# Presenting the Naked Self: The Accumulation of Performative Capital in the Female Strip Trade

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**Abstract:**
This paper explores the female strip trade in Canada and the United States from a dramaturgical approach by looking at how female strippers construct, present and manage their gender, bodies and emotions in their everyday work. The basic theoretical framework of the study is built on Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach to sociology, including three specific theories that can be related to it: Judith Butler's performative theory of gender, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, and Arlie Hochschild's theory of emotion work.

## Introduction

1 Stripping can be defined in as many different ways as there are people to define it. Chris Bruckert suggests that stripping can be perceived as deviance from a criminologist's perspective, or as entertainment from the perspective of the strip club patron. In this paper, stripping will be defined through the perspective of female strippers themselves — as paid work that is embedded within the market economy. In her autobiography, Lily Burana suggests that female strippers enter the strip trade for a variety of reasons such as: paying for their education, supporting their family, taking a break from prostitution and saving for traveling expenses; the common denominator amongst these reasons is to earn an income- for the stripper, stripping is work. Liepe-Levinson writes: "the personal lives of and backgrounds of American strippers are as varied and incongruous as the shows they perform" and further, "are far too diverse and multi-faceted to draw clear-cut conclusions about their job choice en masse, other than the need to make a living" (8-9). Likewise, Heidi Mattson writes: "I'm here to make money. I enjoy the work too, but that is all it is — work" (10). In a basic sense, the work of the female stripper involves: dancing and removing one's clothing on a stage to earn tips, providing private lap dances to strip club patrons for a set fee and conversing with patrons to make further tips. Stripping, as work, will be further explored through the question: How and why do female strippers prepare, present, and manage their gender, bodies, and emotions in their everyday work?

## The Contemporary Strip Trade (1970-2006)

2 While each female stripper may experience the contemporary strip trade differently, the industry is embedded within a larger structural framework of the market economy. In her study of gendered employment trends, Leah Vosko suggests that the current labor market in

Canada is characterized by a move towards increased part-time and temporary work. According to Bruckert, this growth of non-standard employment relationships has limited and conditioned the experiences that women have in the contemporary labor force in Canada and the United States. Bruckert suggests that many strippers in North America decide to become strippers in a labor climate that provides unappealing options for many women. This sentiment is supported by Burana's statement:

> I have, however, had a number of tedious, ass-busting jobs, mostly when I was in high school: cleaning lady, supermarket cashier, department store clerk. So I know a bit about scraping people's crap off of toilets, wearing mildly humiliating smocklike uniforms, and shuffling and refolding product for an indifferent corporation. I also know about trading all that for a job where you can make in one night what you used to earn in a week, or a month. Or two months. (55)

Similarly, Diablo Cody worked through a temporary help agency in Minnesota before quitting to become a full-time stripper because she found that she enjoyed it more, and it met her financial needs more readily. These examples suggest that current labor trends that provide unappealing options for women influence some women's decisions to enter the strip trade.

3 Vosko describes the unappealing aspects of the temporary employment relationship, which has become the normative relationship of employment for women in North America, as follows: it is unstable work with no guarantee of permanency or full-time hours, which leaves the worker vulnerable to an unsteady income; it provides little to no benefits like health care or maternity leave; it generates an unclear relationship between employers and employees; it creates a uniquely individualistic and competitive work environment; and, it often places the worker in physically and emotionally demanding positions. While some strippers may enter the strip trade because of unappealing aspects of normative work standards for women in North America, and the potential to make much more money in the short term, it must be pointed out that these unappealing, precarious working conditions also characterize the contemporary strip trade.

4 The income of the strippers is unstable for a number of reasons: for the most part, they have a tip-based income that can change from day to day, and week to week (Lewin; Mattson; Burana; Bruckert; Liepe-Levinson; Bartlett; Eaves; Cody); their income is largely dependent on their appearance, so any gained weight, physical scarring or blemishing, injury, or signs of aging and strippers cannot work (Burana; Bruckert); clubs may shut down or change their venue leaving the stripper unemployed (Black); the club merely provides a legitimate stage for them to dance on for a fee, so they receive no benefits or maternity leave (Sundahl; Bruckert); and, the marginal nature of stripping in contemporary society makes it difficult for strippers to secure loans (Bruckert) or find further employment after years of stripping

(Black). One stripper interviewed by Bruckert describes the instability of her income as follows:

> It's still kinda nice sometimes to have that steady income like a normal job. . . . Like instead of dancing, just a normal nine-to-five job. That way you can really do your budget. 'Cause I find, when you don't know what you're gonna make, or one day it's a hundred bucks, you go and you spend it 'cause you figure tomorrow I'll make it back, y'know, it's fine. But tomorrow you go and the next day you only make fifty. . . . It's never the same. (93)

The contemporary strip trade also appears to be characterized by an unclear relationship between employers and employees (Burana; Bruckert). For the most part, strippers are characterized as self-entrepreneurs in that they are paid in tips and it is their responsibility to gain access to strip clubs. The stripper generally makes her wages in tips, and provides either a set fee or a percentage of her tips to the club and other workers such as bartenders, waitresses and doormen in exchange for their services. The point where the employee/employer relationship becomes confusing is that the stripper must work within the rules of the club as stated by the owner and managers of the club or they can be fined or fired. Burana also suggests that strippers are often micromanaged by managers and employers in the clubs in terms of how they are to dress, act, and solicit customers. Furthermore, as Bruckert reveals, the club tells the stripper her hours of work to which she has little or no control. Sundahl suggests that if a stripper is late or misses a day of work she can be fined or even fired, forcing strippers to come to work even when they are not feeling well. It is through obfuscating the nature of this employer/employee relationship, and encouraging the idea that strippers work for themselves, that strip club managers and owners avoid paying benefits to strippers.

5 Vosko also suggests that precarious working conditions, such as those of the contemporary strip trade, can lead to a uniquely individualistic and competitive work environment. This type of environment is characteristic of the contemporary strip trade, as strippers must continuously compete with one another for jobs, the most profitable hours, and the attention of male patrons. Drawing on her previous experience as a stripper, Bruckert suggests that there has been a decline in the camaraderie amongst workers in the strip club in recent years. This is a sentiment supported by Burana who suggests that she has not developed meaningful relationships with her co-workers throughout her career as a stripper. This decline of stripper camaraderie appears to hinder what Bruckert describes as the "informal economy" of stripping. Teamwork and camaraderie in the strip trade appear to be important aspects of safety and wellbeing; however, there appears to be support for the view

that the precariousness of the contemporary strip trade is eroding these aspects of their work (Burana; Bruckert).

6 There are also a multitude of physical dangers, and circumvented health and safety policies, in the contemporary strip trade. Liepe-Levinson reveals that industry competitiveness and instability of income can lead strippers to engage in physically harmful work such as death-defying pole maneuvers. The everyday work of the stripper can also be very physically demanding such as: dancing in high heels for extended periods of time; standing in high heels while rarely sitting to take breaks; doing the splits and other aerobic dance moves; and, banging one's knees and other joints on the stage during dance moves. Even more problematic is that when strippers are injured, strip clubs are not required to provide compensation to the injured dancer (Bruckert). There are also certain dangers that go along with working in an environment where alcohol is being served, men are charged with sexual energy, and other dancers are protecting their territory. One dancer interviewed by Bruckert expressed her fears of physical injury from coworkers as follows: "I can't work with black eyes, I can't work with big scars across my face" (94). Beyond the physical dangers of working in the contemporary strip trade, are the psychological and emotional dangers that result from the constant preparation, presentation and management of self in the everyday work of strippers, which will be elaborated upon in a section later in this paper.

7 The picture that has been painted of the contemporary strip trade is one of precarious working conditions that provide: an unsteady income for strippers; an unclear employee/employer relationship; no benefits or compensation; an individualistic and competitive work environment; and physically and emotionally demanding work. According to Leah Vosko, these are similar characteristics of the temporary help industry, which has become the normative employment relationship for women in North America. This further reiterates that stripping is work that is embedded in the market economy, and it has a distinct resemblance to other forms of feminized work. The precarious or unsteady nature of the work, and feminized work in general, provides support for why it is so important for female strippers to effectively prepare, present and maintain the appropriate gender, bodies and emotions in their everyday work. The question then becomes: how do strippers prepare, present, and manage their gender, bodies and emotions in their everyday work?

**An unobtrusive methodology**

8 In exploring the research question, as previously stated, I have used an unobtrusive research methodology that has consisted of reading historical, autobiographical, and fieldwork

studies of the strip trade in Canada and the United States. As I read through the literature I collected on the strip trade I had already decided that I would be exploring the strip trade from a dramaturgical approach. This was a largely inductive approach, similar to Glaser and Strauss's "grounded theory" method, as I did not begin with a comprehensive theory but rather, a theory emerged during the study. Dramaturgical principles are what Blumer refers to as "sensitizing" concepts in that they provide a good starting point, but do not provide a theoretical framework that is comprehensive enough to fully explain complex research questions. During my readings of twenty books and journal articles that captured the voices of over fifty strippers, I began pulling out quotes that related to dramaturgical concepts and the presentation of self. Once I had a notebook filled with approximately sixty quotes I began to think of how I could group this qualitative data to be better organized and make more sense. I began clustering quotes of a similar nature together until I was able to form three performative categories that each quote could be grouped into. Through this process, it became apparent how important the three performative elements of gender, body and emotion were to the everyday work of female strippers.

**A dramaturgical approach**

9 From Goffman's dramaturgical approach, the social world is perceived as a stage where actors continuously engage an audience in theatrical performance. The self is perceived as a malleable construction that must be appropriately prepared, presented and managed to ensure a successful performance on the part of the social actor. Goffman's dramaturgical approach centers on his concepts of: the definition of the situation, impression management, social acts or performances, and the theater as everyday life. Goffman suggests that social actors come to a "working consensus" on the "definition of the situation" through the negotiated meanings of symbolic interaction (4, 9). In any given interaction, a social actor will attempt to present their desired self to an audience who will have an expectation of what that self should entail. Goffman suggests that in social interaction, there is a negotiation of meaning between the social actor and the audience on how the self of the social actor should be performed. When the social actor performs their desired self to an audience, and the audience responds, this symbolic negotiation of meaning leads to a working consensus on the definition of the situation.

10 To maintain this desired presentation of self throughout the duration of the performance, the social actor must engage in "impression management". Goffman suggests that impression management is particularly important for social actors to engage in after

making mistakes in their performances through their own errors or through external factors that threaten the identity of the performer. Goffman writes, "events may occur within the interaction which contradict, discredit, or otherwise throw doubt upon this projection. When these disruptive events occur, the interaction itself may come to a confused and embarrassed halt" (12).

11 The self, for Goffman, is of social origin and can be shaped and molded to present different identities in different social interactions. Keeping with his theatrical metaphor, Goffman's dramaturgical approach centers on his metaphor of the social world as theater. Goffman divides this theatrical social world into front and back regions. The stage of the front region can be considered to be one of the rare structural components to Goffman's dramaturgical approach. The stage provides the actor an area to perform on and a role to play; however, the stage can also constrain the individual as they must play the role that is expected of them — certain plays are performed in certain theaters, i.e. a doctor performs in a hospital, a professor performs in a classroom, while a stripper performs in a strip club.

12 Other dramaturgists, Mangham and Overington, further suggest that a successful social performance is one that appears natural. A natural performance is achieved when the audience does not consider the stage that social actor is performing on, as well as the other elements of the performance such as the preparation required, the backstage, props, or the director. The performance comes across to the audience as though it is not really a performance at all- the successful social performance appears natural or authentic.

**Performances of Gender**

13 Gender is of central importance to the everyday work of female strippers. An interesting theoretical framework to look at the performances of gender is through Judith Butler's performative theory of gender identity. Aspects of this theory can be tied to Goffman's dramaturgical approach via their similar conceptions of identity as performance. Butler's approach also brings in important ideas on how identity performances are conditioned through transactions of power. Furthermore, she does not regard the body and gender as separate entities but rather, regards both as being produced through discourse. These important sociological concepts of discourse and power are neglected in Goffman's work. The main premise behind Judith Butler's theory is that gender is not of natural origin but rather, of social origin. She writes:

> Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free floating attributes… gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance,

> gender proves to be performative [. . .] in this sense, gender is always a doing. (Butler 24-25)

Central to Butler's work is the idea that gender is crucial to the presentation of identity; social actors must prepare, present and manage appropriate gender identities in their everyday life and work. Butler further suggests that gender and sexuality are constructed within the terms of dominant discourse and power. Butler brings in the concept of power to reveal the constraints that social actors have in the gender roles that they play — social actors play gender roles based on the cultural scripts that reify and naturalize the binary gender model of male/female.

14 The preparation, presentation and management of an appropriate gender identity is particularly important to the everyday work of female strippers. Bruckert describes strip clubs as "male spaces" where men come to be masculine. The clubs that Bruckert describes are hyper-masculine; they have sporting events broadcasted on televisions, pool tables, dartboards, video games, beer, as well as overtly feminine strippers teasing and taming the sexual desires of men. Liepe-Levinson suggests that the appropriate display of femininity, as desired by male strip club patrons, is central to a stripper's ability to earn money. Heidi Mattison recounts the response of the male crowd to her performance as a police officer as being silent and unsure until her clothes began to come off revealing her feminine physique. Similarly, Cody suggests that women in the strip trade rarely have any traditionally masculine physical features but rather, are clearly distinguishable as feminine from every angle.

15 Judith Butler's point of departure from Goffman is her account of how the performances of social actors are scripted. Goffman does not really get at why people perform as they do; he does not look at how structures of power condition and shape the social actor's performance. Butler suggests that gender and sexuality are constructed, reified and naturalized through transactions of power. This theory raises some interesting questions about gender and sexuality in the contemporary strip trade: Who are the authors of the gender scripts that guide the performances of strippers? Is stripping an avenue for women to freely express their gender and sexuality? Does masculine hegemony and power in the contemporary strip trade oppress the gender and sexuality of female strippers?

16 These questions are at the center of a larger feminist debate on the liberating and oppressive aspects of sex trade work, including the strip trade. The two-sides of this debate, while not clear-cut opposites, are radical anti-pornography feminism and liberal sex-positive feminism. Most anti-pornography feminists (Morgan; Dworkin; MacKinnon) argue that female sex trade work is inherently oppressive to women, while many sex-positive feminists

(Willis; Rubin; McElroy) counter this argument suggesting that female sex trade work can be liberating for women. The central idea behind anti-pornography feminism is that all female sex trade work is oppressive and exploitative to women and that government policy should regulate and restrict such work. In contrast, sex-positive feminists believe that such policies and laws impinge upon the liberty of women by telling them what they can and cannot do with their bodies.

17 From the perspective of anti-pornography feminists, stripping is exploitative, oppressive and harmful to female strip trade workers. They would suggest that stripping is inherently exploitative to strippers because they are being objectified by men and forced to perform under patriarchal notions of sexiness in order to make their money (Segal). Anti-pornography feminists would also look at the conditions upon which strippers enter the strip trade; they would argue that this is not done out of rational free-choice but rather, that strippers have likely been abused throughout their lives by men, and that they entered the strip trade because they were coerced or thought that it was their only choice (MacKinnon). In more general terms, anti-pornography feminists suggest that the oppression and exploitation of women in the sex trade is both a cause and symptom of the oppression and exploitation of women in general. They suggest that women are oppressed in a patriarchal society and thus, the sex trade is perceived as an extension of patriarchal power and that women are inherently exploited and oppressed by men in these sex trade industries (MacKinnon). Radical anti-pornography feminist Robin Morgan writes, "pornography is the theory, rape is the practice" (139). The idea here is that sex trade work, such as stripping, eroticizes the oppression, domination and humiliation of women, which reinforces the cultural toleration of physical, verbal and sexual violence against women (Cole). Radical anti-pornography feminists do not perceive sex trade work as liberating because these women are working within the confines of the sexual preferences and demands of men — they are not perceived as the authors of their own gender and sexuality (MacKinnon).

18 Liberal sex-positive feminists would disagree that women in the sex trade, such as strippers, are inherently exploited and oppressed. Sex-positive feminism is rooted in the idea that the sexual freedom of women is essential to the overall freedom of women and thus, there should not be limitations such as social policy or societal stigma placing restrictions on sex trade workers (McElroy). The sex-positive feminists would suggest that strippers are able to liberate themselves from the heavy chains that patriarchal society has placed on their gender and sexuality; strippers are able to embrace their feelings of sexiness and use this to make money. Unlike the radical anti-pornography feminists who may suggest that strippers are

exploited in their work, the sex-positive feminist may question who in fact is being exploited. Furthermore, the sex-positive feminist believes that the stripper can make the rational choice to strip, and that she should be given the freedom to make this choice if she wants to; the stripping industry would become oppressive if the government placed strict rules on freedoms of sexual expression such as stripping (McElroy). Sex-positive feminists also suggest that free acts of female sexual expression are liberating for all women, as such acts challenge the traditionally repressive nature of female sexuality (Dragu & Harrison). In this regard, sex-positive feminists perceive strippers as active agents who are not only liberating themselves through their sexual expression, but are liberating all women by challenging the rigid norms surrounding feminine sexuality.

19 Butler's performative theory of gender provides insight into understanding the divide between the liberating and oppressive aspects of the contemporary strip trade. Butler suggests that while gender and sexuality are often reified and thus naturalized, they really do not exist above and beyond the control of social actors. However, she also suggests that social actors are not free to perform gender outside of established cultural scripts that guide appropriate performances of gender and sexuality. Basically, structure and agency exist in a dialectical relationship with one another — the performances of social actors shape gender, and gender shapes the performances of social actors. This dialectical relationship suggests that the contemporary strip trade can be both liberating and oppressive to strippers. This is the double-standard of stripping: strippers have the freedom to express their gender and sexuality, but they must do so within the confines of a socially marginalized institution that is fueled by the sexual desires of male patrons, and the financial desires of male strip club owners and managers.

20 Contrary to what radical anti-pornography feminists suggest, strippers can and do find their work liberating and empowering. Cheryl Bartlett describes the empowerment that she found in stripping as follows: "I know that I am a stronger, smarter, happier person for having walked a mile or two in sexy, dangerous shoes" (161). Burana describes the empowering aspect of stripping as follows: "I am not a reformed nerd from New Jersey walking around with no underpants on[. . .] I am a goddess clothed in my own power" and later, "we [strippers] are gender warriors, reestablishing the parameters of enlightened female behavior" (174, 205). Another dancer states:

> The first time I saw my sisters dance I knew it would be fun. Dancing is part of my character. It's another side of me. When I'm working at the hospital I have to be focused and serious and make decisions. If I did this everyday it would be boring. When I'm at the club I can flirt and be sexual and have fun. It's an ego trip. (Futterman 19)

Similarly, after extensive research Dragu and Harrison challenge the radical anti-pornography view that strippers are "objects" or "victims", suggesting that they are more akin to artists and activists than victims. These experiences of women in the strip trade suggest that female strippers can and do find enjoyment in their work, as well as an avenue for self-expression.

21 However, the radical anti-pornography view that female sex workers can become female sex objects can be supported by the experiences of female strippers. While Burana reveals that stripping liberates her from conservative notions of gender and sexuality, she also suggests that her gender and sexuality are continuously objectified and commodified by male patrons. Through the commercial transactions of the strip trade, clothed men sit and watch women take of their clothes and dance naked. For strippers to make money, they must appeal to the sexual desires and fantasies of men placing them in a position of privilege — it is men who are clothed and women who are naked; there is both power and vulnerability in this transaction.

22 In their everyday work, strippers must give performances that break conventional patriarchal notions of female sexuality, while simultaneously reinforcing patriarchal norms. Dahlia Schweitzer writes: "she is both a sex goddess and a feminine coquette" (72). Similarly, Dragu and Harrison write:

> More important than either looks or ability are the unexpected standards that strippers perform with ladylike decorum. This means a sense of modesty, and the observance of certain feminine traditions, such as cleanliness and hairlessness [. . .] The demand that strippers be ladylike exists as a kind of counterpoint to an ever present expectation that they are going to do something gross. It is common to hear a customer praising a particular stripper for being a lady. What he means is that she isn't as much of a whore as you would expect a stripper to be. (17)

The performances of female strippers involve a balance between traditional femininity and deviant sexual expression. The performance of gender in the female stripper's everyday work is not simply the display of a natural or socialized gender or sexuality — the cultural script of the contemporary strip trade places female strippers in a position where they must negotiate the impossible dichotomy of performing as both a madonna and a whore (Dragu and Harrison). They must uphold traditional patriarchal norms of femininity and female sexual expression in their everyday work, while simultaneously breaking these norms.

**Performances of Body**

23 Like Judith Butler's performative theory of gender, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction ("Cultural Reproduction") has many aspects that tie closely to Goffman's dramaturgical approach, particularly in their similar conceptions of the manipulation and

management of identity in symbolic interaction. Butler's main point of departure from Goffman's dramaturgical approach is her application of the concept of power to the everyday performances of identity of social actors. Pierre Bourdieu departs from Goffman most notably, in regard to this study, in his application of economic principles to social interaction ("Cultural Reproduction").

24 According to Bourdieu, "economics is one of the major reference points for sociology" (*Other Words* 46). He is not suggesting that sociologists should adopt the viewpoint of an economist to better understand social phenomenon but rather, that economics are central to social life and everyday interaction and thus, should not be ignored in social inquiry. According to Bourdieu, the social world cannot be divided into things that are economic and things that are not; economics flow through all of the fields of the social world (*Other Words*). This section will explore how the bodies of strippers are performed in their everyday work from a Bourdieuian approach, and will reveal how the bodies of strippers can become commodified.

25 Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction begins to take shape in his analysis of how social inequalities are reproduced or inherited by further generations through the education system ("Cultural Reproduction"). In basic terms, he suggests that parents with occupations of a higher status such as lawyers or doctors are able to accumulate greater amounts of cultural capital such as books, visits to museums, and trips to Europe than parents with occupations of a lower status such as farmers can accumulate. The children of parents holding upper class occupations can then accumulate greater amounts of cultural capital that is highly valued in the academic field, which brings them success in the education system. This higher attainment of education can be converted into other forms of capital, particularly economic capital. This, in a very basic sense, is how Bourdieu explained the reproduction of social structures and inequalities ("Cultural Reproduction").

26 To understand Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction more clearly, one must understand the three main components of his theory: field, habitus and capital. The first important concept to Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction is what he terms the "field." Bourdieu defines the field as:

> A network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to specific profits that are at stake in the field. (*Invitation* 97)

Bourdieu suggests that the field is a set of organizing principles for groups, which identify,

structure and place values on their social practices (*Invitation*). This paper is a study of the specific field of the strip trade, which entails the exploration of how the strip trade is organized, and what forms of capital are most valued in the field of stripping. Bourdieu (Invitation) suggests that the field is an arena of competition, where social actors compete to accumulate capital and the power to define the values of the field. Bourdieu writes, "A capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field" (*Invitation* 101).

27 For Bourdieu, capital is synonymous with power ("Forms"). A person's capital is created through the degree of asymmetry or conflict between their habitus and a particular field. Bourdieu defines the habitus as: "the durable and transposable systems of schemata of perception, appreciation, and action that result from the institution of the social in the body" (*Invitation* 126-127). Each individual social actor has a habitus that is a composition of his or her social history; it is everything that the social actor has learned, experienced and accumulated throughout their life. A person's habitus shapes how they appear, what they know and how they act. If a person's habitus closely mirrors the values of a particular field, he or she will be successful in accumulating capital in that field. The more capital an individual accumulates within a particular field, the more power he or she has to define the values of that field. This constant competition for capital or power within fields is how Bourdieu, in basic terms, explains the formation and reproduction of social structure (*Cultural Reproduction*).

28 Chris Shilling (2003) suggests that Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction can be used to explore the commodification of bodies. In a basic sense, to commodify something is to turn it into an article of trade or commerce that is processed and sold. According to Bourdieu , economic principles flow through all of the fields of the social world (*Other Words*). From this perspective, the body becomes a form of capital; more specifically, it becomes a form of physical capital. The body is an unfinished entity that is developed, presented and managed to become a bearer of symbolic value. The manner in which a person's body has been developed, presented and managed through such things as movements, gestures, and expressions is rooted in an individual's habitus. The closer an individual's performance of body mirrors the value of a field, the more physical capital he or she will accumulate in that field.

29 According to Bourdieu there are different forms of capital that are interconvertible with each other form at a symbolic rate of exchange (*Cultural Reproduction*). This suggests that those who are able to accumulate physical capital through successful performances of body will be able to exchange this form of capital for other forms of capital. Bourdieu suggests that there are three main species of capital: economic, cultural and social capital

("Forms"). Shilling suggests that the two most important species of capital in relation to the field of stripping are: physical and economic capital. In the field of stripping, physical capital is accumulated through the appropriate performance of body, which can then be converted into economic capital. Lockford writes: "Bodies in the strip club are the currency by which status among the dancers is negotiated with the clientele" (90).

30 According to Bruckert, the most valued form of the female body in the field of stripping is to be: tall, slim, feminine, well endowed, blonde and beautiful. Dragu and Harrison write: "the conventionally sexy qualities of blondeness and a big bosom are highly prized in strippers" (16). This is not to say that other body types do not exist amongst strippers, but this body type appears to have what Bourdieu would consider the highest exchange rate in the field of stripping (*Theory of Practice*). This same body form may be of little symbolic value in other fields, such as in academia, but in the stripping industry it appears to have the highest symbolic exchange rate with economic capital. Mattson describes her feelings about using her body to make money in the strip trade:

> Looks were a tool the way intellect was a tool. Until now I had felt that using appearance and one's sexuality to get ahead was unfair, but then, I reasoned, those same categories are often used by society to determine the merits of women. Why was I above tapping into the system? It was happening already without me. What if I turned the tables? (90)

Mattson later writes: "I was using the power of my body" (115). Both of these statements are very much in tune with the idea that the body of the stripper is a form of symbolic value. It is through the conversion of physical capital into economic capital that the bodies of strippers essentially become commodified — the closer the commodity is to what the purchaser or strip club patron wants, the greater the amount of money or economic capital the commodity will generate.

31 Likewise, if a stripper's body veers too far from the ideal body valued in the field of stripping, the amount of symbolic physical capital she will be able to accumulate will be minimal. This will make it difficult for her to accumulate other forms of capital, particularly economic capital, i.e. if she does not have the right appearance she will have minimal potential to make money. Diamond provides an example of how an unvalued appearance can reduce one's opportunities in the strip trade. She writes: "every now and then in the upscale clubs, the owners could clean house, meaning if they thought you had gained too much weight, you were warned to lose it or lose your job" (88). Similarly, Bruckert suggests that a stripper's potential to make money in the strip trade diminishes if her body is physically scarred or blemished. Strippers can and do deviate from the ideal body type that is valued in

the field of stripping, but such deviations limit their potential to make money.

32 The development of the ideal body of the stripper takes work. One stripper writes: "I try to work out and tan daily, and keep my weight down" (Futterman 60). Plastic surgery, particularly breast enlargements and augmentations, are also common amongst women in the strip trade to achieve the "well endowed" body form that is so highly valued. Heidi Mattson writes:

> As absurd as they were, the breasts brought in more bucks. Breasts didn't have to be beautiful, just big. Among the Foxy Ladies, it was general knowledge that big equaled an automatic promotion, a giant step up the stripper status ladder. I had to think about it… breasts bring more money, shouldn't I stock up on the tools of the trade? A couple of thousand bucks for a couple hundred cc's of silicone or saline that'll bring me a hundred or more each night. (224)

Mattson also writes: "with tits you make so much more" (226). Katherine Frank writes: "For many dancers, silicone or saline implants have become the ultimate accessories, as real breasts are increasingly found to be lacking in aesthetic perfection by the customers" (179). Breast enlargement is so central to the occupation of strippers that they can deduct the cost of their surgery from their yearly income when doing their taxes (Mattson). The economics of this equation are simple: larger breasts equal greater income. It does not mean that women with small or average sized breasts cannot be strippers, but it suggests that they will have less potential for earning money in the field of stripping because large breasts appear to be an important value to the field.

33 But, having large breasts is not an instant guarantee that a stripper will be able to make a lot of money; not only must strippers posses bodies that have the appropriate form that is valued in their social field, but they must also present and manage their bodies in a manner that is valued in the field of stripping. According to Liepe-Levinson, the ideal presentation of the stripper is a performance of desire, availability, confidence, femininity and sexiness. Such a performance requires movements and gestures of the body that portray this persona. Diamond writes: "One thing that you can't do in this business is fake it. The guys can read the body language and they can see it in your eyes. Whether they know it or not, guys will pick up on your bad mood and they will avoid you like the plague" (28). Another dancer, Sathen Black writes: "Before long I went from an average producer to a top money-maker, and a true professional in what I did best: act" (53). Katherine Frank also provides a vivid description of the performance of body in her everyday work. She writes:

> To stay in bodily control of one's responses was also to stay in financial control of the situation. At the same time, to feel, imagine, or perform a bodily response could lend the interaction authenticity and could feel exciting, liberating and transgressive. Finding the balance between these states was tricky, yet successful dancers could help

> to do so through their self presentations and interactions — through their productions and expressions of their body, behaviors, identities and conversations. (Frank 153-154)

Similar to Goffman, Bourdieu suggests that social actors manipulate their identity in their presentation of self (*Other Words*); however, unlike Goffman, Bourdieu suggests that individuals manipulate their identity in a symbolic struggle for capital — the symbolic negotiation that takes place in interaction is a negotiation of power. For Bourdieu, the strip club could be considered an arena of symbolic transactions that are communicated through the language of the body (*Other Words*). For the stripper to have the highest possible earning potential, she must develop, present and manage her body appropriately, in a manner valued by the field of stripping, in her everyday work.

34 While it appears quite clear what the values of the strip trade are as they relate to the development and performance of the stripper's body, it is not clear how these came to be values of the strip trade. How did these values form? Who guides the values of the strip trade? Bourdieu (Invitation) suggests that the values of a particular field are determined through the power of definition, which entails a competitive struggle to attain and mobilize resources to guide the direction and values of that field. For Bourdieu, the individuals that guide a field are those that have the most sought after or valued resources in that field. Stripping as an occupational field of work centers on economic capital or money (*Invitation*); thus, it can be presupposed that individuals with the largest amount of economic capital have the greatest influence on defining the values of the field of stripping. Based on this induction, it appears that it is the patrons with the largest amount of economic resources at their disposal who are able to determine which forms of physical capital have the best exchange rate into economic capital and thus, have the greatest influence on the values of the field of stripping — they hold the power of definition. This is supported by Katherine Frank's claim that it is not the men buying beer but rather, the men buying bottle after bottle of champagne that have the most power in determining the values of the strip trade.

35 Bourdieu would also suggest that the values of a field can and do change through time. Thus, the symbolic value of the form and presentation of the bodies of strippers can also change through time. Bourdieu would attribute such a change to a complex struggle between individuals and groups within a particular field over the power to define the values of that field. Changes in the valued form of the bodies of strippers have occurred as the individuals with the ability to generate, mobilize and convert forms of capital, particularly economic capital, have changed their values of the ideal body type of strippers. Each individual has a habitus that forms these individual values through the accumulation of all of their experiences

in various social fields. In this way, individuals are shaped by social structures and also shape social structures — this is the essence of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction.

**Performances of Emotion**

42 A third performative aspect of the everyday work of strippers is the preparation, presentation and management of emotion. In *The Managed Heart*, Arlie Hochschild details an interesting theory of emotion work that appears to be applicable to the work of strippers. Hochschild defines emotion work as labor that "requires one to induce of suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (7). Building on Goffman's dramaturgical principles, Hochschild suggests that workers, particularly service workers, must continuously engage in a specific form of impression management — emotion management. For Hochschild, emotion is not merely a biological drive, but is something that social actors can manage and feign in their everyday work. Hochschild suggests that social actors must manage their emotions based on what she terms "feeling rules" (56). Feeling rules are the emotive expectations that the social audience holds towards the performer in given social contexts.

43 For Goffman, the performances and impression management of social actors are accomplished through outward appearances or surface acting. Hochschild describes surface acting as follows: "the action is in the body language, the put-on sneer, the controlled sigh" (35). Hochschild's theory of emotion work goes beyond the surface performances of social actors. She expands performances into two separate types: surface acting and deep acting. In surface acting, the body, not the deep inner feelings of the social actor, is the main tool of the trade; the emotions of the social actor only appear real. In deep acting, social actors attempt to convince themselves to actually feel the feelings that they are performing; the social actor not only pretends to the audience, but they also pretend to themselves.

44 Hochschild contends that the constant preparation, presentation and management of emotion in everyday work can lead social actors to become estranged from their own feelings. Hochschild derives this theory through the application of Marx's theory of alienation to emotion work. Marx suggests that the capitalist profit motive will lead to the alienation of physical labors. Hochschild suggests that the capitalist profit motive is now serving to estrange service workers from their true feelings through their emotion labor. She writes:

> Those who perform emotional labor in the course of giving service are like those who perform physical labor in the course of making things: both are subject to the rules of mass production. But when the product — the thing to be engineered, mass-produced, and subjected to speed-up and slow down — is a smile, a mood, a feeling, or a relationship, it comes to belong more to the relationship and less to the self.

(Hochschild 198)

Hochschild suggests that the workers themselves may no longer be able to differentiate when they are actually feeling from when they are just acting; they become emotionally numb, estranged from their own feelings as a result of the capitalist profit motive.

45 Hochschild's theory of emotion work is particularly relevant to the performances of emotion of strippers in the contemporary strip trade. In their everyday work, strippers must engage in impression and emotion management by creating, managing and displaying appropriate emotions, and suppressing inappropriate ones. Bruckert writes: "sexuality is merely a superficial visual play that facilitates and legitimizes the emotional labour through which dancers make their money" (157). The main elements of the emotion labor of strippers are: presenting appropriate emotions, suppressing inappropriate emotions, and using their emotive performances to influence the demeanor of others. Just as Hochschild warns, the constant performances of emotion that strippers must engage in come at a cost — over time strippers appear to become estranged from their own true feelings and become emotionally numb.

46 The appropriate performance of emotion of female strippers is determined by the normative emotive standards or feeling rules of the contemporary strip trade. As Liepe-Levinson suggests, the appropriate performance of the female stripper should elicit: sexiness, desire, femininity and availability. Eaves writes: "Our job wasn't just to be naked, it was to look and behave as though the customers really turned us on. For a convincing performance, men were willing to pay" (85). This need for the stripper to manage her emotions is constant. Bruckert writes: "A woman working in a strip club as a stripper has, first and foremost, to act like a stripper; whether she is on stage or not she is always performing" (71). Strippers may not actually be feeling sexy or desirable while they are working, but they must continuously manage this impression. Lauri Lewin writes: "And even those dancers who seemed to love the rug with sexual abandon [. . .] felt no passion, did not get turned on, *only acted the part*" (74; emphasis added).

47 Much of the emotion management, adherence to feeling rules, and performances of emotion of female strippers appear to be done in terms of surface acting. The surface acting of the stripper entails such things as: the bump or grind in her dance routine, the extended gaze at the male patron, a blown kiss to another dancer, a white dress to appear innocent, a red satin gown to appear seductive, or even the physical alterations she has done to her body, i.e. enlarged breasts. Surface acting is done to convince the audience that the dancer is feeling something that she is not actually feeling. At the surface level, it is the performances of the

body that are key; the language of the body communicates the emotions of the stripper.

48 It also appears common for strippers to engage in what Hochschild termed "deep acting," whereby they actively attempt to alter their inner feelings so that they are not in tension with the feeling rules of their work. Hochschild suggests that deep acting is best achieved by drawing on emotional memories (35). One stripper, Lauri Lewin, does this by imagining herself playing out sexual fantasies with her lover while she is on stage to help feign her performances of sexual passion to the audience. An interesting inner dialogue she describes while on stage went as follows: "In his room we kissed tentatively. His lips were soft . . . I push him back on the bed . . . I began to release myself to an intensity of passion that far surpassed sensation" (80-81). A patron in the club then interrupted her inner dialogue. She continues: "Take off the bra! A man at the Nudie-Tease yelled . . . the voices at the Nudie-Tease brought me back" (80-81). Frank suggests that deep acting lends an aura of authenticity to the performances of strippers. Building on Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, she suggests that authenticity is a form of symbolic capital in the field of stripping. Similarly, Diane Reay suggests a new Bourdieuian species of capital that she refers to as "emotional capital." The idea here is that a stripper can accumulate emotional capital through the appropriate performances of emotion in her everyday work. Keeping with Bourdieu's framework, this emotion capital can be converted into other forms of capital, particularly economic capital. It is for this reason that Heidi Mattson trenchantly describes stripping as, "a perilous mixture of emotion and economics" (179).

49 According to Hochschild, the appropriate performance of emotion also requires the suppression of inappropriate emotions. This appears to be a difficult aspect of the performative work of strippers. A stripper names Blondie writes: "It's hard sometimes because you have to keep up. You can't be sad or depressed. You have to show this public image" (Futterman 46). Burana details the difficulty she found in suppressing her feelings of nervousness while working as a stripper. She writes:

> I lie back, press my feet on the stage and push up onto my toes as I wind my torso and work my thong down. I roll over onto my side and straighten my legs, sending my thong flying. The lights are hot on my skin. Here I am, bare-assed on the last frontier. I start to float away from myself a little because I am nervous. But I'm pretty much ok. I stand up and try to stay in character. (Burana 174)

Burana reveals how difficult it can be for strippers to suppress their inappropriate emotions and avoid giving the audience any hints that what is going on in their minds and bodies may have little to do with their sexy and passionate performances. Bruckert details the account of a stripper who was unable to suppress her inappropriate emotions while on stage. She writes:

> I'll listen to music and I'll watch TV and I'll just dance. I've been doing it, you know when you do it so often you're looking straight at people's eyes but you're kind of looking over yonder, looking at the TV there. You're doing your little crawl and you're giggling inside 'cause there's some show on. I mean I've lost it completely because I was doing a show and I was trying to talk to someone and The Simpsons came on TV and I started pissing myself laughing . . . I walked off the stage. (Bruckert 71)

Hochschild, as well as Thoits, would label such an example "emotional deviance", as the stripper's performance of sexiness and desire broke down because her inappropriate inner feelings were visible on the surface through her laughter.

50 A common emotion that strippers must suppress is anger. In their daily work, strippers must continuously deal with intoxicated men, many of whom have little respect for women and strippers in particular. Bruckert suggests that strippers are able to manage their feelings of anger and resentment towards customers through "hidden transcripts" or inner dialogues where the stripper tries to create scenarios, draw on emotive memories, and put things in perspective all within her own thoughts. One method of doing this, that Bruckert suggests, is to perceive the male patron as a small child; flight attendants are taught to use a similar technique to deal with unruly customers (Hochschild). Similarly, both Black and Bruckert suggest that strippers will often convince themselves that the men in the audience are just "wallets," or anonymous individuals to profit from. Hochschild also suggests the importance of teamwork or "collective emotion labor" to help social actors suppress inappropriate emotions. This is where the back stage region of the strip trade becomes especially important to strippers, as it gives them a region to talk with other dancers, and calm their inappropriate feelings — providing these feelings are not towards other dancers. Bruckert suggests that this is becoming problematic in the contemporary strip trade as increased industry competitiveness and instability is causing a decrease in stripper camaraderie.

51 Hochschild further suggests that emotion labor also involves influencing and guiding the emotions of others. To provide a contrast of how this occurs, Hochschild compares the emotion labor of flight attendants with bill collectors. The emotion labor of flight attendants entails inflating the customers' status and making them feel important, while the bill collector's emotion labor entails deflating the customers status to wear them down into paying what they owe. Hochschild refers to this as the toe and the heel of the corporate world. Interestingly, the emotion labor of female strippers appears to encompass both aspects of emotion work. Strippers must make the customer feel important and special to make their money, but they must also keep the men under control and collect their money from patrons that often refuse to pay following lap dances. Frank writes: "many sex workers also frequently joke about really being "therapists" and understand that their job is to be about boosting a

man's ego by convincing him that he is desirable, masculine, and successful" (119). The idea here is to inflate the status of the customer, to make them feel special, so that they will be more inclined to spend money and return for further visits to the strip club. Strippers must also be able to deflate the status of men to keep the patrons under control and ensure that they respect the boundaries of the dancers and pay what they owe.

52 Hochschild's main concern is that emotion work, such as that of the stripper, will lead to the commercialization of human feeling, which might estrange workers from their own true emotions. This type of emotional numbness appears to be common in the contemporary strip trade. Lewin writes: "If I reached a point of emotional exhaustion, I hid out in the bathroom… sometimes I spent half the day in hiding" (118). She further states: "I asked myself why I felt numb… Lovemaking, in my mind, became like a floor show for two people, and act, the "sex act". I could no longer locate myself in my body. I watched myself and imagined being watched [. . .] still, I must pretend" (Lewin 169). She continues, "I still felt a pain in my gut, a solitary sensation in an overall state of numbness. Wishing I could cry, I curled up in a ball on my living-room rug" (Lewin 174). Lewin was also the stripper who would fantasize about her lover while performing to evoke a more authentic performance; the result of this form of deep acting is that she appears to no longer be able to feel her emotions when she is actually with her lover — she just feels emotionally numb. Another stripper named Carmen writes:

> It's a constant emotional rollercoaster. Sometimes it's gotten so bad when I wasn't making good money, and some customer would say something that I would misunderstand, and I would start crying and run into the dressing room. I couldn't function for an hour or two after that. You can't make any money when you aren't functioning. It gets even more frustrating. You have to be like a soldier. (Futterman 26)

Burana describes the emotional numbness that strippers encounter as "stripper damage." She defines stripper damage as a "permanently shell-shocked look… that inability to de-dramatize" (Burana 221).

53 Hochschild's theory of emotion work provides insight into how and why strippers must prepare, present and manage their emotions in their everyday work. In order to make money, strippers must continuously perform acts that elicit sexiness, availability, femininity and desire regardless of what they may actually be feeling. To abide by these feeling rules of stripping, strippers may engage in surface acting through the language of their body, or they may engage in deep acting by attempting to alter their inner feelings. The emotion labor of strippers also requires them to both inflate and deflate the status of their customers; they must give performances that appear authentic to accumulate emotional capital, while also managing to get paid without tainting this authenticity. This constant emotion labor comes at cost to

strippers; they encounter what Burana terms "stripper damage," and may become estranged from their true emotions.

**Performative capital and the estrangement of self**

54 The everyday work of strippers requires the simultaneous and continuous performance of: gender, body and emotion. Each of these elements are interrelated and simultaneously performed by female strippers. For example, performances of emotion are part of the social construction of one's gender, just as the performances of one's gender are part of the social construction of one's emotions. Furthermore, the body serves to symbolically communicate these "engendered emotions" to others in social interaction (Petersen 2004). This simultaneous performance of gender, body and emotion can be taken as the stripper's performance of self.

55 For the female stripper, the amount of money or economic capital she can accumulate is in direct relation to how closely her performance of self mirrors that which is valued in the field of stripping. That is, a stripper's success is determined by how much "performative capital" she can accumulate to be later converted into economic capital at a symbolic rate of exchange. Accumulating performative capital in the female strip trade appears to include such things as: behaving in a traditionally feminine manner, while simultaneously breaking traditional patriarchal norms; constructing and presenting a body that is tall, slim, feminine and well-endowed; presenting emotions that elicit sexiness, desire, femininity and passion; and, suppressing inappropriate or unvalued emotions such as sadness or anger. Furthermore, the accumulation of performative capital would require the stripper to make all of this performing appear "natural" — as though it was not even a performance at all.

56 It is through this symbolic transaction of performative capital into economic capital that the stripper might become estranged from her self. Former stripper Lily Burana supports this theory of the estrangement of self when she writes: "some very tiny part of every dancer's soul spills out when she performs" (180). Similarly, Heidi Mattson writes: "Stripping was a mine field. Playing the dumb blonde, Binki giggled and blushed her way to a stuffed safe deposit box — and a terribly confused self-image. She didn't know who she was anymore." And finally, Dahlia Schweitzer writes: "The fake is the real thing, and the real thing is a shadow of its former self" (66).

**Conclusion**

57 This study has revealed that the contemporary female strip trade is characterized by

precarious or unstable working conditions. These conditions have led to an intense level of competitiveness amongst female strippers and require strippers to engage in hard, skillful work. For strippers to have success in earning money they must abide by the values of the stripping field. In this study, the concept of performative capital has been developed to explain how and why female strippers prepare, present, and manage their gender, bodies, and emotions in their everyday work. This concept was derived through a synthesis of dramaturgical elements that appear in the work of Goffman, Butler, Bourdieu, and Hochschild.

58 Other studies, such as those done by Bruckert and Liepe-Levinson, have explored performative aspects of stripping in some detail; however, the synthesized dramaturgical theory developed in this paper provides a broader and more useful approach to studying the everyday performances of self of female strippers. This theory has important sociological concepts of gender, structure, power, and economics interwoven into a dramaturgical framework. The everyday interactions of strippers are generally mediated by money and thus, it seems vital to explore the interrelationship of economics and symbolic interaction. Applying these concepts allows one to move beyond the limitations of Goffman's dramaturgical approach.

59 The basic idea behind the synthesized dramaturgical theory developed in this paper is that the success of a female stripper's performance is in direct correlation to the amount of performative capital she is able to accumulate. The successful performance of female strippers entails abiding by the values of the stripping field, as previously discussed. Likewise, deviation from these values would limit the stripper's potential to earn money — the contemporary female stripping industry is competitive enough that if one stripper is not able to accumulate performative capital, another stripper can readily take her place. As evidenced throughout this paper, the accumulation of performative capital through the successful performances of gender, body, and emotion is how strippers are able to make their money — they convert performative capital into economic capital. However, it is also through this symbolic transaction that the self of the stripper is commodified and might ultimately lead to the estrangement of the stripper's self.

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