

**BEAUTY WORK, RACE AND AGE IN STRIP CLUBS:  
A CASE STUDY FROM ATLANTIC CANADA**

by

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## Abstract

This MA thesis aims to address the gap in research about how beauty work in the strip trade is influenced by popular ideas about race, age, and gender. It documents in detail the beauty work practices of a small sample of women in the strip trade industry in Atlantic Canada. Using ethnographic fieldwork; observation; and focused, unstructured interviews, the thesis is consistent with Ronald Weitzer's "polymorphous paradigm," which emphasizes the diversity of personal experiences and power relations by people in erotic entertainment.

This study of strippers' challenges, experiences, and strategies found that: (1) many of the women interviewed were not fully aware of the amount of money and time they devoted to keeping or improving their appearances; (2) the beauty work performed by interviewees reveals both subtle and blatant prejudices with respect to race, age, and gender which defends and privileges traditional Eurocentric values of whiteness, youth, and femininity; (3) it is suggested, although it cannot be conclusively proven with a small sample, that race (not age) is the primary factor determining opportunities to work in the strip trade in Atlantic Canada.

The interviewees had different levels of job satisfaction, self-esteem, and experiences of blatant and subtle racism and colorism. It is argued that the workplace culture of the strip club called "Pearls" operates to defend, enforce, and maintain traditional Eurocentric values which privilege and reproduce a hierarchy of desire in which whiteness is at the top. Consequently, race operates as one of the primary principles by which the relationships between the management, strippers, and clientele are organized.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

“Are you black or white?”

“Are you black or white? And you’re not fat, are you? Because I am going to be honest when I see you, so it’s best you tell me now.” These were the first questions that the manager of the most prestigious strip club in Quebec City asked me in the summer of 2011, when I called with the goal of booking myself to work. A “booking” means that a stripper is able to work at the club for a set fee – typically for a period of two weeks to a month, if the stripper does not live locally. I answered “correctly” and was booked over the phone. Note that I purposefully use the word “correctly” when describing my response, as I understood implicitly that the “correct” answer – in this context, at least – was that I am white and “in shape.” In other words, I knew that this answer would be more likely to secure me a booking than if I had described myself as either “fat” or as being a member of a minority group.

Keeping “in shape” in the strip trade typically refers to keeping a slim figure, which is most often accomplished by attending gym sessions, maintaining diets, and/or undertaking beauty sessions (Mears, 2011). Thus, I knew that if I described myself as anything other than white and slim, the manager would be likely to request photos of myself in underwear or a swimsuit in order to review my physical appearance – and that he would also likely decline to book me for work if he did not consider me a suitable fit for the club. Furthermore, if I was found not to possess the physical attributes I described on the telephone, or was deemed “too old,” the manager would have the power to refuse me at the door of the club. When strippers are refused on arrival, no official explanation is required of the managers. Instead, strippers are simply told that they are unsuitable for the club, or that they do not have the right “look.” Meanwhile, it had been made clear from the phone interview that there are certain physical traits that managers look

for to uphold a club image – and that this concept of an “image” is, in turn, regarded as a way to maximize the club’s profits. Consequently, anyone working in the strip trade has to constantly scrutinize and manage their own physical appearance in order to obtain work in the industry.

Nonetheless, on this occasion, when I arrived at the strip club in Quebec City, the manager seemed pleased with my appearance, and made no indication that I would not be able to work that evening. This was, by then, my second year in the industry, and I knew that I was marketable on account of being white, and performing beauty work such as bleaching my hair blonde and keeping myself “in shape.” Similarly, many of the other strippers were blonde, slim, and white: the majority even appeared to have undergone breast augmentations, and I recall thinking that they looked like the Mattel Barbie dolls I had played with as a child.

#### Thesis outline

My primary research concerns involve the beauty routines of strippers in Atlantic Canada, as well as how my own past beauty work as a stripper sheds light to the beauty work required to remain an active and appreciated participant in the strip trade of Atlantic Canada. Specifically, I examine what might be learned about subtle and blatant racism, ageism, and gender bias from the beauty work of strippers in Atlantic Canada and how race and age influence one’s opportunities to work in the strip trade.

Consequently, my approach will focus on what defines beauty within the strip club industry, as well as investigating in what ways racial status and age inform this definition and help to shape beauty work practices for my participants. I examine in detail the range of work required to create and maintain this beauty standard. To this end, I will consider how my own beauty work conditioning has socialized me to be aware of the preferred or expected ways to



answer the sorts of interview questions asked by the Quebec City club manager to whom I applied for work.

In Chapter 2, I conduct an extensive literature review in which I set up the theoretical framework for my research and offer a context for understanding strip trade work. More specifically, I use Weitzer's (2009) polymorphous paradigm to contextualize and frame my research. I then define beauty work, outline the theoretical frameworks used for the race and age analysis, as well as present a gap in the literature on the strip trade.

In Chapter 3, I present my methodology; this entailed using ethnographic fieldwork, observation, and scheduled qualitative interviews to analyze the manner in which aspects of physical appearance may limit or aid strippers' work opportunities. To this end, I interviewed ten women who were working as strippers at Pearls, a strip club in Atlantic Canada. Upon completion of the interviews, I sorted my data according to dominant themes, and performed a qualitative analysis.

Before presenting my findings, however, I introduce and describe the background of my research in Chapter 4. Interestingly, while I anticipated some of the responses that I received, others were surprising and unexpected. I discuss these responses in Chapter 5, including the interviewees' beauty work routines, personal stories, and descriptions of the strippers' lived experiences of both age and race in the club environment. These accounts are analyzed in relation to the current literature.

Finally, in the last chapter, I conclude by summarizing the beauty work practices of my participants, and the influence age and race have on employment opportunities in the strip trade industry of Atlantic Canada, and the ways subtle racism and ageism work to inform beauty work practices of those employed or seeking employment in the trade. I describe how my findings fill a gap within the current literature and close by discussing the manner in which my research

presents new potential avenues for further research. The political ramifications of my thesis are clear in light of the implications of the strip trade for both strippers as well as the sex-worker community at large.

### Ethnographic Inspiration

My interest in researching the strip trade began when I was working in a strip club as a third-year undergraduate sociology major. I was enrolled in gender studies courses at this time, and after several months in the business – and after being exposed to many new and unanticipated situations – I decided that I wanted to document in a Master’s level thesis the lessons I learned over the course of my new job.

Katherine Frank (2003) was both a stripper and a scholar-in-residence who has previously analyzed the perspectives of patrons in a strip club setting. Frank undertook her research on the strip trade from a participant-observation perspective – in a study titled “Just Trying to Relax: Masculinity, Masculinising Practices, and Strip Club Regulars” – and her choice of this approach enabled her to achieve deep ethnographic insights into the lived realities in the strip trade. The author’s choice of this particular approach to ethnography resulted in a highly credible investigation of these issues, and consequently has served as an inspiration to me in my own research on closely related subjects.

For the purpose of the current study, however, I have chosen to take on a different methodological approach. This is in large part due to the fact that my own experience in the strip trade has given me a different and unique set of insights as to the types of labour and standards involved in this industry. In fact, this approach is a common one in contemporary sociology, in which researchers often seek to acquire an inside perspective by gaining direct experience as workers in the industry they wish to study (Mears, 2011). While I am no longer engaged in part-

time work as a stripper, I have nonetheless become personally familiar with the industry, and have thereby gained access to the lived realities of strippers. This was one of my central research goals: by undertaking observation in a familiar environment, I was able to acquire access to more information than I might otherwise have been able to as an outside observer while simultaneously acknowledging that I may not be able to see patterns outsiders could see.

The ultimate goal of my research is to give voice to an often-marginalized group of women who are frequently silenced and/or misinterpreted by others (Frank, 2003). In doing so, I hope to help reduce the social stigma surrounding people who work in the beauty or sex industry. Beauty work is a topic that involves many women from varying and diverse ethnic backgrounds (Millard, 2011), and as such, I hope that my work will speak to a broad range of readers from a similarly wide range of social and ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, my work aims to help reveal the politics attached to beauty work, and the way in which these politics may have an impact on women beyond those directly involved in the strip trade.

### The Strip Club Scene in Canada

According to the popular strip club forum “Stripperweb” (<https://www.stripperweb.com>), an online community where strippers can exchange ideas and tips, there are approximately 360 strip clubs in Canada, each of which may attract distinct types of dancers and clientele. Strip clubs are spread throughout Canada and large cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal have more upmarket and expensive strip clubs, which are directed to professionals and business owners (Erickson & Tewksbury, 2000). Smaller towns, in contrast, more frequently possess what Frank (2003, p. 15) describes as “dive bars,” which have “less-fancy” decor, as well as lower drink prices and more-relaxed dress codes for both strippers and clients.

The sex industry is complex and includes many occupations. In Canada, sex workers are defined as “adults who earn at least part of their income through the sale of direct sexual contact,” a definition which includes those who are engaged with street-level sex work as well as indoor sex work (Understanding Sex Work, 2012). Strip clubs, on the other hand, are defined as commercial venues where a certain type of sexual service – such as lap dances – are commodified (Price-Glynn, 2010), and such commodification indicates that sex and sexual services have become goods that are for sale at market value (Mears, 2011).

Stripping can be defined as “dancing and removing one’s clothing on a stage to earn tips, providing private lap dances to strip club patrons for a set fee, and conversing with patrons to make further tips” (Fogel, 2007, p. 1). Stripping is thus unique among other forms of dance to the extent that its central features are the removal of clothing and negotiation with the clientele for tips (Trautner, 2005). These definitions therefore situate the strip trade and stripping within the entertainment industry, as well as define the way in which stripping is unique with respect to other available sexual services. Consequently, throughout the following discussion of my research, I will refer to these definitions.

Strip clubs that primarily feature female strippers are environments that embody heteronormative gender performance and gender roles (Price-Glynn, 2010). Additionally, it has also been said that strippers “challenge all social decorum by removing their clothes” (Sweet & Tewksbury, 2000, p. 326), and the sex industry is therefore often demonized, overlooked and/or misunderstood (Frank, 2007), or even viewed as being outright deviant by society at large (Price-Glynn, 2010). As such, my motivation to study this topic is a result of the frequent (mis)representation of stripping as a profession, as well as my own interest and personal experience in this field of work.

## Defining Beauty Work

Given that “beauty work” is a central element in understanding the strip trade, it is important to provide a clear definition of what exactly is constituted by “beauty work” before delving into further discussion. Clarke and Griffin (2008, p. 61) define beauty work as: “interventions, including anti-wrinkle creams, cosmetics, hair dyes, cosmetic surgeries, and non-surgical cosmetic procedures (e.g., Botox injections, chemical peels, injectable fillers, laser hair removal, microdermabrasion, and laser skin treatments).” For the purpose of my research, however, I will also include some other important aspects of beauty work such as clothing, perfumes and deodorants, as well as manicures and pedicures, in order to illustrate in greater detail the various kinds of beauty work interventions performed in the industry that may be less invasive but require more time and daily effort.

Because being in shape is highly valued in the strip trade, a significant additional aspect of “beauty work” involves dieting and exercise, as these are of crucial importance in maintaining the specific type of physique required for successfully obtaining work as a stripper. Failing to maintain these hegemonic beauty standards thus has the potential to severely limit the ability of an individual to acquire work in the labour force (Kwan & Trautner, 2009; Beausoleil, 1994); and therefore it can be said that such “beauty work” is typically pursued for the purposes of obtaining the indirect rewards of continued employment and the financial gain that comes with it (Kwan & Trautner, 2009).

## Research Context

In recent years there has been a growing interest not only in the study of exotic dance, but also in sex work in general, which may be attributable to the growing popularity of adult entertainment and its popularity within popular culture (Liepe-Levinson, 2002). Consequently, contemporary

research on the strip trade has created a variety of controversies and ongoing debates regarding the precise nature of exotic dance and sex work (Bradley-Engen & Ulmer, 2009). However, closely related topics such as beauty work, race, and age in the strip trade have yet to be explored in similar detail. Thus, because my own work represents one of the first specific investigations of the role of beauty work in the strip trade, I draw upon a variety of academic literature across a wide range of topics, to be summarized and analyzed in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework & Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Although beauty work in the strip trade is a relatively unexplored subject, there exists a range of scholarship about sex work. This literature has provided a number of different perspectives, which have given rise to important disagreements across academic disciplines. It could be argued that one of the most marked divides on the topic is within the feminist perspective on the strip trade. Feminists have long debated whether sex workers ought to be regarded as being either victims or agents, and this complex divide has been addressed and analyzed by many other authors (Alexander, 1998; Cornell, 2000; Kinnell, 2002; Weitzer, 2009). Thus in order to situate the literature on the strip trade, I begin by providing a brief overview of this debate in the wider context of the sex industry as a whole.

Regardless of the different schools of thought, however, certain consistent themes emerge from the literature, including the issues of social stigma, identity management, discrimination, race, gender, citizenship, exclusion, and patriarchy. In order to situate my own research in the proper context, it is then crucial to examine a variety of scholarship in these areas, with a specific view towards explaining how these research areas can be seen to relate to each other. The context that emerges will thus highlight a variety of common themes and potential gaps in the present understanding of these topics – gaps that my own research aims to address.

In undertaking a theoretical exploration of the role of beauty work in the strip trade, I then conduct a review of the existing literature on the strip trade in general, followed by a description of a sociological framework in which issues of gender, race, exoticism, class, age, and labour can be related to each other for the purposes of providing a theoretical foundation for my own study. Given the wide breadth of current research on these issues, this will involve unpacking and

outlining a variety of specific sociological theories to extract a number of common and intersecting themes, as well as the way they serve as a unique research topic in the field.

### Theoretical Framework for Understanding Work in the Strip Trade

The oppression-versus-liberation debate regarding the strip trade began in the 1980s, manifesting primarily in the form of disagreements between radical feminists who argued that pornography and prostitution are harmful to women (both individually and collectively), and libertarian feminists who supported sex as long as it was consensual, regardless of the kind of sex that was being consented to (Ferguson, 1984). Today, these debates continue amongst feminists, and the two poles of the spectrum are currently defined by abolitionist feminists on the one end and pro-sex work feminists on the other (Farley, 2005; Namaste, 2005). However, while the debate appears to be polarized along these lines, many women's and feminists' opinions are not necessarily wholly consistent with either pole of this continuing argument. Pro-sex work feminists and many women involved in the sex industry – including myself – use the term “sex *work*,” with an emphasis on work, when describing their engagement in sex-industry labour (Bruckert, 2002; Namaste, 2005). Abolitionist feminists, on the other hand, maintain that sex work is not merely *work* as any other but is rather based upon violence and coercion, and therefore constitutes exploitation (Farley, 2005; Jeffreys, 2008). I would argue that this assumption – namely, the assumption of total victimization – is intrinsically patronizing, and limits the ability of sex workers to define their own personal experiences.

Both the meaning and cultural significance of sex work, thus, are subject to a number of different cultural interpretations and intellectual frameworks. Here, Ronald Weitzer's “Sociology of Sex Work” (2009) is particularly useful for situating and defining the nature of sex work in the current social climate, as it examines key dimensions of contemporary sex work – especially as it



relates to the context of prostitution. In this work, Weitzer (2009) asserts that most contemporary research places too much emphasis exclusively on street prostitution and female workers, in the process defining an entire trade by only one specific work context. In doing so, researchers have had the tendency to reduce prostitution to either a form of deviant behaviour or gender oppression involving male domination over women, often viewing street work as an illegal activity and apart from legitimate work (Weitzer, 2009). According to Weitzer (2009), there are significant differences between street work and what can be considered “indoor” work, a type of sex work that concerns both male and transgender workers, customers and managers, as well as a complex system of relations between workers, clients, and management. As such, Weitzer (2009) argues that most of the current literature examines sex work where it is illegal, which in turn neglects circumstances where it is legal and regulated by the government, such as strip trade work.

For Weitzer (2009), these two conflicting viewpoints on sex work can be seen as belonging to either the “oppression paradigm” – a perspective that depicts all types of sex work as exploitive and violent, and which therefore also perpetuates gender inequality – or the “empowerment paradigm,” which sees the commodification of sexual services as potentially empowering to the workers, who can themselves be seen as fulfilling a need like any other service-industry worker. Interestingly, Weitzer (2009, p. 215) offers a third option, the “polymorphous paradigm,” arguing that “unlike the other two, this paradigm is sensitive to complexities and to the structural conditions shaping the uneven distribution of agency, subordination, and job satisfaction.” By taking into account the wide variety and range of the lived experiences of sex-work labourers, the “polymorphous paradigm” can be seen as reconciling these conflicting viewpoints. It avoids viewing sex workers as a single, homogenous group by accounting for the subjectivity of each individual involved in the sex-work industry.

For the purposes of my study, Weitzer's "polymorphous paradigm" provides a more appropriate viewpoint on sex work, as it enables a broader analysis of my findings by allowing for a consideration of different contexts and influences that affect female strippers in the trade. Specifically, this is because this paradigm neither victimizes nor glorifies work in the strip trade. In other words, by recognizing both the advantages and disadvantages of being a sex worker, the polymorphous paradigm provides a theoretical foundation by which to look at the intersections of beauty work, race, age and gender in terms of one's opportunities to gain employment in the strip trade without assigning fixed, a priori values to their meaning.

### The Strip Trade

The work of strip tease, to some extent, has been widely researched, and numerous studies have documented the power relations between strippers, clients, and management, as well as issues of social stigma found in under-regulated strip club practices (Frank, 2007). Compared to other areas of sex work, it has been argued that if anything, stripping has been over-researched (Bradley-Engen & Ulmer, 2009; Frank, 2007). Despite this, Bradley-Engen and Ulmer (2009, p. 43) point out that there are methodological difficulties in undertaking strip club research, as "accessing establishments and developing a rapport with those in stigmatized populations require substantial time, energy, cost, and, to some degree, luck." Furthermore, although both the meaning and political values attached to race have been essential to some research studies on strip clubs (Brooks, 2001; Collins, 1990; Kempadoo, 2004), they have been limited in comparison to other forms of research on the strip trade. Some studies have also included age as a factor, but not as a central research question (Collet & Trautner, 2010; Fogel, 2007; Frank, 2007; Mattson, 1995; Ross, 2010; Sweet & Tweksbury, 2000). Similarly, while studies have been undertaken on beauty work, few of these have examined the role of beauty work in the specific

context of strip clubs (Fogel, 2007; Cody, 2006; Diamond, 2002; Price-Glynn, 2010). These gaps in the existing literature are sufficiently large that it is difficult to find any substantial number of previous research studies that has specifically examined the combined intersections of beauty work, race, and age in strip trade work.

Nonetheless, a few studies exist that can shed indirect light on this subject. For example, Clarke and Griffin (2008) conducted in-depth interviews with 44 women aged 50 to 70 years living in Canada and gained access to the lived realities of women undertaking beauty work, with the aim of examining what types of meanings these women attached to this form of work. Their study came to the conclusion that beauty work performed as a part of one's job in a strip club is much different from beauty work employed outside of such a setting. The strip trade, however, was not the primary topic of their study, serving only as an illustrative example in an overall study on beauty work, thus touching on the topic without exploring it in sufficient depth.

A crucial gap remains in the theoretical analysis of the meanings attached to beauty work, race, and age in the strip trade. Consequently, the significance of beauty work undertaken by strippers in strip clubs – and the way in which the discursively feminine stripper body is prepared and consumed through racialized and ageist discourse – has not been sufficiently unpacked. Therefore, the primary purpose of my own research is to analyze the “beauty work” undertaken by strippers, and the potential ways in which race and/or age may intersect and define such work.

### Why Do We Perform Beauty Work?

Kwan and Trautner (2009, p. 50) conducted a literature review of the beauty work practices of various people in the United States, as well as the cultural contexts in which these practices occur, finding that individuals perform beauty work on themselves in order to “receive certain benefits within a specific social hierarchy,” According to Kwan and Trautner (2009), some of the

benefits of attractiveness range from better mate selection, higher employability and better pay, to better access to education and overall better treatment and social outcomes. As a result, various forms of beauty work performed by individuals end up reproducing and strengthening a social system that privileges youth and attractiveness. These authors further explore beauty work practices that people perform within different cultural contexts, as well as how these forms of beauty work create individual, social, and institutional rewards according to physical attractiveness. Their analysis is therefore useful for my investigation, as it helps to highlight the meaning and rationale behind the performance of beauty work, and account for why strippers would perform this work.

Model-turned-sociologist Ashley Mears conducted interviews with models and model scouts – and conducted her own ethnographic work based on her time as a fashion model – finding that beauty has economic value, and that this value is up for sale in the global marketplace. Her book *Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model* is a study of beauty in the fashion industry and the importance and value of “looks” (2011, p. 2). Her research led her to conclude that the ideal feminine body is “white, slim and bourgeois with straight teeth” (Mears, 2011, p. 55). In the strip trade in particular, an idealized feminine appearance is a commodity and valuable in itself, and thus particular physical characteristics are assigned value and importance over others.

Ross (2000) conducted a historical study of the Canadian strip trade in post-World War II Vancouver. He argued that regardless of how much nudity was allowed or required, female bodies were expected to conform to male-defined standards of female sexiness, with emphasis placed on having a “pretty face, medium to large breasts, long shapely legs, a small waist and long hair” (Ross, 2000, p. 239). Notably, these particular beauty standards continue to persist as

common ideals in the current literature on beauty work (Mears, 2011; Trautner, 2005; Frank, 2007) and, I would argue, these ideals also have a substantial racial element attached to them.

It is worth noting here that the concept of beauty is neither singular nor universal, but rather that its precise definition can be subject to changes across different contexts. On this point, MacDonald & Rich (1983) performed a meta-analysis by contrasting and combining results from different studies on the variety of meanings attached to beauty in North America. Consequently, both they and others conclude that ideas of beauty are acquired during socialization (MacDonald & Rich, 1983; Kwan & Trautner, 2009), and that there are certain traits which are consistently favoured and valorized over others. Moreover, not only are many of these idealized beauty traits accessible only to certain people, but those sought after are often exclusionary along both gender and racial lines (MacDonald & Rich, 1983; Mears, 2011). Over and above the existence of these societal expectations, Clarke and Griffin (2008) also discovered that many women had submitted to beauty ideals in relation to their appearance. Here, the way in which the authors employ the word “submitted” is significant, implying a sense of resistance while giving in, as opposed to an all-pervading desire to conform to beauty ideals.

For Kwan and Trautner (2009), however, simply put, the Western beauty aesthetic is one that privileges the white ideal defined in opposition to the black body; in other words, the Western ideal of beauty is racially Eurocentric and homogenous in nature. The black body is the Other and the “blue-eyed, blond, thin women could not be considered beautiful without the Other – Black women with classical African features of dark skin, broad noses, full lips, and kinky hair” (Kwan and Trautner, 2009, p. 61). As such, depictions of the Eurocentric beauty ideal come alongside negative, stereotypical, and controlling images of black women’s bodies (Collins, 1991). These cultural depictions lead to important racial and ethnic differences in body dissatisfaction and beauty work.

Furthermore, these culturally accepted markers of beauty have their origins in the colonial discourse of white Europeans (Bhabha, 1990). As a result, cultural norms and representations of beauty in Western societies tend to be homogeneous and emphasize a feminine ideal of slenderness and firmness (Bordo, 2003). Such hegemonic beauty ideals both idealize youth and privilege whiteness, as these are embodied in fair skin, eye colour, and hair texture (Kwan & Trautner, 2009; Mears, 2011). Some authors have also argued that these images of hegemonic female (and male) beauty are all-pervasive, highlighting that we perform beauty work corresponding to a social system which distributes and rewards opportunities based on physical appearance that reflects white ideals (Kwan & Trautner, 2009).

### Social Constructions of Race

That socially accepted ideals of beauty are Eurocentric has been documented in a variety of research regarding various institutions, such as the labour force, schools, advertising, and the cosmetics industry (Clarke & Griffin, 2008; Masi De Casanova, 2004; Mears, 2011; Patton, 2006; Scanlon, 2007; Yang, 2011). Such studies share in common the conclusion that youth, slimness, and “Eurocentric” ideals have become deeply ingrained in current social attitudes regarding beauty. The concept of race, therefore, is a central theme in my study on beauty work in the strip trade, and comprises the second part of my theoretical framework.

Fundamentally, race is a social construction, and one that is implemented in society in order to both define and differentiate between individuals as well as among social and cultural groups (Bonam, 2007). This is reflected in the fact that there is no biological basis for distinguishing human groups along the lines of “race,” and that the categories employed to differentiate among these groups reveal themselves, upon serious examination, to be inaccurate (Omi & Winant, 1994). Instead, in sociological terms, the notion of “race” goes beyond

referencing different types of human bodies. Believing race is a social construction “allows individuals to undermine racial stereotypes” (Bonam, 2007), as it enables us to see the flawed system under which these frameworks have been constructed. In my study, therefore, the term “race” will be used to express the differences among my participants’ various relationships to this social construct and, in turn, to categorize their experiences.

Ideas about “race” are the basis of many negative stereotypes that construct a group, and individuals within that group, as “other”; this construction is then repeated over and over, which makes it a predictable, clichéd, and ingrained concept in social discourse (Bhabha, 1990). These stereotypes serve the purpose of simultaneously exaggerating the differences of the “other,” and portraying these differences as both stable and predictable. Whatever is said about the identity of the “other” merely reflects the identity of the self that speaks; indeed, stereotypes influence the way we position ourselves in relation to other individuals. Bhabha (1990) also argues that while no one wants to be “othered” by stereotypes, there may yet be some stereotypical characteristics that could nonetheless be desirable for an individual to possess. Stereotypical discourse thus enables beliefs that can at once be both positive and negative (for example, a stripper could be viewed as being simultaneously beautiful and deviant).

Pettigrew & Meerteens (1995, p. 1) argue that there are two distinct forms of prejudice: blatant prejudice and subtle prejudice. “Subtle prejudice is the modern form; it is cool, distant and indirect,” and consists of indirect, unexamined biases such as a defense of traditional values, an exaggeration of cultural differences, and a negation of certain positive emotions. “Blatant prejudice,” on the other hand, is what is considered direct racism in popular discourse, and consists of opposition to intimate contact with a particular group. Racial stereotypes and discrimination, as such, are not always directly explicit: racism in the form of “subtle” prejudice is so ingrained within the dominant discourse that it is difficult to detect. Furthermore, “subtle”

prejudice can also permeate into assumptions about age and gender – both of which are also relevant to my research.

For the purposes of my research, here, “subtle” prejudice will be considered in relation to Tuulia Law’s (2012) theoretical concepts of “acceptable otherness” and “ambivalent desire.” In a study of Toronto strip clubs, Law developed these concepts in relation to what she saw to be the “archetype of the Romanian Stripper.” According to Law (2012, p. 139), her physical body was “other” – but not *too* other, “as she was still white.” Here, the racialized “other” is a body that implicitly threatens to collapse the white homogenous ideal of femininity and beauty, and ergo, is too different to be acceptably desirable. Law (2012, p. 140) goes further to argue that, in the case of the “Romanian stripper archetype,” conflicting desire for the “other” stirs up interest on behalf of male clientele, and thus causes them to favour women that they perceive to be “acceptably [limitedly] exotic.”

As such, Law’s work underscores that the strip trade is based on physical appearance, and that “race” is one significant way in which strippers can be categorized on the basis of physical bodies (Smaje, 2000). Moreover, some recent studies have explored related topics such as the pressure to undergo body modification (Weitzer, 2009), suggesting that the strip club environment can compel strippers to modify their physical appearance to adhere to male ideals – ideals that are often racially framed. However, while strippers may be coerced into some practices on the basis of their physical presentation, Weitzer (2009) argues that there remains at least some room for individual agency, an idea which will be addressed in relation to the effects of race, age, and gender on the performance of beauty work later in this thesis.



## “Race” and Beauty Standards: Colourism

It can be said, therefore, that one of the main characteristics that continues to separate in-groups from out-groups is skin colour. A common theme emerging from the above-mentioned studies is that a society that idealizes a Eurocentric beauty ideal confers preferential treatment to those with whiter skin, while those who possess darker complexions are frequently placed into stereotypical categories and judged harshly on their physical appearance (Matthews, 2013). More specifically, the prevalence and assertion of white, homogenous beauty ideals has created colour hierarchies, formed in both out- and in-groups, causing negative evaluations of dark complexions. Colourism, a term first coined by Alice Walker in her 1983 book *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, differs from racism in that it is a prejudice used to describe “the preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color” (p. 290).

Hunter (2007) researched the experiences of African-American, Latino, and Asian-American people in relation to skin colour, finding that light-skinned people have clearer advantages in relation to income, education, housing, and the marriage market, even when controlling for other variables that might affect these prospects. Her research demonstrates that colourism is directly related to the larger system of racism in the United States, which exports a colour complex that helps sustain multibillion-dollar skin-bleaching and cosmetic-surgery industries worldwide. According to her research, increasing one's beauty directly correlates to increasing one's “whiteness.” She also points out that skin-bleaching products, among other forms of beauty work that promise to “whiten” skin, are thriving not only in post-colonial nations, but also in the U.S. (Hunter, 2007).

Although tanning is also a multi-billion-dollar industry, the difference between bleaching and tanning is that they are not both equally grounded in racism. In *The Significance of Skin Color in Asian and Asian-American Communities: Initial Reflections*, Jones (2013) conducted a

comparative analysis of how skin colour operates within different racialized groups, with a specific focus on African-Americans, Asians, and Asian-Americans. Her initial review found that although the meaning attached to skin tone variations varies depending on geographical location and historical context, skin tone variations matter across racial categories. According to Jones (2013), all three groups operate under a Eurocentric beauty complex which equates beauty with whiteness, and whiteness as conferring social status. Consequently, all three cultures discourage the practice of tanning. When describing the different perceptions of tanning, an interviewee of Chinese descent in Jones's (2013) study said, "we tanned differently, she [Caucasian friend] tanned golden and I tanned brown.... Caucasians liked being tan because it indicated health and sunshine, whereas I accepted getting darker during the summer as an inevitability but not particularly desirable" (p. 1107). Thus, in most parts of the world, tanning is not seen as a status symbol - if anything, it is discouraged. The practice of skin bleaching, however, is directly linked to trying to gain the benefits that come with being whiter. Meanwhile, a white person, with or without a tan, still benefits from being white. Tanning, then, can be understood as a matter of aesthetics and not as racially motivated.

#### "Race" and Beauty Standards: "Good Hair"

Patton's (2006) study examined the effect of the white standard of beauty on African-American women, questioning prevalent societal definitions of beauty. Her work has found that adherence to Eurocentric standards of beauty has had, and continues to have, devastating effects upon African-American women – namely by pitting them against the dominant cultural standard of beauty. More specifically, Patton (2006, p. 32) argues that the following are the three most common standards of white female beauty in the United States which women are subject to. Women's hair should be: (1) long, curly or wavy (i.e., not kinky) and preferably blond; (2) look

styled – which requires both money and time; and (3) appear feminine – that is, different from men’s hair. She therefore claims that a greater amount of specific beauty work is required of black women in order for their hair to conform to hegemonic standards, and concludes by offering strategies for challenging the hegemonic white standard of beauty – for example, by refusing to view one type of beauty as normal.

In her study titled “Hair as Race: Why ‘Good Hair’ may be bad for Black Females,” Robinson (2011) analyzed the relationship between race, black female beauty, and hair texture. The author conducted a qualitative study of black females between the ages of 19 and 81 in order to conceptualize the value placed on hair, including questions such as what defines “good hair” and the “motivations for desiring good hair” (2011, p. 358). She found that among her participants, good hair was defined in terms of maintenance – bad hair needs straightening, good hair does not. The author’s approach is particularly convincing, as she includes additional and often-overlooked considerations, such as the influences of colonization, and the way in which black is often pitted against white. In terms of hair, value “work(s) against black females” (2011, p. 358). Similarly, white women with “frizzy” or coarse hair are required to have it straightened and silky smooth, or in smoothed loose curls.

The work of both Patton (2006) and Robinson (2011) serve as useful examples of studies that have examined the beauty practices surrounding hair, and illustrate the ways in which the current societal standards for haircare are Eurocentric in nature and exclusionary to the black body.

### Beauty Work and Race

The complexities and cultural meanings attached to women’s beauty work and personal presentation is a topic of central concern in Beausoleil’s (1994) study, in which she interviewed

women about the ways they engage in beauty and appearance care in their personal morning routines. The primary aim of her study was to gain an understanding of the significance of cosmetics and overall physical appearance in contemporary American society. Makeup, therefore, was a key aspect of beauty work considered in the study, and her research provides a detailed account of specific makeup practices, as opposed to beauty work in general. The author also discovered that intimacy with a man can significantly alter appearance practices. However, many women also confess that men with whom they have been intimate have requested they wear less makeup. The author concluded that her analysis of women's beauty practices enabled a deeper understanding of gender, femininity, and class. Thus women's makeup practices have to be read and interpreted in relation to these various intersecting concepts.

More importantly, however, Beausoleil (1994) included black, Latina, and white women in her study in order to see how women are positioned in relation to dominant white models of beauty. The author states that her study offers a means of understanding what it is to be white or a woman of colour under different circumstances. Because practices involving cosmetics are heavily influenced by social concepts of gender, race, and class, findings such as these were crucial in determining the sorts of questions my interviewees would be asked regarding customer and management preferences on makeup and beauty work in general. Beausoleil's work is therefore highly relevant to my own research, as she is one of the few authors who has closely examined issues of specific beauty work through the sociological lens of race.

Collins's (1990) work on images of black women in society is particularly useful when approaching the position of black women in the strip trade. According to Collins (1990), black women are considered differently within the sex trade compared to white women, with dominant social imagery presenting them as "animalistic" in nature. Moreover, according to Holmes (2016), the feminization and sexualization of black women started with the European imperialist

narrative which perceived conquered land as wild and animalistic in nature awaiting conquest by (white) men. This narrative not only included but encouraged the conquest of black women who were perceived as byproducts of that manifest destiny. Her research suggests that the sexual debasement experienced by black women throughout American history has led to the racial fetishization of the black female body prevalent today. Collin's (1990) theory of hypersexuality supports Holmes' argument, finding that black women are constructed as sexually aggressive and reliant on social assistance likely due to colonial histories that stratify women, portraying white women as the ideal and black women as there to be colonized. In racially homogenous settings where the predominant group is white, such as the research site of this study, this has particular importance. Without much exposure to the urban black body, in a racially homogenous setting, the black female body is simultaneously prepared for consumption based on a historically-colonial fetishization of the female black body and pitted against the white ideal. This research argues that race is an indicator of the working experiences of sex workers, and is thus related to my own research questions, whereby I aim to analyze the way in which race informs an individual's beauty work in the strip trade in Atlantic Canada.

### Beyond Black and White

So far, most of the studies under consideration have dichotomized race into black and white. Notably, however, one researcher suggests a radically different approach. Masi de Casanova (2004, p. 287) offers a study of beauty work that does not embrace the "usual black and white dichotomy of race." Rather, de Casanova analyses the beauty ideals imposed on American-Ecuadorian women in day-to-day life, consistently emphasizing the need for studies regarding femininity, gender, and beauty that go beyond the binary of black and white. In her own study, she concludes that Latina women were more likely to say that they identified with African-

American women in terms of beauty routines and acceptance of body shapes. Yet, in practice, the orientation of U.S. culture toward a Caucasian ideal of feminine beauty has led to lower confidence regarding body image and lower self-esteem among respondents (Masi de Casanova, 2004). Moreover, as there is considerable racial diversity beyond mere black and white categories, there is also much variation within different ethnic and racial groups which do not fit within a dichotomy; this also needs to be taken into consideration.

### Social Constructions of Age

As mentioned above, alongside race, another social construct shaping individual lives and determining social positioning is age. This construct is mediated through a youthful ideal, in which the management of the aging body is the primary discourse, and youth is the currency. This can be seen through various advertising campaigns that promise to fight aging and maintain youth (Oberg & Tornstam, 1999). Although both genders are under pressure to embody this ideal, pressure is particularly strong for women (Bordo, 2003).

Regarding the topic of age, Clarke & Griffin (2008) conducted in-depth interviews with women over 40 years regarding their beauty work and how it affects their daily lives. A 52-year-old respondent stated that she felt discriminated against on the basis of both her physical appearance and her age when she applied for a customer-service job. Discussing beauty work in the labour market, the respondent stated that “although the 25-year-old doesn’t have the experience, they hire the younger woman. It happened today to me – she’s tall and blonde and long-legged and flirts with the bosses and has no computer skills” (Clark & Griffin, 2008, p. 663). Highlighting the “blondeness” and long legs that the new employee embodies, this is an example of the ageist and Eurocentric values placed upon physical appearance: the ideal of beauty here is white, young, and slim. This study on age demonstrates how youthfulness is the

desired state to embody, and therefore is of direct relevance to any study on the role of beauty work in the strip trade.

### First-hand Accounts of Beauty Work

Cody (2006) and Diamond (2002) are two former strippers who have each published autobiographical accounts of their respective careers. Both authors dedicated much of their writing to describing and analyzing their daily practices of engaging in beauty work as part of their stripping jobs. Effectively capturing the significance of beauty work in their professions, these authors serve as noteworthy examples of the value of body aesthetics within the biographical approach, one that is reflected in this study through the use of interviews, as well as my journal.

Cody (2006, p. 1) describes herself as an “unlikely stripper” and writes that her experiences in an upscale strip club are “oddities.” It therefore appears that she had not come to accept the happenings within the strip club as “normal.” This may be understandable in light of the fact that Cody was, at the time, a 24-year-old from a middle-class upbringing who initially embarked on this “unlikely” career as a result of having become bored with her previous position at an advertising agency. She goes on to describe her year of working in the strip trade in great detail, and even includes photographs of herself on the job that chronicle in detail all the beauty work she performed that year in order to transform herself into a stripper: fake tan, hair extensions, bronzer, MAC stage makeup and fake nails. Her extensive effort at self-documentation serves as a powerful illustration of the sheer volume of useful information that can be obtained through the (auto)biographical method.

Diamond (2002, p. 3), on the other hand, is a pseudonym of an author who has written of her own experiences working as an exotic dancer in the “dark underworld” of Las Vegas. While

Diamond does not disclose exactly how many years she worked in the industry, it nonetheless appears that she was stripping in Las Vegas for an extended period of time. Given the stigma surrounding stripping and sex work, and especially the extent to which she documents the intricate details of the profession, it is thus not difficult to empathize with Diamond's decision to remain anonymous. Diamond's accounts of her own experiences on the job are especially useful in this regard as she describes, for example, how her long brunette hair worked as one of her primary assets on the job.

While these are not "academic" works in the traditional sense, both Cody's and Diamond's accounts were helpful while conducting my own research – particularly in validating the use of biographical participant accounts. Furthermore, the insider knowledge contained in their work is also particularly useful to readers who may lack direct personal experience in the stripping industry. Consequently, the availability of these biographies demonstrates that there is a wider potential audience for detailed studies of the strip trade beyond that of traditional academic researchers.

### A Gap in the Literature on the Strip Trade

The Eurocentric nature of socially accepted ideals of beauty has been widely documented across a vast array of studies, with many concluding that youthfulness, slimness, and Eurocentric features have been deeply ingrained in the current social discourse surrounding beauty (Clarke & Griffin, 2008; Masi De Casanova, 2004; Mears, 2011; Patton, 2006; Scanlon, 2007; Yang, 2011). These beauty ideals have been deemed western and hegemonic, ageist in embracing youth, and racist in privileging whiteness, embodied in the ideal of fair skin, certain eye colours, and specific hair textures (Kwan & Trautner, 2009; Mears, 2011). It has also been widely concluded that



beauty work is performed within a social system that distributes and rewards opportunities based on physical appearances (Kwan & Trautner, 2009).

Despite the substantial amount of research conducted on beauty work, race, and age, there is a lack of analysis on the intersection of beauty work, race, and age in the strip trade industry specifically. Although research has been conducted on the role of race in the strip trade, research on the meaning and political value attached to race in the strip trade is limited (Brooks, 2001; Collins, 1990; Kempadoo, 2004). Previous studies on the strip trade have included race and age as a factor, but not as a central research question (Collet & Trautner, 2010; Fogel, 2007; Frank, 2007; Mattson, 1995; Ross, 2010; Sweet & Tweksbury, 2000). Furthermore, even fewer studies have examined the role of beauty work in the specific context of strip clubs, despite the prevalence of research on beauty work in general (Fogel, 2007; Cody, 2006; Diamond, 2002; Price-Glynn, 2010). Finally, although a large part of the research on the strip trade to date has been quantitative in nature, no studies have looked at the deeply embodied and lived intersection of beauty work, race, and age in the sex trade industry through an equally intersectional methodological approach – namely one that combines an autobiographical/observational approach with qualitative ethnographic research.

The following chapter will provide a detailed description of the methodology used towards assessing and unpacking the many social messages and standards that women in Atlantic Canada are subjected to, both in the specific context of the strip trade and within society more generally.

## **Chapter 3: Collecting the Data**

### **Introduction**

The following study is a qualitative inquiry into the lives of strippers in Atlantic Canada. It is in part an ethnography, as its primary purpose is to analyze the systems of meaning for a specific cultural group (Bryman, 2012, p. 80). Notably, this sociological study is the first of its kind to be conducted in this region.

This chapter documents the research methods, inspirations, and limitations of this study, as well as outlines the primary challenges involved in the undertaking of this study. These include the challenges of finding a research site, locating and interviewing participants, categorizing the demographic, analyzing and reflecting on my own beauty work through the use of a journal, and navigating the potential ethical concerns involved in such a project.

### **Methodological Inspirations**

I learned many valuable research lessons by participating in Cecilia Benoit's (2012) CIHR-funded project titled "Contexts of Vulnerabilities, Resiliences and Care among People in the Sex Industry," which adopted an intersectional lens. I really enjoyed the interview process, and this experience gave me an insight into conducting qualitative research for sex workers, and specifically for strippers – experience which became especially relevant to the research described in the following chapters. Over the course of my involvement in Dr. Benoit's project, I found myself relating to certain sentiments expressed by Cullum (2003), in that I felt that I belonged to more than one world in the eyes of my interviewees. Cullum illustrated that she belonged to two worlds: the working class world she originally came from, and the elite university world she was part of as a student. I had to deal with similar conflicting identities. I am originally from the

working class in Australia. Throughout my Bachelor's degree and a portion of my graduate degree I have made a living by stripping, and therefore, have had to deal with four different identities: immigrant, working class, elite/university researcher, and (ex)stripper. At the time, I was concerned that these entanglements might lead to potential conflicts of interest, wherein I might be simultaneously included in and excluded from the strip trade. Despite these reservations, however, my personal positions did not seem to negatively impact my research.

The simultaneous sex worker and graduate student is a controversial and deviant position to hold in society. This is in large part because sex workers – unlike graduate students – are often considered or assumed to be uneducated and unsuccessful (Weitzer, 2009), and thus the common discourse regarding sex workers is undermined when the sex worker is educated and occupies a middle-class position in society. Law's (2011) study on transitioning out of sex work provides an illustrative example of women (such as myself) who have occupied such a seemingly contradictory position in society. Law's work can thus also serve as an example of how a hermeneutic-dialectical approach – one that does not divide between understanding and explaining, and develops a critical social science in the process – can inform qualitative research about sex workers. Law herself was a graduate student and a stripper during the time of her research, so I naturally identified with her subject position.

Law's methodological framework involved semi-structured, open-ended interviews with (ex)sex workers in Canada, and she accordingly built her theoretical framework around the responses she received from her interviewees. Her research shows sex work as a legitimate form of labour that can even be exciting and interesting while providing certain opportunities. She also portrays sex workers not as damaged and deviant, but as able to demonstrate considerable agency and skill to find meaningful employment after leaving the trade. Law's methodological approach (2011) did not impose, a priori, a value system on the interviewer's experience, and by including

the voices of the women in semi-structured interview form, this allowed for the expression of a range of experiences and themes that more accurately reflected the complexities of this profession. Inspired by Law's (2011) thought-provoking work, I therefore decided to adopt her methodology as my own when undertaking my interviews, as I wanted to ensure the greatest possible inclusion of the many diverse themes that might emerge during my interviews.

This research builds on Law's methodological framework to include Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a missing framework for understanding social construction of race. CRT is a critical theoretical framework which holds the ontological position that "society is fundamentally racially stratified and unequal, where power processes systematically disenfranchise racially oppressed people" (Hylton, 2012, p. 24). A commitment to a CRT framework is a researcher's commitment to understanding that some people in society are looking up from "the bottom" as a consequence of their background. This perspective is in-line with the literature review on the social constructions of race and its implications. Employing a CRT methodology to this research thus meant ensuring that the racialized women's positions remain central to this research investigation and critical lens rather than at convenient margins. In addition, the adoption of the CRT framework allowed for "the potential to contest traditional approaches to critical research especially where previous studies including the social sciences have challenged power relations without necessarily challenging racialized ones" (Hylton, 2012, p. 28).

### Finding a Research Site

Selecting a strip club in which to undertake my study was complicated. While I have worked in eleven different strip clubs throughout Canada – including four in Atlantic Canada specifically – I was initially unsure as to which club would be the most appropriate. Consequently, I contacted three of these strip clubs – located in two different provinces – to propose the current research

project. Two of these were establishments in which I had previously worked, and the third was one I only entered as a customer. The first club denied my request without any explanation; the second, however, accepted my request, as did the third club which I had only visited. Choosing between a club with which I was familiar as an employee and another with which I was not was a difficult decision to make from a methodological standpoint. However, I ultimately decided that the former presented a more viable option, as it was a larger club, with a correspondingly higher turnover rate of strippers – a feature which offered a greater number of opportunities for securing participant interviews. I also had a sense of familiarity in that setting, and was further comforted by the fact that I was already acquainted with the owner of this club (although he ultimately declined to be interviewed). Nonetheless, I did have some concerns about conducting research at a site that had previously been my workplace, and these concerns are discussed later in this chapter. In this study, the strip club site of my research is called “Pearls,” which is a pseudonym – as are the names of each participant in this study.

In order to follow ethical guidelines, I sought written permission from management to undertake my study. In the e-mail requesting to undertake my study I outlined my research methods, and took care to explain in great detail the aspects of my methodology that would directly involve my physical presence at the club itself. These included periods of observation as well as the placing of two recruitment posters in the strippers’ dressing rooms. Consequently, the manager, Dale (pseudonym), provided me with written permission to undertake my research project in the form of an e-mail response (this e-mail was included in the ethics application package). Dale was supportive of my study, and stated that he was happy to be of assistance when I was placing my recruitment posters.

Pearls usually had between 4-20 strippers working per night, along with two bar staff employees and a manager on-site. Fortunately, despite my initial concern, none of the study

participants included strippers whom I had previously encountered as an employee. Moreover, most strippers were not local residents and were scheduled to work for only two weeks at a time; the employee turn-around was high, thus yielding a suitably large number of potential respondents for the study.

### Recruiting Participants: Managers and Strippers

The two members of management in my study were recruited directly, given that they – unlike the strippers – work for a set wage, and it was therefore unlikely that their decisions would be swayed by the expectation of direct financial compensation (i.e., tips). The first member of management I approached was the owner of Pearls. He was happy for me to use Pearls as a research site, but declined direct participation in my study. The next two male employees who I approached agreed to participate. These included Dale, the general manager, and Walter, who worked as both a bus-boy and security guard. I subsequently provided each with printed copies of the interview schedule and consent forms in person, prior to the interviews.

Initially, for the strippers, I planned to use two distinct strategies in order to access my sample: purposive criterion sampling and convenience sampling. These strategies included the placement of recruitment posters, as well as approaching participants directly. My intended sample included five white women and five black or “mixed-race” women for the purposes of having a pooled sample variance that would allow for the expression of the effects of white beauty ideals on non-white women.

However, my intended recruitment method – namely, directly approaching potential participants in the strip club and handing them an information letter – proved inappropriate; known as purposive criterion sampling, the method meant I would have been actively seeking out participants to fit my desired sample. I decided that purposive criterion sampling was not suitable

due to the possibility that the strippers might agree to interviews with the expectation of receiving financial reimbursement such as tips. I thus recruited participants solely by placing posters in the changing rooms at Pearls (see Appendix A). This is an example of convenience sampling, as I am analyzing a group of strippers from one specific strip club.

I sought written permission from the management of Pearls in regards to the specific placement of the recruitment posters, in addition to the written permission for undertaking the study in general (which had already been provided by Dale). I designed the posters in an eye-catching manner, and printed them in colour, with the expectation that potential participants would be more likely to notice them (see Appendix A).

#### Placing the Recruitment Posters and Waiting for Responses

To recruit strippers for my study, I placed my recruitment posters in the two dressing rooms (see Appendix A). Dale allowed me to enter Pearls when he was setting up for a Monday night so that my presence would not disturb the working women. In order to interview the managerial staff, I placed one poster in the men's changing room (also a locker room), which was located at the back of the strip club. I placed the second poster in the smaller changing room in the middle of the club, which was concealed by a large curtain next to the DJ booth.

One concern I had was the reaction I might receive from participants if they recognized my name on the recruitment poster. This was, in fact, relatively unlikely, given that I worked at Pearls for only a short time, and I always used a stage name instead of my given name at work. Despite my concerns, however, my name was never recognized.

The recruitment process was both difficult and time-consuming, as I had to wait for respondents to contact me; this meant that the recruitment process was effectively out of my direct control as a researcher, creating a situation that was both unpredictable as well as stressful.

I received two responses within the first two weeks of posting the recruitment posters, one in the form of a text message, and the other a phone call. The phone call, however, did not result in an interview. At this point I was concerned that I may not receive enough responses in order to conduct my research. As a result, I decided to make the font of my posters larger, as well as include a colour picture of a woman applying makeup to gain further attention. Dale permitted me to once again enter Pearls and replace my previous recruitment posters with my updated posters. This time, I was contacted by an additional eleven respondents within the first two months, resulting in ten interviews. In total, I received thirteen responses and conducted eleven interviews, ten of which are featured in my study.

For the purposes of my study I use two broad categories – majority and minority group women. In line with CRT methodology, I have chosen to create the two large group categories so as to accurately understand and document the complex experiences of the women of colour in this study. Majority group women were over-represented in my interviews, therefore requiring me to exclude one of their interviews from my study in order to balance out my data. The choice of which interview to exclude was made at random, and I chose to exclude the last majority group participant with whom I conducted an interview. I discarded the material from my eleventh interview, as it was necessary to achieve a balanced representation of both the majority and minority sample groups so as to ensure that my research methodology remain critically sensitive in being able to place lived experience in its broader sociopolitical frame - race. Over-representation could result in my findings being skewed, and/or an unfair over-emphasis of findings pertaining to one group over the other. Ultimately, I conducted seven majority group interviews, and four minority-group interviews, with one exclusion totaling ten. If my eleventh interview had been from the minority group, however, I may have been more inclined to include it, as the interview ratio would have been more balanced.



I ultimately managed to accurately represent both the majority group of Euro-Canadian women and the minority group of women in my study. Importantly, one of the women in the minority group had parents of different ethnicity; however, she identified with the minority group, and was therefore included in the minority sample. In addition to a balanced racial category representation, I also sought to represent a varied age range and was able to successfully cover a range of strippers between 19 and 53 years old.

The ICEHR was concerned that describing and revealing the physical characteristics of my interviewees might compromise their anonymity. Thus, in order to protect my respondents' identities, I identify my interviewees simply as "majority-group interviewee A, B," (etc.) and "minority-group interviewee A, B," (etc.). Accordingly, there will be no additional physical description of the interviewees. The majority group is "Euro-Canadian"; all other racialized categories are classified as "minority-group interviewees."

### Conducting Interviews

My previous academic work and my past work in the strip trade are two key defining parts of my identity. The way in which they overlap is "an art form and almost literally a way of life" (Jorgensen, 1989 p. 8), in the sense that something I did primarily for financial gain throughout my Bachelor's degree ultimately became the focus of my Master's level academic work. This was both unplanned and surprising, as during my undergraduate degree I had not envisioned drawing upon this work experience for my Master's research. These overlapping aspects of my identity helped to inform and structure my interviews. In her research, Cullum (2003, p. 29) found that "these shifting positions may be connected, overlapping, contradictory, and/or coexisting on many levels." The power dynamic of my own subject position and conflicting identities was constantly changing throughout my interview process.

While I previously worked in the strip trade industry, I am no longer employed in the trade, and during this research study was wearing the hat of a researcher. As such, although it would have been easy and tempting to view myself as an “insider,” I felt that was a privilege I could not take lightly and sometimes had to remind myself of the position I was occupying. Strip work is a varied and multilayered profession constituted of subjectivities that are often far too easy to essentialize. I did not want to presume I had immediate knowledge of the experiences of my participants, even if I sometimes felt that I did. At the same time, during interviews, participants would sometimes share experiences which contradicted my insider knowledge, thereby challenging my uncertain “insider” position and placing me in the position of “outsider.” In order to treat my interviewees with due respect and professionalism, I sought and consulted various resources in the field of strip work and interview-based research so as to guide my research and ethics.

Engaging in participant observation was thus not an option for me. Nonetheless, conducting qualitative interviews yielded a much deeper understanding of strippers’ perspectives than if I had simply made assumptions on the basis of external observation. By relying on in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews I was able to provide my respondents with a platform from which to voice their opinions on issues that directly concern them. This is important because these women are, for a wide variety of reasons, so often silenced and marginalized, and providing them with an outlet for expressing themselves is crucial for producing an authentic study.

The interviews each lasted about twenty minutes to an hour (see Appendices C & D). Each interview was recorded with a hand-held tape recorder, and many supplementary handwritten notes were also recorded. The shortest interview was eighteen minutes in length, and the longest was fifty-four minutes. The interviews were primarily conducted either in the privacy of

the interviewees' homes, or – in the case of out-of-town workers – their hotel rooms. Two interviews, however, were conducted in a University library, due to the respondents' desire to avoid having their roommates overhear them discussing their work. Interviews involving male employees were performed in the liquor storage room attached to the strip club.

My primary goal throughout all of the interviews was to maintain a friendly, yet professional attitude – the aim being to enable interview participants to reflect on their own beauty work and position in the strip trade without undue interference. Nonetheless, at times, interviewees broached the subject of my own participation in the strip trade. During these lines of questioning I was obligated to uphold my position as a researcher and withhold my prior experience in the strip trade. However, at the same time, these shared prior experiences of mine seemed to cause participants to view me as a sympathetic figure to whom they could relate more easily. This power dynamic was extremely different from interviews with the owner and management, as I was used to working under their authority in the club; however, their perception of me as a student and researcher did not seem to be negatively affected by my past role as an employee.

The way in which matters of race and age influence beauty work in the strip trade was another key point of discussion. My own research interests, however, were not the only topics discussed throughout the interviews: I was sometimes entrusted with issues such as personal relationships, divorce, and death. Although these conversations were not directly relevant to my study, I attempted to be courteous, and act as a nonjudgmental listener for my respondents.

Participants signed consent forms before the interviews (see Appendix B) confirming that their participation in the study was strictly voluntary, and that they were free to end the interview process at any time, and for any reason. I also frequently and explicitly informed my respondents that they had the option of a two-week reflection period, during which the records of their

interviews could be destroyed at their discretion. Additionally, if any interviews happened to evoke any traumatic memories, participants would be referred to a free counselling service. Notably, no participant contacted me after their interview to request a referral. Finally, to ensure my interviewees' confidentiality, I agreed not to disclose the name or location of the strip club under study, to disguise all names, and to use pseudonyms of their choosing throughout this thesis and any other writing I might undertake.

In advance of our scheduled interviews, respondents were provided with an interview briefing that included the purposes and nature of the study, as well as the interview questions. One respondent even arrived at the interview with notes to guide her responses. Two interviewees requested that audio recordings not be taken, which necessitated thorough written note-taking. This, in turn, affected the ensuing interviews negatively, as I felt I was so busy writing notes that I was not able to fully engage in the interviews to the extent that I was able to in the other, tape-recorded sessions. Consequently, the "flow" of these interviews was impaired, in part because there were many necessary pauses for note-taking.

Importantly, prior to asking questions directly from my interview schedule, I attempted to establish rapport and build comfort on the part of my interviewees by discussing topics of general interest such as the weather or the décor in their living rooms. For the most part, these general conversations prior to the formal interviews made for a more relaxed tone, and thus enhanced the results.

### Pseudonyms

My participants were asked to select a pseudonym in order to enhance their anonymity as much as possible. Given that strippers are required go under a pseudonym at work – a practice also known as adopting a "stage name" – this was not difficult or unusual for my interviewees. Of the

ten working women chosen to be included in the study, eight selected a pseudonym at the time of their interview, while the remaining two women responded at a later time (via text message) with their pseudonym of choice. The women interviewed included Sinful, Odette, Maddison, Katie, Peaches, Asha, JoJo, Daisy, Kendall, and Mabel.

The significance of pseudonyms among the working women was varied. Sinful and Odette said that their pseudonyms were names they wished they had selected as their stage name at Pearls instead of their current stage names; some chose the names of their loved ones, while the remaining participants selected their names for the simple reasons of merely liking them, or thinking they were “cute” names. The working women seemed happy and excited to chose a pseudonym because this was a way that they would be able to “find what [they] said” (Katie) in my thesis. In contrast, both male participants appeared uninterested in selecting a pseudonym, and instructed me to chose a pseudonym for them. I assigned common English names – Dale and Walter – names that were both easy for me to remember yet dissimilar enough to easily differentiate between the two employees.

I transcribed the participant interviews myself, storing the transcriptions on my computer, which was kept in a locked filing cabinet at my home. The names the interviewees assigned themselves made the transcription process significantly easier; after reading through the transcribed notes many times, the pseudonyms became increasingly familiar to me, and I could readily identify the story of each stripper simply by the name they had selected. The stories of the managers were easier to identify as there were only two. I also believe that including names in my research personalizes each individual, and thus brings my thesis to life for the reader.

### Post-Interview Follow-Ups

To further cultivate my relationship with my interviewees, I offered to send them both the transcribed audio recordings as well as any hand-written notes from their interviews. This, in turn, allowed them some measure of input into their part of my research. Ultimately, however, only three interviewees contacted me to view their interview material or to discuss and clarify their responses. Initially, I expected this process to be beneficial for my respondents, as it would make them feel more included in my study. Instead, however, I found it beneficial for myself, as it assisted me in both understanding and analyzing the content of my interviews in a more precise manner; specifically, these amendments helped me to avoid misrepresenting or misunderstanding their interview responses.

I believe that for at least some of the women the interview process was a time to reflect on aspects of their work they may not have paid much attention to before, since these situations had become a daily part of their mundane working life. By sharing their stories, these women had their experiences listened to and documented in a manner which was free of judgment or stigmatization. The resulting interviews thus represented a chance for me to speak with those who work in my former trade, reflect on my own experiences, and situate my own beauty work, race, and age within the strip trade.

### Interview Analysis Method

I used the N-VIVO software program to code the information yielded by the interviews. I chose some of the codes from the literature and predicted other codes that would emerge from my interviews, such as race, age, cosmetics, plastic surgery, exercise, and diet. Some of the interview content, however, was surprising, so I had to include coding that I had not prepared for in advance. I coded the interview transcriptions by reading through them with an analytical eye,

looking for recurring themes that pertained to my research questions. Correspondingly, the themes I looked for in the data were the roles of race, age and gender, and their various impacts on the kind of beauty routines performed by the workers – themes established as a result of my literature review and theoretical framework. Themes I did not anticipate nonetheless emerged from the data, including the impact of male beauty preferences outside of the club, and the performance of ethnicity by the strippers in and through beauty work.

The categories of race and age had varying impacts on the performance of beauty work and employment opportunities. Both categories were subdivided according to their varying impacts, and according to the participants' personal engagement and experience with the category and its structural workplace effects. The category of race, in particular, was divided according to a number of different contexts in which it operated, what "race" meant to each individual in question, and whether an individual had experienced racial considerations on a personal level. Additionally, how one's racial category affected their performance of beauty work, employability, and experience of subtle or blatant racism emerged as salient points of consideration. While not every single anticipated category that emerged was relevant to my discussion on beauty work, race and age, each category nonetheless provided a deeper insight into the lived realities of strippers at Pearls, and thus ultimately aided me in a more thorough analysis of my data.

### Direct Observation

After having received written permission to undertake my study at Pearls, but prior to placing my recruitment posters, I undertook a night of direct observation at the establishment. Dale, the manager, was aware that I wanted to enter the club as a patron and take some notes on the subject of what a typical night at Pearls looked like from an observational perspective. He assured me

that it would be no problem for me to do so, and that I would blend in as long as I ordered a drink and sat toward the back of the club.

I arrived at Pearls in smart, casual clothing, thereby appearing like any other partygoer out for a night on the town. I sat at a table near the back of the club, in full view of both the bar and the stage, and readied my cell phone so as to take note of anything that might be relevant to my study. Many patrons were actively using their own cell phones and my note-taking was not overtly conspicuous. Dale also mentioned that if any strippers approached me, I ought to tell them that I was waiting for the manager, so as to avoid being overly interrupted.

The details of my night at Pearls are recorded in my discussion chapter (see below); but in general it may be said that my approach of direct observation was ultimately beneficial for my study, as it enabled me to set the scene for prospective readers, thereby enabling them to understand the nature of my research into the work dynamic at Pearls. For my own part as a researcher and (ex)stripper, spending a night as a customer was a markedly different experience than that of working at Pearls; in some moments, in fact, I forgot that I used to work there, and rather felt like I was in a completely different establishment. My exposure to this new perspective, in conjunction with my experience as a former stripper at Pearls, enabled me to read and analyze my interview transcripts in a new and more comprehensive context.

#### Beauty Work Journal

In “Keeping and Using Reflective Journals in the Qualitative Research Process,” Michelle Ortlipp (2008) conducted a study in which she kept a reflective journal during a doctoral research study in order to show the reader how reflective journals are used in engaging with the notion of creating transparency in the research process, and explore the impact of critical self-reflection on research design. Ortlipp’s (2008, p. 704) study found that keeping a reflective journal can “avoid



producing, reproducing, and circulating the discourse of research as a neat and linear process.” Her study found that acknowledging one’s own feelings, thoughts, and experiences in writing up the research helps facilitate transparency in the research process and design.

In 2011, when I was merely flirting with the idea of including my work in the strip trade in a Master’s thesis, I decided to keep a journal documenting my own strip club experiences. This journal included my attitudes toward work, reflections on customers, and how much money I had made. Furthermore, due to the extensive beauty work I had undertaken in order to be ready to work, I would often subtract my beauty work expenses from my profits in my journal. Indeed, beauty work continually emerges as a key theme in my journal. Many of the other issues mentioned therein centre around beauty work as well. For example, conflict with management was often costume- or weight-related, and conflict between strippers was typically competitive in nature, often centering on issues of physical appearance. The novelty of writing about customers and colleagues in my journal slowly wore off – but keeping track of my profits and expenses did not. Consequently, I ended up using my journal primarily for accounting and beauty-work scheduling.

In the early stages of my Master’s degree – after having decided on my research topic – I decided to re-visit this journal so as to include all the beauty products and procedures I had been using as an extra tool of analysis, and thus a research method for my thesis. Consequently, this journal comprises a list of beauty products I purchased and their cost, beauty appointments I attended, and beauty practices I undertook daily at home. My beauty work journal shows that beauty work is labour employed as part of “on” the job expectations, that it is expensive, time consuming, and elaborate. This journal is thus a critical point of reference when analyzing the beauty work of other strippers, as I am able to look at my own beauty work in the strip trade and compare it with the responses of my interviewees. This tool enabled me to reflect on the manner

in which the strip trade, as well as issues of age and race, informed my own beauty work practices while working as a stripper, the process of reflection thereby helping “to bring the unconscious into consciousness and thus open for inspection” (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 703). As a result, my journal will be key tool in the Chapter 5, in which I analyze my data and reference my own beauty work when reading my interviewees’ responses.

### Conclusion

In the foregoing chapter, I discuss the methodological framework and approaches used in my study. I elaborate on the justification for selecting my research methods and introduce the research site and work place dynamic of the strip club of study. My interview schedule (see Appendix C) was developed in a manner that aimed to have strippers from both majority and minority groups, and across age categories discuss the influence of a number of social structures and institutions that have influenced their beauty work. These discussions, however, are intended to allow respondents to demonstrate their degree of agency within the labour and beauty work that they undertake. The interview schedule for management (see Appendix D), on the other hand, reveals aspects of the hiring practices and attitudes held by male workers in strip clubs, and how both the work, and the work site, inform strippers’ beauty work practices.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that the methods utilized in this study were specifically chosen and implemented to allow for a research process that would give expression to a diversity of experiences and voices, as well as theoretical frameworks that allow for the interpretation of these experiences in a way that would respect strippers and hold their work in the highest regard. In the following discussion chapter, I present the research site, Pearls, and the study participants in greater detail.

## **Chapter 4: The Club and its Workers**

### Introduction

The research site for this study is Pearls, a working-class strip club in a medium-sized city in Atlantic Canada. This analysis comes from direct observation as a customer on a Saturday night at Pearls. In this chapter I describe a typical night at Pearls, the transformations of the strippers as they first appear in their street wear to how they present themselves later for a night of work, as well as what a night of work looks like for these women. I also describe the clientele, management, and the overall physical environment. Next, I present a demographic overview of the participants followed by an introduction of the management, their pseudonyms and backgrounds. I then follow with an introduction to the women who participated in this study, their pseudonyms, and backgrounds. Finally, I summarize my observations to conclude with the central themes that arose from my observation and the interviews, in order to offer the context for analyzing the intersection of race, age, and gender on the beauty work performed by the working women of Pearls.

### A Night at Pearls

I entered Pearls as it opened at 6pm in order to observe the strippers arriving in their street clothes. This enabled me to observe their transformations, and to draw comparisons between them as they appeared in their street-wear and how they presented themselves for a night of work. This helps to contextualize the lived reality of the outcomes of the strippers' beauty work from an outsider's perspective. It should be kept in mind that no night is "typical" at Pearls; however, what I describe is one Saturday night, usually one of the biggest nights for partygoers, and therefore one of the most glamorous nights for strippers.

Upon entering Pearls, the first thing I noticed was the smell, a mix of mould, cigarettes, and women's perfume; the place smelled musty and run-down. The lighting in the club was an artificial black light – on at all times, even if it was daylight outside. This type of lighting is known for being flattering, as it hides all traces of cellulite and razor rash while giving everyone a more glamorous look (Frank, 2003). Hip-hop music was being played loudly from an average-quality sound system, and spotlights were flashing on the stage even when there were no strippers present. I took a seat at the bar, ordered a seven-dollar vodka-soda, and sat back to watch my night unfold. Admittedly, sitting in the club as a patron was an unusual feeling, especially after so many years working in the industry.

Pearls seemed to aspire to similar ideals as that of a club in Quebec City; under the black light I could see the silhouettes of various slim body types moving through the club. There was a wide variety of bodies – each differing in terms of height, hair colour, and breast size – but common to all of the women working in the club was their slim physique. It was abundantly clear that, at Pearls, being slim was a central requirement, and this made sense given the emphasis and high value that Western society places on youth and thinness in women (Coovadia, 2002; Mears, 2011). The women working at Pearls possessed a variety of ethnic backgrounds, although the majority were white. That said, it should be noted that I cannot be sure of the ethnic identities of each of these women, as I did not personally interview all of them. Most of the women appeared to be in their mid-twenties, although this was never directly confirmed, as I was only there as an observer.

Between 6 pm and 8 pm, about a dozen strippers entered the club, many of them wearing street clothes and carrying large bags. Strip clubs usually charge strippers a set-fee for stripping, at Pearls that fee was \$20 before 8:30 pm, with the fee increasing \$10 with every hour. As such, I assumed that many were coming in before the fee doubled in price by 9:30 pm. I saw them

entering with wet hair, sweatpants, and no makeup, others were dressed in summer clothes and looked more styled, as if they arrived from a day out. Upon entering, they walked directly to the change rooms, and seemed to remain in the back for approximately two hours. When the strippers left the change rooms and started working on the floor, it was often hard to match them with the women I had seen entering the club; the dramatic makeup, hairstyles, lingerie-type outfits, and six-to-nine-inch high heels had altered their appearance dramatically.

In the centre of the club was a stage with a stripper pole in the middle of it. There was a row of seats surrounding the curve of the stage, although customers tended not to sit there until much later in the evening. Surrounding the stage were additional tables and chairs, set up to seat approximately six people per table. The majority of customers seated at these tables were men. Throughout the evening, I saw only four female patrons, who entered the club together, and stayed only for a short period of time.

Approximately every fifteen minutes, a stage show was announced, and strippers were called to the stage by the DJ. Each stage show was a solo performance: the DJ was located in the back, sequestered in a discreet booth, which itself was hidden by a red velvet curtain. Each stage show was comprised of three songs, during which some strippers would work the pole and perform acrobatic tricks, artfully showing what their bodies would be capable of if engaged in more private settings. At other times, some would simply walk up and down the stage while giving the appearance of being uninterested – here, the customer had to do the work of imagining what that body had to offer, eliciting its own kind of eroticism. Invariably, however, on the third song, all strippers were required to remove their outfits and perform completely naked. Correspondingly, the end of each stage show would often involve applause from the customers.

While the strippers were on the stage, customers would occasionally tip, but what occurred more often was that customers would use the stage show as a type of selection process;

if they liked the girl on the stage and her presentation of what she had to offer, they would approach her to come into the V.I.P. room. The V.I.P. room is a section of private booths in which customers can receive a private show – colloquially known as a “lap dance.” Such shows typically cost \$20 per song, or \$300 an hour. These private sessions are how most strippers make the majority of their income. Strippers’ wages are based on tips, earned either on stage or in the V.I.P. section; the working environment is thus extremely competitive.

During the evening I witnessed many other staff members working Pearls. There was a distinct gender and race breakdown in terms of position and work assigned; all but one of the wait staff and bar staff were women, the security and management staff were men, and all of the staff appeared to be white.

#### Demographic Overview of the Interviewees

My participants had wide life experiences and varied in age range. Of the participants included in this study:

- 10 were female strippers;
- Aged 19 to 53 years-old;
- 2 married and 8 single;
- 6 with children and 4 without children;
- 7 graduated from high school;
- 2 were male members of management; *and*
- 1 male member of management had children, and one did not.

The following section will introduce the participants in more detail as well as elaborate on the demographic overview.

## The Management

Officially, there was only one member of the management on premises, **Dale**. He was 29, white and wore a black suit without a tie. He looked semi-formal but was unshaven and his suit was ill-fitting. He seemed to be on his cell phone most of the time. Occasionally, he would enter the dressing room, but seemed uninterested in what was happening there. The rest of the management “team” spent their time stocking up the liquor and talking on their cell-phones. The only time some of them appeared to show interest was when the women went on stage. Then, it seemed as though they too were part of the clientele – there to appreciate the show.

Dale has been managing Pearls for the last four and a half years. Dale’s responsibilities at work include organizing the roster, making sure the bar is stocked, hiring and firing employees, and keeping the cash float and budget balanced. His matter-of-fact approach to answering interview questions, together with his intelligent wit, made his interview both enjoyable and highly informative. Dale has a Bachelor of Engineering degree, but prefers to manage Pearls in the evenings so he can spend his days as a single father with his son. It appears that Dale has seen it all, and in his position as both a heterosexual male and a strip club manager he claims that he “know[s] what men are looking for”:

There are different strokes for different folks, yes. But beauty being in the eye of the beholder and all that crap doesn’t really work around here. Men are looking for a “damsel in distress” – they want to save a ho. But she can’t appear like a ho – she needs to be young, innocent and helpless. Usually that’s a white girl in her teens or twenties. Hair colour doesn’t really matter, but I can say as of right now all my top earners are white, young and classy, so go figure. (Dale, majority-group A, age 29)

Dale’s “damsel in distress” analogy was something quite unexpected, yet interesting as it betrayed what Dale perceived to be a commonly held male fantasy: the image of the feminine as not just young, but also powerless and dependent. Due to the significant amount of time he had

spent in a management position at Pearls, he seemed to have felt he had calculated the desires of the male clientele.

Walter, the second male employee included in the study, is a 24-year-old security guard and bus-boy, also from the majority group. Walter had quite a different opinion on the role of physical beauty at Pearls. Alternating between his two roles keeps Walter busy four nights a week. Walter's responsibilities at Pearls include removing drunk and disorderly patrons, making sure strippers are paid by clients, wiping down the stage after the shows, and cleaning up after any spills or vomiting in the club. At the time of our interview, Walter had been working at Pearls for one year.

I remain uncertain whether Walter's answers were tongue-in-cheek, or just a display of his lack of inhibitions and openness in speaking his mind. Walter expressed himself in a different manner compared to Dale, and was not shy when discussing what may be potentially taboo for some:

Men want nice tits, round ass and a tight pussy. And they don't want it to be the same as the wife they have at home, but they don't want no jungle bunnies either. It has to be like what you would see in porn or a magazine. The girls work on themselves, and look good – they are not changing diapers and eating Kraft Dinner all day. And personality matters a lot, too: wives just bitch and complain – but a pretty young thing [at Pearls] is always happy to see you if you're paying. It's not real life; it's a fantasy – that's what these losers keep coming back for. (Walter, majority-group A, 24)

It appears that despite their different forms of expressing what men are seeking at Pearls, both male employees agree on one thing, namely, that men are seeking a fantasy. Whether it comes in the form of a “damsel in distress” or a porn actress, men are not seeking what participant Katie later describes as “what you can find walking around in Walmart.”



## The Working Women

I interviewed eleven strippers for my study. For the purposes of balancing out the sampling of both the minority- and majority-groups, I excluded the eleventh majority-group interviewee. Creating and maintaining the balance between these two broad categories allowed for a balanced expression of the differences among my participants' various relationships to these racial constructs.

The women included in the study were: Sinful, Odette, Maddison, Katie, Peaches, Asha, JoJo, Daisy, Kendall, and Mabel. Out of all the women I interviewed, three identified as black, one identified as "blasian" (half black, half Asian), and six identified as white. Physical characteristics of an individual woman are not discussed here due to concerns regarding confidentiality, so my respondents' individual ethnicities will not be disclosed. Instead, Euro-Canadians will be categorized into majority-group A, whereas all other self-identified categories will be referred to as minority-group B.

Out of the ten strippers whose interviews were used in this study, none had completed a university education. Rather, seven had graduated from high school – and of those seven, five had taken college courses. The remaining three – Asha, Mabel, and Jojo – possessed no formal education beyond grade eleven.

Relationships, family ties, and work mobility were evident in the lives of the participants and became a point of analysis later in the study. Odette and Maddison were both married, whereas Peaches, Asha, and Katie had live-in partners: the rest of the strippers identified as single and dating. Peaches was the only interviewee who did not identify as heterosexual and identified as lesbian who was in a relationship with a woman at the time of our interview. Three women had children at the time of the study, and Odette had a grandchild. All of the strippers interviewed had worked in more than one province in Canada, and only two were local to the city in which

this study was conducted. Finally, the length of time during which the respondents had been working as strippers ranged between 6 months and 15 years.

The routes the women took before entering the strip trade varied considerably, and included moving between jobs, drug use or abstinence, various family experiences, and financial demands they encountered. Their experiences in the strip trade also varied widely.

Sinful, now 32, belongs to the majority-group, and is a charismatic woman who has been stripping on and off for nine years throughout Canada, the U.S., and the Caribbean. She believed stripping was her last resort when she was fired from a bottle service position at a Montreal nightclub:

I was 23, lost my job and had rent to pay. I made about \$500 on my first night so after that it's been really hard to quit. I have quit so many times but something always comes up and I go back. (Sinful, majority-group A, age 32)

Sinful is very reflective and analytical about her experiences within the strip trade, and tells her stories in a wry, humorous manner. When it comes to social justice and stigma, however, she is very passionate:

I just think we are still as racist as we were forty years ago. People think things have changed, but they haven't, really. (Sinful, majority-group A, age 32)

This passion also extends into Sinful's openness about her drug use and the temptation of drugs in the strip trade:

When I am hung over or have a coke binge I look haggard. Then I realize the power of all my beauty products because it's like the night before I'm all up in here looking like a goddess and the next minute I am looking like I'm homeless and 10 years older just from one night of partying. Sometimes I get so fucked up that no makeup can fix it so I just have to stay home and sleep it off a few days. (Sinful, majority-group A, age 32)

A stripper who doesn't express the same sentiment towards partying is Daisy, who is 43 years old, a homeowner, and has never been married. She is from the majority-group, and has never experimented with drugs or alcohol. Soft-spoken, Daisy recounts that she started stripping

when she had moved to a new city, and while jobless, had met a lady in a laundromat who was a stripper. Daisy prides herself on her youthful appearance – I must admit I thought she was at least 10 years younger – and describes alcohol and drugs as “ageing”:

I am focused on my money, not on having a good time. The whole reason I go to work is so I can have a good time during my time off. You see some girls walk in here young and fresh looking and after a year they are wrinkled up with missing teeth and no money. Drugs, I tell you. (Daisy, majority-group A, age 43)

Another stripper who appears very young is Jojo, who is 19, from the minority-group, and was planning to be a stripper since she heard about “girls at high school saying it was a great way to stack money.” At the time of the interview, she had been stripping for six months. Jojo presents as a fierce young woman who is not afraid to discuss topics that may be considered taboo. She is currently single, but mentioned she had an abortion, because the baby’s father was trying to “pimp [her] out.” A breast augmentation and a butt lift – examples of surgical beauty work – are some of the procedures that Jojo, a minority-group member, is considering in order to maximize profits. However, she is not yet entirely sure, and worries she may regret plastic surgery in the future.

Like Jojo, Odette has also felt the pressure of plastic surgery while working in the strip trade. She admits to eyelift surgery and breast augmentation, both of which she describes as an investment. Odette, a majority-group member, is a 53-year old married grandmother, and began stripping when she went through a divorce with her first husband. At the time of the divorce, she was 44-years old, homeless, and eating from the food bank. Odette describes stripping as her “only escape to rebuild a new life.” Odette plans on taking a break from stripping to spend time with her husband and grandson. She also mentioned that she is researching college programs, and that she is interested in taking up an occupation that is not based on her physical appearance.

Kendall, 29, belongs to the minority-group and was brought up in a strict religious immigrant family, and her mother is a Sunday school teacher. Reading and comprehension are not Kendall's strengths, and she describes how her literacy affects her in the job market:

English is not my first language. Like, I can talk no problem, but when it gets to workplaces it is not easy. But when I am here [in the strip club] nobody knows whether I can read or write – they just see I can dance and look good. It's less embarrassing to work here. (Kendall, minority-group B, age 29)

Kendall and her younger sister left home together to strip for a weekend in order to save up for a damage deposit for a new apartment. She has been stripping for the past several years to pay off student debt, and to save up money in order to open her own hair salon, as she is a qualified hairdresser.

Maddison, 30 and from the majority group, is a married mother of one. Maddison strips very occasionally, averaging about eight weeks per year during the school holidays. Stripping was something she did in her late teens and early twenties “for fun,” but due to her husband's troubles with the law, she has since had to resort once again to stripping in order to help pay off his legal fees:

My man is not a criminal but he does criminal things. You know, [stripping] was something I wanted to leave in my past, because you can do it when you're young and single, no big deal. But when all the legal fees came up I just did not know what to do. He doesn't exactly like it because I am his wife and the mother of his child, but what can you do? (Maddison, majority-group A, age 30)

It seems that she is conflicted regarding engaging in the strip trade. Stripping does not seem to fit with the identity of wife and mother with which Maddison currently identifies; instead, she believes that it is something more suited to her single, younger years. But due to circumstances, Maddison has to work in the strip trade, spending half of the time she has off from her other employment at Pearls and the rest occupied with her other employment.

On the other hand, Peaches, a majority group member and 29 at the time of the interview has been in the industry for ten years. Peaches recalls that:

I loved to dance, and my dream as a child was to be a showgirl and a gymnast. Although I have taken a lot of breaks in between, dancing is a sure thing. It's fast money, and seeing all the clothes and shoes in your closet gives me a "why not" feeling. (Peaches, majority-group A, age 29)

Peaches is child-free and lives with her female partner. When asked about her experiences in the strip-trade industry, she did not express any major concerns related to her employment, instead stating that she enjoyed the performativity of the role.

Katie, 27, from the majority group began working in the industry at 17 years old (with a fake identification document). Katie worked as hard as she could in order to help pay the mortgage of the house she was sharing with her disabled mother. She understands that people are looking for a fantasy when coming to strip clubs; humorously, she stated that people are not willing to pay for "what [women] they can find walking around at Walmart."

One stripper who mentioned that she purchases many of her beauty products at Walmart is 24-year-old Mabel, a very bold and confident young woman from the minority group, who had been dancing for two years at the time of the interview. She entered the strip trade on the advice of her boyfriend, and describes how he told her she was "beautiful" and could therefore "make money fast." Not afraid to speak her mind, Mabel shared some adverse times she went through at work:

Sometimes other girls are mean to me but they are just haters. They make fun of me behind my back, but I am actually ten thousand dollars richer than most of them because my boobs are a gift from God and they paid for their boobs from the plastic surgeon. So who is really winning here? (Mable, minority-group B, age 24)

The enthusiasm that Mabel possessed made her interview one of the most enjoyable. Although she was born in Canada, Mabel had some difficulty understanding interview questions due to what she described as "my style of *talk*." I inferred that to mean my accent and use of academic

language, so I tried to break down the interview questions to layman's terms. Unlike many strippers I interviewed, Mabel had no interest in plastic surgery due to what she describes as being naturally "blessed."

Thirty-one-year-old mother-of-one, Asha does not appear to be as satisfied with her physique as Mabel. She is from the minority group, well-spoken, and admitted to using a "waist trainer" in order to "create the perfect hourglass figure." Asha's partner takes care of their young daughter when she works. The goal of her trip to Pearls was to save up enough money to allow the three of them to take a family vacation. Asha started working in the strip trade when she saw her neighbour buy a brand new Audi, and inquired as to how she had made the money to do so. The following weekend, Asha went to work with her neighbour and has never looked back.

### Conclusion

This chapter aimed to provide further context for this study, namely the socio-economic background of Pearls, management, strippers and clientele as well as introduce some of the roles race, age, gender and beauty work play at Pearls. Pearls is a predominantly white, working-class night club in Atlantic Canada staffed by a white, working-class management team. The strippers included in this study can be described as working class and low-education, with only seven having completed their high school education. The routes the women took to the profession and their reasons for dancing vary, although financial concerns emerge as a theme. Most of the women are single, with the exception of two who are married. All but one of the women identify as heterosexual. The two male employees are in their twenties and have been working at Pearls between 2 and 4 years. They both speak to and acknowledge that men who come to Pearls are looking for a female "fantasy" which they describe as a slim, white, youthful, classy, porn-like figure.

The next chapter will explore more in-depth the beauty work performed by the women at Pearls and the intersection that race, age, and gender have on this performance.

## Chapter 5: Talking About Beauty Work

### Introduction

This chapter will focus on the practical aspects of participants' beauty work, and in particular, the work of creating and maintaining Eurocentric presentations of hair and body shape, including expensive plastic surgery. Participants' reasoning for their beauty work is discussed, and I include my own beauty work as recorded in my journal along with my findings from participant interviews. By exploring the respondents' beauty work practices, as well as the beauty work required by Pearls, I closely analyze the range of meanings attached to it, and the way race, age, and gender intersect to create a racial and ageist hierarchy among strippers.

Within the strip club, there are unique standards of exaggerated femininity which must be abided by (Frank, 2003). As demonstrated in the previous chapter by Dale and Walter, the management of Pearls, the primary standard is to be "white, young and classy," as well as thin and "what you would see in porn." My very own beauty care practices, as recorded in my beauty work journal, demonstrate an almost daily emphasis on maintaining this image. This included gym memberships and various diets to ensure I maintained a slim figure, straightening and maintaining my blonde hair, as well as making sure I looked well-rested and fresh through the use of concealers, self-tanners and bronzers; in other words, I had to look young. Regular, and almost daily beauty work practices named by almost all of the women in this study when working included: dieting, exercise, waist trainers, application of eyeliner, concealer, lip liner, brow liner, bronzer, lotion, lighter-colour contact lenses, as well as the use of hair straighteners, extensions, weaves, and hair dyes. Breast augmentation, butt-lifts, and eye-lifts were also named as some of the more invasive, but commonly accepted, beauty work practices involved in maintaining expectations of desirability in the strip trade.



## Beauty Work in the Trade

Based on my beauty work journal accounts (see Appendix E) in which I recorded beauty product spending during a typical working month and measured against the answers provided to me by the interviewees, I estimate that when strippers are working more than three nights a week they spend on average \$500 per month on beauty products. When I questioned my respondents about how much they tend to spend, they often had to pause and mentally calculate how much they were actually spending. Katie, Maddison and Asha all reported that they wear MAC stage makeup – a common beauty work tool in the profession. MAC makeup kits range in price from \$85 to \$215, with extra costs to replenish the supply when working regularly. Those who preferred to build their own makeup sets reported spending \$35 and up on brushes alone, with good concealers, lipsticks and eye-shadows adding hundreds of dollars to the cost. Odette reported spending \$350 a month on hair extensions alone. Some of them even seemed shocked by the amount; it was as though they had never taken the time to actually calculate how much money they were spending. Katie explained her reasoning for this somewhat excessive spending:

When I am at work, I dress up as a ho. When I am not at work I am just a normal person. At work everything is done to the extreme. When I am being my real self I just keep it to a minimum. Also, I don't need to get attention from guys when I am not at work. (Katie, majority-group A, age 27)

Katie's concept of what she considers normal in her day-to-day life is vastly different from what she considers normal in the strip club. When she is on the job, she uses MAC stage makeup in addition to fake eyelashes, bronzer, fishnet stockings and nine-inch heels, which allows her to create a dramatic feminized look that sticks out against the black light on stage. She makes a distinction between her work as a stripper and her "real" self, drawing attention to the fact that, for her, the beauty work she assumes is part of labour she performs given her specific

employment industry. For her, when she performs, that identity – and the set of expectations attached to it – no longer applies once she is “off” work.

Odette, unlike Katie, is keenly aware of the way in which her “on” the job beauty work demands affect and govern her “off” the job body. Odette has been stripping on and off for nine years, and has since grown tired of the physical demands of the industry:

I get sick of having to be “on” all the time. Imagine preparing for your bikini body all year round: that’s what stripping is like. Unless you take a big break, you have no room to slip – and even if you do, if you want to go back to work you have to start all over again: so what’s the point? (Odette, majority-group A, age 53)

Perhaps due to her age, Odette feels managing her body to be “stripper ready” to be an exhausting full-time job with little to “no room to slip.” Thus, in certain circumstances, the beauty work expectations that govern the strip trade industry can result in needing to rigorously discipline the body at all times. Through self-regulation and other techniques, women in the strip trade industry must discipline their bodies in ways that reproduce the expectations of their employment at all times.

Peaches conformed to the idea less, however, though there were still small differences in how she viewed herself when she was not working. When I visited her in her living room, she was dressed impeccably, in full makeup, hair extensions, brightly coloured clothes, and high heels. When asked about how she felt about the beauty work expectations of her job, Peaches did not make any complaints about the labour she had to undertake in order to be “strip-club presentable.” I understood this to mean that Peaches applies and maintains similar beauty work standards in her “real” life as she does when performing.

Maddison, on the other hand, made her distinction between on- and off-the-job beauty work very clear:

Well, when I am at work I actually wear makeup. When I am home with my little girl, I’m just wearing jeans and t-shirts doing the school run and taking care of

her. If I have black roots when I'm not working I'm not in a huge rush to retouch my hair, but I would never be like that at work. At work I always have mascara, bronzer and blue contacts. Oh, and shaven legs. (Maddison, majority-group A, age 30)

When Maddison is working at the strip club, the expectations she adheres to are very different compared to when she is not at work. Maddison's on-the-job beauty routine consists of washing, conditioning, blow drying (and re-dying if necessary) her blonde hair, as well as applying bronzer, concealer, eye shadow, mascara, lip liner, and lipstick, as well putting on her blue contact lenses. As such, given a combination of pressure from management, customer expectations, and her own desire to maximize profits, she adopts a totally different practice of beauty work when at Pearls.

This idea of on- and off-the-job beauty work emerged in all of my interviews. This is especially useful when considering the emancipation-versus-oppression debate surrounding strip work. Those who propose that all work in the sex industry is exploitive and violent (and thus contributes to gender inequality) forget, as Weitzer (2009) has rightfully pointed out, that there is a considerable amount of individual agency involved in choosing when and how to perform the expectations of one's sex work. Although some of these expectations may be structural and ergo, exploitive, they are not unique to the stripper industry. Furthermore, the "real" life and "work" distinction challenges the "victim" argument; it denotes that one's work is not the totality of one's identity. Beauty work in the strip trade can thus be understood as the labour expected to be performed for the job.

## Hair

That Eurocentric features have been deeply ingrained in the current social discourse surrounding beauty (Clarke & Griffin, 2008; Masi De Casanova, 2004, Mears, 2011, Patton, 2006, Scanlon,

2007; Yang, 2011) are apparent in every part of the female body in the strip trade – but the one part of the body which seems to hold a higher significance is hair. There is a difference between the hair practices of the minority and the majority groups. Referring to my own beauty work journal shows an almost daily entry of “washed my hair, which included shampoo, conditioner, and blow drying,” with variations including flat-iron straightening or curling, or using specific equipment and techniques on particular days. When I had more time and surplus money, I would include hair extensions as part of my beauty work, extending my naturally blonde hair with synthetic hair, either with clip-ons or at a hair salon.

For the minority group, significant emphasis is placed on having their “hair done” and “sewing in weaves,” an expensive, laborious and painful method of adding synthetic or remy (real human) hair extensions to one’s own hair to add length or volume with a needle. The hair is divided into small sections, each braided an inch or more, with extensions then sewn or wrapped with thread to secure it. This invasive process, which takes between two and four hours, results in headaches for up to two days (and longer if done too tightly) and can also result in natural hair loss, as the threading of the needle damages the natural hair.

Minority-group members Kendall, Jojo, and Mabel all wore weaves, an expensive beauty work practice that starts at \$200 that must be redone every two to four weeks by either a professional (an additional \$45) or if you felt qualified, by yourself. When questioned regarding the state of her natural hair, Mabel said that she would not be permitted to work at Pearls with “nappy hair” (meaning her naturally tight ringlets). Robinson (2011), who analyzed the relationship between black female beauty, race, and hair texture, found that racially motivated beauty standards define “good hair” as straight and “bad hair” as requiring maintenance. According to Patton (2009), this means “good” hair should be long, curly or wavy (i.e., not kinky). Although by these standards, similarly, white women with “frizzy” or coarse hair are

required to have it straightened and silky smooth, or in smooth, loose curls, for the majority-group members, myself included, “maintenance” most days means washing, conditioning, blow drying and/or straightening our natural hair – not submitting to a painful, laborious and expensive two to four-hour procedure. Mabel’s comment is a clear example of how Pearls maintains socially accepted ideals of beauty that privilege a white, Eurocentric ideal of beauty that works against black females, one not unique to the stripper industry.

As all of these women have tightly coiled, coarse or wiry (nappy) hair opposed to the ideal Patton speaks of, they often opt for weaves, which Jojo described as “long, straight, and silky.” Asha – who is from the minority group but describes herself as “mixed” – does not use weaves, and instead straightens her natural hair using a chemical known as a relaxer, which has the potential to result in scalp damage and permanent hair loss. This procedure requires touch-ups every six to eight weeks and costs about \$85-\$200 depending on the length and the natural texture of your hair, and whether you do it yourself or go to a salon. Interestingly, salon treatment price varies depending how “nappy” your hair is.

The majority group, on the other hand, also mentioned hair often in their interviews, emphasizing the importance of women’s hair in maintaining the ideal standard of beauty prescribed, though it was not as much of a key talking-point as it was with the minority group. When discussing her beauty work routine, Sinful states that: “Your hair has to look nice. Maintaining your hair is a big part of dancing.” For Sinful, much like myself, “nice” hair merely means shampooing, conditioning, and blow-drying or styling already existing long hair. The difference between Sinful’s and my own hair beauty work practices illustrates the privileges afforded to those who fit into Eurocentric standard of beauty.

Unlike the minority group, Daisy uses false hair extensions – long lengths of artificial hair in her own hair colour – not to cover her hair, but merely to extend the length. Daisy’s long hair

is a pivotal asset to her in the trade, as it allows her to conform to the dominant image of long hair and standard of feminine beauty – thus resulting in increased profits. In reference to her hair-related beauty work, Daisy admitted that “I like my hair to be super long, so the extensions cost me \$700 every two months.” While Daisy has a preference about her hair length, she is not attempting to cover the natural texture of her hair. It is important to note that no interviewees had short hair, nor mentioned ever having had short hair while working at Pearls. This further emphasizes the importance of long hair in the exaggerated standard of femininity required when working in a strip club.

Although hair emerged as a theme with both both minority- and majority-group members necessary for the maintenance of an idealized standard of female beauty that emphasizes long smooth hair, the beauty-work routines of the minority-group members discussed in this section demonstrate the considerable time, energy, money and danger necessary to uphold this image. It is one that greatly privileges the majority group over the minority-group members’ “bad” hair.

### Body Shape

An aspect of beauty work that appeared to require similar labour for both the majority and minority groups was the maintenance of body shape. Western society places a high value on thinness for women (Coovadia, 2002; Mears, 2011), and Pearls was no exception. The manager, Dale, and security guard and bus boy, Walter, each had similar opinions regarding the required stripper body at Pearls. Although seemingly conflicted about enforcing the beauty standards required to conform to the general strip club standards, they were nonetheless willing to critique the women on their appearance. Dale, for his part, is required by the owner of Pearls to fire strippers if they are “too fat,” and shared a story regarding a stripper he recently fired for her weight who had been working at Pearls for four years:

It's hard, you know. Like how the girls look reflects on us. So if they look bad, [Pearls] looks bad. Anyway this white girl who I had known for a long time was looking a little messy. She had gained about 40 pounds over six months and it was not pretty. Anyway, the owner came in one night, and she was doing a stage show right when he walked in. And he was standing at the bar and giving me the dirtiest look. I walked over to him and he said, "What the fuck is that on my stage?" When he said that, I got the point that she wasn't what we wanted at Pearls anymore; and, look, to be honest I knew it was a long time coming, just my heart felt bad because I knew she was a single mother of two kids. Anyways, I tried to say it nicely to her, and I said that "we are making a few changes," and she no longer had the "right look." She knew what I meant. You can't be fat and be a stripper – it's just not how it works. (Dale, majority-group A, age 29)

Thus, if strippers deviate from the ideal body shape required to work at Pearls, they become immediately worthless. When the owner of Pearls saw his employee on stage and remarked "What is *that*?" the implication was that her physical body (which had deviated from the ideal) had no value to him as a part of the strip club.

Meanwhile, Walter was not afraid to use the words "chubby" and "beer belly" when referring to strippers whose appearances were less-than-ideal for the purpose of working at Pearls. The irony is that Walter himself was severely overweight, but due to his position at the club, he was not objectified and therefore his weight and body measurements were irrelevant.

As a result of the explicit and exaggerated ideal of the thin body, many costly and time-consuming tools were employed in the ongoing maintenance of the physiques of strippers employed at Pearls. These included a range of gym workouts, diets, waist trainers, and, in some cases, plastic surgery. What Peaches described as a "thin and toned" body, one with lean and tight muscles, appeared to be a priority for all strippers interviewed. There was much talk of the desire to "lose weight," and of the stress of gaining weight if strict dietary and exercise regimes were not adhered to. My own beauty work journal demonstrates a strict adherence to maintaining this image, making sure I went to the gym three days a week, even on days I was exhausted.

Maddison was the only respondent who did not report undertaking any diet or exercise regime, due to her “good genes” which caused her not to gain weight.

Meanwhile, the other study participants described many experiences with body shaping, including exercise such as cross fit, Pilates, weight training, walking and squats, as well as dieting, corseting and surgical procedures such as augmentations and lifts. Daisy was quite frank when discussing her exercise and diet regime, and her opinions on the importance of a slim body:

Since I started dancing, I became stricter with my diet. I use a vegetable steamer a lot, and I do Pilates, which keeps me toned. I also try to go for long walks, or sit in the sauna to clean out my skin. I think when I only danced as my full-time job I was more into my diet and exercise; now I am into it, but not as much, because with my regular job no one sees me naked. But even if I didn't dance I wouldn't treat my body like a garbage disposal. (Daisy, majority-group A, age 43)

She asserts that regardless of stripping or not, she would still take care of her body – but that working as a stripper has caused her to do so more than if she did another job. Here, the off-work and at-work expectations blur as the beauty work required by the strip trade comes up against “real” life just like they did with 53-year old Odette, who also reported being exhausted from her “on” the work expectations. Because the strip trade’s version of the ideal is a tight and thin body, the maintenance of that ideal is necessary to increase the value of one’s labour. At Daisy’s regular job, nobody sees her naked, so it is not as much of a concern.

Odette explains that due to her age (53 years old), the pressure for her to keep a thin body at work is very high. She states that if she was younger it “wouldn’t matter much if I packed on a few pounds,” but due to Odette’s age she feels as though she is under constant scrutiny, and that she must adhere to beauty standards even more so than her younger colleagues. She claims that the strip club management will “find any excuse” to fire her due to her age. Here, Odette’s employment precarity in relation to the ageist beauty work standards of her workplace are



explicit; due to a professional emphasis on young bodies, she is made to feel disposable, possibly because there are so many younger women available to take her place (Law, 2011).

It is important to note here that “subtle” prejudices are so ingrained in our dominant culture that they permeate into assumptions about age and gender. Odette and Daisy’s example directly speaks to the way ideals of youth govern and regulate her “aging” body in relation to beauty work practices – much more so than that of her younger colleagues. These prejudices are so powerful that Odette feels her job security to be threatened, adding to the vulnerability she already feels at work.

### Surgery

For Odette, part of rebuilding her life after her divorce has been surgical beauty work. Odette believes her breast augmentation increased her profits, and she has undergone an eye-lift – which she described as “invasive and painful” – but she simultaneously characterized as “an investment.” Four of the majority-group respondents reported having had undergone breast augmentations, while for minority-group members Asha and Kendall body-modification practices took riskier routes. Recent studies have explored the pressures to undergo body modification (Weitzer, 2009) in sex work, suggesting that the strip club environment can compel strippers to modify their physical appearance to adhere to male ideals – ideals that are also racially framed, as will be explored later in this section.

Majority-group member Sinful appears to be confident about her choice to have undergone her breast augmentation:

I’m not going to lie – I used to make big money. But after I got my boob job [breast augmentation], my profits went through the roof. There are some guys who like flat-chested girls, but they are usually pedophiles. Not only did my boob job make me more money in the club, but it just made me feel so much hotter even in real life. I love them. I have had them for seven years, though I am going to have

to get them redone soon. But if I had never been a stripper, getting my boobs done probably would never have even crossed my mind. (Sinful, majority-group A, age 32)

Similarly, Daisy, Peaches, and Odette do not seem to regret their respective breast augmentations either. I would argue that the pressure of maintaining an exaggerated standard of femininity is why they chose to undergo these procedures. As confirmed by Sinful, for strippers, breast size can be a significant determinant of earning potential. A dancer's salary has been found to be directly proportional to her breast size, and breast augmentation has shown to increase a dancer's earning potential by almost a hundred percent. As they may be rewarded for physically altering their bodies through invasive surgery, they may feel pressured to have their body altered in order to maximize earning potential.

Minority-group member Asha had not undergone a breast augmentation; however, she uses the "waist training" girdle technique:

Yes, I go to the gym a few times a week, and I wear a waist trainer, which gives me the perfect hourglass figure. But they are bad to wear if you want more kids because they affect your organs. (Asha, minority-group B, age 31)

A waist trainer is a type of girdle which reduces your natural waist size by constricting the abdomen and ribcage, thereby creating a slimmer figure and accentuating curves. She also disclosed that she would continue to use it even if she was not a stripper, in order to "keep a nice body to keep my man." Asha, who is a mother of one and a member of the minority-group, never discussed whether or not she was interested in having more children; however, even potential organ damage did not deter her if it meant she would be able to achieve a perfect hourglass figure, one often associated with exaggerated standards of femininity. This shows the value of a desired type of body shape and the pressure to uphold the beauty work standards have been so internalized that she is willing to comply with them – even at the expense of her own health or

potential fertility. Asha's answers would suggest that the workplace hazards of the strip trade include considerable health risks.

Another participant who was willing to risk her safety and health in the name of beauty was Kendall. Kendall reports that people in the club would tell her she had a "small ass for a black girl," which resulted in Kendall flying to South America to undergo a "Brazilian butt-lift." This procedure involves a fat transfer from the stomach region to the buttocks. Consuming a high-calorie diet of between 3,000 to 3,500 calories for three months was required for Kendall to create the fat which she then had transferred, and the recovery process included significant pain and bruising. She is happy that she underwent the procedure because now she "can wear anything." Yet, similar to many other respondents, Kendall is not preoccupied with beauty work during her time off:

When I am going to class I don't care how I look. I already have a boyfriend and my focus there is my schoolwork not getting attention. I just go for comfort and let my skin breathe. But I still maintain basic things like my hair and nails. I just don't style it unless I'm going to an event or something like that. At work I have full hair, makeup, matching outfits, nice nails, earrings and jewelry. (Kendall, minority-group B, age 29)

The presence of a man as a boyfriend or husband appears to alter one's beauty work. The significance of such intimacy with a man was also discussed in Beausoleil's (1994) study on the role of makeup. According to Beausoleil (1994), intimacy with a man can significantly alter one's appearance practices, as women alter their makeup practices to conform to the expectations of desirability on behalf of their partners. Kendall is not too concerned about her personal presentation outside of work because she *already* has a boyfriend, whereas Asha said she is required to undertake beauty work in order to "keep [her] man." Thus, it appears that Kendall views beauty work practices as a way of attracting a potential mate, whereas Asha views them as a tactic for maintaining an ongoing relationship with a mate. Similarly, Beausoleil (1994) also

had conflicting findings in her study; she found that many women wore more cosmetics around men, but that ironically many intimate male partners asked these same women to wear less makeup.

It is important to note here that the performance of beauty work with regards to body shape expectations seemed to be of concern to both majority- and minority-group women, although to different ends. Majority-group participants Odette, Sinful, Peaches, and Daisy all opted for the breast augmentation procedure, with the 53 year-old Odette having also undergone eye-lift surgery. Kendall, however, was the only minority-group member that had chosen to undergo plastic surgery - a painful Brazillian butt-lift – but in order to conform to the expectations of the black female ideal. Interestingly, although all other beauty work practices (hair and make up) performed daily, weekly, and monthly by the minority-group members conform to the white ideal, in the case of plastic surgery, minority-group participants did not seem as inclined to undergo plastic surgery in order to conform to white beauty ideals. By contrast, even when exercised as a choice, minority-group member Kendall seemed to use the procedure to conform to, or emphasize, a black body ideal. This could be due to the racially homogenous setting of Pearls where an exaggerated female black body may be fetishized but still prepared for consumption through the white beauty ideal.

While strippers may be coerced into some practices on the basis of their physical presentation, both Weitzer (2009) and Kwan and Turner (2009) argue that women's agency is central to these practices and constitute a mode of regaining control of their bodies. Most of participants included in this section reported feeling good about their decision to undergo body modification and their respective reasons for choosing to make this “investment.”

The range of beauty work practices performed by the women at Pearls suggest that the ideal femininity articulated within the strip trade is one with a very specific adherence to

hegemonic beauty ideals that both idealize youth, privilege whiteness – as embodied in fair skin, certain eye colours and hair textures (Kwan & Trautner, 2009; Mears, 2011) – and emphasize thinness (Coovadia, 2002; Mears, 2011). The unique standards of exaggerated femininity abiding within the strip trade such as insistence on long silky hair, a toned thin body, big breasts and a curvy figure highlight the ageist, genderist and Eurocentric values placed on physical appearance. Furthermore, in accordance with Kwan & Trautner (2009), I would argue that these white beauty ideals are also defined in opposition to the black body. The way in which ageism, genderism and racism operate within the club will be explored further in the following sections.

#### Age in the Club

A gendered constraint that can drastically limit women's acceptance, participation, and earnings in the strip trade is age. My own participants ranged from 19-53 years old; however, the majority of my sample were in their late twenties, or very early thirties. Only Odette and Daisy were over 40 when we met for this study.

All the strippers I interviewed mentioned the importance of “anti-aging” practices and “looking young.” Management also stressed the importance of strippers being young. Stripping under thirty was viewed by management as “normal” and “acceptable,” but Dale stated that:

When you meet a girl who is, say, in her late thirties, or forties even, you have to ask yourself what went wrong. For sure she has some messed up story. But, hey, if they are here on time and making us money I'm not complaining. And I would prefer a forty-year-old MILF [Mother I would like to F\*ck] than a twenty-year-old cow. (Dale, majority-group A, age 29)

Dale's comments reflect on the value of a thin body over the significance of the age of a stripper. Old and thin holds a higher “bodily capital” (Mears, 2012) than young and fat; thus, the pursuit of a thin body in the strip trade appears to be a top priority. Hence the diets, exercise regimes, and even plastic surgery seem to be necessary labour to maintain employment in the strip trade.

Sinful, who was thirty-one at the time of the interview, was proud to tell me how she lied about her age and how people always believed she was much younger. When I asked her if she has ever been refused by management to work at a club, however, she froze up, blushed, and said:

Recently, in the past, say, six months, my age is becoming “a thing.” I went to Ottawa with my friend around Christmas time to work, and we were actually booked by an agent, so the club was expecting us. We flew there and everything, and she was from another province to me so it was a big hassle to organize. Anyways, when we rocked up to the club the management said we had not been booked and we could not work. When we left in a taxi the agent called my friend’s cell phone and said she could but that I couldn’t. She asked why, and he said that the management had called him as soon as I left and said that I looked “too old.” Maybe my glory days are over? Anyway I don’t want to talk about this anymore because it’s kind of embarrassing. (Sinful, majority-group A, age 31)

As noted by van Schie (2012), not many people enjoy the physical downsides of the aging process: “the wrinkled skin, the loss of muscle tone, the sagging body” (p. 22). However, the strip trade is a world where the process of aging is made unbearable. In the current “youth-obsessed” culture (Mears, 2012), age has become a central focus; this obsession is further exaggerated in strip clubs, as it has the power to create both a loss of self-respect and a loss of wages – or even the loss of a job.

The desire for older woman at Pearls is viewed by 29-year old Kendall as a “fantasy.” She labels older women as “cougars,” and when asked what men are looking for at Pearls she claims:

That’s hard to answer. I think most men want young girls – unless they are looking for some type of cougar fantasy. I think a good figure and a well-presented lady is what men are looking for. (Kendall, minority-group B, age 29)

By “older,” Kendall was referring to women who were over forty, like Odette and Daisy. Kendall also had some insightful opinions about older women who had been working in the strip trade for extended periods of time. She referred to this group in derogatory term as “lifers”:

I have been dancing on and off for a while [five years], but I ain’t no lifer. I have ambitions and goals. I am in college right now. You can pick lifers. You can pick

who is a lifer and who is going to be a lifer. A lifer is an old bitch who has maybe had one job before stripping – say, at a fast food joint – and has been in the industry twenty years plus. Usually they don't have kids, but if they do it's with one or more baby-daddies, and they never get married. And picking who is going to be a lifer? Well that's easy. It's a young ho who probably has had a pimp and is not in school and gets caught up in the partying and lets life pass her by. In this industry the time can fly. When you throw coke and booze into the mix, a week can feel like a day, and yeah, that's how lifers are created. One day they are nineteen, and the next day they are a washed-up 40-year-old. That will never be me. (Kendall, minority-group B, age 29)

Kendall displays what Law (2012, p. 43) describes as “ambivalence to the role” of the stripper. Kendall's response to those who are “lifers” betrays a conflicting and negative representation of a role she presently occupies, unable to settle on either a positive or negative opinion of the oppression and pressures she faces. In relation to stripping, “lifer” implies a double stigma: the whore stigma attached to a life-long profession of sexual work, and the stigma of class for not having been able to rise from this type of labour. Kendall was happy to be working as a stripper temporarily, yet she constantly reminded me of her goals and ambitions outside of the trade. I would further argue that there is also an ageist stigma attached to the concept of a “lifer” in the strip trade: stripping is a presumably temporary young woman's game, and the goal is to get out, not age there. The way Kendall spoke about herself and “lifers” served to position herself against “lifers,” thus labeling them as an “other.” Implicit in her statement on “lifers” is the idea of the ideal stripper as someone who's there temporarily, using strip work as a limited-time means to an end, and not as a permanent professional location. Thus, those who have limited possibilities to perform labour other than strip work, or actively choose it, and stay “too long” are often deemed less worthy.

## Gender in the Club

My interviewees made it very clear to me that strippers were well aware of the gendered expectations in the strip club, which is consistent with many studies, including those of Bordo (2003), Mears (2011) and Law (2012). The women understood that they were the sexualized objects of the heterosexual male gaze (Mulvey, 1975), and that the purpose of their beauty work and appearance was to please the male clientele, which resulted in drink purchases, tipping, and lap dances – and that this maximized profits for both themselves, as well as the club as a whole. Jojo said that at work she could not really be herself because she was always a “tomboy” in the way she behaved:

I like to look good, but my personality does not match how I look. I always swear, yell, burp, and I just don't care what anyone thinks. If someone makes me mad I will even smack them. That's why I have to work here at Pearls because I have two assault charges and here they don't ask for no criminal record check. So many girls come here 'cause they all been in trouble for something and can't get hired anywhere else. Oh yeah, so anyway, like here I have to act all girly and sweet, because that's what makes me the most money and makes the guy feel like he is in control. But if a customer disrespects me then I show him who the fuck I really am. I can be cute and give them that dream girl and whatever makes their dick hard. But sometimes it goes to their heads, so that's when they've got to back up and get a fuckin' reality check, 'yo'. (Jojo, minority-group B, age 19)

Jojo expresses dominant ideas of hegemonic femininity as oppressive in her account of her personality traits in relation to her physical body. She directly explains her disdain for performing gender through the means of her personality, but also recognizes that it is necessary in order to maintain her wages and tips. As argued by Price-Glynn (2010), strip clubs that primarily feature female strippers are environments that embody heteronormative gender performance and gender roles. Thus Jojo's “tomboy” attitude was not appealing to customers. Pearls reinforced Jojo's need for hegemonic femininity in both her personality and appearance. In turn, whether she liked it or not, Jojo was required to “do” a hyper-stylized, heteronormative performance of gender in line with the standard of exaggerated femininity upheld in the club.



Apart from Peaches, my respondents were a heterosexual sample. Most strippers held strong beliefs about what it meant to be a “man” versus what it meant to be a “woman.” Odette describes the difference as:

Men are like dogs, you have to rub them on their tummy and they are instantly aroused. Women are like ice cream; you have to make us melt. Like, men are just so visual and dumb. They are so physical. They see a big pair of tits and they instantly like the girl; but women, we need more of a mind-fuck. Yeah, the guy has to be cute and all that, but women are not so visual like men. Like, men make so many assumptions about women, like ok she has big tits so she will do my laundry and give me sex whenever I want. And when you aren't what they imagine, they call you a bitch. It's the same at work; men see you, and they have already decided what kind of woman you are. Usually it's someone they want to control, so you have to make them believe they are in control, but really you are because you are the one making them empty their pockets. (Odette, majority-group A, age 53)

It appears that Odette believes in biological differences between men and women, yet she simultaneously discusses how she has to act and pretend to be what customers desire, which does not come naturally. Odette, however, does not mind playing this role in order to “empty her clients' pockets.” Much like Odette, most interviewees appeared quite convinced of knowing what men want, and what role women have to play in order to satisfy their desires.

In their 2009 study which explored beauty practices as work that individuals did in order to elicit certain benefits within a specific social hierarchy, Kwan and Turner, consistent with Weitzer's (2009) polymorphous paradigm, found that individuals performing normative expectations of gender within certain cultural contexts were far from simply cultural dopes. Instead, they found that individuals negotiate their experiences within structural constraints with considerable amount of agency and employ beauty work in the active pursuit of some goal, whether it be happiness, success, or even resistance.

During my own time working as I stripper, I recall exaggerating my own femininity in order to – like Odette – “empty clients” pockets.” I always found that the more passive and shy I

acted when one-on-one with a customer, the more interested the clients would be. For example, from my own experience, many customers who initially appeared “macho” and traditionally manly later would confide in me that their wives were having affairs, that they felt emasculated, or that they were feeling inferior at work. It was almost as though the men were seeking strippers to play a role which they perhaps did not have access to at home or in society. I would in turn conform or exaggerate the prescriptive qualities of this role in order to maximize my profits.

Mabel and Katie referred to overtly masculine men as both “pigs” and “assholes.” Katie, from the majority group, felt very tired of the “gendered expectations” (Entwistle & Mears, 2013) at Pearls. She explained that she felt like the men did not view her as a “human being” but instead as a “robot”:

Once a customer actually asked me if they keep us here. I wasn't really sure what he meant, and he was paying good too. I just went along with it. I said “Yeah, they keep us in the attic.” He did not even seem surprised. He just said “oh, ok, so they let you out for work and when you have to do things.” What a sicko. Another time I was working in a different club and a customer told me how he would love to lock me up and keep me in his basement. I swear men are all sick. They need healing. (Katie, majority-group A, age 27)

The comments made by this last customer reflect the extreme objectification of the strippers working at Pearls, which some suggest dehumanizes them and may subjugate possible agency. This dehumanization of women was frequently raised in Ashley Mears' (2011) work on fashion models, but the somewhat disturbing comments described by my participants take these objectifications to the extreme. Such comments, however, are not representative of all exchanges between clients and strippers at Pearls, or at strip clubs in general and do not take into account the agency involved in resisting and subverting these roles as mentioned by Kwan and Turner. Thus, my work remains framed in the polymorphous paradigm: “Sensitive to complexities and to the structural conditions shaping the uneven distribution of agency, subordination, and job

satisfaction, it recognizes the possibilities for both the oppression and the emancipation of women in the strip trade” (Weitzer, 2009, p. 205).

### Race, Identity, and Racialized Experiences

As I have now established, strippers are required to perform heteronormative gender and hypersexuality at Pearls. Race constitutes another significant performative aspect of strippers’ identities. As Law (2011, p. 33) argues, “racism, classism, ethnocentrism, and the way in which they intersect with gender and stigma, form the hierarchy of desire at strip clubs.” In addition, Law (2011) argues that this hierarchy creates an expectation on the part of the customers. Strip clubs in turn maintain and reproduce this hierarchy of desire through their hiring practices.

In Law’s (2011) study on transitioning out of sex work, she recalls her own experiences of stripping in downtown Toronto. She explained that she would often play up her Finnish ancestry, because being Euro-Canadian appeared to be boring and unappealing for customers. Thus, by exaggerating her non-Canadian heritage, Law (2011) became more “exotic,” generating conflicting desire for the “other” through her “Finnishness,” thereby stirring up interest from her male clientele – but, crucially, only insofar as she is acceptably and limitedly exotic, or white.

In contrast, Odette said she found being Euro-Canadian an advantage, as that is what she believed “professional men are looking for.” Law (2012) argues that Romanian and other Eastern European strippers are viewed as ideal in the strip trade by both clientele and management, as they are “exotic,” but still white-skinned. Both of these examples speak to a hierarchy of desire where a “limitedly exotic” white body constitutes customer expectations.

This preference is representative of Eurocentric beauty ideals of whiteness that saturate Western culture, with the simultaneous “ambivalent desire” for the “exotic other” (Law, 2012, p. 39). As such, reproductions of the ideal stripper as Eurocentric constitute a defense of traditional

values, namely a white homogenous beauty ideal, and an exaggeration of cultural differences (Pettigrew & Meerteens, 1995) that come with negative, stereotypical, and controlling images of black women's bodies.

Sinful is from the majority group and has never been a victim of racism before. However, she has been witness to the racist hiring practices of a strip club in the province of Ontario:

I have a very good friend who is black. She is a very nice person, and she is very straight. I went to a club with her in Ontario. The clientele was so mean and racist that they wouldn't even look at her in the face. It hurt me a lot because my friend was hurt. We say society has improved but it seems half the population is still as racist as we were forty years ago. She worked a couple of days and never went back, and I stayed there for over a year. (Sinful, majority-group A, age 32)

Law (2012) also observed similar circumstances while she was in the trade, and recognized that the majority of strippers are white, and that there are often less than five percent women of colour working at a club. As we can see in Sinful's story, this racial unbalance is no coincidence. Law (2012) is of a white Euro-Canadian background and, similar to Sinful, was only subject to these racist hiring politics by being a witness to a black colleague's unsuccessful attempt at being hired by a particular club. Law stated that after this incident, "the manager apologized to her [friend], saying that she was beautiful, but that they had already filled their hiring quota for black women and the owner would not allow any more" (p. 41). Similarly, when asked about race, Mabel asserted "no one has ever said anything bad about me being white."

The similarities between Sinful and Law's chronicles are striking. Over the course of my interview with Jojo, she recounted another story of strip club hiring practices, this time in Montreal:

Well, I went to work at a club in Montreal, and when I arrived, the manager told me there were too many black girls. So if that isn't racist I don't know what is. I just left and told him to go and fuck himself. (Jojo, minority-group B, age 19)

The preceding stories all serve as examples of the way racist hiring practices defend and privilege a hierarchy of desire in which the limitedly exotic white body is at the top. White strippers are afforded the privilege of comfortably exploiting a limitedly exotic “otherness;” while, defined in direct opposition to the white body, the black female body threatens to collapse the hierarchy of desire and results in exclusion. The idealized Eurocentric beauty ideal, thus, becomes overt racism manifesting itself in the rejection of the black female body in preference to those perceived as white. This preference may extend to staffing practices as well. Personally, during my time as a strip trade worker in various provinces, I have never seen nor met any member of management of colour at a strip club, apart from a DJ, which is not really considered a managerial position. This under-representation of black staff and management further solidifies the Eurocentric structure of the strip club. By maintaining the racial order within managerial positions, an all-white decision-making sector continues to ensure the reproduction of desire that privileges white bodies.

Asha’s blasian mixed racial heritage is a frequent talking point with customers, and her reactions to questions surrounding race and racism differ significantly from the other women represented in the minority group:

I just focus on my money and stay out of the drama. No one has ever been racist to me. I see more racism between girls. The black girls sit with the black girls and white sit with white. Because I am mixed it is not really a problem for me but I feel more comfortable with black girls. (Asha, minority-group B, age 31)

Asha is not able to be pigeon-holed into the dichotomy of black and white, and this confusion brings attention to the complexities of race that are often ignored. These complexities appear to be misunderstood by some of the strippers themselves; when questioned about race, Jojo explained that race means “when you don’t treat someone good because of what they are born.” This might be because Jojo also mentioned that she has been denied work in high-end clubs in

Toronto because she is “too dark-skinned,” and that they are only willing to hire a limited number of “light-skinned” or mixed-race women.

These experiences illustrate how a racial hierarchy of desire, maintained, reproduced and I would argue, actively defended in the strip trade in Ontario through racist hiring practices, has created colour hierarchies where dark complexions are perceived negatively. Hunter’s (2007) study of the experiences of African-American, Latino, and Asian-American people in relation to skin colour found that light-skinned people have clearer advantages in relation to income, education, housing, and the marriage market, even when controlling for other variables that might affect these prospects. Her research demonstrates that these colour hierarchies directly related to the larger system of racism are formed and enacted not just in dominant groups, but also within the racialized communities themselves, who also afford preferential treatment to lighter-skinned people.

Mabel goes on to describe her experiences of being a minority-group woman in the strip trade. Her experience points to the larger issues of colourism within the strip trade and how the racial hierarchy operates within the strip club:

If something gets stolen or something goes wrong, the staff will always try to pin it on the black girls. Well, the managers are white, so they favour their own, you know? Some clubs won’t take dark-skinned black girls at all – luckily I am light-skinned, so I can pass as mixed. (Mabel, minority-group B, age 24)

Mabel is acutely aware of the racial hierarchy prevalent in the club. Here, she recognizes her “luck” being born “light-skinned,” in the process acknowledging the privileges that come with “whiteness.” Moreover, despite any beauty work efforts or personal characteristics, negative perceptions of dark-skinned complexions – colourism – remains prevalent, and all advantages fall on those who are “light-skinned.” The closer you are to the top of the racial hierarchy – in other words, white – the more privileges you are afforded.

Respondents from the minority group shared more negative comments about how their racial identity informed their experiences at Pearls. Jojo was open enough to share one specific experience:

Once I was wearing a headscarf, and this white girl who was so in love with herself called me “Aunt Jemima,” like that old black woman on the pancake syrup bottle. I took that as her talking down to me. No one like called me a ni\*\*\*\* to my face, but I have had guys reject me to go for a dance, and then next minute they are all over the white girl in the back. I take that as racism because usually I am in better shape than the white girl they pick. They just chose her because they don’t want to try a black girl no matter how good I am looking. (Jojo, minority-group B, age 19)

Jojo’s experience speaks yet to another way in which the hiring practices within the club constitute a defense of traditional values and an exaggeration of cultural differences (Pettigrew & Meerteens, 1995). Aware of the racial hierarchy of desire within the club, and more importantly, her own privileged position within that hierarchy, the white stripper when relating to Jojo reproduced the values built into the economic structure of the club. Thus the hierarchy of desire in the club – reproduced, maintained and defended by the management through hiring practices – structures the relationships among the strippers themselves.

Racism among strippers is a topic which came up in more than one interview. Katie, who is from the majority group, acknowledges that:

I think management looks at race as important because they kind of split girls into categories. Well, actually, the girls split themselves up too. For example, the white girls sit with the white girls, and they don’t really mix with others – well maybe there will be the token Asian in sitting with them – but you’re never going to see black and white girls like 50-50 in a mixed group. No way. So if someone has done something bad the whole group gets blamed. Say a white girl gets caught giving a handjob, then suddenly all white girls will become bitches. (Katie, majority-group A, age 27)

Hiring practices which reward and reproduce hierarchies of desire privileging Western ideals of beauty are reproduced and enforced on the floor. This contributes to a workplace culture of unnecessary hostility and conflict among strippers. Moreover, what is valorized by management

is central to creating the beliefs embedded in the work environment. Such hiring practices translate to racism on the floor with both colleagues and clients.

My participant poll shows a higher percentage of black women hires than those reported in Ontario. This could be due to the racial homogeneity of the study site. Pearls is a white, working-class strip club, in a predominantly white working class region – Atlantic Canada. The higher percentage of black women hires could be as a result of a complex intersection of class and race. First, since Pearls is read as working-class, it may therefore permit more black women to work, as they are also read as working-class (Law, 2012; Mears, 2011). Law's (2012, p. 113) friend was unable to work at her preferred clubs and instead had to work at clubs of "questionable repute;" even at these less prestigious clubs, her friend – a black woman – was still faced with hostility from the customers. Second, in accordance with Collin's (1990) theory of hypersexuality and Holmes' argument on the colonial history of the fetishization of black body, in a racially homogenous setting such as rural Atlantic Canada which does not have much exposure to the black body, the black body may be fetishized and ergo, hold higher capital. It is important to note, however, that what the minority-group hair and make up beauty work routines so clearly expose is that even when fetishized in such situations, the black female body is still prepared for consumption through the white ideal.

Jojo is well aware of the racial hierarchy at Pearls and summarized her experience in this manner:

Let me say this real clear. "Pearls" is like a butcher. If you are white, you are the best most expensive meat, and if you are black you are like a can of spam. The youngest meat is the freshest and the oldest meat is the most stale. A customer even told me black women are better for room service than what they are for stripping. What was the point to tell a manager? They would just laugh at me. I have to try so hard to keep up with everything they expect of me. The hair, wigs, weaves and staying skinny. But I know when I get older I will get tired of it. Hell, black girls over 30 don't strip. But white girls are stripping in their 50s. I guess the black meat gets stale faster than the white. (Jojo, minority-group B, age 19)



What these accounts clearly illustrate is that in a profession predicated on a hierarchy of desire built in opposition to the black body, African-Canadian women become the most marginalized workers in the industry.

It can be argued, then, that to be non-white in the Canadian strip trade is likely to result in substantial discrimination, stigma, and unpleasant work experiences. In this sense, the polymorphous paradigm (Weitzer, 2009) can be read as racially biased. By not explicitly addressing the racial hierarchies built into the social order, the polymorphous paradigm fails to demonstrate sensitivity to the “complexities and structural conditions shaping the uneven distribution of agency, subordination, and job satisfaction” (Weitzer, 2009, p. 215) specific to race. The paradigm allows for the positive experiences of white strippers but overlooks the negative experiences of minority strippers.

### Conclusions

This study of strippers’ beauty work routines found that many of the women interviewed were not fully aware of the amount of money and time they devoted to keeping or improving their appearances. All of the women were well aware of the standard of exaggerated beauty they were expected to perform in the club, standards of beauty that are not limited to the strip trade but are rather emblematic of a larger social system which privileges youth, whiteness, and thinness. Considerable agency was employed in explaining when and why they conformed and how they felt about their performance. Both majority- and minority-group accounts of beauty work practices in relation to hair, body shape, and gender expose a workplace beauty ideal which privileges youth, whiteness, thinness, and traditional but exaggerated femininity. It is necessary to remain employable, maximize profits and avoid stigma. The maintenance of long, silky hair

and the pursuit of a thin and toned body in the strip trade appeared to be a top priority regardless of race, age or gender performance.

A closer look at the differences between the majority-group and minority-group beauty work routines, however, exposes indirect and unexamined biases towards race, revealing a white beauty standard defined in opposition to the black body. This can be seen in the comparison between the beauty routines of the majority-group and minority-group women; the beauty routines of minority-group women are far more invasive, labourious, time-consuming, expensive, and at times, dangerous. This definition of the white ideal in opposition to the black body in turn creates a racial hierarchy which also governs and informs the hierarchy of desire in the club. Strippers with European backgrounds are able to play up or down their backgrounds in order to increase desirability, while black bodies are simply deemed too “other” and threaten to collapse the hierarchy of desire in which the “limitedly exotic” white body is at the top. Directly related to a larger system of racism, this prejudice rewards according to skin colour; it directly benefits those who are “light-skinned” through employability, desirability, and a higher income, while punishing those who are “dark-skinned” with higher costs to remaining employable – and in a lot of cases, social exclusion and job loss. As the workplace culture of the strip club operates to defend, enforce, and maintain traditional Eurocentric values which privilege a racial hierarchy of desire in which whiteness is at the top, race operates as one of the primary principles by which the relations between the management, strippers, and clientele at Pearls are organized.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

### Introduction

The discussion in Chapter 5 highlights some of the most important findings of this research. My analysis chapter draws on the theoretical framework outlined previously to make sense of the data, and examines the beauty work performed by the participants and how this labour operates to maintain and reinforce a racial, ageist, and gendered hierarchy among strippers. All the women included in the study were aware of the “on the job” expectation to perform exaggerated standards of beauty which included an emphasis on traditional but exaggerated gender binarism, youth, long silky hair, a thin and toned body, and an exaggerated performance of a “limitedly exotic other.” Many of the women interviewed, however, were not fully aware of the amount of money and time they devoted to maintaining or improving these standards.

The range of beauty work performed “on the job” and the reasons articulated for their performance varied depending on “the complexities and structural conditions shaping the uneven distribution of agency, subordination, and job satisfaction” (Weitzer, 2009, p. 215). Participants negotiated their experiences within these structural constraints and employed beauty work in the active pursuit of some goal, whether it was success or happiness. Many of the women interviewed employed different standards of beauty work “on” and “off” the job and the reasons for employing beauty work practices varied greatly due to the presence of a husband or a boyfriend who tended to encourage less demanding practices of beauty work. Emphasis on long, silky hair and the pursuit of a thin and toned body, however, appeared to be a top priority regardless of race, age, or gender and this study found that old and thin is more acceptable than young and fat in the strip trade.

A common theme emerging from the thesis is that a society which idealizes a Eurocentric ideal built on whiteness, thinness and youth rewards those with whiter skin more than those who are simply younger and thin. Those who possess darker complexions and do not embody ideals of youth are frequently placed in stereotypical categories and their physical appearance is judged harshly. This represents a form of “subtle” prejudice. To reap the rewards of a culture that idealizes whiteness, thinness and youth, and in many cases, to avoid stigma from not prescribing to this ideal, participants in the strip trade negotiated an extensive, laborious and expensive range of beauty work practices in order to remain employable and/or to maximize profits.

The strip club’s emphasis on an exaggerated Eurocentric white ideal of feminine beauty results in racist, ageist, and gendered hiring practices. Participants describe a workplace culture that “defends traditional values, exaggerates cultural differences, and negates the possibility of positive emotions and empowerment” (Pettigrew and Meertens, 1995). Although some participants were aware of the larger system of domination which enforces whiteness, youth and heteronormative gender performance as the economic basis of the club, the beauty work performed by the women reproduced these values at the expense of other women. In turn, racist, ageist and gender hierarchies informing the beauty work routines of the participants also operated to govern the relations among strippers themselves.

A closer look at the differences between the majority-group and minority-group beauty work routines, however, reveals that the routines of minority-group women are far more invasive, labourious, time-consuming, expensive, and at times, dangerous. The Eurocentric beauty ideal comes alongside negative and controlling images of black women’s bodies, exposing an ideal built in opposition to black female bodies and the larger system of racism.

The intersection of subtle racism and colourism on the hierarchy of desire was consistent with Law’s (2012) notion of “ambivalent desire.” The limitedly exotic white body is the only

acceptable “other.” Artificial means of appearing suntanned do not undermine this ideal. Majority-group strippers with European ancestry and some “mixed-race” strippers reported playing up or down their backgrounds in order to increase desirability. “Light-skinned” women were rewarded with employability, a higher income, and respect in the workplace while participants who were “dark-skinned” reported social exclusion, job loss, and higher costs in remaining employable.

### Summary of Findings

The aim of the MA thesis was to address the gap in research about how beauty work in the strip trade is influenced by race, age, and gender. It documents in detail the beauty work practices of a small sample of women in the strip trade industry in Atlantic Canada. Utilizing ethnographic fieldwork; observation; and focused, unstructured interviews, the thesis is consistent with Ronald Weitzer’s “polymorphous paradigm,” which emphasizes the diversity of personal experiences and power relations by people in erotic entertainment.

This study of strippers’ challenges, experiences, and strategies found that: (1) many of the women interviewed were not fully aware of the amount of money and time they devoted to “keeping or improving” their appearances; (2) the beauty work performed by interviewees reveals both subtle and blatant prejudices with respect to race, age, and gender which defends and privileges traditional Eurocentric values of whiteness, youth, and femininity; (3) it is suggested although it cannot be conclusively proven with a small sample that race is the primary factor determining opportunities to work in the strip trade in Atlantic Canada.

Although the interviewees had different levels of job satisfaction, self-esteem, and experiences of “subtle” and “blatant” racism and colorism, it is argued that the strip club operates not only to reproduce but to defend a hierarchy of desire in which whiteness is at the top. Race

functions as one of the primary principles by which the relationships between the management, strippers, and clientele at Pearls are organized.

The theoretical frameworks that guided this research proved to be applicable to this research project. More specifically, the polymorphous paradigm as a central theoretical framework of my research (Weitzer, 2009) allowed for an account of a wide variety and range of the lived experiences of sex-work labourers. By applying this paradigm, the study accounted for the subjectivity of each individual involved in the sex work industry and avoided viewing sex workers as a single, homogenous group. Additionally, the qualitative approach used in this project proved to be most effective, as this research project sought to understand the social meaning people attribute to their experiences, circumstances, and situations. By also employing in-depth interviews as a data collection technique, interviews were “issue-oriented.” A semi-formal approach with open-ended questions allowed the participants to feel at ease, to vary their answers, and gave the researcher the opportunity to prompt interviewees for clarification.

This research study looked at the beauty routines of strippers examining the beauty work required to remain an active and appreciated participant in the strip trade of Atlantic Canada. Specifically, it examined what might be learned about subtle and blatant racism, ageism, and gender bias from the beauty work of strippers in Atlantic Canada and how body characteristics influence opportunities to work in erotic entertainment. Consistent with Weitzer’s polymorphous paradigm, my study shows that many of the women articulated and spoke to a wide range of strategies as to how they negotiated the complexities shaping the uneven distribution of agency. The women negotiated the identity of stripper, used beauty work as sites of resistance, control, maximization of profit, and felt powerful and powerless sometimes simultaneously. In addition, the range of beauty work employed was always in the active pursuit of some goal, whether that was success or happiness. My hope is that the diversity of strategies employed by the women in

this study contributes to the evolution of contemporary research on the strip trade away from “individual-level pathologizing toward understanding dancers within organizational and cultural frameworks” (Wahab et al., 2011, p. 70). Viewing strippers as operating within larger cultural frameworks which govern relations not just in the strip trade but in the wider social order repositions the empowerment versus emancipation debate. It shifts the site of debate away from the question of individual agency and repositions it towards the complex structural conditions which govern and inform our larger collective socio-cultural foundations.

In this respect, a Critical Race Theory framework proved most useful in understanding the power processes that systematically disenfranchise racially oppressed people (Hylton, 2012). By contextualizing beauty work in the strip trade as “labour” performed as part of the expectations of a job, beauty work is contextualized under a framework which reflects the larger values governing society and not merely as expression (or lack) of individual agency. The range of beauty work practices and the reasons for their deployment were consistent with larger cultural conditions that privilege a homogenous and Eurocentric ideal. These cultural conditions converge with racist, ageist and gender-biased management practices to produce organizational hierarchies that form the interpersonal power relations of the club. It is important to note that the organizational hierarchy also works to create expectations on the part of the customers (Law, 2011).

A closer look at the differences between the majority-group and minority-group beauty work routines reveals that the exclusion of the black body is built into the very hierarchy of desire creating customer expectations. Here, Law’s (2012) theoretical concepts of “acceptable otherness” and “ambivalent desire” are especially useful as she describes the “limitedly exotic” white stripper governing the hierarchy of desire in the club. I would argue that this actually constitutes a form of blatant racism. For example, this study found that thin and old holds more

sexual capital in the strip club than fat and old. If as Law (2011) argues, organizational hierarchy also works to create expectations on the part of the customers, then age is not the most fundamental criterion in the hierarchy of desire. As long as a woman's body is thin and toned, there is an expectation of desirability from customers. Similarly, a thin and toned body is difficult to achieve but it can be regulated through diet, exercise and body modification. In the hierarchy of desire built in opposition to the black body, the racialized "other" is a body that threatens to collapse the dominant ideal of femininity and beauty, and ergo, is too different to be acceptably desirable. If and when the fetishized black body is accepted in a racially homogenous site, it is still prepared for consumption through the white ideal. This opposition in turn creates a racial hierarchy within the club known as colourism – the closer you are at the top of the hierarchy of desire, the more privileges you are afforded. In the strip trade, this directly benefits those who are "light-skinned" through employability, desirability, and a higher income, while punishing those who are "dark-skinned" with higher costs to remaining employable – and in a lot of cases, social exclusion and job loss.

That the white beauty standard is defined in opposition to the black body (Kwan and Trautner, 2009) can be seen from the beauty work practices of the minority-group women whose beauty routines to comply with the dominant standard of beauty were far more invasive, labourious, time-consuming, expensive, and at times, dangerous. These cultural conditions converge with racist management practices to produce social hierarchies that shape the interpersonal power relations of the club including the hierarchy of desire in customer expectations.

Most of my participants were not aware of how much money they were spending on beauty work and I believe this speaks to how deeply ingrained and internalized the defense of these racist, ageist and gendered hierarchies are in our society; their expensive, laborious and



time-consuming reproduction is assumed as the expected byproduct of the job. The discursively feminine stripper body is prepared and consumed through racialized discourse to act as the first defense of traditional Eurocentric values.

### Research Limitations

The discussion chapter offered concluding thoughts on my exploratory and descriptive study of beauty work, race, and age at Pearls. It was not possible, however, to include all Pearls employees, or multiple strip clubs, in this particular study. Other limitations such as the small sample size and difficulty recruiting interviewees should also be noted when considering the generalizability of the findings from this one case study. How the intersection of race, age, and gender operate on the beauty work performance of strippers in a “higher-end” club in Atlantic Canada needs further analysis. For example, it would be interesting to see what kind of beauty work practices are being imported from urban areas as many strippers are being imported from major urban centres, and what kind of beauty practices are distinctly regional and belong to Atlantic Canada. Furthermore, the impact the porn industry has had on the beauty work routines of strippers in the industry needs further research. Lastly, the racial homogeneity of the research site should be noted; Pearls is a working-class club in a predominantly white, working-class region. It would be interesting to investigate the beauty work performance of strippers, and the hiring practices of strip clubs, in areas not predominantly white, such as Toronto, Ontario, where less than fifty percent of the population has a European background. Finally, I would like to add that my findings do not discredit the voices of strippers whose experiences are not reflected in this study. Instead, I want these stories to be viewed alongside other stories and perspectives, and I hope that this project invites more interest in portraying the full range of experiences in the sex industry.

## Recommendations

I hope this study exposes the mechanisms of subtle and blatant racism and colourism and they way they operate under the conditions of the deeply ingrained homogenous white Western ideals which shape the very organizational structures of our institutions. As cultural sites which prepare the discursive feminine body for consumption, we must understand strip clubs not as signifiers of a deviant subculture but rather as powerful cultural institutions that have become economically and socially integrated into our everyday landscapes as “state and city governments allow clubs to be highly visible in cities, suburbs, and residential areas.... Clubs are permitted to advertise their establishments through provocative marquees on their buildings and on billboards along highways” (Wahab et al., 2008, p. 54). In that respect, and in line with the Critical Race Theory framework, we must understand these powerful institutions as operating to defend, enforce, and maintain traditional Eurocentric values which privilege and reproduce a hierarchy of desire in which whiteness is at the top.

Strip club owners and managers have acted to marginalize strippers by making the industry into a cash-based, sub-contractor economy that is nearly impossible to unionize. The lack of monitoring and unionization of strip clubs thus also means that such institutionalized racism goes largely undetected and unchallenged. More research is needed, specifically in the Canadian context, on the effects of racism and colourism in the sex club industry and the way racialized strip trade labourers continue to be exploited by what is effectively a larger Eurocentric and homogenous discourse which continues to monopolize representations of beauty despite an increasingly diverse, multi-cultural and pluralist society.

In addition, I would argue given the recent strength of First Nations’ de-colonizing movements which have actively worked to highlight the imperial discourse inherent in Canadian society; and given Canada’s increasing diversity due to mass immigration that the defense of

traditional values no longer constitutes the definition of subtle prejudice. In an increasingly globalized, Internet-dependent reality, the social conditions which mark our time are a hybridity of experiences and histories. I propose, given the realities today, that the defense of traditional values of feminine beauty constitutes blatant prejudice in the context of strip clubs.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

#### **Understanding Beauty Work in Strip Clubs Recruitment for a Sociological Study**

Are you currently working as a dancer?

Do you have your own beauty routine that you are willing to discuss?



The purpose of my study for a M.A. degree in sociology is to explore beauty work in the strip trade. I am seeking interviewees who are willing to describe the way they make themselves more "beautiful" through activities including the application of makeup, hair styling, exercise, etc. Participation is strictly voluntary. This confidential interview may last up to an hour. If you choose to participate, you will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

#### **Participants may be eligible if they are:**

- At least 19 years of age.
- Currently dancing in this strip club.
- Willing to share experiences regarding beauty work and day-to-day life in the strip trade.

If you are interested in taking part in this study, please e-mail me at [hev226@mun.ca](mailto:hev226@mun.ca) or text or call me at 647 – 677 – 1025. Researcher: Hannah Vermish, Memorial University

## Appendix B: Consent Form

### **Informed Consent Form:**

Title: *Beauty Work and Race in Strip Clubs: A Case Study From Atlantic Canada*

Researcher(s): *Hannah Vermish: Masters Candidate, Memorial University: hev226@mun.ca*

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled *Beauty Work and Race in Strip Clubs: A Case Study From Atlantic Canada*

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study at any time. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, Hannah Vermish, if you have any questions about the study or for more information not included here before you consent. It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, neither now nor in the future.

### **Introduction**

*As part of my Masters/Honours thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Linda Cullum and Dr. Stephen Riggins. I currently work as a stripper and I am studying the industry in which I work. My study is on beauty work undertaken in the industry.*

### **Purpose of study**

*The purpose of this study is to find out the meaning about strippers' beauty routines and how beauty work is attached to race in the strip trade. By interviewing women of different races*

*working in the industry I am able to analyse the beauty practices which they perform. I want to discover how race defines beauty work in the strip trade.*

**What you will do in this study:**

*I will conduct a 60 – 90 minute interview, with open-ended questions, with 12 participants. I will use a tape recorder and take notes.*

**Length of time:**

*60 – 90 minute interview*

**Withdrawal from the study:**

*You can state at any time during the interview that you wish to withdraw from this research project. All participants have a two-week reflection period post interview in which you can contact me and have their data destroyed.*

**Possible benefits:**

*You are part of a unique study on a topic which has been given little attention. This work could positively affect policy in the strip trade for workers. It also brings attention to Atlantic Canada which is a region that is understudied in Canadian literature.*

**Possible risks:**

*If you get upset by a discussion of anything in this interview, or find it personally- or emotionally challenging, you are free to move on to the next question. You also have the option to remove yourself from the study. If you feel that the interview has evoked traumatic memories, I will refer you to a free counselling service. (Kirby House 196 Waterford Bridge Road St. John's Ph. (709) 722 8272)*

**Anonymity**

*Physical descriptions will be included, however, pseudonyms (false names) will be used.*

*Confidentiality of the interview will be guaranteed, however, due to the small size of the study anonymity cannot be guaranteed.*

**Confidentiality and Storage of Data:**

*Tape recordings and notes will be secured in a locked drawer and only I, Hannah Vermish, the researcher, will have access. Transcribed notes will be stored on my own personal computer, and only I will have access to the password. Data will be kept for a minimum of five years. After five years, notes will be shredded and recordings destroyed.*

**Recording of Data:**

*A tape recorder will be used to audio record all interviews. These recordings will not be disclosed to anyone besides the researcher, I, Hannah Vermish.*

**Reporting of Results:**

*The data collected will be used in a thesis, and, in the future, may be used in a journal article or conference presentation. Personal characteristics and direct quotations will be used; however, every effort will be made to keep this information anonymous.*

**Sharing of Results with Participants:**

*All participants will be emailed a copy of their transcribed interview directly to their email, or you may arrange to come and pick up a printed copy from me by calling 709-769-2373.*

You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact: [hev226@mun.ca](mailto:hev226@mun.ca).

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or

your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at [icehr@mun.ca](mailto:icehr@mun.ca) or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

**Consent:**

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been able to ask questions about this study.
- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- You understand that any data collected from you up to the point of your withdrawal will be retained by the researcher for use in the research study.

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

**Your signature:** I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.

I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation at any time.

I agree to be audio-recorded during the interview/focus group

I do not agree to be audio-recorded during the interview/focus group

I agree to the use of quotations but do not want my name to be identified in any publications resulting from this study.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

**Researcher's Signature:**

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Principal Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## Appendix C: Scheduled Interview for Strippers

### **Section I: Demographics**

1. What is your stage name?
2. How old were you on your last birthday?
3. What is your highest level of education?
4. What race or ethnic group do you identify with?
5. Do you identify with the terms “Francophone” (French Canadian) or “Anglophone” (English Speaking Canadian)? (Why/ Why not?)
6. Do you have any children?
7. What is your marital/ relationship status?
8. What is your country of birth?
9. Have you ever lived in another country? Can you tell me about it? – If not can you tell me which Canadian provinces you have lived in? Can you describe these experiences?

### **Section 2: Work History**

10. Do you have another job? (why/ why not?)
11. What city do you mainly work in? (why/ why not?)
12. If it is not your city of residence, do you travel specifically to work in a strip club? (why/ why not)
13. How many years have you been working in the industry? How did you get into it? Why have you decided to continue with the work?

### **Section 3: Race in the Workplace**

14. How would you define the terms “race” and “racism”?
15. Do you consider yourself as belonging to one racial group? Why/ Why not?

16. Do you see “race” an issue of importance when dealing with clients and management? What makes race important or unimportant during these interactions?

17. Have you seen or heard anything that you consider “racist” at your job? If so, can you describe this experience and the way it made you feel?

#### **Section 4: Beauty Work**

18. Can you describe your beauty routine?

19. How important do you believe your physical appearance is in your work? Why?

20. How much do you think you spend on beauty products per month? This includes makeup, creams and visits to the hair and nail salon. Do you think you would make the same profits if you didn't use these beauty products? Why, why not?

21. Could you describe the differences in your personal presentation when working as opposed to during your time off? What is the difference in your beauty routine and clothing?

22. Do you have an exercise and diet regime? Why, why not? If so, do you think it would be the same if you were not working as a stripper?

23. Do you believe there is a certain type of “look” which creates the most revenue in the strip club?

24. Have you ever had a booking rejected on the basis of your physical appearance? Were you given a reason why? If not, do you know of any girls that have, and can you tell me about it?

25. Have you undergone any cosmetic surgery? Why, why not? Do you feel there is pressure on strippers to undergo plastic surgery? Why/ why not?

26. Have your beauty work practices changed over time? If so, how?

27. Do you believe that stripping has had any affects on your physical appearance, either positive or negative (for example, exercise from dancing, or dehydration from drinking)?

#### **Section 5: Client Preferences**



28. What do you feel clients are “looking for” physically?
29. What features do you receive the most compliments on?
30. Have you ever altered you own beauty work to cater to client feedback?

## Appendix D: Interview for Management

### **Demographics**

1. How old were you on your last birthday?
2. What is your highest level of education?
3. What is your current occupation?
4. What race or ethnic group do you identify with?
5. Do you identify with the terms 'Francophone' (French Canadian) or 'Anglophone' (English Speaking Canadian)? (Why/ Why not?)

### **Club Image**

6. How would you describe what the strippers in the club represent for your business?
7. What type of beauty work do you expect strippers to undertake before being ready to work in the club? For example, hair styling, makeup and outfits?
8. Do you think it's important for the strippers to appear "feminine"?
8. Do you have certain looks you prefer in the club over others? For example, skin tone, hair colour or eye colour?

### **Section 5: Client Preferences**

24. What do you feel clients are "looking for" physically?
25. What physical features do you believe clients desire in the club? For example, breast size, hair colour or body shape?
26. Could you describe to me in detail three strippers that you believe to be top earners? For example, their skin colour, hair colour, body shape, typical hair style and outfits.
27. Why do you believe these three are top earners? 28. Do you believe the strippers you mentioned represent the look that your club wants to give off?

## Appendix E: Sample Beauty Work Journal

### Sample Beauty Work Journal

#### Week Ending Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2012

**Products I used this week and price:** Overnight Fake tan 300ml \$60, L'Oreal Shampoo \$9, L'Oreal Conditioner \$8.50, Mascara \$11.99, False Eyelashes \$7, Lip Liner \$13, Lipstick \$20 and Body Lotion \$18.

Goals: Lose weight, grow hair longer and make money.

#### Monday 20<sup>th</sup> August: Day Off

No makeup today had to let skin breathe. Gym and sauna. Working tomorrow so did fake tan before bed which will develop over night.

Removed makeup with lotion when I got home from work.

#### Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> August: Work 6pm -2am

Got up and washed my hair which included shampoo, conditioner and blow dry. Had to scrub of extra fake tan residue and moisturize my body. At work applied concealer under my eyes, foundation, black eyeliner, fake eye lashes, lip liner and lipstick.

Removed makeup with lotion when I got home from work.

#### Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> August: Work 6pm-2am

Got up and washed my hair which included shampoo, conditioner and blow dry. Ate McDonalds last night after work and am feeling very bloated. Need to work out and burn it off.

Went to gym and did 40 minutes of cardio and abdominal crunches.

At work applied concealer under my eyes, foundation, black eyeliner, mascara, fake eyelashes, lip liner and lipstick. Painted nails.

Removed makeup with lotion when I got home from work.

#### Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> August: Work 6pm-3am

Got up and washed my hair which included shampoo, conditioner and blow dry. Had to scrub off extra fake tan residue and moisturize my body. At work, applied concealer under my eyes, foundation, black eyeliner, false eye lashes, lip liner and lipstick.

Removed makeup with lotion when I got home from work.

#### Friday 24<sup>th</sup> August: Day Off (meant to work but too tired)

Had too much to drink at work last night. My head is killing me and I am going to cancel tonight. I look so tired and my skin is so dry and dehydrated. Stayed home, took a bath and did a face mask. Had to eat something greasy to help cure the hangover. I am running low on mascara and foundation so needed to purchase these. I went to the pharmacy and purchased a "Maybelline" Mascara for \$11.79 and a new "Cover Girl" foundation for \$15.

#### Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> August: Work 6pm- 3am

Woke up early and went to the gym to get in an early workout and feel fresh for tonight. Saturday night is my biggest moneymaker so I have to look extra glamorous tonight. As usual, I washed,

conditioned and blow-dried my hair. I applied a shimmering body lotion to give my body some extra shine. I applied some instant fake tanner spray to contour my body for a more slimming effect.

Removed makeup with lotion when I got home from work.

### **Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> August: Day Off**

Feeling exhausted today. My whole body hurts. Went for a sauna in the evening, but other than that, I slept all day.

## **Beauty Work Journal: Week Ending Sunday February 17<sup>th</sup> 2013**

**Products I used this week and price:** Hair Extensions \$250, Shiseido eye masks \$80, Overnight Fake tan 300ml \$60, L'Oreal Shampoo \$9, L'Oreal Conditioner \$8.50, Aveeno Conditioning Spray, Mascara \$11.99, False Eyelashes \$7, Lip Liner \$13, Eye Shadow, Lipstick \$20 and Body Lotion \$18.

Goals: Lose weight, and make money

### **Monday 11<sup>th</sup> February: Day Off**

Went to gym and a got a manicure and pedicure. Feeling like I am getting the flu so went to drink a beet juice and have a sauna to detox. Did a "Shiseido" eye mask at home.

### **Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> February: Work 6pm -2am**

Got up and went to the gym. Did cardio and weights for an hour and a half. When I got home I washed my hair which included shampoo and conditioner. Then I blow dried it and straightened it with my straightening iron. At work, I added hair extensions to my straight hair style which gave me extra volume and length. Then, I applied concealer under my eyes, foundation, black eyeliner, fake eye lashes, lip liner and lipstick.

Removed makeup with lotion when I got home from work.

### **Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> February: Work 6pm-2am**

Got up and washed my hair which included shampoo, conditioner and blow dry. Curled my hair at work with curling iron. Did not put extensions on as I notice that they are pulling my hair out. At work, applied concealer under eyes, foundation, black eyeliner, mascara, false eyelashes, lip liner and lipstick.

Removed makeup with lotion when I got home from work.

### **Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> February: Work 6pm-3am**

Got up and washed my hair which included shampoo, conditioner and blow dry. Applied fake tan lotion in the morning so it would develop by the evening. At work, I put on my hair extensions then straightened my hair with my straightener. I applied foundation, concealer, black eyeliner, false eye lashes, lip liner and lipstick.

Removed makeup with lotion when I got home from work.

### **Friday 15<sup>th</sup> February: Day off**

Went downtown to party. Did my makeup the same as at work but a little less dramatic and no hair extensions.

**Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> February: Work 9pm- 3am**

Really tired from last night and feeling a bit under the weather. Slept all day but could not get up for work on time. Finally got up and took a shower. Washed my hair with shampoo and then conditioned it. I looked really tired so tried to hydrate my face with lotion and then applied double my usual makeup to hide the bags under my eyes and the overall worn-out look. I applied double doses of foundation, concealer, black eyeliner, false eye lashes, lip liner and lipstick. Removed makeup with lotion when I got home from work.

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> February: Day Off**

Stayed in bed all day. Took a shower at night.