

DOING GENDER, DOING CLASS ***The Performance of Sexuality*** ***in Exotic Dance Clubs***

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Organizations are not only gendered; they are also classed—that is, they articulate ideas and presentations of gender that are mediated by class position. This article pursues the idea of organizations as gendered and classed by means of a comparative ethnographic analysis of the performance of sexuality in four exotic dance clubs in the Southwestern United States. Strip clubs construct sexuality to be consistent with client class norms and assumptions and with how the clubs and dancers think working-class or middle-class sexuality should be expressed. Class differences are represented as sexual differences in very concrete ways: the appearance of dancers and other staff, dancing and performance styles, and interactions that take place between dancers and customers.

Keywords: *organizational culture; sexuality; social class; sex work*

One of the key findings of contemporary feminist scholarship is that organizations and occupations are often gendered—that is, they draw on notions of femininity or masculinity that are hegemonically defined. Building on the idea of gender as a performance (Butler 1990; Moloney and Fenstermaker 2002; West and Zimmerman 1987), scholars find that workers in a wide range of occupations and organizations “do gender” in particular ways, based on assumptions about what customers like, motivations, and “normal” interactive behaviors (Acker 1990). Particularly in service-oriented occupations, women work as women, as femininity is constructed and reified in ways that reinforce heterosexuality and male dominance and “naturalize”

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *I would especially like to thank Ronald Breiger and Elizabeth Borland for their advice and suggestions on earlier versions of this article, as well as Tim Bartley, Joseph Galaskiewicz, Andrew Jones, Samantha Kwan, Calvin Morrill, Wade Roberts, Louise Roth, and David A. Snow. I would also like to thank Christine Bose, Christine Williams, the anonymous reviewers from Gender & Society, my research “escorts,” and finally, the three women whom I interviewed for this article.*

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GENDER & SOCIETY, Vol. 19 No. 6, December 2005 771-788

DOI: 10.1177/0891243205277253

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stereotypical images of women (Dellinger 2002; Dellinger and Williams 2002; Hall 1993; Leidner 1991; Loe 1996; Williams, Giuffre, and Dellinger 1999). Through the continual performance and institutionalization of gender and gendered behaviors and rituals, gender and sexuality become central features of organizational culture—those shared understandings, beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that emerge through interactions between organizational actors (Dellinger 2004; Dellinger and Williams 2002; Gherardi 1995; Hallett 2003; Trice 1993).

While the concept of the gendered organization has been critical to our understanding of how and why sexuality and gender are core features of many jobs, what has received less attention is why some organizations—particularly those that are very similar to one another—exhibit different forms of gender and sexuality (Britton 2003; Dellinger 2004). To examine this question, this article builds on the idea of gendered organizations. I argue that gender in organizations interacts with other major features of stratification—such as class and race—to construct unique organizational cultures that project distinctive images of gender and sexuality that are fitted to their particular organizational settings. I show that the activities and practices of strip clubs construct forms of sexuality that are not only gendered but also distinctively classed—that is, they articulate ideas and presentations of gender that are mediated by class position. I explore this idea of organizations as gendered and classed through a comparative ethnographic analysis of the performance of sexuality in four exotic dance clubs in the southwestern United States.

In exotic dance clubs, women at work must act like women by embodying traditionally female behavior and roles as well as by dressing and behaving femininely. Because the central features of the organizational culture within exotic dance clubs are the commodification and commercialization of women's sexuality, the clubs are premised on the consumption of women's bodies and the presence of those bodies in hegemonic male fantasies. Thus, women work not only as women but as sexualized women. Yet despite having similar underlying institutional logics, clubs offer noticeably different presentations and performances of gender and sexuality. My data demonstrate that exotic dance clubs have different organizational cultures based on distinctions made by the perceived social class of customers. Clubs construct sexuality to be consistent with client class norms and assumptions and with how the clubs and dancers think working-class or middle-class sexuality should be expressed. Those clubs that cater to a middle-class audience present one version of sexuality, while a quite different type of display can be found at working-class clubs. As a result, women in exotic dance clubs work not only as sexualized women but as classed women.

Before reviewing the context and methods of the present study, I briefly address two literatures that inform my analysis: the literature on gendered organizational cultures and the literature on the relationship between gender, sexuality, and class. I then present my findings on how organizational culture influences the performance of sexuality in strip clubs. I argue that exotic dance clubs and the actors within them do class much like organizations and their actors also do gender. As West and Fenstermaker (1995, p. 13) have argued, "no person can experience gender without

simultaneously experiencing race and class.” I am asserting that the same is true of organizations by locating class performance as a central feature of organizational culture. Finally, I consider the implications of this study for future research.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND GENDER

Organizational culture refers to the shared understandings and behaviors of a work environment as well as informal or symbolic interpersonal norms such as those that promote or prohibit particular sexual interactions and sexual behaviors (Dellinger and Williams 2002; Hearn and Parkin 1995). Organizational cultures contain strong symbolic orders of gender that provide clues to men and women about how to behave properly (Gherardi 1995). Gender in organizations thus becomes simultaneously and continually performed and institutionalized. While organizational actors may believe they are expressing purely personal, preexisting tendencies and tastes when they dress in a particular way, manage disputes, or interact with their clients or colleagues, their behaviors and inclinations are strongly influenced by their surrounding organizational culture—what “matches” or “clashes” with the organization’s style (Dellinger and Williams 2002; Gherardi 1995; Morrill 1995).

While a number of studies have examined the ways in which particular organizational and occupational cultures are gendered, there is generally little research that compares gender across organizational cultures to understand gender as dynamic, interactional, and context specific (see Britton 2003; Dellinger 2004). Comparing the experiences of male accountants in the magazine publishing industry, Dellinger (2004) found that workers “do masculinity” differently, depending on the particular gender ideologies supported by the organizational cultures in which they are embedded. Similarly, Britton (2003) found that among prison guards, the construction of gender varies across organizational contexts. Thus, when it comes to the social construction of gender in the workplace, these authors support the idea that “where you work matters just as much as what you do” (Dellinger 2004, 546). In this article, I build on and contribute to this idea of gender as context specific by examining the role of social class in the construction and consumption of gender and sexuality.

GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND CLASS

In addition to structuring opportunities and life chances, social class structures gender and sexuality in important ways and is itself constructed and performed in relation to gender and race (Bettie 2000, 2003). As Bettie (2000, 15) argued, women perform “different versions of femininity that [are] integrally linked and inseparable from their class and race performances.” I draw from the results of several ethnographies of American high schools to inform my analysis of exotic dance

clubs because the construction of gender difference and the performance of gender in both locations are magnified and exaggerated. Moreover, these ethnographies highlight that distinctions between middle-class and working-class groups are marked in a range of ways: through clothing, vocabularies, grammar and accents, hairstyles, cosmetics, attitudes toward teachers, and perhaps most important, through attitudes toward and practices of sexual behavior (Bettie 2000, 2003; Morrill et al. 2000; Ortner 1991). The middle-class teens in Bettie's (2000, 2003) California school (most of whom were white) saw tight-fitting clothing and heavy cosmetic use as signals that their working-class peers (most of whom were racial minorities) were sexually promiscuous, even if they were not. Working-class girls, aware of these perceptions, reinforced their class identity by exaggerating the appearance differences between themselves and the white middle-class girls. In this way, as Ortner pointed out, "class differences are largely represented as *sexual differences*" (1991, 178, emphasis added).

Recent comparative work in exotic dance clubs has found a similar relationship between gender, sexuality, and social class as they intersect in women's appearance. Frank (2002) found that customers perceive the appearance of dancers to be related to the position of the club in the class hierarchy. Dancers in lower-class clubs, who were more racially diverse, were considered by male customers to be "overweight," to be "out of shape," and to wear too much makeup and perfume. In contrast, clubs in the upper tier of the class hierarchy consisted of mostly white dancers who tanned and had breast implants. Based on these appearance cues, men imagine the dancers to have different amounts of cultural and educational capital—and it is this distinction that motivates their club choices (Frank 2002). Although Frank's work is a major contribution to the study of exotic dance clubs, her approach, like Bettie's (2000, 2003), primarily emphasizes individuals. As a result, sexuality and class remain individual characteristics and performances rather than central features of organizational culture. In this article, I combine insights from both of these literatures. I examine the multiple ways in which social class, as a core feature of organizational culture, is constructed and institutionalized in the performance of gendered sexuality in exotic dance clubs.

METHOD

To explore the ways in which social class and organizational culture influence the performance of sexuality within strip clubs, I made a total of five visits each to four exotic dance clubs in Pueblo,¹ resulting in more than 40 hours spent in the field. The advantage of a prolonged direct observation technique in this setting is that I was able to experience the club settings and routines as both a first-time club goer and a more seasoned customer, familiar with the settings, members, and activities. These four clubs, The Oasis, The Hourglass, The Treasure Chest, and Perfections Showclub, are the busiest, most well-known, and most popular clubs in town. Each of these clubs serves alcohol, which by state law means that they are

topless only, as opposed to fully nude. Because my sample is derived from just one city in one state, my findings highlight differences within the boundaries of this particular state's laws. While clubs in other locations would no doubt be responsive to variations in state and city laws, I believe that variations in social class norms would continue to be as salient as I found them to be in Pueblo.

Most clubs in Pueblo allow a woman to enter as a customer only when accompanied by a man. Although it is commonly believed that rules governing the admittance of women were created to prohibit prostitutes and lesbians from entering the club, a private conversation with a club manager in Texas (Trautner 1998) revealed that an additional function of these rules may be to prevent jealous wives and girlfriends from entering the clubs and physically harming dancers and/or customers. Consequently, I presented myself not only as a paying customer but also as either the girlfriend or friend of my male escort(s) to observe naturally occurring interactions and club routines. Like many women researchers who enter strip clubs, my presence in the club did seem to be noticeable to both customers and dancers. To minimize the intrusiveness of my presence, I followed the techniques outlined by Wood (2000): I visited each club frequently (five times each) and for long periods of time (at least two hours each visit), which allowed me to blend into the scene and become less conspicuous to those around me.

At each site, I assumed the role of the naïve stranger to blend in with the crowd as much as possible by looking and acting much like the typical woman customer and also to learn as much as possible about how each club operated. This role involves acting naïve, curious, and responsive but very unknowledgeable about the setting, unspoken rules, and activities taking place, which encouraged members to explain and elaborate on the customs and expectations of the club (Morrill 1995; Snow, Benford, and Anderson 1986). I paid particular attention to interactions between dancers and customers, appearances of dancers, and styles of stage and table dances. A dance is the length of one song, which is usually about three minutes long. This means that on any particular stage, about 40 dances occur in the space of two hours. Field data were collected between January and July of 2001.

The drawback to my covert position is my lack of insight into the club employees' thoughts and feelings toward, and explanations of, the routines in which they participate. In an attempt to sort out this issue, I conducted supplemental in-depth interviews with three exotic dancers in the summer of 2002. These women work at the clubs I observed while in the field and were selected based on prior personal contacts. That is, these particular women were not observed in the field and were thus not selected for their typicality nor their unusualness compared to other dancers at their respective clubs. I was interested in learning the extent to which the patterns and trends I observed in the field were reflective of participants' experiences and actual organizational strategies. Thus, I asked them questions about their style of dancing, the dance styles of other dancers, management involvement, how they interact with customers, the kinds of customers that frequent their club, and their perceptions of and experiences with other clubs in town. Interviews were conducted in respondents' homes and lasted approximately two hours each.

SEXUALITY IN THE STRIP CLUB

The four clubs I visited serve two distinct clientele: Perfections Showclub and The Oasis market themselves to a middle- and business-class clientele, while The Hourglass and The Treasure Chest serve primarily working-class and military audiences. While the focus of this article is on how these clubs do class through the performance of sexuality, I should note that they do class in other ways as well. Generally, the middle-class clubs price everything higher than do the working-class clubs, although the differences are often minimal (i.e., a bottle of beer costs fifty cents more at the middle-class clubs, and the cost of admission is \$6 and \$7, in contrast to \$3 and \$4 for the working-class clubs).

Clubs also do class in large part through their physical characteristics. These characteristics, such as the state of the parking lot, quality of the lighting and sound systems, club furnishings, amenities offered to customers, and physical layout of the club, signal to potential customers what kind of club it is and what kinds of sexual experiences customers might expect. In doing so, they also encourage customers to become middle-class or working-class “performers” (Bettie 2003). That is, regardless of their own class background, customers can experience a middle- or working-class event and be seen as a middle- or working-class individual through their consumption of sexuality as organized by the exotic dance club. By providing their customers with cigars, gourmet meals, soundproof phone booths (presumably to call home or the workplace without revealing the nature of their location), and plush, relaxing arm chairs, the middle-class clubs make the club-going experience about more than just sex, more than just viewing unclothed women. They appear to make every effort to insulate customers from everyday reality by providing them with a safe haven in which they can desire and appreciate women and act and be treated like “gentlemen” (Edgley 1989). These clubs, as I will demonstrate, are characterized by performances of desire and gazing at the female form from a distance, constructed to appear as admiration and respect. I refer to this as “voyeuristic sexuality.”

In contrast, the working-class clubs create an atmosphere conducive to pure physical pleasure and lust. Gone are the amenities, high-quality equipment, and soft, comfortable furniture. Customers, who are mostly working-class performers, are able to come to these clubs for vicarious sexual experiences and little else, as the sexuality that is on display is often more interactive than is seen at middle-class clubs. These clubs are havens for the viewing of women as sex objects, for the imagining of these women as sexual partners, and for the enactment of male power (Liepe-Levinson 1998; Wood 2000). This form of sexuality I call “cheap thrills” sexuality.

In addition to the physical characteristics of the clubs, these two forms of sexuality and gender—voyeuristic and cheap thrills—are constructed and institutionalized in various performative aspects of the clubs as well. I argue that these performative aspects—the appearances of the dancers and other staff, the dancing and performance styles, and the interactions that take place between dancers and

customers—are as indicative of class and classed expectations as they are of sexuality.

Images of Attractiveness

There is a general difference in the appearance of the women at the middle-class and working-class clubs. Dancers conform much more closely to the hegemonic cultural ideals of attractiveness at Perfections and The Oasis than do dancers at the working-class clubs. In these middle-class clubs, there is a narrowly restricted range of women's body types. For example, there are very few overweight dancers, women with short hair, older women, women with strong musculature, or nonwhite women. About half of the dancers at each middle-class club appear to have breast implants, and most of the others have naturally large breasts. In fact, one woman I interviewed, Mandy, commented that The Oasis, where she works, "is known for the most . . . for all the girls having them. They call it 'Silicone Valley.'" While there are some small-breasted women, there are comparatively fewer working in these clubs, approximately 10 to 15 percent (as compared to approximately 40 percent in the working-class clubs). Most of the women wear their hair styled in some way (i.e., curled, gelled, sprayed), but all wear their hair loose, flowing down their shoulders and back. Only occasionally will a dancer wear her hair in pigtails to match a schoolgirl costume. All of the women wear makeup, and the majority of the dancers heavily accentuate their eyes with glitter, eyeliner, or eye shadows. Most have long fingernails painted in light or neon shades that reflect the black lights of the club. Mandy says these features describe women who are "classy looking" (at least in this context) and that this is a look that develops over time, as the women become accustomed to the ways in which "Oasis girls" look and "take care of themselves": "Some girls start out and they are so ghetto looking, but then she works and she starts to look better and starts to take more appreciation in what she looks like—tanning, and doing her hair more, and just . . . *changing*. As they are around the other girls and see how the girls keep up themselves, they start to change themselves, because they have the money to also take care of themselves."

According to Mandy, one reason the dancers pay such attention to makeup use and hairstyle is that the amount of money they make from customers is contingent on how sexy, attractive, and feminine they appear to their audience (see Price 1998). While this is true of any club, for middle-class clubs, there is a heavy emphasis on conforming to middle-class cultural ideals. Marina, a dancer at The Treasure Chest, one of the working-class clubs, also recognizes this feature of the middle-class clubs as she comments that "The Oasis and Perfections are probably the best for girls that have ideal bodies according to standards by society today . . . like mainstream standards, pop culture standards."

Fixing their hair, tanning, wearing perfume, and applying particular kinds and shades of makeup not only symbolize doing heterosexuality and femininity—practices that reproduce and naturalize the dominant cultural norms of heterosexuality (Dellinger and Williams 1997; Giuffre and Williams 1994)—they symbolize doing

class as well, as the performers distance themselves from women who are “ghetto looking.” By using their appearances to simultaneously do gender, heterosexuality, and class, these women increase their financial gains while at the same time conforming to, legitimating, and perpetuating dominant cultural ideals.

At The Treasure Chest and The Hourglass, however, there is a much broader spectrum of female bodies on display. There are several overweight women, as well as some women who are so thin their entire skeletal structure is visible through their skin. There are a few older women working at each club (40-ish), and there is a greater diversity of dancers in terms of race. In contrast to the middle-class clubs, which feature predominantly white women, each of the working-class clubs employs a (relatively) large proportion of Latina dancers, with a few Black and Asian women. On a typical night with 30 dancers, approximately 15 are women of color, compared to about 5 of 30 in the middle-class clubs, thus more accurately reflecting the racial composition of Pueblo. Most women also tend to have long hair, and nearly all the white women have bleached-blond hair. Women are also more creative with their hairstyles. One woman at The Hourglass has a completely shaved head, and other women wear their hair in braids or pulled back into ponytails or barrettes. Marina notes that at “blue-collar” clubs such as The Treasure Chest, “you can see more of the personalities of all these people, which is what I am really interested in. The girls can do whatever they want, and do.” Women apply heavy makeup that accentuates their mouths, rather than their eyes as in the middle-class clubs. Most wear dark or bright red lipstick and paint their long fingernails to match, styles typically associated with working-class women (Bettie 2003).

Another aspect of attractiveness is the types of clothing that dancers wear. While by law all dancers must wear a G-string, there are considerable differences in the other types of clothing and accessories worn. Dancers at the middle-class clubs tend to wear outfits—either themed costumes such as a dominatrix or a Catholic schoolgirl outfit or pieces of lingerie like a satin chemise or teddy that covers both the breasts and the buttocks. A few of the dancers wear much more elaborate outfits, such as bodysuits or minidresses. Some dancers choose to wear accessories to appeal to particular members of the audience, like cowboy hats or baseball caps, and some accessorize with thigh-hi stockings or a garter. Veronica, who dances at The Oasis, captures all of these themes as she describes her outfits to me:

Well, I usually do “the schoolgirl.” Ninety-nine percent of the time I wear a plaid schoolgirl skirt with a white top, knee-hi socks. It is the most profitable outfit that I have. And I have a lot of outfits. But tonight, I’m not going to be the schoolgirl. Tonight I brought lingerie; I’ll wear black thigh-his and a black bra and this really pretty black robe that one of the girls sold me. I do have one other outfit, like hip hugger pants that kind of flair out at the bottom, and a little bikini top that’s really cute. For a while, on Sundays only, because on Sundays a lot of people are out riding their motorcycles and they’ll come into the club, I have a little shirt with sequins and a motorcycle, and it says “Born to Ride.” I don’t remember if it says “Harley Davidson” on it, but it’s my biker shirt for the motorcycle people. But my main thing is the schoolgirl.

All the dancers wear high heels, but they wear the chunky heeled platform shoes that were in fashion at the time, rather than traditional stilettos, as worn in the working-class clubs. Dancers at these clubs wear more jewelry than seen at other places, and many even wear wristwatches. Mandy and Veronica both revealed that there was a time when all the dancers were required to wear evening gowns. Veronica says, "When [the present owner] first bought The Oasis, he really wanted to target like age 30 and up, white-collared-class businessmen. So he said that all the girls had to wear gowns or dresses on stages, and we're only going to play 80s music. That was his way to appeal to that age group."

Few of the dancers at The Hourglass or The Treasure Chest wear costumes or anything that could be dubbed an outfit. Most of the dancers wear a bra-like top and their G-string, with nothing else. Occasionally, a dancer will wear some type of lingerie or dress that covers both the buttocks and the breasts, but it is rare. As one of my escorts commented, "It feels like we're at the beach!" Marina agrees but notes that she dresses a little differently than do most of the other dancers at The Treasure Chest, emphasizing how clothing—"covering up"—reinforces and reproduces classed expectations: "A lot of girls will just walk around in just a bikini," she says, "but I'll wear dresses, I'll cover up more and be more like . . . classy. Not that I *am* more classy, but I have that façade." Note also that Marina is highlighting the difference between class as a material location ("not that I *am* more classy") and class as a symbolic performance ("but I have that façade").

What these body images amount to is a complete catering to the cultural ideals and perceived fantasies in the middle-class clubs and a wider array of images of women's sexuality and appearance in the working-class clubs. That the dancers at The Oasis and Perfections draw attention to their eyes suggests an invitation to look and an aura of mystery—they are meant to see and be seen. The red lipstick that accentuates the lips of the dancers at the working-class clubs oozes sensuality, fire, and excitement. In a sense, the dancers draw from two different yet equally stereotyped images of femininity: the good girl (who looks but does not touch, "innocent" in her sexualized schoolgirl outfit) and the bad girl (who falls outside the hegemonic beauty ideals and flaunts her exaggerated sexuality). Yet as Ortner (1991), Bettie (2000, 2003), and others have pointed out, these stereotypes are as much about class as they are about femininity.

Stage Performances: Constructing the Gaze

The stage is perhaps the most visible and obvious place in which sexuality is performed. On a main, center stage of a club, nearly everyone in the audience has a view of the show, and as such, performing on the main stage is a dancer's main method of being seen, making eye contact with customers, and finding people for whom she may perform table dances later in the evening (Ronai and Trautner 2001). For many customers, the stage area is their only experience with dancers, as many patrons never purchase table dances at all, preferring to watch the constant and varied entertainment provided on the stage. This is where dancers can show off

their bodies, show of their athletic and dance abilities, and show customers, through their dance style and choice of music, the personalities they have constructed for their performances.

There is a distinct dissimilarity between the styles of music featured at each of the clubs. While all the women are allowed to choose their music for dancing, there is much less variation than there would be if organizational cultures had no effect on music style. The songs heard at Perfections and The Oasis, the middle-class clubs, are generally contemporary pop music, such as one would find on the Billboard Top-40 or on the television station VH-1 (recall that the club owner at The Oasis required all dancers to perform to hits from the 1980s a few years ago). The songs are for the most part slower, with lyrics that are decipherable. Most of the songs feature male vocalists (such as songs by Third Eye Blind or Matchbox 20), although some instrumental techno songs, as well as some music by Madonna and Janet Jackson, are played. Veronica reveals that a few years ago, "no rap was allowed. None. No rap. But now they play some. You really gotta appeal to everyone." A typical evening, however, features only one or two rap songs.

In contrast, the music at The Hourglass and The Treasure Chest is remarkably different from the middle-class clubs. Most of the songs played are rap songs, heavy metal, and classic rock. There are very few pop songs played, and even fewer songs with women vocalists. Marina describes the music in similar terms, stating that "there's girls who dance to rap music and they'll have more of a 'tough' side. There's girls who do country, and there's girls that do really angry, evil music. And it doesn't necessarily mean that the girl *is* that way, it's just the style that she dances. She'll, like, appeal to the S&M crowd." At the working-class Treasure Chest, where they "can do whatever they want," dancers exercise even more control over the music in the club, while simultaneously playing up their classed, sexualized, "bad girl" image. Marina describes scenes in which "girls will go up on stage and if they don't like the music the DJ is playing, they might tell him 'fuck you,' or they might just lay there and not dance. It is *crazy*." In other words, dancers exercise social control over each other, DJs, and managers by not dancing to songs that fall outside the club's regular style of music.

The dancers at the middle-class clubs take a very passive approach to their stage performances, meaning that the dances are noninteractive. Most of the dancers get on stage fully clothed about 10 to 15 seconds after their song has begun to play and slowly walk around the stage, stopping every few seconds to strike a pose, in which they arch their back, lean their head back, lift their arms up to their head, and lift their hair up off their shoulders and then let it cascade down their back, shaking their head from side to side ever so slowly. About halfway through the song, the dancer will remove her clothing while on stage and let the clothes fall gently to the floor. She then will continue to saunter around the stage, occasionally lightly touching the sides of her breasts with her fingertips as she moves her arms upward to play with her hair. The aspect of the performances that struck me the most on my first visit to the middle-class clubs was that only three dancers on stage ever touched

their breasts while dancing. Of these, none touched their nipples. Instead, they ran their hands across the top of their breasts, almost like a shelf they were checking for dust. One of these women lightly ran her hands up and down the sides of her torso, just barely touching the sides of her breasts with her fingertips. This was a pattern repeated on every visit to the middle-class clubs. Few of the dancers incorporate actual dance moves, and even fewer attempt to move to the rhythm of the music. The focus appears to be on showing off, presenting a sensual and delicate image of sexuality, and making sure that all eyes follow her as she strolls around the stage (creating an audience of voyeurs). Before the song is even over, she picks up her clothes and gets off stage, putting her clothes back on in the process. Consequently, there are about 20 to 30 seconds with no dancer on stage, as the women arrive on stage late and leave early.

To move into one of the working-class clubs is to move into an entirely different world. The music is fast, and the dancers are very active and somewhat rowdy during their performances. While some women do perform the slow, noninteractive dance routines characteristic of the middle-class clubs, these performances are rare, and only 3 or 4 (of approximately 120) will be witnessed over the course of a two-hour time period on all three stages. Most of the dancers use the poles on stage as props to hang onto as they spin around, to lean against as they bend over to give the audience a view of their buttocks, as phallic symbols on which they gyrate, or as climbing devices that they shimmy up and then grab onto with their legs as they suspend their bodies upside-down from the poles. Many of the dancers also display their flexibility by performing the splits on stage, or in the case of a few dancers at each club, lying flat on their backs with their legs up in the air and moving them around from side to side. All of a sudden, a dancer would spread her legs widely and slam them down in a center-splits position onto the stage, causing her shoes to hit the stage with a loud thumping sound. She would repeat this move two or three times before finding other ways to demonstrate her flexibility.

Many of the women in these clubs dance as if they are having sex without a partner. An excerpt from my field notes shows how one woman, Crystal, had a routine in which this style of dance was captured perfectly:

She kept her eyes closed through most of the performance and rolled her head with a slight look of pleasure and intensity on her face. She would grab the outsides of her breasts and cup them upwards and together, and then arch her back, lean her head backwards, and smile. Soon after she began doing this, she pushed her bikini top up over her breasts so that it was all smooshed up at the top of her chest, and fell to her knees. She leaned backwards, back still arched, with one hand on the floor behind her to prop herself up, the other hand now rubbing the insides of her thighs as she thrust her body up and down, back and forth. She began to move faster and harder, breasts bouncing up and down, hand moving towards her head where she would clench a piece of her hair up by her forehead, then let go and drag her open-faced hand down her neck, over her breasts, down the side of her stomach to her outer thigh, ending up back at her inner thigh.

Crystal is giving an explicitly sexual performance—she is showing the audience what it would be like to have sex with her, or what she wants them to think it would be like. The focus is still on watching her, but she invites looks of lust and desire rather than cool contemplation and distanced admiration. Other women would position themselves on stage on all fours with their buttocks facing the crowd. These women would sometimes arch their backs or turn their heads to also have a view of the audience while they shook their bottom and thrust their body back and forth.

Tippling and Table Dances: Interacting with Customers

Dancers expect to receive tips while performing on stage. The stage tip is a customer's way of communicating that he likes what he sees and perhaps that he may be willing to purchase a table dance from the dancer later in the evening. For the dancer, accepting a stage tip simultaneously functions as a way for her to advertise herself to the entire audience and for them to imagine what getting a table dance from her might be like (Ronai and Ellis 1989). Much like the dancing routines themselves, the styles by which dancers accepted tips were characteristic of very different forms of sexuality.

Dancers at The Oasis and Perfections, the middle-class clubs, were much more likely to accept tips without permitting any sort of touching between themselves and the customers, consistent with the passive dancing style. Even when customers attempted to touch dancers, the women enforced voyeuristic sexuality. One customer at The Oasis, for instance, held his dollar between his teeth for the dancer (presumably so that she would use her mouth or breasts to retrieve the bill, a method often seen at working-class clubs), but the woman, with perhaps a smidge of disdain, simply used her hands to pluck the bill out of his mouth.

Many dancers at the middle-class clubs, instead of touching or allowing contact between themselves and patrons, will perform a "mini-show" for the tipping customer to view, as Kayla at Perfections does (as illustrated by my field notes): "A man wearing dark slacks and a polo-style shirt approached the stage during Kayla's dance, with a crisp one-dollar bill held firmly in his hand. He stood patiently at the side of the stage, waiting for her to notice him. She saw him as she turned around, and strolled over to where he was standing, smiling and making eye contact. She lay down on the stage, and for 10-15 seconds, rolled around on the stage, moving her legs in the air in a scissors-like fashion before lifting the side of her G-string for dollar placement." Other dancers, instead of giving the customer a special performance, will lightly place their hands on the man's shoulders and lean over him, throwing their hair over his head and then whisper something in his ear, before removing their hair, stepping back, and lifting the side of their G-strings. Several times I asked my male escorts to tip these women and let me know what kinds of things the dancers were whispering to the patrons. By those reports, they are whispering light conversational fare: "What's your name?" "Are you having a good time?" "Is that your girlfriend with you?" None of these comments are inherently

sexy, but in this context, the way in which these questions are whispered leaves men feeling somewhat special, like the dancer thinks he is interesting enough to have been noticed, or that she wants to know his name.² If the trick works, perhaps he will purchase a table dance from her after she leaves the stage (Ronai and Ellis 1989).

Like the stage tips, table dances at The Oasis and Perfections, the middle-class clubs, are typically characterized by slow sensuality and distance between dancers and customers. Most of the women spend a great deal of their time standing in front of the customer, in between his spread legs, swaying back and forth, lightly touching her breasts and flipping her hair around. The Oasis in particular has been characterized in club reviews and Web discussions as the "home of the air dance," meaning that the dancers rarely make contact with the customers, even during table dances. Even when dancers do make physical contact with customers, they do so in ways that encourage voyeuristic sexuality. Dancers will lean backwards, sitting on the customer's lap, resting her head on one of his shoulders, and squeeze her breasts together. In this position, the man can look down the front of a dancer's body but not see her face. Both Veronica and Mandy describe their styles of dancing as sensual and voyeuristic, yet devoid of explicit sexual contact. Veronica says, "Some girls, like me, dance very slowly, and it's not even really dancing. It's just massaging, looking, a lot of eye contact. I'm trying to enchant the guy or put him in a . . . trance almost, and it works! I mean, women do have a very . . . we have a power that men are . . . it just works. We have a power that works over men. And when you learn how to use it, then you can take their money [laughs]. In that environment. Now, I haven't figured out how to use it in real life, but in that environment, yeah." Mandy's description is nearly identical: "My style is more exotic, like rubbing their hands and playing with their hair and touching their face. And most of the time, when I'm in the right mood, and I got my crap together like last night, I can actually have guys in trances where they're actually closing their eyes while I'm dancing for them."

In contrast, the dancers at the working-class clubs accept tips and perform table dances in very different ways. In these clubs, stage tips and table dances appear to be driven by the desire to give a "cheap thrill," a term that merges sexuality and social class. There is much contact between dancer and customer, and the seemingly most popular dancers are those who touch the customers in some way with their breasts or genital region. One widespread method of accepting tips is demonstrated by Sara at The Hourglass (from my field notes): "She bent down so that her breasts were directly in front of his face, moved close to him, and then grabbed the back of his head, pulling his face into the space between her breasts, and shook her body from side to side. There was not enough space between the man's face and her breasts to see how the man responded, so he might have kissed or licked her breasts and no one would have seen." Another popular method of receiving tips from customers is to grab the back of the man's head and shove it into the dancer's genital region while shaking his head from side to side. Trina, a dancer at The Treasure Chest, thanked a man for his \$1 tip by holding the back of his neck with her left

hand, whispering in his ear, and grabbing his bottom with her right hand. She then slapped his rear end with an open hand and poked him with her index finger in the space right between his cheeks.

Likewise, table dances simulate sex and sexual acts in dramatic ways. I observed several dancers at both working-class clubs who spent at least one-third of each song sitting on her knees facing the customer, with her face directly inside the man's legs, simulating oral sex. Marina is one dancer who uses this trick, and she describes in detail just what it is she is doing down there: "If the guy seems clean and seems all right, I will go down like I'm going to give him a blow job, and I'll do this thing where I'll blow warm air through his pants and I'll roll my Rs so that it feels like a vibrator." It also appears that many of the dancers will very lightly run one of their hands over the man's genital region. Most dancers sit on a customer's lap, facing away from him, grinding their buttocks in a circular motion over his genitals. Dancers also will stand with one foot firmly on the floor, the other resting on the man's shoulder, leaning in toward the man's face so as to give him a close view of her crotch. About a year ago, Marina got in trouble with regulatory agents for "flashing," quickly pushing her G-string over to the side to reveal her genitalia to the customer, a practice she asserts is common (and even condoned) at The Treasure Chest: "When I got in trouble for flashing, the manager told me, 'Well, 95 percent of the girls here flash, so don't feel bad. They just happened to catch you. You should probably just be more careful.'"

These examples make it clear that very different styles of dancing and interacting with customers are taking place at these strip clubs. The middle-class clubs are characterized by performances of passive desire and distance, while the working-class clubs are marked with explicit allusions to sex and sexuality, physical activity and exertion, and contact between patron and dancer.

Staff Attire

Although dancers are the primary signals of sexuality within these organizations, the attire and mannerisms of waitresses, managers, bouncers, and bartenders also support the images of sexuality the clubs are constructing. Staff can be (and are) dressed in such a way as to contribute to an environment of raw sex and casualness or to one of distance, inapproachability, and composure.

The managers and bouncers at the middle-class clubs dress in what might be perceived as a more inaccessible and intimidating manner than do similar types of employees at the working-class clubs. The managers (all men) wear suits, complete with tie and vest, while the bouncers are dressed in all black—slacks, button-down collared shirt, and vest. These outfits send a signal of restraint, distance, and formality to the patrons of the club. They seem to be telling customers that businessmen belong there. As businessmen themselves, in their suits and ties, they signal that they understand and identify with the needs and expectations of their middle- and business-class clientele. The managers at The Hourglass and The Treasure Chest, however, dress in polo-style shirts with khaki pants, while the bouncers

dress in jeans and T-shirts. They seem both casual and approachable, signaling an easygoing, "anything goes" attitude. "We're no better than you," their outfits communicate to their patrons. "We're workers, too."

Perhaps one of the most striking differences between the two types of clubs is the ways in which the waitresses are dressed. At Perfections and The Oasis, the middle-class clubs, the waitresses have the choice of wearing either black shorts or black pants, with a white shirt of any style, which varies greatly from waitress to waitress. The clothing, typical of waitstaff at many restaurants nationwide, lends the club an aura of legitimacy, and this constructed boundary makes it clear that it is the dancers who are on display, not the waitresses.

It is almost hard to tell the waitresses and the dancers apart at the working-class clubs. Like the performers, the waitresses wear string-bikini tops and G-strings, but they also wear a mesh sarong that only slightly covers their buttocks. The women bartenders wear the same outfits, and all the women employees are available to give table dances, although the waitresses do not go on stage, and the dancers do not serve drinks. The attire of the waitresses makes it clear that these clubs are places in which all the women present are legitimate and permissible sex objects, that there are no boundaries placed on men's desires and curiosities.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have emphasized the ways that exotic dancers perform gendered and classed sexuality. Of course, women's performances are both a reflection and an interpretation of other core features of organizational culture such as management styles and organizational rules. Had I interviewed managers, more dancers, or customers, or had I become an employee of these clubs, my perspective on the performance of class and the performance of sexuality might perhaps be more focused on those features that constrain or enable women's agency. Yet the strength of my observational approach and small sample is that as an outsider, I am able to make sense of the variations in one city's club experiences much as any customer or potential customer might. Consumers, when faced with an array of seemingly similar services, such as those found in exotic dance clubs, make distinctions based on the frontstage of organizational culture (i.e., the performance of sexuality and class) not based on the backstage constraints that produce them.

Expressions and performances of sexuality, I have argued, are not homogeneous. Clubs construct distinctive working-class and middle-class performances and performers of sexuality that are consistent with popular ideas of how class and sexuality intersect. In this way, my analysis shows that social class is a central feature of organizational culture. Others have examined the ways in which the performance of gender in organizations is context specific (Britton 2003; Dellinger 2004), but they have not examined the role that social class plays in creating different organizational cultures and the effects of those classed cultures on the expression of gender and sexuality. Indeed, just as social class was an invisible category of

identity for the young women studied by Bettie (2003), class differences can be overlooked by organizations and gender scholars. In this article, I have argued that exotic dance clubs are not only gendered organizations but also classed organizations. That is, they articulate ideas and presentations of gender that are mediated by class position.

Class differences are thus represented as sexual differences in very concrete ways: in the appearance of dancers and other staff, dancing and performance styles, and the interactions that take place between dancers and customers. Middle-class clubs are associated with a sexuality that is voyeuristic, characterized by distance, gazing, and a formal sexual atmosphere, while working-class clubs are associated with cheap thrills, contact, and a casual sexual atmosphere. These types of sexuality are consistent with and further specify popular images of femininity and masculinity that are also mediated by social class (and race): sexually restrained middle-class white men and women and sexually promiscuous working-class men and women of color. Sex as performance, class, race, power, and gender are thus all intertwined.

Thus, sexuality is much more than an individual attribute, and social class is much more than simply a material location. As women and men construct, perform, and consume gender and sexuality in exotic dance clubs, they are simultaneously constructing, performing, and consuming social class. The task for gender scholars is to examine this understudied intersection between gender, sexuality, and class more fully and in more institutional and organizational contexts, as Bettie (2000, 2003) has done in contemporary high schools. This study of exotic dance clubs, in which gender and sexuality are explicit and exaggerated features of organizational life, provides a rich context in which to view the organizational performance and construction of class. But these processes are at play in other organizational contexts as well, just perhaps more hidden (as class often is). Attention to the simultaneous performance of gender and class will lead us to a richer, more textured understanding of gender and gender inequality, especially in organizational settings. While the indicators of class difference that I highlight here (images of attractiveness, distance/the gaze, and interactions) may be specific to this organizational setting, they may be useful places to proceed as others seek to develop this intersectional approach into other arenas.

NOTES

1. Pueblo is a mid-sized city in the southwestern United States (population approximately 500,000). Pseudonyms have been used in place of the names of the city, clubs, and dancers throughout.

2. Most of my male escorts reported feeling this way, even though they also said they "knew better." That is, they were aware that the dancers were interested in a potential financial opportunity, not in a date, yet each still left the stage with a rush of excitement and feeling "special."

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