The urban strip club and the stripper fantasy in mainstream hip-pop media: its affect upon the sexuality of black women using one case study and several Internet media sources

A Thesis

by

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers why it is important to note that entertainment media companies are using the urban strip club to promote the lifestyle of hip-hop and urban couture. Later in this chapter I note how I came to be writing on this topic. The introduction serves the latter part of my thesis that outlines the implications that the popularization of the strip club has upon the women featured in the media as well as everyday women who are both active and passive consumers of this media by nature of them living in urban centers within the United States.

For young populations around the world those who live in urban and rural centers, attend college and have some following of American pop culture hip-hop, rap and pop music is the voice by which they live and express themselves. Hip-hop music and culture should be acknowledged as a pillar upon which broader American pop culture stands. Institutions like the media, the music industry, and corporations work together to morph and then transmit particular lifestyle values as “black”, “cool”, “hip”, and “deviant” unto the minds of the youth who follow the lives of music artists. One can see it in how people appropriate various parts of an artist’s image like their style of clothing, what designer they wear, jewelry, hairstyle, places they travel to and where they hang out. If an artist wears a certain clothing item to an awards show, or in a music video suddenly the item is manufactured and ready to buy in stores and many people in the street are wearing some version of it, usually cheaper.

Through the production of songs, music videos, reality television, and YouTube videos the strip club has been exposed and made digestible for the general American public. Both male and female rappers have songs saluting strippers and boasting about their ideal woman being a stripper. Artists like 2Chainz, Juicy J, and Nicki Minaj have music videos on location at the strip
Reality television shows follow the lives of big time strippers in Miami and Atlanta, cities recognized nationally for their strip joints. YouTube videos created by media conglomerates and everyday users show what happens in the strip club and interviews with strippers.

The average citizen can see this change in that no longer is he or she separated by a screen from rich and famous entertainers who they see “balling out”; one can feel like they live this extravagant lifestyle of spending money, wearing fancy clothes, driving expensive sports cars, and eating fresh food by going to the strip club and experiencing exactly what they see on the screen. The proximity to the lifestyle of rich and famous entertainers is heightened even more when one can go to the strip club for the birthday party of a famous rapper and also see the stripper who featured in a MTV channel music video.

For the stripper who is not famous this new craze gives her an idea of the potential money she can make and also the potential she has to be famous. For women who visit the strip club she can see another woman’s body on display as form of entertainment and pleasure. She thinks of her sexuality and also of how she is desired. For women and girls who know of the strip club through secondary media only she also thinks of her sexuality and how others desire her. Sexuality I define as the body parts the skin, the buttocks, the vagina, the breasts, the hair, and mind. Sexuality is being confident in being the best self one can be at any given moment given external forces and circumstances. Sexuality is the knowledge of power and potential impact one can have by being a creation and existing.

Through analyses of observations from two urban strip clubs, interviews with strippers, scenes from strip clubs, and scenarios in one stripper reality show, this paper documents how the featuring of the strip club in various media outlets may affect the sexuality black women and answers the question: Is the stripper craze (a term I will use to refer to the urban strip club being
featured in multiple contexts: songs, music, videos, television shows, You Tube) a detrimental or healthy expression to her existence? I answer this question using one case study and several Internet media sources. Further, my background and upbringing in a black urban entertainment center helped me key in on characteristics of black entertainment culture. All my life I have listened to black styles of music, read books by black authors, been to black events, and had conversations over the years all of these things giving information on what is the black aesthetic in America.

My background allowed me to analyze what was happening while I was in the field and what people were communicating in interviews.

This conversation as well about what black women do in entertainment, women and their sexuality in the black community is a subject that has taken place in academia as well among hip-hop scholars and women’s studies scholars. In her book Black Noise Tricia Rose has a chapter entitled “Bad Sistas: Black Women Rappers and Sexual Politics in Rap Music”. She says, “At the very least, black women rappers are in dialogue with dominant American culture as they struggle to define themselves against a confining and treacherous social environment,” (Rose:1994:148). But her analysis omits facts that could change the conclusion of her literature. She does not mention southern rap, a subgenre that has long had songs saluting strippers, detailing strippers as the epitome of entertainment and strippers being in line with the flashy, materialistic style of hip-hop. She mentions the female b-boy dancers, but not the dancers who express the sensual aspects of rappers lyrics. For reasons due to a change in the Hip-hop industry, not Rose’s analysis, she does not include female rappers such as Nicki Minaj, and pop singers like Rihanna who take on what is considered a masculine voice. Aspects of Minaj’s and Rihanna’s brand support manipulation of the female sexual organs. Their lyrics detail stories of
them wanting to take strippers home and fuck them, slapping strippers on the ass, and making it rain on a stripper’s ass. Their videos are shot in strip clubs or are creative reenactments of the strip club.

Emotional labor and sex work have been at the forefront of women’s studies for also. While men do use their bodies for work, by virtue of being subject to the system of patriarchy, there are more job opportunities that involve female sexuality and it being acceptable to treat women as objects. Whether or not it is a part of the job description is another story. This means that women are subject to a variety of circumstances in which people in power such as co-workers, bosses, managers, and etcetera abuse their sexuality. As it pertains to stripping, academia has well documentation of the hole in the wall strip clubs where management steals money from the employees, where employees are not safe from the harassment of patrons, and so on. Thus far the overwhelming notion in academia is that the public display of the female body makes her subordinate to the male gaze and that by choosing to use her body for profit she contributes to her own oppression. Countless scholars have written on this topic. Discussions and authors used by Patricia Hill Collins are wide-encompassing in her book Black Feminist Theory.

Female exotic dancers who perform to “misogynistic” hip-hop music and participate in the promotion of strip clubs complicate the discussion on whether or not sexual labor is positive for women. It is possible that their behavior can be discussed in ways that encourage liberation of the black female body I conducted field research and interviews with strippers and the takeaway is that to be a woman conscious of the history and power of shaking ass and breasts is essential to tapping into the deep side of the erotic as discussed by Audre Lorde in her text “Use of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power”. She was saying that only one part of the erotic is highlighted and worked upon because this kind of erotic benefits the man or some person. But there are other
types of erotic, the good feeling achieved during sex that can be applied to other things so that this pinnacle of feeling can be felt in other things besides intercourse. Though I do not think Lorde was speaking on dancing, the feeling of dancing and being conscious of the feeling one’s own body can bring joy. This consciousness of feel good is translatable to other tasks in which the body is present. Dancing or not, the body is present constantly; while living and breathing one cannot escape it.

This definition of self is apparently particular and also necessary to black feminism. “Black women have also stressed the importance of self-definition as a part of the journey from victimization to a free mind in their blues…Anne William’s notes, the assertion of individuality and the implied assertion—as action, not mere verbal statement—of self is an important dimension of the blues (Collins:1991:104)”. While Nicki Minaj, Rihanna, and the like are not blues artists can their actions, speaking of how they go to the club and slap ass and have enough money to spend on strippers, be seen as an assertion of individuality and self definition?

On the other hand feminist theory documents the historical and ongoing abuse of black bodies by mainstream institutions, beginning with slavery and in the present day the media and corporations. They are hardly ever in favor of liberating black bodies for that would mean an end to the neoliberal economy. Strippers fall under one of the simplistic stereotypical roles that benefit the white man’s dominance. Collins uses a quote by Trudier Harris to begin chapter four, “Mammies, Matriarchs and Other Controlling Images”. The quote precisely explains images of the stereotypical black woman,

“Called Matriarch, Emasculator, and Hot Mamma. Sometimes Sister, Pretty Baby, Auntie, Mammy and Girl. Called Unwed Mother, Welfare Recipient, and Inner City Consumer. The Black American Woman has had to admit that while nobody knows the trouble she saw, everybody, his brother, and his dog, felt qualified to explain her, even to herself, (Collins:1991:67).
It has been great that this scholarship that has been done thus far, but going forward it is important to make conclusions that everyday women can relate to. Even though black feminist theorists have more than good intentions by documenting the struggles of black women, the analysis can at times be overwhelming and evoke the same feelings as the people and institutions that not only feel qualified to explain her, but have power to determine her fate as well by withholding information. It is important that women come away from readings NOT feeling like the decision to use her body for profit means that she has neglected her wellbeing. On the contrary women should come away feeling like they have learned about their complicated relationship with society and with a better understanding of how to positively engage with their sexuality and make informed decisions about how they want to use it.

This conversation about black women’s bodies is one that I have been having with my mother, mother(s), and friends since I was about ten years old, but I did not know I was preparing for this moment of writing a thesis. Dancing as a form of entertainment was always something friends and I and I enjoyed together. But when we would wind our hips too much or shake our butts in the mirror, camp staff scolded us. I understood that the movement was related to sex, but we were simply enjoying the fun and happiness social dancing gave us. Our mothers told us we must only dance “like that” in spaces that were safe like the house.

But my training in dance made forced me to engage the opposing notion that winding the hips is what it means to be a good dancer, that my pelvis is my home. I have been a student of West African dance since I was six. Along with learning the physical technique, a very important part of the African aesthetic I learned was the history of African dance. The movement of hips, pelvis, and chest in varying pulses and gyrations is a main part of African dance from many parts of Africa. The constant presence of the rhythm of the hips is a main aesthetic in African dance. It
was something I had to master, this movement in the hips. And so one the one hand dancing with
the hips, pelvis and chest pulsating has negative relationships with sex, but the other hand it was
a sensuality I have and still am learning to perfect.

The topic started to get more complicated, perhaps during puberty in middle school. The
display of the female body in public (dancing or revealing too much flesh) started to become a
common conversation topic for my friends and me. We went out partying/clubbing with the
understanding that if we danced and dressed in a certain way men would approach us as if we
had signaled for them to approach us. It was exactly what our mothers had told us, so when did
men learn to view butt shaking as a signal to aggressively. Not necessarily because the buttocks
and breasts have been symbols of sex and sensuality since antiquity. Not only is it pleasurable to
look at a gyrating butt, but also scientists have studied the relationship between a man’s desires
for curvy women with the ability to reproduce children, and so the attraction is biological as
well. So it makes sense, but to have to pull away from the male’s aggressive attention and be
subject to anger when we did not want to dance is what we saw as a problem.

But of course humans have the power to complicate the world in which they live in
beyond what has been given by biology and science by this little desire called pleasure, wanting
and creating things that are may be detrimental to human existence. To have a place where
women are paid to give pleasure complicates the experience of pleasure. What does it mean that
on a personal level, a stripper may not be attracted to the man she is pleasing, but she is pleasing
him anyway because it is her job?

The first time I became intrigued by what happens in the strip club is when I saw a
documentary featuring The Gold Club, now defunct in Atlanta. What stood out in the
documentary were the celebrities and athletes that hung out at the club and the large sums of
money they spent to be entertained by the women dancers there. The other captivating thing was
the mysterious look of the place. The building was a lone-standing all black box, with a gold
solid gold awning. The box sat far back from the street. There was a carpet out in front.

When I moved back to Atlanta, there was a club that looked exactly like this down the
street from my house. One day I voiced my curiosity aloud. I also voiced my hesitance to go into
one of the places when I was of age. I wondered if I would stand out because I was a female. I
wondered how one was supposed to behave in a place and what the rules were. My mother told
me that a friend had went and observed a strip club for an assignment. I never thought I would
get to this moment when I would have the opportunity to do the same.

I had anxiety of what I wanted my thesis topic to be. I wanted it to do with dancing so
that it would be relevant with my dance minor. Around the same time I was declaring my thesis
topic I went to a club in Philadelphia’s Gayborhood. I was intrigued by the different costumes
people wore, especially the men who were doing vogue dancing in full drag. I had questions, but
I did not know what they were. I felt myself drawn to the topic, but not wanting to fully engage
with it since I was not in the culture and had no prior knowledge on which to draw conclusions.
In the back of my mind I kept thinking about strippers and the image of the black women in
music videos. We had talked a little about in a class I was taking on race and ethnicity. One day
we watched a video by Iggy Azalea called “PUSSY”. All of the women shaking their butts are
black, while the white Australian rapper walks casually down the street rapping to the eye of the
camera. American society seems to attribute higher status to the cerebral over the corporeal. In
many cases white women have the luxury of not having to play out the “dirty” corporeal aspects
of the video, but still reap the benefit of being seen as “classy, “clean”, “cool” and “cute” by the
viewer. Yet the corporeal dirty booty shaking that the black women carry out is essential to the
success of the videos creative mark. Complicated shit. It seemed like every month there was another video with these same traits except sometimes it was black woman performing the cerebral.

It would be too difficult to do it on strippers. The black woman’s position is too complicated to describe, especially this new one, I thought. Having to interview strippers and the potential of others to judge me caused anxiety. I was sometimes intimidated by the attitude a lot of black women have: the “don’t fuck with me” glare, the silent competition even in just passing her on the street. We can be standoffish, so beautiful it makes one nervous, and tough. But again it was my mother who encouraged me to embark on the topic. When I spoke with her I came to the conclusion that the challenge of it all is one to engage.
CHAPTER TWO METHODOLOGIES: Observations, getting interviews and other sources

To ensure that my research is as close to the real world as possible, I drew on several sources: observations at a Philadelphia strip club and a Washington, D.C. strip club that advertise as “Hip-hop” strip clubs. These clubs are located in or just outside of city limits. The interior and furnishings is well kept, clean, and chic. A variety of working class, middle class and upper class make up the clientele. The attire varies from casual, business casual, to men wearing business suits. See pictures included on pages 13, 18, 23, and 24.

Because I was not able to obtain interviews in the time allotted using the process required by the department, I include video and audio from the Internet including interviews with strippers and footage from inside strip clubs as responses to impressions, assumptions and ideas made by books and me. Perhaps my own lack of extensive research has led me to this claim, but I did not find books that cover stripping in hip-hop. I decided to use literature from the 1990s by Tricia Rose on hip-hop, Kariamu Welsh-Asante on the African Aesthetic.

My thesis is necessary because it exhibits changes in the tactics of the hip-hop industry to get people into clubs for reasons such as the decrease in creative budgets due to economic downturn. My thesis is also important because it tells of female rappers employing the male gaze in the strip club, a topic that deserves to be studied for it may complicate ideas about what is straight male behavior if women carry it out. Also, what does it mean that women actually enjoy dancing to “misogynistic” music? Furthermore, my thesis is made possible by the advent of the Internet. The Internet has affected the behavior of the population in ways that are still changing and unknown.
While journalism articles are not seen as an appropriate reference in academic papers, the rate at which they are written: hourly/daily, captures rapid changes in society (such as the advent of the Internet) and popular opinion in a way that scholarly books cannot. In this paper scholarly articles and journalism articles function as evidence that mainstream Hip-hop music has taken on a new character.

Included at the end of this paper is a compiled list of strip songs and music videos that feature strippers. I made the decision not to include descriptions of this in the thesis because there is little meaning to analyzing song lyrics and music videos that for the most part, the message is clear to the listener/viewer. Furthermore, the focus of this paper is not the stripper craze itself, but the effects of the stripper craze upon strippers and women.

**Part I: Going to the strip club**

Part A: My first ever visit to the strip club

I thought I was lucky that I had just turned 21 because according to the law you have to be 21 to enter the strip club. But it dawned on me that many of my male friends had already been to a strip club at around 16. When I was explaining my thesis to a friend of mine he said that he simply paid more to enter under age.
This is a description of two strip clubs, one in Washington, D.C. the other in Philadelphia. These experiences allowed me to see what a club is really like compared to how I have seen them portrayed in music videos and discussed among groups of people.

Stadium Club - Gentlemen’s Club and Steakhouse in Washington, D.C. has open bar from 6 to 9pm every Wednesday. The entry fee for ‘ladies’ (as they are referred to) is $10. At least this is what is advertised on their twitter page, on the radio and among people I spoke to about the club $10 open bar (flat fee for unlimited drinks) was one of the things most mentioned. I had plans on going to Stadium the entire summer, but it wasn’t until I found a person to go with that I felt comfortable going. I had no idea how I was going to get people together to go. I had one friend in D.C. who I knew would come, but I needed about five people, which after my advisor suggested, seemed to be a very good idea to appear most natural and blend in with the crowd. A few people at my job had talked about Wednesday nights at Stadium including my boss and a woman who I befriended that worked on the same floor as me. They were both natives of Washington, D.C. so I trusted their opinions about where to go. One day this woman who I befriended showed me pictures of her previous evening, I asked where she went I and was so blessed and surprised to hear “Stadium!” She was my in! I told her I needed to visit for research. She said she would get a few friends to come. I had one friend. And so we ended up being a group of five ladies going to Stadium on a Wednesday for $10.

The club is located near Rhode Island Avenue. The location is tucked away among concrete buildings with rusted metal fixtures, hardly any windows and docks for trucks. There were one or two trucks. This was not a unique situation though. I had been to clubs in areas like this before and I always wondered why they were around industrial warehouses like a lush watery oasis in the desert. An obviously renovated establishment, with brightly colored signs,
people and cars moving about stands in stark contrast to the drab grey, eerily desolate old buildings that surround it. There is a brand new bank on the corner brightly lit; with windows so streak free that appears that they do not exist. The street that the club is on is short, between two main thoroughfares. The pavement is cracked in some places and light grey indicating that it hasn't been repaved in a while. We all dip up and down as the car goes over bumps. A black banner takes up the entire side of the club that is on the street. In large slender sans serif pink letters, Stadium is printed on the banner. Also on the banner is a neon pink outline of a woman. She is on her back with one leg in the air, one leg bent. She has on high heels on because there is one straight line extending from each of her heels. Long wispy hair whirls around down by her waist.

We drove past the club to go to the bank because a few people needed cash. As far as I know clubs take only cash for entry fee and have an ATM. I did not need cash so I waited in the car watching the scene around me. Two women walked by going up the street and by the way they were dressed I guessed that they were on their way to Stadium. One of the girls was honey brown with honey brown locks. She had on a pair of huge black rimmed fashion eyeglasses and red lipstick. She wore a black bodysuit that became mesh to show off her torso and the length of her legs. She had on black heels that are in fashion now: a platform in the front, no heel in the back and are shaped like an S. I do not remember what her friend had on. I hollered to the front of the car, “They must be going to Stadium.” My friend responded, “yeah and you’ll be seeing more of that all night. It gets to be more than that!” (Referring to how flashy the woman’s outfit was).

When we drove up to the club, there were a few cars parked in the small parking lot right outside of the entrance. There was a canopy over the door and a red rug covering the pavement.
A few feet from the door were two chairs and table with a machine on it. This made up the area where security was checking IDS and bodies.

Just inside the entrance stood one large framed black man over 6 foot five. I think he was a bouncer because he had on all black pants, shirt and shoes. He stood still and expressionless. His eyes were not moving, not darting to people conversing or the flow of people in to the club. By nature of him being a bouncer though, I assume he was more alert than he was letting on. Two women stood next to a woman taking money. At clubs like this, with primarily black patrons (called black clubs and sometimes ghetto clubs) women always take the money. She stood out from the two women standing next to her. She appeared to be fair-skinned black woman. She had bright red nails that were about one and a half inches long. Her hair was fine and golden and went to her thighs. Her eyelashes were long and jet-black and weighed down her eyes so that they slanted into tiny slits. All of it was fake; the nails, hair, and eyelashes. She had an ethereal, seductive beauty and looked like she could see into souls. She had her makeup done. Though she appeared exotic and certainly intriguing to look at, her look was nothing I had not seen before. She reminded me of women in music videos or at in clubs in Atlanta and Miami. They have a fantastical beauty about them; silent and looking into the camera as they dance.

When it was time to pay an interesting scenario played out yet I have found it again typical of clubs with primarily black patrons. When the fine lady sees the 10 dollar bill my friend is handing her, she replies, “its 20”. She glances down at the 10 dollar bill just enough to recognize it as such, and then busies herself talking while you react to the news: tell the rest of your party, verbally protest, decide what to do, and get out more money, since hell, you are already here. She never acknowledges that fact that it was indeed advertised as $10, she just waits. Only when one inquires as to why the price has changed does she unapologetically, almost
as if she is commenting on how cheap we are state the reason for the discrepancy in club entry
fee. Sometimes it is too late to enter for $10. Other times it is, “I’m so sorry you thought it was
that $10, it is actually $20”. On this night the reason was that a special guest was appearing,
“going to be in the building”. I later found out that it was Yo Gotti’s birthday. He is a rapper
from Atlanta who is well known, but not as popular as Hip-hop artists who make records for both
Hip-hop and pop, though he has featured records with Gucci Mane, T.I. and Lil Wayne.
When we got into the club at about 7pm, clusters of people were scattered around. It was still early so there was enough room that we could choose where we wanted to sit. The decor was black so that blue, pink and green lights illuminated the walls and around the bar. The padded seats were long benches and went around the entire perimeter of the club. We took our seats (I was surprised we could sit because at other clubs one must pay more for seats) on the opposite side of the entrance, on the left of the VIP, and directly in front of the farthest dance pole out of the two main dance poles that were on either side of the bar. VIP stands for very important person. One pays more for being VIP and with the title comes preferential treatment. The services that come with being VIP vary but include valet parking, having a place to sit, sitting front row, being waited on, and meals or drinks included. At the very least VIP almost always means being allowed to enter a venue without waiting in line and being separated from the rest of the club. In the context of Stadium on a Wednesday the location of the VIP section is clear: it is cordoned off with thick velvety black ropes, a bouncer standing between the general section and the VIP, making sure that people do not pass the rope. The seats in the VIP are not long benches but individual chairs. There were three dance poles on wall opposite the bar. A small staircase led to the raised section, which also had bench seats. Each dance pole was raised on a platform between the long seats.
Men wore professional attire and a few had on full suits. It was early on a Wednesday evening so I think they came from work directly to the strip club. Women appeared younger than men probably because of how they were dressed. Most women had on typical nightclub attire: heels, no tennis shoes, jeans, leggings and silky blouses. Opposite sexes stayed to themselves and groups seemed to be homogeneous. Groups that came together, stayed together and talked with one another. Some people were seated and others were standing around talking with one another and drinking. There was not much dancing going on but this changed later in the night.

There was something different in the way I saw women and men interact at the strip club versus how I have seen women and men interact at a regular social club. Women at Stadium were not shaking their butts or glancing around to see who was looking, trying to get noticed. They did not stand around looking as if they were waiting for men to approach them. Men were not standing around watching women and waiting for women to dance with them so that they could then approach them and try to dance with them. My theory is that there is no pressure to perform the act of choosing the opposite sex or performing for the opposite sex because the dancers are there. They take that requirement off of each gender.

There were about seven strippers standing and sitting together directly off of the stage behind the poles that were on either side of the bar. Their mannerisms struck me as casual because I thought of strippers as performers and thus those they would follow the protocols of the proscenium stage: Once the performer is on stage they are transformed into a persona and must stay in character at all times. The audience does not see the preparations the performer has gone through. Even when a performer is not performing if the audience can see them, the performer is still and does not display pedestrian movements like resting on one hip while standing, or laughing. The dancers did not follow the standards of the proscenium stage. I could
see the dancers talking to one another, fixing their hair in the mirror and adjusting the strings of their costumes.

All of the dancers appeared to be black, but came in a range of shades. They looked to weigh about 125-175 pounds. There was one who stood out as darker complected than the others and she was thinner than the others and climbed the pole with more vigor than the others. One woman danced on the pole nearest to us. She was ebony brown. As her set goes on she rearranges her outfit so that her breasts and vaginal area are showing. As the night goes on I see that it is typical for dancers to come out with their tops and vaginal areas covered but then take them off as the song plays, to put them back on and back off again. My friend tells me that the amateur dancers go earlier in the night and that as the night goes on better dancers come out and do better “tricks” like climbing the pole. There was a range of music playing; mostly early 90s pop R&B. Does the way she dances have anything to do with who is in the audience and whether or not they will tip her? She does not make eye contact with the audience but at one point comes over to man next to us and gets on top of the table and shakes her butt right in front of him. He does not tip her and after several minutes she moves back to the pole.

While I was not expecting her to wow me something about her dancing seemed mechanical and turned me off. She was not dancing to the rhythm of the music. A common topic is differences between the way men and women need desire fulfilled. I have often heard it said on midday talk shows that men are excited by flesh, the image of what is in front of them and mood, imagination and the feeling of the experience, which would include elements of style, music, and ambiance, influence women. By this explanation I was looking at her as a female. I didn't feel like she was dancing to the music. She wasn't following the rhythm. Repeatedly she flipped her long hair to one side, which initiated her head to swing around in a big circle and then
bend over at her waist and jiggle her butt while holding the pole with one hand. She didn't twirl up the pole very often. She climbed it once when she first started dancing and hung upside down. There was a horizontal pole hanging from the ceiling directly over the bar. She did some type of curl on it. She vigorously moved her arms from bent to straight, which made her body, go up and down. She was over a man at the bar and her hair dangled down to brush him. It appeared that she had touched him and I expected he would look up to watch her, but he did not.

It seemed that more women than men tipped the dancers, contrary to who the assumed clientele of a strip club would be. The men were still and did not tip much, but sat relaxed talking with one another and sipping their drinks. My theory on this takes into account my knowledge of the law in Washington, D.C. One is not allowed to touch the dancers and lap dances are not allowed. Women seemed to be tipping to show support. They said things like, “damn ma, go ahead!” They would stand around the pole and throw ones on to the stage. If someone were far away, they would crumple the bill and throw it on stage. I wanted to give dancers their share of money and people who I came with expressed the same. My friend and I split a five-dollar bill into ones. One can go to the cashier and get ones. We tipped whenever a dancer did a split or climbed the pole and came down fast, or did a combination that interacted with the music.

The dancers were not making much money. There were only a few bills on stage. I assumed they were ones and sometimes fives, but not any denominations larger. Every few minutes a man in all black with a push broom who was standing behind the dancers would come and sweep the money his way and off of the floor. I thought this was in all strip clubs until I went to Onyx.

As the night went on more dancers came out until there were about 15. They wore all kinds of costumes, had different body types and hairstyles though most wore some wig or weave.
The variation of body types was way more than what I had seen in music videos and below the level of perfection rappers detail in songs. Rappers talk about their love the strip club in videos with perfect-looking strippers, when the locations they might go to in real life are quite different. There was way more of a range expressed here; some of them had cellulite and wrinkles. But they all had to dance and make money. There was a man talking over the loud speaker talking to the dancers, encouraging them with “damn, who is that sexy body over there?” and also making fun of them, "What are you doing over there? That ass is too still!” I saw it as encouragement, rather than a negative because some of the dancers would look over to the MC booth, point and laugh or shake their heads and laugh. I also saw it as a way to get audience participation. When the MC calls out a dancer, people refocused their attention on another dancer but I did not see an influx in tipping or any people getting up to dance. The size of the crowd increased a lot over the course of the night and everyone was dancing. When it was time to go, I had to squeeze past people to get through. People were in the area between the bar and the raised section.

It was shortly before 2 a.m. when we left to beat the rush of everyone leaving. Lots of people are standing outside. Let out is one of the biggest events during the course of a club night as people are still hype from the experience inside and hoping to continue it outside by seeking out the man or woman that caught their eye. We decided to wait for a cab outside of the entrance a few feet away from the parking lot to avoid the crowd and still be visible for our safety. By the time we waited, the club was officially letting out and more cars stuffed up and down the small street. The cops were at the intersection of the street and the main road by the new bank.

Part B: Onyx of Philadelphia
Onyx was very different than Stadium though it shared some things with Stadium. I had heard Onyx mentioned by name in Hip-hop songs. There is one in my hometown of Atlanta and I believe this is where the chain started. I am not sure how I found out there was an Onyx in Philadelphia. I went on a Saturday night with six friends from Swarthmore College. The stretch of Columbus Boulevard where Onyx is located has an industrial look but it is much longer than the small street where Stadium is located. The street is desolate with patches of grass and industrial buildings with no names. Semi trucks were parked about half a mile up the road, which seems to go on for miles. There were no cars or people about. The sign is on the street and says Rick’s Cabaret Gentlemen’s Club and below it “Onyx” with two black dancers standing looking into the camera, their bodies cut at the torso, modest for what you find inside! The establishment looks like a plantation house! This design is contrary to what many clubs look like, boxes
painted matte black. It is a brick building with six white pillars in the front, white shutters and white picketing. Bouncers wore suits or black slacks and white oxford shirts.

The parking attendants wore all black and asked if we wanted valet or to park ourselves. We parked ourselves in the large parking lot around the back of the club. It was $20 to enter with a $3 mandatory coat check. None of us hesitated to pay the $20 because it was after 12a.m. Though the sentiment was not verbalized I could feel that the connection to what we were paying for was clearer than at a regular club. The dancers

My first impression when I walked into Onyx was: all eyes are on the dancers and you can touch and nearly fuck, jeez! A lady with her button down top open smashing her breasts in a man’s face who was sitting in a chair caught my attention. The top was cropped just under her breasts. The material was thin and jersey and sizes too small so that her breasts spilled out of the bottom of it. The atmosphere seemed more serious and less party like than Stadium so I decided to stand by the wall and observe before figuring out what I wanted to do. In that time I found out that there was a $7 surcharge on the ATM machine and at the bar a $50 tab required if you wanted to pay for drinks and food by credit card.

The layout of the club was more centered on the dancers and it seemed to force patrons to tip more too. There was one main stage with three poles at the middle of the club and with seats around it. The patrons’ body orientation and therefore their gaze toward the stage or else they would be looking at a blank wall. If you wanted a close view of a dancer that meant you had to approach the stage. Sometimes the eye contact of a dancer made a patron tip. This pressure was evident when on many occasions a patron or group gave smug look at a dancer who was not performing to her par. They would slip into conversation, looking up when a dancer kept her
gaze on them. After holding their money and staring and talking for a few minutes, they would throw a few dollars on the stage and return to conversation, never looking at the dancer again. It was as if the pressure had passed for good. At times patrons expressed anger toward other patrons who were seated in front but not tipping. “Maaan, they sitting in the front, they not even tipping! They need to give up their seats!” VIP was on one side of the stage and the regular folk and the bar on the other. The area was clearly VIP because it was roped off and there were hardly any people seated there. Later there was a bouncer standing by the rope. His presence enhanced the clearness of the boundary. There were more people in VIP, and therefore harder to define the regular patrons from the VIP patrons. A regular patron could slip into VIP. Both sides had individual chairs that were black with wide high backs and low to the ground. They were roll able, so that patrons could accommodate the size of their party. Also the rolling chairs allowed patrons easily change their position to get lap dances.
There were small tables mixed in with the chairs. A dancer would roll a patron away from the rest of the group and have enough space to straddle her legs, or put her hands on the floor with her legs at the patron’s head.

Shortly after we arrived a cocktail waitress came over and asked if I wanted a shot. I got one but before taking my money she asked if my friend wanted to take one with me. Of course it was a strategy to get us to spend more money. When it was time to get my change she said, “I owe you five in change, how much do you want back?” I found the question odd. I was used to getting all of my change and making the decision to tip in my private space, but I felt the pressure of her direct inquiry and so tipped her. About a half hour later she came back and asked if we wanted another shot. I believe one person in my group got one. She repeated the same procedure asking the person buying the shot, if one of her friends wanted to take a shot with her. If no one else in the group took the invitation to buy a shot, the cocktail waitress would say, “you gonna make her take a shot by herself?!”

Two guys from the group that came with me were first to be approached by a dancer. She started shaking her butt on his crotch area immediately, without asking him did he want to dance. After he did not tip her she left and continued dancing and walking around the club.

I saw only one what I have heard termed “lazy stripper”. This is what I have heard men say about strippers. A lazy stripper is defined by the fact that she has a blank facial expression, makes little eye contact, does not bounce her butt and breasts, and does not climb the pole. Most dancers smile and make eye contact while they perform. They move closer to the patrons that show the most interest through their body language and how much they tip. When a well known single comes on, or when a single has extra bass and high hats the dancers rigorously shake their
arms and hair, stomp and pound their heels around the stage, and make swifter transitions
between the poles.

Music premieres in the strip club and so strippers dance to it first. There are several
reasons for this. One is that upcoming artists already know to bring their new tracks to the strip
club and thus make tracks that strippers like to dance to. The premiere of new records in the strip
club is rumored to have stemmed from record executives going to the strip club for entertainment
anyway. It was a good way to test the success of a record on an audience and since you can
observe whether or not people are moved by the song enough to pay for it, you can observe the
success of the record in dollar amounts. I heard premieres from Rick Ross and 2 Chainz, “I been
getting money where the fuck you been?” I found out the song was new when the MC made the
announcement, “new music y’all, turn up!”

The role of the MC at Onyx seems more necessary to the flow of business than it was at
Stadium: to call dancers from the dressing room to the stage when it’s time for their set. He also
talks over the speaker to the dancers, but more to the audience than at Stadium. He saying things
like, “if you didn’t come with bands (large stacks of money held together with a rubber band, but
also just a lot of money), Onyx is not the place for you! If you not tipping, you getting kicked out
of the club. If you don’t have racks (large amounts of money), get the fuck out the club. If they
not tipping ladies tag team em, we got money to make!” It is interesting that at every club I have
been to the MC is always a man.

Dancers on stage pick up the money and sweep it along the floor in the most discreet
manner seemingly trying to make the act of picking up a dollar as sexy as bouncing her butt.
This is just one of the ways in which we associate values and emotions with a plain paper dollar.
Money is sexy. It is a symbol of her skill and talent. There was a lot more money on the stage here than at Stadium. Being able to have a personal interaction with a dancer makes the spending worth it. Being able touch the dancers, get lap dances and, have private sessions with dancers induces more pleasure than just seeing her. She kept smiling with her eyes on us and dancing while pushing the money toward the middle of the floor. Some dancers crawled on all fours, slow and sensual undulating through her spine like a cat she swept the money from the corners of the stage. This is what she does when there are multiple people tipping and the money has landed everywhere rather than in one spot when someone is throwing/placing/raining it right over her butt and vaginal area.

There seems to be a language of which only the participants of that common interest are aware. Through interactions of speaking, gesture and dancing one can observe the level of familiarity and comfort a dancer has with other dancers and the space. Newcomers to the environment or to the profession I detected quite easily or at least thought I could, but perhaps it was another tactic to get someone to tip. Some dancers stood or sat around, stared with their arms crossed and did not dance. Some strippers interacted like friends laughing, joking and drinking together while they wait for their set on stage to come up. Some ‘work the floor’ together in twos and at most threes. This formulation makes the most money. Groups created more excitement on stage and three people can engage more audience members than one so the audience was more excited too. People have a habit of tipping when they see another person tip.

Other dancers work alone. But for some this is not a problem, especially for one dancer who comes on about 2a.m. and performs the whole stage for three songs. She made the most money during the whole night. People stopped what they were doing to watch her perform. She had lots of energy. Some I could tell were new because they do not seem as fluid and
comfortable with their performance as the others. It is the newest strippers, the ones who do not have any "friends" and do not fully understand the language of the interactions necessary to function in the area that make the least amount of money. The way a dancer(s) make money is similar to having a booth at a hair salon - the house gets a cut and you take the rest. The women at Onyx walked around with moneybags. Interviews with strippers talk about how much she got in her bag. Rick Ross has a song called “Money Bag” in which the hook goes, “money, money, money baaaagggs!” Onyx closes at 6 a.m. but we left at about 3.

**Part II: Getting interviews with strippers**

My plan was to find interview subjects by going to the strip club and dropping off my information. My plan was to speak with the bartender(s) only, not the dancers. But if the moment presented itself, I would speak to dancers directly. But after going to Onyx, I was told I could not return to the strip club. When I inquired as to why, my safety was the reason. If management saw me talking to the dancers they might think I am a government employee or someone trying to expose the strip club for some illegal activity. After expressing my level of comfort ability with such places (I grew up in a city, I have been going out with friends since I was 15) I still was told that under the department’s watch my safety was a concern. Yes, I had read about clubs being shot up, them being run by the mob, and being dirty and run down but I took those as sensational stories. I had been to the same clubs in the same parts of the city that people called dangerous and tell you not to go to. While some parts of town are this way, coming from a community that people speak of this way I say most of it is the stigma and ignorance of the community’s function that surrounds communities of color. It surprised me that as sociologists they were feeding into the hype of the media machine and not more considerate of the nuances. Me seeing them as the experts in social matters and field research the response made me wonder
if when going to the club on my own time, I should be even more watchful. Later on I was told I
could not visit because it was an issue of safety for the dancers. If management saw me talking to
them, there was a potential they would face harsh consequences. But the strip club I am looking
at does not operate this way. Strippers who had worked at clubs suggested that I speak to dancers
directly to get to know them and to get an interview. They told me that each dancer is different,
some like to talk. The director of the documentary I was able to interview on the phone, spent
time working with management from the strip club. He informed me also to talk to dancers
directly as the best way to get an interview.

I was confused. I had read in sociology classes about getting closer to the other, breaking
down incorrect perceptions of the other. I thought people in the department would advise me of
how to operate with a careful eye within the context. I thought there would be advise about how
to tailor my actions based on the situation, sort of like a detective or undercover cop. I was
confident of my ability to care for the dancers and myself. Further, the level of danger upon the
dancers and myself was not high whatsoever. Clubs like Onyx of Philadelphia, Stadium, and
Magic City, to name a few are known nationally for their level of service and entertainment.
They live up to a classy image and are thought of as places that celebrities and people who have
money would like to frequent. While it is a problem that the level of service even toward the
dancers goes up only when people who have money

I was further surprised when IRB advised against asking the Dance Department if they
knew any strippers reason being the possibility of my request being misunderstood. The
connection between technical dance and stripping is strong. Many strippers are technical dancers
and vice versa. But I had already asked the dance department and was told that my request would
be brought up at the faculty meeting. Persons in the faculty suggested that I visit the strip club.
When I followed up on the request, my contact told me that everyone at the meeting, and she twisted her face to show the group response when she brought up my request. I am not sure what there is to be misunderstood about stripping. It seems that in academia certain kinds of dance in certain contexts are favored, considered more legitimate than others. Like how Ballet was once and in many ways still is considered the most technical and grueling of dances, there is a hierarchy/elitism within dance despite movements in stripping being apart of dances from Africa, the Caribbean, Salsa, and Tango, and sensual stories being apart of dance.

Since I could not go the strip club I was advised to call unions. Prior to this I did not know stripper unions existed and so this method was beneficial to me but not effective in getting interviews. I crafted emails and made calls, but got voicemails and people who said they would forward my request, but no interview came from that. I found other people to call such as the director of a documentary on You Tube. I was able to get in touch with him and he suggested that I return to the strip club during the day when strippers are not hustling and have more time to talk and may enjoy someone to talk with. I spoke to people in the dance department like the accompanists and instructors who found out about my work. They advised that I go to the strip club and talk to the dancers. I spoke with friends about my thesis and they offered to ask their friends who are strippers if they would interview with me. I got one interview from this method.

The suggestion by people in various expertise to visit the club and talk to strippers directly seems to suggest that it was a viable, safe option for the dancers and myself. What it did was take further me from everyday women, going back to Tricia Rose’s comment about academic writing not being true the experiences of everyday people. It also made me resourceful, which is a good thing.
Swarthmore College participated in the perpetuation of certain activities, spaces, and people being labeled “other”. By nature of how I was required to conduct research, the institution maintains the “otherness” of certain spaces and people. Maybe it is that faculty is in a different generation and is not aware of forms of entertainment being mainstream and the positive thing about them being more mainstream is that they are safer, cleaner, better to their employees. If an institution like Swarthmore College that takes pride in being liberal and progressive minded, wants to stay ahead of the curve, faculty need to be able to support research in all contexts, in this case pop culture. More importantly, while as an individual I critique systems of patriarchy, it takes the support of renowned institutions like Swarthmore to support research to dismantle systems of patriarchy where women may end up experiencing a myriad of negative circumstances.

**Part III: Interviews from the Internet**

I knew about these videos because this is what I do in my free time; look at strippers! But they also come up in my Facebook newsfeed of 867 “friends”, proof that other people look at it too. What is World Star Hip-hop? The biggest thang since sliced bread yawwll! More on that later in this paper.
CHAPTER THREE I WAS BORN TO DANCE, I NEEDED THE MONEY:
What strippers say about the job

Since I had trouble getting interviews directly with strippers I used an alternative. Using You Tube videos available as opposed to interviewing women myself, have impacted the conclusion I come to in my thesis. The advent of You Tube makes it possible for me to go directly to a database of information in the form of audio and video. This is a luxury not afforded to previous scholars, but it causes some problems. You Tube is a platform that has users with many motives: to promote a service, to give information, to entertain. Some of the material struck me as overwhelmingly supportive of stripping as a profession. Certain videos promote a particular strip club venue.

The videos do not address complications and nuances of dancing naked in a system of patriarchy. They do not address how the system privileges sexual freedom and aggression of men, and how the system condones women’s bodies being for the pleasure of men. Thus is the videos strippers do not have the chance to address how it affects them women and girls at large. Had I interviewed strippers directly I guess that some of these issues would have come up. Of course there would have been other issues to watch out for, such as the nature of my thesis being misunderstood to people non-academic and how they would respond because of their own perceptions and guards over their personhood. To the few women I did speak to briefly I could tell that they were used to guarding their profession due to the stigma which society, though said to be moving more liberal, still attaches to jobs that have to do with sex and pleasure, making it hard for one to progress in the job market and in general to be treated fairly by others.

Below is a table of five videos that I watched several times, transcribed, and which I will use as evidence to support my analysis on stripping. Please refer to this table when reading Chapter Three. I will refer to the media as evidence that stripping at such clubs participating in
the stripping craze (ones in which the clientele is mostly middle to upper class and the dancers have backgrounds in dance, not the desperate “crack head clubs” as GiGi refers to them as) is a viable temporary option for income. I will touch on how dancing rooted in the African aesthetic is beneficial to strippers, women and girls. I will touch on how strippers and interviewers maintain the patriarchal system by dancing in these places. So as much as dancing is beneficial to the sexuality of women, it combined with the intention of Western civilization to use the black female body for profit and gain makes stripping in strip clubs bad for women.
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<th>Interviewer</th>
<th>Featured Dancers</th>
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<td>Thunder</td>
<td>Audio</td>
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<td>2. Part I: Ashley &amp; Sherrella Interview exotic dancers from Stadium club DC</td>
<td>Super Gorge TV</td>
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<td>5. Poles, Power, and Everyday Women</td>
<td>Monique John</td>
<td>Monique John</td>
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<td>Video, on location, compilation, YouTube</td>
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1. **Thunder of Onyx**

This first interview by Jay Lorenzo of Live Hip Hop radio is with Thunder who works at Onyx of Philadelphia. This interview appeared as one of the first search results when I Googled “Onyx Philadelphia”. The fact that Thunder has an interview is telling because when I went to Onyx she stood out to me with her level of performance and engaging with the audience. She struck me as a quality, seasoned performer. I wanted to Google her, but did not know her name.

The interview consists of Jay asking a question about how she got into stripping, how she interacts with men in the club, how much money she has seen, and sex. For each question Jay asks Thunder responds with a two to three minute story. The other part of the interview she goes into detail about a relationship she had with a man. In the 35-minute interview her real name is never revealed.

The manner in which the interview is delivered shows that it is largely for promotional use. After every response Jay responds with a casual comment about wanting to see Thunder at Onyx, what kind of men she likes, how open and personable she is. Though at first glance the comments seem to be harmless banter and exchange, a deeper analysis shows that all of the comments are meant to lead one to visit Onyx and spend money. The task of the radio personality is to indirectly sell the strip club, making the advertisement as entertaining as possible. It also shows that there is a conscious effort on the part of the stripping and entertainment industries to get people into the club. This interview is less about what is like to be a stripper, what goes on behind the scenes, in the dressing room for instance. It is more about contributing to the glamour and mystique surrounding the strip club.

When the interview starts Jay announces that interview for “Bad Chick Week” is with Thunder, a dancer at Onyx of Philadelphia. The segment comes on with a high percussive hip-
hop instrumental in the background. It remains on for the duration of the interview. Over the music Jay begins by describing Thunder as a Hip-hop video vixen. He says that the program is blessed to have her because she has gotten over a million views on World Star Hip-hop. It was no surprise that Jay does not give an explanation of what World Star is because it is well-known and referenced by pop media outlets like BET, You Tube, and by users on Facebook. World Star Hip-hop is an “American hip-hop and shock site” launched in 2005 by Queens native Lee “Q” O’Denat. It features aggregated sensational content such as fights in McDonald’s, premieres of rap videos, and videos of women on its 18 and over site, World Star Honeys. According to the Alexa traffic report WSHH is equally popular among women and men under 35. Alexa ranks the site at 208 in the United States and 708 worldwide. WSHH is known amongst people most likely to stumble upon this interview: young, urban, black, people in social arenas around rap, strippers, and black media.

Jay uses Thunder’s appearance on WSHH to transition into his first question: How did you get on World Star? Thunder explains that she wanted to do it after she saw how popular her stripper friend Secret got after doing it, bookings, exposure, and credibility. So in the spur of the moment she got with her homeboy booked a hotel and shot the video. Thunder made the video and put it on WS understanding the potential the feature would give her to make more money. Jay responds by saying how hot the video is and goes on to describe what is in the video. The listener is supposed to go look at Thunder on WS. He goes into his next question: Did you get your name from the way you shake her ass? She goes into another story saying that at a certain point in the night dancers have to dance in twos because there are so many of them. When she had to dance with Rain she changed her name to Thunder and it stuck. It stands out that Jay did not ask Thunder to go into detail about what is like to work with 40-50 girls like the other
sources did. Urban clubs have about 40 to 50 girls. Tanisha (real name withheld), the only interview I conducted, says that other clubs, white clubs (featuring music by white artists and white dancers) do not have as many women working in one night. Morgan touches on a similar idea but added that there being 40 to 50 girls make the competition for money stiff. “When they make their first bag they get boobs, butts, lips...40 or 50 girls in one place you have to have the hustle and the body to overcome the fact that you can’t talk or dance.”

The competition for a clientele’s attention and money seems to affect decisions dancers make about their body image. Working in a strip club is not just about dancing and the dancer being able to enjoy dancing while the audience enjoys a performance, but what makes a client feel happy to spend money. While some men tip no matter what, as Thunder mentions Kevin Hart does, a lot only spend money when a dancer is pleasing sexually or if they like them on an individual basis. If most of the men pay for women with longer hair, then it is automatically more lucrative for the dancer to have long hair.

After that he says, “tell us more about Thunder”. Jay’s questioning style is affective compared to mine. He asks questions that force her to tell a story. When I was interviewing my Tanisha, I did not ask her questions that made her tell a story. But I did not have prior knowledge about her dancing and work. I did not know how to ask her more about a topic. When I made casual comments to gently get more of an answer, with her she laughed and said more words. She told me there was an incident about an altercation with another dancer, but she did not want to speak about it. She said that there is a lot of drama between girls even girls who are not aggressive end up in drama. Perhaps Thunder’s open nature is what makes her good for an interview. What does it mean that some people’s personalities are better for interviews? Does
this make the data skewed by leaving out the stories of dancers who are quieter, not as willing to speak about the job?

Thunder says she started stripping because it was a dare. Jay responds excitedly and says she is a ball of fun. Platinum Playgrounds was the first club she danced at. She has been dancing since she was three. Jay says he will watch the video again and go see Thunder live at Onyx. He makes the claim, “Strip clubs make the world go around.”

Jay’s next question is about how she interacts with men who vie for her personal non-professional attention. They start speaking with lots of slang. They use words like strip, pussy, dick, and wood. Note here that the slang term cock is not used in certain profession slang is appropriate, but in the case of the entertainment industry, black English is employed so that the content being pushed appears real, open, up front, easy to relate to. The deviance of the Black English from the Standard English makes whatever is being sold seems cool, down with the cause of everyday folks. Thunder maintains this open air when she answers questions about her personal life. Jay asks her, “Are you looking for someone and what are his or her personal qualifications?” She laughs and says intensely, “Yes, I am looking…I am definitely looking.” This is code for men come out the club and try to get with her and spend money at the club. Jay jokes that he looks like Kevin Hart, a famous black comedian, if you squint. He also edges her on to tell more about what she likes. She goes on to explain her preferences more. She says that she has a rule not to get with club patrons. Jay asks her, so you must have sex at home right after the club after you done aroused yourself so much.” Somehow she ends up telling a story about a man she met, but could not give up. He was crazy and actually bipolar but his “good wood” made her stick around. He “dicked her down”, so good she could take his bullshit. She stays on the story for ten minutes, about a third of the interview. He talks to the audience men and women
and at this moment tells women to keep their men satisfied, that they need to learn how to be flexible like Thunder. He tells Thunder that she is so open and real. She agrees and calls her self real open.

Jay moves on by saying, “now... Onyx is popular as a club. What have been your celebrity encounters at Onyx and how much money do celebrities throw at the strip club?” Thunder talks about the Eagles players and how they have arrogant attitudes expecting the dancers to have sex with them as long as they tip the most. She mentions a player DRC who does not do that. She describes him as chill. Then Jay asks how much money Thunder has made. What is the biggest payday? Yo Gotti threw a stack on stage. He asked for a certain song to be played and threw $1600 on stage.” I can hear the excitement in Thunder’s voice. She says after the fame she got on WS she will stay at Onyx indefinitely. Her original plan was to stay until she turned 25 this year and then open up a business. Jay responds that it is worth it for what they do. “Get out to Onyx and throw some cash and kick it with Thunder!” Next Jay announces that Thunder’s birthday party will be at Onyx. She will be in a glow in the dark show and there will be her favorite music, dub step.

The interview ends with Jay sealing his new found tight bonded relationship with Thunder, “You do not even have to be promoting shit, just come on the show and talk, you and me family now.”

So evidently Thunder was on the show to promote the club. She did not talk at all about her feelings about the club or her image. In the P.O.P documentary the women speak more about how their financial and life circumstance made them enter the profession. They spoke about themselves as professional dancers/entertainers rather than strippers. Virgo in particular says dancing has made her more confident. The thing about all of these videos is that each dancer
comes with her experiences of working at the club that differ from the next dancer. In another You Tube video a former Magic City dancer responds to the P.O.P documentary by saying that it’s awesome but that a lot of the negative aspects of dancing were not touched upon. On her page she has 10 Reasons to NOT become a stripper.

2. **Morgan and Danielle of Stadium**

This next interview with Morgan and Danielle of Stadium is less overtly promotional; it does not promote a certain event. There is the same kind of promotion of the club venue by nature of them being interviewed on location at Stadium. They talk more about their jobs as strippers than Thunder does: what they do to prepare to go on stage, their relationship with the other women, how men act, the profession compared to a regular 9-5. Thus the analysis of this video will focus on these aspects rather than pointing out how the video quietly advertises for the strip club.

The segment opens with the host Ashley Silva whose first words are “recently there has become an almost obsession with gentlemen’s clubs”. Ashley is a honey brown woman with curly black hair; it is a weave by the texture. Her eyebrows are penciled in; the shot is on her face so we cannot see what she is wearing though it looks to be all black. Both dancers are in white t-shirts. Their legs are showing and it looks like they have on bikini bottoms. They are wearing heels. The view cuts away from the scene with the host to a scene of dancers on a pole. The room is lit bright purple tinged with red, the pole is purple. Silva goes on to say, “contrary to what the viewer may think, it’s not just men coming to the strip club”. The scene returns to the video of now one dancer on the pole with her head and hands on the floor her butt up and her legs perpendicular to the pole. The video cuts back to the interview and Silva says she is “with two of the most popular dancers, Morgan and Danielle at the newest gentlemen’s club in D.C.”
There are four women seated, however the one on the far left is not identified. Her first question is why females come to the strip club? Both Morgan and Danielle say they think women come in for personal reasons because they want to take what they see and use it at home. Does the word stripper offend her? Danielle does more talking than Morgan. She is sitting closest to the host. Danielle says she was put on earth to entertain people with her body and that she would be ridiculous not to dance. She does not want to do anything else; this is the job for her. Danielle goes on to touch on the strategies dancers have for making money. She said that contrary to popular belief many strippers are lying when they say they are in school. It is a tactic used to gain sympathy from patrons so they tip more.

Morgan got into stripping after getting a divorce and losing her businesses. She used to be a registered nurse. It’s hard to work five days a week, to not take vacation when you want to. In one night she can make what people make in a month. For these reasons she would not go back to nursing. The most Danielle has made in one night at Stadium is $3400; tax-free she adds and laughs. Morgan did not want to say the most she has made. So the potential to make money makes stripping a good option for a woman who is struggling and in need of money. This has been since at least the early 1900s.

The next question is so predictable and a trend with all of the videos. After asking how much they make or what is the most money they have seen in one night Ashley asks what kinds of celebrities come into the strip club associating money with stardom. Danielle mentions Chris Robinson and Neyo. Danielle says, “There is so much star power in one place and so stripping is about how you are as a hustler how you use your mouthpiece, how you carry yourself.” She misplaces the power to make money on the dancer and does not critique this system of how money is made.
There are two types of worker/manager relationships in a strip club, one being independent contractor status. Someone on the site reddit.com who self describes as “a manager of an average sized club with about 40 girls” (assuming he is male, people are asking questions with the assumption that he is male, why?) asks I am a strip club manager, what would you like to know? One user asks “Do you assign them work shifts or supervised them on the job? He responds,

“No girl is an employee, they are all independent contractors. Be here before 7 and there is no fee to work, every hour after 7 the fee goes higher and higher and higher and higher. Most girls are required 3 shifts a week except for the "Club Dimes" they pretty much do whatever the fuck they want. Oh, and of course I supervise them. When they do something stupid like try to bring a cigarette on stage, do a lap dance on the floor, leave early etc. etc. I get them back in line. Hurt these girls $ and they straighten right up. Put them on day shift for a week or take away a weekend and they are angels for at least a week or two. They may run to another club for the weekend but they're uncomfortable and want to come back home.”

While the term independent contractor is used to describe the relationship in which workers do not have a set schedule or salary, the term independent contractor is contested amongst stripper labor rights activists who say strippers are still employees. It is illegal to have to pay management in order to work. Many organizations across the country such as the Exotic Dancer’s Union in California have worked to have strippers protected under state and federal laws so that they have a set wage and benefits. In a case covered by The New York Times involving Rick’s Cabaret International Inc., a company that owns a chain of strip clubs including Onyx of Philadelphia that I attended, a judge ruled that dancers are “strippers were hourly workers who deserved at least the minimum wage” due to the “micromanagement” by managers,

“Among the dos and don’ts detailed in the company’s pamphlet of “Entertainer Guidelines” were requirements that the dancers work eight-hour shifts at least three days a week, wear stiletto heels at least four inches tall, skip body glitter and cover any tattoos
with makeup. The decision also said the dancers were mandated to “dance your first song with your dress on and your second song with your dress off.” Then, while entertaining the customers up close and personally, they were to keep one foot on the floor and could never have both knees “on a guest” at the same time.

In this interview with Danielle and Morgan it is important to highlight that there is a particular way of talking and acting that makes the most money, which depends upon how much the client is willing to tip based on performance. Danielle makes it sound as if some strippers talk and act better than others, when really it’s that their way is more conducive with what the clients want and thus they behave in ways conducive with making money. Sherrella asks a question for the first time, “How does dancing affect personal life?” Danielle who is doing most of the talking says stripping is like any other job in that it comes with a description. She says she must keep her hair, nails, and make-up done, and keep her outfits new but more than anything she says, the job requires being single and not having kids. Her response echoes Morgan’s who says she is staying single.

Danielle goes on to talk about her reasons for stripping. She says she did it for the family when they were hitting rock bottom. Here there is a big contrast with what she said before; that she became a stripper because she was born to entertain with her body. Her response at this point is more desperate and says something about the circumstances under which she came to the job. The next segment is on safety. She mentions Player’s Club where someone follows the main character home. Morgan mentions that an employee at one point did follow her home. Do you do a routine before going on stage? Their moods when they go on stage. Morgan gets nervous. Danielle interrupts with that she loves to wow the crowd. She says she has one, two three; Ashley laughs and says five, shots of Patron so that she can mix and mingle. She moves her head up and down and emphatically says it’s ok! It’s what the job calls for.
Though one might think so, it is not necessary to belabor the point about the emotion needed to carry out the job because there is already been shown that one must employ positive emotion maybe contrary to how they really feel. I argue that emotional labor, though on a spectrum from low (construction workers, police officers) to high (stewardesses, secretaries, strippers) is required of everyone participating in the neoliberal economy. There are ways of being that are not allowed. The neoliberal economy impacts how the entire society is constructed. The degree to which one must change and endure is especially heightened for African-Americans and other peoples whose everyday culture the neoliberal economy is counter but requires the most work of for the least pay.

On what keeps the customer coming back. “Never give “it” up because “it” is what keeps the guy coming back because his ego is involved. It’s power, she says with both hands out. “Let me shit on her so that she gives it up,” she says. “The perception of the exotic dancer is that we’re all plastic or they are whores.” At Stadium there it is a lot of variety and so there are fantasies to fulfill. The advice Morgan gives is to have something to fall back on, know what you are getting caught up in. “People will give you money for anything.”

At the end we learn their names are Ms. Peru and Fat Rabbit as they give their Instagram and Twitter names. And of this I ask what the importance of a stripper name is? I have not heard this touched on in any of the interviews though the names are catch. The names exude sex; they are alluring, exotic; something that if she were to get popular, her name would illicit images of how she danced on the pole, or how she looked. In the next documentary I watched, Cali is the first strippers to be interviewed. It is a simple name, but her style definitely matches some attractive cultural and aesthetics of a part of California exhibited in hip-hop music.
3. Power of Pussy

“The stripper business started in Africa,” says the narrator Bernie Mac in the film *The Player's Club* directed by Ice Cube. Black people know about this film, but *The Player's Club* was not included in places that archive stripper films. Maybe the catch is that this film has a black director and is featuring black women, people who have struggled to be acknowledged and actively shut out of the film industry. *The Player's Club* must be noted in film history and sociology because it details so well an aspect of the black experience, so prominent to fueling entertainment trends in the broader population.

The film mirrors stories I have heard about all aspects of stripping including how managers act, how the crowd acts, what strippers do toward each other and how they make their money, how management makes money. PC is a story of a woman who decides to become a stripper so she can make her way through school. She meets them when they are in the shoe store she works at and she is helping them try on shoes. And so P.O.P starts off well in detailing the history of this particular kind of strip club.

Various scenes introduce the strip hub of Atlanta: the Braves stadium, a brown Bentley with chrome rims, cop cars lined up outside of the Hawks stadium and CNN Center, a street signs that read Metropolitan Parkway, Memorial Drive, and Columbia Drive.

The music turns off and we are left with footage of a woman who says she is teaching the stripper tap, “Contrary to the Twerktteam, it is NOT a kick.” “Hey everybody I'm Gigi Maguire, for those of you that don't know me, I am your stripper's favorite stripper, AKA show me the money.” She formerly worked at Magic City, a strip club that has been around more than most clubs that shut down after five or so years. When my mother went to check the mail at the Post Office after school we rode past Magic City, right across the street from the Greyhound Bus
Station and the MARTA train station Garnett. This image comes to mind when Magic City is mentioned by name in rap songs.

GiGi is sitting at the front desk. As a fresh-eyed watcher, I assume this is her business. Later she confirms that she left that (dancing at magic city) for this, she says as she smiles and points to the sign behind her. It has pink ribbon letters that spell PoleFanAddicts. My experience with calling pole fitness places is that they do not want to be associated with Strip clubs. I called several pole fitness places in Philly remembering the connection between GiGi and her business. They caught me by surprise when they talked as if pole fitness is morally above stripping in the club. The first response was “No, our instructors have real jobs, you can call down the street for that.” I did not expect that people who strip would contribute to the negative attitude toward strippers. One woman I called had a longer conversation with me than the others and explained why pole fitness places and women might not want to interview. Stripping is still considered taboo. For women who stripped in order to make money to go onto another career, knowing that she was a stripper, the company may not want to higher her. She said, “Many women are in school to become doctors, lawyers, and etc.” I wonder why these professions are seen as more legitimate than being an academic especially when money from stripping supports moving into such professions or is said to at least. I did not research any statistics that could show how many women go on to other professions.

She goes over her career fast and with a casual air. GiGi danced from January 2000 until August 2011. She bartended from 2003 until 2005 and came to Atlanta as a bartender. When she did a contest at Magic City and won, they hired her. A quote by T.S. Eliot is on a black screen, "what we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning."
The next scene opens with Cali singing loudly in the dressing room. The camera is not directly on her, but in the mirror. This is Cali is from “Cali's east side”. She whirls and curls her neck as she talks into the camera and looks it up and down with her hands. She has what people call attitude and seems to be the only way to describe it. She is light brown, has big top and bottom eyelashes, a smooth face, glossed lips, and very big gold hoop earrings. "It's a blessing (to dance) honestly," Cali says. Before saying this she is talking about the economic differences between Atlanta and California. She was working at KFC not even making enough money to do her hobby of skating. “I didn't have money to do shit.” It is a surprise that even as a single person she did not have enough money for a cheap hobby. Says something about the state of the job market and the over saturation of workers and under demand in the United States. She explained that her closest friend is in New Orleans, so she wanted to be independent. If something falls through she has no money, so she was saving money until the next thing came through. “I guess I am just going to dance.”

Choosing to dance in the face of hard times is a trend. Morgan, Danielle, and Cali are all cases in which the strip club provided them an alternative from falling through. One can look at this as a bad thing, the fact that women have options to sell their bodies. But one cannot ignore the fact that the existence of the job was an alternative to the normal eight-hour work day in which the potential to make large sums of money is limited.

The camera pans their belongings like baby wipes, duffle bags, and then to Cali who has on a bra and panties. This mirror shot is recurring perhaps to take the edge off of being seen directly in so few clothes. There was one girl who took her under her wing and told her how the business goes. This is why we were being shown the belongings: it is a part of the business. Prior to the woman taking her under her wing, Cali’s danced like she was at a club or party. She did
not have any transition the other dancers say. She showed Cali that they do make-up; they do hair and all of the “ins and outs” as we see her putting on clothes, most likely a costume. Cali has flower tattoo is green and red going from her thigh and snaking up to the right side of her bellybutton. She explains that a lot of girls were not as welcoming and open arms to her. Cali’s mentor finally comes onto the screen. The black screen has been established as an informative tool (5 yrs experience, Cali’s mentor, Ask her about leukocytes) it says.

Simone describes herself as a real tomboy before working at the strip club because she did not wear lashes; she used to wear her hair a certain way. She has on pink lipstick a black scarf and a pink sweatshirt that is cut revealing the shoulders. She explains that make up is necessary because you are judged on how you look. Gigi says “the club hires you, they give you the rules, and they put you on the floor.” She emphasizes that THERE IS NO TRAINING on how to dance or how to interact with clientele. Everything is trial and error and it can be a disaster. But later on Virgo, Cali, and NuNu explain that the whole process gave them confidence, they actually practice being a better dancer.

Cali who used to teach ballet, modern and jazz says she does not know shit about this. The scene is of Cali on the pole. You can see her butt shaking and other parts of her body vaguely. The club is lit by blue lights. She says was nervous to get up and dance “ass hole naked”. GiGi was worried about being naked in front of strangers too, but the other women being naked too make one blend in. There is slow piano music while showing in slow motion all of the different girls. GiGi says there is a difference between stripper and entertainer. The stripper does a two step and a booty bounce, but an entertainer does all that and works the pole to give a show which is better than a stripper cause she can do all that and you (the audience member) did not realize she did not take her clothes off.
The next scene is of two women on a very tall pole. In heels, she is standing on the other woman's thighs. The girl on the bottom is upside down. Black screen Part 2: Stripping vs. Entertaining. NuNu is a pole fitness instructor. And scene cut to Snack Pack rehearsal. Looks like the studio at PoleFanAddicts. There are three women on three poles dancing to “Click” a song featuring rappers Big Sean, Kanye West, and Jay Z. Simone explains that herself, GiGi, Sweet Pea, Innocence, and Virgo make up the group the snack pack. Simone has arched eyebrows, makeup, eyeliner, primped hair that is short and black, a grey sweatshirt with black shirt over it that says Nirvana. They got together after Mikey put them together because they “did way more than the average stripper stroll,” Simone says. Next GiGi is seen talking about snack pack and other strippers who are talented: “Tip Drill, Takers, Spider and Magic, Maliah and Blac Chyna, but we are the only well-known strippers out of 1000,” she explains. She talks about the combination of physicality and muscle tone and technique that makes them stand out as strippers and entertainers. Three women are climbing the same pole so that they are stacked one after the other. She is singing Nicki Minaj and Two Chainz song,” yeah I love them strippers, she whispers yeah I love dem, strippers, yeah I love dem strippers,” as she practices with Virgo she is horizontal on the pole with her arms outstretch and Virgo is sitting on her lap swinging her legs. They call it the swing set. Now the viewer hat Simone has two tattoos on her back as she explains how the movement combinations got their names: united we stand, bench press, however it felt. “It keeps you in shape! It takes multiple aspects to put you on top. Bang, boom, pow, she dramatically gestures to her face and body.

This next girl showing her outfits is new to the documentary. The scene alternates between Ms. Molly and another girl who is not named. Ms. Molly started off in white clubs in
Cali and Vegas and this is the first black club that she has worked at. She cannot dance but smiling and personality gets her and she would not make money with out it. She had brown hair gelled back into a high bun, lip gloss, hoop earrings, black zip-up hoodies, and eyeliner, very smooth face, no acne. “Big booty girls are a commodity in the south, but that is not true,” she says. There are skinny girls in black clubs she says as she whirls her neck and smiles, she is referencing herself. The next girl has pink lip gloss, dark brown hair with blonde streaks, fake eyelashes, lighter skinned, gold and black top with stones around neckline. “Ms. Molly can dance now,” she says. We see her butt and then the rest of her in the mirror as she explains that you have to be less tense and “it will just wiggle even when you think it won't it will.” Virgo says, “You have to observe and practice thighs go in in.” Virgo says she learned in the kitchen, and it’s an ankle movement.

Next scene they show the proper procedure to popping. They are in the dressing room, Simone and another stripper showing. The incorrect way is to put your hands on your knees at an angle. She uses this language, open your legs buss it open and she bends over with back parallel to floor. She says "that's not right ladies, that's so uugggh." Stand up straight and bend straight down, into a second position.

Part 3 Misconception and Perception black screen. Cali is talking. People think they are selling ass, because she works at Magic City. She is fine with what she does; she does not think it is degrading. She says everything is a technique even though it looks like you can go up there and pop. GiGi goes on to say there is more hole in the wall clubs than there are clean places like Magic City. In movies, the strippers are crack heads, and don't care about their bodies, you can get your dick sucked in the corner for $40. It has started to evolve but it is still taboo because of the bad clubs people think it is like how it is in players club and hustle and flow. Some type of
women party. This is how they are choosing to make their money and life.” GiGi goes on to say that stripper life and mother life are separate. She has a girl. She would never let her girl be a stripper, absolutely and positively not. People looking at her sideways because she is a stripper and the negativity that comes with that and she her daughter will never have to deal with that. She can move on and go to college. If she had a different path she would have embraced it. Now she can be more of a soccer mom, spend time with her daughter and cook dinners. Tanisha who I was able to interview says that of course a parent would say do not strip. In her own case she says she would tell her daughter neither to not strip, nor to strip.

Pebbles is 18 she is from Panama City, she is by herself her and family are not close. She has braces. She did the regular job thing, two jobs; it is not really doing anything. She came to Atlanta with a boyfriend a few years ago. It is easy to save $5000 in a moth as opposed to Virgo does not believe in stripping cause you want to she believes you do it because you have to. You have to do what you have to do given circumstances. She wants to relax go to school and push music because that is what she likes to do. She explains that 2012 she grew a lot and became a woman. Cali says she is not happy with herself because she compares herself and life to everyone else. She is skating in Cascade Skating Rink. She has experienced confidence and growth through dancing, women in entertainment industry this is your power, this is what you use to gain independence. “Choreography, dancing, meeting dancers, embrace pole art, not so much stripping, look at it in a different light.” If you were a girl you would want to be a stripper. “If you ain't got no corporate job and you ain't on super ass old lolol.”

In a response to P.O.P one dancer from Magic City says they left out the tolls it take emotionally and psychologically. She wishes the video would have been more truthful. There is pressure to be a product, be looked at as sexy and making that transition back to normal life is
hard. “Your mind accepts that you can be bought with a price.” She has been kidnapped for a price. Bouncers will not risk their lives for you. People get obsessed. She wishes the video would have talked about influences not on pockets. Perhaps P.O.P. was about promotional use, he did say that he did other things for the establishment.

4. Strip Club Queens Reality Show Preview

Urban Clout logo Newton Media Group logo presents Strip Club Queens Atlanta. The logo is a pink crown and pink stripper hanging upside down on the pole.

A hip-hop beat comes on accompanied with pictures of downtown Atlanta, and heavy clouds moving over the area. Cut to woman sitting in front of a black back drop she is black, red lipstick, eyebrows and eyes done, hair down to below her chest, butterfly tattoo in the middle of her chest, neck tattoo. She is wearing a low-cut black top. We can see only her top half. She is not looking directly at the camera but off to the right side and down. "It takes a lot to be a dancer in Atlanta. We see a woman under dark pink lights getting money thrown at her. There is a women with pink hair. The women we saw sitting is still talking as we see shots of different dancers. One is in a pink bra with stones around the neckline and bottom. A shot of pink thigh high boots from the floor angle as she slides on the floor.

"There is a perception that strippers are prostitutes, sexual beings." She says strippers have high standards. And we see a woman on the floor with her arms outstretched and money on the floor, part of a pole in the foreground. Another woman, also in black, it is hard to tell them apart, says that people think that because they are chasing money they will get it by any means. The scenes splice very fast of different women in costumes of red, gold fringes and hot purple. I cannot see any of their faces, just bodies, bent over at the edge of the stage as if she is about to tuck and tumble, swinging from the horizontal pole. There is long black hair that is tightly curled
and money on the floor. A regular looking woman, regular because of what she is wearing has a wad of money in her hand. She is staring and smiling with a bill in her hand. As the song goes off abruptly the dancer slides down the pole and the words follow the lives of six exotic dancers "strippers" flashes across the screen with the same pink I have seen in almost every video or strip club logo. “Personalities clash it” says next and then a white girl presumably Kat it says to the left of her body in front of a black screen. She has on a black top that has hot pink and gold designs, floral looking like Modern Victorian with a gold chain with huge links. Her hair is blond. She says, "They don't like my white ass." And we see a scene of her in the club of her ass literally. She is doing the stripper booty clap with her legs outstretched and booty muscle going up and down as she looks back at it, which is a song by the way. Finally we find out the name of the dancer who has been sitting in front of the camera, Bebe. She responds, "I have my issues with that motherfucker. She goes on to elaborate on how Kat walks around the club thinking she owns it, and she calls us donkeys. I guess this is the drama of the show. The white girl and the black girl employee are clashing. Bebe's nails are down white, and she has brown hair that stops by her breasts. She talks with her hands. Kat has. Friendship is tested. And we see what I presume to be another character in the show say, “alotta my friends don't like Sinna, she giggles and says, but I love Sinna.” This girl has on a grey short sleeved shirt. Her cleavage is out, she has on red lip gloss, has a gap, she looks to be of Spanish decent of some kind, because of her skin color and hair texture, which is fine. the next scene is of Sinna who has blue hair and blue eyebrows, makeup done, a black top that is see through up top but black on the bottom. She explains that she was suspended from the club for not being able to separate work from wanting to beat her ass. I have no idea who she is talking about, but I guess we will find out later. Ginger
we find out is the girl's name who has on the grey shirt who says "It's always problems with these niggas; it's always problems with this money."

Boy it is difficult to transcribe a reality show. There are so many camera splices and effects to create the dramatic effect. But it is beneficial in showing what the negative sides of stripping are about that the PO.P. documentary did not touch on. Next is Ferrari who talks about some situation between her homegirl eke, herself and Boy Toy. She explains about how some women are your friend but they are “really laying up in the club with your nigga. This shit happens every day, bout a old snake ass bitch." When Ferrari talks, her hands point to the right and she sticks her neck out to the camera. She has on a bright red top, with cut outs at the shoulders. Her hair is blonde, and swept up. Her make up is done. A gold necklace with multiple chains is around her neck with another piece lying on her chest. The necklace is huge and gaudy. Boy Toy says she used to be a slum bitch from the ghetto and people worried about why her pussy is famous and why yours is not. She is talking about people being worries about her personal life and what she has and we see a kitchen with a huge island in the middle, hors d'oeuvres on the table served by a chef with stainless steel oven and fixtures, the place is new. This time Boy Toy's hair is swept up; she has pink lips and pink eye shadow, a huge gold necklace medallion with three faces and a neckline that plunges to her high waist. The shirt is sequined with dark gold, green and black.

Each segment is split up by a black screen and a tone like something dropped with words across the screen. This time it is confronting issues and we see Kat drinking. Another character comments that she has a drinking problem, anger and we see a man yelling, "don't do that shit again, you too wasted. You come in here and get drunk like that again any other time you get drunk like that again, I promise Imma sit your ass down, are we understood?" He is in a suit with
a red oxford shirt. His eyes and eyebrows are raised as if to be conveying the seriousness of his message.

“Drama Unleashed” Ferrari is talking anytime you working with a bunch of women it is going to be drama it is going to be people that stick together it is going to be people that think they know more than you. A hip-hop beat picks back up and a woman is touching her knees shaking her long hair and then she comes back up so that we see she has red leather shoes to match her red leather bra and panties. And finally we see the sign Diamonds of Atlanta Gentlemen's Club.

Ferrari says she wants to show people that she is "playing with a check". This means that she has enough money to do with whatever she wants. She mentions something about getting “kicked out of piles” and we see each dancer counting money at the end of the night. In another episode she explains what it means to get kicked out of the pile. If a dancer is already dancing and another client sitting near the first wants her to come and dance she has to dance. The problem is that he will put her money in the pile that is already formed. According to the rules, she is not supposed to join a pile after it has already started. She will either not get any of the money in the pile or have to give up $100.

5. **Poles, Power, and the everyday woman with NuNu of Magic City**

NuNu was a formal ballet student. She describes stripping as a crazy experience because women's bodies look totally different. She thought that “we basically all have the same thing, but we do not.”

She goes on to describe the ups and downs of being a dancer. They do not make all of this money and everything is great. She invests in hair, eyelashes, costumes, shoes, make-up to come back to work and look good. If she makes $500, she invests about half. “I just choose to get
naked and make some money,” but she is like everyone else. There is a scene of three women on the pole at Magic City. The scene is dark but figures can be seen through blue lights. A popular song by Myyko Montana “Do It” (included at the end of this paper) is on while they are dancing. She continues that she cannot work at a store and look at people and ask can I help you? “I cannot work at Forever 21 and stand there and look at “those people”. I choose to ask can I help you. Can I get naked and dance for you?” She laughs. Strippers are good girls that are in school with boyfriends at home she emphasizes, that come there because they have that hustler mentality. The shoot is in the dressing room, white lockers, and mirrors.

She says “The women got y'all beat, they spend more money than the men”. She says I don’t know what this epidemic is, but women have been coming into the strip club more than men.” What does that say about the strip club on a regular basis? Who is it for? If it is about straight men, what does that mean? “A lotta y'all be tryna come in here tryna a find a sugar daddy or trick, we see y'all, we see y'all.” She laughs at her own jokes. “Alotta women are intrigued.”

There is a video of rapper Nicki minaj touching a dancers butt and sliding it down the pole. She has money in her left hand. Other women are standing around her watching. There is another video of Rihanna putting money on a strippers butt. NuNu says, "I would not think I would have to go up to another woman and tell her the rules, because it's all about respect. I respect you, you respect me.” But from my visit to the club I remember being confused as to what is appropriate for how to touch women. Some of what I saw is done seemed like it crosses the line, like smacking a girl's butt. Even how women choose to engage surprised me. Like at Onyx the dancer smashing her breasts into a client's face. How does one know the line of respect in that situation?
CHAPTER FOUR SEXUALITY: As a stripper, as a woman

From this process many things have become apparent about the urban strip club. By urban strip club I mean clubs such as Onyx, King of Diamonds, Magic City, and other establishments made popular from being mentioned in rap lyrics, on camera in rap videos, and being frequented by appearances from rappers. The establishments serve a largely black clientele, but are consumed by whoever consumes mainstream rap music, a large part of the globe. One cannot say whether or not black women dancing in the strip club is totally good, or totally bad for the women involved. But the mainstreaming of the strip club via rap music seems to be creating a better environment for the dancers; the clubs are cleaner, better managed, and not as dangerous. The design of the way one must survive requires participation in the money economy. For some time in one’s young life stripping is a viable and attractive alternative to the 9-5, minimum wage, no personal time and no vacation lifestyle.

However the cross-marketing is a new way by which institutions make profit and revenue remains a dirty and deceitful illusion in which the dancers and the general public does not win. Media conglomerates made the choice to start shooting videos in the strip club so that the general public can enjoy the rich and famous lifestyle depicted in music videos. The music videos, YouTube videos, and WSHH videos all participate in creating the illusion that women are enjoying what they do, and willingly participants in their bodies being on display and manipulated; they smile laugh and say they love the job. I wish I had the opportunity to interview more women, more managers, and people in the music industry so that this question could be answered with more facts. No matter how oppressive the system may be it is a fact that there is no shortage of women participating for a variety of reasons and this is the dangerous part in the perpetuation of systems.
Dancing in itself without the muddy waters of money and the neoliberal economy is joyous and beautiful. Welsh says, “The humanizing African aesthetic is conflicted by its inevitable but contrary relationship with the technological Western aesthetic which is linear, finite, and efficient.” Following in the big footsteps of dancers like Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, and Kariamu Welsh, it is important to comment on dancing as a pillar of relationship with the universe from an Afrocentric perspective. In her book The African Aesthetic, Keeper of the Traditions Welsh says,

“Numerous writers have expounded on the historical and cultural bond between continental and diasporan Africans. It is not based solely on color, but the bond exists because of a common African heritage that dates back to pre-dynastic Egypt (Ancient Khemet). Within the general African aesthetic there will exist a multitude of national, what I call family aesthetics. Family aesthetics are related by specific common characteristics while maintaining individual ethnic aesthetic identities. Thus the Sabaar dance of the Wolof people of Senegal is unquestionably Wolof, at the same time it shares common aesthetic traits with the Chopi people of Mozambique, (Welsh:1993:3)”

It is a way of forming confidence and familiarity with one’s body, one’s vessel and means of survival. Going forward it is important to reclaim an art that is black and those roots being grounded in the African dance aesthetic contrary to the sentiment that white communities are more liberated in their expression. My female professor says that she likes to dance and shake her butt with her friends, but that she does it out of fun and games and knows that really, it is not good, she should not be doing it to certain types of music and in certain places. I have heard this same sentiment from many women, but they should not have to feel this way dancing for it is denying the self of experiencing the total self. For instance, NuNu plans on becoming a yoga instructor and personal trainer. She said that dancing can immediately relieve her stress and that she loves it.

Both Welsh and Dunham say that the dancing in the community is a statement of its values and of its condition.
“The emotional life of any community is clearly legible in its art forms and because the dance seeks continuously to capture moments of life in a fusion of time, space, and motion, the dance is at a given moment the most accurate chronicler of culture pattern. The constant interplay of conscious and unconscious finds a perfect instrument in the physical form, the human body which embraces all at once. Alone or in concert man dances his various selves and his emotions and his dance becomes a communication as clear as though it were written or spoken in a universal language.” (Clark:2005:516).

For the African in America it is important to note that the values and personas of the African American community are shaped in reaction to European perceptions and systems. Welsh says, “It is not uncommon to see Eurocentric African art,” (Welsh:1993:6). I believe this is what has become of stripping. For similar to black music, fashion, jargon, dancing is appropriated by the mainstream media and turned into something that is detrimental for the black community to participate in because it depends on the community being less than conscious.

What it is important to note is that black women remember the roots from which this dancing comes from. Not only does it come from a place beyond the one in which we live but the body is beautiful, dancing and celebrating it is beautiful.

In academia there needs to be new ways of writing for everyday women in women’s studies in ways that don’t look down upon women for being sexy, speak for women who use their bodies for profit. From the videos I watch it seems that black women are analytical and have the intention of making good choices given their circumstances. Black women face enough burdens that lead to hypo-sexualization, academia must write in a way that supports her!

It is important to teach people as young women and boys to be conscious while enjoying themselves. It is no mistake that men feel entitled to women’s bodies, society supports this idea. How is it that there are men my age fulfilling the traits our mothers taught us to watch out for: the aggression you will experience for dancing that way? Her body is not yours to have/pay for. As long as one can pay for a woman to dance and perform other sexual acts a woman’s sexuality
is in danger. This is not to say that sexually charged environments cannot be safe and enjoyable for women, it is the money and the rules that make it a problem.
A few music videos and songs about strippers:

   [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y34jC411m70&feature=youtube_gdata_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y34jC411m70&feature=youtube_gdata_player).
   [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgSH3LPfo6g&feature=youtube_gdata_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgSH3LPfo6g&feature=youtube_gdata_player).
   [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v24W85yYqYA&feature=youtube_gdata_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v24W85yYqYA&feature=youtube_gdata_player).
   [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5Z3KUOrhS0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5Z3KUOrhS0).
   [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9chJZcHU6_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9chJZcHU6_o).
    [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAHMVL7rraw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAHMVL7rraw).

   [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ABNhd8QiaM&feature=youtube_gdata_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ABNhd8QiaM&feature=youtube_gdata_player).
   [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUHLXExSu2Y&feature=youtube_gdata_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUHLXExSu2Y&feature=youtube_gdata_player).
Work Cited


