

Empowerment

The Art of Seduction in Adult Entertainment Exotic Dance

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Strippers are exploited and degraded women, 'psychologically and physically assaulted by males', say some feminists and members of the Christian Right in the United States. Not so, say empowered adult entertainment exotic dancers themselves, who gain self-esteem and can earn up to six-digit incomes through tips and fees by dancing for individual patrons. About one-third of exotic dancers in the United States are putting themselves through college or graduate school with earned income and flexible schedules. Single women, single moms and married women dance to support themselves. The dancers gain power through the art of seduction.

This article takes a different perspective from the large literature debating whether or not nude dance is 'degrading' or 'empowering'. Instead, I explore the exercise of agency in adult entertainment exotic dance clubs (also referred to as erotic, nude or topless dancing, striptease, gentlemen's clubs, juice bars, and adult cabarets). Elsewhere I have written about the context and cultural conflicts concerning exotic dance (1998, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2012). Here, I extend work done by pioneers who studied nonverbal communication in everyday behaviour, such as anthropologists Edward Hall and Ray Birdwhistell, and I consider the psychobiology of sexuality. In addition, I build on research in the anthropology of dance, where dance is seen as a form of nonverbal communication (Hanna 1987, 1983, 2005) and the relationship is examined between dance, sex, gender, dominance, defiance, and desire (Hanna 1988). A substantial literature argues that dance is communication but does not explain how. I address the communication processes of empowerment through the dance art of seduction.

My research began in 1995 when I was asked to be an expert court witness in a First Amendment case related to table dancing and to apply to exotic dance

the semiotic, socio-linguistic paradigm I had used since the 1960s to study dance in Africa, on school playgrounds and in American theatres. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and artistic expression. Following the research approach I used with other forms of dance, I examined the characteristics of exotic dance, how it conveys messages from the performer to the viewer, how the performer gets viewer feedback to know if the communication was successful, how the dancer exercises artistic control within the aesthetics of exotic dance, working conditions of the dancers, and how the dance fits within its social, historical, and political context.

Of course, I read the court testimony of nearly 100 earlier cases. These cases were mostly about efforts of governments to 'corset' exotic dancers and strip their First Amendment rights through, for example, burdensome zoning requirements and land use regulation, requiring extensive procedures for licensing of dancers, clubs, and managers, regulating hours of operation, amount of body disclosure, types of exotic dance movements permitted, whether and how dancers may touch themselves and patrons, visibility of dancing onstage and offstage at a patron's tableside, club illumination and other physical configuration characteristics of a facility, distance and buffer zone between dancer and patron, and manner of tipping. Although exotic dance is protected by the First Amendment and cannot be banned outright, many local and state governments try to regulate exotic dance to death on moral grounds and on the false assumption (Paul et al. 2001; Land et al. 2004) that it leads to crime and decreased property values disproportionate to other businesses. In a few clubs in San Francisco and elsewhere, and in many parts of the world, the ultimate climax of exotic dance may be a sexual act for money. But fantasy reigns in the approximately 3,000 well-run clubs in the United States, comprising a 12-billion-dollar industry, with clubs on the American Stock Exchange and Nasdaq (National Association of Securities Dealers Automated).

While in the 146 clubs I visited across the nation, I observed no fewer than 1,500 performances. I interviewed more than 1,000 dancers, managers, owners, bartenders, disc jockeys, housemothers and housedads, patrons and community members. I learned about some of the performers' backgrounds and training; relationship to the clubs and income; artistic control of the intended messages of their dance communication; imagination/creativity, judgement and skills used; and their perceptions of patrons' expectations. I asked about patrons' motives for visiting the clubs, patrons' expectations, and their reception and interpretation of the dancers' messages. I also took cognizance of federal, state and local laws, club rules, and economic and performance space constraints on dancers and patrons.

Moreover, both by telephone and through E-mail, I interviewed additional dancers, patrons, and club owners and personnel, as well as sex researchers. I also read letters from dancers who wanted to share their stories with me and the extensive literature on the exotic dance industry, including reports from the Associated Press, Reuters, *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, master's and

doctoral theses (in, for example, anthropology, theatre studies, social work, and women's studies); books and articles on exotic dancing across the United States; trade publications such as *Exotic Dancer*, *Adult Entertainment Today*, *Showgirls*, *Stripper Magazine*, *Danzine*, *Exotic Dancer Alliance*, and American Planning Association reports. These works were written by scholars, planners, journalists, former exotic dancers, and photographers.

In addition, I examined the scientific research on nonverbal communication, 'a field that encompasses a wide variety of disciplines within both the social and natural sciences, from neurophysiology, psychophysiology, behavioural ecology, and ethology to social psychology, psychiatry, anthropology, sociology, and linguistics' (Segerstråle & Molnár 1997, p. 2).

In more than 600 interviews, exotic dancers say dancing is empowering. Gabriel explained, 'The money, and the power I had over men. It was mind blowing. Men buy things for your children. One man went from being vice president of First Virginia Bank to delivering pizza. At first it was after hours at the club, then drugs. And problems. He was showing up at our homes. He lost his job after the girls called his boss to ask him to give this man work. It's sad how men need the club. They need attention. Men from all walks of life come to the club. Businessmen come for lunch because it's a fun place.' The question I address is how exotic dance is empowering.

Shai Shahar, performing artist, reminds us, 'Dance and seduction go together like hand in glove and the history of their long association goes back to before recorded time. Salome's dance of the seven veils so intoxicated the king that he gladly ordered a beheading so that he could enjoy her freely given charms. In our modern era we remember that Mata Hari was a dancer first, and that it was by the power of her dance that she seduced powerful men into bed who told her secrets. One of the most powerful men ever to serve in the United States Congress, Wilbur Mills, had to resign because of his relationship with a stripper, Fanne Fox' (personal communication, December 2004). Among many groups in Africa, females seduce males by demonstrating through dance their potential strength and creativity. The WoDaabe men of Niger dance to gain a woman's favour.

The Latin origin of the word 'seduction' means to lead or attempt to lead astray, enchant, or entice into a wrong or foolish course, especially a sexual act. The styles of seduction are many, including alluring, bewitching, tantalizing, beguiling, inveigling (winning over by coaxing), flattering and exploiting. The salesmanship/marketing may be subtle or brazen or a combination.

The art of seduction through dance is more than a physical courtship duet. This seduction embodies the thought of the seducer and the seduced and is certainly a form of power and persuasion. Consequently, governments and religious groups worldwide have banned dancing or imposed controls for fear of its potential for sexual arousal. Baudrillard (1990:21) notes: 'The feminine is not just seduction; it also suggests a challenge to the male to (...) monopolize

sex and sexual pleasure, a challenge to go to the limits of its hegemony...death.' However, he notes that today 'phallocracy is collapsing' and refers to seduction as an ironic and playful form. Foucault (1990) and many feminist writers document how sexuality has been socially constructed and restricted throughout history. Today sexuality is a contested area in America's current culture war between the Christian Right seeking to impose a theocracy and the defenders of civil liberties.

Seduction in legal adult entertainment exotic dance in the United States is a form of fantasy. It's sexy, but it's not sex. Most people engage in sexual fantasy occasionally, and fantasies are generally recognized as part of healthy sexuality (Leitenberg 1995; Zurbriggen & Yost 2004). The fantasies expressed through exotic dance may whet the appetite for reality or they may be fulfilling in themselves. However, sexual desire is independent of acting upon desire. 'Eroticism,' says Octavio Paz, is a 'representation' that diverts or denies sex in action. Eroticism 'is sexuality transfigured, a metaphor' (1995:2). Clubs and dancers advertise sex, but don't sell it; what they sell is only an illusory promise of sex (see Reichert and Lambiase 2003 on sex in advertising many products).

Successful seduction in exotic dance is measured by patrons' tips to a dancer onstage and requests for individual dances for a fee and also tips (at the patron's table or couch, on his lap, or in a shower). In the progression of counterfeit intimacy (Eneck and Preston 1988), patron commitment is manifest in continuous tipping, repeatedly buying a dance, and even becoming a regular (a patron who frequents the club to see a particular dancer upon whom he bestows fees and even gifts). DJs and bartenders making comments to patrons about tipping the pretty lady or getting a private dance oil the seductive process. A dancer may begin her performance with dollar bills (the common tip) in her garter belt, and other dancers may tip the performer to encourage similar patron behaviour.

Adult entertainment exotic dance

Exotic dance is a form of dance, art, theatre, and adult entertainment that is supposed to be 'naughty' adult play, a fanciful teasing that transgresses social decorum and dress codes in an ambience ranging from sedate to carnival-like. To be risqué, exotic dance discloses more of the body (generally nudity climaxes a three-song performance) and uses different sexually suggestive movements than are usually seen publicly.

There is variation in exotic dance depending on the laws of a particular locality. Generally, in the first part of a dance sequence, a dancer performs onstage for the audience as a whole, as a kind of bait or foreplay, in order to 'seduce' patrons for tips and then for fees and tips in the second part. In part two, a performer commonly dances in the audience area for an individual patron (next to where the patron is seated, or in a special area, often called a VIP room, found in many clubs). Women generally dance for men, and increasingly also for heterosexual couples and for women.

Exotic dance performance permits 'ocular penetration' of a dancer and her

choreography and improvisation that attempt to trigger in a patron a fantasy, an elaborate story or fleeting thought of romance, sex, or dominant-submissive identity. For some patrons, merely ogling the beauty of the kinetic body may suffice. Exotic dance has given rise to its own special imprint of 'eye candy' movements performed in high heels that derive from belly dance and burlesque and are influenced by vernacular, jazz, Broadway theatre, music video, jazz, and hip-hop dance, cheerleading, and gymnastics. In turn, exotic dance influences social and theatre dance forms.

Why dancers engage in seductive fantasy

Exotic dancing is a job, a means of earning income. Consequently, dancers' motives are to seduce patrons to tip and to buy private dances. Flexible scheduling allows dancers to go to college and to take care of their children. Some dancers also like the exercise and attention, and see their work as an avenue to express their independence and challenge social norms. Others, bitten by the theatre bug, like to pretend to be someone else.

Knowledge sources for seduction through dance

Dancers' own seductive tools come from the general kinds of seductive behaviour humans engage in (Buss 1994; Lloyd-Elliott 1995) and cultural norms, as well as their own experience and observation of other dancers. The dancer's art derives meanings from culturally-based movements, use of space, patterns of touch, male fantasy, and sensory elements, for instance perfume (Goffman 1959; Hochschild 1979, 1983). Of course, the perception of dance, art, play, and sexuality is subject to an individual's interpretation. However, there appear to be some evolutionary universals in female seduction – focus on breasts, hips, and body proportions that mark sexual identity and youthfulness, that is, capacity for reproduction. Note that not only does dance draw upon the everyday for its meaning, dance may influence the everyday. For example, thongs, the skimpy covering of buttocks and genitals seen on public beaches today, began with strippers, as did high-heel stiletto platform shoes. Specific moves associated with exotic dance have become de rigueur in MTV (Music Television Video), social freaking and booty dancing, and strip aerobics in gyms.

Sexual Fantasy

'Men's fantasies, by and large, are truly *fantasies*. ...The male fantasy world is populated by beautiful women (famous actresses, models, and so on) who are always sexually available and willing to participate in all manner of outrageous sex,' according to Abramson and Pinkerton (1995: 120). Studies of male sexual fantasies (Leitenberg and Henning 1995) have found that the content of the most frequent acts of imagination are memories of past sexual experience and experiences that have not occurred but are exciting to imagine. Common images are of nude or semi-nude females; intimacy; seduction scenes; sex with a new

Freud Got It.
Anonymous caricature.

WHAT'S ON A MAN'S MIND



female partner; sex with two or more women; a man's power to drive a woman wild; different sexual settings, positions, and practices; questionable partners; things one would never act on in real life; orgies; and submission and dominance.

Courtship

In everyday life, 'communication in courtship shows a process in which the sender slowly reveals his/her intentions and the receiver seems to sum up different combinations of courtship signals over time. Basically women control male approaches and elicit male self-presentation. In contrast to females, males seem to make their decisions on the basis of interpersonal attraction,' report Grammer, Kruck, and Magnusson (1998:7). High muscle tone, bright eyes, a direct body orientation, soft speech, flirtatious glances, held gaze, demure gestures, head cocking, and pelvis rolling convey romantic and sexual interest, as does the use of space and touch.

Meaning of Space

A key element of dance is body motion in space. The meaning of seductive messages of distance between the exotic dancer and the patron comes from the use of space in offstage social relations. Physical proximity in a social interaction conveys a message and an expectation about the level of intimacy appropriate or desirable for that interaction (Burgoon et al. 1996; Linz et al. 2000).

Hall's research (1966) on the meaning of the use of space in daily life found this: In American culture, *intimate* distance has a close phase (0-6 inches, such as in love-making, wrestling, comforting, and protecting) and a far phase (6-18 inches for less intense but still intimate interaction). A romantic relationship in American culture commonly includes a dinner or nightclub date with the pair seated close together and touching as a metaphoric sign of attraction. Consequently, in individual patron-focused exotic dances, the performer is similarly close to the patron to evolve a fantasy of romance.

Hall also found that *personal* distance, the usual space we maintain between ourselves and others, also has a close phase ($\frac{1}{2}$ to $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet for people bonded in some way, such as family members) as well as a far phase ($2\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 feet used for discussing subjects of personal interest and involvement). *Social* distance has a close phase of 4 to 7 feet, used for impersonal business, and a far phase of 7 to 12 feet for formal business as in an office or home. Finally, *public* distance has a close phase of 12 to 25 feet, such as in a presentation to a small audience, and a far phase of 25 feet or more.

Gaze

Eye contact and staring provide information. These eye movements reveal attraction, intimacy, attentiveness, competent social skills, credibility, dominance, and valence of feeling (Kleinke 1986). The gaze regulates interaction and exercises social control.

Touch

Touch is a common component of seduction. An understanding of the meaning of self-touch, performer-performer touch, and performer-patron touch comes from research beginning with S. M. Jourard's 'An Exploratory Study of Body Accessibility' in 1966. Because there is a massive involvement of skin in sexual congress (Montagu 1971), any brief touch, such as a dancer shaking a patron's hand, can be symbolic.

'Artists and poets have sought to capture the power and grace of touch to express intense as well as subtle human emotions that transcend words, but only recently have behavioural scientists begun to analyze the role touch plays in human social interaction, physical health, and emotional well being,' writes Thayer (1986: 7). With biological roots in the mother-child connection, touch is humankind's earliest form of communication, 'clearly one of the most basic and commanding forms...an imperative to the establishment of social attachment' (Grammer et al. 1998: 59; see also Vedantam 2002).

The variety, context, strength and duration of touch, who is the toucher and who is the touched, and whether touch is active or passive, all influence meaning and can reveal the state and style of relationship between two people (Floyd 1997). Hall (1976) notes that touch can be sensual, utilitarian and/or friendly. Touch communicates many different positive feelings and ideas - from comfort, pleasantness, rapport, fellowship, warmth, empathy, humour, playfulness, sentience, immediacy, and cordiality to sensuality and intimacy. Of course, touch can be hostile and harmful.

Thayer states, 'Even a fleeting, impersonal touch between strangers can have a powerful emotional impact' (1982:281). Touch is part of attentiveness, which includes gaze, smile, and direct face-to-face orientation. Certainly, powerful cultural norms and religious strictures surround touch and physical contact, as they relate most particularly to sex, aggression, dominance, and power.

Self-touch

Self-touch in the form of preening is a marker of sexual allure. In American courtship, for example, stroking the hair presents the self in an attractive way (Schefflen 1965). When aroused, women tend to caress their necks more than men and may touch their mouths and lips with their fingertips.

Dancers' seduction strategies

Cornucopia of Ploys

To get tips and sell private dances, performers engage in various ploys of seduction, both onstage and offstage (Enck 1988, Ronai 1989, Wood 2000, Dee 2002, Frank 1998, 2002, Liepe-Levinson 2002). A dancer commercializes human feeling, as do many workers in the service industry (Hochschild 1979, 1983). As in acting, the dancer needs to induce feelings in herself to sustain an outward appearance that evokes a patron's feeling of being cared about; she may have to repress any negative feelings about a patron or herself. Ticks and twitches of nonverbal leakage may interfere with seduction efforts. A dancer's smile must be convincing, eye contact engaging, and energy vibrant. Dancer Tera Patrick says, 'God made us all different and we all have imperfections, but nothing is sexier than confidence' (2005:20).

Dance Communication

All forms of dance take from the everyday and frame it, stylize, intensify and creatively reconstitute it. Although dance may be abstract and play with form, observers read their own meaning into dance. Like language, in the sense of being a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings, dance uses signs, senses, and movements through time and space and with effort; these have certain meanings and responses. Music, costume, lighting, and verbal speech usually enhance the messages of danced body language. Trafficking in an armoury of seductive signals, a dancer tries to communicate to a patron that she is potentially sexually available, symbolizing exciting freedom from social control.

Dance communicates through the sight of performers moving in time and space; through the sounds of physical movement, breathing, accompanying music and talk; the tactile sense of body parts touching the ground, other body parts or props, and air about a dancer alone and a dancer touching a spectator; the sense of spatial distance between people; the sense of empathy with a performer's bodily movement and energy; and the smell of a dancer's breath, physical exertion and, especially, perfume.

To convey to patrons what is expected behaviour on their part, a dancer onstage may appear with dollar bills in her garter, or other dancers may go up to the stage and place bills there to encourage patrons to do likewise. The DJ may help patrons know about tipping with verbal comments.

Reading Ability

Some performers whom one would call physically unattractive or poor dancers often earn more money than those who are better looking and more skilled dancers. The reason is they know how to read and relate to a man and make him feel comfortable. Sheer beauty or excellent dancing may intimidate a patron.

A dancer's ability to read a patron is critical. Dress and jewellery show a man's income and whether he's worth a dancer's attention. Because every viewer receives artistic messages through a personal mental filter that magnifies what pleases and screens out what does not, the dancer needs to discover what messages to send the patron. She tries to decode which fantasies a patron is seeking, and what tastes he has. Drawing upon what she imagines to be elements of a patron's fantasy, she attempts to create and maintain his belief that his desired sexual or other experience is possible. Keeping a man wanting more creates patterns of hope and disappointment. Dancers feed off a man's excited reaction – he likes to feel a woman is inflamed because of him. Of course, some patrons know the dancer's nonverbal and verbal 'come-on' is part of a fantasy game, indeed, an extension of child's play (see Brustein 2005). Yet, at times undercover police try to ensnare dancers by eliciting their fanciful sexy talk and movement, and then charge them with solicitation for illegal prostitution.

Dancers check out a man's facial expression and colour, the way he sits, and how he dresses (Kahn & Rudnitsky 1989). Generally, the following patterns hold true. Facial colour shows interest. Eyes are the 'mirror of the soul': are they direct and expressing interest or are they roving, checking out other dancers? An unblinking gaze is clinical, whereas an indirect gaze suggests self-consciousness and a need for reassurance. Darting eyes convey nervousness and suspiciousness; a furtive glance reflects an intimidated but interested patron. A wink is teasing. A wide-eyed patron is engaged in what is going on, perhaps surprised or naïve. Knitted eyebrows are the trademark of a man weighted down with responsibility. Raised eyebrows are questioning and receptive.

A spontaneous smile indicates friendliness and may be a beacon of desire. A grudging or smirking mouth or poker face is usually a brush-off by a conceited man who harbours a false sense of superiority. An ear-to-ear grin shows an upbeat person. A frozen mouth is a sign of a person who shields feelings. A patron who bites his lower lip is nervous. Lips parted show openness and interest. Upturned corners are positive, while a tight-lipped or trembling-lipped expression is cold. Licking one's lips is a sexual come-on. A chin thrust forward shows pugnacious determination. Flowing nostrils come with excitement. A man with crossed legs is guarding his most sensitive organs and shows reticence about engaging in sexual relations. Sitting hunched over characterizes a man bent by burdens who would welcome light entertainment.

Exotic dancers use what psychologist Howard Gardner (1983) calls interpersonal intelligence. They learn to calculate the effects of their persona and dance, to understand men, and to attend to a patron's signs of approval to guide



Dancer smiles

their artistic improvisation and self-presentation. In trying to be what a dancer thinks a patron wants, she may mirror his movements to be in tune with him. Dancers perform an illusion that is an extension of the viewer's desire. They may play such roles as little girl, coquette or seductress, innocent little Lolita or siren, cowgirl, nurse, cheeky flirt, and dominatrix. In the course of a performance shift, dancers may play many roles. Creating an air of independence makes some men want to possess the dancer.

Creativity

Creativity, implying imaginativeness, originality and novelty, is an idea or practice that people knowledgeable about a dance form recognize. Patrons may tire of sameness. Although a dancer may imaginatively interpret choreography created by another person, performers tend to improvise in response to their own mood, the music and, most importantly, patrons' responses. Improvisation refers to an exotic dancer extemporaneously and imaginatively using acquired body techniques and learned skills to choose among dance movement vocabulary; use of time, space, and effort; and grammatical possibilities at the moment to achieve a particular effect within the style of exotic dance. Sometimes called free-style dance, in contrast with performing choreography or a script determined beforehand, improvisation is what American jazz is about – freedom within limits. There is even a specific genre of dance called contact improvisation (Novack 1990).

Exotic dancers put their own stamp on what they learn as they artistically control stage names, makeup, perfume, costume, the tease, body disclosure, shape and quality of movement, amount of space between themselves and patron, self-touch, nonsexual patron touch, gimmicks, props, and banter. Exotic dancers create their own dances to the music they or the disc jockey select.

Creativity in exotic dance is driven by what most attracts men, as the dancers compete for market share. Dancers discover how to induce a patron to relax, how to 'talk up' a man, and ways to flatter him ('You are my favourite customer', 'I've missed you', 'I love to hear about your work'). If one dancer offers more novelty, then others may try to attract attention by being yet more distinct. Adult club competitions for the best innovation, an opportunity to perform, the narcissistic and exhibitionist thrill of being admired and desired, the desire for risk and adventure, and the fantasy of being the most beautiful woman in the world also stimulate creativity.

A dancer knows or discovers herself and creates and recreates meanings of herself in order to best select her seductive strategy. Of course she capitalizes on her positive attributes. Women have historically been aware that their sexuality attracts men and have used this to their advantage, whereas men use their height, physical attractiveness, and wealth to oil their way in the world. With planning and calculation, as well as intuition, spontaneity and improvisation, a dancer competes with other dancers to successfully target patrons. Dancers draw upon their life experience, especially a dance or gymnastics background. Many have picked up moves watching MTV, dancing at discos, observing other dancers, being coached, and by trial-and-error experimentation. A dancer creatively draws upon her spirit, attitude or intensity radiating from inner desire, smiles, a voice that lulls, and graceful movements that contribute to seduction.

Grooming

Dancers try to make themselves stand out from the others. They manicure their nails with shapes, colours, and patterns. Makeup includes eye shadow, eyeliner, eyebrow pencil definition, face paint, powder, blush between the breasts, and rouged cheeks and nipples. Dancers may vary their contact lens colour; cut, braid, colour or disguise their hair with attached hair pieces, wigs or head coverings. Dancers tan and oil their bodies which they make buff at the gym. They depilate their underarms and legs, and shave or wax the pubic area to create designs, appear virginal, and allow viewable genitals.

Most dancers are young. Others try to appear youthful and healthy. Mimicked when nonexistent in reality, signs of the state of being young are full lips, smooth skin, clear eyes, lustrous hair, white teeth, animated facial expression, good muscle tone, bouncy gait, flushed cheeks, and perky breasts. Rouged cheeks trigger attention.

The 1990s witnessed tattooing anywhere on the body and piercing of the ears, nose, eyebrow, armpits, navel, lip, tongue, nipple, clitoris, and labia as acts

of fashion, eroticism, self-love, and identity. Performers may enhance or parody the 'ideal' body with surgically enhanced breasts and flesh reduction, for example.

Costume

Suggestive costumes include special undergarments, cocktail décolletage or meagre dress, fur, feathers, and sequins. Feathers and fur are linked to slang: bird, chick, pussy, bitch, animals associated with low intelligence, and thus subject to a man's right to make them captive and domesticated at his will. Hot colours are linked with sexuality, white with virginity, and black with night-time activity. Props, such as a phallic snake or swan neck, may arouse.

As the ballerina wears the identifying toe shoes, the stripper dances in the ubiquitous five-to-eight-inch heels, often stiletto platform shoes. The heels provide a semblance of elegance, yet they also constrain motor freedom by making it necessary for the dancer to take short steps. The heels modify body posture, arching the back and thrusting the bosom forward, calling attention to the leg, breast, and derriere.

In addition, the heels are phallic symbols elongating the female leg to its erotic pinnacle or pressing into the floor. The foot was an erogenous area of a woman's body in Victorian England and especially China.



Nudity

In exotic dance, nudity conveys the message, 'this is the adult entertainment of contemporary exotic dance', and nudity distinguishes it from other forms of dance – old-fashioned burlesque and two new transformations of exotic dance: striptease aerobics and striptease therapy. Embedded in the culture of its time, exotic dance by definition must be 'naughty' by revealing more of the body than is normally seen in public and by evoking eroticism.

A Dancer Prepares, photo by Chris Dame



Nude Dancer, photo by Chris Dame



Stripping Costume, photo by Chris Dame

The revelation of nudity in a striptease is the 'climax' of the erotic fantasy. Nudity is to exotic dance what a punch line is to a joke.

Stripping to nudity has an element of seductive tease, a withholding, coyness, and advertising. Nudity may seductively convey messages of eroticism, temptation, allurements, pretence of sexual availability and longing, or other meanings patrons attribute to nudity. Through nudity dancers communicate the message of the beauty of their moving shapes with finely moulded planes and rippling curvaceous surfaces, texture, defined musculature, flickering shadows and highlights, hints of the skeletal frame and vertebrae, and the product of their hard work in creating and maintaining a buff, sensual body.

Humour

Parody is part of a dancer's seduction toolkit. By flaunting sexuality, the dancer can make fun of it. Nudity in exotic dance communicates humour as it pokes fun at the pretence of clothing (for example, expensive, military, or judicial clothing), conspicuous consumption, the obsession with self, mocking the typical person's self-presentation, social class, and religious beliefs about modesty (see, e.g., Pollard 20004-2005). The *derriere* symbolizes eroticism and also derision and abuse. During bachelor parties dancers make fun of male desire.

Dance Movement

Eyes

Eye contact is a critical seductive strategy. Looking intensely into a patron's eyes may be confrontational and allow him to see her interest. A dancer may close her eyes or intersperse eye contact with eyes cast downward in feigned modesty. She may look furtively, blink slowly, roll her eyes, glance flirtatiously, and play peek-a-boo. The gaze indicates degrees of attentiveness and arousal, and welcomes a person into one's line of sight. Eyebrows rising and falling acknowledge a person's presence. The eyes influence attitude change and regulate interaction. In addition, they define power and status relationships (Leathers 1986:42).

Body

A moving beautiful body is seductive as waves of motion flow from head to toe, weave serpentine shapes, pause suggestively, and resume movement. A dancer sends messages of emotion through muscle contraction and release, tension and relaxation, rhythmic variation, proximity, bringing the patron within her kinesphere (the space defined by extending her limbs without changing her stance and within which she bodily creates designs) and touch. Tilting a relaxed head to reveal the neck and throat more openly is inviting. Hair frames the face, and hair preening usually accompanies sexual arousal, so this too is in the seduction arsenal.

Dancers' curvilinear, fluid, or percussive movements call attention to seductive female attributes. Feminine body parts are shimmied, shaken, thrust and rotated (hence the phrase 'bump and grind') in stylized mimicking of sex acts. Dancers develop their own high-heeled strut. Dancing on a pole, a phallic symbol, allows gymnastic moves that show off skill and body parts from unusual perspectives. Mirrors are backdrops and sometimes 'partners' as the dancer moves her hands or other body parts along the mirror. Mirrors may convey self-love as well as multiple views of the dancer, doubling or tripling her impact.

Squatting in front of a patron seated at the edge of the stage and opening her garter is seductive, as well as remunerative. In interacting with a patron, a dancer may empathically echo, mirror or synchronize a patron's posture or movement to bond through sameness. Tuning into a patron's wavelength may make him feel affirmed and recognized as desirable. When a dancer lacks skill or beauty, there is a tendency toward lewd movements as a substitute to attract patrons' interest.

Mouth

Smiles, grins with exposed teeth, and pouts are turn-ons. A smile shows recognition, friendliness, warmth, unalloyed delight, coyness and *joie de vivre* in contrast with a grimace and frown. A dancer may blow kisses and pucker her lips. She may bite her lower lip, slip her finger into her mouth or lick her lips, suggesting the pleasure of fellatio or cunnilingus. Other tongue gestures are means of seduction.

Self-touch

Self-touch commonly occurs in exotic and other forms of dance, as well as other performing arts. A seductive tactic, self-touch serves to capture a person's attention and participation in an interaction. Self-touch directs audience gaze during an overload of stimuli from the total body in action. Dancers play with symbols of femininity: garter belts, gloves, cleavage, hair, and lips. Dancers may cup their breasts together, grab themselves simulating auto-erotic ecstasy, and stroke or slap their buttocks. Caressing themselves, they luxuriate in their own essence.

Self-touch is artistic ephemeral body decoration: The dancer creates designs, sculpting lines, and curves over the body and into space, using her fingers like a paintbrush. Since women tend to stroke their necks more than men and may touch their mouths and lips with their fingertips when aroused, the dancer does this to bewitch a patron. The meaning of self-touch includes sexual symbolism, modesty, protective shielding, and covering as a tease.

By touching her own body, costumed or nude, especially parts usually covered on an American public beach, a performer points to her best sexual assets. She transgresses social mores of mainstream society in keeping with the historical tradition of adult entertainment being 'risqué'. A dancer's self-touch

may show the patron where she would like him to touch her in fantasy. He can identify with her self-touch and fantasize his hands as hers, thus possessing a beautiful woman.

Patron Proximity

Through moving close to a patron, the dancer creates a romantic ambience. Subservient and welcoming signals give men permission to approach. Patrons may ask for a dance or may want dancers to approach them and ask for a dance. Dancers may ask the patron, either indirectly through eye contact or directly, if he wants a dance. Patrons are sometimes willing accomplices in the fantasy of theatrical performance (Liepe-Levinson 2002).

Closeness between dancer and patron is essential in overcoming 'noise' to convey seductive dance messages through sight, sound, smell, and touch. Ekman (2003) describes micro-expressions – ultra-rapid facial actions, some lasting as little as one-twentieth of a second – that lay bare our feelings that cross our faces spontaneously and involuntarily. Proximity permits blowing in the ear. Dancer-patron proximity prevents smells from cigarettes and beverages from overwhelming the scents of perfume and pheromones.

Because patrons vary in their physical ability to see, hear and smell, proximity is also important for effective communication. Moreover, the music is often loud as part of the aesthetic ambience of contemporary adult cabarets, so proximity is necessary for dancer and patron to hear each other speak, complimenting and flattering in a soft voice, and to hear paralanguage (laughter, pitch, and nonverbal vocalizations). Dancers ask about a patron's preference for movements they would like to see; they joke about recent sports events; they talk about the patron being special.

Approaching a patron from a side angle and slowly moving around to face him is more seductive than a full face, front torso approach that can be potentially challenging and threatening. But open body postures can also be welcoming. The dancer tries to establish boundaries around her and a patron to create a private safe haven, not a claustrophobic box.

Of key importance, proximity permits the dancer and patron to receive feedback (signs of interest include pupil dilation and eye widening) from each other, and thus to communicate effectively, both participating in the performance as co-creators of fantasy. This is the attraction of live performance.

Patron Touch

Exotic dancers touch patrons who come up to the stage and who purchase individual patron-focused dances to convey messages of comfort, camaraderie, affection, playfulness, intimacy, and eroticism. A dancer's touch of a patron has seductive merit in creating a 'conversation' within a mutual aura or electricity. Of course, touch is deceptive within theatrical fantasy. A mere touch on the shoulder when getting a tip or working the floor (moving about tables where

patrons are seated) may be seductive. Exotic dancers stir emotions and entice patrons as they commonly swish their hair over a patron's head, chuck under his chin, brush a hand over his hair or run their fingers through it. Dancers also put an arm around a patron's neck, put their hands on his shoulder or thigh for balance while arching backward or otherwise moving in a precarious way, and kiss his cheek, forehead, or hand. A dancer may lure a patron by massaging his neck or rubbing her cheek against him. When patron and dancer are seated next to each other, the dancer may play footsie and cross and uncross her legs.

Patrons are usually permitted to touch a dancer's hands, arms, shoulders, knees, thighs (especially when placing a tip in a garter), hips or waist. Blind patrons especially want touch. Lap dancing (a dancer sits on a patron's lap and dances) has become a way to communicate a facade of intimacy.

When the patron is getting a dance, the dancer tries to keep the patron feeling special. She must negotiate limits of, for example, the use of touch, and then prevent the patron from exceeding the limits. Otherwise she might arouse the ire of other dancers who don't want to be pressured by patron expectations that they do likewise, she might get fired by management or cited by the police. Dancers, bar tenders, waitresses and floor managers are involved in keeping order.

Tip Tricks

Exotic dancers may perform tip tricks to seduce patrons to joyfully give them generous gratuities. The tip tricks performed at Sirens in the hamlet of McLean, town of Groton, Tompkins County, near the city of Ithaca, New York, include the following:

- A dancer places a patron's dollar bill in his mouth and then removes it between her cupped breasts.
- A dancer places a patron's dollar bill underneath his shirt collar near his ear, blows in his ear and then takes the bill between her cupped breasts or her teeth.
- A dancer places a patron's dollar bill in his mouth while he is seated on a chair next to the stage. Then she does a headstand between his legs, her shoulders resting on the seat, and snatches the bill by squeezing it between her buttocks cheeks.
- A dancer places a seated patron's dollar bill in his mouth, and from onstage places her feet on his shoulders, and lifts her body so she can pick up the bill with her buttocks cheeks.
- In another 'facial', a dancer invites a patron to lie back on the stage with his feet on the floor. She takes his dollar bill, moistens it with her mouth on a vertical fold to make it 'stickable' and places it tent-like over his forehead and nose. Then, facing away from him, she bends over and backs up over the bill and, watching between her legs, quickly picks it up with her buttocks cheeks. She might grab it with her hand if she starts to lose her grip.

Scent

Scent is essential in the mating rituals of many animals. Therefore, it is not surprising that smell is the most powerful trigger of mood, memory and emotion among humans (Classes 1993). 'The human body may produce some of the most powerful olfactory aphrodisiacs of all' (Fisher 1992:41), especially in the groin and armpits. Apocrine glands in the skin, mouth, feet and vagina secrete pheromones that produce physiological and behavioural changes in another person. About human olfaction, Stoddart (1991) says, 'communication using chemicals as messengers is as old as life itself.' Each person's smell is unique. Moreover, humans are well-equipped to broadcast and receive social chemical messages (Weller 1998).

Scent has a long-standing association with sensuality; a spicy smell conveys the social identity of alluring *femmes fatales*. Even the Bible attaches communicative value to fragrance; the 'Song of Songs' is particularly noteworthy for its olfactory imagery that bespeaks of romance. Moreover, odours stir memories and emotions as a function of the nasal lining's direct connection to deep parts of the brain. Perfume is an important mediator of personal attraction and even love (Weiss 2004). Jellinek (1994) says that perfume sends multiple messages: 'Notice and like me', 'love me', and 'I am sophisticated'.

Music

With its ineffable quality, music may generate emotional transformation and amorous interest. Dancers select music that moves them, makes them feel comfortable and sexy, and hopefully puts patrons in a good mood and vulnerable to seduction. Sustained external rhythms can change internal rhythms, heart rate, breathing, and create rushes of emotion that sweep through the body in both dancers and patrons. Song texts may convey seductive messages. Music associated with special events and from films or musicals can evoke the memory of specific characters and their actions. Instruments sometimes have symbolic sexual associations. Seductive movements tend to have a slow rhythm, although many dancers perform to fast recordings. A club's clientele -- age and socioeconomic status -- guide the DJ's musical selections.

Illustrative of popular seductive songs DJs were reverberating through the sound systems are: 'Turn Me On' by Kevin Little, 'Let's Get It Started' by Black-eyed Peas, 'Pussy' by Lords of Acid, 'Chocolate Salty Balls' by South Park, 'Slither' by Velvet Revolver, 'All Nite' by Janet Jackson, 'Sweet & Dirty Love' by Gene Simmons, 'Deliverance' by Bubba Sparks, and 'Move Your Body' by Nina Sky (Manack & London 2004).

Setting

A club's atmosphere assists the dancer's seductive strategy. Clubs may decorate with specific themes to attract neighbourhood residents, a special clientele, or diversity. For example, a club promoting the biker culture had the walls lined

with a variety of bikes and even had a mechanical bike to ride. Comfortable chairs and couches help patrons relax. Low, soft lighting creates an environment for romance and individual patron-focused dances, whereas bright lighting would convey the milieu of a hospital operating room. Fog machines create a sense of mystery. A dancer may stand over a machine placed in the stage floor to allow fog to rise up between her legs. Poles allow for gymnastic moves. Mirrors and professional stage lighting, besides the DJ's commentary, contribute to a theatrical ambience. The DJ 'pumps up' patrons to tip the dancers and buy individual dances. Yet the clubs need to follow local and state laws as well as their own business instincts to codify and control sexuality (Foucault 1990) and learn how to help the dancer evoke fantasy.

Patron susceptibility to seduction

Dancers' seductive tactics attract men differentially. Patrons' personal characteristics affect their vulnerability to seduction. Age, income, profession, ethnicity, religion, and motivation for attending exotic dance clubs affect their responses. Of course, some men seek a sexual thrill, whether in fantasy or in reality. In a time of deadly sexually transmitted diseases, fantasy sex is safe sex.

Some patrons are lonely, unhappy, shy or lacking relationship skills who seek attention from attractive women, perhaps as a spouse once was, or perhaps as desirable as a new spouse or lover. Numerous patrons seek 'understanding', nonjudgmental listeners. Some men feel safer with exotic dancers who are perceived as 'vulnerable' in their nudity and who are not competitors or judges. Patrons may seek a refuge, a place to hang out, relax and be entertained. Curiosity about the female body seduces some patrons; lovemaking commonly occurs in the missionary position in the dark and with clothing on. Some patrons just like to view and fantasize about a variety of women and still remain faithful to one. Watching and fantasizing about exotic dancers, or getting suggestions from dancers on how to please a woman, sometimes saves a marriage by relighting a fire. Being aroused by gazing at a dancer may encourage a man to go home and have sex with his 'fat and ugly wife' (Wesely 2002:1201).

A man can feel manly and dominant when he pays for a dance without having to try to relate to a woman and risk failure. Macho males find male identity and bonding through the fantasy of being a phallic man with money. Although a patron may find pleasure in playing the dominant role by dispensing tips and fees to dancers, he may find the inversion of the male dominant stereotype by female manipulation to also be appealing. Interacting with a dancer allows a patron to show his masculinity to other patrons. Indeed, the assertion of masculine power by being desirable to women and by being able to financially take care of a woman (through tips and fees) is seductive (Wood 2000). Engaging in tip tricks may be pure fun. Bachelor parties 'educate' the groom. The pleasant environment of upscale establishments seals many business deals. Athletes and sports enthusiasts celebrate or mourn game outcomes. Businessmen at conventions seek an adventure and change of pace.



Club Staff

Many men and women who frequent the clubs seek aesthetic pleasure in the beauty and gracefulness of the nude female body. Being ravished by female pulchritude is a magnet for some patrons. Joe Slade (1989) suggests men succumb in their 'pursuit of beauty and the search for truth...The reason we worship so fervently at the Temple of Toplessness is that, for us, beauty is the Other -- the hidden profound mystery in fleshy form. Our expeditions to topless bars are nothing less than quests toward the unknown, dangerous journeys to the land of [the] exotic.' Some men are like tourists, visiting clubs as they would visit museums. They expect to see the revelation of a woman's sexual self. A one-on-one experience with a beautiful showgirl may be a magnet. A patron may fantasize and loyalty to one dancer and be a 'regular' who comes to see her frequently as if she were his real girlfriend. She feigns reciprocal interest.

A patron may fantasize his commercial transaction of a fee for a dance as a gift to his girlfriend. (Frank 2002). Both dancer and patron engage in feigned interest, ploy, and counter-ploy. However, some patrons actually seduce a dancer and vice versa: weddings have occurred. Gabriel's husband was first her patron.

Conclusion

Most exotic dancers say they are subjects, rather than objects of exploitation, degradation or psychological or physical abuse, as some feminists and members of the Christian Right have argued. Not all female dancers are successful and empowered; some have had bad nights depending on the clientele for the evening and the number of competitors dancing and what attracts a particular man. I have explained what adult entertainment exotic dance is and why and how dancers engage in the art of seduction to empower themselves. Dancers draw upon the meanings of sexual fantasy, courtship, use of space, touch, self-touch, and dance communication in everyday life. Their successful seduction strategies depend upon such factors as their patron-reading ability, creativity, grooming, costume, nudity, humour, proximity to patrons, eyes, scent, dance movement, self-touch, patron touch, tip tricks, music, and club ambience. Seduction success is impacted by patron vulnerability and willingness to participate in fantasy. The art of seduction in adult entertainment exotic dance transpires in a sensorium, a bombardment of expectations, signals, sound, and mood-altering substance when alcohol is available. Dancers milk the men for as much money as possible, building up the power of their purse. Patrons willingly submit to seductive vulnerability when they enter a club. Thus the performer-patron connection provides mutual pleasure.

However, the sexuality in adult entertainment exotic dance is fraught with cultural conflict creating a yawning, and often screaming, chasm between social acceptance and unacceptance. Myths about adverse secondary effects -- namely, the myth that clubs cause crime and property depreciation, deriving from an alleged tawdry history prior to the development of gentlemen's clubs in the late 1980s and perpetuated by the media and the Christian Right -- create community conflict (Hanna 2003, 2005, 2010b, 2012). These myths have been disproved by scientific studies. However, in representing modern 'immoral' secularism and challenging Bible-mandated patriarchy and modesty, exotic dance violates the Christian Right's absolute commitment to its values, gender roles, and sexual rules and is, therefore, a target in the aggressive efforts of the Christian Right to impose its morality on the nation. Body ideology is a key underpinning of American conservative culture (Griffith 2004).

Yet the sexual fantasy that the dancer tries to trigger or reinforce is not harmful in terms of mainstream society's values. Indeed, psychologists consider a person's not having some kind of sexual fantasies as a sign of pathology (Leitenberg 1995). Sexual fantasy may be a safety valve, a liberating possibility of self-acceptance (Neu 2002:153). Moreover, sexual fantasy is a safe form of 'sex'. Neuroscientists have recently discovered that the human brain has multiple mirror-neuron systems that specialize in understanding not just the actions of others but their intentions, the social meaning of their behaviour and their emotions. Giacomo Rizzolatti has said, 'Mirror neurons allow us to grasp the minds of others not through conceptual reasoning but through direct simulation.

By feeling, not by thinking.' Not surprisingly, researchers observed that mirror neurons are powerfully activated by pornography. For example, when a man watches another man have sexual intercourse with a woman, the observer's mirror neurons spring into action (Blakeslee 2006). So this biological response of mirror neurons is surely active in the art of seduction in adult entertainment exotic dance fantasy.

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