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INTRODUCTION

This book draws on field observations, interviews, and my own personal experiences to expose the different social worlds of exotic dance. Rather than making judgments about stripping as a profession, saying whether or not stripping is bad for women, or merely identifying the impact of dancing on women, I investigate variation in the structural arrangement of exotic dance establishments. Throughout the following chapters, I reveal how the organization of work creates different perceptions of work. Strip clubs vary, and types of clubs contextualize the experience of exotic dancing, creating more or less circumstances in which stripping can be good, bad, or indifferent for the women involved. Portraying exotic dance establishments as distinct types of social worlds, I detail the various settings and subcultures within which exotic dancing takes place and specify how each of these contexts gives rise to its own conditions of negative affect, limitation, and obligation, as well as satisfaction and empowerment.

Working in the sex industry carries a large social stigma, of which those involved are very aware.¹ Even with the increased visibility of the sex industry in popular culture, the sex worker is generally not regarded as “normal” by others. A considerable number of federal, state, and local laws ban and/or regulate various types of sex work. The type of sex work allowed varies greatly across location, and erotic establishments are continually subject to extensive regulation. Public opinion polls report that roughly half of Americans feel that stripping should be illegal at bars or clubs (Gallup 1996). Indeed, many wonder how anyone could do this kind of work and question the character of erotic entertainers.

Despite, or perhaps because of, its provocative “deviant” nature, there is limited sociological research on sex work relative to other areas of inquiry. Women in the sex industry are aware of the misunderstandings and judgments associated with their work. Subsequently, sex workers may be suspicious of researchers; they may be resistant to inquiries from “outsiders.” Furthermore, whereas the strip club may be sociologically fascinating for researchers, it is an occupational environment for strippers. Our research field is their job. For these women, scholarly research, theoretical debates, and sociological speculation may very well seem self-righteous, condescending, and completely irrelevant to the pragmatic issues of their daily lives. Dancers are there to work; they may really not want to be bothered by some academic “tourists.”

Furthermore, regardless of numerous books and high-quality articles (mostly in specialty journals), it seems sex work has yet to gain its rightful legitimacy in social science. Those who pursue this line of research may find getting grants or publishing in mainstream academic journals is an even tougher task compared to many of their non-sex work colleagues (regardless of the quality of their work). I recently experienced having an editor of a well-ranked mainstream journal describe my work as “T and A.” He overruled the recommendations for publication made by all of the reviewers and rejected the manuscript solely on its “inappropriate” topic. I suspect this type of rejection, and my subsequent frustration and disheartenment, is not unique. Undoubtedly, some sociologists, possibly out of fear of the stigma associated with being labeled a “sex researcher,” and the corresponding career obstacles, have avoided or eventually abandoned research interests in this area. This is unfortunate; as a consequence, the structure of the sex industry, the organization of sex work, and the social influences on sex workers’ lives remain underexplored relative to other social phenomena.

Recognizing the deficiency in sociological discourse in her recent presidential address to the Midwest Sociological Society, Joane Nagel urged “sociologists to consider sexuality and the role of sexual systems in their own research” (2000, 1). Similarly, recent scholars have stressed the need for more research specifically on sex work (Weitzer 2000a, 2000b; Lerum 1998). Such research is essential for understanding the opportunities and obstacles sex workers encounter, including the organizational and

political influences within the sex industry and making informed decisions regarding relevant legal and social policies.

As a sociologist and former sex worker, I regularly speak to classes and groups about my experiences and research. Many people are intrigued by the sex industry and want to understand how it works. But they also share larger concerns: Is stripping bad for women? Should you feel guilty about going to a strip club? Beyond the sheer fascination with the sex industry, most want to know if they are “hurting” women by patronizing these establishments—if the women who work there have been abused and are being exploited. Are these clubs dens of sin and broken dreams, filled with downtrodden women, selling their bodies out of desperation? Or are these women strong and sexually liberated, making viable career choices? By visiting these establishments, are you degrading women, or are you appreciating the female body? Such questions I regularly encounter, in various forms.

This book is a step toward answering these and similar questions. In short, the quick answers to all of these questions are, sometimes yes, sometimes no, and sometimes yes and no. Yes, sometimes, the strip club is degrading and exploitive. But at times it is not. Exotic dancing is complex and can include a number of diverse and even contradictory experiences. So, yes, on some occasions you should feel bad about going to a strip club. But sometimes you should not. You should go and hand your money over enthusiastically and enjoy yourself, unashamed. And then there are situations that are more ambiguous. Often, you hand over your money, and both you and the strippers have some mixed feelings about the whole situation. *But by all means you should hand over your money.* Now that you have the brief and no doubt unsatisfying answers, in the rest of the book I will try to explain these answers as thoroughly as possible.

Many who study sex work care deeply about this topic and are greatly concerned with the lives of sexually stigmatized groups. As previously noted, to be a sex work researcher, one has to be passionate about the subject matter. As academic rebels, we should respect our tenacity and celebrate our passion, yet be careful to avoid trading empiricism for sententiousness. Polemical advocacy compromises academic rigor. I am concerned when encountering works that initiate research based on the position that sex work is degrading. The authors conduct research that, not

surprisingly, reinforces the view that this work is injurious and speculates as to the various negative consequences of erotic labor.

Interestingly, through my work as a dancer, I quickly learned that dancers themselves are aware of the larger “victims-versus-agents” controversy and use it to their advantage. Strippers, by trade, tell customers what they want to hear. And, based on my own experiences as well as those of fellow dancers, I know that the victim-versus-agency debate is alive and well in the strip club. Dancers draw on this debate regularly when interacting with customers to make money. Indeed, they are aware that people are questioning whether dancers are women down on their luck. They make the most of this guilt and stereotype to increase tips. More than once have I observed dancers playing the “sympathy card” with their regulars, describing how they are in desperate need of cash for their children or rent. This is a valuable money-making tactic, often used independent of actual need. Making men feel sorry for them, dancers often play on a client’s desire to “save” them. It is a common practice to play on the victim status to manipulate clients into giving dancers extra money or paying bills. I have done it myself and can verify that it is extremely profitable.

Whereas some customers are best manipulated by the sympathy card, others find this to be a turnoff. Guilt can be effective for some clients but not for others. If they feel guilty about being at a club, they may not stay very long. If they see the strip club as full of downtrodden, desperate women, they may feel shameful and leave. This can substantially impact dancers’ tips. In order to avoid “scaring them off,” dancers may try to portray themselves as happy and content with their jobs; the upbeat attitude of the sex worker makes people feel more comfortable about patronizing these establishments. Thus, they try to portray themselves as “party girls” who are just young and having fun. This “agent” status relieves customers’ sense of guilt about patronizing strip clubs. When patrons are having fun, they spend money. I learned this early on and quickly became a master of the artificial good time.

Social science has yet to adequately take these skills into account when interviewing dancers or other sexual performers. In these occupations, telling people what they want to hear becomes common practice, if not a job requirement. If a dancer believes a customer needs to feel better about her employment, she will portray herself as empowered. In contrast, if she has a customer who feels sorry for her, she will use that to her advantage as well. In

other words, dancers play out the gendered understandings of the occupation in interactions. This is a talent; dancers are accustomed to reading subtle cues to decide how to portray themselves, especially with regard to the victims-versus-agency issue. Indeed, it is not surprising that sociological works written by former sex workers often find dancers espousing the liberties of dancing, whereas works by advocates or critics of sex work find sex work to be degrading.

For example, in her recent work, *Stripped*, Barton (2006) comments on current research's lack of insight from former sex workers and questions whether her study should include participant observation. She concludes that she could not bring herself to be a participant, and thus does not overcome the same shortcoming she laments. Specifically, she describes her decision not to dance: "I soon discovered that simply watching the show swiftly drained most of my emotional reserves. In the beginning, I felt depressed and exhausted after only forty-five minutes in a club. After a few months of visiting the bars and getting to know some of the dancers, I learned to tolerate the noise, the smoke, and the undiluted testosterone for about one to two hours before I had the irresistible impulse to leave at once. Clearly dancing was not an option for me . . . I quickly grasped that the role of a *sympathetic outsider* would more easily facilitate researching this book" (2006, 4–5, emphasis added).

The sympathetic outsider? Upon reading this, I knew immediately that the subsequent findings would reinforce the researcher's perception of dancers as exploited and characterizations of male customers as "undiluted testosterone." Taking this position, Barton then proceeds to conclude that dancing is emotionally draining and oppressive. However, it is reasonable to suspect that, despite attempts to conceal her negative feelings, dancers may have perceived her distaste for stripping and her sympathy for the women who do it. Her work thus demonstrates the difficulties of interviewing exotic dancers and how these interviews can be easily led by the interviewer ideology.

My own experience with dancers renders her conclusions seriously questionable. In her book, Barton talks openly about her refusal to dance, her revulsion at the idea of dancing, and her pity for dancers. I was thus "underwhelmed" by the conclusion that dancing has long-term negative consequences for women and by her characterization that it is only satisfying to the extent to which

women's performances conform to the clients' gendered expectations. These results did not ring of unbiased empiricism and thus were neither particularly surprising nor compelling. It is possible that, based upon subtle and inadvertent social and conversational cues, the dancers she interviewed quickly identified a potential bias, determined what she wanted to hear about the "toll" of stripping, and gave her answers to establish that finding. They quickly sized up the situation and went into misfortune mode. This may be particularly true if she entered the field in a customer-like role and/or was giving dancers money (this seems to be the case, based on her description). How is this possibility for response bias taken into account?

Some may say that the act of stripping is degrading in any context; that is, it is demeaning for women in any club, by reducing them to physical bodies.² To say that stripping in itself is degrading based solely on the fact that attention is being placed on nudity and sexuality naked assumes that being looked at as a physical body is inherently degrading. Humans are physical beings; being seen physically and sexually does not in itself dehumanize. Being looked at as a physical being, noticed for one's physical attributes, is only demeaning if it is unwanted. If one does not want to be looked at as purely a physical or sexual being, then stripping can be demeaning. But this may be the case in any occupation. A teacher or lawyer who is seen as a sexual object rather than a colleague is being degraded. But what if one does want to be seen in such a manner or really does not mind? Perhaps it is somehow inherently wrong, and people who want to be seen as sex objects are misguided (though I seriously doubt that). But that does not change the fact that they do want to be seen that way, and many really do not feel bad about it.

Is it not reasonable that at least some women may want, in some particular instances, to be seen only as sexual creatures? On occasion, some women (or men for that matter) may want to be seen as sex objects. A beautiful woman may want to be seen and admired for her appearance; she may find praise for her physical attributes satisfying. She may desire to be seen sexually. The idea that, on occasion, women and men may want to be sexualized in some circumstances is certainly not new. Exotic dancers are not the only individuals who are rewarded for and seek prize for their physical attributes. Let's not kid ourselves. Strippers did not invent tanning beds, breast augmentation, sexy outfits, high heels, or lin-

gerie. They just brought them all together in one place and made money off of them.

There is reason to believe that, because it is based on its portrayal and exaggeration of gender roles and the commodification of women, sex work, such as prostitution and exotic dance, is a reproduction of larger gender inequality. Such arguments are often found within the genre of feminist literature (for some examples, see the works of MacKinnon 1989; MacKinnon and Dworkin 1998; Farley 2004; Raphael and Shapiro 2004; Raymond 1995, 1998). These arguments may have merit for larger social issues, but I believe this is missing the point. While it may very well be that larger gender inequality creates the market and labor that guarantee continued existence of sex work, that does not mean that being a sex worker is inherently wholly detrimental for women. In other words, while it may be that gender inequality produces the conditions that allow there to be a sex work industry, this does not mean that the women who participate in it are not making choices. Within these larger social constraints, women do have some agency. Let us not cast them all as weak, hopeless sufferers; to do so belittles them. By all means, if you feel bad going to a strip club, then do not go. But I seriously doubt that the closing of strip clubs would bring about an end to larger social inequality.

One may say (and many have said) that a dancer may enjoy her work, yet, at some assumed higher level of abstraction (apparently beyond her own understanding), she nevertheless is being exploited. Thus, we cannot assume a woman is not being exploited because she willingly participates in her degradation. Perhaps this is so. This begs the question: If not the women involved, who is to decide whether or not something is degrading *to them*? Researchers, perhaps? Advocates? Scholars?

The idea that “we” determine that “they” are being exploited, even if their own comments imply that they are not, is condescending and runs the risk of ignoring our data. This position suggests that somehow we recognize their experience better than they do. It allows us to simply dismiss any evidence that contradicts our premise. We know what we want to find and will cast aside any contradictory response as false consciousness. By dismissing their interpretations of their own situations, we are, although perhaps not intentionally, saying they are not aware enough or intelligent enough to make sense of their surroundings. That position

certainly seems to demean these women and their own sense of themselves and their lives. Gender inequality exists, but it does not mean women are not strong, resilient, and independent. To condemn sex work as degradation and dismiss the variation in the erotic laborers' understanding of their world undermines many women's sense of agency and belittles their choices—often all in the name of “helping” them. Some authors claim to be “giving these women a voice” but then discard what they do not like to hear.

Alternatively, works written by many proud current and former sex workers dispute the findings of anti-sex work scholars. These writings must be interpreted with caution as well. My own research findings, among others, suggest that there are indeed women who choose this profession and take pride in this work (Bradley 2007). While their firsthand experiences suggest sex work can be fulfilling and a source of satisfaction, the reader must be aware that they may not be representative of the population of dancers. Many of these authors acknowledge that their status as authors and/or scholars suggests that they may be particularly advantaged relative to the typical dancer. There are lots of strippers. I suspect a select few write their own books. I doubt whether their experiences are the same as the many women who probably will not become professors, authors, journalists, or independently wealthy. That does not mean that even relatively privileged women involved in sexual labor do not face many potentially degrading or exploitive encounters. Many of these works describe traumatizing experiences along with stories of empowerment and self-acceptance.

Perhaps my own approach has created new dilemmas. It is not my intention to berate the work of any researchers. Rather, I hope that my work will complement the fine work of my fellow researchers. Social phenomena are best informed by multiple perspectives. My goal here is to build on these works, putting the autobiographical works of dancers in context and highlighting the potential benefits of placing the social scientific findings in context.

Throughout this book, I operationalize degradation based on more concrete definitions of situations. In other words, I suggest that stripping, and sex work more generally, is degrading *if the women involved in it feel degraded*. It is exploitive if the women do not enjoy their work, do not want to be there, and feel compelled to do it. And yes, I find that sometimes they do feel that way. Other times they do not. Other times, they feel a sense of

agency in their work; they choose to work in these jobs, choose these jobs over viable alternatives, and find satisfaction in their careers; they like what they do. And many times they may have mixed feelings about their jobs, characterizing their work as a mixture of agentic and oppressive moments. My purpose here is to contextualize the work of stripping as it relates to dancer perceptions of their work. If the argument is that stripping is degrading for the women who work in the profession, then we must explore potential variations in their subjective experiences, as well as in possible correlates of their experiences.

In this book I try to give the reader an understanding of the negative, positive, and ambivalent characterizations of stripping *as these women understand it*. To do so requires that I do not take on what I believe to be the larger question of personal beliefs. I must describe what I hear and observe and look for systematic themes and correlates across individual experiences. My own life may be insightful and provide clues and suggestions for inquiry; but I must not cloud the data with prejudgments or make larger ideological implications that go beyond the scope of my data and analyses. To take the position that sex work is systematically bad is to impose one's own morality on an entire occupation, independent of the varying opinions of those involved in this line of work. And, to be sure, how I feel about the profession in general is less important than how sex workers themselves experience their work.

MY INTEREST

In *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge* (1991), Dorothy Smith describes her difficulty in separating her personal feelings and values as a woman and her scholarly work as a sociologist and researcher. That is, in an effort to define her work as value neutral and academic, she attempted to remove herself from her work. In her feminist critiques of sociology, she states that too often scholars are trained to disregard their own personal experiences as a source of reliable information about the character of the world. She concludes that it is an impossibility. Smith argues that the only way of knowing a socially constructed world is by knowing it from within. Not only is it false to believe that researchers can avoid being human in

their research, but belief in strict objectivity ignores the valuable insight and genuineness that comes from being an insider (Smith 1991, 1989).

This spirit of identifying with one's life experiences and allowing them to motivate and guide one's research agenda is critical for the production of sociological knowledge. Smith concludes, "I am not proposing an immediate and radical transformation of the methods of the discipline . . . What I am suggesting is more in the nature of reorganizing the relationship of sociologist to the object of our knowledge . . . This involves first placing sociologists where we are actually situated . . . making our direct embodied experience of the everyday world the primary ground of our knowledge" (1991, 377).

Consistent with this perspective, researchers in the study of deviance have regularly integrated their life experiences with their sociological training to produce highly regarded ethnographic research. For example, Becker's research on the lives of jazz musicians and the lives of outsiders originates in his own experiences as a jazz musician (1963). More recently, Elijah Anderson (2003) wrote about his entrée into African American corner and liquor store culture, which led to the influential *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City* (1999). Describing his research at Jelly's place, a street corner tavern setting, Anderson found that his own experience drove his inquiry into this area of research. He believed that "one of the main reasons I may have gravitated to this setting was that it gave me the opportunity to think about my own background, my own story, even important aspects of my identity" (2003, 217).

In this tradition, the current ethnographic study began as an autobiographical venture undertaken during my career in exotic dance. Specifically, I set out to understand why I made the choices I made, danced when, where, and how I did, and, above all, had so much difficulty terminating my career as a dancer. Much like Anderson, I became increasingly aware of the tension I experienced throughout my dance and graduate career; a tension "based on the awareness that I lived in two worlds" (Anderson 2003, 235).

Experiencing this duality, being at once in the social world of the university where I was an overworked graduate student of questionable ability and, simultaneously, a highly regarded and successful dancer in the world of adult entertainment highlighted both the similarities and the differences of each social world. Both

worlds had moments of satisfaction and uncertainty. There were moments when I was simultaneously proud of my ability as a dancer and ashamed of my performance as a student. On Friday night I was a goddess, and on Monday morning I was entirely unremarkable. But there were also times that I thanked God I was in graduate school and not “just a dancer.” My pride in producing a good paper or performing well on an exam fell on deaf ears at the strip club. I became well aware of the organization and expectations of these distinct social worlds. I began journaling my experiences, thinking that perhaps these notes would help me understand my own ambivalence.

During this time, I began reading works written by other sex workers, specifically exotic dancers. Authors such as Heidi Mattson, Lily Burana, and Cheryl Bartlett described the trials and tribulations of sexual labor.³ Their stories do not glorify stripping but reveal all the complex experiences of dancing. Yet, for all the negative experiences, these women chose to pursue this line of work. In fact, these women, and many other such authors, found it incredibly difficult to quit working in the sex industry. The image of dancers portrayed in these works counters popular perceptions of sex workers as dumb, unskilled, or abused (Sweet and Tewksbury 2003; Ronai and Ellis 1989; Prus and Irini 1980; Salutin 1971).

These women were bright, articulate, and educated. They had choices; they were not desperate, poor, or without agency or options. Mattson continued to work as a dancer, long after graduating from Brown University. Similarly, Burana, journalist and former stripper, reentered dancing shortly after getting engaged. She felt compelled, for reasons she herself does not fully comprehend, to dance one more year. She was satisfied in her life and relationships yet undertook a farewell journey stripping at clubs across the country. Her trip was one of self-understanding and life transition, not one of desperation or exploitation. Bartlett, shortly after receiving her Ph.D. and taking a new job, began moonlighting as a dancer. She explains her entry in dance as driven by her desire to know and experience her body, to be physical, and to take control of her life. “Having always been a person more cerebral than physical, I tend to live a pleasant, if sedentary life firmly stationed in my mind . . . When I turned thirty, along with the extra weight, my hormones went crazy. I began to feel not just more sexual, but sensual. I have a new confidence in my body that

I couldn't have even imagined before, and now I revel in it. I would hate to waste this feeling" (2003, 15–16).⁴

Their stories seemed remarkably similar to my own. Originating in my own lived experience, my interest in this topic as academic research emerged from my formal training in the sociology of deviance and social psychology. From this training, I became interested in getting to know and understand the experiences of other dancers; I began to see this area as a sociological phenomenon. My original intention was to understand my own motivations. However, my interactions with other dancers and sociological training suggested that my experiences were not atypical.

I strongly identified with these authors and their stories and longed to understand this work as a sociological experience. Much of the current sociological literature has focused on the research questions related to the actual process of performing sexual labor: what these women do, how they talk to clients, client motivations, the role of the bouncer. That is, work on strippers and by strippers has revealed much about the techniques and experiences of exotic dancers and other strip club actors. In their well-known study on stripping, Ronai and Ellis (1989) described the tactics utilized by dancers in their interactions with customers. They reveal how dancers use speech and body language in their work, often feigning interest, flirting, or pretending to be what they perceive a specific customer finds appealing. Such strategies as the use of particular costumes, conversational tactics, and so on, are readily employed by dancers to make them more attractive to customers and to increase customer spending. Enck and Preston's (1988) dramaturgical analysis of exotic dancing revealed similar findings.

In addition to interactions with customers, studies have also examined dancer strategies in negotiations with management and the stresses associated with working conditions. Recent work by Egan (2006) explores the tactical use of music in dancer-customer and dancer-management interactions. She found that music is often used by dancers as a form of covert protest. When dancers have difficulties with customers or with management they often select music with lyrics that express their hostility. Moreover, playing "their music" becomes a statement of independence and a coping mechanism for dealing with aversive working conditions. Other research has explored similar topics such as background characteristics (Sweet and Tewksbury 2003), management pressures for body modification (Wesely 2003a), or dancer strategies

for adjusting to the conditions associated with exotic dancing (Sweet and Tewksbury 2000; Wesely 2003b; Barton 2002; Deshottels and Forsyth 2006; Bradley 2008).

Although not explicitly the focus, numerous studies provide evidence of differences in club structure. Earlier research on exotic dancing, such as early research by McCaghy and Skipper (1972) and Boles and Garbin (1974), acknowledged dancer preferences across clubs yet did not make distinct club-level organizational comparisons. More recently, in her (2002) analysis on male motivations for patronizing exotic dance establishments, Frank discusses her experiences across clubs with regard to dress codes, tipping policies, and other social practices. Differences in recruitment and retention practices have been documented among friendship networks in brothels as well as erotic clubs (Chapkis 1997).

Furthermore, research by Sweet and Tewksbury (2000) reveals substantial differences between what motivates strippers to continue working. They posited three ideal types of strippers in terms of their motivation to continue their dancing career: (1) the career dancer, who continued to work to make money, (2) the party dancer, whose lifestyle centered on consumption of drugs and alcohol, and (3) the power dancer, who obtained rewards through the act of being desired by others. This typology of dancer revealed that there is variation in the experience and motivation of dancers. However, these authors do not investigate possible social organizational variations that might produce these dancer types.

Moreover, structural variation in the “image” promoted by organizations may influence individual sex worker motivations and experiences. For example, Skipper and McCaghy (1970, 1971), in a study of strippers, found that dancers at some clubs were more likely to report that their role as a dancer was “entertaining.” These dancers were also more likely than others to report using dancing to gain entry into more glamorous professions, such as professional dancing, acting, or modeling.

I have opted to examine the contextual variations that underlie much of the literature and unpack their meaning. In researching this book, I have taken a number of roles, both participating and relatively unobtrusive. This book draws on my many different approaches to studying stripping, including participant observation as a dancer, dressing room assistant, and barmaid, as well as unobtrusive field observations, dressing room interviews, and outside interviews. This diversity of data collection perspectives

allows me to give a vivid description of the larger culture and organization in which dancers experience their work.

While there are certainly individual personalities and differences that dancers bring to their jobs, part (I believe a great deal) of how dancers understand and feel about their vocation is conditioned by the organizations in which they work. I have tried to draw upon my own personal lived experience for insight yet maintain the sociological distance requisite in my role as a researcher. Some of my experiences are included to add illustrative depth to my analyses. But this is not my autobiography; rather, I use some of my own story as a framework to help the reader understand the social worlds of dance and the varied experiences of exotic dancers.

Furthermore, I develop a theoretical explanation for how variation in these situational interactions can have substantial effects on perceptions of career agency and constraint. I conclude by arguing that the organization of sex work creates the conditions under which dancers feel internally and/or externally motivated and experience agency or constraint. I present a typology of club organizations, including the hustle, social, and show clubs, and discuss how the conditions of work vary across these clubs. I then discuss how the unique contextual features of each club lead to variations in career commitment development.

APPLYING A SOCIAL WORLDS PERSPECTIVE

Many scholars have argued against the one-dimensional understandings of sex workers' lives as exploitation or agency (Egan and Frank 2005; Barton 2002; Weitzer 2000a, 2005a, 2005b). I wholeheartedly agree. Throughout the following chapters, I detail not only how dancers experience their work but the larger cultural influence in which these dancers' perceptions take shape. In doing so, the current study is consistent with the social-worlds/processual-order perspective developed by Anselm Strauss and his colleagues (Strauss et al., 1963; Strauss 1984, 1993).⁵

The processual-order approach stresses interactions between identities and organizational context. This perspective focuses on the reciprocity between higher-level conditions and individual actions. Within a society there are a multitude of networks of regular activity and mutual response. These *social worlds* are defined by lines of communication and participation and encom-

pass various subworlds, subcomponents segmented by allegiances, access to resources, professional identities, ideology, and so on. Thus, individual-level phenomena cannot be understood independent of the large structures in which they exist, and, in turn, larger social organizations cannot be understood without an appreciation of human interpersonal behavior (Strauss et al. 1963; Strauss 1984, 1993).⁶

Larger social structures create situations in which people act, and, in turn, people's actions can change, modify, or reinforce the larger social structure. So, applying a social-worlds perspective entails taking into account interaction processes as well as structural features within which individuals act. Thus, I detail the organizational culture and informal structure in which members of the exotic dance environment do "sex work." That is, in the strip club, the product is continually created as members individually interpret experiences within a social context.

The framework I put forth is for conceptual clarity, not to be used to dichotomize women's experience. Rather, I conceptualize this club schema as a continuum of social worlds. Although the majority of clubs fall into a particular category, the strip club typology presented is not intended to be discrete classification schema. In other words, although each type is presented separately for conceptual clarity, this typology represents a *continuum* of club organizational patterns. That is, not all clubs can be uniquely classified as one distinct "hustle," "social," or "show" club. Rather, I suggest that clubs will exhibit patterns of dancer perceptions and commitment development similar to those outlined in this study to the extent that a particular club displays organizational features that characterize a certain type.

This book does not necessarily contradict accusations of sex work, nor does it confirm them. I believe that my role as a sociologist is to understand social phenomena as an individual's lived reality. My job is to reflect people's commonsense understanding of their lived experience of social life. In this tradition, I posit that a thorough understanding of sex work is best informed by looking at the profession through the eyes of those who do it.