

- . 1989. "Making the Elite Lawyer: Culture and Ideology in Legal Education." Ph.D. dissertation, Northeastern University, Boston.
- . 1992. *Making Elite Lawyers*. New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall.
- Granfield, R. and T. Koenig. 1990. "From Activism to Pro Bono: The Redirection of Working Class Altruism at Harvard Law School." *Critical Sociology* 17:57–80.
- Heinz, J. and E. Laumann. 1982. *Chicago Lawyers: The Social Structure of the Bar*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Jackall, R. 1988. *Moral Mazes: The World of the Corporate Manager*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kanter, R. 1977. *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lamont, M. and A. Lareau. 1988. "Cultural Capital: Allusions, Gaps and Glissandos in Recent Theoretical Development." *Sociological Theory* 6:153–68.
- Lurie, A. 1983. *The Language of Clothes*. New York: Vintage.
- Nelson, R. 1988. *Partners with Power: The Social Transformation of the Large Law Firm*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Newman, K. 1988. *Falling from Grace: The Experience of Downward Mobility in the American Middle Class*. New York: Free Press.
- Pfuhl, E. 1986. *The Deviance Process*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Ryan, J. and C. Sackrey. 1984. *Strangers in Paradise: Academics from the Working Class*. Boston: South End Press.
- Schur, E. 1971. *Labeling Deviant Behavior*. New York: Harper & Row.
- . 1980. *The Politics of Deviance*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Sennett, R. and R. Cobb. 1973. *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. New York: Random House.
- Smigel, E. 1969. *The Wall Street Lawyer*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Spangler, E. 1986. *Lawyers for Hire: Salaried Professionals at Work*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Steinitz, V. and E. Solomon. 1986. *Starting Out: Class and Community in the Lives of Working Class Youth*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Stone, G. 1970. "Appearance and the Self." Pp. 394–414 in *Social Psychology through Symbolic Interaction*, edited by G. Stone and H. Farberman. New York: Wiley.
- Useem, M. and J. Karabel. 1986. "Paths to Corporate Management." *American Sociological Review* 51:184–200.

13

LEARNING TO STRIP

The Socialization Experiences of Exotic Dancers

JACQUELINE LEWIS

Learning an occupation is a common form of adult socialization. Occupational socialization occurs during formal education, during job training, and during time spent on the job. Every profession has a set of values that it wants its colleagues to embrace. For example, to become a doctor one needs to learn the skills and knowledge of practicing medicine as well as the

Jacqueline Lewis, "Learning to Strip: The Socialization Experiences of Exotic Dancers" from *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality* 7, no. 1 (1998): 51–56. Copyright © 1998. Reprinted with the permission of SIECCAN.

attitudes and values of the medical profession. Medical students experience an intense period of professional socialization during the years, almost a decade, they spend in medical school and residency. The previous reading on law students is another example of professional socialization. This selection by Jacqueline Lewis, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada, illustrates the occupational socialization experiences of exotic dancers.

Introduction

Entering any new job or social role requires a process of socialization where the individual acquires the necessary values, attitudes, interests, skills and knowledge in order to be competent at her/his job. As with any new job or social role, becoming an exotic dancer requires a process of socialization. For exotic dancers, achieving job competence involves getting accustomed to working in a sex-related occupation, and the practice of taking their clothes off in public for money. In addition, in order to be a successful exotic dancer, women must also learn how to manipulate clientele and to rationalize such behavior and their involvement in a deviant occupation.¹ For some dancers, the socialization process is partially anticipatory in nature, although dancers reported that most of their socialization occurred once they had made their decision to dance and found themselves actually working in the strip club environment. In this [reading], I explore the factors influencing entry into exotic dancing, the socialization experiences of exotic dancers and the process of obtaining job competence.

Background

Since the late 1960s, exotic dancing and the experiences of exotic dancers have been the focus of academic inquiry. The relevance of some of the available literature to the present study is, however, limited by the focus of the articles. Within this literature on exotic dancers, only the articles by Boles and Garbin (1974, 1974c), Carey, Peterson, and Sharpe (1974), Dressel and Petersen (1982), McCaghy and Skipper (1972), Prus and Stylianoss (1980), Skipper and McCaghy (1971), and Thompson and Harred (1992) address the socialization experiences of dancers in any detail. Dressel and Petersen's (1982b) focus on the socialization of male exotic dancers makes their work of limited applicability to the present study.

Although much of this research was conducted over [25 to 30] years ago, some of it remains relevant to the work reported here. For example, [some works listed above] provide an historical point of comparison that indicates some consistency between past and current research findings on the occupational socialization of exotic dancers.

The literature on occupational socialization of exotic dancers emphasizes two basic themes: (1) the factors that influence entry into dancing; and (2) anticipatory and on-the-job socialization experiences. Two types of models

have been advanced to explain entry into exotic dancing: (1) career contingency models and (2) conversion models. In some research reports, these models are used on their own, and in others they are used in combination. Although a variety of singular and combined models have been used to explain entry into exotic dancing, there are several common factors that are identified across the studies: (1) knowledge and accessibility of an opportunity structure that makes exotic dancing an occupational alternative; (2) an awareness of the economic rewards associated with being an exotic dancer; (3) a recruitment process involving personal networks; and (4) financial need or a need for employment.

With respect to the anticipatory and on-the-job socialization experiences of dancers (Boles and Garbin 1974c; Dressel and Petersen 1982; Thompson and Harred 1992), early research found that most female dancers had either professional training in dance, music or theatre, had been previously employed in the entertainment industry, or received extensive training in stripping prior to dancing before an audience (Boles and Garbin 1974c; McCaghy and Skipper 1972; Prus and Stylianoss 1980). However, despite their advanced (anticipatory) preparation, a large part of the occupational socialization dancers experienced occurred through informal channels after they had entered the occupation. Through observing and interacting with other sub-cultural members, dancers learned the tricks of the trade, such as how to interact with customers for profit; manage their deviant lifestyle; and be successful at their job (Boles and Garbin 1974c; Dressel and Petersen 1982; McCaghy and Skipper 1972; Thompson and Harred 1992).

Method

This study used a combination of field observations inside strip clubs and interviews with exotic dancers and other club staff to identify issues associated with the work and careers of exotic dancers. Observations were conducted at clubs in several cities in southern Ontario. Observational data were collected primarily to supplement interview data and to assist us in describing the work environment of exotic dancers including physical setting; contacts between those present in the club (employees and clients); and the atmosphere of different clubs.

Thirty semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with female exotic dancers, club staff and key informants. Participants were recruited either by the research team during field trips to the clubs or by dancers who had participated in the study. Each interview was audiotaped and took place in a location chosen by the respondent (e.g., respondent's home, a research team member's office, a private space at a strip club, a local coffee shop). Interviews lasted anywhere from one to three hours, with the majority taking approximately one and a half hours. All interviews were conducted informally to allow participants to freely express themselves and to allow for exploration of new or unanticipated topics that arose in the interview.

The interviews explored each woman's work history, her perception of her future in the occupation, a description of her work, the various forms of interaction engaged in with clients, use of drugs and alcohol, current sexual practices, perception of risk for HIV and other STDs associated with dancing, sexual health-maintaining strategies, factors influencing risk and ability to maintain sexual health, and the presence and/or possibility of a community among exotic dancers. Interviews with other club employees were designed to tap their experiences in, and impressions of, club-related activities.

As interviews were collected and transcribed, it became increasingly apparent that there was a variety of recurrent themes that ran throughout the interviews (e.g., motivations for entry, socialization process, health and safety concerns, relationships between club employees, impact of dancing on dancers' lives, etc.). Coding categories were developed to fit with these emerging themes. . . . As noted by Glaser and Straus (1967), "[. . .] in discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept" (p. 23). The quotes that appear in this [reading] were selected as examples of the responses provided by the women interviewed that fit the various conceptual categories that emerged during data analysis.

Becoming an Exotic Dancer

Unlike other more conventional occupations with formally structured socialization programs, the socialization experiences of the women we spoke with were informal in nature. Dancers reported that they acquired the requisite skills for the job through informal socialization processes that either (1) were anticipatory in nature, occurring prior to dancing; and/or (2) occurred on-the-job, once they were employed to dance in a strip club.

Anticipatory Socialization

Early studies of female exotic dancers (see Boles and Garbin 1974b; McCaghy and Skipper 1972) found that most dancers had fairly broad anticipatory socialization experiences, having been previously employed in an entertainment-related job, having some type of professional training in dance, music or theatre, or having an agent who helped prepare them for the career of exotic dancing. In this study, we, however, found little indication of the latter two types of anticipatory socialization experiences.

Although one woman had a background in drama, she talked about how it actually did little to prepare her for the job:

I thought you know, O.K. being in Drama, ya, I'm kind of a freer person, whatever. But, like, actually taking off your clothes—nothing, nothing prepares you

for it. Nothing. Seconds before I went up to go dance [for the first time], I'm thinking, oh my God, I can't do this, I can't do this. I can't do this. Then my music started playing and I'm like, I guess I have to now. And you know, your stomach's all in knots and you just do it. There's no way to describe it. You just do it.

Even the few women who indicated that they began dancing with the help of an agent talked about how they received little job preparation. For example, one woman said:

I responded to an ad in the local paper and there was a number and you phoned the number and then you met with this guy and he made you sign a contract and then he kind of talked to you about what goes on. There was no training. Then he just took me to the bar later that evening and that was it.

Although the experiences dancers reported during their interviews varied, the women we spoke with who reported engaging in anticipatory socialization, talked about spending time in strip clubs before deciding to dance. In recalling their entry into exotic dancing, some of the dancers we interviewed spoke of being curious about dancing, and wanting to find out if it was something they could do. These women reported that they sussed out and gained familiarity with dancing by going out to strip clubs on their own and talking to dancers or by going out to the clubs with friends who hung out at or worked in strip clubs.

So, I read some more about it. I read a couple of books on the sex industry and strippers in particular and burlesque dancers. Um, and then I visited a lot of the clubs and tried to talk to the dancers about how they got interested in it and how they get paid and what the job entails. They were pretty open to talking to me about it. . . . and she's like, I'm not really just waitressing, I'm dancing too. And I'm like, "Wow, oh, how much money are you making doing that?" And she's like, "Well, really good and you know if you want to help make your daughter's life better, why don't you come with me one night?" And I'm like, "Oh, man, I don't know if I could do that, you know." I got real scared and everything, but we set a date for the next Friday.

The other women who had anticipatory socialization experiences reported experiencing a more gradual drift into dancing (Matza 1990).² Instead of purposefully going to strip clubs and talking to people in the industry with the intention of sussing it out, these women drifted into dancing through associations they had with people in the industry or by working as a waitress in one of the clubs.

I didn't start out dancing. First I was a waitress. Eventually, I quit waitressing and I went and started dancing at a strip club.

I waitressed for about a year at the Maverick, and then I started to dance. I've been dancing for 7 years, just over 7 years.

I used to date this guy and some of his friends worked in the clubs, so we could go and hang out. He used to try to get me to try it [dancing], but I wouldn't. But, once we broke up, I decided to try it. . . .

According to Ritzer and Walczak (1986), "[. . .] deviant occupational skills may be learned through involvement in different but related occupations or through nonoccupational activities" (p. 144). Through hanging out with people associated with the industry or by working in a strip club in some other capacity, these women experienced a form of anticipatory socialization that enabled them to view dancing as a viable job option. As noted by Matza (1990), "some learning is truly a discovery [for the individual], for until they have experimented with the forbidden, [. . . they] are largely unaware that infraction is feasible behavior" (p. 184).

A lot of my friends and a lot of the group that I used to hang around with while I was waitressing were uh, we were all in the same circles with the guys from a strip club for women and uh, the two clubs were connected, and so they kept saying "try it" and, you know, "go to this bar, start there" and that's just how I ended up there.

I lived with a guy when I was at [high] school. . . . We moved right into the city, downtown Toronto and he was hanging out with strippers. . . . And I used to threaten him, you know, if you keep hanging out with these girls, I'm gonna become one. And I did.

I used to waitress at a saloon and then I was hanging out with some of the girls and then dating guys from a dance club for women, heaven forbid, and it just went from there, I guess that's how I got into dancing. . . .

The experiences of the women who drifted into dancing can be viewed as a form of recruitment or conversion process whereby the individual is gradually introduced/exposed to the inner world of a new role or career and gives up one view of that role, or one world view, for another (see Becker 1964; Lofland and Stark 1965; Prus and Sharper 1977). According to Lofland and Stark (1965), the reinforcement and encouragement made available through intensive interaction with subgroup members is necessary if the recruit is to experience a complete conversion process.

Regardless of how they began their process of occupational socialization, in providing themselves with time to think things through, and to learn to identify with the norms, values and beliefs of the dancing subculture prior to entering it, these women were engaging in a form of role rehearsal and anticipatory socialization. Such efforts provided them with the opportunity to prepare themselves for the eventual reality of their new status, thereby easing the difficulties associated with the transition. Through engaging in anticipatory socialization, the women interviewed became accustomed to the strip club environment and the idea of taking their clothes off in public for money, thereby facilitating their entry into dancing.

On-the-Job Socialization

Similar to the socialization experiences of individuals in other occupations, novice dancers learn through interaction and observation while on-the-job. Since exotic dancers, however, have little, if any, formal training, learning through observation and interaction is crucial for attaining job competence (see Sanders 1974). Although some of this learning may be anticipatory in nature and occur prior to the initial dancing experience, it takes some time and experience to move from being a novice dancer to a seasoned pro. Since there is no formal certification structure, peers play an important role in this transformation process. During this period, novices can continue to acquire knowledge from those around them about how to be successful at their job. Experienced strip club staff can therefore play an important role in the socialization process of the novice dancer. As one woman noted:

You learn as you go. Other people in the club give you advice. And, you know, you gradually learn about how to make more money and who to talk to and that kind of stuff as you go.

Through talking to and receiving advice about the job from other staff members, novice dancers learn how to handle situations that may arise while working in the club, and how to dance for profit.

The DJ at the first club I danced at was very good. On my first night he was like, "don't worry about it. . . . You know, just go up there and do your thing and you know, don't worry about it." And the other girls were kind of supportive, like, "Oh, you'll get used to it, it's not that bad after a while." You know, some of them kind of take you under their wing and sort of show you the ropes so to speak. . . .

I learned a lot just watching the other women. Some of them had been dancing for a while and they were really good at handling customers when they tried to break the rules.

Other dancers play a particularly important role in the socialization process. As the following quotes illustrate, novices can learn how to dress, dance and interact with customers for profit, through observing and interacting with dancers more experienced than themselves.

Most of the dancers are really nice, like, they're really understanding. They knew, you know, I hadn't danced for very long. Everybody was offering me advice. There were a few that were kind of like, stay away from me and I'll stay away from you sort of thing.

I get ideas for my show from watching, you know, the ones that have been doing this [dancing] for a while. . . . There were these three other dancers there that were amazing. Like, they couldn't have helped me more. . . . I'd only been dancing for about a week and you know, they were offering me advice left, right and center. And you know, they were just so nice. They couldn't be more helpful.

One woman explained how a friend of hers, who was an experienced dancer, helped teach her how to table dance.

[Talking about her first table dance] So, she comes up beside me and the next thing I know, both our tops are off and she's like all rubbing close to me and I'm like going, "Oh my God." I never thought of her that way before, you know. Cuz we've always just been friends, you know. So, it was kind of a funny experience. But, he [the customer] ended up spending like a hundred dollars on songs. So, I'm thinking, hey, this is great, you know. I mean, this is awesome. I've got money to come home with, you know, it wasn't a wasted night. I thought, O.K., I can deal with this a couple nights a week.

She went on to describe how her friend, along with a few other dancers, also helped her with her first stage performance:

The only thing that was really scary after my first night in the club was the stage, because I had never been on a stage before, and I'm thinking, "Oh my God, I don't have big breasts, I'm not like toned and tanned and blonde" or whatever. So, my friend's like, "Well, we can do like the dance that we did with that guy. We should do a dance on stage together." And, I'm like, "But I'm not gay and I'm not going to be able to make them think that I am." She's like, "Well, don't worry, just follow my lead [. . .].". . . And then after doing that a few times I decided that, you know, I wanted to try it on my own. So I did, and I didn't like it as much because, you know, you sort of feel really centered out. But eventually I got used to it and I was able to do it, you know. Now I've got the hang of it.

Rationalizing Participation in a Deviant Occupation

Since exotic dancing is viewed as a deviant occupation in our society, if novice dancers are to retain a valued sense of self, they must learn ways to justify their involvement in the strip club subculture. According to Sykes and Matza (1957), in order to deviate people must have access to a set of rationalizations or neutralizations that allow them to reduce the guilt they feel about violating social norms. Neutralization makes norm violations "morally feasible since it serves to obliterate, or put out of mind, the dereliction implicit in it" (Matza 1990:182).

During interviews with dancers, it became apparent that dancers typically rely on several "techniques of neutralization" (Sykes and Matza 1957) to justify their involvement in deviant behavior. Similar to Thompson and Harred's (1992) research on topless dancers, we found that the dancers we interviewed tended to rely primarily on three of Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization.

They denied injury or harm:

Ya well, we pretend [that they like the customers], but what do they really expect. Do they really think we are there because we like them, that we like to dance

for men—no. And really, who are we hurting? We may take their money, and although sometimes it may be a lot, but, they are adults, they should know better. And besides, it's just money.

They condemned the condemners:

People may judge us and say that dancing is bad, but they seem to forget who it is we are dancing for—doctors, lawyers, sports figures. If it wasn't for them there would be no dancing—so maybe the focus is on the wrong people [the dancers rather than the customers].

As soon as you tell people you dance, it's "Oh." It's a totally different idea of what kind of person you are, or however you are is a put on. I just think what is the big deal. We are all the same here.

So I take my clothes off for a living. Doesn't make you any different. You all go there smoking dope and drinking beer anyway so. . . .

And they appealed to higher loyalties:³

Well, they say that you're not supposed to show your body to lustful men and that that's a sin. . . . But, the other way I looked at it was, I have a daughter who is two years old and the government really doesn't give you enough to survive, so I had to do something. And I figured that if it's a sin to take off your clothes and it's a sin to let your child starve, definitely, I would take care of the second one, and it's probably more normal. . . .

In addition to using some of Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization to justify their involvement in exotic dancing, we found that dancers used the technique of normalization. As the following quote illustrates, some women attempted to justify or neutralize their involvement in exotic dancing by refuting the deviancy associated with it.

And I looked at the salaries these people were making and it was, you know, a thousand dollars a night, some nights, and it was really, really substantially helping with their tuition. And these were people working on Master's degrees and Doctorates and all kinds of things and I thought, "Wow, if they can do this, hey, maybe I can."

Despite the deviancy associated with being an exotic dancer and the negative aspects of the job, most of the women we spoke with seemed to be able to rationalize or justify their involvement in exotic dancing. In summarizing the use of justifications by exotic dancers, one woman said:

You can justify it because you bring home money and at the end of the night that feels great. You don't reflect on, you know, how you were degraded, the leering and the other bad stuff. You know, you don't think about it because you've got a big wad of money in your hand.

In other words, the major incentive for entering dancing, money,⁴ is also used as the main justification or rationale for continuing to do it. As with Hong

and Duff's (1977) study of taxi-dancers, the neutralization techniques or rationalizations used by exotic dancers to downplay the norm-violating nature of their behavior, soothe guilt feelings, and cope with the unpleasant aspects of their jobs, were learned during the informal socialization processes that occur on-the-job.

Putting on a Show

Beyond acquiring the courage to take off one's clothes in public and learning how to justify one's actions, obtaining competence as an exotic dancer also requires learning to be good at the job. In order to become a successful exotic dancer, the novice dancer must learn how to put on a good show or performance. As with any successful performer, dancers need to learn how to use impression management skills to create an illusion that will allow them to control/manipulate their audience in order to achieve some specified goal, in this case the acquisition of money. In their interviews, the women talked about how their job required they put on a skillful performance that would lure men in and get them to spend their money on dancers.

A dance is not just dancing, it is the way you present yourself, the way you talk to the customer, the way you introduce yourself. If you gonna have a smile, right away it's gonna be easy [to make money].

Just turn the guys on, make them think that we are like, you know, licking each other [when performing with another woman]. But we weren't, it's all show. I mean, you don't have to do anything, you know, that's real. You just have to make it look real. So, you know, you would lift up the girl's leg, put your head down, you know, pretend that you're like, oh, you know, that kind of stuff. You know, like men are kind of stupid, so they buy it, right. . . .

As dancers reported in their interviews, learning how to control or manipulate an audience is acquired through observation and interaction with sub-cultural members within the club setting.

I was really glad I waitressed before dancing. I got to overhear a lot of the conversations between the dancers and the customers. It was that way that I figured out how to operate and ways to play the men for their money.

Some of the girls that have been dancing a while here were really nice to me. They gave me advice on how to keep the guys interested so they will buy several table dances in a row.

Skill development, improvement, and job competence more generally were affirmed by coworkers through praise, and by customers through applause, requests for table dances, the development of a regular clientele, and increased take-home pay.

Typology of Dancers

Although the women interviewed reported that they experienced a process of adjustment in becoming a dancer, this process differed somewhat according to the type of dancer each woman could be classified as. Based on the interview data collected, there appear to be two types of dancers: the career dancer and the goal-oriented dancer. Both types of dancers report money as the primary motivating factor for entry into dancing; however, they differ in the types of future they envision for themselves. Despite the fact that most of the women we spoke with told us that they never intended on making dancing a career, some ended up staying in the industry for many years, essentially making it one. Other women reported that they entered the world of dancing with the expectation that dancing would be their career for a while. Whether they intended on making dancing a career or not, the career dancers we spoke with tended to possess limited skill training and education. As a result, they saw dancing as an employment opportunity that enabled them to make a decent living that would otherwise be unavailable to them through other channels.

This is a career for me, it's seventeen years. I don't want to stop this now. And besides, what other job could I get where I can earn this kind of money.

There really are no jobs for women like me who have little education. At least none where I could make this much money. . . .

I've been a stripper for 7 years, what else am I gonna be able to do? You know, even if I try I'm always gonna be a dancer, I'm always gonna be labelled. I make good money, so why go work for minimum wage?

In contrast with the career dancer, the goal-oriented dancer enters dancing with a specific goal in mind.

I don't look at it like a career so it's kind of like a means to an end. You know how you put yourself on a program, like a five-year program. Get in there and make a whack of cash and then go on to something else. Like that can't be the only thing that I want to do for the rest of my life.

There's aspects of the job I like, I mean, I do like some of the girls that work there, some of the bar staff. You know, they're fun to be around at work. And the guys, if they're nice, I can, you know, have had some good conversations. But, I do not like taking my clothes off you know? And I don't want to make this a career. It is a means to an end.

Some dancers report being motivated to enter dancing in order to make the money they needed to get or stay out of debt. . . .

The bills kept coming in and coming in and I couldn't keep my head above water and everybody was threatening to take me to court and I had all these debts and I just, I needed money fast. So, I thought I could dance for a bit until I got on top of things.

I don't want to do it, but you have to, I have to do it, I don't have a choice. I have a car payment, I have to pay my rent, I can't not do it.

Nothing else will pay my bills. So that's it.

One specific group of goal-oriented dancers are the students. These women report that for them dancing is a short-term job that pays well and that can fit in with their class schedule.

It's ideal when you're going to school because you just make your own schedules. When I have exam week I don't go at all. So, it fits in with school. So, I guess, I mean, I don't think I would work [as a dancer] once I finish school, unless I couldn't find a job or something. . . .

The commonality among goal-oriented dancers is that dancing is seen as a short-term thing, a means to an end, once the end is achieved (e.g., they graduate from university, pay off their debts, etc.), the plan is to leave dancing. It is important to note though, that although many goal-oriented dancers reported planning on leaving, some spoke of difficulties exiting once they got used to the money they could earn.

It's kinda hard once you get used to the money to leave [dancing]. I mean, like, I always said I would leave when I got out of debt, but the money draws you back.

I've wanted out for so many years now and just didn't know how. You get so trapped in there and I didn't know what to do or what I could do.

I started dancing to help pay off the mortgage on my house and get rid of some debts. I thought it was a one shot deal, but I seem to fall back on it whenever I need money.

The type of dancer one identifies as has implications for the socialization experiences of dancers. Women who see dancing as a career, rather than as a temporary job, tend to be more inclined to get involved in the "dancer life," develop relationships with other dancers and club employees, and become immersed in the strip club subculture. As a result, they are likely to experience a more complete socialization process than goal-oriented dancers. Goal-oriented dancers, in contrast, tend to limit their ties to others in the business. As the following quotes illustrate, they try to keep dancing and their private lives separate.

I don't hang out with other dancers. When I leave here I go back to my other life.

Although I try to be friendly to everyone here [at the club] I stick to myself as much as possible and when I leave [work], I try to leave it and everybody associated with it behind.

The implication of keeping the two aspects of their lives separate is that goal-oriented dancers have to contend with the stigma associated with dancing on their own and, as a result, often live very closeted/secretive lives.

I work really hard at keeping this [dancing] a secret from my family. It is hard cuz I still live at home with my parents. So, I keep my costumes in the trunk of my car and I make sure I am the only one with a key.

And I went home to visit and my mom's like, "So, how's your summer going?" And she's asking me all these questions and I had to lie and say that I was working for a security company. I hate it [lying], cuz my mom and I just started to get really close again and here I was suddenly back to the way I was when I was a teenager, the lying and you know, staying out all hours of the night and all this stuff, and you know, it hurt to lie to her. . . .

It's really hard because, you know, you're lying to your parents. Well, I am, and I'm close to my family. And I was lying to my friends and to my boyfriend at the time.

Without a community of supportive others, these women have limited access to competing definitions of reality and are therefore more likely to feel some sort of guilt and shame for choosing to dance. Since it is through interacting with other subcultural members that people learn rationalizations for their behavior, these women are likely to have limited access to the techniques of neutralization used by other dancers that are important for the maintenance of a positive sense of self.

Limitations of the Dancer's Socialization Process

Although both career and goal-oriented dancers felt they were able to experience successful occupational socialization that enabled them to achieve competence as exotic dancers, most of the women interviewed talked about how the socialization process inadequately prepared them for some of the realities of the life of an exotic dancer. A Stripper's Handbook (1997), a booklet written by several dancers in the Toronto region, nicely illustrates the benefits and limitations of learning about exotic dancing through informal channels. Although the booklet contains helpful information and advice about the job (e.g., where to get a license, how much a license costs, how to save money on costumes, stage show rules, DJ fees, fines, freelancing vs. working on schedule, etc.), it also glosses over some of the negative effects the job can have on women's lives (e.g., relationship problems, inhibition of heterosexual desire, etc.). The tendency to overlook the negative is typical of the advice women reported being given by subcultural members, especially the women with limited ties to the subculture.

When discussing the limitations of their socialization experiences, the women we spoke with reported having little knowledge of, and therefore being unprepared for the impact of, dancing on their private lives. The area of impact most often mentioned was relationships. In terms of relationships, women spoke of the difficulties of having and sustaining heterosexual relationships with males outside of the industry. For some women, relationship

difficulties were tied to the problems men they date tend to have with their occupation (see Prus and Stylianoss 1980):

I'd suggest to any girl that ever dances, unless your boyfriend's a male dancer, don't date someone when you're stripping. Most guys say they can handle it. They can't and then they start coming into clubs and causing bull shit.

My ex didn't like it. It wasn't because he didn't trust me, he just didn't like the whole idea. He didn't want me dancing not because he was jealous or anything, just because I think he knows it's stressful and it's just not good for you psychologically. . . . My current boyfriend, he dances at a gay bar so he knows what it's all about.

Other women report that the difficulty of developing or sustaining heterosexual relationships was tied to the nature of their job (i.e., they usually work at night, in a bar, in a job that requires them be around and constantly interacting with customers, many of whom they don't like).

Relationshipwise it's very hard. I think it's hard for someone to take a dancer seriously, it takes a certain type of guy that can, look beyond that and ah, if I'm involved I have a really hard time doing my job. If I'm single I'm better with my job. It's hard to meet people cuz I work nights all the time. When I was working full time I was there a good 5 nights a week. On my night off I don't want to go to a bar or anything, I'm in one every day, so you never get a chance to meet people. It's pretty much taboo to date someone you meet at work, cuz you don't know who they are outside of there and they've been giving you money to strip in front of them all night, and they are like, "Ooh yeah, I want to take you on a date." And you are thinking, "Yeah, sure you do. For what, why?" So that's hard. And it's hard if you have a boyfriend, it's hard for them to deal with it. . . .

Despite the difficulties exotic dancers confront in terms of developing and sustaining relationships, some of the women interviewed expressed an interest/desire to have a stable intimate heterosexual relationship. Others, however, talked about being disinterested in men.

I'm kind of sick of, you know the men and, I just, I've always been a, you know, a big chested person. So, I always gotten the yee-haw's and stuff walking down the street and I just kinda had it after a while, you know?

I hate to be looked at. I don't like to be looked at by men. I don't like men very much.

One solution identified by dancers to the relationship difficulties and inhibited heterosexual desire dancers experience, is pursuing relationships with other women. According to the women we interviewed, it is not uncommon for female exotic dancers to develop lesbian relationships, either

because of a disinterest in heterosexual relationships stemming from dancing or because relationships with women are just easier to develop and sustain while they are working as exotic dancers (see Carey et al. 1974; McCaghy and Skipper 1969; Prus and Stylianoss 1980).

I think a lot of girls end up bi. . . . I think it's convenient because it's easier to go out with another dancer, another girl than go out with a guy. You know what I mean? They understand your likes and a lot of guys that date dancers are assholes. So why deal with the hassle of going out? Why not just date a girl? I would have [dated women] if I met a nice girl.

It's a lot easier to date a girl than to bother with going out. But I just happened to meet Paul who dances as well and fits into my lifestyle. But, if I wouldn't have met him I probably would date women. But I just never, I just never met any girl that I had enough in common with. A lot of the girls are [lesbian]. But a lot of people stereotype you. You know what I mean?

As noted by McCaghy and Skipper (1969), three conditions associated with the occupation are supportive of same sex relationships: "(1) isolation from affective social relationships; (2) unsatisfactory relationships with males; and (3) an opportunity structure allowing a wide range of sexual behavior" (p. 266).

Conclusion

As other studies of exotic dancers have found, there are various factors influencing occupational entry into exotic dancing. This study provides support for a combined career contingency/conversion model. According to this model, four factors influence entry into the exotic dancing: (1) knowledge and accessibility of an opportunity structure that makes exotic dancing an occupational alternative; (2) an awareness of the economic rewards associated with being an exotic dancer; (3) a recruitment process involving personal networks; and (4) financial need or a need for employment. For the women interviewed, these factors played a significant role in their anticipatory socialization process and their movement in the direction of exotic dancing.

Although similar to earlier studies of exotic dancers (this study found evidence of a combined career contingency/conversion model for entry into exotic dancing), there were also some differences between the findings of this study and that of previous research in the area. For example, contrary to earlier studies, we found little indication of dancers' having pre-job formal socialization experiences that involved professional training in entertainment-related fields, prior to entering dancing. This difference, however, may be tied to the evolution of stripping. Over the past [35] years or so, stripping has gone from a form of theatre or burlesque stage show,

where complete nudity was rare and touching was prohibited, to the more raunchy table and lap dances performed today that often involve complete nudity, and sometimes physical and sexual contact between the dancer and the customer.

Despite some different findings in terms of the anticipatory socialization experiences of dancers, similar to other research in the area, we found that once the decision to dance was made and they were employed as dancers, the women we interviewed continued to experience a socialization process through interacting with and observing other subcultural members. The on-the-job, informal occupational socialization the women reported experiencing enabled them to achieve job competence, even in a deviant occupation.

As social learning theories of deviance suggest, although most of us learn the norms and values of society, some of us also learn techniques for committing deviance and the specific motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes that allow us to neutralize our violation of normative codes. The socialization experiences of dancers fit with this framework. Learning occurs through observing and interacting with strip club employees, especially more experienced dancers. Through such observations and interactions, novice dancers learn techniques for rationalizing their involvement in the occupation, a process which enables them to stay in the job and succeed, while retaining a valued sense of self.

Although exotic dancers can experience socialization processes that result in job competence, their occupational socialization often inadequately prepares them for the potential impact of their job on their lives outside of the club. The most often mentioned area of concern was intimate relationships, due to the difficulties exotic dancers reported on developing and sustaining heterosexual relationships and desire.

ENDNOTES

¹According to Ritzer and Walczak (1986), "an occupation will be treated as deviant if it meets one or more of the following criteria: (1) it is illegal; (2) one or more of the central activities of the occupation is a violation of nonlegalized norms and values; and (3) the culture, lifestyle, or setting associated with the occupation is popularly presumed to involve rule-breaking behavior" (p. 374).

²According to Matza (1990), "drift is motion guided gently by underlying influences. The guidance is gentle and not constraining. The drift may be initiated or deflected by events so numerous as to defy codification. But underlying influences are operative nonetheless in that they make initiation to . . . [deviant behaviour] more probable, and they reduce the chances that an event will deflect the drifter from his [/her deviant] . . . path. Drift is a gradual process of movement, unperceived by the actor, in which the first stage may be accidental or unpredictable" (p. 29).

³Appeal to higher loyalties involves rationalizing deviant behavior by couching it within an altruistic framework.

⁴Although money is part of the motivation for anyone seeking employment, for dancers, it was the amount of money that could be earned dancing, compared with the amount that could be earned in more legitimate jobs, that motivated them to try dancing.

REFERENCES

- Becker, Gary S. 1964. *Human Capital*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Boles, Jacqueline M. and A. P. Garbin. 1974a. "The Strip Club and Stripper-Customer Patterns of Interaction." *Sociology and Social Research* 58:136-44.
- . 1974b. "The Choice of Stripping for a Living: An Empirical and Theoretical Explanation." *Sociology of Work and Occupations* 1:110-23.
- . 1974c. "Stripping for a Living: An Occupational Study of the Night Club Stripper." Pp. 312-35 in *Deviant Behavior: Occupational and Organizational Bases*, edited by C. D. Bryant. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Carey, S. H., R. A. Peterson, and L. K. Sharpe. 1974. "A Study of Recruitment and Socialization into Two Deviant Female Occupations." *Sociological Symposium* 8:11-24.
- Dressel, P. L. and D. M. Peterson. 1982. "Becoming a Male Stripper: Recruitment, Socialization and Ideological Development." *Work and Occupations* 9:387-406.
- Glaser, B. G. and A. K. Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategy for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Hong, L. K. and R. W. Duff. 1977. "Becoming a Taxi-Dancer: The Significance of Neutralization in a Semi-Deviant Occupation." *Sociology of Work and Occupations* 4:327-42.
- Lofland, J. and R. Stark. 1965. "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective." *American Sociological Association* 30:862-75.
- Matza, David. 1990. *Delinquency and Drift*. New York: Transaction Books.
- McCaghy, C. H. and J. K. Skipper. 1969. "Lesbian Behavior as an Adaptation to the Occupation of Stripping." *Social Problems* 17:262-70.
- . 1972. "Stripping: Anatomy of a Deviant Life Style." Pp. 362-73 in *Life Styles: Diversity in American Society*, edited by S. D. Feldman and G. W. Thielbar. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Prus, R. C. and C. R. D. Sharper. 1977. *Road Hustler: The Career Contingencies of Professional Card and Dice Hustlers*. Toronto: Lexington Books.
- Prus, R. C. and I. Stylianoss. 1980. *Hookers, Rounders, and Desk Clerks: The Social Organization of the Hotel Community*. Toronto: Gage Publishing Limited.
- Ritzer, George and David Walczak. 1986. *Working: Conflict and Change*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Sanders, C. R. 1974. "Psyching out the Crowd: Folk Performers and Their Audiences." *Urban Life and Culture* 3:264-82.
- Skipper, J. K. and C. H. McCaghy. 1971. "Stripteasing: A Sex-Oriented Occupation." Pp. 275-296 in *Studies in the Sociology of Sex*, edited by James M. Henslin. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Sykes, G. M. and D. Matza. 1957. "Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency." *American Sociological Review* 22:664-70.
- Thompson, W. E. and J. L. Harred. 1992. "Topless Dancers: Managing Stigma in a Deviant Occupation." *Deviant Behavior* 13:291-311.