

A Question of Deviancy: Comparing Exotic Dancers and Female University Students

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Abstract The primary goal of this study was to evaluate similarities and differences between exotic dancers and non-dancing female university students on demographic variables, self-esteem, aspects of personality, attitudes toward sex and sexuality, and attitudes toward exotic dance and exotic dancers. A total of 230 predominately English speaking females participated. A one-way multivariate analysis of covariance was conducted to examine differences between students and exotic dancers on the dependent variables. After adjusting for level of education, Wilks' criterion confirmed a statistically significant effect of group. Follow-up univariate analyses illustrated that exotic dancers reported significantly more sexual permissiveness than their non-dancer counterparts, reflecting a more casual, open attitude toward sex. Students endorsed sexual practices that may be perceived as more responsible, such as their higher scores on a measure of birth control use. Further, students scored higher on a scale of sexual communion, indicating an endorsement of sex as the ideal or “peak experience”. Consistent with expectations, there were no significant differences between groups in perceptions of exotic dance as a normative activity or as a matter of choice. As well, there were no differences on measures of self-esteem, extraversion, or neuroticism. These findings suggest that exotic dancers and female students reveal similar characteristics on measures of personality, self-esteem, and attitudes toward exotic dance.

Keywords Exotic dance · Strippers · Perceptions · University students

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Recently, there has been a noteworthy transformation within advertising and other forms of media with regard to the representation of the female body. Traditionally, women have been portrayed as submissive, unassertive objects put on display primarily for the male audience. Currently however, women are more often being depicted as active, powerful, independent participants who are liberated enough to choose whether it is in their best interest to use their bodies as a source of financial gain (Gill 2008). Both McNair (2002) and Fensterstock (2006) have labeled and defined this change as the “porno chic” or “stripper chic” movement, in which the influx of photographs, apparel, and activities formerly limited to the sex industry are being integrated into mainstream culture. For instance, in the last 5 years, pole dancing has progressed from being an activity exclusive to the sex industry to a hobby advertised to women as aerobic exercise, all while claiming to liberate and empower (Whitehead and Kurz 2009). The *Tantra Fitness* pole dancing studio in Vancouver, Canada outlines a mission statement wherein their goal is to provide “an open space for women to be playful and courageous while discovering their inner beauty through fitness and dance” (Tantra Fitness 2012). Similarly, research has examined various activities which fall under the ‘stripper chic’ movement including studies of young women’s involvement in the notorious *Girls Gone Wild* video productions (Pitcher 2006) and the very popular sex toy parties (Attwood 2005). These changes publicize the arrival of a new wave in Western sexual culture and a new embodiment of femininity, in which permissive attitudes towards sexual expression are viewed as ‘sexy’, ‘cool’, and ‘liberating’ (McNair 2002). The ‘stripper chic’ movement may showcase the shift in Western culture toward embracing exotic dance as a legitimate and celebrated profession and life style. While it is not known whether current cultural shifts have indeed played a significant role in legitimizing exotic dance, for researchers, the mere suggestion of a cultural shift highlights the paucity of exotic dance research and reminds us of the numerous assumptions that are embedded in society about women who choose to work as exotic dancers.

Exotic dance refers to the erotic portrayal of one’s body through nude dance, seductive movement, and sexually suggestive behaviors (Forsyth and Deshotels 1998; Reid et al. 1994). These activities directly intend to arouse prurient interests, sexual desires, and fantasies (Schiff 1999), and operate within a commercial enterprise for the purpose of economic gain (Forsyth and Deshotels 1998; Reid et al. 1994). Although exotic dancers have long been portrayed as uneducated, sexually promiscuous, neurotics—who lack both ambition and a sense of self-worth (see Morrow 2012, Tillier and Snyders 2009)—it is unclear whether these assumptions are accurate or factual. The purpose of our study is to compare exotic dancers and their non-dancing counterparts on such variables, to determine whether women who dance are significantly different from those who do not. By evaluating attitudes toward sex and sexuality, as well as attitudes toward exotic dance and exotic dancers, we further hope to understand the current climate of the exotic dance profession from the perspective of both dancers and non-dancers.

A Brief Review of Exotic Dance Research

The earliest studies on the profession of exotic dance focused primarily on the micro-level, concentrating on the individual dancer and/or her experiences associated with dancing (Wahab et al. 2011). Throughout the 1970's, researchers held the assumption that exotic dance was a deviant occupation and thus, dancers themselves were deviant (Forsyth and Deshotels 1998; Skipper and McCaghy 1970). According to Ritzer (1997), a job can be labelled deviant "if it is illegal, if it is considered immoral, and if it is considered improper" (p. 297). For women, baring their naked bodies has traditionally been accepted only in the presence of husbands or a physician; female nudity has long been viewed as "private" or "sacred" (Skipper and McCaghy 1970). Thus, women who used their naked bodies for financial gain were considered promiscuous (Skipper and McCaghy 1970), uneducated, immoral, and of lower social status (Jesser and Donovan 1969). Even when societal standards surrounding the degree to which it was acceptable to bare skin in public became more lenient (Skipper and McCaghy 1970), exotic dance continued to be portrayed as a "shameful" or "dirty" profession (Wahab et al. 2011), and researchers continued to reinforce the widespread opinion that exotic dancing was an obscene occupation (Boles and Garbin 1974; Carey et al. 1974).

These earliest studies also pathologized dancers by proposing that women who joined the profession shared common backgrounds afflicted with abuse, low self-esteem, and broken families (Skipper and McCaghy 1970). Scholars seeking to define the mechanisms underlying dancers' decisions to pursue the profession theorized that a commitment to this type of deviant lifestyle was dependent upon the interaction between an individual's characteristics (i.e., exhibitionist tendencies), past experiences, and situational factors (Skipper and McCaghy 1970). That is, the typical characteristics or experiences identified among exotic dancers in the literature included little paternal affection or an absent father, early sexual development, early sexual experiences, an average level of education, leaving home at an early age, exhibitionistic behavior, and dancing out of financial necessity (Carey et al. 1974; Peretti and O'Connor 1989; Prus and Irimi 1980; Ronai and Ellis 1989; Salutin 1971; Skipper and McCaghy 1970).

Overall then, researchers placed considerable effort in finding support for the commonly held perception that exotic dancing was an amoral occupation and that dancers themselves were amoral, a product of social or family dysfunction (Skipper and McCaghy 1970). This assumption saturated every aspect of research during the early 1970s to late 1980s, including the ways in which research questions were asked and how research results were reported (Wahab et al. 2011). Beginning in the 1990s however, researchers shifted their attention to organizational factors surrounding exotic dance—a much wider- or macro-level- analyses of the contextual influences embedded in the exotic dance profession (Wahab et al. 2011). Sociocultural variables became important components of such analysis and in particular, investigations of the strip club environment in terms of its myriad rules and hierarchical structure (Forsyth and Deshotels 1997). Though strip clubs, as opposed to the dancers themselves, were presented as the underlying basis for the

continued existence of exotic dance, the profession was nonetheless still described derogatorily and presumed to include deviance. Prostitution was identified as a common occurrence at most lower-class clubs (Forsyth and Deshotels 1997; Kay 1999), and drugs were acknowledged as a central component of the club environment, with many dancers reporting easy access to drugs as a benefit of the job (Forsyth and Deshotels 1997). Alcohol, cocaine, marijuana, and MDMA (ecstasy) were seemingly common among dancers, who used such substances in attempts to dissociate from aspects of the job that they found demeaning, or as a way to cope with stressful situations in their work environment.

One particular aspect of work environment stress for dancers that gained widespread research interest during this era was the stigmatization of the profession, stemming from the general perception that no “self-respecting lady” would ever work at a place where deviant activities were openly condoned (Cavan 1966; Detman 1990). Evidence indicates exotic dancers well aware of the stigmatization attached to their occupation (Skipper and McCaghy 1970; Thompson and Harred 1992), and subsequently, many tried to keep their profession private (Skipper and McCaghy 1970) or incorporated “stigma management strategies” (Thompson and Harred 1992; Thompson et al. 2003).

Few recent studies have investigated whether dancers continue to endorse the stigma surrounding their profession, or whether the perception of exotic dance is presently perceived as less stigmatizing. Rather, current research emphasizes understanding exotic dance and dancers within the cultural climate of sexualization, violence against women, and female liberation (Wahab et al. 2011). Studies vary in the extent to which dancers are considered either victims of broader societal issues—placing exotic dance at the forefront amidst the sexualization and victimization of all women (Wesely 2002)—or as the embodiment of female liberation—women taking control and ownership of their lives, careers, and success (Deshotels and Forsyth 2008).

To date, the majority of studies on exotic dance have been conducted by researchers within the field of sociology, a discipline which often relies on qualitative methodologies such as field observations and semi-structured interviews. Consequently, findings are often gained through relatively small sample sizes and few include a comparison group. Further, the majority have maintained commonly held stigmatizing beliefs about exotic dancers, without conceding the influence of such research being explored under the influence of a negative cultural zeitgeist (Wahab et al. 2011).

To our knowledge, very few quantitative studies have investigated exotic dancers and the variables that distinguish (or fail to distinguish) them from their non-dancer counterparts. One noteworthy exception, Downs et al. (2006) explored exotic dancers and college women on body objectification, self-esteem, and relationship satisfaction. These researchers found that college women reported greater satisfaction in their relationships relative to exotic dancers. However, Downs et al. did not find a between group difference in self-esteem, an interesting finding given that dancers did report more body surveillance, and ranked appearance-based attributes as more important than competence-based attributes.

In response to previous qualitative studies that have largely pathologized dancers and their profession, our purpose was to assess exotic dancers and non-dancing female university students on variables including self-esteem, personality constructs, attitudes toward sex and sexuality, and perceptions of exotic dance and dancers. Although some researchers (see Downs et al. 2006; Skipper and McCaghy 1970) have focused on exotic dancers' personal characteristics (e.g., exhibitionist tendencies) or situational factors (e.g., coming from a broken family), many have failed to compare these attributes to non-dancer populations. Other factors have been thoroughly explored in the research such as motivations for dancing, relationship impact, the club atmosphere, and coping with stigmatization (Wahab et al. 2011). However, as noted by Wahab et al., the existing literature has largely pathologized dancers, possibly contributing to widely held conceptions of exotic dancers as uneducated, sexually promiscuous extroverts, who suffer from low self-esteem.

Overall then, we anticipated that our study would (1) provide quantitative evidence, using larger sample sizes than in previous research, of the differences and similarities between exotic dancers and non-dancing female university students and, (2) illustrate that female university students and exotic dancers view this faction of the sex industry as normative, perhaps supporting a new trend in sexual liberation.

Method

Participants

The sample was comprised of 230 predominately English¹ speaking (67 %) females² between the ages of 18 and 49 years: 178 students recruited through the research participant pool of a large Western Canadian university, and 52 exotic dancers recruited from dance clubs located within the same city. Dancers were initially recruited through site visits to nine exotic dance clubs by the research team, and subsequently, via snowball sampling techniques.

Table 1 shows the distribution of participants by group, mean age, and mean number of years dancing. Analyses indicate that student participants were significantly younger ($M = 22.88$, $SD = 4.85$) than their exotic dance counterparts ($M = 29.43$, $SD = 8.42$), $F(1, 228) = 50.58$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .16$. Further, Chi square analysis revealed a significant difference in reported sexual orientation, $\chi^2(2, N = 230) = 19.22$, $p < .01$, highest level of education, $\chi^2(4, N = 230) = 45.75$, $p < .01$, and relationship status, $\chi^2(4, N = 230) = 42.42$, $p < .01$ (see Table 2).

¹ Participants were asked to indicate their primary language spoken at home. Twenty two percent of participants indicated speaking both English and another language (e.g., Cantonese, Punjabi) equally, while 10 % endorsed "other" as their primary language spoken at home (i.e., Cantonese, Chinese, Farsi, Filipino, Gujarati, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Punjabi, Spanish, Ukrainian, Urdu, and Vietnamese).

² Only females were selected for participation in this study because of the small number of males who are employed as exotic dancers.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of participants by group, mean age, and years exotic dancing

Group	<i>n</i> = 230	Mean age (SD)	Years dancing
Students	178	22.88 years (4.85)	NA
Dancers	52	29.43 years (8.42)	4.40 years (1.50)

Table 2 Distribution of demographic characteristics by group

	Students <i>n</i> = 178	Dancers <i>n</i> = 52
<i>Sexual orientation</i>		
Straight	164 (92.1 %)	36 (69.2 %)
Lesbian	3 (1.7 %)	2 (3.8 %)
Bisexual	11 (6.2 %)	14 (26.9 %)
<i>Education</i>		
Less than high school	NA	
Completed high school	14 (7.9 %)	4 (7.7 %)
Some undergraduate	146 (82 %)	10 (19.2 %)
Completed undergraduate	15 (8.4 %)	23 (44.2 %)
Graduate school or above	3 (1.7 %)	9 (17.3 %)
<i>Relationship status</i>		
Single	52 (29.8 %)	11 (21.2 %)
Casually dating	27 (15.2 %)	21 (40.4 %)
Seriously dating	74 (41.6 %)	2 (3.8 %)
Married/Common-law	24 (13.5 %)	17 (32.7 %)
Divorced	NA	1 (1.9 %)

% appear in parentheses

Measures

Demographic Information

Participants were asked to respond to a seven-item questionnaire regarding their age, language spoken at home, sexual orientation, highest level of education, and marital status. Exotic dancers were also asked how long they had been dancing professionally, and the names of clubs in which they had worked during their time employed as dancers.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg 1965)

The 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was used to measure participants' level of global self-esteem (e.g., "I feel that I have a number of good qualities"). Items are scored using a Likert-scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), with composite scores ranging from 10 to 40. Higher scores reflect a higher degree of self-esteem. Validity of the scale has been established in previous research and

acceptable psychometric properties have been reported, with coefficient alphas ranging from .72 to .88 (Gray-Little et al. 1997; Robins et al. 2001). In the present study, the RSES had an alpha coefficient of $\alpha = .85$.

Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Brief Version (EPQ-BV; Sato 2005)

The 24-item EPQ-BV measures the two primary personality traits of extraversion and neuroticism postulated by Eysenck and Eysenck (1992) to most robustly explain individual differences in personality. The scale instructs respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with questions pertaining to their level of extraversion (e.g., “Do you usually take the initiative in making new friends?”) and neuroticism (e.g., “Would you call yourself tense or high-strung?”). Responses range from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). Twelve items combine to produce a subscale score of extraversion and the remaining 12 items produce the neuroticism subscale composite.

In terms of reliability, the EPQ-BV consistently produces alpha coefficients between .90 and .92 (Sato 2005). The measure has also been assessed with reference to high internal consistency and test–retest reliability and a relatively robust factor structure (Sato 2005). Cronbach’s alphas in the present study were .92 for the extraversion subscale and .91 for the neuroticism subscale.

Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale (BSAS; Hendrick et al. 2006)

The Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale is a 23-item measure which assesses the participant’s attitudes toward sex and sexuality. These attitudes are measured through four subscales consisting of: (1) Permissiveness, which is operationalized as a casual and open attitude toward sex (e.g., “I do not need to be committed to a person to have sex with him or her”); (2) Birth control, defined as responsible sexual attitudes (e.g., “Birth control is a part of responsible sexuality”); (3) Communion, operationalized as viewing sex as the ideal human experience (e.g., “Sex is the closest form of communication between two people”); and (4) Instrumentality, operationally defined as sex being a natural and biological part of life (e.g., “Sex is primarily a bodily function, like eating”). Ten items combine to form the permissiveness subscale, 3 items form the birth control subscale, 5 items relate to communion, and 5 form the instrumentality subscale. These items were assessed via a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), where higher scores reflect greater endorsement of the subscale constructs. Previous research suggests coefficient alphas ranging from .73 to .95, and test–retest reliabilities between .57 and .92 (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Reich, 2006). In the present study, the BSAS produced the following alpha levels for each subscale; permissiveness $\alpha = .90$, birth control $\alpha = .83$, communion $\alpha = .72$, and instrumentality $\alpha = .68$.

Attitudes Toward Exotic Dance Scale

Based on the Attitudes toward Prostitutes and Prostitution Scale (Levin and Peled 2011), our measure was modified to ask participants about their perceptions of

exotic dance as either a normative or deviant activity, and exotic dancers as either choosing of—or victimized by—their occupation. Modifications involved primarily word substitutions, in that prostitutes/prostitution was changed to exotic dancers/exotic dancing. However, one question was reworded to reflect the construct of interest in this study. The original measure contained a question asking whether participants believed prostitution to be another form of rape in which the victim is paid. We changed this question to an assessment of the extent to which participants believe exotic dance is another form of prostitution. This change reflected an obvious difference between prostitutes and exotic dancers (i.e., exotic dancers are not required by their profession to engage in coitus), but also stayed true to the concept that some may perceive exotic dance as “sex work”.

The measure is comprised of four subscales; dancing as choice/victimization (e.g., “Exotic dance is another form of sex trafficking of women”, dancing as normativeness/deviance (e.g., “The existence of exotic dance increases the rate of sexually transmitted diseases”), dancers as normative/deviant (e.g., “Most exotic dancers are morally corrupt”), and dancers as choosing/victimized (e.g., “Women choose to be exotic dancers”). Participants are instructed to endorse their agreement of 28 items on a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with lower scores reflecting a belief in normativeness/choice and higher scores indicating deviance/victimization.

Psychometric properties of the original measure as reported by Levin and Peled (2011) indicated alpha coefficients ranging from .81 to .88. In the present study, alphas were considerably different. The dancing as choice/victimization (DGCv) and dancing as normativeness/deviance (DGNd) subscales had low alpha coefficients of .51 and .56 respectively. Therefore, two items from each of these subscales were removed due to poor item-total correlations. On the DGCv subscale, the question, “Exotic dance is a way for some women to gain power and control” ($r = .05$) and the question, “Exotic dance is a way to empower economically disadvantaged populations” ($r = .08$) were removed. On the DGNd subscale, the questions, “Without exotic dance, more women would get raped” ($r = -.18$) and “Watching exotic dance provides men with stress relief” ($r = -.06$) were removed, increasing Cronbach’s alpha to moderate coefficients of .60 and .74 respectively.

The dancers as normative/deviant and dancers as choosing/victimized subscales had poor reliabilities of $\alpha = .41$ and $\alpha = .24$, and were therefore excluded from further analyses.

Procedures

This study was presented to participants as an attempt to understand current perceptions of and attitudes toward exotic dance and dancers. Both student and dancer participants were directed to a survey site (www.fluidsurveys.ca) where an anonymous survey could be accessed. Questionnaires on the site were presented in the same order for all participants. Study information and consent were presented first, followed by the RSES, the BSAS, the Attitudes toward Exotic Dance and Dancers Scale, and finally, the EPQ-BV. Demographic questions and a debriefing form were provided last. University student participants completed the survey in

exchange for course credit in specified psychology courses. Participating exotic dancers were able to enter their names into a draw for a gift certificate to a local shopping center.

Results

Given evidence showing concurrent relations between sexual liberalism and education (e.g., Strassberg and Lowe 1995), reported level of education was covaried in all applicable analyses. Statistically significant effects were followed by a series of univariate analyses with a Bonferroni correction on each dependent variable (Tabachnick and Fidell 2007). Multivariate statistics were selected as the appropriate method of analyses for the majority of this study's research questions to avoid the concern of controlling for inflated Type I error that results from the univariate analyses of multiple correlated dependent variables (Tabachnick and Fidell 2007).

Analyses of Differences Between Students and Exotic Dancers

A one-way multivariate analyses of covariance was conducted to examine differences between students and exotic dancers on the dependent variables of self-esteem, personality, attitudes toward sex, and attitudes toward exotic dance and dancers. After adjusting for level of education, Wilks' criterion confirmed a statistically significant effect of group, $F(9, 219) = 34.703, p < .001, \eta^2 = .64$. Follow-up univariate analyses of each individual dependent variable using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha of .005 illustrated that exotic dancers reported significantly more sexual permissiveness than their non-dancer counterparts, $F(1, 227) = 13.94, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$, reflecting a more casual, open attitude toward sex. However, students endorsed higher scores on the subscale measure of birth control, $F(1, 227) = 245.24, p < .005, \eta^2 = .52$. Further, students scored higher on the subscale of communion, $F(1, 227) = 37.25, p < .005, \eta^2 = .14$, suggesting a greater endorsement of sex as the ideal or "peak experience". Consistent with expectations, there were no significant differences between groups in perceptions of exotic dance as a normative activity or as a matter of choice. Further, there were no significant differences in perceiving sex as a natural, biological fact of life (i.e., instrumentality), or in self-esteem, extraversion, or neuroticism. Table 3 presents adjusted means and standard errors by group.

Relations of Self-Esteem, Personality, Sexual Attitudes, and Attitudes Toward Exotic Dance and Dancers

A series of correlations with the effects of level of education partialled out were used to measure the associations among our several dependent variables for each group. Results of the correlational analysis presented in Tables 4 and 5 illustrate that several significant relationships were found.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for dependent variables by group

	Students $n = 178$	Dancers $n = 52$
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale	31.03 (.36)	31.29 (.69)
<i>Eysenck Personality Questionnaire</i>		
Extraversion	3.60 (.05)	3.82 (.10)
Neuroticism	3.08 (.06)	3.42 (.11)
<i>Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale</i>		
Permissiveness	2.45 (.06)	2.95 (.12)
Birth control	4.34 (.05)	2.57 (.10)
Communion	3.54 (.05)	2.87 (.10)
Instrumentality	2.86 (.06)	3.01(.11)
<i>Attitudes toward exotic dance</i>		
Dancing as choice	2.87 (.04)	3.01 (.07)
Dancing as normative	3.07 (.04)	2.85 (.07)

Means are adjusted for the effect of the covariate. Standard errors appear in parentheses

Table 4 Partial correlations among dependent variables for student participants

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Self-esteem	–								
Extraversion	.31**	–							
Neuroticism	–.63**	–.15*	–						
Permissiveness	–.03	.07	.10	–					
Birth control	.05	–.05	–.09	.18**	–				
Communion	.06	.06	–.15*	–.11	.19**	–			
Instrumentality	–.06	.16*	.01	.34**	.02	.29**	–		
Dancing as choice	.14*	.08	–.17*	–.27**	–.11	.16*	.04	–	
Dancing as normative	.09	.14*	–.13*	–.41**	–.11	.10	–.05	.73**	–

** $p < .01$ (1-tailed); * $p < .05$ (1-tailed)

For instance, among student participants only, there was a moderate positive correlation between extraversion and self-esteem. This finding is not surprising and indeed, has been demonstrated in previous literature by Swickert et al. (2004), who reported a consistent positive correlation between extraversion and self-esteem. Interestingly, there was a strong negative correlation between neuroticism and self-esteem among student participants, but a strong positive correlation between neuroticism and self-esteem among dancer participants. This finding may reflect the anxiety and vigilance that dancers have about appearance-based attributes, like beauty and sex appeal, which act as currency in their line of work. Indeed, Downs

Table 5 Partial correlations among dependent variables for exotic dancer participants

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Self-esteem	–								
Extraversion	.23	–							
Neuroticism	–.62**	.01	–						
Permissiveness	–.47**	.40**	.58**	–					
Birth control	–.38**	.27*	.45**	.78**	–				
Communion	–.30*	.32*	.52**	.78**	.81**	–			
Instrumentality	–.36**	.39**	.58**	.81**	.76**	.88**	–		
Dancing as choice	–.24*	.12	.32*	.50**	.45**	.33**	.41**	–	
Dancing as normative	.19	–.20	–.52**	–.55**	–.37**	–.43**	–.49**	–.21	–

** $p < .01$ (1-tailed); * $p < .05$ (1-tailed)

et al. (2006) indicated that dancers reported greater objectified body consciousness—but not lower self-esteem—as a consequence of their type of employment. Of course it is also possible that dancers inflated their self-esteem responses in order to avoid being perceived as the stereotypical stripper with self-esteem issues. Clearly additional research is needed to sort out the complexities of this finding.

Finally, and perhaps not surprisingly, both groups showed positive correlations between permissive sexual attitudes and increased birth control use, acceptance of dancing as a chosen occupation, and acceptance of dancing as a normative activity.

Discussion

To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first of its kind to provide quantitative evidence of the similarities and differences between exotic dancers and non-dancing university students on variables of self-esteem, personality, attitudes toward sex, and attitudes toward exotic dance and dancers. To date, the majority of research on exotic dance has been primarily qualitative in nature. While not discounting the depth of insight that qualitative research provides, we strove to obtain results generalizable to a wider population of dancers. Our main objective was to provide quantitative evidence that could offer a more accurate representation of dancers as they compare to the average female university student. Our secondary objective was to investigate whether exotic dancers and non-dancing university students perceive exotic dance/dancers as a less deviant, more normative, profession.

First, though not our primary focus of investigation, our findings revealed that 44 % of exotic dancers had completed an undergraduate degree and 17 % had completed graduate school or above. This is contrary to both the early literature (see Jesser and Donovan 1969)—and the popular mainstream conception—of exotic dancers as uneducated, unintelligent women (Barton 2001). Strikingly, our sample

of dancers from nine separate clubs provides evidence that dancers are not only completing bachelor degrees, but continuing education via graduate programs.

The results of our study also showed that university students and exotic dancers perceive exotic dance as a socially acceptable activity. Attitudes toward exotic dance were assessed by means of our modified “Attitudes towards Exotic Dance” measure, which asked participants their perceptions of exotic dance as either a normative or deviant activity. Lower scores on this measure indicate the endorsement of exotic dance as a normative activity and as a matter of choice, and no differences between university students and exotic dancers in such endorsements were found. Further, although we did not use the subscales that assessed participant views of dancers themselves as normative/deviant and choosing/victimized, due to poor subscale reliabilities, an informal review of those findings indicates lower scores on the scales, suggesting that both groups endorsed the normative and choosing options. We therefore argue that our findings modestly publicize the arrival of more permissive attitudes towards sexual expression such that the profession of exotic dance is more likely to be viewed as ‘sexy’ and ‘liberating’ rather than deviant and shameful. These findings are consistent with the musings of Fensterstock (2006), Whitehead and Kurz (2009) and McNair (2002), who suggest that a “new” female sexuality has filtered its way into mainstream culture and generated an era of female power and sexual expression. Nonetheless, further research is needed to determine whether these findings reflect historical shifts.

Our study also indicated no significant differences between university students and exotic dancers on self-esteem, or on the personality variables of either neuroticism or extraversion. Similar findings were reported by Tillier and Snyders (2009) who investigated exotic dancers’ experiences and found that participants demonstrated strong self-concept, confident personalities, and boosted self-esteem. Tillier and Snyders reported that their participants felt a sense of contentment and self-gratitude while dancing, which in turn led them to a higher level of self-comfort and esteem. Our findings indicate endorsement of exotic dance as a normative activity and a matter of choice, suggesting less stigmatization surrounding participation in this profession.

When participant attitudes toward sex were assessed, findings revealed significantly more casual and open attitudes among exotic dancers than among their non-dancer counterparts. This should not necessarily be taken to mean that exotic dancers endorse sexual promiscuity—a concept advanced by early literature in this field. Rather, one possible explanation for this difference may reside in the finding that people with non-mainstream sexual practices and orientations tend to endorse more alternative relationships and uninhibited attitudes towards sex and sexuality (Barton 2001). Given that 26 % of our exotic dancer participants were bisexual and 4 % were lesbian, compared to only 6 % bisexual and 2 % lesbian among our non-dancer participants, it is possible that less mainstream philosophies influence the way these participants choose to execute and label their sexual relationships. Further, the exotic dance environment has been shown to promote sexual fluidity, openness to bisexual tendencies, and unconventional relationship arrangements (Barton 2001), which may allow dancers to explore their own

sexuality and desires, resulting in a more open, permissive, and casual attitude toward sex.

Conversely, university students were found to have a more conscientious attitude towards sexual practices and were more likely to adhere to monogamous partnerships. For instance, students were more likely to report sharing the responsibility of birth control with their partner, as well as viewing birth control as part of responsible sexuality. Once again, it is erroneous to conclude that exotic dancers differed from students on these variables simply by virtue of working in the sex industry. Rather, our findings could be explained by considering that exotic dancers were, on average, 7 years older than students, and that approximately one-third was married. It may be that our older, or married, dancer participants did not consider birth control a priority; perhaps they were much less concerned about preventing pregnancy or felt the consequences of its absence manageable or desirable. Or perhaps, as some evolutionary psychologists suggest (Miller et al. 2007), the use of birth control pills make exotic dancers less titillating and negatively impact their earnings, relative to tipping increases attained by naturally cycling, ovulating women.

In addition, students scored higher than exotic dancers on the attitude toward sex subscale of communion, suggesting a greater appreciation for sex as an encounter that is shared between two people in love. On the whole, students were more likely than dancers to view sex as the ultimate human interaction, an experience that is intense and overwhelming. This finding is in concert with those of Hendrick et al. (2006), who suggest that students place more emphasis on the experience of sex being meaningful and idealistic. It is reasonable that dancers differed from students in their endorsement of communion because they were significantly older than our student sample. Certainly, some evidence indicates that sexual idealism becomes less relevant with both age and sexual experience (Gott and Hinchliff 2003). Or perhaps, as posited by Barton (2001), dancers' exposure to a world considered 'taboo' has made them more inclined to break sexual barriers—such as expectations of virtuousness and sexual modesty—that have long hindered female sexuality. Given changes in the acceptance of female sexuality over the last decades that may play a role in influencing sexual behaviors (Gott and Hinchliff 2003), clearly additional research should be conducted.

Limitations of the Present Study

Though it is tempting to claim that our findings suggest a shift in the cultural perception of exotic dance from a pathologized view to one that encapsulates exotic dance as means of empowerment, our study was not longitudinal in methodological design and we have no baseline comparison, other than perspectives of exotic dance as reported in previous literature. Indeed, it would have been beneficial had we taken the opportunity to ask participants about their perceptions of cultural change in the exotic dance industry.

It is also worth noting the difficulty we experienced in recruiting exotic dancers as participants to this study, perhaps from mistrust of how they and their profession

would be portrayed. This resulted in participants who may not have been representative of the “average” dancer (least neurotic, most extraverted, highest self-esteem, most educated). While the current study did reveal that exotic dancers and students do not differ in their views of exotic dance as a normative activity and a matter of choice, our sample only represents a small portion of the exotic dance population. Perhaps an effective tool for further studies would be the utilization of advertising on freelance web sites, which would access a wider population and ultimately obtain more participants.

Moreover, two subscales from our Attitudes toward Exotic Dance measure—the assessment of dancers as normative/deviant or choosing/victimised—were not used in the present study due to poor reliabilities, though preliminary analyses suggested scores in ranges we would expect. It would therefore be beneficial for future researchers to develop reliable measurement tools, specific to the assessment of exotic dance, which could cultivate more accurate results.

Conclusion and Future Prospects

To our knowledge, the current study was the first of its kind to provide quantitative evidence of the similarities and differences between exotic dancers and university students. The findings revealed that although exotic dancers and students differ with regards to sexual permissiveness and communion, there was no significant difference between groups in perceptions of exotic dance. As an occupation that was once considered corrupt and uncivilized, exotic dance is now flourishing in our society as a common source of economic growth and, perhaps, an expression of sexual freedom. Future studies may examine differences between exotic dancers’ attitudes towards dancing as a means of financial gain, and students’ attitudes towards engaging in the act of dancing themselves. Although research on exotic dance remains limited, and many unmeasured aspects of exotic dance remain, future studies should replicate this research and modify certain aspects to obtain more robust results, shedding further light on a subculture that evidently might not be as “taboo” as once proclaimed.

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