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Mismatched Identities: Experiencing White Womanhood and White Motherhood as an Exotic Dancer

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MISMATCHED IDENTITIES:
EXPERIENCING WHITE WOMANHOOD AND WHITE MOTHERHOOD AS AN
EXOTIC DANCER

By

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Thesis

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Mismatched Identities: Experiencing White Motherhood and White Womanhood as an Exotic Dancer

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In this paper I examine the work of exotic dancers in the Rocky Mountain West, focusing on their identities, identity conflict, identity threat, and overcompensation. In over twelve hours of recorded interviews, I asked ten exotic dancers working in Montana about their work, families, and communities as well as their perceptions of themselves and their work. I found that this marginalized group that resides in places that have rural characteristics, often face identity threat because their identities are known within their communities. The identity threat arises as a result of expectations and stereotypes of dancers, and in order to deal with this threat, the informants relied on overcompensation. The informants overcompensated in a myriad of ways that included costuming, exhibiting anger, creating a tough outer exterior, and drug and alcohol use.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I am interested in women who are marginalized because of the career paths that they choose. Montana is an interesting state because of the makeup of its community members. Although not all the cities in Montana are rural, characteristics of places in Montana follow characteristics of rural communities. Rural-like communities are often smaller and so individuals are often viewed in all the roles that they play in their communities. One's livelihood can be affected by how others stereotype and characterize them, through tight social networks and lower population density. Additionally, rural communities may have a more traditional view of sexuality (Little 2007). Because of the tight networks in rural communities, and a sexuality defined to preserve the rural community (Little 2007), a moral code is strictly adhered to in order to ensure individuals have permanent partnerships. Along with this, the population is smaller, which allows for more body policing by other individuals in the community. Because of the lack of diversity, I assume that mores in Montana are more traditional because of the ability to monitor and enforce hegemonic thinking in a more controlled environment. Little further explains this in describing how rural communities "incorporate a very conservative form of heterosexuality based on the moral superiority of procreative sex within a stable and permanent relationship" (Little 2007; 863). Montana, not only has low density populations, but also has a large population of Christians (United States Census Bureau 2015), and therefore this conservative idea of sexuality, rooted in religious morals, is pervasive within the state.

One distinct group, women who live in Montana and do sex work, are more likely to be under scrutiny for a variety of reasons: they are a minority group working in the

margins of the community workforce; they often violate sexual norms for female behavior; and their presence is more visible in the community. As discussed earlier, over-policing by a community that holds tight to permanent heterosexual relationships, can present a difficulty for those on the margins of respectability. For this project I investigate the lives of women in a rural-like state who perform sex work, particularly exotic dancers. Montanan women who are employed in the sex industry will have a more challenging time navigating their way through their communities because their role as dancer comes to define them as individuals and may directly oppose other identities accepted by other community members. Other roles that these individuals may hold (i.e. mother, daughter, family member, religious member) tend to differ in terms of what is acceptable behavior. Therefore, dancers are more likely to experience threats to their identities associated with the roles that conflict. This conflict will result in negative emotions, and therefore a need for impression management.

My goal with this project is to understand the multiple identities that exotic dancers hold, and how conflicting identities influence their interactions within their communities. This study will be beneficial to sociology, especially to research on the importance of community. First, I establish that exotic dancers are marginalized in rural-like communities because of their work and the norms and stereotypes of individuals who are exotic dancers. To examine this, I assume that those in Montanan communities have less access to anonymity because of the tight-knit makeup of their communities, and therefore their career choices will likely be known to others within the community. Second, I examine how those who work in occupations on the edges of respectability (in other words, violate norms) negotiate their identities within small towns, how they

respond to stereotypes and misperceptions, and how they manage these threats to their identities. This research contributes to our understanding of identity threat, identity management, and emotion management. This study also provides insights into how Montana communities treat those who are marginalized.

Although there is already research conducted on exotic dancers, these studies tend to focus on status structures and power dynamics within strip clubs (Weitzer 2009; Frank 2002), rather than individual identities and emotion management. This study is different because it focuses on how dancers see themselves, how self-perceptions influence their behavior, and how they respond emotionally to identity threat within their communities. The focus within Montana communities provides an interesting context, because anonymity is difficult, and dancers have frequent interactions with those who know them, including their families.

I conduct in-depth interviews with exotic dancers in rural Montana to better understand how they negotiate interactions within their communities, manage the multiple, and sometimes conflicting, roles of exotic dancer and mother, wife, and daughter, and the emotions that result from these conflicting role relationships and identity threats¹. I focus on how much of their identities are shaped by their careers, and how stereotypes of both exotic dancer and mother/family member influence the treatment they receive in their communities. During these interviews I ask questions about identities, perceptions of stereotypes, and experiences outside of work in the community

¹ There are four categories of identity threat: categorization, distinctiveness, threats to the value, and acceptance. Here I use the third type—where the value of one’s social identity is threatened. Here, the value of being an exotic dancer is threatened. I also use the fourth type, acceptance. Acceptance refers to identity threat that arises when one’s position in the group is questioned. Here, a dancer’s position as a respectable woman is questioned. (Branscombe et al, 1999)

to help me understand if exotic dancers are, indeed, marginalized because of their work and how they perceive marginalization and the results of stereotyping. I explore whether conflicting roles result in identities that are threatened, what form threats take (if any), and how dancers respond to identity threats. I also focus on emotions that result from the dancers' perceptions of stereotyping and identity threat. I ask questions about what emotions they experience and how they manage those emotions. Ethnographic Interviews better provide the points of view of the dancers themselves and give me a more complete picture of the meanings of their work for their lives in Montana communities.

I analyze the responses given to answer the following research questions: What is the identity of exotic dancer and what are the norms and expectations that go with that identity? How are exotic dancers treated in rural-like communities when their occupation is known? Are identities based on conflicting roles such as mother, daughter, dancer and woman threatened? How do exotic dancers experience identity threat and how do they negotiate their identities when threatened? More specifically how do exotic dancers feel when others perceive their multiple identities? How do they manage the resulting emotions?

IDENTITY THEORY

Identity refers to the set of meanings that define who an actor is and the behavior that results based on the meanings from the point of view of the actor (Burke & Stets 2009). These identities can be demonstrated by the roles played in association with them, an individual's membership in a particular group, or the characteristics that identify the individual as a person who is unique (Burke & Stets 2009). Individuals may have

multiple identities because they may have memberships simultaneously within separate groups. They may also play separate roles within each group. Every identity an individual holds adheres to meanings and symbols that are central to the identity and set within the subculture of the groups to which they belong. The fact that people can possess more than one identity, allows for a conflict to arise, especially when role expectations don't align. Cultural beliefs of what constitutes correct behaviors, thoughts, or emotions for certain identities may not be consistently appropriate within the other identities a person might hold. I argue therefore, that norms and expectations for "proper" identities such as being a mother, daughter, sister, and woman, conflict with the norms and expectations for an inconsistent identity, as is the case with exotic dancers. Examining each identity will clearly show how these identities are culturally symbolized within the Montana setting.

A central aspect to identity theory is that an actor has the ability to treat the self as an object (Burke & Stets 2009). By doing so, the actor may behave in ways that are appropriate to the role they inhabit. The role of an individual comes from the categorization of the self as an occupant of a specific role and incorporating the meanings and expectations of that role within a performance (Burke & Stets 2009). The pattern of behavior that is socially recognized provides a means of identifying, and thereby placing the individual within a certain group. Those that perform their roles, may be judged by others and themselves as either positive or negative based on how closely their behavior matches the norms and expectations for that role (Reid et. Al 1994). This research supposes that exotic dancers will view themselves as playing the role of exotic dancer. Based on cultural norms, the dancers will hold certain perceptions and behaviors

appropriate to this identity. However, the perceptions and behaviors they may hold may not be appropriate for the other roles that they may also have. This study will examine the multiple roles that an exotic dancer may adopt and how those roles either work together or conflict², creating disruption within dancers' lives.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

Much like identity theory, social identity theory also recognizes that identities categorize the actor. Adding to this however, social identity theory examines the importance of the prototypes that define the properties that represent the categories or groups that an individual identifies with. Prototypes incorporate a set of interrelated properties that describe and therefore prescribe the necessary perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that are accepted by the in-group (Abrams & Hogg 2010). The in-group demonstrates the prototypical behavior of a specific role. According to Michael Hogg, members of the in-group possess certain attributes that define a category (2004). The recognition of similarities between individuals of the same group are accentuated to feel ties with the group. The differences between those members of the in-group and those who are not solidifies the divide between those who hold prototypical behavior, and those who do not. Groups that lose cohesion do so because of disagreement over what the attributes of the prototype are. Therefore, those that adopt the typical prototype are more likely to be accepted as members of the in-group. Being a part of a specific group, exotic dancers will exhibit behaviors, emotions and beliefs expected of their prototype such as being a sexual being. These behaviors however, may not be expected of the dancers within their other roles (i.e. being a good mother).

² Role Conflict is defined as a situation in which a person is expected to play two incompatible roles and the role requirements conflict with each other. (Stets and Burke, 2000)

Social identity theory and identity theory both recognize the hierarchy of identities to examine the salience of identities. Stryker (1968) further examines hierarchy salience. In a given situation a person may be more likely to focus on one identity to become a successful member of the in-group. Identities that are the most important to the individual are more likely to be adopted without any cues. The most salient identity also will be used more frequently than other identities. This study assumes that different identities will be adopted and exaggerated in certain contexts (such as being a “good mother” while dropping children off to child care), and irrelevant in others (such as being a “good mother” while exotic dancing). The two identities conflict, therefore in order to perform better within certain identities, it follows that the other roles an individual holds will be ignored in certain social situations.

When an individual does not exhibit the prototypical behavior expected of that role, identity threat may occur. Membership in a certain group is successful when an individual incorporates the prototype into their personhood. Not conforming to norms and expectations for the role can risk a person’s legitimacy within the group. When identity threat (a challenge to the adoption of an identity) occurs, an individual will try to bring the identity and behavior together, in order to avoid the threat (Hogg & Abrams 1998). Therefore, when threatened, the individual is more likely to overcompensate and exaggerate behaviors and experience prototypical emotions expected of that role.

This study examines three separate identities (woman, exotic dancer, mother,). These identities are associated with prototypes that may not incorporate the same characteristics. Therefore, one or more identities may be threatened. This study focuses on the emotions and resulting behavior when a dancer experiences identity threat because

of inconsistent norms and expectations for conflicting identities. To observe these questions, the roles first must be examined.

WOMAN IDENTITY

Women in particular are held to certain standards when it comes to their role in society. The subordinate status of women goes back in history. Women are viewed within our culture as “supportive, warm, and tender (Burke & Stets 2009). Along with these ideals women are expected to be chaste. “Chastity was considered testimony to a woman’s worthiness” (Wonderly 2003:24). According to Foucault, the idea of purity has become the norm within Western culture, and images of the “virgin” are present within modern depictions of femininity (1978). Women are therefore allowed to be either the virgin or the whore. The virgin, is the prototypical woman, and the other (a sexual woman) would be considered part of the out-group. Within our culture, women who don’t exhibit the prototypical behavior (being pure) are condemned. Those who dance provocatively for money exhibit behavior that directly opposes the acceptable characteristics of the prototypical woman within our culture. Women are traditionally urged to be nonsexual beings, concerned with comforting, and dedicated to being good mothers (Wonderly 2003). This is in direct opposition of the prototypical exotic dancer.

In this study, I will focus on the identities of white women living in the American West, specifically, in Montana. While 89.2% of Montana’s population is white, 6.6% of the population identifies as Native American/ Alaskan Native (U.S. Census 2015). Considering that a significant proportion of the population identifies as such, it is important to discuss how those who identify as Native may have different norms concerning femininity. I emphasize again that this study focuses on the lives of white

women that are exotic dancers in Montana. Their identities as women within their communities, as mothers, and as exotic dancers, are all shaped by this racial classification. Because respondents in this study were all white, the conclusions provided herein cannot be generalized to another ethnic or racial population.

MOTHER IDENTITY

The role of mother has been tied with womanhood for eternity (Wonderly 2003). A traditional facet of motherhood is that a mother should be financially able to care for her children, and also be emotionally invested (by focusing more on their child(ren)'s needs over their own) , which can, and often does create contradiction (Hays 1993). Intensive mothering is culturally the standard within our current culture. It requires an intensive amount of attention physical and emotional energy, as well as a financially stable life that provides all of the things deemed necessary by today's standards (Hays 1993). Women are taught that mothers need to be self-sacrificing (Hays 1993, Johnson & Swanson 2006). This can create a "matrix of tensions" within women who hold the identity of being mothers (Oberman & Josselson 1996:344). Mothers must often negotiate between conflicting matters (financial stability and ability to spend time with children) in order to be "good mothers".

Good mothering implies that women who are mothers, must not only be able to biologically produce children, but also maintain a social relationship with their children. This is characterized most often by ideas of "emotional intensity, selflessness, nurturing and protection (Stearney 1994: 147)." This archetype is reinforced and those who go against it are often labeled as bad parents. The demand on mothers to be emotionally caring, protective, and attentive to the needs of their children complicates the other

expectation of mothers, which is to be financially stable (Hays 1993). Within our economy today, a single-income household is less possible (Hochschild 1989). The increasing demand for a dual-income has caused more mothers to take on careers, cutting into the time and availability for intensive mothering. In a single parent household, the financial burden falls on one person alone, also cutting into a mother's ability to engage in intensive mothering. Therefore, while it is necessary for mothers to work in order to create financial stability, many mothers feel negatively about doing so (Johnson & Swanson 2006).

The characteristics necessary for the identity of mother is in direct opposition to those related to the identity of exotic dancer. Not only do exotic dancers need to work, but they do so in a sexualized sphere. Mothers, just like women in general, are not seen as sexual beings. The selflessness prescribed to mothers, may seem to be the opposite of the sexual, manipulative role of exotic dancer. If a woman identifies with, and performs one role, and then is confronted with expectations, behaviors, thoughts and emotions from another role, then she will feel her initial identity is threatened. Again, it is important to emphasize that the behavior associated with the mother identity is shaped by the racial category of white. For other racial groups and minorities, mothering techniques may be different. Racial culture can and often does influence prototypical behavior for what is correct concerning mothering ideals.

EXOTIC DANCER IDENTITY

Exotic dancing is a subset of sex work. Exotic dancers are [men and] women who remove all or most of their clothing in a performance for paying customers (Skipper and McCaghy 1970). This category may include those who are considered to be go-go or

burlesque dancers. In this study, exotic dancers are those who work actively in strip clubs and are often referred to as strippers. They dance in a provocative manner for economic gain. Exotic dancers create revenue by sexualizing themselves and their bodies in a performance. The role of exotic dancer is an occupational role that carries with it expectations for how the work is performed and also expectations and stereotypes of individuals who perform the work.

Crystal Jackson (2011) examines the assumptions of exotic dancers. Jackson argues that exotic dancers are all viewed as heterosexual beings with no control over their sexuality. This assumption emphasizes the conflicting view of prototypical women as sexual beings. Exotic dancers are expected to be accustomed to being sexual beings. They must also learn how to manipulate their clientele to make more money (Lewis 1998). Prototypical behavior would then consist of being sexually driven, and manipulative. Since, women are expected to be in control of their sexual urges (Wonderly 2003), this would create conflict between the identity of exotic dancer, and the idea of what constitutes a proper woman (and mother). Racial and ethnic intersections may play a part in what is considered proper behavior for an exotic dancer. Again, it is important to stress the role that race plays in constituting acceptable behavior. The prototypical behavior for a white exotic dancer, may be different than prototypical behavior for a person of color that dances. This researcher's focal point is white women in Montana and therefore the prototypical behavior may not be generalizable to all races and ethnicities.

RURAL IDENTITY

Although the U.S Census dictates that a rural community is less than 2,500 people (USDA 2015), for research on exotic dancers in Montana, I will consider the entire state of Montana as rural for the following reasons. There are traits that are consistently used in the definition of rural. These characteristics outlined by Mondal (2015) are 1) size of the community 2) density of the population 3) predominance of agricultural occupations 4) degree of close contact with nature 5) homogeneity of the population 6) degree of social stratification 7) amount of social interaction and 8) level of social solidarity.

Montana may be characterized in terms of these rural features. Although Montana is a large state in physical size, there are fewer people. Because of the low density it is more likely that interactions will be across ties used for multiple purposes and involving face-to-face relationships. Ties that are used for multiple purposes are called multiplex ties. These ties create a stronger emotional attachment to the group, because the individuals are in close contact with each other in multiple ways (Paxton & Moody 2003).

Agriculture is the state's number one industry (Montana Department of Agriculture 2015). Montana also can identify as rural because its residents experience a closer contact with nature, living in low population density areas, even if their communities are greater than 2,500 residents. Much of the land in the state is public: almost 30 percent. The U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service all manage significant amounts of public land and make them accessible to Montanans. According to the Montana Wilderness Association (2016) 80 percent of Montanan's enjoy the outdoor recreation that Montana has to offer. Because of the low density of Montana, and its heightened likelihood of face-to-face

interactions, anonymity is less possible. The customs, traditions, and culture of the society is shaped by a more homogenous population. While there is vast land area, there are fewer people who are more similar to each other than those living in large urban areas. Therefore, the monitoring and enforcement of hegemonic ideals concerning womanhood may be more likely to influence women living in Montana who defy traditional ideals of femininity.

This study is not focused on rural areas in particular, but rather rural-like places. Montana has characteristics much like those listed above for rural areas. The setting of Montana allows for an interesting look into rural-like areas and how this influences how community treats members who are marginalized. The addition of having a high population of Religious individuals further complicates matters. The morals associated with religion, create an impact because of the focus on permanent heterosexual relationships (Little 2007). The rural-like status of those living in Montana is affected by the characteristics of rural places.

In this study I argue that women who are exotic dancers are stereotyped as individuals of low moral value, promiscuous, and sex focused. These stereotypes (or cultural beliefs) will conflict with prototypical behavior for mothers, women, and religious/spiritual actors. When the norms and expectations for the identity of exotic dancer conflict with expectations for her other identities (mother, wife, daughter, religious person), dancers are likely to experience identity threat for at least one identity.

I hold the assumption that this conflict will be played out in perceptions of negative treatment, disapproval, and threats to identity. For women who perform exotic dancing in rural areas, I expect that identity threat will be more common and

overcompensation will be more necessary. While I will not be conducting a comparison between rural and urban women, I expect that dancers will express frustrations about negative treatment, disapproval, and identity threats and their inability to escape them in smaller communities.

In an identity hierarchy, an individual's most salient identities will be most threatened by conflicting expectations of other identities. When individuals experience identity threat, they will engage in identity management and overcompensate through behavior congruent with the threatened identity. For dancers, if their exotic dancer identity is threatened they are likely to point out their own behaviors that verify the exotic dancer identity, make reference to props and other objects that help verify that identity, and use justifications in their language to try to reconcile conflicting expectations.

Conflicting expectations for roles with which the dancers identify will also result in negative emotions such as anger, guilt, and sadness and that will require emotional labor thereby mediating their emotional experiences as dancers with expectations placed on them as women, and mothers.

This study contributes to the existing literature by adding information regarding the harmful cultural messages of what it means to be a woman, a mother, and an exotic dancer. By examining the negative consequences of these cultural messages and realizing that women are multi-faceted, we can change the harmful stereotyping of actors within their roles.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS

I conducted qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with exotic dancers (strippers) who are currently dancing (or have danced) for their primary income in Montana strip clubs. In-depth interviews provide insights into how rural dancers see themselves, and how they perceive that others within their communities view them. It also provides understanding of how exotic dancers engage in identity negotiation and emotion management, when identities based on conflicting roles are known to their communities.

Recruitment And Properties Of The Sample

Informants for interviews were asked to participate using three types of recruitment; flyers, previous contacts, and social media. There are 7 active strip clubs in the state of Montana. My sample incorporated participants from all the clubs in Montana, in order to gain a better understanding of how dancers in a rural-like state perceive that they are treated by their communities.

My first method of recruitment began by obtaining permission from the club management to post a flyer. This flyer contained information about the purpose of my study, emphasizing the importance of understanding the lives of exotic dancers and how they can help, my contact information, and where and when the interviews would take place. Interested dancers were urged to contact me for further information and a meeting.

My second method used previous contacts and acquaintances. I asked dancers directly if they were willing to be interviewed and scheduled interviews with them. I also handed out cards with my contact information to pass on to other dancers who might be willing to be interviewed. Additionally, at the close of interview sessions, I asked

contacts if they might suggest others that I could contact who might be interested in participating in the study.

The third method of recruitment was a post on social media explaining my project. It gave a brief description of the goals of the study and a description of participants who qualified. I asked anyone who met the criteria and was interested to contact me privately through messaging and set up an interview that way.

Using these methods provided me with a sufficient sample for ethnographic interviews. Participants were urged to contact the interviewer to set up interviews directly, thereby making the process entirely voluntary (except for the solicitation of personal contacts). I chose this recruitment method to ensure that my interviewees were not coerced into participation. For incentives, I advertised that I would provide breakfast, lunch, or coffee in exchange for their participation. I also emphasized that they received opportunities to share their expertise and impressions of exotic dancing and to help a graduate student with her research aimed at better understanding of the world of exotic dancing from their points of view. I chose not to provide any other incentives (especially monetary) because of the meaning that exchanging money may have to those in this line of work. Considering that dancers provide a set service for money, providing food seemed less likely to be considered payment for work.

I located 10 informants who were willing to be interviewed. My goal was to transcribe approximately 20-30 hours of interview time to gain a better understanding of the points of view of exotic dancers in Montana, but with 10 informants, I recorded over 12 hours of interviews. Potential informants were asked to meet with me over lunch, breakfast, or coffee to share the experience of exotic dancing with me. They were told

that the interview would be recorded and that it should take about 1-1-1/2 hours. I let the dancers know that I am interested in understanding their work from their points of view. They were also asked if I could contact them again with follow-up questions or if they needed clarification on any points. The only inclusion criteria I used for this study was that the interviewees are currently (or have been) exotic dancers in Montana as their primary form of income during that period. I chose not to use women who have only danced during amateur nights, since their experiences would differ from those who dance to earn their income and to support themselves and their families.

Procedures And Ethical Concerns

There were potential ethical issues that could arise from this study. First, there was the potential for psychological stress being caused by this research study, as interview questions and possible probing could cause interviewees to relive painful memories. I asked sensitive questions about family relations, and experiences with threats to their identities resulting from their career choices. These questions could have presented uncomfortable feelings. I emphasized during the interviews that respondents were not required to answer, that they should skip any question that made them uncomfortable, and that they might stop the interview at any time. To lessen the possibility of emotional trauma, I also offered the participants a list of services available to them (such as counselors in their area, etc.).

Next, exotic dancers may be a vulnerable population. There may be elements of living in poverty, and distrust of those with power over them (such as health care professionals, agents of social services, and criminal justice professionals). I was careful to ensure confidentiality (by using pseudonyms to guarantee that their identity is

protected) and made sure not to record any personally identifying information. If identifying information was recorded, such as telephone numbers, or contact information, that information was destroyed immediately following the interviews and were never be attached to the informant's responses.

There are seven clubs in Montana where exotic dancers perform. These clubs are located in Billings (1), Gallatin Gateway (1), Great Falls (1), Rocker (1), Three Forks (1), and Missoula (2). These clubs all fit the criteria for my study, because I am interested in the social interactions and self-perceptions of dancers in clubs in rural-like areas or small cities. While the census definition of rural is less than 2500 residents, and some clubs are located in the larger towns of Montana, the character of the state as a whole is rural (as discussed previously). As a manipulation check, I also compared information for those dancers from more rural areas with those from small cities. Additionally, I asked my informants the degree to which they identified as rural, as this could have revealed some contrasts.

While the locations of the clubs are public knowledge, it is crucial to keep answers from informants unattached to the location from which they work. The answers provided by the informants could potentially create difficulties for and harassment of dancers from community members, because I asked the dancers about how they felt they were perceived and treated by the communities in which they lived. And because these areas have small populations, the identity of an informant may be deduced if reported results are tied to location. To alleviate this risk, I destroyed all of the data which contained identifying information, but equally important, I did not disclose the names or

identifying factors (such as work location) of my informants within my research study so that specific responses could not be traced to specific communities or specific informants.

Purpose Of Methodology

The use of qualitative in-depth interviews and previous ethnographic observational notes were the most appropriate methodologies to use in my study because I was investigating how exotic dancers perceive that they are treated by their communities, and how this influences them emotionally. Surveys could provide similar data, but they are less appropriate for this study because they do not provide context and underlying meanings of behavior and interaction from the points of view of the dancers. In order to understand how this population manages conflicting identity expectations, and the resulting emotions, in-depth interviews are the most appropriate way to get a descriptive account of the conflicting identity expectations which dancers experience, and the importance of their identities within community interactions. Interviews provide the best chances for the researchers and the respondents to get to know each other, and build trust, in order to better understand the dancers' points of view. In addition, ethnographic data is appropriate for observing behaviors and witnessing the act of engaging in identity and emotion management and understanding the relationship between them.

Assumptions

Being stereotyped as an exotic dancer will influence how others treat dancers in conjunction with the conflicting role identities. My interviews began with questions concerning exotic dancing. I asked how long they've danced, some of the places they've danced, and how they feel about dancing. I also asked each participant to explain what she does as a dancer. I also asked questions verifying the degree of the respondents'

rural identities. If they have danced in other places, I asked about how that compares to dancing in Montana. And I asked questions about where they live, and how that relates to aspects of their careers.

Once dancers told me about their identities as dancers and about their lives, I asked questions about family, and familial reactions to their exotic dancer identity. I asked about family members and their frequency of interactions. I also asked them questions regarding their families' feelings regarding their career, and the resulting emotional responses. (See Appendix A for questions). Considering that there are certain norms and expectations for women, especially within rural communities, I expected to find that there would be conflicting expectations from families and other community members who have expectations of dancers in both their daughter/sister and exotic dancer roles.

The remainder of this paper focuses on these meanings, and the social interactions that shape these actors. Following a brief description of my methods of research, I expected to find 1) how life for exotic dancers in rural areas requires identity management because of conflicting role identities, 2) how exotic dancers are marginalized, 3) how identities are threatened requiring overcompensation, and 4) how this identity management is experienced as "emotional labor" for dancers within the workplace, requiring a set of "feeling rules."

From there I looked more closely at the expectations for motherhood, especially within rural Montana, and felt I was likely to observe expressions of conflict with informants' perceptions of their identities as exotic dancers. I asked questions regarding their status as mother, and how other mothers within the community treat them, if their

occupation is known. The questions asked on motherhood focused on the subject's identity as a mother: Would you like other parents to know about you as a mother? How might you show that to them? (See Appendix A for a complete list of questions.)

Interview Procedures

I used semi-structured interviews to collect my data. Semi-structured interviews guide the conversation yet allow for participants to provide information that is important to them, but may not have been reproduced in the interview questions. This allows us to gain a better understanding of the dancer's experiences from their points of view. Semi-structured interviews provide a road map, while dancers can also discuss themes from outside the confines of questions posed. Therefore, we can understand the participants' points of view and allow their voices to be heard more completely and more naturally than either a survey or a structured interview would allow.

This study provides insights into how dancers in Montana feel they are perceived and treated across their multiple identities. Not only does this provide insights from the rural dancers points of view, but it also provides knowledge on how dancers navigate their way through their communities. The lack of anonymity and the unique state of Montana will extend our knowledge about rural communities and their female inhabitants.

Researcher Notes

Immediately following data collection, I made journal entry notes that discussed the body language and the overall tone of the interview. These notes included my perceptions of each of my participants, as well as how my informants behaved and spoke during the interviews. These notes were helpful in allowing me to further recall the

meanings behind what participants said in the interviews and identify feelings and or comments that I felt were especially important to my findings.

This was a rather subjective data source, that included all my personal impressions that could affect my analysis. By recording this information, I could make notes on my subjective thoughts and feeling while ensuring my own awareness of potential biases. It also provided a place to discuss ongoing thoughts regarding the interviews and interview process, as well as my own desire to befriend participants because of their honest and open natures. As a researcher, I realized that this journal became an important facet of my time spent interviewing. The nature of some of these interviews caused me, as a researcher to have to do my own emotional work. The journal therefore became a place where I could also de-compress upon conducting some truly emotional interviews.

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS

Interview participants

The ten interviewees were all Caucasian women. They ranged in ages from 18 to mid-40's. All of them were considered by beauty standards to be good looking. They were all of an average to lower than average weight and had clear complexions. Rayelle no longer danced, however, she was an active dancer within the last year of her interview. Six of my respondents were mothers, however not all of them had custody of their children, and of those mothers, two of them had adult children. The personality of each of my respondents correlates to the success of the interview, as some respondents had better rapport with me as an interviewer. Star, had had some previous negative experiences with people knowing her career and was quiet and reserved during her interview. Tasha, in her forties is a long-term career dancer who still travels around the U.S and has been dancing since her early teens. Charlie, a curvy individual who was particularly beautiful, was in therapy at the time of the interviews for struggling with gender dysphoria and was wearing a binder at the time of the interview. Jane also revealed feelings of gender dysphoria and was enrolled in the university at the time of her interview. Harley, with an upbeat and happy personality was also a traveling dancer, interested in the world of wrestling and all it had to offer. My respondents came from a myriad of backgrounds; however, it is important to note that all of my respondents were white. While Native Americans are a sizable proportion of the population in Montana, this signifier was not mentioned in any of the interview sessions because of the makeup of my participants. Many of the informants started out the interviews as shy and reserved with closed off body language such as tense shoulders and looking down. However, as

we progressed through the questions and responses their shoulders began to relax, and a sense of comfort and ease began to show. Their shoulders started to become less tense and the interview became more like a guided conversation. Slowly, interviewees became more informal and friendly. I conducted interviews in multiple coffee shops and cafes around Montana. I traveled to Bozeman, Billings, Great Falls, and Missoula. I went most often to coffee shops and restaurants, although one informant preferred to be interviewed in her home. As stated earlier, each interview lasted for about an hour. The criteria for being involved within the study was to have been a dancer for at least six months. This would give the informant an idea of what being an exotic dancer entailed, as well as the ability to discuss the prototypical dancer.

Throughout the rest of this paper, I discuss the identity prototypes and societal expectations of dancers. Then, I discuss emotions and emotion management. Finally, I present concluding comments based on the results.

IDENTITY PROTOTYPES

In order to better understand the multiple identities they held, I asked informants about what made up a prototypical exotic dancer, the prototypical mother, and the prototypical woman. How they defined their identities was examined by their definitions of what creates a proper dancer, woman and mother.

Dancer Prototype

In order to gain knowledge about what makes a prototypical dancer, I asked my informants about their experiences with dancing, and how they defined the behavior and appearance of what a dancer should be. Their responses centered on several sub-themes

having to do with the physical and emotional experiences of dancers: every body type is desirable, fitness is required, empowerment is a benefit, and dancers are counselors.

Body type or “flavors”

All the dancers I talked with discussed what makes the best kind of dancer. These definitions relied less on standards of beauty and instead focused more on personality. In fact, most dancers went to lengths to point out that dancers don't need to have a certain body type. Every dancer I talked with discussed that women of all shapes and sizes are qualified. For instance, to the question “What makes a good dancer,” Harley replied, “Good physical appearance doesn't have anything to do with what makes a good dancer. It's your personality, your ability to hustle, and your ability to deal with a lot of bullshit...” Jane metaphorically defined it as:

...you have a variable for- Okay I call it the ice-cream factor. Like everybody has a flavor. Yes, my flavor might be chocolate, but sometimes I like vanilla and sometimes I like strawberry. So, everyone has a flavor, but there's always variations to that.

Along that same vein Charlie referred to “the flavor of the night” and Rayelle pointed out that “Everybody has a different opinion of what beauty is.” When discussing which women can last as dancers Charlie continued “... the ones that can have a conversation. Have a body, and be willing to ask, would you like me to dance with you. Those are probably the three basics.” For my respondents, body type wasn't the most important thing, because every body could be desired. Lilith added:

Not like a flair, but more of like that twinkle. You have to have that twinkle. Cause if you don't have that twinkle and you force it, they know. Men are not dumb, they know when you're trying, even the drunk ones do. And so do women, if women come in they know. But if you come through with this brilliance... This brilliance of 'oh you're the pretty shiny thing.... That's charisma

My respondents were aware that customers who came in seemed to care less about physical appearance and desired something a little “more”. My informants recognized that attitude and an inviting personality would get them a lot further than just looking good. To make the most money, they needed to be able to juggle outward appearance as well as produce a convincing charismatic character. While some of the women believed that physical appearance was somewhat important, others were under the impression that outward appearance was less important than the personality and attitude of the dancers. Because beauty has different meanings for everyone, all dancers would be able to find clients who prefer them to another dancer.

Strength (physical)

While dancers understood that their attitude played a bigger role in gaining and keeping a loyal clientele, they didn’t ignore that physical appearance was still a very important part of their job. This had less to do with facial appearance and more to do with being able to physically stand the demand on their bodies from the job. Lilly pointed out “you have to be healthy, because you’re moving a lot.” Tasha, a career dancer in her early 40’s further described dancing and the physical aspect of it.

When I was younger, I did not have to go to the gym, or give myself massages before work, but at 41 it’s a must that you take care of yourself. You’re literally living off the way that you look.... When you dance it’s like going to the gym. You’re physically tired... You’re gonna be physically tired like you went to the gym for eight hours every time you go to work. It’d be like you’re doing cardio for eight hours, that’s what our job is like every day.

Tasha wasn’t the only participant who stressed the importance of being able to physically withstand the pressure that dancing incorporates. Jane pointed out “My body would hurt so bad. When you wear 8-inch heels, you climb a 20-foot pole, you spin so fast that

sometimes you get sick... You crawl on your hand and knees, you hurt; you hurt so bad.”

Lilith summed up the physical fitness required of a dancer:

Fuck pilates. Fuck yoga. Fuck Aerobics. Fuck it all... If you dance and do a stripper dance routine for half an hour, you have gotten your upper chest. You've got your legs. You've got your inner thighs. You've got your lower legs. You've got your back and muscles. You've got your core. You've got your stamina and endurance all in one god damn soup. It's one of the best exercises.

The demands of the job require that dancers not only be physically fit enough to withstand the pressure of dancing for hours on end, but also require that they cultivate a personality that will continue to intrigue current customers as well as bring in new customers. Rayelle further pointed out the need for physical health when she stated “when your body doesn't let you do it anymore, what are you going to do? When you don't have the looks anymore, what are you going to do?” Physical fitness ensures that these women can handle the physical labor of the work they are doing, and the emphasis on charisma leads to the next sub-theme I found, empowerment.

Empowerment (perceived)

The prototypical exotic dancer feels empowered and uses that power. Although dancers started dancing because of the money, and that is a huge benefit of the job, one of the most common themes discussed was that of empowerment. It was, in fact, one of the best things about the job for most of my informants. Harley stated, “It gives [you] so much power over everyone else.” CJ giggled quietly while she explained that “it's like you don't even have to ask them for money or do anything, they just do it... It's like our show.” This empowerment worked two-fold. Not only did it make the dancers feel more powerful, but it also allowed them to release pent-up aggression that comes from working

with customers who try to push boundaries. Rayelle further described the ways she feels empowered while working

There was some guys sometimes that would be really loud and rude at my tip rail... I'd bend them over and give them a wedgie or I'd fucking slap them super hard. They liked that... So, I got paid for beating the shit out of some dude that's being a jerkass. I'm fine with that.

Charlie continued "I feel like I'm exploiting them [customers]. In a certain way that is hard to admit, but I feel like I get exploited every day, I just get paid for it this time."

This desire of having power over the customers was evident in many of my interviews.

Dancing gave the participants power they didn't realize they had before. Lilith summed it up nicely when she stated:

You realize part way through that you are actually the one with all the power. And so, it's a very empowering job. Extremely empowering. The fact that you're up on a stage and they want you, they can't have you. In some ways it's kind of a nice way to get yourself off... I'm gonna suck your money out of your pocket and leave you with nothing at the end of the night but your own problems, and I don't care. That's kind of that feel[ing] of 'I get to be the victor in all this. Yes, you get to see me naked, but I don't care. \$1000 of your hard-earned money just went into my pocket and all I have to do is take my clothes off.

The dancers seemed to gain more than just money from their experiences. They consistently felt comfortable in their skin and even during interviews appeared to be honest and sincere. Their body language included a head held high, shoulders back and sustained eye contact which emitted confidence and recognition of an inner power that comes from recognizing their strength. These women consistently demonstrated, during the interviews, the mental and physical strength they developed as a result of continuously having to engage in emotion work. Along with this feeling of empowerment, the women also discussed the emotional work required of dancing and

gained solace from the fact that they provided customers with an understanding ear. This leads to my next theme: counseling.

Counseling (for the client)

All my respondents perceived being a counselor as a characteristic of exotic dances. Each discussed the ways in which they counseled their clients. This characteristic was hugely important and not surprising because, in past literature we see that women often are required to take part in emotional labor. The sphere of exotic dancing is no exception. This type of labor evokes a certain emotional state within their clients. The women I interviewed consistently felt the need to put their clients at ease. They also work to make each client feel special. CJ stated from the start that “It’s like you’re a counselor with your clothes off.” Rayelle further explained “People come to the club, as sad as it sounds, to get stuff off their chest.” Star illustrated this point by telling a story:

I did a lap dance for this person that got a VIP and he didn’t want me to dance. He just wanted me to talk to him and he was really drunk, and he was crying. He told me that he said things that he never told anyone. When that happened, it felt like a therapeutic session.

As a dancer, it was far more important to be able to listen to your clients than dance for them. By interacting with their clients, the dancers could provide a service that was way more than just dancing. Lilith elucidated further, “So sometimes people don’t believe in therapy, but in a way, they get it from us. So, we’re healing. We’re a good healing, good alternative to cheating and arguing in front of kids.” To further examine the theme of counseling Tasha stated:

Dancers are more like unlicensed psychiatrists, I would dare say. We hear everybody’s problems and we have to sit there and listen. If they ask for our opinion, we’ll give them our opinion. But we hear marital problems,

divorce problems, addiction problems. They come here, they get drunk, they give us a couple hundred bucks, and they just wanna talk and talk.

The importance of being able to talk to clients gave my respondents confidence in themselves. This further empowered my informants and once again illustrated how they perceived the importance of their work and the strength, satisfaction, and self-esteem that they derived from it.

Based upon the interviews, the expectations for exotic dancers are that they are happy in their career choice. They are also expected to be sexual beings able to make clients feel wanted regardless of their own emotions. Dancers are also physically and emotionally strong enough to handle the intensity of the job. The confidence that they have is also an expectation and norm for those that I interviewed. These key characteristics are the norms for dancers and thus create the prototypical dancer behavior and attitude.

Woman Prototype

Following questions on dancing, I asked my respondents what makes a good woman. This question is important because I expect that the dual identities of woman and dancer are conflicted because of mutually exclusive societal norms regarding each. Where dancers are required to be sexual beings, the bulk of history paints women as chaste and quiet (Gibson 2006). This seems to be in direct opposition to the idea of what a prototypical dancer should be. Norms of family first, cleanliness, virtuous, and pretty conflict with expectations for dancers of being sexual, caring mostly about sex and pleasing their partners, and of low moral character (Jackson 2011).

When asked about what a woman should be like, participants talked about their families. Quite a few of my interviewees recalled how they had been told specifically

what to do to be a good woman. The list of these is consistent with traditional ideas of femininity, focusing on being clean, virtuous and a part of a family (Gibson 2006)

Charlie discussed how her religious upbringing also influenced her views on womanhood:

You're familiar with proverbs 3:1? It mentioned a woman gets married, has the babies, stays home, takes care of the babies, makes the food, cleans the house. Doesn't have any- this is all kind of- this is after a lot of thinking but doesn't focus on self-care or no focus on self-care. And so, like devotion of self to others to the point of destruction.

Charlie was aware of the fact that women are trained to be servers. They serve their families, their children, their men, etc. Jane continued this theme when she acknowledged that "My mother was like the epitome of a traditional sweet feminine woman. Very submissive. Not volatile and all over the place. My mom, what she showed me about being a woman was more about her loyalty, about taking care of your family, and your family comes first when you do those things."

Along with having a family, being a woman has more to do with being attractive, always. This includes physical appearance as well as being able to take care of everyone. Tasha further emphasizes this point, saying, "My momma who raised me told me that pretty girls keeps pretty houses. They keep their pussy's clean. Down there cleanliness was very high on the Richter scale." Not only was there a lesson on how a house should be kept, but there is also a lesson on hygiene. She continued by explaining, "She wanted me to look like a model from the time I woke up, and she wanted my house clean and my body clean, and she wanted me to cook good, healthy food. These things are instilled very deeply." The reliance on beauty and cleanliness has followed Tasha to this day and

represents the need for a woman to be physically appealing as well as conforming with traditional feminine roles.

Reality of womanhood: norm violation

As my respondents continued their discussion on what makes a proper woman they started to create a broader definition of what a woman should be. The dancers I interviewed seemed to agree with society's definition of what makes a good woman, but often felt as if they violate those norms themselves. This could be looked at as a way of managing the conflict between the norms for the two identities. When I asked Charlie if she agreed with what she had said about how a woman should be a server, she candidly said:

Fuck no. I'm a fucking alcoholic in recovery. I am a self-centered, self-serving frightened to death son of a bitch... somebody that cares for themselves, somebody that has emotional intelligence, somebody that- and this isn't necessarily specific to one gender in my opinion. Somebody that cares for themselves, somebody that has strong boundaries. Somebody that reinforces their boundaries, somebody that is honest and transparent. Does what they need to do, instead of doing what everyone else thinks they should do and actually living their fucking life.

Where my interviewees first answered stereotypically what a woman should be, their own definitions of a proper woman were not so gendered. In fact, CJ pointed out "I don't think being a good woman and being a good man, there shouldn't be any difference. It's just being a good person." Interviewees initially talked about what they had learned from outside influences, however, as we continued on, they realized that in general it's less about being a "good woman" and more about being a "good person". Harley perfectly summed being a good woman as "I don't think there's any one way to define a woman, and a strong woman at that. Mostly, my family's view is happy, safe, and healthy. As long as you're all of those things, do what you do."

Prototypical Mother

Much like findings of other studies done on motherhood, all of my respondents discussed intensive mothering (Hays 1993). They expressed that in order to be good mothers, not only did they need to financially support their children (which often became the reason for choosing this type of work) but also, they needed to spend time with their children.

Financial support

The majority of my respondents discussed being able to adequately provide for their children, even if they didn't have children currently living with them. This meant being able to "have enough money (Charlie)." Gemini further illustrated that "... you can buy them whatever and keep them fed, and keep them clothed, but that's just kind of like expected." Those that had children pointed out that part of the reason they did the work that they did was because it enabled them to financially provide for their children.

Lily best described why being financially stable as a mother is important:

I feel like before people have babies, they really need to look at the whole picture. Not just "oh cute little baby" That's all that's in their heads-and that's in my head right now too. How are they going to pay their medical bills? When they get sick what are they going to do? Do they have a dependable vehicle that can take them to the hospital? What if they went into labor and you can't get ahold of anybody? What if you can't breastfeed? Formula is like 60 bucks a can, or like 40 bucks a can- I don't know what it is now. It's expensive so people really need to freaking think about that. Because I see these little kids walking around with clothes that are too small, and they're just- my kids get dirty, they play in the mud- but you can wash that off. And if they're always freaking snotty that's not normal. It's not freaking normal. Take them to the damn doctor. They're like 'oh it's just a snotty nose' no it isn't. There's obviously something wrong- you have a runny nose because you're trying to get rid of something. so obviously, it's not okay. I just-people disgust me. If you're living with your parents why are you going to have a baby? Why? When are you ever going to get out and get on your own if you're having a baby when you live-when you're freaking 25 and live with your parents?

Just like intensive mothering has a focus on being able to financially provide, my respondents also felt that way. Aside from being financially sound, they also focused heavily on the time spent with children.

Self-sacrificing for the sake of the child

“More than anything, I just think it's important to be there. You have to be there for your kid, you can't just abandon somebody (Rayelle).” My respondents agreed that being a mother was a difficult job that required a lot of time. There was also an emphasis on self-sacrifice. This further illustrated the idea of intensive mothering that is common within our society (Hays 1993). Tasha further proposed that this need to provide for your children could go against what you may need to do for yourself:

You have to be non-selfish to be a good mom. You better be prepared to go without. I don't care how much income you have. I'm not talking go without financially. You better be ready to go without many things: sleep, time for yourself. Your shower might be three minutes instead of five. You maybe have to go without your bowl of cereal because the other kid took the last of the milk and you gotta go to the store. You better be unselfish.

The idea of being able to do what you have to do for them was further explained by CJ, “It's not how you feel about somebody, it's what you do for them... Once you're a mother, it's not about you anymore. It's still your life, don't lose yourself with your kids, but never put anything above your child.” Much like the bulk of our society, my respondents were adamant that being a good parent wasn't only about being able to financially provide. Being able to be around your children and help them was very important. Gemini perfectly summed it up when she said “There's always money made, but you can't make time. So, you can't get back time. You can always make more money. Spend time with your kids.”

The discussion on motherhood further showed that a good mother requires the ability to mother intensively. While providing financial support while also providing time, care, and attention has proved to be difficult for most women today, especially those working 40 hours or more a week, these dancers stressed that their occupation granted them the ability to spend time with their children while also being able to provide financially. As CJ's quote perfectly illustrates:

The best thing about my job is the money and how much time I get to spend with my kid. I only work three days a week. Sometimes four, and I make just as much or more- than people who work a full-time job and get like \$800 paychecks. I'm bringing in like \$1500 a week.

My respondents continued to examine that being a mother consists of being financially stable as well as able to be extremely involved in a child's life. The idea of intensive mothering (Hays 1993) continues to be a societal expectation for those who choose to have children, and my respondents felt the same way.

IDENTITY CONFLICT

As discussed earlier, identity conflict occurs when the norms for one identity are inconsistent and mutually exclusive from the norms for another identity. It then becomes impossible to enact the different behaviors associated with each identity at the same time. In comparing dancer identity with the mother identity, the norms for mothering are not the same prototypical norms for being a dancer. While the norms for mothering are not prototypical for dancers, these norms are acted out by those that I interviewed. The respondents provided time, care and attention to their clients, as well as their children (if they had any). The reliance on these mothering attributes is in opposition to the independence needed to be a dancer, however when these norms were incorporated into their interactions with clients, dancers recognized that they were more successful

financially. My interviews supported the supposition that there would be identity conflict because of the different and mutually exclusive characteristics attributes delegated to each role. A mother is supposed to be nurturing and pay full attention to their children. A dancer needs to be independent and sexual. This often leads to stereotyping of dancers being considered selfish and in need of moral guidance. This can lead to identity conflict, because my interviewees felt that being vulnerable and open (like a mother) could be detrimental in their work spheres. It becomes impossible for the actor to play both role identities at the same time.

I asked questions about my respondents' relationships with others in their parenting role when their career is known (they are playing the role of mother, but their dancer identity is known), whether they would tell their children about their career, and whether they talk about their children in the dancing sphere (they are playing the role of dancer, but their mother identity is known). These questions were created to see how dancers managed the identity conflict when norms are incompatible for two or more of the identities that my interviewees held.

The first question to get at this variable involved whether my interviewees told their families about their careers. For the most part, my other interviewees did feel some hesitation about letting people know that they did dance. It seemed that telling individuals about their career choice, was a fear that my respondents imposed on themselves because of the way that they are treated by outside community members. The idea that dancers are less than, or morally lacking, led to feelings of hurt because they felt that this wasn't the case. These feelings of hurt were due to the threat to the identity of a respectable woman, because of their exotic dancer identity being labeled as less than.

When questioned whether my respondents let their children know of their career choices, many voiced that they did tell their children that they danced, but not that they danced without clothes. A few respondents also felt fear that their children would begin dancing. Jane explained “[if my daughter danced] I would ask what happened to you that you are in this place.” This quote indicates that those that I interviewed felt some discomfort about their career choices. The negative connotations that surround the identity of exotic dancer are well-known by my respondents and the fact that they chose to hide the full capacity of their career and urge their children away from this job, shows that there was some identity conflict between being a respectable woman and being an exotic dancer. The identity threat and conflict created by having identities that aren’t congruent to one another was in part due to the societal and cultural expectations that they felt.

Societal And Cultural Expectations

Expectations for dancers: dumb, morally inferior, worldly, promiscuous

The informants included in this study talked at length about the expectations placed upon dancers. Many discussed how dancers were often seen as less intelligent and only capable of doing “degrading work”. Charlie talked at length about her education and the surprise that clients reacted with when acknowledging her intelligence:

I was talking with a client and I referenced existentialism and he was like ‘what? I don’t even know what that is.’ I tried to—How do you define existentialism? I just started to find different words. He was just like, ‘The fact that you fucking know what that word is just tells me you shouldn’t be here.’ I said, ‘Why wouldn’t I fucking know what that means?’

Jane further discussed the “dumb” stereotype and how the bulk of customers “are expecting me to not be an equal, or as having no intellectual value.” This belief is further

perpetuated by social media and the impact it has on how we perceive categories of people. Gemini referenced how social media has kept this stereotype going:

You see memes on Facebook, like the one where she is trying to spell out cat and then she's like 'fuck it, I'll just be a stripper.' People put a lot of stigma behind being stupid and being a dancer.

Harley, who has danced around the country discussed that these stereotypes and expectations are affected by the geographical location:

So, I've met all sorts of different people that- but generally we're looked down upon. In the bigger cities, it really is considered a normal thing. In the smaller communities it is actually way more frowned upon, and way more talked about than in the big cities. Portland is like the strip club capital of the world.

The ability to have your career somewhat normalized gave Harley confidence and she discussed at length enjoying going to bigger cities to dance. The stereotype that dancers were dumb also played into how they reacted with their customers. Jane touched on the fact "you have to play being dumb, you have to lower yourself a little," in order to keep customers happy. Through this research the stigma of being dumb plays a significant role in the dancers' lives as well as dictates how they choose to interact with the customers. Jane recognized this fact when talking about expectations:

There is a reason there's a social stigma. It does represent something that was negative at some point in time, so that's kind of where that image comes from. That may be why most people think that we do it, because we're not very bright and there's nothing else we can do.

However, my interviewees did not fit this stereotype. Much of them had at least some college experience. Out of my 10 respondents, over half had experienced schooling past high school. This included not only college, but aesthetician training, and trade school as well. All of my respondents were well spoken. That doesn't even include the wealth of knowledge gained by lives full of hardship and experience. Star summed it up nicely

when she exclaimed “People really don’t know that much about what it’s like to be a dancer.”

Along with negative stereotypes being forced upon them, they also pointed out that many clients would urge them to go beyond the bounds of dancing and push them into the realm of prostitution. This happened to be the biggest expectation they were faced with and perhaps one of the worst. Gemini, a soft spoken, mild-mannered interviewee had this to say:

I just think that guys that come to the strip clubs here have this idea that all dancers are sluts, and everybody’s got that mentality about us. Then they come to the strip club and they’re pretty shocked that you can’t actually take a dancer home. I definitely think that they probably view me as a little less modest than most girls, a little less innocent or whatever... I definitely think that customers think we’ll do a lot more than we actually will.

This expectation caused my dancers to feel that clients viewed them “as an object of disrespect... some object of desire to get some happy ending from.” Harley pointed out that customers view dancers like “they’re out trying to get their next fix, and it’s an easy way for them to find prostitution clients.”

The expectation that dancers will do “more” than dance has been experienced by all of my interviewees, proving that this expectation is the most universal and perhaps the most harmful. Jane further explained “They’re expecting you to go home with them, they’re expecting a lot of things. At a certain point you allow them to believe that, you kind of play along.” It is important to make customers feel desired and a requirement for successful dancers to play that line. The idea that a woman would get naked in front of a client, led clients to often believe that sex was the end goal of going to the clubs.

Rayelle was aware that this harmful expectation could lead to discontent of the clients:

I think it actually pisses people off when they don't get what they think they are going to get. I think that sometimes they expect to have more of a good time than they actually do, just because, I've had multiple people and this stuff happens to, I think every girl, where they ask for more outside of the club and stuff like that. I've had a lot of people kicked out for it because it's illegal to ask somebody to have sex with you for money. That's illegal. I've had a lot of people kicked out for that.

Tasha further continued “They [clients] are looking for somebody to go home with... they seem to think we’re prostitutes.” Charlie sarcastically said “I get proposed to, or propositioned at least once a shift. How lucky...” Customers aren’t the only ones who hold this stereotype as Charlie continued “people, like police, will come in and ticket women for indecent exposure and prostitution.” The fact that this problem is so pervasive led Charlie to believing in the decriminalization of sex work, “I wish that it was legalized actually, because then people wouldn’t come to strip club to fucking look for sex and shit.”

Lily furthered this argument when examining an interaction with a client:

I had a guy, he comes, sits next to me one time and he's like 'Show me your tit.' and I was like 'no' and he goes 'show me your tit!' and I was like 'NO!' he goes 'but you're a stripper.' -- He said 'Oh, meet you in my truck?'... Some guys come in there and they think-They are just hot shit in there. I don't think they realize how many guys try to do that [proposition for sex]. Like they think they're the only guy-I don't know they just-Guys think about it completely differently.

Informants often described customers attempting to take them home, yet they were also adamant that not all customers behaved that way. Lilith examined “Smart ones see them exactly as they are. That they're in to see a naked woman who is making money no judgement calls. Women will always see them as women trying to make a living.”

Rayelle further described the difference between clients “I think it depends on the person,

obviously, but I think that some customers treat us like real people, and other customers look at it like we're meat.” There is no typical customer, because there are different people being serviced throughout an evening. However, it does seem that the majority of negative interactions between my informants and their clients was the belief that a customer could get “more.” The negative interactions experienced by my respondents led to a myriad of emotions as well as overcompensation techniques used to lessen the strain of the identity conflict experienced.

First, I assume that those in rural-like communities have less access to anonymity because of their tight-knit communities, and therefore their career choices may be known to others within the community. My respondents were aware of the stereotypes applied to them because of their career choices. They had negative feelings and worries about letting people know that they were dancers, because of the negative implications this entailed. Second, I wanted to examine how those who work in occupations on the edges of respectability negotiate their identities within small towns, and how they respond to stereotypes and misperceptions, and how they manage these threats to their identities. My respondents felt their identities threatened because they were expected to only be a prototypical dancer. In order to manage these threats, they used a variety of overcompensation techniques including: anger, putting up a tough exterior, depression, and drug and alcohol use coping skills. This research contributes to our understanding of identity threat, identity management, and emotion management. This study also will provide insights into how rural communities treat those who are marginalized. I had expected to find that identity conflict would cause my participants stress. I did find that there were identity conflicts. I thought that they would manage the emotions felt, by

keeping hidden the taboo identity of exotic dancer, however this was not the case.

Instead, I found that my participants talked in depth about their careers and didn't keep it well hidden at all, but instead relied on overcompensation.

OVERCOMPENSATION

Throughout my study, it became clear to me that the respondents were overcompensating because of the way that their identities are threatened when they are seen as a uni-dimensional exotic dancer. This identity and its prototype caused clients of my respondents to treat them as if they are just a body, with low morals and no feelings, as well as a lack of control over their sexuality. The stereotypical dancer identity was in opposition to the intelligent, multi-faceted human beings that emerged as they described themselves.

Informants relied heavily on overcompensation and emotion management in order to continue the work they needed to do. The dancers experienced threats to their woman identity, because of their career choice. The woman identity is one that is deserving of respect and the dancer identity has been marginalized into a non-self-respecting identity. Dancers are overcompensating for the way that their other identities are threatened when they are seen as a uni-dimensional exotic dancer (just a body, not very smart, has low morals, has a tough exterior, not capable of feelings, has lack of sexual control, and loves being a sex object). Respondents emphasized these attributes in their conversations with me, demonstrating that they did not squelch their emotions and were independent and struggled to be in control of their own lives. They began using overcompensation techniques as well as emotion management in order to deal with the identity threat that comes from being seen as one uni-dimensional identity.

Emotion Management

There is a lot of work that goes into being an exotic dancer. Emotionally, dancers must manage their own feelings to maintain fruitful relationships at work. These respondents continuously had to monitor and express emotions in a way that wouldn't affect the relationships they formed at work. This involved dealing with clients who often either verbally or sexually assaulted them or demeaned them because of their career choice. Informants frequently were forced to manage their negative feelings in a way that would not damage the client/dancer relationship. Bordering between being considered a sexual being and also someone deserving of respect led dancers to juggle between the two identities. To continuously entertain customers despite negative treatment led to many different types of emotion management and overcompensation, which included costuming, dealing with hurt, anger, depression, ignoring the situation, as well as drug and alcohol use. This type of work not only has physical repercussions on the body, but emotional repercussions on the individual. To deal with the challenging work, respondents spoke in length about the emotions felt because of the work they do and the ways in which they dealt with the resulting emotions (overcompensation and emotion management).

Costuming: playing one identity exclusively

A common theme within my interviews was the fact that informants prepped themselves for work by creating a persona. This worked to help alleviate apprehension that comes from being in a vulnerable position. It also helped create a confidence in these informants that led them to create strong characters that could make money. Charlie sums up the experience in the following manner:

Fuck. There's a picture in the back room of Elizabeth Taylor, that looks like super glamorous and amazing and I put on my music and I'm just like take a deep breath and then I'm like- depending on my mood that day, I'm beautiful, I'm intelligent. You are all my slaves [customers]. It's like go out there and fucking own it. I get bored. So, I got to keep it spicy. Charlie is feminine. Charlie is queen supreme. Got this oozing sexual energy, dominance, innocence, very confident, everyone likes her. There's no place for insecurity. It's just taking one aspect and really exaggerating that. Instead of just having this whole spectrum individual.

By focusing on certain parts of the individual, most of the dancers also created characters that were based on the sexual and confident parts of their personalities.

Charlie was clear that they were not being true to every part of themselves but knew that by creating a character that was one dimensional provided them with the necessary characteristics needed to do their jobs successfully. This overcompensation works to help the dancers create an exaggerated identity based off sexual energy. This required mental preparation was a common theme among my respondents.

One of my respondents explained that when she comes to work she creates a character. Informants tend to worry about being vulnerable. In conjunction with identity theory, this is important because they manage their emotions by hiding them. The creation of an alternate identity provides these informants with the ability to keep hidden the vulnerabilities they have. This can not only be a way of protecting the dancer from the potential dangers of exposing too much about themselves, but also as a way to create entertainment for themselves while at work. Due to the mental and physical demands of the job, many of the individuals find ways to cope and continue their work. For Harley creating a character was a fun way to “spice things up.”

I have different lies that I tell in different strip clubs; I keep track of what lies I'm telling. I don't have to tell these people about me. I can tell them about this totally fictitious person, and it's fantastic. I don't have to be- I just have to remember that night and that customer, like 'this is what I told

you.' And especially when I'm traveling and I'm not going to go back to that area or that club, I can make up this whole new persona, and it's so much fun.

Creating a character allows the individuals to capitalize on a fantasy that they have worked to create. The character is not always a new character as Harley describes but can be nuanced as Charlie touches on. By focusing on one aspect of their personality, Charlie created another person that wasn't as complex as the typical human being. This works in two ways. Customers get a fantasy of what they want (which the dancer can capitalize on), and dancers can protect themselves while also having a bit of fun.

The idea of costuming and putting on a character is beneficial for both parties. However, it can also lead to some difficulties, because the full spectrum individual with multiple identities is no longer prioritized. This can lead to conflict within the individual because they now must focus on one specific identity as opposed to the person that is created by the intersection of their multiple identities. Costuming helps these informants manage their emotions, by giving them a chance to look at the treatment from an outsider view. The new persona, allows these informants to, in a way, not experience the negative treatment perpetuated by clientele. The prototypical dancer behavior, is often in opposition to the prototypical independent women ideal. By creating a "totally fictitious person", respondents are able to suppress the negative emotions that crop up due to experiences of being hurt physically, emotionally, and verbally by clients.

Hurt due to others' reactions to exotic dancer identity

Hurt or offense was felt by all of my respondents. Whether this was a result of assault, or conflicted power dynamics, is unknown. However, it can be assumed that the conflict between the exotic dancer and the identity of an independent hard-working

woman played a large role in producing negative emotions. The norms for the niceties of dancers and the pride of their ability to work often went hand in hand. When these norms were violated, hurt often followed. The norms for being treated as respectable professionals is oftentimes violated by the behaviors of prospective customers. The behaviors that customers exhibit show a lack of respect for the independence and professionalism of the dancers. The behaviors of clients therefore threaten that identity. It was difficult for respondents to be nice, because of the negative interpersonal experiences, and yet necessary for financial wellbeing. Hurt oftentimes led to anger as a way to compensate from the identity threat felt. Anger is thus dealt with in the following ways: denigrating customers, feelings of guilt, physical and verbal attacks, suppression of negativity by joking, as well as using drugs and alcohol.

Hurt was often felt by these respondents. This was a result of threats to the identity of the respondents. Informants were aware of the prototypical behavior of their identities. The sexual identity of an exotic dancer produced unwanted behavior from clients and community members at large. By being labeled as an exotic dancer, the stereotype of being unable to control their sexuality was reacted upon by clients and other community members. This resulted in a lack of respect by those other individuals. The informants therefore felt identity threat because client behaviors show a lack of respect that threatens the woman identity. Dancers compensated for the identity threat through anger. The hurt was resulted in anger that was often played out in ways that underscored the very characteristics that were called into question.

Anger at clients

Anger was a universal theme among respondents and is an interesting emotion for many reasons. One reason is that the majority of exotic dancers are female. Sociologists have recognized that through socialization, women are less likely to express anger. Furthermore, if they do express anger, there seems to be a sense of guilt following that, even if the emotion of anger is justified. These informants often felt guilt because of the conflict between being expected to be nice and friendly (showing no anger), and the anger felt by being treated disrespectfully (because of the pride associated with their success as dancers). “There's no way a girl can work this month, after month, after month without taking time off. There's just no way... You get so bitter- You just take days off. you get used to it.” (Lily) It was important to informants that they have control of their emotions. This was not only important as women, but to continue making money. If they expressed anger in a way that was not deemed as appropriate they could face being sent home from work. This proved to be problematic, not only because they would lose the wages for the day, but also because they would still need to provide money to the club for the time that they were at work.

Occasionally however, there were slip-ups. A few of the dancers discussed that they felt anger and sometimes because of this engaged in combative behavior. After getting her butt slapped, Gemini said, “Out of pure reaction I turned around and knocked him out. Just like side armed him.” She was told that this behavior was unacceptable and continued... “I guess it was kind of uncalled for.” This sense of guilt for protecting herself was due to the negative reaction of the club managers, following her reaction to being assaulted. Lily also discussed the fact that she has been physically combative with customers who would not leave her alone. When she first started she would tell them,

“do it again, and I will punch you in the face.” The physical aspect of anger was disapproved of by places of employment, and eventually all the dancers expressed anger in other ways such as ignoring the issues, denigrating customers, or using drugs and alcohol in order to try to manage the emotion.

One of the most common ways that informants could express the anger they felt because of their jobs was to find a way to express it verbally or by reclaiming their own power. Respondents often said they didn’t care about the way that they were being treated, but their words said differently when asked about how they feel about their customers. The dancers managed being offended through getting angry first, and then managed their anger by producing a tough exterior, denigrating customers, or pretending to ignore it. The hurt felt by respondents due to identity conflict, led each of my respondents to react to the hurt by using emotion management.

They would just look at me and think that [that strippers are dumb] and I would just let them and go 'You know you're wrong but I'm not gonna educate you cause whatever the fuck, I don't give a shit. I don't give two shits what you think. The fact that I just sucked \$500 out of you means you're the dumb bastard. Not me. So, I win this.

This quote shows how Lilith ended up shrugging off her anger in a way, while still expressing that she was unhappy with her clientele. Lilith took solace in the fact that when people ascribed her as being stupid, she could ascribe the same label to them, because she felt as if she was coming out on top because of the monetary transaction. The money aspect empowered many of these dancers and was a way to mock her clients into giving her more money. Lily laughed as she told me that she told her clients on multiple occasions “If one guy puts up \$1 and expects me to do something for him I’m like 'You know that won't even buy me a candy bar.' It won't. So, you want me take my

clothes off for \$1.' Nobody is going to do that ever. I'm like, 'I don't know if you're aware, but you're supposed to be giving me all of your money.'" The mockery was a way to express their displeasure without overstepping the boundaries put in place by their place of employment. Charlie continued along the same vein

As far as dealing with guys at work a lot of people just have so much shame about their desires, including myself, but it's a very complex job. People asking me-they're talking to me about eating my pussy, it's like so old. It just becomes this game where you're like 'I see pussy, but would you eat my ass?' They're just like asking and moaning and you're seeing what they can do because you're here all the fucking time and get bored.

Charlie examined that people often feel shame about their sexual desires. By joking along with the customer, it made the situation that could be tense and awkward much more manageable.

Because untamed sexuality is a prototypical behavior of dancers, informants seemed to become bored with the idea of sexual encounters. My respondents often talked about teasing customers on the basis of sex. The shame they felt due to the sexual nature of their job was then managed by making sex a joke. It was also a way to tease the customer. This seemed to be the most common way that the dancers dealt with the anger felt from the way they were being treated. The dancers I interviewed felt pride in their careers and their ability to be financially independent. However, the norms and expectations for dancers and their identities, tended to make respondents feel as if they were often looked down upon. This treatment not only required them to manage their anger but the way they had to handle it led to the next theme of ignoring the abuse.

Ignoring: putting up and shutting down in theory

While there was often elements of anger and depression because of the stress of the job, the dancers I interviewed eventually started overcompensating by saying they

were just ignoring the unruly behavior of clientele. Because there is difficulty created by the work that is a result of negative treatment given by customers as well as the population at large, another overcompensation technique that respondents used was ignoring the problems. It became more of an unspoken rule to put up with harassment. In another sphere, unruly behavior would not be tolerated, in the strip club sphere, it was expected and dealt with by brushing it off. The dancers' identities are threatened by displays of disrespect by their customers. To overcompensate, the informants began to ignore the disrespectful behaviors of clients. The interviewees would behave as if the negative treatment by clients didn't matter and that it wasn't offensive. Rayelle stated, "I really couldn't care less about that [harassment] because I got to the point where I just stopped letting it affect me, Where I just didn't care anymore... You have to act like you're still happy. (laughs) I just didn't let it affect me." Rayelle managed her emotions by adopting the dancer identity and playing it out. That included being happy and sexual, even if she didn't want to. While she claims that she stopped letting it affect her, she clarifies this by pointing out that she is "acting" like she's happy, even when she isn't. She manages her behavior and manages her emotions.

Harley continued... "I really try and do like the stripper voice of, 'oh no. You can't touch me there, you can't touch me here. You have to keep them back there, you have to be a good boy, so I can be nice for you.' just put it out really nice." Harley shows how even if people assault her, she subtly tries to get them to stop. Assault by customers becomes a fact of life that many of the dancers learned to brush off after months of dancing.

Another way that dancers tried to defend themselves was by calling attention to another population of sex workers, namely prostitutes. While addressing assault within the exotic dancing sphere, the dancers I talked to discussed that while it was irritating it was up to them to put up with it, they found comfort in explaining that they weren't the same as other sex workers. Tasha, a dancer who has been working for over 40 years said explicitly, "that's irritating, but it's part of the job. We're not prostitutes, we're not for sale. I tell them I am too pretty to be a whore. or I tell them, 'girls that look like me are not hookers'." This worked as a way to point out their higher status and therefore their entitlement to respect. The role of exotic dancer is not considered a very high-status occupation; however, it claims a higher status than prostitute. By pointing out that they were not prostitutes, my respondents were managing the hurt that they feel because of the disrespect that they felt. It worked as a way to claim they were deserving of respect while also demoting another facet of sex work. This quote leads to another aspect that wasn't looked for but was touched upon. Dancers are well-aware of the hierarchy of sex work as a whole use it to justify their worthiness and demands for respect. By referring to the hierarchy, the dancers were grasping for ways to examine the need they had for respect. By placing themselves on a hierarchy, the dancers placed themselves at a higher status. This allowed for them to demand respect from their clients. Harley furthered this theme by discussing how when being propositioned for sex she tells them, "it's called a brothel. Go find one'. This is not it."

The dancers I talked with have dealt with a significant amount of assault. One main assault theme was their being propositioned for sex. Other examples of abuse they are faced with include physical and emotional abuse by clients, as well as other members

of the community. This ended up with the dancers becoming accustomed to the way they were being treated and left them feeling as if they were supposed to just ignore it or put up with it. I argue that respondents felt as if they were ignoring the behavior, however by pretending to ignore abuse, they overcompensated with hard and tough behavior. If they were tough and strong, then they could hold on to their identities of being independent, professional, and worthy. The dancers had to act tough in the face of disrespect to continue doing their job effectively. These informants often felt hurt by the way they were treated. They dealt with this emotion by getting angry, getting physically or verbally violent, or by pointing out their higher status. These overcompensation techniques also related to the next type of emotion felt by respondents: depression.

Depression of interviewees

Due to the intensity of creating a one-faceted character that must put up with a multitude of abuses, respondents talked extensively about how that led to feelings of emotional hardship. This not only influenced them on a personal level but reached out into other facets of these informants' lives. Burn out was a reality for many of the respondents. Star talked about the repercussions of being seen in the identity of an exotic dancer, "I've seen dancers that have been there long-term, and I haven't seen one of them that's happy. It seems like maybe being like a sex object it gets to you after a while. You get burnt out." Rayelle added "Towards the end of my career in dancing, I definitely had a lot of mental breakdowns towards the end. I was just over it, I definitely burnt out-burnt myself out on it. I was disgusted being there." The burn out wasn't only a result of abuse being encountered daily, but also because of the worth equated with their identities. Jane, an exceptional woman who talked extensively on emotional stability pointed out:

I noticed that my emotional stability is actually linked to how much money I make. Because your making money based on the fact of your appearance, your looks... you really start to associate 'If I made money, my value as a human goes up. If I didn't make money, my value as a human goes down' So after a while all that stuff weighs on you, and it's very heavy. It's super heavy. And even if you don't realize it, you start to think about it, and you just don't want to do it... I think it's hard because in a way we don't respect ourselves. I can promise you every girl from a club has an image or identity issue. It's hard sometimes when someone is nasty to you, you start to question 'is that real? Am I really those things?'... I mean you really have to know when to work, and when not to work. If you started getting exhausted all the time, you're not going to make any money and it's just going to perpetuate itself.

Respondents were clear on the fact that the job, while providing many financial benefits, was extremely difficult. By putting a price on what their identity was worth, many of respondents were affected in the long run. All of the individuals I talked with experienced the same kind of burnout and discussed needing to take time off in order to recuperate from the hardships of the job. These hardships were less a result of the physical labor, but more so the emotional labor forced upon these respondents. Lily also summed up her feelings of hopelessness.

That really wears on you. I get to work and I'm just-I'm worn down. I'm worn out. Burnt up... I don't know-There were so many times I could just give up, you know. Like I'm driving and I'm like 'Oh, I should just drive my car off the side of the road.' or 'God. I just want to go to sleep and never wake up.' I have struggled with depression, like I have my entire life. So, it's nothing that I couldn't control. I have no reason to be depressed. I have a house over my head. Food in the fridge. Vehicles, animals... I just struggle. I can't necessarily say struggle with myself, but I have anxiety and that doesn't help either. So that makes me super depressed... I have literally done everything.

It seems that the career choice, while providing the financial necessities in life leave much to be desired for these respondents. There is an apparent struggle that comes with such an emotionally difficult job, that can't be ignored. The reason there is so much emotion management within this facet of sex work is because it happens to be extremely

hard on the individuals participating in it. The importance of remaining a single-faceted person and relying on the wealth of individuals to help keep up the façade seemed to be extremely tiring and detrimental to respondents' mental health. The emotional problems that this career brought up not only affected them personally but also affected my interviewees in their relationships.

Respondents are only looked at as sex objects and being portrayed in that light left them feeling emotionally vulnerable and somewhat shut off. Harley discussed the difficulty she had when working with clients. "I have a hard time with eye contact when I'm at work and I've worked on that over the years, but it's still- I just can't do it. I'm just like 'I'm naked. You should be looking elsewhere. Don't look at my face. Like this is- Can I just spread my legs before you please?'" The need to be nothing but a sex object seemed to cause Harley enough difficulty that eye contact is something that seemed to make her feel too vulnerable. This vulnerability not only was hard to deal with in the work sphere but was present in other spheres of her life as well.

I've also started having a hard time translating that [being sexy] outside of work. like intimate life, I have a hard time being sexy. It's more like get in there get it done. I'm not so much with the foreplay anymore. I mean I was never big into it anyways, but now it's really... Unless I'm in the mood, it's really hard to get me in the mood period. So I completely- I didn't want to do anything, ever... I wasn't wanting to have sex ever. But I'm like 'no I just don't feel sexy. I'm not horny, I'm sorry. I can't. It's not you, it's literally my insides, my biology right now, that I can't. I dress up for people. I dress up, and I act sexy and I do all these things even when I'm not feeling like it. So, when I come home, I'm just like 'I just want to be naked, I don't want to wear these uncomfortable lingerie outfits, and I don't want to be sexy and I don't want to be like 'oh yes hi...' Just like get in there okay. I'm naked. just go... and really the biggest thing is time. Like, if you make time for me I appreciate that more than any material gift that you could give me. or good dick. Dick is good too, but I love time. (laughter) I love time. A lot of times, it's just like relaxing on the couch, or like in bed watching anime, or just like snuggled up and playing phone games, and watching tv together- that's all I ask for... I'm repulsed now

by people who kiss my neck on the front side. Like kissing me all up here, because when I'm in a lap dance that's all they're trying to do. It's like kissing me here, nibble my ear... I'm like stop. just stop don't do that.

The reality of the job wore down on the relationship that Harley had. It was difficult enough that her sex life was affected by the job. Being a sex object is a difficult position to be in and the repercussions disturbed the informants in many ways. Charlie furthered this discussion when talking of their relationship and how it is affected by the career they chose.

Even in my personal life like my partner, who I love to death, he'll say, 'You're so pretty and beautiful.' I'm like 'Honey, you need to find another way to say that because I hear that every fucking day at work and it really doesn't mean that much to me anymore because of it.' I was like, ' Tell me that you love my intelligence. Tell me that you love who I am. Tell me something that you know intimately about me instead of the fact that my body is beautiful. Because my body is going to decay before I know it. It's cheap to me and my relationships function differently. The routine that I do [with my partner] before work is like he holds me. We usually stand up and hug and I take deep breaths and he holds me and then he just -he says you know you're beautiful, you're intelligent, you know you're sexy and you're not a home for broken hearts. I'm nodding the whole time and I'm deep breathing, usually I cry, and then I fucking go to work.

The pain felt by the respondent is palpable. Charlie along with many of the other respondents felt that compliments were ineffective. Charlie's other identities were threatened by the behavior she experienced at work. They didn't want to be seen as only the dancer identity, so she overcompensated by playing down and ignoring the beautiful, sexy dancer identity that they also held. After being forced to play a single sexual role for so long, the idea of being sexual and attractive to even someone as significant as a partner was tiring. The ability to ignore compliments, while problematic in relationships, actually worked as a way to protect respondents in their work sphere. Jane pointed out "Then, the girls when they get through that [low point] develop a sort of disconnect and it

really become more like a routine thing. You're not actually engaging with people. They don't believe the boys when they tell them that 'You're so special.' All that stuff starts to fade away, and many girls develop marketing techniques.” If the dancer could effectively take in compliments without treating it like a special occasion, then they could make more money.

It isn't just about the money however. By treating their career more like a business, respondents could deny that what they were doing was a result of having low morals. This also worked to protect them from emotional heartache. Being viewed as only a sexual object can and does often leave individuals feeling sad and used. Clients are for the short-term. The clients flatter the dancers in order to get what they want. Dancers, acknowledge that this is the case, and compliments become ineffective, because they are a tool to get what one desires. By protecting themselves from feeling positive emotions due to compliments, the dancers protected their vulnerabilities while also being more financially successful. Jane exemplified why being immune to compliments was so important, while Charlie and Harley touched on why it could be so detrimental. Due to the intense emotions encountered by my respondents, another extremely common coping skill was use of drugs or alcohol. While drugs and alcohol are a way of coping with issues, it is important to note that it is not the same as emotion management. Whereas emotion management is a way of managing emotions to fit a certain situation, drug and alcohol use can be used as a way to deal with stressful situations and negative emotions. The dancers use drugs and alcohol as a way to deal with the stress without actually ignoring or manipulating their emotions to fit into certain situations.

Drug and alcohol use

Some of the difficulty that arises with the career of being an exotic dancer was because of the location where the transactions take place. In Montana, all of the strip clubs also serve alcohol. In fact, many of the clubs have a two-drink minimum that must be paid by the clients. It is also very common that clients will pay for the dancer to have a drink with them, in order to continue the semblance of a relationship. Rayelle pointed out that “[there are] Lots of drugs no matter where you go, there's always at least one of them [dancers] obviously high or something.” It was a way for my respondents to put up with the interactions taking place daily. Gemini added... “It's definitely easier to dance once you've had a little bit [of alcohol]. It misses a whole click in your brain (laughter) when you're a little intoxicated. So, it makes it a little easier to get naked in front of people that you don't know when you're slightly inebriated.” Charlie continued in the same vein:

Well the girls can't do their jobs if they're not on something... The alcohol dependency... When you drink alcohol it, and this is all from a perspective of somebody that's been sober for almost two years. When you drink alcohol, you lose your inhibitions and you're able to do things that you normally wouldn't be able to do.

Lilith also touched on this point when stating, “I got pretty messed up on a nightly basis just to deal with the fact that I had to stick my chest in men's faces.” Drinking alcohol or doing drugs is a way to overcompensate. My respondents used drugs and alcohol as a way to rid themselves of their inhibitions. This technique of overcompensating allowed my respondents to feel much more comfortable in their dancer identities. This technique however can prove to also be dangerous for respondents, especially those who have difficulty with drugs and alcohol. Jane, who was very honest about her own struggles

with addiction discussed how problematic it can be to be working in a place that constantly reinforces the social importance of alcohol.

For me it's a dangerous environment. Every single person there does drugs. Normally someone would be like 'what kind of drug is this' Great. I went two years sober there. I was on probation, it was rough, it was so hard. The second I got off, I started drinking again. Like I can't go into that building without getting messed up. And usually I can manage the limit, and usually I only do it within certain boundaries but it's like-dangerous... Some people can't dance without it [drugs of some kind]. For me, I have a personal problem. I've been using drugs since I was nine years old. Ten years old. I love it. So, if people hand it to me for free, just give it to me, keep offering it and everyone's partying, I'm going to be doing it.

The number of drugs and alcohol present, creates problems as well as providing respondents with a safety blanket to perform their job. It is this double-edged sword that exemplifies the difficulty of the exotic dancing sphere. A lot of the emotion management strategies and overcompensation techniques that they have learned to effectively do their jobs, have led to many difficulties with addiction and alcoholism as well. This further provides evidence that exotic dancing is a difficult job that is entirely focused on one section of a person's identity. The resulting emotions from the labor they have chosen to do, influences the informants in many parts of their lives, in a way that being a mother does not.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

When I first began this project, I expected that respondents would face identity conflict because of the conflicting prototypes for being a good mother and being a good dancer. All the informants interviewed were Caucasian making this research difficult to generalize to other racial and ethnic identities. The findings focus on white womanhood in communities with rural-like characteristics. Through the ten interviews that I conducted I found some evidence to support the claim that interviewees would face identity conflict because of the conflicting prototypes of being a mother and a dancer. My informants discussed not wanting their own children to choose the occupation of exotic dancer. There was also reluctance to disclose their career choices to members of the community as well as family members. Where I had started this research thinking that there would be more identity conflict between the identity of mother and dancer, the evidence provided by the interviewees pointed out more conflict between the broader identity of woman and dancer. This research shows the identity threat faced by dancers from rural-like states such as Montana.

There were detrimental effects of focusing on only one identity that an individual might hold as well as the conflicting identities of dancer identity, and its antithesis (stereotypically) of being a respectable, hard-working woman. The identity threat was based off of expectations and stereotypes of dancers, and in order to deal with this threat, the informants relied on overcompensation. The informants overcompensated in a myriad of ways which included costuming, exhibiting anger, creating a tough outer exterior, and drug and alcohol use. My informants are all accustomed to being treated as

a prototypical dancer. This identity though empowering in many ways, is difficult to manage because of the way that others (particularly customers) stereotype and treat those that work in sex work. I discovered that the practice of viewing dancers as stereotypes—always sexual, objects to be viewed, used, touched, and not respected as individuals with control over their bodies—conflicted with dancers’ identities as strong, independent, proud women and this brought my respondents many difficulties emotionally. Part of the difficulty was a threat to their identities as women deserving of respect. They responded by over-compensating: getting emotionally angry and physically acting out, ignoring the issues, depression, and often-times drug and alcohol use.

The identity that was the focus of this research, was that of an exotic dancer. This identity requires a person to be fit as well as have an enticing personality. While looks were less of a focus than personality, all the respondents were aware of what they needed to do to keep customers coming in. This included putting up with physical, verbal and emotional abuse brought on by clientele. Another aspect that was difficult to navigate for respondents was feeling empowered by their job. While respondents liked to discuss the power they had when working with clients, they were also demonstrating a way to overcompensate for the way that stereotypes portrayed them. This led to identity conflict, and feelings of depression and anger, that couldn’t be resolved in traditional ways.

This research supports previous research that exotic dancers are viewed as heterosexual beings with no control over their sexuality (Jackson 2011). Many times, respondents were expected to want to have sex with their customers. This proved to be detrimental because it pushed clients of my respondents to treat them as insatiable sexual

beings undeserving of respect. Clients were often guilty of harassing these informants with no repercussions. They treated the dancers as objects, simply for the clients' pleasure with little respect for the dancers as whole women.

This research also supports the assumption that mothers need to be emotionally nurturing as well as financially stable (Hays 1993). All the respondents discussed that dancing was a good career to have because it could provide financial stability while also allowing for a schedule that was flexible. The informants continuously discussed being able to provide for children in ways that were self-sacrificing. Because respondents were most solely described as dancers, and their financial success hinged on this identity, they seemed to have felt the pressure of the dancer identity more so than the identity of being a mother.

This research clarifies the way that exotic dancers navigate their lives as well as their emotions. The interviews show how difficult it is to be a sex worker and exemplifies the dangers of being stereotyped. Furthermore, these interviews examine the identity threat to their woman identity, felt by respondents when faced with abuse from clientele.

The research examines the detrimental effects that identity conflict can present to individuals. Respondents continuously overcompensated to address identity threats, thereby creating harmful strategies for coping. If focusing on only one identity has proven to be harmful, then it is important to recognize that every individual is made up of more than one. It is crucial to an individual's mental health that people understand that placing constraints on a person's identity can be damaging. Unless exotic dancers can be looked at as something more than a sexual being, they will continue to experience

identity conflict as well as experiences of harassment. This research can be used to remind us that values that our society holds dear (such as hard-work and independence) should be respected regardless of career choice. The lack of care given to individuals based off of stereotypes given, can result in influencing emotion management strategies rooted in overcompensation techniques that are self-defeating as well as harmful.

In this study I argue that women who are exotic dancers are stereotyped as individuals of low moral value, promiscuous, and sex focused. These stereotypes (or cultural beliefs) conflicted with prototypical behavior for women. When the norms and expectations for the identity of exotic dancer conflicted with expectations for other identities (mother and woman), dancers are likely to experience identity threat for at least one identity. For women who perform exotic dancing in rural-like areas, I expected that identity threat would be more common and overcompensation more necessary, because of the lack of anonymity posed by the geographical rural-like characteristics. While I was not conducting a comparison between rural and urban women, dancers in this rural-like setting expressed frustrations about negative treatment, disapproval, and identity threats and their inability to escape them in smaller communities.

Conflicting expectations for roles with which the dancers identify resulted in negative emotions such as hurt, anger, and depression and those emotions required emotional labor thereby mediating their emotional experiences as dancers with expectations placed on them as women, and mothers. The identity threat felt by these white informants forced them to utilize overcompensation, and emotion management techniques to continue to perform the functions of the job.

This study contributes to the existing literature by adding information regarding the harmful cultural messages of what it means to be a white woman, a white mother, and a white exotic dancer in rural-like communities. By examining the negative consequences of cultural messages surrounding expectations of identities, and realizing that women are multi-faceted, we can change the harmful stereotyping of actors within their roles.

Limitations and future research

While this study humanized these respondents, it is important to understand the limitations. I was only able to attain interviews from ten respondents, when originally, I had wanted to interview three from each club. In future research I would like to have a broader group of informants who can represent more of the varied experiences of rural dancers. A smaller sample (10) is difficult to generalize to the greater population, and therefore not all findings may be generalizable. In addition, future research should focus on concepts of shame. Since most of the informants are childless, in the future I would hope to garner more respondents who have children.

There is also an emphasis on white womanhood, motherhood, and exotic dancing. Future research could focus on the different racial and ethnic minorities within the state to address differences between race and ethnicities and their prototypes. Another limitation I ran into was the comfortability of informants. When discussing exotic dancing, respondents were often more closed off than when discussing motherhood. Whether this was due to the nature of the topic, or the order in which it came is unknown. For future reference, informants were much more open and vulnerable when talking about their children. Perhaps asking questions on motherhood first would have created a

more open and vulnerable atmosphere than discussing dancing. Another limitation that should be addressed is that of rapport. It should be noted that the rapport between the interviewer and interviewees was different in each interview. Some informants were very open and inviting, and others were more closed off, this could be due to differences in personalities.

Another limitation of this study was the distrust of the interviewer by the strip clubs in Montana. I was not able to flyer each of the clubs in Montana, because they chose to be more private. Had I been able to, there could have been a possibility for a larger sample size. Because I was forced to rely on snowball sampling as opposed to a random sample, there is a chance that the results contained in this research project are skewed. Some of the informants may be more willing to talk about their lives than others, and the individuals they know may be similar in this way. It would be interesting for future research to be able to randomly sample dancers within the state.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARTICIPANTS

Intro: Thank you for agreeing to this interview- I am going to record the interview, but if you ever want to skip a question or turn off the recorder, let me know. You will still receive this free meal. You know that I am interested in dancers in Montana and their different identities. To begin, I would like to ask you some questions about what it means to be an exotic dancer. . Next I will ask questions about some of your other roles, regarding your role as a mother and how you decided to become a mother. Finally, I'm interested in the role of religion in your life, so I will ask questions about that. Please give me as much detail as you feel comfortable with—I would like to get as complete a picture of your experience as possible.

Exotic Dancing

1. How did you get started dancing? (Or, how did you get the job at XXX Bar?)
2. How long have you been dancing?

You know, I've seen exotic dancers working in bars before,. I'm sure that my impressions of what they do is far different from the way that exotic dancers see the same things. Don't you think that's true?

What I'm interested in is that I would like to find out what it's like to work as an exotic dancer. If I got a job at XXXX Bar and worked there for a year or two, how would I see things? What would I have to know to do a good job and survive and make sense out of what goes on? I'd like to know what you do each day/night, the problems you have, just everything that goes into being an exotic dancer.

3. Could you start at the beginning of a typical work shift and describe to me what goes on? Like, what do you do when you first arrive, then what do you do next? What are some of the things you would have to do on most days/nights, and then go on through your shift right up until you walk out the door and leave the bar?
4. (Repeat this question as necessary to get all details.) Can you tell me about a typical day at work?
5. What makes a good exotic dancer?
- 6.
7. Can you tell me about some of the places you have danced?
8. How are these places different from each other?
 - a. If outside of Montana how does a club inside Montana differ from a club in another state?
 - b. If a "city" club vs. rural club how does that differ?
9. How do you think that your customers view exotic dancers? What are their expectations for how you will behave or what kind of a person you are? Are your customers ever wrong in how they see you? If so, explain.
10. Do you enjoy dancing?
11. Can you tell me the best thing about your job?
 - a. The worst?

12. What happens when you meet people who don't know that you're an exotic dancer. Do they treat you differently? How?
 13. Is it important to you to let them know that you are an exotic dancer? Why or why not? How do you let them know? Are there ways to let them know without coming right out and saying so? What would you like people to know about being an exotic dancer?
 - 14.
- Now I'd like to ask you a little bit about your family.
15. Tell me about your family
 - a. How many family members (by blood or marriage) live nearby in the community That you see at least once a year?
 - b. How often do you see each one of them?
 16. How are you related to each person that you listed?
 17. What makes a good daughter?
 - a. Sister?
 18. Do your family members know that you are an exotic dancer
 - a. How did they find out?
 - b. How did they react the first time they heard?
 - c. How did you respond to their reaction?
 - d. If they don't know, is it important to you that they don't know? If so, why? How do you keep it a secret?
 19. How does your family feel about your dancing as a career?
 - a. How does that make you feel?
 20. Have you ever had an incident in which your family made you feel like you had chosen the wrong occupation?
 - a. If so, describe an incident to me. Who was involved? What did they say? How did you respond? How did you feel about it?
 21. What would you like family members of dancers to know concerning your career?

Motherhood

22. Tell me about your child(ren)
 - a. How many do you have?
 - b. How old are they?
 - c. Do they live with you full time?
 - d. Are you living with your child(ren)'s father too?
23. How and when did you decide to become a mother?
24. Tell me about your experiences with being a mother?
25. Is it important to you that others know that you are a mother? Why? Why not?
26. What makes a Mother good?
 - a. Bad?
27. How do you feel when people do not know that you are a mother and just assume that you are NOT?
28. Do your children go to school/daycare?
29. Do other parents of your children's friends and classmates know that you dance?

30. Tell me about an interaction with other parents at school/daycare where your occupation was a topic of conversation or was commented on.
 31. Do you receive social support from other mothers in the community?
 32. Do you ever feel like you are treated differently from other Mothers in the community by those parents who know that you dance?
 33. How does the way that you are treated by other parents make you feel?
 34. Have you ever felt that your children were treated differently by other parents?
- I'm also interested in the role of religion and spirituality in people's lives.
35. Are you religious or spiritual? In what way? How do you practice your religion or spirituality?
 - a. Are you a member of an organized religious group? If so, What religion?
 36. How do you feel when you practice your religion? Where do you go to practice your religion? What emotions do you experience at that time?
 37. What is a typical member of your religious organization like?
 38. What makes someone a good _____ or a bad _____? What are the expectations that people have for someone who practices _____?
 39. What are some of the key beliefs that guide members of your religion in their behavior and beliefs?
 40. Do other members of your religious community know your occupation? How do they know?
 41. Do other church members ever refer to your occupation? How? Do other members of your spiritual/religious community have different expectations for you?
 - a. Can you describe an instance where this happened?
 - i. Who, where, when, how, how did you respond, how did you feel?
 42. Do you ever feel that you need to explain your occupation or justify it to others in your religion?
 43. What would you like other members of your religious affiliation to know about your occupation?