having a good time."

I put on the music I feel comfortable with. I like a lot of reggae and r/b and hip-hop, and I'll get up there and I'll get into it because that's my music. . . . And I'll dance and dance. . . . I mean I know a lot of them [customers] are like, "What the hell is this music?" But if I'm having a good time, they will too.

Not all dancers have equal access to the tools of impression management. Each club operated differently regarding some of these tools. At Michael's, dancers were prohibited from wearing jewelry in body

piercings anywhere other than in their ears or navels, and tattoos were supposed to be covered (as best they could be) with makeup. The reason for this also involved impression management, by the club owner. He explained to the dancers that he did not think piercings and tattoos conveyed a "high-class image," and since his was a "high-class establishment," he wanted the dancers to convey images that were consistent with the image he wanted the club to have. At this same club, a disc jockey selected the music to which the dancers worked; thus, they tended not to associate their self-presentations with the music being played. They focused much more closely on costume, makeup, movement (dancing, posing), and information management, the elements over which they did retain control. At Jonathan's, on the other hand, no prohibition was made on body adornment, and dancers selected music for their sets. Here, however, impression management from the stage had to be accomplished much more quickly, as dancers only worked the stage for two songs at a time; where at Michael's, dancers rotated around four stages for a total of five songs before moving to the floor to sell table dances. So while the dancers at Jonathan's had more tools at their disposal with which to create images of themselves for the customers, at Michael's, they had more time with which to solidify the images they attempted to create.

In the strip club, the strippers are, at first glance, the only obvious impression managers. Closer observation shows how the customers also work to manage their self-presentations. In groups of friends, they manage their self-presentations for each other as well as for the stripper. When alone, they manage their self-presentations for the dancers and for other customers. During an interview, Diana told me about how she learned that the man who pumps her gas invented a story for a dancer he had a lap dance from at Michael's, where Diana works.

Sunday night, perfect example. I was in there, and the guy who pumps my gas every week came in. And he was trying to hide from me, but I saw him right when he came in. . . . I saw him the whole time. And he was getting a table dance from one of the girls. And when I told her I knew him, she said, "Is he like a golfer or something?" I was like, "No! He fills my gas every week; what kinds of story did he tell you?" So when I saw him today, I said, "How's that golf tournament?" And he laughed and was like, "Real original huh?" And I was like, "Oh yeah" (rolling her eyes).

The customer's remark that his story might not have been "real original" suggests that he expects storytelling to be part of other customers' interactions with dancers as well. Diana's response (sarcastically saying "Oh yeah" and rolling her eyes) confirms that in her experience, customers attempt to create images of themselves for the strippers by giving information that is sometimes false.

At Jonathan's, I watched as a table of three young men bought a table dance. All three did a lot of "posing," one tilting his head to the side and one holding his hand to his cheek, in ways that suggested examination or appraisal of the dancer. Posing is a way of intentionally conveying an image to others. There is another way that customers interact with one another that would more readily be considered showing off rather than posing or engaging in impression management. An observation at Michael's demonstrated one way in which customers show off for each other.

Two tables of three customers each are seated one on either side of the pedestal stage near the door. They became very competitive about tipping and making noise as the night wore on. It was one of the customers at the table nearest the door that started the noise (hooting and whistling at the dancers), and the table opposite began to get noisy as well. Then the competition for the dancer's attention through tipping started. At one table, a customer would get up and tip and then go back to the table to try and get more money from his friends. At the same time, a customer from the other table would be tipping the dancer. The two groups exchanged looks and even bits of conversation during all of this.

On the other hand, rather than competing to show their enjoyment, or showing off, some customers seem to guard their expressions to keep other customers or the strippers from thinking they are enjoying it too much. Sapphire, in an interview noted the following:

If they're even that much more attracted to you, that makes them kind of squirm and look around like "someone's going to think I'm enjoying this too much," you know, like "I'm not supposed to be watching her like this."

My observations of customers' impression management indicate that more than relying on dress or body adornment, they depended on

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conversation, gesture, and facial expressions to try and convey whatever image they wanted to the strippers, or friends, or to other customers. During a table dance, the way a customer looks at the dancer in front of him conveys significant information to the dancer. One dancer explained to me that if a customer does not seem to be interested in her body or the music, then she assumes he is displeased with her and that it becomes very difficult to finish the dance. But it might be that the customer is actually trying to show respect for the dancer or to differentiate himself from the other oglers by not paying as much attention to her nudity. James, a customer, told me that he "doesn't want to seem like all the other customers who just stare," so he tries to look into the stripper's eyes more than he looks at her body. Tori explained that the way a customer looked at her and the way she judged his body language during a table dance helped her know how to continue.

I pay attention to whether or not they look back in my eyes. Whether or not they look at my face, what part of my body they look at, what they want to see more of. . . . It kind of tells me whether I need to look them in the face, or whether my smile is important, or whether or not they want to see my behind again, or whether they just want me to really get down to the music.

Another dancer explained that she thought the most respectful customers were the ones who paid attention, made eye contact, did not make lewd comments or facial expressions, and openly seemed to be enjoying themselves by smiling at her, nodding to the music, and by tipping. To her, tipping showed a respect for the work involved.

EMOTION WORK: ANOTHER ASPECT OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Emotional labor involves a specific kind of impression management: the management of feelings. Arlie Hochschild (1979, 1983) was the first to write about "the commercialization of human feeling." Her research on airline workers, particularly women flight attendants, illustrated the ways in which airlines required flight attendants not only to fit a certain physical image (discrimination suits have ended some of that) but also to create a certain emotional environment for customers. The emotional impression that the airlines want their flight attendants to

create for their passengers is one of "being cared for in a convivial and safe place" (Hochschild 1983, 7). The labor that goes into creating this environment is emotional labor, not only because its product is emotional but because the process of producing it requires emotional manipulation within the worker herself. Hochschild explains that it "requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (Hochschild 1983, 7). This emotional labor requires the "transmutation of emotional systems" (Hochschild 1983, 19), meaning that workers must take acts that are usually private and employ them in public settings. 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. Other examples will be given below.

While the flight attendant's job is to make passengers feel cared for, the stripper's job is to make customers feel cared about. The difference between these two emotion-based impressions is that in the first case, the intent is to create a feeling of somewhat maternal care, that is, having all the mundane details attended (being fed, checked on periodically, being safe), while the intent in the second case is to create a feeling of more sensual attraction. As noted, many customers want not only a turn-on but also something more personal. In the section above, we saw how strippers manage impressions by leading customers to believe that there was a chance for something more, something beyond the dances for which they are paying. Giving a customer the impression that she is interested in him, the dancer conveys an idea. But there is a feeling, an emotion that goes along with that idea. The idea perhaps is, "Gee, she seems to like me" or "Maybe she'll go home with me." The corresponding feeling might be better described as something akin to pride or self-confidence.

Creating this feeling involves more than Lynne's verbal manipulation, "I have to get to know you better." It requires a host of nonverbal cues and gestures. As with Hochschild's (1979, 1983) flight attendants, smiling and eye contact are among the most important of these. Sapphire told me of a customer who explained to her that eye contact and smiles were important because it made him feel like she "was enjoying the fact that [she's] there for us [customers]." Tori, another dancer, during an interview told me, "I look them in the eye. I smile. Overwhelmingly, people [customers] tell me that it's my smile and my eyes that get

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them." Adding to the nonverbal nature of these gestures and cues is an even more elusive element, that of seeming "real". That is to say that keeping a smile on her face or meeting a customer's eyes is not enough for either the stripper or the flight attendant. The smile must be convincing. The eye contact must be engaging. Explaining the difficulty of selling table dances, Jasmine told me, "You have to be so 'on.'" She contrasts being "on" with being "in your own little world." Being "on" means being emotionally and mentally directed toward the customer. Jasmine explains that it is hard to be emotionally directed toward the customer if she is worried about making money.

I just have to tell myself that it doesn't matter, that I'm just going to work, that it doesn't matter if I have a good night or a bad night. Because if I put that pressure on myself, then I'm tense, and that shows. If I'm thinking, "I've got to make money," and I'm asking, "Would you like a dance?" then it just doesn't work. So I just have to be there and be up and relaxed. It's hard; it's so mental.

This example illustrates the "suppression of feeling" that is part of Hochschild's (1979, 1983) definition of emotional labor. It takes work for Jasmine to ignore the real reason she is at the club (to make money) and focus on entertaining the customers. While Jasmine talks about the suppression of feeling in her work as a stripper, Sapphire talks about transmuting her private response to nervousness into valuable tools for managing her interactions with customers.

One of the good things for me is that if I'm nervous or feeling just a little bit uncomfortable or something, I tend to smile or laugh or giggle. So I mean that makes it much easier because when someone's in a good mood and happy and smiling, they tend to do a lot better [at selling table dances].

Tori's approach was to use interaction with customers to draw energy for herself on nights when she was not feeling "on": "I just smile more, then I find one person who wants a dance and is really into me, and I just take that energy and use that to keep me going."

Emotional work on the part of the stripper is necessary not only to make the customer feel wanted or attractive but also to keep him from feeling uncomfortable. A customer reported to Ronai (1992), "I'm not here to scare the girls. I'm here for the illusion that they like me. When I

see a scared new dancer, I feel like the boogie man" (p. 110). It is the dancer's job to look calm, collected, and as if she is enjoying herself, not to look nervous, scared, tired, stressed out, or bored. Delaney, one of the dancers at Jonathan's, felt that customers ought to perform some emotion work as well. By placing some of the responsibility on them to enjoy themselves, she acknowledges the interactivity of creating good feelings. She also acknowledges the ability customers have to make the strippers' work either more or less difficult. Talking about the need for reinforcement from the audience to feel good about her dancing, she said,

I get embarrassed if I see other people watching me dance, and they notice that no one looks happy. I'd rather have them [the customers at the stage]. . . . If they're not tipping I'd rather have them smile and at least pretend they're into it. I think its embarrassing if they're stone cold.

Delaney's moments of embarrassment are indicative of a lack of emotion work on the part of customers. If they wanted to, they could affect a sense of interest in her dancing or her body to convey to her a feeling of being good at her job. It is possible that one reason that strippers appeal to customers is because it is implicit, through the substitution of money for true emotional obligation, that customers need not attend to the emotions of strippers when interacting with them.

Sometimes strippers use emotion work techniques to resist affirming masculine power. Sapphire discusses using eye contact to make customers feel self-conscious about their participation in interactions with her.

You know what's funny? I enjoy making people feel uncomfortable when I'm dancing. I do 'cause I kind of giggle to myself when I'm doing it. You know, there're just some men who come in and they're enjoying themselves, but they're also uncomfortable because they're kind of embarrassed. I'll keep meeting their eyes, and they'll keep looking away.

Some strippers, I've noted, make faces when they turn their backs to customers during table dances. Others roll their eyes. The turning of her back to the customer serves not only to show him her ass but also to give the stripper a small break from the work of appearing to enjoy the dance and the customer. In addition, it gives the dancer a chance to demonstrate "role distance" (Goffman 1961) to herself and to the other

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dancers. It was important to the dancers I interviewed that I know they were not "taken in" by the customers, and that while they sometimes honestly enjoyed their work, they always framed their interactions with customers as work, not as pleasure.

The Delta flight attendants studied by Hochschild (1979, 1983) were selling their emotional labor to a company but directing it toward the passengers with whom they interacted on each flight. The strippers in this study sell their emotional labor directly to their customers. In some ways, that makes the power dynamic in the strip club less straightforward. Strippers are, for the most part, independent contractors. They pay the clubs to work there. They do not have bosses in the typical sense. Yet, to say they are their own bosses would be to underestimate the influence the customers have over them. As noted above, this power is multidirectional. In terms of exchange relationships, the customer has power over the dancer's financial success. He is not obligated to tip, except by his regard of strip club conventions and his desire for individual attention from the dancers. The stripper has power over the attention she gives and over the display of her body. Strippers themselves report sometimes feeling sexually or erotically powerful, commanding the attention of the men in the club.

Actually, I have fun doing it; most of the time, I really do. I like that kind of attention, you know, the spotlight on me. And the money's great. So it kind of gives me what I need. . . . I'm kind of sad for when I do get that much older that I can't do it any more. (Sapphire)

Several dancers reported sometimes enjoying the sexual attention they received from customers, telling me that especially when first starting to strip for a living, the positive attention they got from the customers was "a rush" or "almost addictive." On the other hand, dancers also report feeling that customers in the club have a sort of collective power over the self-esteem of strippers.

I don't see it as female dominance over men or that they're [strippers] in a power position because they're dancing. I see it as the fact that the women there have their self-esteem affected by the way the customers treat them. . . . And in that regard, the men do have a lot of power over them, not necessarily as individuals but as a collective in terms of how they relate to them [strippers]. (Tori)

CONCLUSION

It is notable that in the relationship between stripper and potential customer (within the realm of what is possible within the club⁵), rejection almost always happens in one direction: he refuses her dance. In fact, one of the reasons strippers say men come to the clubs is to avoid the potential rejection they face by women at regular bars. If he has money in hand, he will almost certainly be able to secure the temporary attention of a woman in a strip club. Part of this is due to the ordering of interaction within the clubs. Dancers approach customers, asking them to buy dances, and customers approach the stage to give tips and get attention. This alone makes rejection of the customer unlikely, at least as long as his behavior remains within the boundaries of what is allowable in the club. However, if a customer offended a dancer, she might refuse to dance for him again or refuse to sit with him after her dance. Dancers also sometimes avoided approaching certain customers. The missed opportunities I described above are possibly incidences of dancers silently rejecting customers in a way that avoids the confrontation a verbal rejection could create. Thus, dancers have the power to reject customers, but such rejection was usually a reaction to offensive behavior on the part of the customer and was usually evident in dancers' avoidance of certain customers rather than in outright verbal rejection.

The power discussed in the preceding paragraph is similar to the power in most sales relationships: the customer approaches or is approached by the salesperson and then can accept or reject the product being sold. The customer can influence the salesperson's work environment and financial success, while the salesperson can influence the customer's access to the product. However, if we return to the concept of masculine power introduced earlier, we see a much more subtle power at work in the strip clubs. Feminist critics of sex-work often claim a general and all-encompassing domination of women by men, a domination that allows no agency on the part of women. I suggest that what actually exists between men and women, and what is evidenced in the interactions between strippers and customers, is a more dynamic and also more insidious power. It is a power that is not inflicted by men onto women but is enacted by men and women together primarily for the benefit of men through interactions that affirm cultural notions of masculinity. It is enacted in a setting in which the obvious activity is the watching of women by men but in which underlying that obvious

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agenda is the women's attending to their customers, in which through the creation and use of fantasy, women simultaneously become two-dimensional paper dolls (to allow the customers to see what they want to see) while engaging in a significant amount of emotional labor (to make believable their attention and interest in the customers). Strip club interactions then, full of ironic twists, create a source of affirmation of customers' masculinity in a very traditional sense and, thus by affirming it, lend power to that masculinity.

One of the ironic twists involves the necessary recognition of the dancers' power to influence customers' experience of affirmation. While the amount of attention a customer receives for his money is the product of often-complex negotiation, it is the dancer who retains ultimate control over his access to her smile, eye contact, and further affirmative interaction. Michelle's effort to make her customers feel that they are the "only ones in the room" and that she would "do anything to be with them" indicates the awareness dancers have over their ability to influence the customers' sense of being desired. In addition, Sapphire's use of eye contact to unnerve customers is a vivid reminder that dancers intentionally undermine as well as affirm customers' experience of masculine power.

Finally, customers give dancers a sense of power by being willing to pay for the attention they receive. Dancers told me that one of the dangers of stripping, particularly early on, is becoming "addicted to the money and the attention." They explained that it could "be a rush" to have so many men offering them money to dance, display their bodies, talk, smile, and "be pretty." The dancer gets some elements of her femininity affirmed, just as the customer gets his masculinity affirmed. The customer pays for his affirmation with money. The dancer pays for her affirmation in costly although nonmonetary ways. Long hours of emotional and physical labor, stigmatization, and disdain from outsiders and having to manage the negativity that customers sometimes direct at dancers are just a few of the costs that dancers balance with the financial rewards and affirmation received through interactions with customers.

This article paints strip clubs interactions in the perspective of a feminist interactionism that recognizes nuances not acknowledged by the more mainstream deviant occupations approach, on one hand, and the more essentialist radical feminist approach, on the other. Further research and writing from this perspective would deepen our

understanding of sex-work and its implications for the study of gender, of work, and of the construction of emotions, power, and identity.

NOTES

1. During the early process of club selection, I spent about ten hours observing as a customer in four other New England clubs. A few observations from these early hours have found their way into this article.

2. I use the terms *men* and *women* here to indicate gender as a social construction, as opposed to the terms *male* and *female*, which are taken to indicate sex, an aspect of biology. For a discussion of the difference between sex and gender, see, for example, Lindsey (1997), Andersen (1988), and Kessler and McKenna (1978).

3. An interesting aside, regarding the valuing of men's ability to provide financial security comes from recent census data. In the United States, middle-class men have been losing some of their financial power (if this power is measured by the ability to be the sole wage earner of the family), as middle-class women have been moving into paid employment and as more and more middle-class families find they need two incomes to maintain their middle-class status. For example, the United States Bureau of the Census data published in 1996 indicate that the rate of married women in the civilian labor force has increased from 31.9 in 1960 to 61 in 1995. We might infer from this that married men have less financial power relative to their wives than they did 35 years ago. Married women in 1995 might be understood to be more independent of their husbands than they were in 1960. In the strip club, the power of a man's dollar remains firm. His money is desired by dancers, and so, he as the controller of that money is also desired for that which he can provide. Dancers will attend to him, affirming the power of his money and his desirability.

4. Dream House is not one of the two clubs in which I did the majority of my observation. It is a club in another state that allows contact between the dancers and customers. I refer to it here because it provides such a clear example of a customer "performing" for his friends.

5. It is true that customers often proposition dancers and are rejected, but dating customers is against the rules of most clubs, and so the rejection can be written off as "nothing personal." In fact, dancers try to keep their rejections from sounding personal ("I don't date customers," or "I'd lose my job").

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