



**WOMEN'S
SUPPORT
PROJECT**



**ADULT ENTERTAINMENT
OR EXPLOITATION?**

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In the last 10 years over 300 clubs have opened up all over the UK with 21 in Scotland¹. This increase in venues offering adult entertainment involving nudity is part of the increased normalisation of the sex industry and exploitation of women for sexual purposes. Thanks to aggressive marketing from the industry, many lap-dancing venues are promoted as upmarket gentlemen's clubs. They advertise glamorous jobs for women based on making huge amounts of money. Pole dancing/fitness classes are promoted as the sexy way to keep fit, increase your confidence and to please your man! However the reality of being involved in the lap dancing industry is rarely discussed. For many women working in lap dancing clubs the reality is not so glamorous or empowering.

We have taken some of the arguments that people use in favour of lap dancing and presented the reality to support people who want to take action against commercial sexual exploitation.

¹ <http://www.ukstripclubs.com/scotland/>

It explodes the myth that it can be likened to, and regulated in the same way as karaoke, live music and cabaret. These establishments are not providing benign and harmless fun. Make no mistake, this is sheer exploitation of women – sexual and financial. These are sleazy strip clubs and no amount of talk of being 'up market', 'elegant', and 'top end of the market' will change that.

Councillor Jim Coleman, Deputy Leader of Glasgow City Council, from the foreword to Profitable Exploits 2004

FICTION – THE WOMEN MAKE LOADS OF MONEY – IT’S A GREAT JOB.

A small number of women who work in big clubs, go on ‘tours’ or appear in ‘lads mags’ may make lots of money, but for a lot of women involved in lap dancing this isn’t true. In most clubs the women are self-employed and have to pay house fees to the club each night. They can also be fined for a variety of reasons like wearing the wrong shoes; hair not being styled in the right way or refusing drinks. The club owners tend to have far more women working than necessary in order to make more money for themselves. Women face the prospect of being out of pocket at the end of the night and so may feel pressure to break their own boundaries and go further in terms of sexual contact. It is the club owners who make lots of money from the customers, not the women.

FACT – Research, which included visits to clubs in both London and Glasgow, reported that in one club in London dancers were receiving £5 per dance. Customers were observed tipping between twenty pence and one pound for dances. [Bindel, J. \(2004\) ‘Profitable Exploits: Lap Dancing in the UK’](#)

Urban legends surrounded the amount of money it might be possible to make in the club. In reality no one ever seemed to make that much money. It’s the only job I’ve ever had where some nights I could end up paying to be there.

“Lucy” quoted in [Object \(2007\) ‘The Truth about Lap dancing: A Performer Speaks out’](#)

Once you’ve been there a while, you learn that certain things are profitable, and no contact is the first rule you learn to break. Eventually you start to wonder, what is the difference between me and a prostitute?

“Elena” quoted in [Bell, R. \(2008\) ‘I’m seen as an object, not a person’ in The Guardian](#)

FICTION – IT'S JUST DANCING, WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

What happens in lap dancing clubs is not dancing. Women just dancing around a pole in their underwear is not the norm. The clubs market the women as sex objects offering full nudity and a sexual experience and owners create an environment where the selling of sexual services can occur. Any rules and restrictions on touching and the distance that men have to be away from the dancer can be ignored so that the clubs can get more money. Women within these clubs experience high levels of verbal and physical abuse and are regularly propositioned for sex. Women involved in lap dancing often use drugs and alcohol as a way of dealing with the impact of their work. The clubs encourage customers and wider society to see the women as objects that are always sexually available for money. This happens in a culture where violence against women is rife.

FACT – Holsopple conducted interviews with women who worked as strippers. All of the dancers interviewed had suffered verbal harassment as well as physical and sexual abuse while at work. All had been propositioned for prostitution and three-quarters had been stalked by men from the club they worked in.

Holsopple, K (1998) 'Stripclubs According to Strippers: Exposing Workplace Sexual Violence'

Scottish research with 110 men who had bought sex in prostitution found that 31% of the men had accessed prostitution through a lap dancing club.

Challenging Demand report 2008

What's the point of seeing a strip show and not getting a bit of fanny? The fun part is seeing her c**t. You can open The Sun if you just want tits.

(Bindel, J. (2004)

'Profitable Exploits: Lap Dancing in the UK')

FICTION – IT'S AN EMPOWERING CHOICE, WOMEN AREN'T FORCED TO BE LAP DANCERS.

Most women aren't physically forced into lap dancing but are attracted by the promises of glamour and money. It is a narrow understanding of power – based on sexual attractiveness, which cannot get women equal pay, equal representation and an equal voice. Empowerment is about more than stripping off and posing for men. An industry based on commercially exploiting men and sexually exploiting women is not empowering. Research shows that most women enter lap dancing because of poverty, a lack of choice and childcare pressures. Lap dancing is portrayed by the sex industry and in the wider media as glamorous and lucrative and so this can seem like an attractive option. Men rarely are presented with this kind of exploitation as a valid way to make money for their families.

By presenting lap dancing as a positive career choice for women, what are we saying to young girls about their abilities and self worth? Lap dancing portrays women's bodies and their sexuality as their most important qualities, as valued by men. This empowerment does not bring equality and better wages for women.

FACT – Recent surveys have suggested that 63% of young women aspire to be glamour models. 25% want to be lap dancers and only 3% teachers.

(http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/s/161/161338_naked_ambition_rubs_off_on_teen_girls.html)

Lap dancing is about creating a situation whereby the men feel they are doing you a favour – that's the way the game is set up, so all the power is with the customer.

(“Elena” quoted in Bell, R. (2008)

‘I’m seen as an object, not a person’ in The Guardian)

I have two children, who I have to support by doing this. I feel really yucky prancing around in a school uniform, because I feel I’m encouraging perverts who come to the club, to abuse children.

(quote from lap dancer in Bindel, J. (2004)

‘Profitable Exploits: Lap Dancing in the UK’)

FICTION – IT'S THE MEN VISITING THE LAP-DANCING CLUBS WHO ARE BEING EXPLOITED!

Male consumers can be financially exploited, through hidden charges, inflated drinks prices and payment for dances. The vast majority of this money goes to the venues, not the women. Lap dancers are under pressure to make money and can see customers as just a business transaction. Men visiting lap-dancing clubs are the ones in control of the situation as they hold the power in terms of money. It is the women who work there who are objectified and de-humanised, relying on the customers' payment for pseudo sexual activity.

FACT – Recent research has found that the customers in lap dancing clubs spend an average of £200 per visit. (Westminster debate)

For me, I suppose, the question is always, why would you want somebody to take their clothes off for you when you know that they don't really fancy you, when you know it isn't what they really want to do?
(“Elena” quoted in Bell, R. (2008) ‘I’m seen as an object, not a person’ in The Guardian)

Although some of the girls – the really pretty ones who are well-stacked – can make a fortune at times, most of them struggle to make a proper wage.
(quote from a punter in Bindel, J. (2004) ‘Profitable Exploits: Lap Dancing in the UK’)

FICTION – LOTS OF MEN ARE STRIPPERS, WHAT ABOUT THEM?

The vast majority of people who are dancers in the sex industry are women. Men who are strippers do not face the same levels of violence or social stigma and attach a very different meaning to their experiences. The objectification of women in this industry stems from and perpetuates inequality between men and women in society. The reality is that we live in a society where violence against women is rife and there is a high level of demand from men to buy and control women's bodies. There is simply not the same demand from women to buy sexual services from men.

FACT – In 2007 ‘Tricky Dickys, the first men-only lap dancing club for women opened in Birmingham. After less than a year the club closed. (Cullwick, E (2008) ‘Tricky Dicky’s Flops: lap dance club for women a failure’ in The Birmingham Mail)

FICTION – WOMEN GO TO THESE CLUBS TOO!

Some women may go to lap dancing clubs, however just because women sometimes go, it doesn't stop it being harmful. Women tend to go to the clubs for very different reasons than men – often as part of a couple or as part of a larger work outing. Women have won employment tribunals against companies who use lap-dancing clubs as corporate “entertainment”. Lap dancing impacts not just on the women who participate, but also feeds into the idea that women are sexual objects and are sexually available to men. Women who live and work in the vicinity of these clubs have reported being very uncomfortable and research has shown that incidents of sexual harassment and assault have increased in areas where lap dancing clubs have opened.

FACT – Eaves Housing conducted research into the effects of licensing and attitudes to lap dancing establishments in two boroughs of London, including Camden. They found that in the 3 years before and after 4 lap-dancing venues opened in Camden incidents of rape increased by 50% and sexual assaults by 57%. They also found increased levels of harassment of women in the area and fear of violence. (Eaves (2003) “Lap dancing and Striptease in the Borough of Camden”)

As a dancer when you see a man or woman come in together, you aren't going to treat them the same as you are a man on his own or a group of men. You will act according to what you think they want.

(“Lucy” quoted in Object (2007)
‘The Truth about Lap dancing:
A Performer Speaks out’)

The power relations inside lap dancing clubs aren't that simple either. Of course not every experience is the same, but if women have all the power in lap dancing clubs why do some men admit that it is not just sexual titillation which keeps them coming to clubs but the power trip that they get from paying a performer to strip for them?

www.object.org.uk

USEFUL SITES

www.stoppornculture.org/home.html
www.oneangrygirl.net/antiporn.html
www.nopornnorthampton.org/
www.againstpornography.org/
www.antipornographyactivist.blogspot.com/
www.object.org.uk/
www.talkintrash.com/playboy/PB.toc.html
www.throughtheflame.org/
www.genderberg.com/
www.aboutface.org/

CHALLENGING DEMAND

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