

**A NAKED TRUTH: A GLIMPSE INTO THE LIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF EXOTIC
DANCERS**

by

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I declare that **A NAKED TRUTH: A GLIMPSE INTO THE LIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF EXOTIC DANCERS** is my own work and all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Summary

This research explores the lives and experiences of female exotic dancers with the aim of gaining an empathic understanding of their involvement in the stripping industry. The stereotypes and generalizations of exotic dancers and the stripping industry undermine the exotic dancer's ability to be seen as an individual with her own story and her own experiences. The participants of this research were selected through convenience sampling and consist of three female exotic dancers. The researcher interviewed the participants using a semi-structured interview format and focused on the dancer's experience within the exotic dancing industry, her family history, her relationships, and personal life. The data was analysed using thematic network analysis. The thematic networks are often contradictory and inconsistent with the common stereotypes and ideas held about exotic dancers. The results indicate that some exotic dancers experience meaning, healing, gratification, and power within their work and live responsible, productive lives.

Key words: Female exotic dancers; strippers; stripping; nude dancing; strip clubs; stereotypes; thematic network analysis; genograms; interpretive research; qualitative research.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

This research explores the lives and experiences of female exotic dancers with the aim of gaining an empathic understanding of their involvement in the stripping industry. Schiff (1999) defines nude dancing as a sexual act that is directly intended to arouse prurient interests, sexual desires, and fantasy. Exotic dancing entails selling an erotic portrayal of one's body through nude sensual dance, seductive movement, and other sexually suggestive behaviours within a commercial enterprise for the purpose of economic gain (Forsyth & Deshotels, 1998; Reid, Epstein & Benson, 1994).

Exotic dancers are viewed as deviant within the social norms of 'acceptable' femininity and are stereotyped as drug-dependent, 'easy' women with no brains or ambition. Many people's perception of exotic dancing is that it is dirty and immoral (Forsyth & Deshotels, 1998). Exotic dance is often falsely associated with illegal forms of sexual labour as well as with 'deviance', thus promoting the view that exotic dancers are pathological (Egan, 2003a).

The stereotypes and generalizations of exotic dancers and the stripping industry undermine the exotic dancer's ability to be seen as an individual with her own story and her own experiences. This research is based on the premise that experience consists of multiple realities and truths, and that each dancer's version of reality is valid and valuable.

In Chapter 2, an overview of the recent research on exotic dancers is discussed. The literature explores the lives of exotic dancers and their experiences with each other, within the club, and within society. The research design is discussed in Chapter 3; including the aim and rationale of the study, the method of analysis, the validity and reliability of the research, as well as ethical considerations. Chapter 4 elaborates on the theoretical lenses that constitute the epistemology and ontology of the research. The results of the research are discussed in chapters 5, 6, and 7. The three women who participated in this research were Anastasia, Natalie, and Poison. Each chapter provides an in-depth account of each woman's experience as an exotic dancer. Chapter 8 provides an integration and discussion of the research results and includes the limitations of the study as well as recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2 – Research Overview

Literature review

The literature explores many areas of the lives of exotic dancers and their experiences with each other, within the exotic dance club and within society. There is a debate within literature as to whether exotic dancing is oppressive or liberating. This reflects the highly personal and subjective nature of the job and the work that it entails. The literature conveys the multiple realities that exist within any context as Sloan and Wahab (2004) confirm, “women’s truths are informed by context and subjective experiences” (p 39).

History

Stripping was originally a form of theatre or burlesque stage show rather than the explicit striptease with which we are familiar today. In the past 25 years it has developed into a performance which includes complete nudity, raunchy table and lap dances, and sometimes even physical and sexual contact between the dancer and client (Lewis, 1998).

Pornographic media has contributed to the development of exotic dancing and took it from a slight departure from exotic dance in the 1940s and 1950s to the highly formalized, direct sexual and social interaction by the 1970s (Prewitt, 1989). As the norms regarding photographic treatment of nude women became more relaxed, dance

forms began to include ‘genital’ presentation and more intimate interaction between customer and dancer (Prewitt, 1989).

Social constructionism and sexuality

The social constructionist view incorporates a view of sexuality from a social, cultural, and historical perspective. Such a viewpoint postulates that sexual reality is not based on fixed sociobiological laws transmitted across generations, but is socially constructed and constricted by social and cultural constituencies that are customized by individuals (Philaretou, 2006). The meaning of any cultural activity is largely dependent on the point of view of its participants (Schiff, 1999). This acts as a powerful determinant of a person’s gender and sexual scripting, and ultimately helps to shape the intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of his or her sexuality (Philaretou, 2006). Exotic dancing is experienced within the social definitions of sexuality and can be experienced both positively and negatively. From one perspective, the dancer receives much admiration and acceptance. On the other hand, she may experience rejection and judgement. The type of interaction that she experiences depends on the social constructions and moral outlook of the other in conjunction with her own perceptions and interpretations.

Challenging social norms

Exotic dancers are viewed as ‘deviant’ or ‘bad’ by non-participants because they challenge social norms by removing their clothing for financial gain (Sweet &

Tewksbury, 2000b). Travis Hirschi assumes that conventional society governs the perspective from which behaviour is viewed (cited in Bernard et al., 2003). Female nudity is considered a threat to social order. Exotic dancers symbolize freedom from social control. The implication of exotic dancing and nudity are the liberation of male lust, the contamination of commerce with sex, and the unsettling of family values (Mestemacher & Roberti, 2004). Women who engage in exotic dancing or participate in any form of sex work are stepping outside of society's definition of respectable femininity (Barton, 2001). The inevitable judgement of others for stepping outside the definition of acceptable femininity is something that all exotic dancers will experience at some point. The factors that contribute to this controversial career choice are important in understanding the life choices and context of the exotic dancer.

Factors associated with exotic dancing

Philaretou (2006) describes several commonalities regarding the lives of female exotic dancers, including: 1) low socioeconomic status and dysfunctional family backgrounds, 2) considerable monetary payoff of the work compared to other low wage, low skill or high wage, high skill full-time jobs, 3) the exciting and interesting nature of the job in comparison to average jobs, 4) the temporary illusionary feelings of female power experienced on the job, 5) the sexual titillation experienced from engaging in sensual erotic dances in front of a cheering male audience, and 6) the companionship, social support, and fun times experienced with co-workers.

Factors associated with a future career in exotic dancing include early physical maturity, early sexual experiences, early independence and departure from home, absence of the father from the home prior to adolescence, average educational levels, and a relationship between exhibitionist behaviour and previous job experience (Sweet & Tewksbury, 2000b). Forsyth and Deshotels (1998) similarly concluded that a tendency toward exhibitionistic behaviour, opportunities which make stripping an accessible career, and awareness of the easy economic reward of stripping were all factors which led to a career as an exotic dancer.

Other issues common to female strippers were an athletic background, entertainment background, childhood abuse, and the ‘ugly duckling syndrome’ (Sweet & Tewksbury, 2000b). The most common response to inquiries about childhood career aspirations was a career in modelling. Modelling is associated with beauty, popularity, fame, acceptance, praise, and money. Exotic dancing offers everything that modelling does, except for social acceptance (Sweet & Tewksbury, 2000b). Recognition, acknowledgement, and attention are important human needs and this is the interpersonal pay-off for exotic dancers. However, the positive attention and belonging that she receives in the club may be unique to that context and she may experience the opposite in other contexts.

Some dancers learnt at an early age, through sexual abuse, emotional abuse, dysfunctional family relationships, and neglect, that acting provocatively and emphasizing their sexuality got them attention, affection, and sometimes even a feeling of power (Wesely, 2002). The sexualized body consequently becomes the only clear point

of identity for a developing sense of self (Wesely, 2002), and this experience could result in a young girl growing into a woman who uses her sexuality, through exotic dancing, to feel powerful and satisfy emotional and relational needs.

The reason or rationale for engaging in exotic dancing may also effect other people's judgement and acceptance of the exotic dancer. Women start out in this career for different reasons. Mestemacher and Roberti (2004), as well as Lewis (1998), identified two types of exotic dancers; goal-oriented and career-orientated. Goal-oriented exotic dancers are temporarily involved in exotic dancing and they work to earn money as a means of meeting another goal. Career-orientated exotic dancers, however, intend to remain in the industry long term as a means of economic survival and usually have limited vocational and educational skills (Mestemacher & Roberti, 2004). Sweet and Tewksbury (2000a) also identified different motivations for a career in exotic dancing and they categorized exotic dancers into three types; career dancers, power dancers, and party dancers. The 'career dancer's' motivation is to make money, the 'power dancer' obtains psychological rewards by being desired by others, and the 'party dancer' enjoys the lifestyle of alcohol and drug consumption (Sweet & Tewksbury, 2000a). This illustrates the fact that exotic dancers are in this occupation for different reasons and have different conceptualizations of their careers and the role that it plays in their lives.

Sloan and Wahab (2004) identified four categories of women who work as topless dancers. 'Non-conformists' are the strippers who dance to challenge social norms and to be rebellious; these women have the privileges and resources to enter a stigmatized

occupation and leave it when they please. The ‘workers’, on the other hand, enter the exotic dancing profession because it offers the highest income and a means of supporting themselves and their families. ‘Survivors’ describe the dancers who come from extensive histories of childhood abuse and dance as a means of escaping from a dysfunctional family environment. The fourth category is the ‘dancers’ who have taken traditional dance lessons and aspire to professional dancing careers.

The multiple categories of exotic dancers described by various authors illustrate the various motivations for such a career; however, these categories are overly simplistic and should not be used to label or ‘box’ an individual into a limited understanding of behaviour. The reason for any behaviour, including exotic dancing, is highly complex – the dancer’s history, family environment, relationships, interpersonal style, personality, world view, financial situation, childhood experiences, values, coping mechanisms, support structures, and other important contributing factors must be taken into consideration.

Oppression vs. liberation

The ‘radical feminist’ perspective finds any kind of sex work inherently and irrevocably exploitative within patriarchy. Their view is that all dancers are victims of sexual and physical abuse whose employment in the sex industry perpetuates patriarchal disdain for women (Barton, 2002). Radical feminists have focused on eliminating the sex work industry, arguing that it contributes to a continued objectification that harms all women

(Murphy, 2003). The ‘sex radical’ feminists theorize sex work as subversive of patriarchy’s definition of conventional femininity and strongly support the sex worker’s right to perform erotic labour. They view dancers as empowered actors in charge of their own destinies, goddesses on raised stages accepting homage from admiring men (Barton, 2002). This view is in line with ‘liberal feminists’ who believe sex workers are active participants in a social system and are exploiters who trade their sexuality for commerce (Murphy, 2003). Murphy (2003) argues that exotic dancing cannot be viewed as either entirely liberating or entirely constraining; acts and behaviours have multiple, not singular, meanings and consequences and therefore both views have value (Barton, 2002).

Most of the literature focuses on the more negative aspects of exotic dancing. The label of ‘oppressed’ or ‘liberated’ should not be bestowed by outside observers but should rather be a term used by the dancer herself to describe her own perception and experience. The experience of exotic dancing cannot be narrowly labelled as one or the other and it should be considered that both labels may be applicable for the same woman at different times and in different contexts.

Gender roles

Katherine Frank theorizes that strip clubs invert normative gendered behaviour; women do the approaching and face the possibility of rejection, and private sexual behaviour is made public (cited in Egan, 2003a).

Throughout history, Western culture has rewarded women for being attractive or for providing men with sexual gratification (Murphy, 2003). If women do so in a traditional, heterosexual way, such as wife or mother, they are considered ‘Madonnas’ or “good girls”. Within the strip club, ‘bad girl’ practices are required and legitimized while the dancer is simultaneously required to maintain a ‘good girl’ performance in other areas of her life (Murphy, 2003). Exotic dancers may struggle to integrate and satisfy the conflicting messages and demands that they receive from the multiple contexts in which they live and work.

Strip club patrons

Erickson and Tewksbury (2000) observed six varieties of patrons that frequent strip clubs. These categories are based on the motivations and interaction styles of the men and include ‘lonely’, ‘socially impotent’, ‘bold lookers’, ‘detached lookers’, ‘players’, and ‘sugar daddies’. The ‘lonely’ patron attends strip clubs to ‘connect’ with dancers and foster communication and companionship. This category displays the least evidence of objectifying the dancers. The ‘socially impotent’ are often physically unattractive and socially introverted men who frequent the club also for companionship and conversation. They, however, lack the basic social skills to procure or maintain it. The ‘bold lookers’ are in pursuit of a voyeuristic and pornographic experience, and actively and openly objectify the dancers. The ‘detached lookers’ are also in pursuit of a voyeuristic experience but they display a more indifferent attitude towards the dancers and their

nudity. This group of patrons are less demeaning and less objectifying than the ‘bold lookers’. The ‘players’ interact with the dancers for conversation and companionship. They gain a dancer’s attention through their confidence, flattery, flirting, and ‘smooth’ personalities as if they were in a traditional bar/club setting. The ‘sugar daddy’ is the affluent man who experiences an increased level of intimacy with the dancers; he receives ‘special’ attention and his relationships with the dancers are more substantial and seem to last longer.

Power

Power, within the exotic dancing context, is understood to be a contested, negotiated social resource that is constantly being enacted during interpersonal encounters and is relational in nature (Wood, 2000). According to Bernard et al. (2003), beauty and sexuality act as the currency in this profession (Bernard et al., 2003, Downs, James & Cowan, 2006). Using the body to obtain economic rewards results in power for the dancer; however, this dimension of power does not measure up in the larger social, political, and economic realm (Spivey, 2005).

Wood (2000) argues that interactions between strippers and their clients are means of receiving attention, the possibility for the enactment of masculine power, as well as erotic entertainment. Eroticism is only part of what draws men into strip clubs (Wood, 2000). According to Wood (2000), eroticism allows for the conveyance of something more: attention. It is the possibility of interaction, in the form of attention, that sets exotic

dancing and erotic videos apart (Egan, 2003a; Wood, 2000). It is in the strip event that clients are able to experience desire in being desired, desiring the other, and even desiring oneself (Egan, 2003a). Wood (2000) argues that the attention that a customer receives in a strip club is most valuable when it allows for two things: witnesses and the ability of the client to imagine the personality and history of the dancer. This creates the possibility for the enacting of masculine power.

Masculine power is defined as power that differentiates men from women, is ordinarily attributed to men, and, when acknowledged in women, it is downplayed, de-emphasized, or construed as unfeminine (Wood, 2000). There are two socially constructed characteristics which contribute to the definition of masculine power: being desirable to women and being able to financially take care of a woman (Wood, 2000). The giving of money to a woman for something she has provided lends power to that money. By making the object of this financial exchange the actions of another person, the money now has not only value but power (Wood, 2000). The power being affirmed during the striptease interaction is relational. This is created when the attention being purchased is noticed by others and distinguishes the client being attended to from other customers who are not receiving the attention of a dancer (Wood, 2000). The dancer then becomes a symbol that is exchanged with witnesses in return for recognition of the customer's momentary desirability and financial power (Wood, 2000). Strippers increase the status of men through labour aimed at creating an impression for the men themselves – the impression of being interesting, sexy, and desirable (Wood, 2000). The creation of this

illusion is bidirectional as Wood (2000) confirmed: men would even resort to giving false information in order to create positive images of themselves for the strippers.

Forsyth and Deshotels (1997) observed a hierarchy of power in the strip club. In descending order of power it consisted of a) the owner or manager, b) the disk jockeys, c) the dancers, d) the bartenders, and e) the waitresses and bouncers. A complex 'tipping' system between the various levels of this hierarchy ensured positive working relations and the generation of more income for all the employees of the strip club.

Exotic dancers are powerful within the club context, yet their power is based on becoming a sexual ideal and this role does not elicit such power in mainstream society (Pasko, 2002). Spivey (2005) suggests that the symbolic meanings connected to behaviours are constantly being negotiated during the transaction in a strip club. The exchange is also guided by larger macro dimensions of power. As men dominate and control societal institutions, women respond with micro dimensional forms of power, that is, women attempt to direct interpersonal relations (Spivey, 2005, Wesely, 2003b). Egan (2003b), however, acknowledges the dancer's power in the strip club context and how she uses her position strategically to make money and to find a position within masculine desire and fantasy without simply being reduced to it.

Many dancers perceived power over male clients during their interactions in the strip club. Dancers enjoyed the power they had over men in terms of money, the ability to control men's actions, and to manipulate men's fantasies (Deshotels & Forsyth, 2006).

She also has power over the attention she gives the customer as well as over the display of her body (Wood, 2000). The male customer exerts power over the stripper by constructing her as an object while simultaneously being controlled by his very spectatorship (Murphy, 2003).

The context of the strip club reinforces the general social construction of women as constantly available sex objects, despite the fact that dancers actually maintain a certain form of power in their interactions (Pasko, 2002). Exotic dancers may uphold power in their individual exchanges with customers; however, their work is perpetuated by inequality and performed with negative social and psychological consequences (Pasko, 2002, Wood, 2000). Researchers argue that what nude dancers really sell is not the opportunity to gaze at a naked form, but the possibility for men to buy a position of sexual dominance in the eyes of sex workers and other men (Barton, 2001). Barton (2002) remarks that the fact that exotic dancing is such a lucrative occupation, relative to other low skill jobs, traps many women in the industry, a consequence of our capitalist patriarchy. This argument illustrates the fluid nature of power within the exotic dancing industry and that power is operative on many levels.

Dancers expressed feeling powerful on stage and that dancing has healed old wounds from the past. They also stated that their self-esteem was connected to how much money they made. Dancers indicate that they are the dominant party in the sexual transaction and that offering money for sexual services is perceived as an expression of weakness (Deshotels & Forsyth, 2006). Mestemacher and Roberti (2004) explained that by

subverting societal convention, the stripper takes on masculine attributes and defies feminine passivity. She is allowed to exercise unchallenged command over her body, freely expressing her sexuality while simultaneously forbidding the role of the man (Mestemacer & Roberti, 2004).

Michel Certeau distinguished between strategies and tactics as ways of negotiating power in dialectical relationships (Murphy, 2003). He defines strategies as dominant forces of power in institutionalized sites such as patriarchy, organizations, and families. Tactics, however, are viewed as the tools of the weak; tactics take the form of creative guises, trickery, and deception (Murphy, 2003). Dancers are participants within a patriarchal strategy as well as the organization of the club, and often use tactics to subvert the authority of both this patriarchal context as well as the managers of the club.

Murphy (2003) describes how dancers must devise creative discursive tactics that simultaneously allow their own active subjectivity and yet create the appearance of that which is considered the proper form, that is, that of the passively observed. Exotic dancers working in the strip club environment engage in a variety of independent and collective resistance strategies to increase their income and enhance their sense of personal power (Lewis, 2006). This includes working cooperatively with other co-workers, including waitresses, bouncers, and disk jockeys, to generate more income and protect one another (Lewis, 2006). Spivey (2005) describes how dancers employ resistance techniques to control customer misbehaviour that include individual as well as collective tactics, thereby creating power and control. The individual tactics include

spatial distancing, verbal one-liners, physical aggression, and ‘calling on customers’. The collective tactics result in unified action (Spivey, 2005). Dancers do experience a sense of power within themselves and as a group, and it is essential to understand the dancer’s experience and perspective in order to fully appreciate the power dynamics within the exotic dancing interaction.

Dancers’ personal experience

Barton (2002) found that the longer a woman danced, the more fragile her self-perception grew. Barton (2002) theorized that this is because of the negative, often abusive, and hurtful experiences that women undergo working in strip clubs, along with the low social status of dancing and the high consumption of drugs and alcohol. Dancers also experienced discrimination in obtaining housing, employment, and medical care and often hid the fact that they danced from family and friends (Barton, 2002). On top of this discrimination, dancers are stereotyped as being drug-addicted, stupid, sleazy hookers or victims of sexual abuse (Barton, 2002).

The more extended the exotic dancer’s career, the more her feelings about her work reflect the radical feminist perspective (Barton, 2002). Sweet and Tewksbury (2000a) confirm these findings in their study; women who had worked in the industry the longest were most adamant that stripping should be avoided. There seems to be a dichotomous experience of working in the stripping industry. Barton (2002) describes how many dancers feel worse about their bodies, their sexuality, their intelligence, and their overall

identity in the social world, while some women can experience dancing as liberating and rewarding, at least for a while. Murphy (2003) found in other studies on professional and amateur stripping that many of the dancers expressed joy and pride in their performances on stage. The experience of dancing seems to be very personal and changes with time.

Socialization

Strippers experience most of their socialization into their careers as exotic dancer through the other dancers and employees of the club after they have entered the occupation (Lewis, 1998). Some dancers reported not having any training when hired and are expected to know how to dance and entertain (Forsyth & Deshotels, 1997). The novice exotic dancer learns how to dress, dance, create an illusion, and justify one's actions, as well as impression management through the informal means of observing and interacting with dancers more experienced than themselves (Lewis, 1998).

Costs and rewards

Besides the financial gain and cooperative working environment, strippers expressed other forms of reward from working in this industry. Some of the rewards included meeting new and different people, the lifestyle, feeling streetwise, smarter, and stronger due to their experiences as an exotic dancer, boosted self-esteem and self-confidence, feeling a sense of happiness, being open-minded and feeling comfortable with

themselves, the bonds and friendships with other dancers, and the praise and ‘love’ that they receive from the audience (Sweet & Tewksbury, 2000a).

The costs of being an exotic dancer included inappropriate touching, violence, insults, negative stereotyping, propositions, late hours, smoking, drinking, drugging, the physical demands on the body, becoming desensitized to deviance, and developing an expectation for a high income level which then ‘traps’ the dancer in this career (Sweet & Tewksbury, 2000a). Wesely (2003b) found that some dancers felt that they could succeed at little else than stripping and became so entrenched in the industry that they could see little beyond it. Exotic dancing may strip the dancer of her personal power, including her confidence, self-efficacy, and ability to consider alternative choices. ‘Institutionalized’ dancers may feel trapped and powerless in larger society.

Dancers also commented on a loss of energy and being drained. One of the dancers interviewed by Barton (2002) explained that this occurs because dancing depletes her sexual energy and she gives away more of her sexuality than clients financially compensate for.

Dancers also experience negative health effects from working in a strip club, including the physical conditions of their work environment, job requirements (breast implants, surgery, high heels), as well as the stigmatization and harassment associated with the job (Maticka-Tyndale, Lewis, Clark, Zubick & Young, 2000). The coping strategies that the women use, such as substance abuse, were also detrimental to their health. Dancers who

became immersed in the strip club lifestyle and spent their time ‘partying’ with the customers and staff experienced greater threats to their health and safety (Maticka-Tyndale et al., 2000).

Identity conflicts

According to Spivey (2005), dancers experience identity conflicts as they attempt to separate the physical body from larger identity issues. Reid et al. (1994) found that the role identity of exotic dancer is not a significant identity for most of the strippers in their study and that their role as ‘stripper’ is used to benefit other roles such as ‘mother’ or ‘student’. Many dancers express neither pride nor shame about their work; they view it simply as an occupation rather than a lifestyle and identity (Sweet & Tewksbury, 2000a). Many strippers attempt to separate their ‘working’ identities from their ‘real’ ones (Murphy, 2003).

However, even though exotic dancers would try to separate their occupational role from their authentic identity, identity confusion was often not limited to the club context but spread to all aspects of their identity and personal life (Wesely, 2003b).

Exotic dancing is a job which often results in conflict with the definition of self and a questioning of that definition. The exotic dancer is reduced to physical attributes and the complexity of her individual identities is lost (Wesely, 2003a). Although strippers attempt to keep their two identities separate, in reality the idea of a ‘real’ self and a

‘performative’ self may be a rational ideal. If dancers could truly separate their occupation from their authentic selves then, according to Murphy (2003), their self-esteem would not be affected by participating in this stigmatized profession.

The act of stripping may result in dancers compromising their own values and standards which threatens and undermines their self-concept. Strippers start out in the industry with firm personal boundaries about how ‘far’ to go with a customer. Over time, however, these boundaries are compromised and this results in identity conflict, numbing and dissociating from the body (Wesely, 2003b). It is not necessarily the perceptions of others which conflicts with a dancer’s self-concept but rather the act of compromising her ideas of personal boundaries that challenges the way dancers understand themselves (Wesely, 2003b).

Coping with stigma

The theory of cognitive dissonance states that when people experience a lack of fit between their attitudes and behaviour, they must try to reduce this discrepancy through some type of cognitive redefinition that modifies their beliefs or reinterprets them to better fit their behaviour (Thompson, Harred & Burks, 2003). The dancers used cognitive and emotional dissonance to reduce the disharmony between their attitudes and values and their behaviour (Thompson, et al., 2003). The persona as dancer is different from their personal self and this discrepancy results in emotional strain. Cognitive redefinition allows the dancer to modify her beliefs and to reinterpret them to better fit her behaviour.

In order to manage stigma, the dancers also used neutralization as well as dividing the social world (Thompson, et al., 2003). This entails rationalizing their choice of occupation as well as perceiving their lives as exotic dancers as separate from the rest of their social world. Murphy (2003) was struck by the irony of the life of the exotic dancer in that, “privately she must hide what publicly she exposes” (p 324).

Dancers cope with stigma by dividing their social worlds. A dancer’s social world is dominated by an ‘insider’ vs. ‘outsider’ perspective (Bradley, 2007). An ‘insider’ is anyone who works within the industry, such as disk jockeys, bouncers, managers, and so on. An ‘outsider’ is anyone who lacks experience within the industry and therefore lacks empathy or understanding; clients, boyfriends, and the general public fall into this category (Bradley, 2007).

Lewis (1998) noted that the motivational factors for a career as an exotic dancer can effect the level of socialization into the ‘strip club subculture’. Career dancers are more involved and develop relationships with other dancers and club employees. They are therefore more likely to learn rationalizations for their behaviour and are subsequently able to maintain a more positive sense of self. The goal-oriented exotic dancer, on the other hand, limits her involvement with others in the business and, as a result, has limited access to these techniques of neutralization (Lewis, 1998). This may imply that career dancers are better able to justify their behaviour and protect their self-esteem than goal-oriented dancers.

Body objectification

Exotic dancers use many techniques, or ‘body technologies’, to change or alter their physical appearance in order to become the ‘feminine ideal’ which is considered to be white, blonde, and thin with large breasts (Wesely, 2003a). Wesely (2003a) describes how the strippers in her study would use a variety of ‘body technologies’, including eating disorders, hair removal, drugs, laxatives, obsessive exercise, and surgery in order to create a fantasy image that results in more male approval and therefore more financial reward. The dancers become trapped in a never ending cycle of dancing in order to earn the capital for their next procedure, which further objectifies the body, which then leads to the seeming necessity for further ‘body technologies’ (Wesely, 2003a).

Girls and women are exposed to millions of images of what constitutes the feminine ideal throughout their lives. Women learn that they are valued for their sexual bodies and spend time, energy, and money in an attempt to create this unattainable ideal (Wesely, 2002). A women’s sexual objectification therefore serves as a means of reinforcing and reminding women of their inferior status (Wesely, 2002).

Body objectification seems to be the norm within the exotic dancing context as Downs et al. (2006) found. They found that exotic dancers reported more objectified body consciousness than college women did. Strippers often go to great lengths to be sexually attractive and manage their appearances by disciplining and manipulating their bodies to adhere to the feminine ideal (Murphy, 2003). The dancers indicated greater body surveillance, and they ranked appearance-based attributes as more important than

competence-based attributes, whereas college students' ranking were in the opposite direction (Downs et al., 2006).

Dancer's sexuality

Many dancers are bisexual or lesbian. Some researchers argue that exotic dancers become lesbian because of their isolation from effective social relationships and their overall dissatisfaction with men (Bernard et al., 2003). It has also been suggested that, because female exotic dancers are exploited, they may develop hostile attitudes toward men and therefore lesbian relationships provide greater sexual fulfilment (Bernard et al., 2003). Sex work is a means to explore your sexual identity. Homosexual desire and the sex industry seem to reinforce one another positively, the club often encourages woman-on-woman displays and therefore a woman's homosexuality is accepted and rewarded within the club context (Barton, 2001). Strip bars and peep shows offer women easy access to other women and encourage them to break taboos (Barton, 2001). Lesbian dancers expressed that they felt it was easier for them than for a heterosexual woman because they can keep a clear boundary between their fake desire enacted for men and the authentic desire they feel for women (Barton, 2001). An exotic dancer's personal sexuality is bound to be effected and the boundary between 'work' and 'reality' could easily be blurred.

Exotic dancers often express the difficulty in having and sustaining heterosexual relationships with men outside of the industry (Bradley, 2007; Lewis, 1998). Schiff

(1999) describes how, for dancers in heterosexual partnerships, romantic relationships are often transient. In a comparison between college women and exotic dancers, Downs et al., (2006) found that college women reported significantly more positive relationships with their 'significant others' than dancers did. The personal costs of exotic dancing may at times exceed the financial remuneration.

Exotic dancers face a considerable amount of stigma and are often forced to choose a 'lower quality' partner because they violate a relationship norm by appearing sexually available to customers (Bradley, 2007). Male partners of dancers often did not identify with the role of their partner but identified with the perspective of the client. This led to jealousy, insults, and relationship stress. The dancers expressed an understanding of their partners' feelings; this may be because, within this industry, it is a lucrative strategy to anticipate the needs and perspective of the generalized other (Bradley, 2007).

Creating an illusion

According to Schiff (1999), nude dancing is a form of erotic fantasy formation. The dancer creates the illusion of relation through a strategy called 'counterfeit intimacy', a term created by Jacqueline Boles and Albeno Garbin, which is defined as the false affection, attraction, or sexual desire that the dancer enacts with the customer (cited in Erickson & Tewksbury, 2000). The sexual desires created by the stripper are never meant to be satisfied; the dancer's power resides in being the cause of desire rather than the object of desire (Uebel, 2004). The fantasy and intimacy that dancers sell appeal more to

a male audience because for men, sex is lust and gratification and for women it is more about a partner and a relationship (Bernard et al., 2003). Female and male dancers play to vastly different audiences. Female dancers offer fantasy sex whereas the few clubs that cater for women sell fun and entertainment, not the fantasy of sexual pleasure (Bernard et al., 2003, Egan, 2003a).

The concept of ‘counterfeit intimacy’ as a means of manipulation and feigned relationship is challenged by Forsyth and Deshotels (1997). They claim that this concept is too limiting as a construct and overlooks the intricacies of the emotional states of both the dancer and customer. The interaction between the dancer and customer is affected by a multitude of factors including prior involvement with regular customers, offsite interactions, as well as the attachment to the customer as potential lover, mate, or friend. Interactions between the dancer and the customer should not be labelled with a single blanket term. It should be considered that at least some relationships between dancers and their customers are not simply a result of financial need and hard work.

In support of this argument, Uebel (2004) noted a completely different interaction between customer and dancer, where the stripper takes on a therapeutic and supportive role with the client. Some of the dancers in his research expressed a wish to support men and their impaired masculinity through a ‘talking cure’. The interaction between stripper and client becomes redefined from a voyeuristic one to a meaningful interpersonal experience (Uebel, 2004).

Emotional labour

Arlie Hochschild's concept of emotional labour involves a specific kind of impression management: the management of feelings (cited in Wood, 2000). In order to create sexual enticement and fantasy stimulation, strippers perform 'emotional labour' and induce feelings in others while they suppress their own (Pasko, 2002, Wood, 2000). This emotional labour requires the 'transmutation of emotional systems', meaning that workers must take acts that are usually private and employ them in public settings.

One of the important elements of the fantasy that is created through emotional labour is that the dancers are understood by the men to be single and thus possibly available (Wood, 2000). This provides the stage for the performance to take place. The stripper seduces the client by creating a believable relationship (Murphy, 2003). Female exotic dancers must be emotionally responsive to the client, keeping his desires as a priority, but her own emotional needs must be suppressed at the same time (Spivey, 2005). Research finds that gendered power, women as subordinate and men as dominant, is recreated through this 'emotional labour'. However, when men engage in emotional labour, for example the sales industry, it leaves them in a dominant position (Deshotel & Forsyth, 2006). When a man engages in 'emotional labour', such as creating a false sense of camaraderie when selling insurance, he is left in a one-up position having made the sale. He would not have to repress his true self and his friendliness is not necessarily a manufactured illusion. When a woman sells her body or sexuality, she has to shut down many aspects of herself and project an often entirely different persona. The long-term

independence of exotic dancers could be compromised due to this enactment because after only a few years, dancers say they are burned out (Schiff, 1999).

Studies find that the kinds of emotional labour that women engage in with customers requires that they be submissive or perform in ways that damage their sense of self. The result of this emotional labour is therefore disempowerment. When women engage in emotional labour, they become estranged from an aspect of self which is used to do the work (Deshotels & Forsyth, 2006). However, it can also be said that researchers are seeing the same behaviours, that is, emotional labour, as empowering when a man performs them and disempowering when a women performs them (Deshotels & Forsyth, 2006).

Another version of emotional labour is the ‘confidence game’. The confidence game involves an act of trust development, fake pretences, and duplicity in order to acquire some sort of gain. The confidence game is an act of deception and is an assumption of power; power over the victim is necessary in obtaining the reward (Pasko, 2002). Exotic dancers use the confidence game through creating false relationships, developing rapport, varying their personalities and preying on psychological vulnerabilities (Pasko, 2002). The dancers, while deriving a sense of power through manipulation, were not comfortable with this manipulation; wielding power over another decreased their ability to create an authentic self (Deshotels & Forsyth, 2006).

Pasko (2002) illustrates a different perspective; dancers do not merely ‘surface act’ but rather seek to act authentically, not by pretending to be a sexual object but rather by becoming one. Exotic dancers use this ‘deep acting’ when they create emotions that seem sincere and spontaneous, even though they are covertly managed (Pasko, 2002). Exotic dancers use physical space, their appearance, cigarettes, and sex acts to deceive the client into accepting the pseudo-closeness and staged attention of the strip act (Pasko, 2002). Because of the false intimacy created and the depersonalization of sexual acts, many exotic dancers admit feelings of estrangement and emotional dissonance, a disturbance and strain between what they feel in private sexual acts and in their sexual displays for profit (Pasko, 2002). Dancers often use alcohol and drugs to aid in the disassociation of self from their work (Forsyth & Deshotel, 1997).

Drained from performing pseudo-sexual activity, stripping actually inhibits women’s own exploration of their own sexuality and sexual pleasure (Pasko, 2002). The dancer’s performance is mistakenly taken at face value by the customer as a natural and spontaneous representation of her real self. This increases the disparity between the dancer’s authentic self and her constructed pseudo-sexual occupational self and increases the degree of alienation and self-estrangement she may experience interpersonally and intrapersonally (Philaretou, 2006).

Deviance and acceptance

Female exotic dancers experience less community support for dancing as a way to earn money than do comparable males (Bernard et al., 2003). Although strong bonds are created within the subculture of exotic dancing, dancers do maintain bonds with mainstream society and have strong, conventional ties such as education, religion, and supportive family, friends, and significant others (Bernard et al., 2003). Working a deviant occupation, such as exotic dancing, requires a highly sexualized presentation of self and this isolates exotic dancers from the activities, sexuality, and social relations of other women (Pasko, 2002). Many dancers prefer not to dance for women because they are afraid that they will be mistreated or rejected by other women (Barton, 2001), and yet many dancers are lesbian and do find a sense of acceptance with other women. Dancers experience women's disapproval as very upsetting and they appreciate a woman's acceptance and support (Barton, 2001). Exotic dancers are not necessarily strong and confident women with high self-esteem. These qualities are typically present in dancers, but they are not qualities that lead women into exotic dancing (Sweet & Tewksbury, 2000b).

Many dancers found a sense of belonging and acceptance in interactions with their colleagues. Dancers form a certain camaraderie backstage in which they share grievances and gossip, and gain a sense of self-worth (Spivey, 2005). Within this backstage environment, dancers create a social site for group solidarity by reframing dominant discourse and validating their own voices and desires through conversation. Dancers change from object to subject through creating both a narrative and bodily agency by desexualizing the body (Spivey, 2005).

There are multiple aspects to a career as an exotic dancer. Belonging, judgement, power, social norms, gender relations, and sexuality are all important themes within the experience of dancing and it is highly personal, fluid, and contextual.

Chapter 3 – Research Design

Exotic dancing or ‘stripping’ is defined by the researcher as the sensual and erotic portrayal of one’s body through movement and varying degrees of nudity. Exotic dancing is usually performed with the aim of financial gain. Both men and women perform this ‘erotic labour’. This research focuses on women who have had experience in the exotic dancing or ‘stripping’ industry. The words ‘exotic dancer’, ‘stripper’, and ‘dancer’ will be used interchangeably throughout this research.

Aim and rationale

The aim of this research is to explore the lives and experiences of female exotic dancers. In providing a space to tell her story, I hope to gain some insight into the life of an exotic dancer and acquire some understanding of her reality. The world of exotic dancing is completely unknown to me and I hope to extend my own reality by immersing myself in this foreign and unconventional context.

Exotic dancers are considered ‘deviant’ because their career choice is not within the parameters of socially defined norms. Exotic dancers are often stigmatized, stereotyped, and morally judged. The perception of strippers as being ‘deviant’ results in little understanding of their lives or who they are as people outside of their profession.

This research is based on my own personal curiosity. My life and experiences represent the opposite of the exotic dancer's experience. I have generally made conforming, 'socially acceptable' decisions and have had little exposure to the 'deviant' side of humanity. Being exposed to a world I have little understanding of will give me the opportunity to explore and discover new realities, as well as expand and challenge my own thinking.

Problem statement

Exotic dancers or 'strippers' are associated with drugs, drinking, promiscuity, and prostitution. These stereotypes are discriminatory generalizations that lose sight of the individual and silence alternative 'truths'. This research aims to investigate the 'truth' behind the image of the exotic dancer by understanding her experience and giving her the opportunity to tell her story.

Participants

The research will be conducted from the interpretive perspective. The interpretive approach aims to harness and extend the power of ordinary language and expression in order to help us to better understand the social world in which we live (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). Interpretive research relies on first-hand accounts and tries to describe what is perceived in rich detail (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). The challenge of interpretive research is to understand the meaning of the text rather than to measure, generalize, or

predict outcomes from the data as is the case in the large, random sample of quantitative research (Walker, 1996).

The participants were selected via convenience sampling and consisted of three exotic dancers. A small sample is appropriate because the research findings are not intended to be generalized. Convenience sampling was used because it is difficult to gain access to participants. The owners of the clubs (gatekeepers) in which exotic dancers work are often adverse to interviews with dancers. The limitation of this, however, is that the sample becomes 'self-selected'. The dancers who agree to an interview may have particular personality traits and experiences that lead them to participate in research. This may result in findings that are similar in some way and may limit the 'richness' of the data collected.

The data was collected through personal, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with exotic dancers. The interviews are estimated to be an hour long and took place where it was convenient for the dancer.

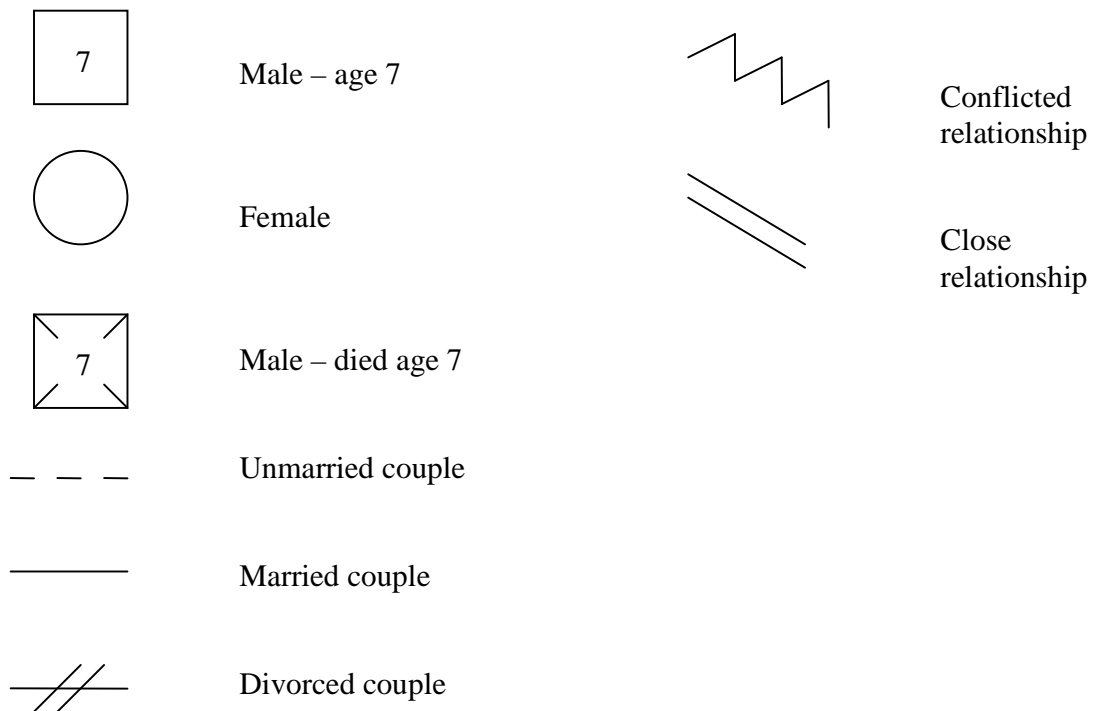
The interview format consisted of questions relating to the participant's personal experience as an exotic dancer. Interview questions included: How did you become an exotic dancer?, What are the difficulties and challenges that you experience as an exotic dancer?, How does exotic dancing make you feel?, Who are you behind the scenes?, How do you experience power as an exotic dancer?, What are your relationships like with other dancers?, What is your opinion of the stereotype of exotic dancers?, How does

exotic dancing effect your personal life?, and How would you describe your experience as an exotic dancer?

Understanding the participant

According to Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999), it is important in interpretive research to stay close to the data and interpret it from a position of empathic understanding. The meaning of human creations, words, actions, and experiences can only be ascertained in relation to the contexts in which they occur; including both personal and societal contexts (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999).

A thorough description of the characteristics, processes, transactions, and contexts that constitute the phenomenon as well as the researcher's role in constructing this description provides a rich and deep subjective account of the data. The phenomena studied should be understood within context and elicit new and different perspectives of behaviours or events (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). The context for this research includes the world of exotic dancing, and the participant's personal life, history, as well as relationships with others, including her family, colleagues, and partner. Genograms were therefore obtained from the participants in order to understand her personal context. The following legend provides the interpretation of the symbols on the participant's genograms.



Procedure

The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and then transcribed. The transcribed interviews are available on request. Interpretive researchers want to make sense of feelings, experiences, social situations, or phenomena as they occur in the real world, and therefore want to study them in their natural setting (Terre-Blanche & Kelly, 1999). The researcher visited strip clubs in order to gain a better understanding of the context, atmosphere, and working environment of exotic dancers. The researcher visited three strip clubs in total and spent approximately seventeen hours interviewing female exotic dancers, observing the context, and conversing with managers as well as male and female exotic dancers not included in the formal data collection.

Method of analysis

Interpretive research methods try to describe and interpret people's feelings and experiences in human terms rather than through quantification and measurement. Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999) suggest a basic starting point for analysing data from an interpretive perspective but concede that interpretive analysis rarely proceeds in such an orderly manner. The steps are as follows:

1. Familiarization and immersion: The researcher works with the text (transcribed interview) and immerses him- or herself in the text in order to gain insight and understanding.
2. Thematising: The researcher infers themes that underlie the research information.
3. Coding: The researcher then groups similar instances under common headings or themes.
4. Elaboration: The researcher then studies the themes in a more in-depth manner in order to gain a fresh view and to explore deeper and alternative meaning. Dialoguing occurs between the researcher, the context, and the participant's context; between the researcher, his or her supervisor, colleagues; between the researcher and the account itself, his or her own values, assumptions, interpretations, and understandings. The themes will then be organized into thematic networks such that basic themes, organizing themes, and global themes form the grid (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Thematic networks systematize the themes elicited from the data into lowest-order premises evident in the text (basic themes). The basic themes are then grouped together to summarize more abstract principles (organizing themes). The global themes represent the highest level of abstraction and encapsulate the principle metaphors in the text as a whole (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

5. Interpretation and checking: This refers to the final account that relates to the research question or phenomenon studied. The researcher then also reflects on his or her role in the whole process and includes his or her personal experience within the research context.

Validity and reliability

Reliability is defined within quantitative research as the degree to which the results are repeatable. Interpretive researchers do not assume that they are investigating a stable and unchanging reality and therefore do not expect to find the same results repeatedly (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 1999). The quantitative research concept of reliability is replaced by the qualitative concept of dependability. Dependability refers to the degree to which the reader can be convinced that the findings did indeed occur as the researcher said they did. This is achieved through rich and detailed descriptions that demonstrate how opinion and interpretation are found within and develop out of contextual interaction (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 1999). This research on the lives and experiences of exotic dancers will be dependable because the interpretation will be based on an in-depth

analysis of the transcribed interview and placed within context. The interpretation and understanding of the data will be co-created through the collaboration of the researcher and the participant as well the researcher and supervisor.

Validity refers to the degree to which the research conclusions are sound (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 1999). Validity, from a qualitative research perspective, is defined by the degree to which the researcher can produce observations that are believable for her- or himself, the participants being studied, and the eventual readers of the study (Durrheim, 1999). Qualitative researchers find it impossible to identify and rule out validity threats before doing the research and reject the idea that research findings can be accurate reflections of reality (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 1999). It is, therefore, more applicable within an interpretive research approach to discuss credibility. Credible research produces findings that are convincing and believable and ensure that conclusions drawn from the data are appropriate (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 1999).

The credibility of the thematic network analysis is based on the inclusion of the text in the interpretation. The text forms the basis of the interpretation and excerpts from the text are used throughout the analysis to substantiate the researcher's interpretation. The analysis must also be logical, coherent, and sensitive to the exotic dancer's meaning. The researcher clarified with the participant continuously in order to ensure that the communication was understood correctly. The researcher searched for meaning, pattern, and understanding from a holistic perspective and attempted to make sense of the dancer's story within the context of her life and experience.

Ethical considerations

Research should consider three ethical principles according to Durrheim and Wassenaar (1999); these are autonomy, non-maleficence, and beneficence. The principle of autonomy requires that the participants are aware that their participation is voluntary, of the purpose of the research, that they have the freedom to withdraw at any time, and that they have the right to anonymity in any publication that may arise. These requirements will be communicated to the exotic dancers verbally and through an informed consent form which will be signed and dated by both the researcher and participant.

The principle of non-maleficence means that no harm should come to the research participants or any other person or group of persons (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 1999). No harm was expected to come to the participants during the research. However, the researcher was aware and vigilant, throughout the research process, of any physical, emotional, or psychological harm that may have come to participants.

The principle of beneficence requires that the researcher designs research that will be of benefit to the research participants or to other researchers and society at large (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 1999). The research aims to give a voice to members of society who are often judged and stereotyped. The narratives of the experiences and lives of exotic dancers has provided a new perspective and a better understanding of women who are employed in this line of work within the sex industry. This research also provided the exotic dancers with the opportunity to be heard and understood.

Chapter 4 – Theoretical Lenses

Ontology and epistemology

Ontology and epistemology provide the theoretical framework that forms the foundation of research. Ontology and epistemology determine the position and perspective of the research and researcher and need to be stated clearly in order to create consistent, coherent, and relevant research.

Ontology refers to the nature of reality that is researched and what can be known about that reality. Ontology can be defined as an explicit formal specification of how to represent the objects, concepts, and other entities that are assumed to exist in some area of interest and the relationships that hold among them (ontology, n.d.).

Epistemology defines the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Reber and Reber (2001) define epistemology as the branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature, origins, methods, and limits of human knowledge. Ontology and epistemology determine the context, perspective, and method of the research (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999) and allow the researcher to reflect on the process of knowledge creation.

Interpretive ontology

This research aims to explore and understand the personal experience of exotic dancers, and therefore an interpretive ontological perspective has been selected. The interpretive approach aims to understand the internal reality of subjective experience and has no conception of ‘objective reality’ (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). Interpretive research relies on individual, first-hand accounts and attempts to convey the richness and diversity of personal human experience. This approach advocates the understanding of human creations, words, behaviour, and experiences in relation to the contexts in which they occur. ‘Recontextualization’ is important as the text is placed within context and understood within that context (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999).

Interpretive research therefore works from a phenomenological perspective, where the focus is on real-world events as one perceives and experiences them, instead of the physical experiences themselves (Reber & Reber, 2001). The focus of this research on the life, events, and stories of exotic dancers allows the dancer’s subjective experience to be acknowledged and respected as a valid reality. An interpretive ontology gives the participant a voice within the context of understanding and empathy.

Empathic epistemology

Epistemology from this perspective could be described as empathic, i.e. understanding the experience of the other. The relationship between the researcher and the research is one of observer inter-subjectivity and respects the reality that the observer or researcher and the participant co-create (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). It is an in-depth account

of human experience and is accepting of the individual's personal truths. The personal nature of this epistemological stance is highly suitable for researching a potentially sensitive topic such as the experiences of exotic dancers.

Qualitative research paradigm

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define qualitative research as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, events or experiences in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research is naturalistic and aims to study phenomena as they unfold in real-world contexts without manipulation (Durrheim, 1999). Qualitative researchers interpret phenomena as interrelated wholes and aim to discover important categories and interrelationships through exploring genuinely open questions (Durrheim, 1999).

Social phenomena, according to the qualitative approach, are context-dependent and the meaning of what is being researched is dependent on the particular situation that an individual is in (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The researcher is the instrument of observation and data is collected either by interviews or by observing and recording human behaviour in contexts of interaction (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Qualitative methods of data collection are congruent with research from an interpretive perspective. Qualitative methods permit rich and detailed observation of a few cases and

allow the researcher to create an understanding of phenomena through observation of the phenomena as they emerge in context (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

The following three chapters provide the results of this research. The three exotic dancers who participated in the study are Anastasia, Natalie, and Poison.

Chapter 5 – Anastasia

Introduction

The first dancer, Anastasia, was born on a farm in Robertson in the Western Cape. She grew up on the farm with her mother, three siblings, and her step-father. Her mother died when Anastasia was nine years old. It was then that her step-father started to sexually abuse her.

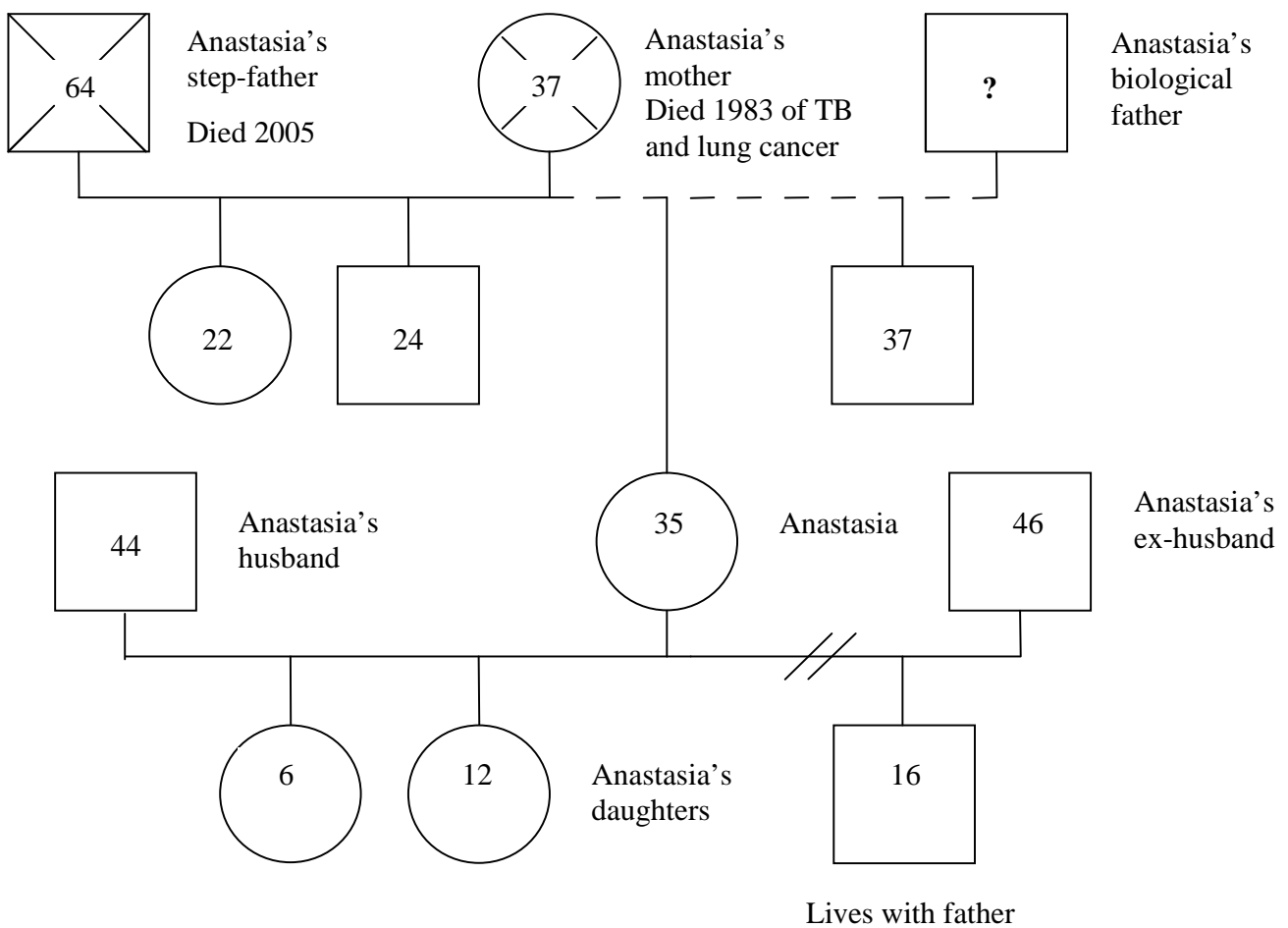


Figure 5.1: Anastasia's genogram

Anastasia only found out three years ago that her step-father was not her biological father. Anastasia's real father was actually her mother's German employer. Her mother worked as a domestic worker for this man and she conceived two children with him; Anastasia and her older brother. She was a vulnerable child without the protection of her mother; she was not only sexually abused by her step-father but was also raped by a family friend. Anastasia did not enjoy a loving, nurturing childhood and was often not heard or understood by other family members. When she told her grandmother that she had been sexually abused, her grandmother beat her and told her that she was lying. Anastasia found out years later that her little sister had also been sexually abused by her step-father. Anastasia was later raped by fifteen men while doing a show one night.

Anastasia's family is characterized by different races and nationalities. Her grandmother was Black, her mother was Coloured, and her father was White. Anastasia now understands why she and her brother had different colouration and why they were treated differently from her two younger siblings. Anastasia remembers her two younger siblings enjoying preferential treatment. When she learnt that her father was not her biological father, this childhood unfairness made more sense to her.

Anastasia was only able to complete Grade 9 because her family did not have enough money for her to finish her education. She worked in a clothing store when she left school and later moved to Cape Town where she met her first husband and started her career as an exotic dancer. Her marriage to this man did not represent an escape or a new

beginning as the cycle of abuse continued. Anastasia's husband was physically and emotionally abusive. Anastasia has a son with her first husband but when she left him he prevented her from taking the baby with her. Her son grew up with his father and Anastasia now has a distant relationship with him. Anastasia believes that her ex-husband has a negative impact on her relationship with her son because he says negative things about her to her son.

Anastasia then moved to Gauteng, where she received therapy from a psychologist in Pretoria. This allowed Anastasia to integrate her experience and find meaning in her past. According to Anastasia, the therapy that she received helped her tremendously and has allowed her to help other women in similar situations.

Anastasia describes her relationship with her younger brother and sister as close and protective. Her relationship with her older brother is also close but she feels that she is the only one making the effort to maintain a relationship with him – the rest of the family has abandoned him because of his alcohol abuse.

Anastasia has been married to her second husband for twelve years and they have two daughters.

Researcher's experience during the interview

As an outsider to the world of exotic dancing, I was surprised and inspired by my conversation with Anastasia. Dressed in skimpy leopard print, her outward appearance did not allude to the level of wisdom and insight that she expressed. Anastasia's openness and compassion allowed me to expand my own ideas and thoughts about women involved in exotic dancing as well as other sex work industries. My own stereotypes were challenged and replaced with a more complex understanding of exotic dancers; exotic dancers are more than 'party girls' looking to make some money and fool around with men.

It was Anastasia's humanity which impacted me most; her ability to connect with me. Anastasia was gentle, open, and genuine in her account of her experiences. Dressed conservatively with my notebook and recorder, I felt alien in this twilight world of semi-clad and naked women. Anastasia's personality and easy manner of relating made me feel at ease. I experienced first-hand why Anastasia is so good at what she does; she provides men with the opportunity to feel understood and accepted.

Thematic analysis

The themes which have been extracted from Anastasia's story have been organized into thematic networks on three levels; namely, basic themes, organizing themes, and global themes. The interpretation will discuss the basic themes, then the organizing themes,

followed by the global themes. This will provide a logical format which will aid in the understanding of the analysis and reflect how the themes emerged from the data.

Table 5.1: Thematic network for Anastasia

Basic themes	Organizing themes	Global themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discovery/insight • Learning • Role flexibility • Confirmation of self 	} Differentiation/autonomy	} Transformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abuse • Ambiguity • Diffuse family relationships and relational inversion 	} Crisis/history	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exotic dancing as self-expression/enjoyment • Helping/instructing • Income/contributing to the family 	} Gratification	} Conservation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining relationships • Creating the context for the erotic experience • Retribution/revenge 	} Power	

Basic themes: Discovery/insight; learning; role flexibility; confirmation of self

Discovery/insight

Working as a stripper seems to lead to personal discovery and social insight. Dancers often express that their learning in the strip club environment has affected their world view as well as their lives. Anastasia comments on how “You learn a lot from dancing actually, about different types of guys that come here, why they come here” and “At least I can say I’ve learnt a lot in this industry as well”. Dancers expand their conceptualizations about men especially, and effectively make a ‘paradigm shift’ through their own reflections on their experience.

Anastasia reflects on her own shifts about her perception of men when she states “I can’t judge every guy the same cause one guy abused me now I think all the guys are the same – you must give each guy a fair chance,” and “I used to think all men, before, I used to think all men who comes here, they all fuck their wives around... But after, I think it’s actually great that they come here, at least, rather come here and see something, relax, stress gone, everything, than go to an escort agency, where you can pick up something and give it to your wife.”

Anastasia’s experience with many different men in the strip club exposed her to a new reality, one in which men were individuals with different characters. This allowed her to recreate a rigid perception which had formed as a result of childhood sexual abuse as well as multiple rapes.

Learning

The learning acquired in the strip club context is not only for personal growth but is also used for personal financial gain. By reading their clients well and drawing on their experiential knowledge, strippers are often able to manipulate a situation to their advantage. Anastasia commented on this process, “And I will sit and I will talk to him. Because of my experience, that gives me a lot of power. It takes me two minutes and that guy will empty his whole bank account for me because of my personality and because I know what it’s all about.”

Dancers also admit that their learning and experience is not always positive. Their understanding of people is less naïve and they are more aware of the “darker side” of humanity: “You get your weirdos, and you get your business guys, you get guys that, like this one guy who comes here he wants to be called ‘daddy’. And you must act like you’re his daughter. And I’m starting to think, you know, that I just want to put my fist through your face because what don’t you do to your own kids at home that your wife don’t know about. And you’ve come here and I must act like your daughter and this and that. So you learn a lot about what’s out there in the world.”

Role flexibility

Anastasia demonstrates an adaptable role flexibility that allows her to function effectively and appropriately in the different areas of her life. Within the strip club Anastasia has multiple roles; she is the sexual temptress but she is also a confidant for her clients who are experiencing difficulties: “Ja, I’ve got clients who actually come here basically for an

hour, so I can talk with them, we have lunch, whatever. And he asks advice with his wife and how he can improve his sex life. They said to me I must be their sex therapist to improve their sex lives because since the wife got babies and kids, she's not interested in sex."

Anastasia also displays role flexibility in her personal life. It's important for her to differentiate between her personal life and her life as an exotic dancer for her children and her husband: "A lot of girls, they go out, they go clubbing and they dress like a stripper, top up here, skirt up here, everyone knows they're a stripper and they treat them like a stripper. I don't want to be treated like that when I'm outside. I see a lot of my clients outside here but I don't want to talk to them, nothing. I'm dressed totally different, in my jeans and my takkies, with my kids, come to Spur and whatever... A lot of the girls here don't know how to separate the two [personal and professional lives]; they go out and the client's sitting there with his wife and they say hi, when are you going to come and visit me at [the club] again. That's very unprofessional; you can't do that, that's why you must separate the two. Otherwise, if I'm going to take my work home, I won't be married for twelve years, 'cause my husband's going to get sick of me talking about all my shit that I have at work. And I'm acting like a stripper at home, it's not going to be good for my kids, I'm not going to be a good role model for them."

Confirmation of self

Men often visit strip clubs to enjoy a validating experience with a sexy and attractive woman. The dancer creates the impression that he is desirable and this confirmation may

result in an ‘ego boost’ or a more positive sense of self: “And I make him feel special, even though he doesn’t look sexy or whatever, but I will make him feel sexy. And he will think, ah, this is the first time, you know, that a woman makes me feel sexy about myself, you know, makes me feel wanted.” The exotic dancer, however, also experiences a similar sense of confirmation and validation as a sexy and desirable person: “And I think it’s about the attention too. You feel wanted. You feel that the guys is interested in you” and “In here, you feel wanted, you feel like a guy notices you, it’s all like a ego boost for you, attention, you’re up there, girls like it.” The strip club seems to provide a context in which both the men and the women gain some sort of psychological pay-off in the form of confirmation of the self.

It could be argued that the dancers gain a more genuine and authentic validation of the self because the men in the strip club are genuinely interested in them and the services they offer, whereas the validation that the men receive is a carefully enacted illusion meant to manipulate them into believing they are desirable. It is difficult to determine to what degree the male patrons are aware of this manipulation, but it would seem that the experience is confirming to some degree, otherwise they would not return to the strip club.

The themes of discovery/insight, learning, role flexibility, and confirmation of self can be grouped together under a meta-theme of differentiation/autonomy. Differentiation/autonomy serves as an organizing theme for these basic themes.

Organizing theme: Differentiation/autonomy

The process of differentiation and autonomy can be described as creating the self in reference to others. Differentiation describes a process of becoming oneself through one's experience and defining one's function as different to the original or source. Autonomy is the process through which an individual becomes defined, free, self-directed, and independent of others. In Anastasia's story, it is clear that she became differentiated and autonomous through her discovery, insight, learning, role flexibility, and confirmation of self. Developing her sense of self was not only important for Anastasia's identity formation but also enabled her to distinguish herself from her past and her abusive experiences. Through learning, growth, and personal development, one is able to establish a new sense of oneself and, in this way, create a clear distinction between oneself in the past and one's new identity in the present. This has enabled Anastasia to differentiate herself from her past and become the confident, open, and warm individual that she is today.

Basic themes: Abuse; ambiguity; diffuse family relationships and relational inversion

Abuse

Anastasia suffered childhood sexual abuse and was raped multiple times. She carried the hurt, anger, and pain for many years. She also experienced domestic abuse in her first marriage. A psychologist helped Anastasia to understand and integrate her experience, and her new found self-awareness and insight is used to help others. Anastasia is busy

writing her story and hopes to publish a book on her experience to help other women: “And it’s easy for me to talk about it. Everyone always says to me, you talk so... you can just talk openly about it. I said I can, but I can help a lot of people who’s been there.” Anastasia healed the experiences of her sexual abuse, domestic abuse, and rapes and transformed herself into an open and caring human being.

Ambiguity

In Anastasia’s family of origin there was a lot of ambiguity and ambivalence. She was not aware that the man she called her father was not her biological father. She found out later that her real father was a white man that her mother used to work for. Two of her siblings were only half-siblings because they did not share the same father. The identity of Anastasia’s family was obscure and uncertain, which can leave a young child feeling unsure of where she belongs. Anastasia’s mother also died when she was nine years old which may have left her with more ambiguity about her role in the family and who her real family was.

Diffuse family relationships and relational inversion

The boundaries in Anastasia’s family of origin were diffuse and permeable. The natural and appropriate boundary between a father or step-father and child were broken when Anastasia’s step-father sexually abused her. Anastasia was simultaneously taken from the role of child who is supposed to be protected by her father, into the role of a sexual, adult woman. Anastasia was also the oldest female in the house and, when her mother died, she had two younger siblings to take care of. Anastasia had to grow up extremely quickly to

fulfill a motherly role when she was very young, creating a relational inversion. This relational inversion was reinforced through her step-father's sexual abuse, defining her as his 'lover' or 'partner' through his actions.

The themes of abuse, ambiguity, and diffuse family relationships and relational inversion fall under the organizing theme: crisis/history.

Organizing theme: Crisis/history

Anastasia experienced a difficult childhood and a disturbed relationship with her step-father. She was sexually abused and grew up in a family where there was ambiguity, diffuse family relationships, and relational inversion. Anastasia underwent much personal transformation through therapy and exotic dancing which healed the trauma associated with her past. Anastasia is now in control of her body and her life. She has the power to define her personal boundaries and the strength to cope with the personal violation in her past. She also has the power, insight, and experience to ensure that her own daughters grow up in a safe and protected environment.

The two organizing themes of differentiation/autonomy and crisis/history can be described by a meta-meta-theme – transformation. Transformation functions as a global theme.

Global theme: Transformation

Anastasia has been through many difficult and traumatic experiences and has demonstrated her personal strength, adaptability, and capacity for growth. One of the overlying themes which describes and connects much of the data through her differentiation/autonomy and crisis/history themes is transformation. Anastasia's story is rich in descriptions of how dancing has contributed to her personal growth. Exotic dancing has provided her with the means to develop on a psychological and spiritual level, and to become the powerful, strong, and successful woman that she is today.

Basic themes: Exotic dancing as self-expression/enjoyment; helping/instructing; income/contributing to the family

Exotic dancing as self-expression/enjoyment

Exotic dancing is experienced as enjoyable and fulfilling by many dancers. This idea challenges the stereotype that stripping is a degrading job for desperate single mothers or a laborious necessity for drug addicts. Anastasia comments, "But I like dancing, I like music, I like meeting people. Um, I like to sit and think what makes a guy's mind tick. I like to climb into a guy's mind, you know, why guys come to places like this." Anastasia finds her job stimulating and challenging and these two factors contribute to her job satisfaction.

Helping/instructing: Helping clients

Exotic dancing is not only about financial reward. Anastasia expressed a genuine interest and connection with her clients and expressed pride in listening to them, building their self-esteem, and helping them with their personal problems. Anastasia observed how her intentions were different from the younger dancers: “It’s for the young girls, the ones that are after money, material things, they’ve got no kids, no husband, they’re just in it for the money, for them it’s all about money. Then for me, I like to sit and talk to guys, find out why you’re here, why you’re sad, how was your day, work, talk to me, I’m a good listener, that type of thing.”

Being interested in the client seems to lead to more opportunity for financial reward for the stripper: “That’s why the girls don’t understand. I’m older, they’re young, but why do I have so many customers and they don’t have so many customers? It’s because the customers know with me it’s not always about the money, it’s about helping them with their wives and their problems”.

Anastasia’s popularity is also a reflection on the needs and wants of men. An erotic experience is not the only objective for some men frequenting strip clubs. The interpersonal connection, listening, and emotional reciprocity may allude to a deeper desire for a more meaningful interaction with the opposite sex. The connection created with a dancer may act as a substitute or compensate for what’s lacking in an intimate relationship. Anastasia comments: “I’m interested in how your day was, you know, his wife doesn’t ask him how was your day babe, or whatever, here he comes to the strip

club and a girl is interested in how his day was” and “He just wants to come and chill. And then I sit with them and I can talk for hours and it gets out. So we’re also like Dr. Phil – we’re like psychiatrists, we sit here, we listen.”

Helping/instructing: Helping other dancers

The relationships between the dancers also seem to be an important source of meaning and gratification. Although the relationships seem to be contentious and competitive at times, there is often a lot of cooperation and support between the women: “That’s why I like to help other people; I know sometimes they back-stab me, even the girls here. I always forgive, I always like to make people smile and I always try to help people” and “If new girls comes here she always tells them I’m going to put you under Anastasia’s wing. She’ll give you good advice and she will teach you the game, because other girls will give you wrong advice.”

Helping/instructing: Helping wider society

Anastasia aims to help other women who have been sexually abused through her own knowledge and experience, but she also aims to help them in another way: “Some women goes overweight after they have kids and I used to give classes to women to make them like pole dancing to make them feel sexy, you know. Because, if you’re pole dancing, your metabolism goes up, so they’re going to lose weight, surprise their husband, they’re going to be more sexy in bed, they’re going to feel more sexy in bed.” Anastasia also intends to empower women by sharing her knowledge on sexuality. By teaching women

how to tease and entice their husbands, she hopes to create better connections and relationships between couples.

The importance of sexual knowledge and awareness is becoming more and more recognized. The owner of the strip club, Gina, has created a workshop that teaches women how to be sexy, create more intimacy with their husbands, and be more sexually confident. The increasing number of women visiting strip clubs also indicates that women are becoming more sexually explorative, more interested in sexual contexts, and more open to traditionally masculine sexual experiences. Anastasia comments on this process: “And we get a lot of couples coming in as well. And the women come here and see it’s not so slutty and whorish like everyone say, ‘all the strippers is whores and sluts’, they come here and they see it’s actually a thing they and the husband can enjoy.”

Income/contributing to the family

Providing for the family and ensuring financial security is another way in which an exotic dancer’s occupation contributes positively to her life. Money is a form of power in Western society and the financial rewards of stripping give the dancer many choices and opportunities. Many strippers use their income to pay for drugs, alcohol, and partying, but others use it to provide their children with better opportunities: “I did it before just for the money but now I put money away, I bought a house, got a car, saved for my kids. I’ve got two daughters; I save for my kids for their college and all that so they’re looked after, so they don’t have to do this, because I’m not educated.”

Anastasia's dancing experience also contributes to her intimate relationship with her husband. When asked how exotic dancing affects her personal sexuality she responded, "It's very good (laughter), especially with the experience. If you're unexperienced, you start in the game and then you learn a lot like if you wanna spice up your sex life at home, makes it more sexy, where I wouldn't have done it before, like put something sexy on, put music on, dim the lights, you know, dance for my husband, you know." and "It's good for your sex life at home. It spices it up, it's not boring, something different. You try different things."

The themes exotic dancing as self-expression/enjoyment, helping/instructing, and income/contributing to the family are all described by the organizing theme: gratification.

Organizing theme: Gratification

Anastasia expresses her personal gratification, belonging and sense of meaning throughout her story. Anastasia experiences a sense of gratification through her dancing, interacting with clients, her relationships with other dancers, the help she can provide to others as well as the financial contribution she is able to make to her family.

Basic themes: Defining relationships; creating the context for the erotic experience; retribution/revenge

Defining relationships

Although the client would seem to hold all the power in terms of his financial capacity, the dancer maintains the definition of the relationship. She will decide on how close, how intimate, and how personal the client is allowed to get to her. Within an interpersonal context, the dancer is very powerful in determining the quality and fulfillment of the interaction. Many dancers comment on their feelings of power and control when dancing for men. Anastasia confirms: “It’s like I’m in control. I’m up there on stage and I dance, if I want you to touch my boobs, I’ll take your hands and put it there. If I don’t want you to, I don’t let you. So you’re in control. So I see it as the only place, my little fantasy world, where I can be in control, you can see, look, but you can’t have it. Outside here the men is normally in control, you know, he’s the man of the house, he pays the bills, he sees that everything is okay with his family, he’s in control. This is the only place where I can be in control.”

This power reversal also seems to suit the men. Anastasia comments: “Sometimes guys like women to take over, to take the lead, because they’re like business guys, they’re always on top there, they give the orders and everything, they’ve got a lot of power. You give the orders here. It’s our little fantasy world. What we says goes. A lot of guys like that and it gives us a lot of power.” The fact that this power is contained in a “fantasy world” and is “given” to the dancers undermines the possibility that the power originates

in the dancer. It would seem that even in these erotic games, the men still allow this illusion to take place and, therefore, may still maintain the power in these exchanges.

Creating the context for the erotic experience

The strip club provides the venue for a fantastical enactment of eroticism and entertainment. The dancer creates an illusion which is based on manipulating the client into believing that he is attractive, interesting, and sexually desirable, “but what women don’t understand, men also want to feel wanted. That’s why they come to strip clubs. They also want the woman to show him that she’s into him, she’s interested in him”. However, the interest that the dancer shows in her client is not an authentic interest. Her interest is part of the fantasy, a fantasy which is defined by an exchange of money for services: “Then some girls are only interested in the money, and it makes the guy, it’s almost like acting, you make that guy act too, to come to the guy’s wallet.”

Strippers need to perform while at work and keep their personal identity separate from their dancer identity: “You must separate them. When I put my foot in here, when I drive in this parking lot, I’m Anastasia. And then I’m Anastasia – I’m the psychiatrist, I’m the sexual therapist, I’m everything, because it’s acting.”

However, there also seems to be a certain amount of congruence between the dancer identity and the self: “This is the only place where I can be myself” and “Here you can drink, you can sit, you can just be yourself. I always tell my clients that what you see is what you get.” It would seem that Anastasia is congruent with who she is in many aspects

of her job, but there are also other aspects in which she has to act and create a fantasy. Anastasia could be referring to her personality as authentic and the striptease as an act; perhaps there is authenticity as well as performance aspects to interactions within the stripping context.

Retribution/revenge

Anastasia used her power and control over men to attain retribution for the hurt in her past. By using her sexuality to manipulate men, she felt she was ‘one-up’ and, in this way, got revenge for what men had done to her: “For me, it was all about money and getting men back; it’s my way or the highway. I’m in control. I’m this spoilt little brat – that type of thing. So, if I didn’t like you, fuck you, give me money. If I want you, you know, this is my price” and “the only reason I could get guys back is by going into this, you know, I get something out of it. I went into it actually for the wrong reasons; to get guys back.” Anastasia used this external form of power to try and find justice for what had happened to her, but, over time, she developed a more internal sense of personal power. She converted her pain into wisdom through her experience in therapy and self exploration. Her power is now more obvious in her authentic interactions with others, her understanding of people, her desire to help, and her self-awareness and understanding.

Anastasia demonstrates her insight into how dancers often use their financial power to eliminate the trauma and pain from the past. Although money is a form of power, how you choose to use it determines whether you will develop an external, artificial sense of power or a more authentic form of internal power. Acknowledging one’s personal

responsibility and choices is a form of internal power that is ignored by many people, including dancers: “The money, the money is very good. Then you get your girls who knows it’s good money, quick money; they throw their lives away. Everything goes up their nostrils and they can’t cope with the work, the hours, and what happened to them, the rapes and abuse, and that’s their way of coping. Taking a line, or doing whatever they’re doing because they think it’s going to kill the pain, but it doesn’t work. A lot of them throw their life away within this industry and a lot of girls better their lives.”

Anastasia’s true sense of power seems to come from a personal battle with her hurt and pain, and trying to find meaning in what happened to her: “I was hateful with men, where was God when I was abused? Why did it happen to me? So I used to say, ‘fuck God!’ Where was he? I’m his child, why did he let it happen to me?” After working through the trauma in therapy, Anastasia’s strength is evident: “I’m actually glad I went through all of that shit, the bad, the good, because that made me a much, much better person. If all that bad stuff didn’t happen to me before, in the past, I wouldn’t be the person that I am today.” She has integrated the experience into herself and has developed a new sense of self mastery, “It’s like a test between the devil and God. God said, ‘you know what, you can put anything in front of this woman’s path, she’s my child and I know she’s strong. You can do it to her. I’ll tell you she will come out on top.’ That’s how my point of you and everything changes about everything”.

It could be argued that authentic power is a matter of personal character and internal strength rather than the ability to do, act, or accomplish something. Forgiveness takes

tremendous courage and strength, and this form of power needs to be acknowledged. “Mentally, if you want to handle what happened to you, you must face it. Face the people. You can’t do it with every single one now, but accept it, forgive them, and carry on with your life. If you don’t forgive the person, what he did to you, it will still be there.”

The basic themes defining relationships, creating the context for the erotic experience, and retribution/revenge are all described by the organizing theme: power/control.

Organizing theme: Power/control

The strip club provides a context in which many power relations are inverted. Western society is still predominantly patriarchal and men still seem to hold the power in many spheres. When a man walks into a strip club, however, social norms are left at the door. It is the dancer who defines the relationship with her client and creates the context of the erotic experience. Anastasia also had a more personal power game at play – for her, exotic dancing was a means of getting revenge and retribution on men (‘men’ symbolizing those who had abused her in the past). Anastasia demonstrated her personal power and strength by overcoming her anger and hatred through forgiveness.

The organizing themes of gratification and power/control can be conceptualized as a process of conservation.

Global theme: Conservation

Another overlying theme that emerges from Anastasia's story is conservation. Conservation describes the process of preserving the status quo and creating stability within a system. Anastasia conserves her environment, her experience, and her interactions through two other processes; namely, gratification and power/control. Anastasia has created a satisfying work experience and financial stability, security, and predictability in her life. In this way, Anastasia is able to maintain and control her world, a process that she was not able to experience in an unpredictable, inverted childhood.

Summary

Anastasia's personal life experiences and her career as an exotic dancer have resulted in the dichotomous phenomenon of personal transformation and personal conservation. These two global themes have been described in relation to Anastasia's personal and individual experience. The themes of transformation and conservation are also evident in Anastasia's family on multiple levels.

There is evidence of transformation in racial and cultural identification through the generations of Anastasia's family history. Anastasia's mother was Coloured but her grandmother was Black. Anastasia is of mixed racial decent but she identifies herself as Coloured. This is a conservational act because her mother was Coloured and may be an attempt to conserve ethnic identity, belonging, and connection to her mother and family of origin.

Anastasia and her older brother represent another transformation in the family's cultural or racial identity because their father is White. Anastasia's first husband is Coloured and she had a son with him who now lives with his father. Marrying a person of the same cultural or racial identity is a way of conserving a family's culture or identity. Anastasia divorced her first husband and then married a White man. Anastasia mentioned in a telephonic conversation that her ex-husband is angry with her and tells her son that she married a White man because Coloured people are not good enough for her. These lies and distortions have damaged the relationship between Anastasia and her son. Besides the normal conflict and animosity after the divorce, it seems that inter-racial relationships can be perceived as disloyalty to one's ethnic identity and can result in anger and rejection.

Anastasia's current husband is White which represents further transformation in the cultural identity of the family. Simultaneously, however, there is conservation in the patterns of relationships; Anastasia's mother was also a Coloured woman who had a relationship with a White man. It is interesting that Anastasia has repeated a pattern that was illegal in apartheid South Africa. The transformation of the South African law and constitution has allowed for the repetition of inter-racial relationships and the continuation of mixed-race generations in Anastasia's family.

Anastasia's actions and decisions have also represented a transformation in the culture of her family. Anastasia described how some of her siblings are unemployed, irresponsible,

and abuse alcohol. Anastasia's behaviour and choices represent a differentiation from other family members. She has created a responsible, stable, and healthy way of living. Exotic dancing is not necessarily a career for reckless, immature young women. It can provide the means for financial stability and a good standard of living.

Anastasia has also transformed old family narratives to ensure that her own children are protected and respected, and this represents another differentiation from family members. Anastasia described how her grandmother would beat her when she told her about the sexual abuse that she had experienced and accused her of telling lies. Anastasia has asked her daughters to communicate openly with her and has assured them that she will believe them if someone hurts them in any way. The culture of the family has been transformed into a situation where children are respected, heard, and supported instead of abused and neglected.

Anastasia's personal story of transformation and conservation as an exotic dancer needs to be considered in relation to her family background and racial or cultural identity. Anastasia's history and context of living provides the foundation of her subjective experience as well as the script for future family patterns. It is important to understand and include these factors when attempting to interpret and appreciate the life and experiences of an exotic dancer.

Natalie's relationship with her older sister was conflicted and distant while they were growing up and they are still distant today. The only person who Natalie had a close relationship with was her little brother who she protected and had a special connection with.

Natalie describes herself as a lonely, shy, and insecure little girl while growing up. She did not experience affirming, warm, and secure relationships with any adults. Natalie relocated extensively during her primary school years. Her family moved between Holland and South Africa multiple times due to her parents' business. She attended school in Holland and South Africa and was never able to establish a group of friends or a sense of predictability or stability in her life. When she was about twelve her family settled in South Africa permanently.

Natalie started exotic dancing in 1991 and has travelled and danced in Holland and the USA. She met her first husband, who was also South African, while in the USA. The couple came back to South Africa and married in 1992. The marriage lasted a year. Three years later she met her ex-boyfriend. Three months into their relationship she fell pregnant with her daughter. She left her ex-boyfriend when her daughter was eighteen months old because he was emotionally abusive. Natalie's daughter has lived with her father since she was eight years old. Natalie met her current husband in 2001 and they had a son together in 2007.

Natalie now describes her relationship with her mother as distant but she feels closer to her father. She describes her relationship with her sister as almost non-existent; they only contact one another when it is absolutely necessary. Natalie feels that her older sister does not like her and that is why they have never been able to create a bond. Natalie experiences her sister's rejection as hurtful which has contributed to feelings of non-belonging and non-acceptance. Natalie is still very close to her brother. Even though he lives in Holland they are in constant contact with one another.

Natalie stopped dancing for an agent and opened her own business in 2004. She used her experience as an exotic dancer to open a pole dancing studio where women can learn to pole-dance, express their sexuality, and build self-confidence. She has sold multiple franchises of her business throughout the Gauteng area. Natalie is currently separated from her husband and lives with her son.

Researcher's experience during the interview

When I interviewed Natalie she was not wearing any make-up. For most women, the thought of going to work without make-up is a bit like going to work naked. Then I realized that Natalie does indeed go to work naked. Natalie's confidence and comfort with herself was obvious. Going to work without make-up may seem like a meaningless, unimportant action, but it communicates many things in a subtle manner. It shows a sense of rebelliousness against social norms that say that a woman should always make the

effort to be sexually appealing. It also demonstrates personal strength in her ability to go against such powerful norms and to still remain strong in her identity and self-worth.

Even in childhood, Natalie possessed the ability to challenge the norms. Individuality, however, comes at a price – Natalie struggled to belong and did not fit in with her peers. She has now found a way to express herself while being accepted. I wonder whether I would have the courage to break away from convention and risk rejection. Natalie's struggle is humanity's struggle. Everyone has battled with feelings of rejection and judgement and longed for belonging and acceptance. Every person wishes to be noticed, admired, and recognized as a unique and special person.

Thematic analysis

The themes which have been extracted from Natalie's story have been organized into thematic networks on three levels; namely, basic themes, organizing themes, and global themes. The basic themes represent the initial themes that emerged from the interview. The organizing themes coordinate the basic themes into groups. The global themes provide a meta-understanding of the basic themes and organizing themes. The interpretation will begin with the basic themes, then the organizing themes, followed by the global themes.

Table 6.1: Thematic network for Natalie

Basic themes	Organizing themes	Global themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belonging in childhood • Belonging through exotic dancing • Belonging and non-belonging with men and women • Acceptance by society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belonging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy and self-confidence • Energy and performance • Creative energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy exchange 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal growth • Self-esteem and body image • Helping/instructing • Courage and overcoming fear • Empathy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healing and growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power, intuition, and self-protection • Creating the context for the erotic experience • Power in personal relationships • Exploitation at work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power 	

Basic themes: Belonging in childhood; belonging through exotic dancing; belonging and non-belonging with men and women; acceptance by society

Belonging in childhood

When Natalie was younger she was not a stereotypical little girl. She was more comfortable associating with boys and with her younger brother. Natalie describes her childhood: “But I never had women girlfriends. I was like a tomboy. I used to be with the boys all the time.” Her separation from other girls and women was so clear to her that she says: “And I never ever thought that I’d be teaching women. If you had told me this fifteen years ago I would have said you were talking rubbish.” Natalie found acceptance with boys when she was a child and, in many ways, stripping for men offers the same comfort. Natalie may have attempted to conserve this male acceptance through stripping; dancing naked will surely gain men’s adoration and attention.

Natalie attended seven different primary schools while she was growing up. Her parents had a business in Holland and would relocate regularly. Natalie went to school in Holland and in South Africa; often changing schools in the middle of the school year. Natalie expressed that it was difficult to make friends in Holland because she could not speak Dutch. As soon as she started to settle and make friends she would have to move again. The constant moving back and forth between countries led Natalie to feel insecure, shy, and lonely.

Belonging through exotic dancing

Natalie explains that, in hindsight, she entered the career of exotic dancing because she wanted to belong: “I suppose, if I look back, I just wanted to belong.” Exotic dancing creates a sense of belonging because it leads to the creation of a group of women who accept and need each other. The ‘outside world’ is judgemental and rejecting of women who strip so exotic dancers can find a sense of belonging with one another. When a person cannot gain acceptance and belonging through conventional means, he or she may join a deviant group in order to gain membership, recognition, and a sense of identity in relation to others.

Although Natalie was looking for a sense of belonging when she started out in this career, she also experienced negative evaluation from other women. Natalie experienced belonging with other dancers but simultaneously experienced rejection from other women. She described how her dancing would be affected when there were women in the audience: “So you keep worrying what is she gonna think.” The need to belong to your own gender and to feel that you are accepted by other members of your own sex seems not only important for a sense of group affiliation but also for a sense of your identity and confirmation as a man or a woman. Hence the expressions, ‘he’s one of the guys’, ‘girl’s night out’, and ‘she’s one of us’.

Belonging and non-belonging with men and women

Acceptance and non-acceptance can be found within the same moment and within the same context when exotic dancing. A man could accept a stripper as his sexual fantasy

and admire her on stage, but, at the very same moment, he could be rejecting and judgemental and see her as sleazy and only good for a 'one night stand'. Natalie describes the oscillating opinion of the audience: "I've been admired and I've been booed off stage and had drinks thrown at me and women telling me I'm being, ah, exploiting myself." It seems that, within the context of exotic dancing, acceptance and non-acceptance are two sides of the same coin.

Natalie experienced the dichotomy of acceptance with men but the simultaneous non-acceptance with women. Natalie protects herself against other people's judgement of what she does for a living, especially women: "When there are just guys, guys are guys and you don't care about them 'cause they're going to go home and do their own thing anyway. But with women, you want to belong. And those women might be thinking what in the hell is she doing" and "If I was with anybody and they asked me what I did I wouldn't tell them, I'd be cagey about it because they'll hang on to their boyfriend tightly." Exotic dancing is based on the primitive art of displaying sexuality in order to attract a mate. The exotic dancer becomes an expert in using her sexuality in order to attract men and obtain financial reward. Some women will perceive a stripper as competition or as a threat because a stripper represents the sexual ideal, a temptress who can seduce a women's partner and break up a relationship. The stripper gains acceptance, approval, and belonging with men by personifying sexuality. By creating this image, however, she simultaneously loses her belonging and acceptance with women.

Acceptance by society

The need to be accepted and to belong is a fundamental human need. Natalie makes a reference to how the choice of her deviant career led to society in general not accepting her: “Now they accept me. In those days they didn’t. In those days they thought I was degrading myself.” Natalie is not dancing at the moment as she has opened a successful pole dancing school and has sold multiple franchises throughout the Gauteng area. If people did not accept her in the past because of her exotic dancing, it could be that they accept her now, not because they have simply accepted her choice of career, but rather because she no longer dances and has instead created a business out of the knowledge that she accumulated through dancing. Creating a business and becoming the ‘reformed’ deviant is socially acceptable and even admired. Her acceptance now seems to be a result of her conforming to social norms and behaving within the social definition of acceptable femininity. Society has not necessarily become more accepting of deviant behaviour such as exotic dancing. Exotic dancers still seem to experience discrimination, stereotyping, and moral judgement. Natalie’s social acceptance could also be due to the fact that she now has more confidence, social standing, and presence, and this positive persona is interpersonally accepted and rewarded.

The basic themes belonging in childhood, belonging through exotic dancing, belonging and non-belonging with men and women, and acceptance by society are grouped under the organizing theme: belonging.

Organizing theme: Belonging

Natalie did not experience a sense of belonging or appreciation within her family while she was growing up. She struggled to find friendship and acceptance with other girls because she was different and moved around a lot. Natalie was a tomboy and found a sense of belonging and acceptance with her little brother and other boys. These childhood experiences could have influenced Natalie's choice to become an exotic dancer. By using her sexuality she could continue to find a sense of belonging and acceptance with men.

Natalie also expresses a need to belong with women. However, the belonging that exotic dancing provided simultaneously undermined her belonging with women. Only now, has Natalie now found her sense of belonging and acceptance. She teaches and works with women every day. She has developed meaningful relationships with them as she helps them to express their sexuality and develop self-confidence. Natalie is respected and appreciated for her experience and skill, and finds a sense of meaning in her work.

Basic themes: Energy and self-confidence; energy and performance; creative energy

Energy and self-confidence

When Natalie was younger, she used to hold her energy levels back: "I used to pull my energy in so I could make myself smaller so people wouldn't notice me. But what happens when you do that, especially when you're shy, people come really close to you, 'cause they can't feel your energy. If you throw your energy out there then they don't need to come closer, 'cause they can feel you from there already. So I've learnt now, I

can walk into a place and people will know I'm there 'cause I just throw my energy out there and they don't have to come up close and get into my space and then they don't drain me."

Natalie has recovered from her younger, shy self and is now confident and outgoing. She gives off positive energy and is clearly comfortable with people noticing and acknowledging her presence. Natalie has realized her own personal power through her dancing and expresses herself openly and confidently. She is no longer afraid to put herself out there. Natalie's experience as an exotic dancer has led to increased self-confidence and self-expression.

Energy and performance

Performing as an exotic dancer requires that you invest a lot of emotional and physical energy into your act. There is a continuous energy exchange between the dancer and her audience, as Natalie illustrates: "There's a whole energy exchange there that happens" and "You stop worrying about how you look and you start worrying more about how you can give them more of yourself." When the performance is not well received or the dancer is not confirmed by the audience, the energy exchange is limited. There seems to be a one way flow of energy as the dancer tries to elicit a positive response to ensure that the men enjoy the show "You've gotta go in there and lift them up. And they just take your energy. They just bleed you dry."

This illustrates how Natalie is often powerless in her interactions with the audience and, although she invests a lot in her performance, she cannot control how it is received. At other times, Natalie explains, the audience is enthusiastic and positive and that increases her own energy and results in a positive outlook: “And there’s other days, it might be a big party and everyone is just clapping and going mad, and you can walk out of there and do another twenty shows because they give you so much.” The exotic dancer is often reliant on the audience for energy and confirmation of her performance.

Creative energy

Natalie also describes how she experiences a personal energy within her own body and how this energy directs and creates her performance: “But when I’m on stage, I literally, I channel another energy through me.” The reference to ‘another energy’ implies a supernatural, almost spiritual, force that acts through her, taking the responsibility of the performance away from her and taking control of her movements. This energy could also be described as creative energy, a life force, or even spiritual expression.

The basic themes of energy and self-confidence, energy and performance, and creative energy are described by the organizing theme: energy exchange.

Organizing theme: Energy exchange

The ‘energy’ that Natalie refers to is an internal, emotional resource that is used to create. This personal energy can be used to create context or connection with others through

extending oneself in interpersonal relationships. Emotional energy is constantly expended in interpersonal transactions. Emotional energy is a dynamic resource within the individual and its sustainability is dependent on interpersonal exchanges. It is a continual process of give and take that can leave the individual energized or depleted, depending on the relationship of input vs. output.

The exotic dancer uses her emotional energy to elicit a response from her audience. When the dancer creates the desired response, she feels that she has been successful. She has received the desired energy output in response to her energy input. The exotic dancer, or any performer, is able to exchange emotional energy with others through relationships. A positive, affirming, and enthusiastic response from the crowd provides the dancer with the energy that enables her to continue. A negative, dull, or disconfirming response from the crowd communicates to the dancer that she must try harder or increase her input.

The organizing themes of belonging and energy exchange are described by the interpersonal process of participation.

Global theme: Participation

Natalie's struggle with belonging and acceptance, as well as her energy exchange with others, is part of the process of participation. Participation describes the process of an individual's involvement with others and the process of taking part in interpersonal exchange. In order to participate in interpersonal contexts, one needs to be accepted and

aware of the rules of engagement. By participating within the exotic dancing context, Natalie gained a sense of belonging and acceptance and learnt how to engage with her audience using her energy. Natalie has created the opportunity for participation for others through her pole dancing school. The women who learn to pole-dance at her studio find a sense of belonging and cooperation with other women. Natalie describes how the women help one another within a learning environment that is non-judgemental and not critical.

Basic themes: Personal growth; self-esteem and body image; helping/instructing; courage and overcoming fear; empathy

Personal growth

Natalie found healing through her dancing and her experiences have created a sense of meaning for her life. This seems to contrast with the negativity and lack of meaning which most people would associate with exotic dancing. Natalie describes herself as a shy child who received little attention and affection from her parents. She described her parents as “Completely cold emotionally. My parents never hugged me. I never knew what a hug was until high school.” Natalie explains that she realizes now why she started dancing – it provided her with a chance to be acknowledged, to be the centre of attention, and to be wanted and admired: “Can everybody see me now? Here I am. You can’t miss me.”

As she matured, Natalie developed a personality that could be described as spontaneous, daring, and adventurous: “But I’m always the first to try something. I was the first person to have a belly ring in this country. I was the first to have my boobs done as a dancer. I’m

not, you know, if there's something going on I wanna try it. I'll be there. If you tell me there's a plane ticket waiting for you, I'll be on that plane, 'cause that's how I am. That sense of trying out new stuff." Natalie overcame her self-conscious childhood and adolescence to become a bold, courageous, and confident woman, "But it helped me tremendously. I mean, when people met me... I've got a friend from school and she saw me the other day at a show and she said, 'my God, if you'd told me this then I would never have believed it' because I was so quiet in class they didn't even know I was there. I was like this little mouse."

Self-esteem and body image

Exotic dancing helped Natalie to grow into a beautiful, sensual, and graceful woman who respects and loves herself. When asked how exotic dancing affected her body image, Natalie exclaimed, "A hundred and eighty degree turn! Three sixty! If I had to say I used to be, to me anyway, I was like an ugly duckling. I was too skinny. I had knobbly knees and knobbly arms and I didn't look after myself. I didn't know how to wear make-up. But when you learn to move in your body you become so fluid, that you start sitting upright, you start, you know, walking taller." The confirmation and admiration she received as a stripper helped Natalie to recognize her own beauty and to realize that she was desirable and sexy.

Dancing provided Natalie with the opportunity to accept her body completely: "I'm fortunate actually, 'cause I accept myself completely; how I look." Many women in Western society struggle to accept their bodies because it is difficult to measure up to

society's definition of the feminine ideal. Natalie wanted to help others when she started exotic dancing, but she soon found out that others did not need her help. Instead, the experience helped her to find her own healing: "But it helped me tremendously". When asked how exotic dancing has affected her as a person, Natalie replied, "It's brought my self-esteem right up there. I never had any. I'm completely happy with myself. I keep striving for improvement and perfection. But that's nothing to do with me not liking myself. No, I can do anything; if I can do that then I can do anything." Natalie's self-esteem is also confirmed by the positive and meaningful contribution that she is making to other women's lives through dancing. Her exotic dancing career has led her to a place in her life in which her work is appreciated and makes a difference, and this contributes positively to her self-worth.

Helping/instructing

Natalie has been searching for a sense of meaning since she was young: "The universe deliberately pushed me in this direction, to be doing this, because I know ultimately since I was five years old my aunt used to say that you're going to be a lawyer, because I wanted to divorce her from her husband, that was what I was going to do, was help women."

Natalie is now helping other women through her pole dancing school. She teaches them to be in touch with their bodies, to accept themselves, and to explore their sexuality. Natalie sees a meaning in her chosen life path and believes that she was guided by a spiritual force to help women in this way: "...I had to go through and do the dancing and

experience all of that so I could pass that knowledge on. So I'm doing my life's work; that I know without a doubt. I cannot do anything else; this is what I'm meant to do." Natalie describes how pole dancing helps other women: "It's to make them realize that it's got nothing to do with how you look. Stop worrying about that. If you wanna move, I've seen the most sexiest girls dance; they were overweight...They move so gracefully because they accept that they are a woman...when your body is acting this stuff out every day, it starts changing your thoughts after a while, and it happens so subtly, you don't realize it, until one day you realize, ah, I'm not insecure when I do this."

Natalie has come full circle. She started her journey into exotic dancing as a way to find belonging, whereas she is now creating belonging for others: "That's exactly what it does, because these girls start belonging."

Courage and overcoming fear

Dancing naked requires courage. Natalie didn't drink alcohol or take drugs before her performances. She had to rely on her own courage to put herself out there and do her show: "The hardest thing, I think, for anybody to do, as a general social phobia, is public speaking. So I think stripping is one notch up from that because you're taking off your clothes in bright lights and everybody is studying you from head to toe and you can't hide." Natalie had to overcome her fear of judgement and criticism in order to give a good performance: "So if I had to sum up my experiences, I'd have to say that it's overcoming that social barrier, of worrying what do people think of me, or they're going to see my bum or they're going to see my breasts or whatever. You forget about that, you

stop worrying about how you look and you start worrying more about how you can give them more of yourself, and that's a big hurdle.”

Natalie also describes how it requires more courage to dance at a show than in a club. At a show the dancer has to captivate the entire audience with her performance, whereas, the dancer in a club only has to entertain a few men who have paid for a table dance: “They have a whole club full of three hundred guys waiting for the show and you are the show. So it's a very big difference, 'cause you have to cater for those, if you ask a table dancer to do a show, she won't be able to, because it's too scary. And you think, 'but you're already taking your clothes off, it's not.' They're not used to entertaining an entire crowd. They will stand and walk up to the pole and gyrate around the pole for twenty minutes and the guys are bored after ten already, 'cause she doesn't know how to pull the crowd in. You've got to throw yourself out there and that's just too scary – there's all these people watching you. When you're at a table, there's only six guys or whatever. No one else is watching you.”

Empathy

Natalie experienced a time in her life when she felt insecure and shy, especially when she had to attend school in a foreign country. Through her own experiences and her understanding of herself, Natalie expresses empathy for other women who feel the same way that she felt: “I mean, I can see by the way a woman carries herself, I can see what issues she's got. I can't tell you exactly, I can't say, 'well when you were five...', but I can say, 'ooh, why are you trying to cover yourself up by how your shoulders are' or

whatever. I can just see it, but I can't tell you what, I don't have a whole list of thoughts but I know how I need to speak to that person." Natalie uses her ability to understand others to develop trust in her interactions with them: "And you get so close and they will tell you things that they wouldn't tell somebody else because they think you're one of these people whose going to believe you if you say it anyway."

The basic themes of personal growth, self-esteem and body image, helping/instructing, courage and overcoming fear, and empathy are described by the organizing theme: healing and growth.

Organizing theme: Healing and growth

Natalie has experienced healing and personal growth through exotic dancing. She has overcome childhood inhibitions and has used her knowledge and experience to empower other women. Teaching exotic dancing has provided meaning in her life and has been personally rewarding for Natalie. She has also overcome fear and developed empathy for other people's difficulties. Dance, in general, is an expression of self through movement. Exotic dancing provided Natalie with the opportunity to express herself, be acknowledged, and gain approval. Exotic dancing was therapeutic for Natalie.

Basic themes: Power, intuition, and self-protection; creating the context for the erotic experience; power in personal relationships; exploitation at work

Power, intuition, and self-protection

Natalie explained the difference between dancing in a club and dancing at events. Dancing in a club offers the protection of the bouncers so that the dancer feels more in control. However, the dancers in clubs are exploited to a larger degree and have to follow the club rules. In a sense, they are less powerful. Natalie preferred her freedom from the artificial and unhealthy club setting but, when she danced by herself at events, there was no protection for her: “They feel safe because somebody is watching. They’re inside a club; they’re not on the road by themselves. There’s no protection as a dancer at all. So you need to be more brave driving around. There’s no protection. If you call the cops, what are they going to say? You were looking for it.” Dancing alone at events was less restricting for Natalie but she had to keep her wits about her constantly because a situation could become dangerous quite easily. Without a sense of agency and choice, Natalie would be completely powerless in a threatening situation.

Natalie created a sense of power for herself through her own intelligence and intuition. Natalie never drank or took drugs when she performed and therefore was always in control of her body and thoughts: “I’ll never drink at a place and I’ll never stay there.” and “No, I never took drugs or alcohol or anything and I’ve seen girls get into serious trouble because of it.” Natalie also developed her skill for reading people and describes how she was able to read the crowd to determine her own safety: “Because I am so alert.

If a guy is gonna grab my bum, I know he's gonna do it before he's even thought of it.” Natalie sometimes refused to dance at all and, in this way, she maintained her sense of power and control: “And you know what, there's certain crowds that I get a feeling. I've, three times in all of my years, I've done a show that I've walked in and said, ‘no’” and “It's such a bad energy there that I said, ‘no way, I'm leaving’”. The one time, I did the show because I needed to get another girl out so I stayed so I could give her time to leave. She would have had serious problems if I didn't stay. Then I just go. If I get a bad feeling I'll leave my bag in the car and I'll say to them, ‘listen, I'm just going to fetch my stuff’ and instead of going back in I'll get in my car and I'll go. I'll face the repercussions, but I'm not going to put my life at risk.” Natalie demonstrates not only how dancers look out for one another but also how she had to trust herself. Natalie was willing to put her job in jeopardy based on her intuition and personal perception of certain situations.

Creating the context for the erotic experience

Being an exotic dancer is like being any type of entertainer or actor; it requires that the dancer becomes a fantasy and entertains a whole crowd of people. Natalie sums up the experience of performing as an exotic dancer when she says: “When you're naked on stage everyone is watching you and they are watching your every move. So you have to be a really good actress, should I say, and if you try and hold yourself back, they don't, they're not going to enjoy the show. So you're forced to give it your all. It's like being a really good actress.” Natalie has the power to create a sexual fantasy and to captivate her audience.

When on stage, Natalie described her own sense of power and control over her male audience: “I mean, the house could be brought down, I mean, that’s such a power trip as a woman. To be the only woman and you can do what you want.” Natalie described how the men’s “mouths are like gaping, their eyes are this big. They’re just so in awe. They’ll do anything for you” However, Natalie felt less powerful when there were women in the audience: “But, let me tell you, if there’s a woman in the audience it keeps you back.” The judgement and opinion of other women is something beyond her control and may have led her to feel less empowered. The women in the audience would not respond as affirmatively as the men and there is always the possibility that they would be judging her. The power and control she felt with her male audience would not be felt with the women in the audience and this could undermine her performance and self-confidence.

Power in personal relationships

Natalie illustrates how exotic dancers experience power and control with men, on and off the stage. As a couple in a social situation, the woman who is an exotic dancer often receives more attention than her partner does: “Here I am the queen bee and he has to take second place, and they don’t like that for very long. You know they might in the beginning because it flatters them and they can tell everyone, but after a while they start getting jealous” and “They get very competitive, but there you are getting all this admiration from everybody.”

Natalie described how partners often need to take second place to a girlfriend or wife who is earning more money than they are. She agreed that there was certainly a power

difference between the genders: “I mean, they earn a lot of money. The girls at [strip club name] could earn ten to fifteen thousand Rand a week and that’s all cash and they have no overheads. They spend it on clothes. Now the guy feels...what guy at the age of twenty one is going to have that kind of income that she’s got.” and “Look, I also supported boyfriends for years. As far as that’s concerned, I also did the same thing. They’re all crying about their boyfriends not working, I had the same problem, I mean, because they just can’t compete with you. Men are like that, they’ll feel like a failure and they’ll stop straight away.” Money and admiration are viewed as commodities and seem to give the exotic dancer a sense of power; sometimes more power than their partners.

Exploitation at work

Before Natalie started dancing she was employed in a job which paid her less than a male colleague who did exactly the same job as she did: “I cannot stand it. Don’t tell me that I must earn less because I’m a woman. If I’m doing the same job, why must I earn less?” Natalie was powerless over her own earning potential at this stage and felt oppressed by her boss and his friends who were sexually harassing her. Through her dancing, Natalie took control of her own life and finances. Natalie not only enjoyed exotic dancing (“But I tell you my favourite were the bachelor parties, I just loved those”) but she felt less exploited as a stripper. Exotic dancing was not perceived as a form of exploitation to Natalie because she was more exploited in her ‘normal’ job than she was as an exotic dancer: “And he said, oh, you’re exploiting yourself and I said, what exactly is exploiting because I am still being harassed but I’m now getting paid R15 000 versus R2 000 and I

can leave.” A sense of exploitation seems to be relative to the perception of one’s situation, and not the situation itself.

The basic themes of power, intuition, and self protection, creating the context for the erotic experience, power in personal relationships, and exploitation at work are described by the organizing theme: power.

Organizing theme: Power

Natalie has the power to create her reality, to influence others, and to control her environment. When Natalie was a child she did not possess this power and had to conform to her parents’ wishes. At such a young age, Natalie could not control her life, make her own decisions, or create a sense of stability or predictability. Through exotic dancing, Natalie has the financial ability and personal agency to exert control and create choices for herself. Natalie had the personal power to leave unhealthy or unhappy relationships as well as negative working conditions. Natalie has also developed intuition, the ability to read people, and the skill to predict behaviour. This has given Natalie an increased sense of personal mastery over her life.

The organizing themes of healing and growth and power/control create the process of individuation.

Global theme: Individuation

Natalie has integrated her experience and developed an individual identity and personality. Individuation is the process of becoming an individual who is unique and differentiated from others. Exotic dancing provided the forum for Natalie to explore who she is and who she wants to be. Through her challenges, learning, and personal insight she has created self-worth, self-understanding, and identity. Natalie's self-growth, healing, and personal power has enabled her to find a balance between being an individual and belonging.

Summary

Natalie's experience as an exotic dancer is described by the two global themes of participation and individuation. Natalie's experience within her own family is also described by these two processes.

Natalie's brother and sister have both chosen conventional, socially approved, and admired professions. Natalie's brother is a pilot and her sister is a nurse. Natalie's choice of career can be seen as unconventional and unacceptable according to socially defined norms and values. Natalie's career choices represent an individuation from her family and may have even been a rebellion against the family's rules and norms. Natalie's parents were disapproving of her exotic dancing career and this may have enhanced her feelings of non-belonging and loneliness. Although her parents are proud of her now and

approve of her successful business decisions, the impact of their judgement and criticism may have contributed to Natalie's need to find belonging elsewhere.

The patterns within Natalie's family also seem to indicate participation with male members and exclusion or non-belonging with female members. Natalie currently experiences a closer and more accepting relationship with her father, but less so with her mother who she describes as extremely distant and disengaged. Natalie has a very close, rewarding relationship with her younger brother but describes her relationship with her sister as cold and detached. Natalie's relationship with her twelve year old daughter is distant and often conflicted, and she believes that this is caused by her ex-boyfriend's influence on her. Natalie's daughter lives with her father and, according to Natalie, she is influenced by what her father says about Natalie. Natalie is very close to her fourteen month old son and describes their relationship as very special.

Natalie's sense of belonging, acceptance, and closeness with the male members of her family may have created a personal narrative for Natalie. Natalie may have believed, on a deep, emotional level, that she belonged with 'the boys'. This personal schema may have led her to participate in contexts that are defined by male participation, male desires, and male approval.

Natalie's participation and individuation in her own family is interlinked with the same processes that she experienced as an exotic dancer. Through her experience as an exotic dancer, Natalie had the opportunity to participate and belong with women. Through

dancing, Natalie was simultaneously able to express her individuality and discover her self-esteem and self-confidence. She also created the context for others to belong and develop self-esteem by teaching pole dancing which has given her work meaning. Exotic dancing provided Natalie with the opportunity to explore alternative ways of being and experiment with personal narratives. Exotic dancing can be described as a creative context for Natalie because it has allowed her to recreate her ‘ugly duckling’ childhood identity into one which is strong, powerful, and accepted.

Chapter 7 – Poison

Introduction

Poison grew up with her father, mother, and younger brother until she was about six years old. When her parents got divorced, her father left and her mother could no longer afford to support her children.

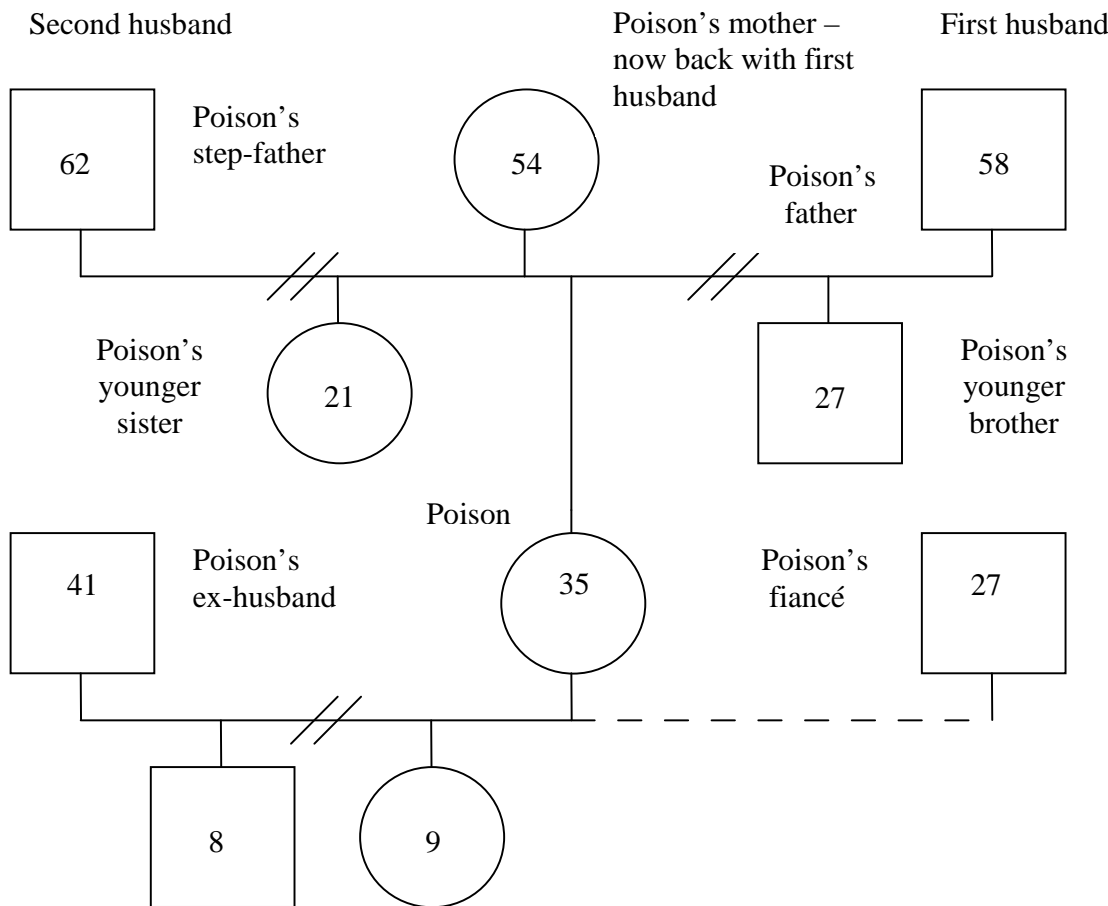


Figure 7.1: Poison's genogram

Poison and her brother were sent to live in foster care and then in a children's home. Poison and her brother returned to their mother once she was able to support them eight years later.

Poison expressed that she enjoyed living in the children's home and sees her experience there as an important contribution to her development. She had fun with her friends and expressed gratitude for the discipline, structure, and care that she received there. Poison believes that her experience in the children's home allowed her to differentiate from her mother. It allowed her to think for herself, develop her own morals and standards, and taught her the difference between right and wrong.

Poison got married at the age of nineteen and had two children with her ex-husband. She had her first child when she was twenty six and then started exotic dancing. When she found out that her husband had been unfaithful, she left and took the children with her. Poison had the financial means and independence to ensure her children did not go into state care once her marriage disintegrated.

Poison describes her relationship with both of her parents as close and supportive. Although she once had a good relationship with her mother's second husband, this relationship is distant now that her mother is back with her first husband, Poison's father. Poison is very close to her brother but has a more conflicted relationship with her sister whom she perceives as irresponsible and indulged. Poison's sister worked as an exotic

dancer for a while but, after she experienced sexual harassment from her employer, she left the industry. She is now a sales representative.

Poison currently lives with her son and her fiancé. Poison's daughter lives with her grandmother. This arrangement is reportedly beneficial for everyone involved.

Researcher's experience during the interview

Through my interaction with Poison, it seemed to me that she has found her place in the world. She is financially successful, she enjoys what she does, and she is mature, responsible, and authentic – she is true to who she is. It had not entered my mind before undertaking my research that exotic dancing could provide job satisfaction and personal gratification. In my limited conceptualization of the exotic dancing industry, I concluded that being a stripper must be exhausting, demeaning, and generally unpleasant. My initial curiosity and interest in exotic dancing was based on the idea that exotic dancers must suffer in what I perceived to be an oppressive and degrading profession. I wanted to investigate the difficulties and traumatic experiences of these women in order to provide them with the opportunity to be heard. Poison proves that each dancer creates her own experience and that one's personal reality is defined through one's thoughts, behaviour, and feelings.

My interview with Poison highlighted many of the issues and difficulties that I have experienced as a woman. Many women in Western society are very sensitive to the

constant bombardment of perfect, female images. The social pressure on women to be the feminine ideal impacts most women, including me. Poison has the courage to dance naked in front of approving and disapproving men and still maintain a healthy self-esteem and feel confident in her appearance and who she is. Poison's ability to remain strong in the face of criticism, judgement, and disconfirmation was an inspiration to me.

Thematic analysis

The themes which have been extracted from Poison's story have been organized into thematic networks on three levels; namely, basic themes, organizing themes, and global themes. The basic themes represent the initial themes that emerged from the interview, the organizing themes coordinate the basic themes into groups, and the global themes provide a meta-understanding of the basic themes and the organizing themes. The interpretation will discuss the basic themes, then the organizing themes, followed by the global themes. This will provide a logical format which will aid in the understanding of the analysis and reflect how the themes emerged from the data.

Table 7.1: Thematic network for Poison

Basic themes	Organizing themes	Global themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning • Discovery/insight • Expanded thinking/challenging stereotypes • Morality and values • Dancer self vs. authentic self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity formation 	Transformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divorce and foster care • Sexualized parent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis/history 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exotic dancing as enjoyment • Relationships with other dancers • Income/contributing to the family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gratification 	Conservation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self created reality creating the context for the erotic experience • Personal power and resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power 	

Basic themes: Learning; discovery/insight; expanded thinking/challenging stereotypes; morality and values; dancer self vs. authentic self

Learning

Many dancers comment on the learning experience of working as an exotic dancer. Poison reflects on how she learnt more about sex as well as her own sexuality through her experience as an exotic dancer.

Working as an exotic dancer provides the opportunity to learn about sex; from the male customers as well as from other dancers: “People that don’t know about sex that do come into the industry, they learn a lot. They learn a hell of a lot in here. And if they don’t learn from the men and this, they learn from the other girls as well because they do talk, you know.” Learning about sex and one’s personal sexuality is often neglected in society. The strip club provides reinforcement and reward for sexual self-awareness, sexual knowledge, and the ability to create sexual tension.

Discovery/insight

Working in a strip club entails being exposed to many different people. This exposure to variation allows the dancer to expand her thinking about people and men in particular. This increase in information about people results in a more complex understanding of others.

Poison commented that learning within the industry allows for a better understanding of men: “It’s much better than what you experience outside this industry because you think,

oh, you get hurt once, and you think all men are like this and all men bugger around, all men does this.” Working with many different men has consistently resulted in a more integrated perception and an appreciation of variation, rather than categorical, stereotypical thinking.

The knowledge that Poison gained working as a stripper has impacted on many areas of her life: “And, you know, in this industry you get to know yourself better, you get to know men better, you get to know how to actually work your relationship better.” and “Talking to people and actually getting to know people, getting to know yourself better, it’s unbelievable.” Gaining knowledge and learning has been a positive experience for Poison. Her interpersonal skills and understanding of people have been a great advantage to her: “That’s why I say, as a dancer, you get to know so much better, like you get to know people, you’re worse than a bloody psychologist!”

Expanded thinking/challenging stereotypes

Stereotypes are generalizations that we create about others according to our own experiences and values. These categories serve as mental short-cuts when attempting to make a judgement about an individual from a particular ‘category’. Stereotypes allow us to make quick judgements or decisions about a group or category of people, but are often inaccurate because they are formulated based on group behaviour. Stereotypes can be unfair and discriminatory as they lose sight of the individual. Poison expressed how her own stereotypical thinking has been challenged and she reflected on the stereotypes within the exotic dancing context.

Expanded thinking/challenging stereotypes: Stereotypes about men

Within the exotic dancing context, both men and women are stereotyped. Poison, like Anastasia, expressed her appreciation and understanding of men as individuals: “Everybody thinks men are just about sex and it’s not. Men is totally different, as you get different women, you get different men.” and “It’s not to say that he’s a man, he’s like that, and it’s not so say she’s a woman, she’s like that. It’s not true.”

Men are often also stereotyped as ‘cheaters’. Poison comments on the fact that this is not necessarily true: “You get hurt once and you think all men are like this and all men bugger around, all men does this. And they actually don’t.” Poison’s ex-husband betrayed her and broke her trust by cheating on her. The exposure to different men in the strip club may have helped her to avoid stereotyping men and may have allowed her to trust a partner again.

Expanded thinking/challenging stereotypes: Stereotypes about exotic dancers

Strippers are often stereotyped to be drug addicted, stupid, alcohol-intoxicated, sleazy, and promiscuous. Although there is truth to some of these adjectives, Poison comments that dancers are not all the same: “You could say even fifty percent of the girls is like that, okay. They really do take drugs, they really do drink like fishes, they really, ag, the way they dress outside is horrific.” and “Not all of us is the same. Everybody is different.”

Poison illustrated that, although she is a stripper, she is neither promiscuous nor stupid: “I might be a dancer but I’ve only slept with two people in my entire lifetime.” and “It’s not to say we’re dancers, we don’t have brains.” When people get to know her personally, she feels that they appreciate who she really is: “And over time they get to know you as a person, they get to know that, okay, but it’s not really that bad. We are just dancers – we come to work, we dance, and we go home.”

Poison expresses the frustration of being misunderstood and not acknowledged for her difficulties or contributions: “A lot of people think we’re not normal people, they think we’re, you know, we’re outrageous and we’re this and we’re that, and they like to say, we’re all like this and we’re all like that because they had one experience with a stripper, and we’re not, we’re just normal people. We are actually more calmer than other people and we’ve got more life experience than other people. We live much harder lives than other people do and they don’t realize that.”

Female exotic dancers are often stereotyped as bad mothers and as poor examples to their children. It would, however, seem that working flexible hours as an exotic dancer is beneficial in many ways: “I think my kids, because I’m an exotic dancer, enjoy life more because I’m an exotic dancer. I’ve got more time to spend with them during the day. I can actually sit and do their homework with them which other parents don’t even get the chance because they work till six o’clock at night...and I sit every day with my kids, I sit every day, I do their homework with them. I spend time with them, weekends we sit and

we have time and we have family times and everything which other people don't really know."

Although Poison enjoys the extra time that she spends with her children, she is also aware that what she does could impact her children negatively. Poison protects her children from ridicule or shame by not sharing the whole truth with them: "They know that mommy dance but they don't know that I take my clothes off. They are too small in the first place, when they are older and actually old enough to understand, yes, I think I will tell them because I will never be dishonest with my kids."

Expanded thinking/challenging stereotypes: Stereotypes about culture and gender

Poison also commented on cultural and gender stereotypes and how she does not let them restrict her as a person: "I'm Afrikaans, I'm supposed to be like this, I'm English, I'm supposed to be like this, you know, I'm supposed to treat my wife like this. I'm an Afrikaans woman, I've got an Afrikaans man, I'm supposed to be bitchy every day, I'm supposed not to give my husband sex, what, what, what, because that's what they want from me. I'm supposed to shut up and clean the house. It's not like that, it comes from a two way street, and you actually make your life worth living, a hundred times better."

Morality and values

Poison demonstrates the importance of morality and values in who she is as well as in her work. While talking about her relationship with her fiancé, Poison communicates how loyalty and trust are essential in her relationship and that even though she works in an

environment defined by temptation, she would never accept an offer of sex from another man: “But, no thank you, no other man, he can put a million bucks on the table and I will tell him, ‘no thank you.’” Poison believes that one’s behaviour is a reflection of who they are: “Ja, it all depends on who you are, what you do. I mean, some of the girls, if the men tells them I’ll give you R5 000 they’ll go like ‘yay’, they will go and do it. For me, they can put a million bucks on this table, I’d say, ‘no thank you, it’s not worth my life.’ And I’ll stand up and I’ll walk. It all depends on who you are and what you believe in in life. As I said, we are all different.”

Poison’s level of personal integrity contributes to the pleasant working environment that she has created at the strip club. A stable sense of morality and values provides her with a solid core with which to evaluate herself. These morals and values have provided Poison with a stable foundation and a personal definition of integrity with which she can evaluate herself and her behaviour. This contributes to a healthy self-esteem and sense of self-worth in an industry which can be very judgemental, degrading, and demeaning.

Dancer self vs. authentic self

Poison also comments that there is a high degree of congruence between her dancer self and her authentic self: “I wouldn’t say that I’m very much different than I am here. I like to be myself, I like to be me, I like, a lot of people, if you actually meet them in here, you’ll see that they’re totally different to who they are at home. I’m me.” Although Poison may be ‘herself’ while at work, she does not blur the boundaries on what is appropriate for a particular context: “I’m a responsible mother. When I walk out of here

you will never in your life say that I'm a dancer." It would seem that Poison, similar to Anastasia, can be herself within the strip club, but everything associated with being a dancer is left behind when she leaves.

The basic themes of learning, discovery/insight, expanded thinking/challenging stereotypes, morality and values, and dancer self vs. authentic self can be grouped together under the organizing theme: identity formation.

Organizing theme: Identity formation

Identity formation can be described as the process of creating a self-definition by incorporating beliefs, ideas, and values into a self-concept. In Poison's story it is clear that she has created a stable and positive sense of self which allows her to function well in multiple contexts. The personal growth that Poison experienced through her learning, discovery, and insight has contributed to her current self-concept. Poison demonstrated that her behaviour is based on her morals and values, and this contributes to a sense of personal integrity. Challenging stereotypes and expanding her thinking has also formed a part of her self-definition. By reflecting on her own truth, challenging ideas, and maintaining a sense of individuality, Poison is able to cope well with the strain of the often stressful, chaotic, and unstable world of exotic dancing.

Basic themes: Divorce and foster care; sexualized parent**Divorce and foster care**

When Poison was a child, her parents split up and she and her brother were sent to live in foster care and then in a children's home. Poison is not sure of the reasons for this but she thinks it was because her mother couldn't afford to take care of her and her brother when her father left: "Um, I think my father left and my mother didn't have enough money to look after us and then eventually we ended up in foster care and then we ended up in a children's home".

Her parent's divorce created instability and unpredictability in Poison's life. These early experiences may have created the need for control, power, security, and financial independence. Exotic dancing provides all of these things and has allowed Poison to create a stable environment for her own children: "As an exotic dancer you don't take life for granted. A lot of people do. As an exotic dancer the moment you got kids, you want better for your kids in life, so much better. You don't want your kids to be in a situation they're not supposed to be in. I think most of the exotic dancers had a very hard life. Most of them become dancers because that's their only way out. So ja, they experience life much harder and they want better lives for their kids and they want so much more, they try so much harder than other people. And people don't realize that, people think we are just pathetic people and our kids is going to grow up as drug addicts and it's not true."

Sexualized parent

Poison describes her mother as a very sexually expressive person: “Ooh, my mom was an extremely sexual person, even now. She is still. If that woman could have sex twenty four seven, she’ll do it. Um, she actually, when I was a teenager, she actually tried to introduce me to men, and I just backed off because I didn’t like the idea.” Poison expresses her disapproval of her mother’s behaviour indirectly when she discusses how living in the children’s home was a positive experience and provided her with lessons in morality: “That is one thing that I learnt in the children’s home as well, you learn what’s wrong and what’s right, you know the difference between wrong and right. When you live with your parents you just learn what your parents does. And you just carry on with it. If I lived with my mother my whole life, I might as well, I most probably would have been like that. But because I was in a children’s home I knew that I could choose what I want to be in life. And I saw it was wrong. Back off, I didn’t like what I saw.”

Poison didn’t have a mother she could look up to and respect. She had to create an identity without the guidance of a mother who represents the nurturer and teacher in a child’s life. Poison used her experience in the children’s home to create a sense of self which has given her the strength and resilience to get through some very difficult times in her life. When asked whether the children’s home was a traumatic experience, Poison expressed how the children’s home made a positive contribution to her life: “No, children’s home is, I think, more kids experience more traumatic experiences at home than they do in a children’s home. Children’s home actually look after you. You’ve got a good diet, you’ve got good friends, they teach you good manners, why in the world don’t

you want to be there? So ja, I never had a problem being there.” The children’s home represents the consistency, care, and structure that Poison believes were important in her development.

Poison’s experience of her parent’s divorce, foster care, and a sexualized parent created the organizing theme: crisis/history.

Organizing theme: Crisis/history

Poison’s childhood experiences shaped who she is today and defined her as a person. Poison’s past is characterized by instability and broken trust. Poison’s parents divorced when she was a child and she had to go into foster care and then into a children’s home. Her trust in her parent’s ability to take care of her was broken. Poison also describes her mother as a very sexual person and this influenced her when she was growing up. Later in life, Poison was betrayed by her ex-husband and this represents another relationship which was unstable and unpredictable.

The organizing themes of identity formation and crisis/history form the global theme: transformation.

Global theme: Transformation

Poison's difficult past and her experiences in the strip club had a substantial influence on who she is today. Poison describes how she has created her experience through her choices and her ability to create her own reality. Exotic dancing has provided her with the opportunity to transform a family narrative and to establish a new context for her own children. The overlying theme of these processes is transformation. Transformation can be described as a change in nature, form, appearance, or character. Throughout Poison's life she has experienced many challenges, instability, and change, but she has adapted and modified herself effectively in response to the fluctuating input from her environment. Poison constantly recreates herself through her experience. Exotic dancing has provided her with stability and a dynamic environment in which to grow.

Basic themes: Exotic dancing as enjoyment; relationships with other dancers; income/contributing to the family

Exotic dancing as enjoyment

Some exotic dancers love the 'game'. Poison confirms that her interactions with men are fun and enjoyable: "I enjoy what I do. Yes, I do like teasing men, I love it, okay." A positive working environment and a pleasant working experience contribute to the sense of enjoyment that Poison finds as an exotic dancer. The strip club in which Poison works is owned by a woman, Gina, who is an exotic dancer herself. Having empathy and understanding for the women who work for her, the owner has created a working environment that takes the needs and health concerns of the dancers into account. The

ventilation systems and the working atmosphere contribute to Poison's enjoyment of her work: "Oh, this place is lovely. I have never had a club that I've worked at better. Because I've been at all the clubs, um, I didn't work for very long at all the clubs, I've only worked here for about much longer." and "I'd much rather work here. It's relaxing, it's calm, there's no problems." Women in the exotic dancing industry cooperate on multiple levels. The dancers cooperate with one another and Gina, the female owner, creates a positive working atmosphere through her respect for and understanding of the dancers, and her knowledge of the exotic dancing industry.

Relationships with other dancers

The relationships that the dancers have with one another contribute to Poison's sense of gratification in her work. Dancers support one another emotionally and share their knowledge and experience: "If one's sad, you know, the other will come and help. We will comfort each other, we will actually learn each other. If some of the new girls come in, Gina likes to tell them to come to me and I have to train them and tell them about the business and help them, you know, to see that the men is not really that bad and how to handle the men. So ja, we do help each other." It would be expected in a context defined by attractiveness, money, and performance that there would be high levels of competition between the women. Although there are elements of competition, it would seem that there is also a high level of collaboration, support, and helpfulness between the dancers. The dancers find a sense of belonging and acceptance with one another. This sense of belonging is important in this industry because exotic dancers may not necessarily find

belonging and acceptance in other contexts because of the stigma attached to their career choice.

Income/contributing to the family

Poison finds pleasure and meaning through dancing because she is financially stable and can provide for and take care of her children: “I’m quite happy with what I do. I make a lot of money, I provide for my kids, I’m happy.” As a single mother, Poison had to find the resources to care for her children, and being successful as a mother and provider contributes to her self-esteem and sense of personal power: “I’ve got more diplomas than they do. I can have a much higher job than they do but I was a single mom. I couldn’t, I just couldn’t do it, I had to, in today’s lifestyle, if you want to look after your children you can’t go do a receptionist job and look after two children. You can’t. It’s impossible”.

The basic themes of enjoyment, relationships with other dancers, and income/contributing to the family are described by the organizing theme: gratification.

Organizing theme: Gratification

Poison expresses her personal gratification as an exotic dancer through the enjoyment she experiences and the playful nature of her interactions with clients. Poison also derives a sense of meaning in her work through her relationships with other dancers and the sense of belonging that this creates. The cooperation, care, and concern that the dancers provide

for one another allows for positive intrapersonal interactions and fun experiences. The financial rewards, security, and stability that exotic dancing provides for Poison and her family also contributes to the gratification that she experiences as an exotic dancer.

Basic themes: Self-created reality; creating the context for the erotic experience; personal power and resilience

Self-created reality

Poison expressed how her own behaviour creates the reality that she experiences. Poison is a mature person who takes responsibility for her actions: “I don’t drink, I don’t use drugs, I don’t go out after work or nothing – I go home. I’ve got two kids; I’m a responsible mother. I’m most probably one of the most responsible people you will ever meet in your entire lifetime.” and “It all depends on who you are, what you do.” Poison’s perception is congruent with a concept known as internal locus of control. This means that Poison perceives the outcomes of events to be within her own control and as a result of her own decisions rather than only due to external, chance factors.

Poison mentioned how many exotic dancers do not maintain personal and professional boundaries and this undermines their self-respect: “If you allow yourself to do extras then eventually you’re going to feel more disrespect.” and “You know it’s okay in the club but put some clothes on when you go out. Have some respect for yourself.” Self-respect is created through the dancer’s own actions, boundaries, and appropriate responses to different contexts.

Poison's sense of internal locus of control is also evident in dealing with problems and difficulties. Poison takes her work seriously and is aware of her responsibilities: "If you don't create problems for yourself, you will never have problems." and "Some of the girls will create drama for themselves." Poison also takes personal responsibility for her own health and well-being: "It all depends on whether you look after yourself." Perhaps Poison enjoys exotic dancing because she feels in control of her destiny and takes responsibility for her own experience. By working with the system she has created a satisfying work experience.

Creating the context for the erotic experience

Having control over their interactions with men is a form of power for some dancers. The ability to create a state of desire or arousal and then not satisfying the customer leaves the dancer in a 'one-up' position and the customer in a 'one-down' position. The customer wants something that the dancer chooses to withhold which results in a feeling of power for the dancer: "I think, secretly in any woman, it's anything a woman wants, it's lovely to tease a man but she doesn't have to do anything back because it's that power trip of a woman. Just like a man loves to be on a power trip, a woman loves it as well."

Poison reflects on her experience in a club owned by a man who showed no understanding for the women who worked for him and used his power to manipulate them: "He thinks the girls are little robots, you know, he wants the girls to work 24/7." and "I know certain men that owns clubs, I don't want to mention names, but my sister worked for him for a month and he actually told her if she doesn't sleep with him, she's

not working in the club anymore. And she called me so I almost killed that man. I had him by the throat. I told him I will kill him, you don't talk to my sister like that, you don't tell her things like that." Poison reclaimed her own power in this situation by threatening the man's life. Although it would seem an undignified way to solve a problem, it may be that this was the only manner in which she could regain control in the situation and protect her sister. Violence and threats are often the weapon of the disempowered; powerful communication which makes the voices of the oppressed heard.

Personal power and resilience

Assertiveness, knowledge, and experience are other forms of power which the dancer uses to her advantage: "A lot of women are very innocent and very stupid still. They don't really know what they're doing, so, at the end of the day, the men will take the power. But somebody like me, I will have the power over the men, 'cause I don't keep my mouth shut and I am straight to the point and I love to have the power."

It is evident that working within the exotic dancing industry is not for the sensitive and faint-hearted: "You have to learn how to talk to people. Everybody thinks it's easy money; it's not. It's a damn hard job. It takes a lot of courage, it takes a lot of self control, and it takes a lot of, how can I put this, it makes you or it breaks you. A lot of the women don't even make it a month. They can't take the pressure because they either get too sick or they either feel too bad about themselves afterwards because the men put them down; they don't have the personality to stand up towards those people so..."

In an industry which is defined by attractiveness, desirability, and being sexy, it would make sense that one's personal sense of self-worth is defined by men's approval and confirmation. It is, however, important to have a strong sense of your own attractiveness, a comfort with oneself, and the ability to cope with rejection. Poison demonstrates how her sense of self-acceptance is a form of power: "I don't really care what other people think about me. I'm me. If he doesn't like me, tough cookies. I mean, everybody doesn't like the same person; um, that one might like me, that one might like somebody else. So what, we're not all the same."

Poison also demonstrates a sense of personal power by overcoming the difficulties and hardships in her life. Poison has gained wisdom and strength through integrating her experience but others benefit from this personal power too: "They think because people went through a hard time in life is much worse off in life than other people. It's not true, because we are much, much stronger people than other people. I'm not ashamed to say it, but I had a very hard life. Yes, but I don't like to brag about it either because I don't want people to feel sorry for me, because it happened, it made me a stronger person. And, at the end of the day, I can teach my children what's right and wrong and let them choose their own things in life, make them their own people in life at the end of the day."

The basic themes self-created reality, creating the context for the erotic experience, and personal power and resilience fall under the organizing theme: power/control.

Organizing theme: Power/control

The themes of power and control are evident in Poison's personal and professional life. Poison uses her knowledge and life experience to create her reality. She also has a sense of personal power that developed through her experience and resilient character. Poison demonstrates her sense of power within the strip club context in her interactions with men and in her ability to maintain firm boundaries when it comes to her self-esteem, her personal boundaries, and her behaviour.

The organizing themes gratification and power/control are described by the process of conservation.

Global theme: Conservation

Conservation describes the process of preserving the status quo and creating stability within a particular context. Poison conserves her environment, her experience, and her interactions through two key processes; namely, gratification and power/control. Poison uses her abilities, insights, and personal strength to create a stable reality and integrates her experience to create a better understanding of herself, her life, and her work. The ability to preserve one's identity, self-worth, and happiness in an environment that can be repetitively disconfirming is evidence of personal strength.

Summary

The global themes in Poison's story are transformation and conservation. It is evident that Poison's life and experience have been characterized by these two processes. Working as an exotic dancer has given Poison the power to transform, differentiate, and recreate her identity, her thinking, and her reality. The financial and personal rewards of exotic dancing have also provided Poison with the ability to create consistency, stability, and predictability in her life.

When Poison's first marriage ended, her life was turned upside down. Poison had the personal power to provide for herself and her children, and to ensure that her own children didn't have to be sent into government care. As a mother she was able to care and provide for her children. Through her career as an exotic dancer, Poison was able to make sure that her childhood experience was not repeated for her own children. In this way she recreated a family narrative.

Poison's mother divorced her first husband, married a second husband, divorced the second husband and then returned to her first husband. Poison's mother's back-and-forth behaviour could reflect an inconsistency and instability in her relationships. This pattern was also repeated in Poison's relationship with her mother. Poison and her brother were in their mother's care, then in foster care, then in a children's home, and then in their mother's care again. Her parents' relationship and her living arrangements were unstable and unpredictable. Poison's life was constantly transforming as a child, and the transformation was beyond her control.

Poison has created a stable home environment for herself and her children. This stability is a transformation of a family narrative. Although Poison has transformed a family narrative, some family patterns have been conserved. The reason for Poison's daughter living with her grandmother is personal and confidential. Poison's daughter lives outside the nuclear family home and this is similar to Poison's experience as a child and represents a consistency in the family's way of functioning.

Poison's experience as an exotic dancer is intertwined with her experience as a mother, a daughter, and a partner. The themes elicited from Poison's story should not be interpreted in isolation from her history, her interpersonal functioning, and her family context. It is important to acknowledge the complex, multi-layered, and multi-factorial nature of any experience.

Chapter 8 – Discussion and Integration

The focus of this research is on the lives and experiences of female exotic dancers. The researcher hoped to understand the dancer's perspective, participation, and difficulties within the exotic dancing industry.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with three exotic dancers. The researcher also spent time observing the exotic dancing context by visiting three different strip clubs and interacting with female strippers, male strippers, managers, and bouncers. The interview questions concentrated on gaining an empathic understanding of the dancer's life and experience. The researcher also investigated the dancer's family history, patterns, and relationships in order to provide a framework for the dancer's subjective conceptualization and explanation of her experience.

The three exotic dancers who participated in this research display commonalities in their relationships, demographics, and family histories. The three dancers are aged between thirty five and thirty eight, all of them have been divorced, and all of them have children. All three dancers have a child living outside the nuclear family home, but for different reasons.

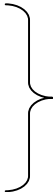
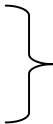
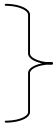
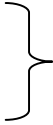
All three women are responsible mothers, ensuring that they provide for their children and protecting them from the industry in which they work. Murphy (2003) describes how strippers may struggle to integrate and satisfy the conflicting messages and demands that

they receive from the multiple contexts in which they live and work. Within the strip club, ‘bad girl’ practices are required and legitimized while the dancer is simultaneously required to maintain a ‘good girl’ performance in other areas of her life (Murphy, 2003). The three participants in this research contradict Murphy’s findings because they demonstrate a mature and responsible way of creating appropriate boundaries between their work and their personal lives. This may be because the three women are older and more experienced than other exotic dancers and are therefore better at adapting, transforming, and integrating their different roles.

The interviews conducted with the participants were recorded and transcribed. The data was analysed using thematic network analysis and the resulting themes were organized on three levels; namely; basic themes, organizing themes, and global themes. The three levels of basic, organizing, and global themes represent different degrees of abstraction. The basic themes are the first level of abstraction and are descriptions of the themes that emerge initially from the data. The organizing themes are the second level of the thematic network and are used to organize the basic themes and describe the process of the basic themes from a higher level of abstraction. The global themes are the third level of the thematic network and describe the organizing themes from an even higher level of abstraction.

The organizing and global themes from the three participants have been summarized in Table 8.1. This provides an overall view of their experiences as exotic dancers.

Table 8.1: Summary of organizing and global themes across the three participants

Organizing themes		Global themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Differentiation/autonomy• Crisis/history• Identity formation		Transformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gratification• Power (Anastasia and Poison)		Conservation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Healing and growth• Power (Natalie)		Individuation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Belonging• Energy exchange		Participation

Transformation

The global theme of transformation is composed of three organizing themes; differentiation/autonomy, crisis/history, and identity formation. Transformation describes the process of change, development, and growth. The dancers’ lives, histories, and family experiences were similar in many ways. The dancers had all experienced difficulties, crises, and hardships in their past. All three women had experienced instability,

unpredictability, and insecurity in their respective childhoods and all had been isolated, hurt, or abused by their family members. All three women had been betrayed or abused by their husbands or partners.

The dancers described personal transformation, growth, and differentiation as a result of their difficult experiences. Working in the exotic dancing industry allowed the dancers to expand their thinking and create a sense of autonomy, personal power, and independence. All three dancers view their hardships, pain, and losses as learning experiences and believe that all of these challenges have made them stronger, wiser, and better human beings. Their personal experiences of transformation have also enabled them to transform family patterns, their own lives, and their future.

The dancers were also able to define who they were and formed an identity in an industry that requires role flexibility and adaptation to ever changing contexts. Their experiences have contributed to who they are today and have formed an integral part of their personal identities. According to Wesely (2003a), exotic dancing is a job which often results in conflict with the definition of self and a questioning of that definition. Exotic dancers are reduced to physical attributes and the complexity of their individual identities is lost (Wesely, 2003a). The strippers who participated in this research demonstrated strong self-concepts and personalities that were used effectively in their work and personal lives. Factors that were important in identity formation included personal integrity, morals, values, personal boundaries, and the definition of an ‘authentic self’ and a ‘dancer self.’

Conservation

Conservation represents the opposite process of transformation. Conservation describes the process of creating and maintaining stability, consistency, and the status quo. The global theme of conservation is composed of two organizing themes – gratification and power. All three women who participated in this research view their exotic dancing experience as rewarding, enjoyable, and meaningful. The idea that the lives and experiences of exotic dancers can be gratifying and rewarding is contradictory to the stereotypes held about strippers and the exotic dancing industry.

The three dancers described processes of gratification, learning, growing, personal power, and helping others in their careers. A sense of belonging, self-confidence, and genuine connection with others are other benefits that the dancers described. Current literature confirms these findings. According to Sweet and Tewksbury (2000a), exotic dancers enjoy meeting new and different people, the lifestyle, feeling streetwise, smarter, and stronger due to their experiences as exotic dancers, boosted self-esteem and self-confidence, feeling a sense of happiness, being open-minded, and feeling comfortable with themselves. Exotic dancing can provide the context for personal gratification and may enable some women to empower themselves financially and become the equals of men.

The three women also described feeling powerful as exotic dancers and that they define their relationships with their clients. According to these dancers, the male-female power dynamics in the strip club are inverse to the male-female power dynamics in society.

Current literature acknowledges that exotic dancers uphold power in their individual exchanges with customers but their work is perpetuated by inequality and performed with negative social and psychological consequences (Pasko, 2002, Wood, 2000). The three exotic dancers who participated in this research have, however, created better living conditions, stability, and economic independence due to their high income. Their economic empowerment has enabled them to leave unhealthy relationships and provide for their children. These women have also demonstrated psychological growth and insight through their experiences as exotic dancers. As in most careers, success and satisfaction as an exotic dancer seems to be dependent on good decisions, integrity, personal responsibility, and hard work. Exotic dancing does not necessarily lead to negative social and psychological consequences; it depends on the woman herself rather than her choice of career.

The gratification and power that these exotic dancers experience are conservational because these processes allow them to create stability, predictability, and control. By enjoying her work, the exotic dancer is gratified and will continue to work in the industry. Simultaneously, the stripper's identity and meaning are also conserved as she continues to engage in rewarding erotic labour. The power that the women experience as exotic dancers is also conservational because it allows them to be in control of their own lives and create their own experience.

Individuation

The global theme of individuation is composed of healing and growth and power. It is surprising to think that exotic dancing could provide the context in which these women were able to find healing and growth. Barton (2002) found that the longer a woman danced, the more fragile her self-perception grew, and describes how many dancers feel worse about their bodies, their sexuality, their intelligence, and their overall identity in the social world. However, all three women describe how they experienced transformation, self-growth, forgiveness, and personal strength as exotic dancers. The three participants demonstrated an integrated sense of self, self-confidence, and self-esteem. This may be because these dancers created boundaries between their professional and personal lives and ensured that they did not contravene their own morals and values while at work. According to Wesely (2003b), it is not necessarily the perceptions of others which conflicts with a dancer's self-concept but rather the act of compromising her ideas of personal boundaries that challenges the way in which dancers understand themselves.

Exotic dancing is not the most conventional form of art and self-expression but it is still a form of dance. Nudity, erotica, and sensual movements are seen in many contemporary art forms and it is conceivable that exotic dancing could be a creative and expressive experience. Dance and self-expression are widely known to be healing and therapeutic, and perhaps exotic dancing provides the same benefits.

The women also expressed a sense of personal power as exotic dancers. At some point, all three of these women had to rely on their own strength, abilities, and determination in order to get through their difficulties. This displays power. Forgiveness, faith, and love are also forms of personal power that need to be acknowledged. An individual's inner resources, integrity, values, character, and spirituality are very powerful and are often not recognized because of their unscientific, immeasurable nature. The current literature does not discuss these forms of personal power. The power of the human spirit, as well as healing and growth, has contributed to the dancers' processes of individuation.

Participation

The global theme of participation is composed of belonging and energy exchange. Belonging describes the process of having a place with others. A person can only be defined in reference to others as nothing can have a real identity in isolation. Relationships create meaning, identity, and belonging. All three dancers described how they found belonging through exotic dancing; with other dancers, with their audience, with their clients, with other women, and even with society as a whole. Current literature confirms these findings. Spivey (2005) found that dancers form a certain camaraderie backstage in which they share grievances and gossip and gain a sense of self-worth. According to Sweet and Tewksbury (2000a), exotic dancers enjoy the bonds and friendship with other dancers and the praise and 'love' they receive from the audience. Through personal growth and transformation, the dancers formed more rewarding relationships with others and created more meaningful lives.

Energy exchange describes the process in which emotional and physical energy is exchanged with others during interpersonal interactions. All performers, including exotic dancers, expend energy in order to entertain their clients and create the context for others' experience. Their energy expenditure is often returned through their interaction with their clients or the audience, but, sometimes, the dancer has to expend more than is returned. One of the dancers interviewed by Barton confirmed this concept of energy exchange by describing how exotic dancing depletes her sexual energy and that she gives away more of her sexuality than clients financially compensate for (Barton, 2002). Although all three women expressed that they enjoy their jobs, they also described their work as difficult, challenging, and draining at times. Exotic dancers require high levels of physical and emotional energy, not only for their performance and their clients, but also for their relationships with other dancers, their children, and their partners.

The process of energy exchange and a sense of belonging create the experience of participation. Participation involves finding a place with others, finding a place in the world, and engaging in interpersonal transactions that are meaningful and rewarding.

Researcher's perspective and experience

The results of my research on the lives and experiences of exotic dancers were unpredictable and surprising. I did not expect to find such deep and meaningful accounts of personal experience. I expected to hear stories of exploitation, entrapment, and low

self-worth. Instead, I heard stories of courage, strength, transformation, growth, healing, and gratification. I had not conceived that such experiences could be found in the context of erotic labour, stripping, or the exotic dancing industry.

My interest in this topic was based on my own curiosity and my own naive conceptualization of what it must be like to be a stripper. Before this research, I had never been to a strip club or spoken to a stripper. I was fascinated by a world in which women danced naked for a living. My own life and experiences have adhered to socially defined norms and values and have been conventional and ordinary in many ways. Doing research on exotic dancers gave me the opportunity to be a somewhat unconventional and unpredictable.

I was completely oblivious to the rules and norms of the exotic dancing industry and I experienced the discomfort of being in an unfamiliar and unknown environment. I was almost thrown out of a strip club due to my ignorance. A colleague and I decided to visit a well-known strip club in the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg. Feeling a bit awkward and out of place when we entered, we decided to sit with a group of men who were obviously out for a good time and didn't mind us joining them. Not long after we had sat down, a bouncer came up to my colleague and I and asked us to leave the club. Having just paid the entrance fee, I was not about to leave without a good reason. The manager came over and again asked us to leave. Not knowing on what grounds we were unwelcome, I asked him to explain what we had done wrong. The manager explained that the strippers were unhappy with our presence in the club and felt that we were

undermining their financial opportunities. Completely unaware of strip club etiquette, we had just sat down with a group of men who were paying customers. The strippers knew that the men would not buy lap dances or table dances when they were sitting with women. As I glanced around the club I noticed the dancers' stares and disapproval and realized that, as two women, we represented competition.

The strip club represents a mini social system with its own norms and values. The dancers were angry with our disrespect of their rules and boundaries and the fact that we had limited their earning potential for the evening. It also clearly illustrated our exclusion in this context. The strippers had all clearly communicated amongst themselves as we unwittingly sat in a booth and sipped our drinks. We were clearly not accepted as fellow women, as clients, or as researchers. Our exclusion was not communicated verbally but rather by the dancers' body language and facial expressions. By being ostracized in this way, I realized that I did not belong and that belonging and non-belonging can only exist in relation to one another as a dichotomous process. As we were being excluded and 'rejected', the dancers found belonging and inclusion with one another. These dancers joined forces against a perceived threat and this cooperation amongst them demonstrated that belonging and inclusion are powerful processes. Eventually, my colleague and I had to leave and I must admit that I was a little relieved because the atmosphere had become tense and we were clearly outnumbered.

When researching an unconventional topic such as the lives and experiences of exotic dancers, other people's reactions can illustrate wider society's perspectives or opinions.

While explaining my research to a group of friends, one of them seemed affronted and said that there must be a way I could get out of this research; surely I could contest this research topic. I had to explain that I had personally chosen and designed this research topic. People who are unfamiliar with the sex industry, strip clubs, or exotic dancers may feel that the topic is dirty, degrading, unnecessary, or meaningless. I think that action has become divorced from the actor. People are judged on what they do and the person is lost behind the label. By understanding the lives and experiences of these three exotic dancers, I have proved that these stereotypes are untrue. Exotic dancers are complex individuals who cannot be judged solely on their career choice.

Limitations and recommendations

Limitations of the research

One of the limitations of this research is that the findings cannot be generalized to all exotic dancers. The sample is too small to reflect the lives and experiences of exotic dancers in general and therefore does not inform the reader about the general experience of working in the exotic dancing industry. The researcher used convenience sampling in order to find participants for this research and this represents a bias in the sample. The exotic dancers who volunteered for this research have particular personality traits and commonalities that make them more open to participation in research. This means that there may not be much variation, difference, or diversity in the sample and this limits the research results.

The aim of this research was to go beyond generalizations and stereotypes in order to hear the individual's voice. The purpose of this research was to understand the experience of the dancer as an individual in relation to her personal context and family history. The researcher wanted to gain an empathic understanding of the dancer's experience through an in-depth, holistic exploration and interpretation of her life.

It is important to recognize that, although the data was analysed according to verified qualitative methods, the subjective interpretation of the researcher cannot be eliminated. The researcher's own perspectives, opinions, and experiences will influence the understanding, interpretation, and communication of the data and results. For example, the researcher is a woman and may be more sensitive to women's issues than perhaps a male researcher would be. The researcher may focus on issues of power, independence, and female sexuality more than other relevant issues. The researcher has not been personally involved in the sex industry or exotic dancing and this will affect her interpretation of the data. An external observer of any context or experience has to rely on subjective conceptualizations rather than experiential knowledge when interpreting data and other information. This could provide the researcher with a more detached perspective on phenomena, and it could simultaneously limit her insight or interpretation of information due to a lack of personal involvement and understanding.

Recommendations for further research

The stories and experiences communicated by the exotic dancers in this research have illustrated how exotic dancing can provide the context for healing, growth, power, gratification, and transformation. It may have demonstrated that sexual expression, erotica, pole dancing, and nudity can be healing and therapeutic.

In Western society, many men and women feel inferior due to the constant bombardment of images of the ‘perfect’ human form. Women learn that they are valued for their sexual bodies and spend time, energy, and money in an attempt to create this unattainable ideal (Wesely, 2002). Further research could investigate the possible benefits of healthy self-expression within sexual or erotic contexts on body image, self-confidence, and self-esteem. Pole dancing, for example, has recently become a very popular hobby amongst women and this interest could reflect a need to express one’s sensuality, develop belonging with other women, or become more confident in one’s sexuality. Many women also want to express themselves sexually without feeling judged, degraded, or dirty. This may also allude to women’s increased freedom and exploration of sexual contexts.

Sexual self-expression, nudity, and sensual dance have not traditionally been considered as therapeutic. It may be of use to the psychology industry to be aware of the possible benefits of pole dancing, erotica, and nudity considering society’s current difficulties with sexual disorders, body-image issues, and low self-esteem.

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