



# Profitable Exploits: Lap Dancing in the UK

For Glasgow City Council

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The report can be accessed on Glasgow City Council's website:-

[http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/en/YourCouncil/PolicyPlanning\\_Strategy/Corporate/Equalities/Women/Prostitution.htm](http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/en/YourCouncil/PolicyPlanning_Strategy/Corporate/Equalities/Women/Prostitution.htm)



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## **1. Foreward by Councillor Jim Coleman, Deputy Leader of Glasgow City Council**

I welcome the publication of this study funded by the Council and undertaken by Julie Bindel of the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit at London Metropolitan University. For the first time this report provides us with an analysis and some understanding of the nature of so called 'gentlemen's entertainment'. It explodes the myth that it can be likened to, and regulated in the same way, as karaoke, live music and cabaret. These establishments are not providing benign and harmless fun. Make no mistake this is sheer exploitation of women – sexual and financial. These are sleazy strip clubs and no amount of talk of being 'up market', 'elegant', and 'top end of the market' will change that.

The report highlights the exploitation of the women involved in these establishments, paying a fee to owners and being totally dependent on private dances to make any kind of living. It's a far cry from the prevailing myth of young women making a fortune for a few easy hours entertaining high-powered businessmen.

Local authorities like Glasgow strive hard to create cities in which all citizens feel included and respected. We believe that the vast majority of the general public feel that these establishments do no good for our reputation or image and make women, in particular, feel objectified and demeaned. They are also seen as undermining women's feelings of safety and act as magnets for men seeking sexual services.

I believe that this report backs up the Council's request for the Scottish Executive to amend the Civic Government (Scotland) Act to take these operations into the same category as those requiring sex shop licenses.

Thanks again to Julie for producing such a readable and informative report within a very short time scale. Thanks also to Pauline Wallace and Scott Macpherson who prepared the report for printing.

## 2. Executive Summary, October 2004

### Introduction

- 1.1 Lap dancing has increasingly caught public attention during the last five years. Opinion is divided as to whether or not the activities in the clubs are part of the sex industry or the leisure industry.
- 1.2 Within the industry there is evidence of denial that lap dancing is linked to the sex industry.<sup>1</sup> None of the club owners or customers interviewed defined the clubs as part of the sex industry.
- 1.3 Men who might consider strip clubs and brothels distasteful or unacceptable can justify a visit to a lap-dance club as harmless fun. There have been historic and cultural changes regarding the public perception of the clubs.
- 1.4 Chain clubs advertise widely, for example on buses, flyers, the Internet and taxis. Billboards rented from local authorities also carry advertisements.
- 1.5 There is significant opposition in the UK to these clubs from a variety of organisations, businesses and individuals.
- 1.6 There have been complaints from former staff, members of the public and police officers claiming that sexual services are on offer in some clubs.
- 1.7 In line with the council's equality policy and stand against commercial sexual exploitation, in 2002, Glasgow City Council systematically oppose license applications on the grounds that they 'demean and exploit' women.
- 1.8 Lap dancing has been described as 'the fastest growing area in Britain's sex industry.

### Aims and Methodology

- 2.1 This study seeks to address lap dancing, and lap-dancing clubs, in a context of growing concerns from Glasgow City council regarding the current licensing system and lack of local authority powers.
- 2.2 It draws on a range of perceptions – the police, licensing boards, the general public, customers and dancers.
- 2.3 Glasgow was the main focus, with some attention to London.
- 2.4 The following information was sought:

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Alan Whitehead, formally of *For Your Eyes Only*, June 2004.  
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- Definition, origin and growth of lap dancing
  - Numbers of existing establishments in the UK
  - Numbers of dancers and customers involved
  - Recruitment methods
  - Advertising
  - Dancers' employment, and working conditions
  - Licensing laws and implications for police/local authorities
  - Impact on the community/businesses
  - Links to prostitution, drugs and other crimes
- 2.5 A number of methods were used, including a literature review, Internet research, visits to clubs and interviews.
- 2.6 Four clubs in Glasgow and two in London were visited in order to observe and interview dancers, customers and staff. Information was subsequently recorded onto pro formas.
- 2.7 Twenty dancers and fifteen customers were interviewed in the six clubs visited.
- 2.8 Public opinion was polled in Glasgow and London. Club owners, police officers, women's groups, journalists and licensing officials were also interviewed.
- 2.9 Covert observation methods were used in clubs. The work of CWASU adheres to the ethical guidelines of the British Sociological Association.

## **What We Know**

- 3.1 The UK's first lap-dancing club opened in 1995. There are now an estimated one hundred and fifty legally operating clubs throughout the UK.
- 3.2 Private 'VIP' rooms were first established in the US and Canada in the early 1990s and provoked considerable public protest. Most UK clubs have private rooms.
- 3.3 It proved impossible to determine the precise number of establishments in the UK, as some operate without a licence, or do not define as lap dancing clubs.

## **Legal Context**

- 4.1 Lap-dance clubs have come under local authority and police scrutiny. Police forces have conducted a number of investigations into misconduct and criminal activity within lap-dancing clubs during the last eight years.
- 4.2 Lap dance clubs are currently covered by a Public Entertainment License (PEL). Opinion is divided on how lap-dance clubs should be defined and licensed.

- 4.3 In England and Wales Licensing Boards have the power to impose conditions, which are enforceable in the criminal court. In Scotland Licensing Boards can seek undertakings from applicants on matters relating to the operation and management in respect of the proposed premises.
- 4.4 There are no legal restrictions on full nudity during one-to-one dances, but there are limitations on the level of physical contact permitted between the dancers and customers during a private or table dance, and in the public area.
- 4.5 Licensing regulation has proved contentious for law enforcers, members of the public, women's organisations and club owners. There is general agreement that licensing conditions are inconsistent.
- 4.6 None of the clubs/pub visited for this study fully adhered to the terms of their licences.
- 4.7 Evidence of bodily contact and sexual services being offered and/or requested was noted in some clubs.
- 4.8 The Scottish Executive has been accused of failing to provide local authorities with the powers to deal adequately with such enterprises.

## Club Visits

- 5.1 *The Truffle Club, Seventh Heaven, Diamond Dolls and Legs' n' Co* were visited in Glasgow, and *Spearmint Rhino*, Tottenham Court Road branch, and *The Flying Scotsman* in London<sup>2</sup>.
- 5.2 Security was felt to be inadequate in all six clubs. All four Glasgow clubs allowed the 'no touching' rule to be broken.
- 5.3 The majority of one-to-one dances are conducted in a curtained-off area, sometimes with booths. VIP rooms are distinct from 'private dance areas'.
- 5.4 Dancers are self employed and therefore have no employment rights. They pay a fee to work in the clubs. The private dance is the only legitimate way for the dancers to make money.
- 5.5 Dancers feel pressurised to secure dances with as many of the customers as possible, especially if they are in debt to the club.
- 5.6 None of the dancers interviewed in the Glasgow clubs were satisfied with their working conditions. No club had a dedicated dressing room for the dancers, nor did they provide facilities for refreshments away from the public areas.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Flying Scotsman* is licensed as a public house, but with the same conditions as *Spearmint Rhino* with respect to conduct with the dancers/strippers.

- 5.7 Problems identified by the dancers interviewed ranged from threats of physical violence from customers and demands for sex, to practical health and safety issues.
- 5.8 In 2001, 'erotic dancers' were invited to join the GMB. There is opposition from most club owners to dancers joining.
- 5.9 There was no evidence of direct coercion of the dancers by management into working in the club, or providing sexual services, but a number of factors contribute to the possibility of the dancers being pressurised into offering, or agreeing to, sexual services without direct instruction from management.
- 5.10 All club owners interviewed accused other club owners of running disreputable clubs offering sexual services.
- 5.11 There is evidence of links between lap dancing and pornography.
- 5.12 The dancers are encouraged by management to drink alcohol on site.
- 5.13 The majority of dancers interviewed expressed ambivalence towards the customers.
- 5.14 The 15 customers interviewed ranged in age from eighteen to sixty. The majority live in the UK; two thirds had partners and almost half had children. Nine had been to the club, or another lap-dance club, on at least one previous occasion.
- 5.15 This study revealed the complex process and set of conditions in which dancers become more susceptible to requests or suggestions to sell sex. The lack of employment rights, the experience of accumulating debt, expectations of the customers and fierce competition create a climate where the selling and buying of sex on the premises becomes more likely.
- 5.16 There was some evidence of pressure on the dancers from management to create an impression of sexual availability. Several of the dancers stated that a number of customers assume they will agree to provide sexual services.
- 5.17 All of the dancers interviewed insisted they did not offer sexual services but admitted there were women who were known to be willing.
- 5.18 Approximately half of the customers in Glasgow went to clubs looking for sex. Four (25%) claimed they had had sex with a dancer on the premises.
- 5.19 There was no evidence of the selling of sexual services in *Spearmint Rhino*, London, on the premises, but there was in *The Flying Scotsman*.
- 5.20 There was evidence that some of the dancers were involved in coercing money from customers. During all visits in Glasgow and at *Spearmint Rhino* in London it was noted that the ratio of dancers to customers. One occasion, this meant that those who had not managed to secure enough money through private dances

would attempt to charge a 'hostess fee' for talking to the customer, or continue to dance after the track had finished, without explaining that this meant the customer would be charged for further dances.

- 5.21 So long as club managers assure the police and others that any dancer found to be offering or engaging in sexual services will be dismissed, places the onus for behaviour onto the dancer. There has been a tendency, as highlighted through tribunals and police evidence, that club owners who either encourage dancers to engage in sexual activity, or merely 'turn a blind eye' are not held responsible for allowing that to happen.

## Clubs in Context

- 6.1 Widespread opposition to lap-dancing clubs has been voiced by a number of agencies and from a range perspectives. However, there is also support for such clubs from individuals, for example, those using the club facilities<sup>3</sup>, and bodies such as the UK Network of Sex Work Projects<sup>4</sup>.
- 6.2 Twenty members of the public were polled near to lap dance clubs in London and Glasgow. Three quarters said they would rather not work or live in an area near a lap-dancing club.<sup>5</sup>
- 6.3 The Glasgow Chamber of Commerce has objected to the opening of all four clubs, on the grounds that their presence will have an adverse effect on Glasgow's image, and negatively affect trade.
- 6.4 Opinion is divided, as highlighted by press reports, as to whether the clubs are acceptable entertainment.

The main reasons that have been put forward for not opposing the clubs are:

- It is not prostitution, but 'entertainment'
- The women work in a nice environment, and are there freely
- The customers are a 'better class' than in some other clubs
- It is 'good, clean fun'

The main reasons advanced in opposition to them are:

- They overlap with/are a front for prostitution
- They encourage men to sexually objectify women
- People/other businesses do not want the clubs in their area

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<sup>3</sup> This includes customers, staff, and those linked to the business, such as breweries, advertising agencies, dancers' agents and the dancers themselves. However, a number of the dancers were critical of lap-dance clubs, and some were ambiguous.

<sup>4</sup> A non-profit, voluntary association of agencies and individuals working with people in prostitution.

<sup>5</sup> The poll was not large-scale market research, but consisted of randomly selected members of the public being asked a series of questions regarding lap dance establishments who were in the area at the time.

- Lap dancing is demeaning to women, and can encourage sexual violence/abuse
- 6.5 In Glasgow, women's groups that focus on violence and exploitation are united in their critique of lap dancing clubs. A number in London expressed similar opinions.
- 6.6 Little work has been done in the UK on the prevalence and nature of lap-dancing clubs, or the social consequences of them. Further research is needed.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- 7.1 It can be concluded, from the body of evidence that some lap dance club owners and managers create conditions in which prostitution is likely to occur.
- 7.2 There is no evidence of significant numbers of dancers engaging in prostitution activities, however, the clubs run in a way that implicitly encourages the customers to expect and seek sexual services from the dancers.
- 7.3 There is evidence that activities within lap dancing clubs are in direct contradiction with equality between men and women, and normalises men's sexual objectification of women.

This study concludes the following:

- Lap dancing clubs, contrary to the opinion of club owners interviewed for the purposes of this study, are part of the sex industry
- Lap dancing is becoming increasingly normalised
- Activities within the clubs can be seen as detrimental to gender equality
- The buying and selling of sexual services does occur in some lap dance clubs
- Current licensing conditions are inadequate and fail to enable local authorities to control the proliferation of such establishments within their locale
- Working conditions and terms of employment of lap dancers are inadequate and problematic
- There is strong evidence that dancers can suffer humiliation and sexual harassment on a regular basis, from customers and staff/management
- There is a strong public lobby opposing lap dance clubs in the UK and elsewhere
- Many dancers begin working in lap dance clubs through lack of real choice
- The requirement for dancers to 'glamour model' to advertise the club, and the evidence that some customers take covert photographs of the dancers whilst naked, links lap dancing clubs to pornography

This study recommends:

- Local authorities should be given more power regarding licensing of these activities
- License the clubs under the same conditions as sex shops
- Providing the power to control the numbers of licences granted
- Apply licensing conditions to advertising the clubs and related activities

- Make issues of employment practice and working conditions for the dancers a condition of the license
- Regularise licensing regulation and codes of conduct for dancers and club rules/conditions
- Prominently display the rules of the club and the licence in all lap dance venues, including at the entrance and on tables and bar areas
- Subject clubs to regular, obligatory checks by undercover police officers and licensing/enforcement staff
- Abolish dancers' 'rent' payment to management
- Abolish VIP suites and curtained areas. As one police officer interviewed during the study explained, "From a police perspective it would make life and enforcement easier if we did not have the VIP rooms" (August 2004)
- Introduce CCTV coverage throughout the premises excluding toilets and staff changing room
- Central governments to fund research on the social consequences of commercial sexual exploitation, which should include lap dancing
- Central governments to fund public awareness campaigns on sexual exploitation

7.4 This study is the first of its kind in the UK. It is based largely on observations within the six clubs, and interviews with those with some involvement and/or interest in the 'lap dance industry'.

7.5 Based on testimony from some of those involved in the lap dance club industry, it concludes that lap dancing clubs and related activities can be viewed as demeaning to women, and potentially detrimental to gender equality.

### 3. Introduction

Lap dancing has increasingly caught public attention during the last five years. Opinion is divided as to whether or not the activities in the clubs – naked or near-naked women dancing for men in private booths or at their tables – is part of the sex industry, or the leisure industry (Lillith, 2003; Bruckert *et al*, 2003). Clubs have managed to gain a certain air of respectability, partly due to endorsements from a string of celebrities, including Robbie Williams and Sophie Dahl. The National Westminster bank has a corporate account with a lap dance club, as do other city firms in London (Eaves Housing, 2003).

Within the industry there is some evidence of denial that lap dancing is linked to the sex industry.<sup>5</sup> None of the club owners or customers interviewed for this study defined the clubs as part of the sex industry<sup>6</sup>. Similarly, men who might consider strip clubs and brothels distasteful or unacceptable can justify a visit to a lap-dance club as ‘just a bit of fun’ and ‘harmless’. One former dancer who worked as a stripper argues that there have been historic and cultural changes with respect to the public perception of such establishments:

The public perception of people going to these places has changed from sad old men in raincoats to overpaid ‘jack the lads’ throwing away their bonus payments (Tyke, undated).

Lap and pole dancing have become themes in soap operas, music videos and Hollywood movies. When *Eastenders* ran a storyline featuring a lap dancer in 1998, the actor was sent ‘sackfuls’ of mail from men asking her to do private dancing for them and requests from Sunday tabloid newspapers asking her to do ‘glamour’ modelling<sup>7</sup>. *Striptease*, in 1995, and *Showgirls*, 1996, were the first contemporary mainstream Hollywood films with a stripping theme.

The larger or ‘chain’ clubs are widely advertised on buses, flyers, the Internet and taxis. Billboards, which can be rented from a number of companies and other entities, including local authorities, carry advertisements for lap-dancing clubs. Some establishments now offer pole-dancing lessons to women who wish to dance for their partner<sup>8</sup>. One website advertising lap-dancing lessons for women appeals to their potential customers thus:

So come on ladies; its trendier than Pilates, healthier than aerobics, more fun than licking chocolate moose off Brad Pitt, and it will give you more tricks to take back to the bedroom than a Paul Daniels magic box<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Alan Whitehead, formally of *For Your Eyes Only*, June 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Not all interviewees were asked this question.

<sup>7</sup> Telephone interview with the actor, July 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Dance studio The Basement in north London, and the Glass Slipper in London, offer pole and lap dancing and stripping lessons. The classes are recent additions to Salsa and ‘Street Dance’.

<sup>9</sup> [www.chillisaucelondon.co.uk](http://www.chillisaucelondon.co.uk).

Despite this growing normalisation, there is significant opposition to the clubs from a variety of organisations, businesses and individuals. For example, there have been complaints from members of the public and police officers claiming that sexual services are on offer in some clubs. One police officer who visited a central London club said he had “grave concerns” about it<sup>10</sup>, after finding evidence that the ‘no touching’ rule was being breached, and stated he was offered sex with one of the dancers.

In line with the council’s equality policy and stand against prostitution and commercial sexual exploitation, and partly as a response to women’s groups, members of the public and local businesses, in 2002, Glasgow City Council became the first local authority in the UK to systematically oppose license applications for lap-dancing clubs on the grounds that they ‘demean and exploit’ women.<sup>11</sup>

Vigorous defences of lap dancing have been mounted by club owners, dancers and customers, as well as those who take a broadly positive view of the sex industry as a whole. This report aims to reflect the range of opinions found.

## What is Lap Dancing?

A variety of dances are offered in lap-dance clubs and are performed both in the main areas and, in the majority of venues, in a more private area that is often curtained off. ‘Pole dancing’ refers to a ‘cabaret’ performance in the main club area and is the element most commonly used in TV and film representation. ‘Table dancing’ is performed near the customer’s seat, with the dancer’s breasts eye level to the customer. ‘Couch dancing’ entails the dancer standing over a customer sat on a couch, hanging her breasts over him. The US version of ‘lap dancing’ requires the woman to straddle the man’s lap and grind or brush against him. A variation involves the woman dancing between the customer’s legs while sliding down in the chair so that her thighs are rubbing the customer’s genitals as she moves. This is also known in the US as ‘friction dancing’ (Frank, 2003). Licensing agreements for some UK clubs clearly state that the dancers are not permitted to touch the customer with any part of the body (see Section 4), aside from the customer placing money in the dancer’s G-string. Such agreements would preclude some of the variants outlined above.

Lap, table and pole dancing are variations of the same routine, and tend to occur in the same venue, as do stripping and ‘erotic dancing’.

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<sup>10</sup> Police officers at Metropolitan police CO14 division, as reported in: Robert Verkaik, 2004, ‘Spearmint Rhino Hires Ex-Detective to Clean Up Club’s Act’, *The Independent*, April 29.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Councillor Jim Coleman, May 2004.

## Origins and Growth of Lap Dancing

Lap-dancing clubs originated in the US. 'Exotic dance' clubs began opening there in the 1960s. During the next 30 years there was a slow, but steady growth<sup>12</sup>. Private 'VIP' rooms were first established in the US and Canada in the early 1990s and provoked considerable public protest because it was thought that sex would be taking place in private (Bruckert *et al*, 2003). The development of the sector in the UK has followed this trend, with the majority of registered lap-dance clubs offering private room facilities. Since the first club opened in the UK, some clubs have staged regular events featuring stripping and lap dancing for lesbians, gay men and heterosexual women<sup>13</sup>.

Lap dancing has been described as 'the fastest growing area in Britain's sex industry'<sup>14</sup>, and in the leisure industry in general. The previous owner of *For Your Eyes Only*, Alan Whitehead, dismissed criticism of his contribution to the expansion of the sex industry and argued: "Sure they (the dancers) take their clothes off but they're not strippers. They're dancers."<sup>15</sup>

## Normalisation and Influence on Popular Culture

Lap dancing has invaded popular culture at a time when 'ho and pimp' chic<sup>16</sup> is at its height. The song 'Lapdance' by the hip-hop act N.E.R.D sold three hundred thousand copies in the US, with lyrics suggesting a link between stripping and 'girl-power'. Cake, a group describing themselves as 'feminist party promoters', advocate the lap-dance-as-party-game to their customers<sup>17</sup>.

In the UK, pole dancing is becoming popular amongst some female celebrities as a form of exercise. Daryl Hannah, Heather Graham and Kate Moss are all apparently taking pole-dancing lessons, and Sarah Cox and Zoë Ball have had their own poles installed at home<sup>18</sup>.

Lap-dance clubs and agents regularly advertise in *The Stage* newspaper. For some of the women, becoming a lap dancer is motivated by underlying aspirations of being an 'entertainer'. Two dancers at *Spearmint Rhino*, London, spoke of their interest in becoming involved in the acting profession, one stating that she had been told at her audition by the housemother<sup>19</sup> that, "lots of girls go on to being actresses and performers from here" (LD1).

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<sup>12</sup> David Price, 1996, 'A cancan too far – history of burlesque in the context of lap dancing', *History Today*, December.

<sup>13</sup> *Lap Attack* in Streatham, London, is a monthly event catering for women only, and featuring male strippers who offer private lap dances. *The Candy Bar*, a lesbian club in central London, hosts regular strip and lap dancing shows for women.

<sup>14</sup> 'Lap dancing contest cancelled', *UK BBC News*, 14 April, 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Nick Webster, 2003, 'A Brief History of Lap dancing', *Daily Mirror*, July 9.

<sup>16</sup> This refers to the adoption of prostitute and pimp 'dress styles' by some fashion designers.

<sup>17</sup> <http://slate.msn.com/id/2084507/slideshow>.

<sup>18</sup> Megan Lane, 2003, 'The woman rapper taking on lap dancing', *BBC News Online Magazine*, December.

<sup>19</sup> The person responsible for organising the dancers

## Why the Concern?

Concern about the expansion of the lap-dance club scene can be divided into the following areas:

- Links to organised crime and criminality
- A front for prostitution
- Inadequate licensing laws
- Neighbourhood disruption
- Perpetuation of gender inequality

These issues were explored during the study, and are addressed in this report.

## Notation

The term 'lap dancing' is used throughout this report to mean any type of 'erotic' dance, such as table and pole dancing. Some clubs included in this report self-define as table dancing. However, for the sake of consistency, these clubs will be referred to as 'lap-dance clubs', and the dancers involved, 'lap dancers'.

## 4. Aims and Methodology

This short exploratory study seeks to address lap dancing, and lap-dancing clubs, in a context of growing concerns from Glasgow City council regarding the current licensing system and lack of local authority powers, in line with its equality policy and stand against commercial sexual exploitation. Opposition to the clubs from some women's groups was also noted. The study draws on a range of perceptions – the police, licensing boards, the general public, customers and dancers.

The commissioned project aimed to address a number of issues with respect to lap-dancing clubs in the UK whilst retaining a specific focus on Scotland. These comprised:

- The definition, origin and growth of lap dancing/table dancing
- Numbers of existing establishments in the UK and geographical locations
- Estimates of the numbers of dancers and customers involved
- Where/how the are dancers recruited
- Where/how the are clubs advertised
- Terms and conditions of the dancers' employment, and working conditions
- Licensing laws and implications for police/local authorities
- Impact on the community/businesses
- Links to prostitution, drugs and any other crime

## Methods

The study was conducted using a multi-methodological strategy, which was discussed and agreed with the commissioning body, and formally agreed at a meeting of the Council's Policy and Resources Equalities Sub-Committee.

Methods used were:

- Literature review
- Internet research
- Visits to clubs
- Interviews

## Literature review

A literature search was initially conducted to examine issues raised in other countries where lap dancing is prevalent, such as the US. The search was conducted via electronic libraries, websites and other accessible materials, with the aim of exploring a broad range of opinion, and gathering further information on the phenomenon of lap-dance clubs than the interviews alone allowed. Research and papers from a variety of perspectives were studied, focusing on the following themes:

- Definition, origins and growth of lap dancing
- Previous research
- The influence on popular culture

- Accounts from former strippers and lap dancers
- Quantitative and qualitative studies of violence and abuse of dancers
- Commodification of 'erotic' dance
- Deception and duplicity in lap-dancing arenas
- Concepts of fantasy and power
- Effects of prevalence and normalisation of lap-dancing establishments

One search carried out on the Lexis Nexis newspaper database, between July 16 2003 and the same date in 2004, produced a total of nine hundred and fifty one news items, features and columns in newspapers and magazines in the UK on different aspects of lap dancing, with new ones posted almost every day. Over eighty newspaper and magazine articles that provided some basic information about the historical context of lap dancing and initial responses to clubs opening in the UK and elsewhere were initially collated. Out of these, forty were selected for use on the basis that they contained some solid information regarding lap dancing, rather than opinion or speculation<sup>20</sup>.

## Desk-based research

A proportion of the data was gathered using desk-based research. Newspaper reports, Internet websites, entertainment guides and magazines were examined to investigate the following:

- Geographical locations of the clubs
- Estimated numbers of dancers and customers involved

## Visits to Clubs

Visits to clubs in Glasgow and London were conducted in order to observe and interview dancers, customers and staff. As this study focused mainly on Glasgow, four clubs were visited in Glasgow and, for the purposes of comparison, two in London.

In order to speak to the dancers, the clubs were visited when quiet (between the hours of 9pm and 1-2am), therefore allowing more possibility for informal interviews to be conducted. In the Glasgow clubs fifteen dancers were spoken to for between fifteen minutes and an hour and a half, and 12 customers. In London five dancers were spoken to for between five minutes and one hour, and five customers. Information from interviews was recorded contemporaneously using brief notations and then transferred onto pro formas (see below and Appendix 1) as soon as possible afterwards.

In order to preserve anonymity, dancers, customers and journalists are referred to in this report according to the following coding system:

- Location is indicated by G (Glasgow), L (London)
- Dancers are indicated by D, customers by C, staff by S, followed by a number (e.g. GD1, GD3, LS6)
- Journalists are indicated by J and a number (e.g. J1, J2).

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<sup>20</sup> For example, reports on industrial tribunals brought by lap-dance club employees, violence and criminality associated with the club or its employees/customers or protests from residents or businesses.

## Staff

Staff, namely bar and security staff, were difficult to engage in conversation in comparison with dancers and customers. Unlike the dancers, who spend a lot of time engaging in conversation with customers, staff members rarely sit and talk to others in the club. Therefore, relatively little information was gathered from staff. Brief conversations were occasionally possible when purchasing drinks or asking details about the entertainment in the club.

## Club owners

To obtain information on how clubs are run, and to compare the perceptions of owners with those of dancers and customers, a pro forma was designed and club owners interviewed, primarily by telephone.

The pro forma addressed the following areas:

- Working conditions of the dancers
- Security and club rules
- Any inappropriate behaviour of dancers or customers
- Any sexual services requested/offered
- Public opinion
- Licensing issues

A total of six club owners/managers were interviewed. Others were approached but declined to give interviews. For example, two Glasgow club owners stated they could not speak to anyone publicly about the clubs until after the licensing applications for two new clubs had been dealt with.<sup>21</sup>

## Interviews with Dancers

To gain the perspective of dancers, a loose interview guide was prepared. Areas to be explored were:

- ◆ How they got involved in lap dancing
- ◆ Length of involvement
- ◆ Main source of income
- ◆ Working conditions/arrangements
- ◆ Behaviour of the customers/staff
- ◆ Whether sexual services are requested/provided
- ◆ Own perspective on lap dancing and clubs

Conditions within the clubs visited, primarily time constraints on the dancers, mean it was not possible to address all of these areas with every dancer interviewed. A total of twenty dancers were interviewed in six clubs – four in Glasgow and two in London. No sample selection was possible. Interviews were conducted, in conversational mode,

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<sup>21</sup> All four existing club owners in Glasgow opposed the applications.  
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with any dancer willing to participate. All conversations with the dancers were initiated by them, since part of their work is to talk to customers within the clubs.

During the interviews, questions were framed in a non-invasive way, such as 'How long have you worked here?', 'What is it like working here?', 'Does your boss treat you well?', 'Do you enjoy dancing' and 'Can you earn good money?' In some cases the dancers volunteered additional information about their working lives and conditions. Dancers seemed keen and happy to talk. One, who talked for ninety minutes, remarked:

It is so nice to talk to a woman. I get so sick sometimes of massaging men's egos. You have to light their fags, and hang on their every word. I like my work, and most of the men are fine, but it is exhausting putting on a show for them. With my boyfriend I just tell him to shut up when he's boring. You can't do that in here (GD2).

### **Interviews with Customers**

Conversations with the customers were structured differently. In terms of the men actually interviewed, all were approached directly. This was because the men who approached the researcher were all looking for a 'date', and all inferred, in various ways, the possibility of 'free' sex. For example, one said: "It's a relief to know there are birds here who might not charge you." (GC7). Questions asked of the customers were slightly more personal than those asked of the dancers (see pro forma). For example, they were asked if they had a partner and if they ever came to the club looking for sex.

### **Members of the public**

Twenty members of the public were interviewed outside two lap-dance clubs in Glasgow at lunchtime, and on club in London in early evening. Their answers were recorded on pro formas. Interviewees were chosen at random, and ranged in age from early twenties to late fifties.

Interviews with members of the public were designed to explore their perspective on the impact of lap-dancing clubs on the area, and their opinions about the effect, if any, the clubs had on business and the community/image of Glasgow.

### **Semi-structured interviews**

Additional semi-structured interviews were conducted, either face-to-face or by telephone, with one or more representatives of the following sectors: licensing board staff; police; NGOs; local government; members of the public; journalists; Unions; Chamber of Commerce.

- Police and licensing board staff were asked about evidence of irregularity and criminality linked to the clubs
- NGOs were questioned on links between lap dancing and gender inequality
- Corporate firms were asked about membership of lap-dance clubs
- Questions to local government representatives focused on the policy aspects of licensing clubs

- Print and visual media journalists who had previously researched lap dancing for one or more articles were interviewed to explore their knowledge of the activities occurring within the clubs.
- Information was sought from the London and Glasgow Chambers of Commerce on the effects of lap-dancing clubs on the image of the cities, and whether/how that affected business and tourism

As with other participants, confidentiality was given as a matter of course.

The table below details the number of interviews completed with all of these groups.

**Table 1: Data Collection**

	Observational Visits	Interviews Face-to-face	Interviews telephone	Pro formas
Club owners/managers			6	3 *
Licensing board members			1	1
Women's organisations		4	4	8
Union representatives		1		
Elected members		1		
Police officers		1	1	2
Members of public		20		20
Local government policy officers			1	1
Journalists		5	3	8
Dancers	20			20
Customers	15			15
Researchers			2	2
Club promoters			1	1

\* There was not enough relevant information from three of the club owners

### Pro formas

Pro formas and interview guides had a common basis but were adapted to suit each category of interviewee. They served primarily to record interview data in a systematic form that could then be subjected to quantitative analysis. They were used for the following interviewee groups: dancers; customers; club owners; members of the public; police officers and local authority representatives.

### Undertaking research in sensitive areas: ethical considerations

After exploring other options, it was decided to use covert observation methods when visiting clubs. All of the work of the Child & Woman Abuse Studies Unit adheres to the ethical guidelines of the British Sociological Association, whose position on covert research methods is:

Participant or non-participant observation in non-public spaces or experimental manipulation of research participants without their knowledge should be resorted to only where it is impossible to use other methods to obtain essential

data. In such studies it is important to safeguard the anonymity of research participants (BSA, 1994).

However, it has been argued that all social research is invasive and, to an extent, unethical because, for social scientists and criminologists, those being studied usually have less power than the researchers. The key arguments against using covert methods are:

- It is an abuse of power and not a valid research method
- The researcher cannot obtain the informed consent of the subjects

The main arguments in defence of such methods include:

- The distinction between covert and overt (including informed consent) is not as clear as it may seem
- Covert research is sometimes necessary as the only way to document important areas of social life, especially where there is crime/corruption

The criminologist Helen Wells argues that:

There are obvious attractions to a method which encourages us to believe that we are witnessing and reporting 'the truth', undisturbed by our own presence. Subjects cannot alter their behaviour or conceal activities if they are unaware that they are being observed, suggesting a higher level of validity than can be obtained by overt methods (Wells, 2004, p6).

In relation to lap dancing, several journalists who have conducted both undercover and overt research in clubs have confirmed that the conduct of staff, dancers and customers is affected when they are aware they are being observed. For example, when J1 was researching a piece she initially visited a club and declared her identity and intentions:

I found that no one except the management, who were excited by the idea of newspaper coverage, wanted to talk to me, and I was viewed with suspicion. Everything seemed controlled, and I had a sense that I was not seeing the true picture (Interview, June 2004).

When she returned, posing as a customer on a night out with friends:

It was different. The women started to tell me how most of the men are wankers, and that they didn't like their jobs. It was a different story than when I had visited as a journalist (ibid).

A number of University Ethics Committees stipulate that researchers who carry out covert observations should fulfil the following criteria:

- The information is in the public interest
- There is no other way to obtain the information

- Any harm to individuals or organisations is outweighed by the benefits of making the information public

### **Ensuring the Research was Ethical**

As well as visiting one club overtly, a further six were visited covertly (as a customer accompanied by a 'male boss'). To address the ethical concerns in undertaking all covert research, the following steps were taken to ensure as far as possible the safety and anonymity of those interviewed for this study.

- Dancers were spoken to with courtesy and respect at all times
- No 'overly' personal questions were asked
- No actions were taken that might provoke particular behaviour or actions by the dancers or customers

All interviewees (other than dancers and customers interviewed during covert visits) were fully informed about the nature of the study, and consent for participation was obtained before interviews were undertaken.

### **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations in relation of this study. Several individuals were reluctant to give information. For example, club owners were reticent in the light of public criticism, and because licenses for clubs are often objected to/scrutinised by police officers and local authorities. This exemplifies one of the main difficulties of conducting research in environments where social stigma is an issue, and highlights the advantages in employing covert methods under certain circumstances.

## 5. What We Know About Lap Dancing

The UK's first lap-dancing club, *For Your Eyes Only*, opened in north London in 1995. There are now an estimated one hundred and fifty legally operating clubs in the UK, with sixty-six registered in London alone (Dickson, 2003).

### History

In the 1950s and 60s there were strip clubs and public houses that ran 'stripper' evenings in towns and cities across the UK, but it was generally seen as unacceptable to watch women stripping, as the activity had a certain stigma attached to it (Price, 1996). The stripping activities took place in the main area of such venues, and private liaison with the women was not permitted.

During the 1970s, most public houses and clubs would expect the dancer to hand a jug around to the customers for tips. In some establishments there was no obligation on the part of the customers to pay,<sup>22</sup> and this practice still operates in some venues. The current regime, however, means that lap dancers pay either 'rent' to the owner for each shift they work, and/or a percentage of the money earned from private dances and tips (Tyke, undated).

Private 'VIP' rooms were first established in lap-dance venues in the US and Canada in the early 1990s and provoked considerable public protest because it was thought that sex would be taking place in those rooms (Bruckert *et al*, 2003) Currently, the majority of registered lap-dance club in the UK have private room facilities.

### Numbers

Despite extensive research, it proved impossible to determine the precise number of establishments in the UK that currently offer naked contact dancing as part of their regular entertainment. The McCoy's Guide to Adult Services<sup>23</sup> and Punternet, a site for prostitute users to 'compare field notes' about individual prostitutes/sex establishments, provide lists of lap-dancing clubs in the UK. However, they exclude: premises regulated by entertainment licenses where lap dancing is staged informally and that might feature a dancer on occasion; sports clubs and venues that host stag nights where lap and pole dancers are hired regularly as special entertainment; and those operating without an entertainment license. Women's campaign group OBJECT ([www.object.org.uk](http://www.object.org.uk)) claims there are over three hundred lap-dancing clubs in the UK, some of which are operating without a license.

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<sup>22</sup> Tyke, undated, 'A personal account of the London Strip Scene', available online at <http://www.trashcity.org>.

<sup>23</sup> An annual guide to the off-street sex industry in the UK and Ireland.

## Locations

Clubs are mainly located in city/town centres, with a minority in residential areas. However, pubs and other venues that host occasional 'shows' are often situated in or near residential areas.

The Ultimate Strip Club website (<http://www.tuscl.com/sc-Listings>) and Trash City (<http://www.trashcity.org>) identify clubs in 74 localities across England, Wales, and Scotland:

Alderly Edge	Nottingham
Aberdeen	Northampton
Abingdon	Norwich
Aylesbury	Oxford
Birmingham	Plymouth
Blackpool	Portsmouth
Bolton	Preston
Bootle	Purfleet
Bournemouth	Redcar
Brighton & Hove	Reading
Bristol	Rochester
Cardiff	Rotherham
Chatham	Salisbury
Chester	Scarborough
Cheshire	Skegness
Cheshunt	Sheffield
Derby	Slough
Doncaster	Southampton
Dunstable	Southend
Dudley	Stockport
Edinburgh	Stockton
Glasgow	Stoke-On-Trent
Great Yarmouth	Swindon
Halifax	Surrey
Halstead	Uxbridge
Harrogate	Watford
Hayes	Wigan
Heathrow	Windsor
Hove	West Bromwich
Huddersfield	Weston Super Mare
Hull	Workington
Isle of Man	
Leeds	
Leicester	
Lincoln	
Leighton Buzzard	
Liverpool	
London	
Luton	
Maidstone	
Manchester	
Milton Keynes	
Newcastle	
Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit	
London Metropolitan University	

## Previous Research

There has been very little specific research to date conducted into lap dancing, or lap-dancing clubs, in the UK. Additionally, most research on the topic is problematic in that the samples of interviewees are relatively small, and the studies are, in the main, unscientific.

For the purposes of this research, fourteen studies from the UK, US, Canada, Australia and Hawaii, and forty press reports from those accessed on electronic libraries and Lexis Nexis, were selected for analysis; these were supplemented by papers on stripping. The key themes that the selected studies focused on were:

- Perspectives of the dancers
- Effects on communities
- Legal/licensing issues
- Customers

Key findings from the range of material accessed are summarised below with respect to these four areas.

### Dancers' Perspectives

Three of the publications that were examined explored dancer-customer dynamics from the perspective of the dancers, with a particular focus on the elements of fantasy and illusion. Gantt (2002) describes the relationship between dancer and customer as a form of 'counterfeit intimacy', and focuses on how dancers create an illusion of being attracted to the customers in order to gain advantage of them, both financially and behaviourally. Based on open-ended interviews with two 'exotic dancers', the author argues that the dancers' sense of control over their surroundings and the customers gives them a sense of agency and power.

Pasko (2002) also examines the dancer-customer interaction using participant observation. The author used three main methods to gather data: working as a stripper in a Hawaii club; conducting thirteen informal interviews with other dancers; and posing as a customer and visiting the club in order to observe behaviour and interactions. Although the author concedes that strippers can have control over customers by providing them with their 'fantasy illusion', she concludes that stripping has 'outcomes of psychological...stigmatisation and potential victimisation' (ibid, p 64).

Holsopple (1998) focuses on violence and abuse towards dancers in the US strip scene, drawing on interviews with eighteen strippers. She found that all the dancers had suffered verbal harassment, and both physical and sexual abuse whilst working. Holsopple also found that all the women had been propositioned for prostitution, and that three-quarters had been stalked by men associated with the strip club.

In a personal reflection on the UK strip club scene Tyke (2002) maintains that many of the strippers being recruited into lap dancing in the mid-1990s:

...were not so sure that the long late hours, need to hustle, constant rejections and lack of friendly faces were worth the odd admittedly very lucrative night when the place was busy.

### **Public Opinion on Local Impact**

Other studies focus on public opinion, specifically on whether lap dancing and stripping have an effect on gender relations and violence and abuse of women. Following the opening of *Spearmint Rhino* in Sheffield City Centre, Lewis (2002) conducted a straw poll of twenty-seven women living and working nearby. Interviewees were asked their opinion on links between lap dancing and prostitution, its effects on relationships between men and women, effects of the club on the area and the sexual objectification of women. The majority of women did not support the club, and believed it had a detrimental effect on women, men's attitudes and the community.

A report by the Lillith Project (2002) focused on seven lap-dance clubs in the London borough of Camden. It concludes that the existence of lap-dancing clubs has a negative effect on the community, that areas where lap-dance clubs operate have become 'no-go' for women who feel uncomfortable walking by, and that men have been harassed by personnel offering them sexual services<sup>24</sup>.

### **Customers**

Frank (2003) focuses on customers in the US in an ethnographic study spanning seven years. She gathered the data through participatory observation, and in-depth interviews with thirty customers in five strip clubs, and 'hundreds' of semi-structured interviews with customers, staff and dancers. Research questions concentrated on the reasons why men became customers, what they get out of the experience and how they relate to the dancers. Frank concludes that men's desire for commercial sexual interaction is a consequence of masculinity and male power, in that the women are viewed as commodified sexual objects.

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<sup>24</sup> Report of Director, Environmental Health Department, March 2002, section 3.4.

## Legal/Licensing

Licensing regulations and the 'retailing' of lap dancing are the focus of a recent UK study (Jones *et al*, 2003). Licensing regulations in six UK local authorities (Glasgow, Manchester, Coventry, Plymouth, Westminster and Camden) were examined and inconsistencies in the criteria applied when issuing licenses to lap-dance clubs highlighted. The authors conclude that:

In the absence of any definitive specific regulatory legislation guidance from central government, individual local authorities have adopted different and at times changing positions in interpreting public interest (p 219).

Mary Sullivan's study (2004) of the effects of brothel legalisation in Victoria, Australia, links table and lap dancing to prostitution and the sex industry. In her view, legalisation expands the boundaries of the sex industry and causes 'women...[to] become products of mass consumption' (op cit p 3).

## 6. Legal Context

Lap-dance clubs have come under local authority and police scrutiny in previous years. One issue that has been the subject of debate is how such clubs are licensed. In addition, a number of challenged license applications have highlighted inconsistency in applying licensing conditions to the clubs and, in some cases, criminal activity associated with them.

### Licensing

Lap dance clubs, like other establishments, which sell alcohol on the premises, are currently covered by a Public Entertainment License (PEL). The Licensing Board of the local authority is responsible for granting the PEL and any subsequent conditions.

Police prepare an initial report for the Board which covers concerns re the applicant e.g. criminal record, pending charges if serious and relevant, concerns over the set up of the business including Directors in the case of a Limited Company, concerns about applicant acting as a front for another who would gain from the business and concerns about public order and safety. The Police monitor the establishment once a licence is awarded and investigate concerns or complaints from a local authority, local police force, business or member of the public. Reports are also provided to the Licensing Board by Building Control, Environmental Health and the Fire Service and cover evacuation procedures, overcrowding etc.

The Licensing Board has the power to impose conditions, which are enforceable in the criminal court.

There are no standard conditions attached to entertainment licences to regulate 'adult entertainment' in the UK. These venues are licensed under a Public Entertainment License (PEL), in the way that a public house would be, rather than as sex establishments. However, there are restrictions imposed by the licensing board on each club, which are enforceable by criminal law. The conditions are outlined in the table below.

Local Authorities can impose conditions on a sex shop or sex establishment regarding advertising but are more limited in relation to Public Entertainment Licences. Venues such as sex shops are likely to have conditions that prevent the use of any external written sign or other visual representation to indicate that forms of nudity take place at the club. However, lap dancing clubs advertise prolifically on billboards, taxis and flyers that are widely distributed.

Opinion is divided regarding how lap-dance and strip clubs should be defined, and consequently licensed (as outlined in Section 5) club owners tend to argue that lap-dance clubs are not part of the sex industry, and that they should, therefore, be licensed as public entertainment, whereas others consider them to be sex establishments and claim they should be licensed as such. Premises licensed as sex establishments are commonly outlets such as cinemas and shops.

There are distinct advantages for club owners to be licensed under a Sex Shop licence (Scotland) Sex Establishment License (England and Wales), rather than a Public Entertainment Licence. The cost of a SEL in Westminster, for example, is £28,531 as opposed to £8451 for a PEL. Some London local authorities enforce the requirement for lap dance clubs to hold a SEL in order to stunt the growth of such premises, including the escalation of 'peep show' type premises. Magistrates in one case regarding licensing such premises held that:

Lewd sexual displays by young naked or semi naked women gyrating to music whilst caressing their breasts or vagina's was not Music and Dancing or Public Entertainment (Willowcell Ltd v Westminster City Council, 1995).

Although the above-mentioned case refers to activity in a 'peep show' establishment, it could be asked how establishments such as those visited for the purposes of this study conduct their business whilst operating on a PEL, as the activities described above were seen to take place in the clubs visited.

Tension between law enforcers and licensing boards usually rests on the lack of concrete special conditions. As one police officer said:

The sorts of license conditions that we like to see are no physical contact. In the early period there was a three-foot rule, but it was too difficult to impose. The girls are competing for financial reward, and one girl offers a bit more, and it carries on, then you're in the realms of prostitution and all sorts of problems (Interview, CO14, August 2004).

However, there are those who argue that the inconsistency of licensing boards imposing special conditions means that club owners are often 'unclear' as to what is acceptable or not.

Indecency is a vague concept. Our client [the owner of a chain of lap-dance clubs] is never in trouble in the US, because everything is written down and applies across the board. But in Birmingham for instance, he could be in trouble for a dancer taking his clothes off. Different police forces apply different standards. It is enormously inconsistent (Interview, club lawyer, August 2004).

There are no legal restrictions on full nudity during one-to-one dances, but there are limitations on the level of physical contact permitted between the dancers and customers during a private or table dance, and in the public area. Whilst the dancer is sitting talking to one or more customers, or when leading them into the private areas, she is allowed to hold the customer's hand.

Licensing regulation has proved contentious for law enforcers, members of the public, women's organisations and club owners. Paradoxically, what those both supporting and opposing the clubs tend to agree upon is that the licensing regimes are inconsistent and often unclear. It could also be argued that there is a problem with implementation. As with the sex industry in general, there is scant monitoring of the regulation of lap dancing. Lack of resources is sometimes cited as a reason for failing to

rigorously check that rules are being adhered to. A police officer overseeing licensing conditions in one London borough explained that:

Some of the boroughs in the suburbs of London don't have as much to spend on licensing, so some of the time they think if we put conditions on these licenses we've got to check them, and we don't have the resources to do that. And they can't afford to pay for the prosecutions if the rules are broken (CO14 Interview, July 2004).

### Breaching Licensing Regulations and Club Rules

None of the clubs/pub visited for this study fully adhered to the licensing conditions described above. The left-hand column on the table below lists a model set of special conditions agreed between the Metropolitan Clubs and Vice Unit, and Spearmint Rhino, Tottenham Court Road, London. The ticks and crosses indicate whether the other clubs adhere to these conditions<sup>25</sup>. Legs & Co has no special conditions attached to its license:

**Table 2: Licensing conditions**

Special Conditions	Spearmint Rhino	Seventh Heaven	Truffle Club	Diamond Dolls	Legs' n' Co	Flying Scotsman
Only dancers engaged by the company can perform striptease	√	√	√	√	No special conditions	Not known
All performers to be provided with code of conduct	√	Not Known	Not Known	Not Known	No special conditions	Not Known
Table dancing to be performed only in designated areas	√	√	√	√	No special conditions	Not Known
No striptease at bar or to standing customers	√	Not Known	Not Known	Not Known	No special conditions	X
No physical contact during dance	√	X	X	X	No special conditions	X
Notice telling customers the above on tables and entrance to club	√	√	√	√	No special conditions	√

<sup>25</sup> It was not possible to ascertain whether clubs other than Spearmint Rhino and Legs' n' Co have any special conditions or agreed code of conduct. Therefore, the table indicates whether a) the club has those conditions attached to its license and/or b) if they appeared to be adhered to during the club visits

Special Conditions	Spearmint Rhino	Seventh Heaven	Truffle Club	Diamond Dolls	Legs' n' Co	Flying Scotsman
No dancing with other dancers	√	Not Known	Not Known	Not Known	No Special conditions	Not Known
Dancers remain standing	√	Not Known	Not Known	Not Known	No special conditions	Not Known
Re-dress at conclusion of dance	√	√	√	√	No special conditions	√
No under-18s permitted in club	√	√	√	√	No special conditions	√
Minimum numbers of Council registered door supervisors	√	√	√	√	No special conditions	Not Known
No dancers under 18. Proprietor to check documents re age, and eligibility to work in UK	√	√	√	√	No special conditions	Not Known
Employment files to be retained for 6 months after employment ends	√	Not Known	Not Known	Not Known	No special conditions	Not Known
Agencies supplying dancers adhere to the same rules	√	Not Known	Not Known	Not Known	No special conditions	Not Known
Entire venue, bar lockers, monitored by CCTV	√	√	√	√	No special conditions	Not Known
All performers to be given code of conduct		Not Known	Not Known	Not Known	No special conditions	X

*Spearmint Rhino* did not have the rules of the club anywhere on display, even though the licensing agreement stipulates that 'A notice outlining condition 5 (no physical contact) shall be displayed at each customer's table and at the entrance to the premises.' The conditions also require that the dancers fully dress at the end of each private dance; however, it was noted that this did not always happen (see Section 5).

Ten dances were observed during the visit to *The Flying Scotsman*. Every dancer, during their performances, displayed the inside of their genitalia by spreading their legs above the customers' heads. This seemed to be an established part of the routine. As one customer put it:

What's the point of seeing a strip show and not getting a bit of fanny? The fun part is seeing her c\*\*t. You can open *The Sun* if you just want tits (LC1).

The dancers regular display of their genitalia represents a patent breach of licensing conditions. *The Flying Scotsman* has a Music and Dancing Licence, and any such premises that are likely to have nude entertainments are all subject to condition SX, which disallows the displaying of the "genital, urinary or excretory organs at any time while they are providing the service" (Islington Council, 2004).

At a licence renewal application for *Spearmint Rhino*<sup>26</sup>, police from Charing Cross Clubs and Vice Unit disclosed intelligence gathered whilst on undercover visits. An officer told the court he had 'grave concerns' about illegality in the club, as dancers had allowed customers to touch them, sometimes intimately, in contravention of the club's entertainment licence. He said that the undercover officers had been offered sex in a private room by two dancers for £500<sup>27</sup>.

In 1999 a case against the proprietors of three central London Clubs was dismissed in the High Court, where it was ruled that the club owners "could not be guilty of failing to maintain good order, as required by their licences, if they were not aware that prostitution was taking place"<sup>28</sup>. Plainclothes police officers had visited the three clubs as a result of intelligence suggesting that sexual services were available. Whilst in the club they observed women dancing in a sexually suggestive manner, who then offered the officers sex at a venue outside the club on the condition that they purchased two bottles of champagne at £80 per bottle.

There are a number of reasons, however, why it may not be advantageous to local licensing boards to further restrict the conditions in which these clubs are allowed to operate. In a paper on the licensing policies and regulations of lap-dance clubs, it is argued that:

In developing and planning and licensing policies, and in taking specific decisions concerning lap-dancing clubs, local authorities have taken account of a range of issues and pressures. Some local authorities clearly recognise that lap dancing clubs can bring economic benefits to the local area and help to diversify its economy (Jones et al, 2003).

The authors also point out that in London boroughs, such as Westminster, nightlife attractions, including lap-dancing clubs, 'are part of the character of the 'West End'' and are, as such, helping to maintain the image of a 'world city' (ibid, p 216).

The Scottish Executive has been accused of failing to properly assist local authorities in licensing issues. Councillor Coleman, deputy leader of Glasgow City Council and responsible for social inclusion issues, explains that:

The City Council has asked the Scottish Executive that the Civic Government Act be amended so that lap dance clubs are categorised the same as sex shops, but they have refused (Interview, May 2004).

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<sup>26</sup> Tottenham Court Road, London branch.

<sup>27</sup> Sherna Noah, 2003, 'Lap dancing club warned over 'indecent acts'', *Press Association*, March 14.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Horsnell, 1999, 'Clubs cleared over offers of sex', *Times Newspapers Limited*, February 13.

## Tribunals

There have been a number of complaints taken out by former employees of lap dancing clubs, including one dancer who was found by an employment tribunal to have "suffered sexual discrimination and hurt feelings"<sup>29</sup>. A head waitress at *Spearmint Rhino*, London, took the company to a tribunal when told by the manager she was not allowed to cover her noticeably pregnant stomach with a white shirt, but had to continue to wear her revealing waistcoat. She was awarded £60,000 for sexual discrimination, breach of contract and hurt feelings. The waitress told the tribunal that the club operated under a 'culture of discrimination' and displayed a 'lack of respect' for women who worked there.

During another tribunal hearing lost by *Spearmint Rhino*, a former manager at the chain, Lee Freer, claimed he saw a pole dancer perform oral sex on a co-owner of the club, in a private booth. The former manager said sexual relationships between bosses at *Spearmint Rhino* branches and the lap dancers were commonplace, as was the sale and consumption of illegal drugs<sup>30</sup>.

A female employee of investment bank, Schroeder Securities, took the firm to an employment tribunal on the ground of sexual discrimination in 2003. Part of her case against the bank was the regular trips by male colleagues to lap-dancing clubs, resulting in the firm having a "laddish or sexist air".<sup>31</sup>

## Police Investigations

Police forces have conducted a number of investigations into misconduct and criminal activity within lap-dancing clubs during the last eight years. In 1997, three Lithuanian women were deported after being trafficked into the UK to work in an Edinburgh lap-dancing club<sup>32</sup>.

In the same year, the owner of Scotland's first lap-dancing club, *The Fantasy Bar*, was charged with rape, brothel keeping and living off illegal earnings. The local police force unsuccessfully applied for a suspension of the club's license on the grounds that 'the licensee is no longer fit to hold a licence, on the grounds of public safety'.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> David Graves, 2002, '£60,000 for pregnant lap-dance waitress', *The Daily Telegraph*, February 06.

<sup>30</sup> Rebecca Mowling and Mark Wilkinson, 2003, 'Drugs and sex sold at Spearmint Club', *The Evening Standard*, September 2.

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.lawyer2b.com/archive/TL2BARCHIVEi3\\_feature.story1.asp](http://www.lawyer2b.com/archive/TL2BARCHIVEi3_feature.story1.asp).

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Rafferty, 1997, 'Euro Hookers Caught in Vice Swoop: International smuggling ring in prostitutes smashed by police', *Scottish Daily Record*, June 2.

<sup>33</sup> Conal Urquhart, 1997, 'Sauna owner on rape charge', *The Scotsman*, October 30.

In 2004, police officers investigated a Birmingham lap-dance club after it was discovered that a 15-year-old girl was working at *Spearmint Rhino Extreme*; club owners accused rivals of 'setting them up'<sup>34</sup>. The council were quoted as admitting that the restriction on under-18s should have been made a condition of public entertainment licences issued to lap-dance clubs.

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<sup>34</sup> 2004, 'Lap Dance Club Claims 'Dirty Tricks' Over Under-Age Dance', *Birmingham Post*, February 3.

## 7. Lap Dance Clubs in Glasgow and London

Club visits were conducted covertly (see section 2) in order to observe and interview the dancers, customers and staff. All four clubs in Glasgow were visited – *The Truffle Club*, *Seventh Heaven*, *Diamond Dolls* and *Legs' n' Co*. In London, two clubs were visited – *Spearmint Rhino*, Tottenham Court Road branch, and *The Flying Scotsman*<sup>35</sup>.

### Description of Clubs

With the exception of *The Flying Scotsman*, a small public house hosting stripping, the clubs were fairly standard and formulaic. The seating was usually divided into sections, with banquettes in the main club area, elevated seating (in the case of *Seventh Heaven*) set back from the main area, and further seating near the poles and cages where dancers perform. One dancer referred to this area as “the erection zone” (GD1).

All clubs promised ‘luxury’ in their advertising, and appealed to potential clientele as a ‘better class’ of person than those who frequent strip clubs, for example, by using the term ‘gentlemen’s club’. *Diamond Dolls* appeals to potential customers thus:

Let us take you on a journey of unexpected delights that will stimulate the imagination and tantalise the senses. Beautiful entertainers from around the world taking it off just for you (Club website)<sup>36</sup>.

*The Truffle Club* also promotes itself as a luxurious, high-class environment:

Enter a world of beauty, sophistication and style where you can enjoy the opulent surroundings whilst sampling from our extensive selection of fine wines, champagnes, quality cigars and something more, all served to your table (Club website)<sup>37</sup>.

Most of the clubs visited were extensively mirrored. The mirrors reflect both multiple images of the dancers and that of the audience as they watch. Photographs of semi-naked women add to the decor.

In reality, the promotion of the clubs as sophisticated and glamorous is questionable. The dancers appear to try hard to create an atmosphere of relaxation by lighting customers’ cigarettes, passing their drinks, and generally tending to them whilst they are in the club. However, the result can be a sense of what one writer has described as ‘counterfeit intimacy’ (Erickson and Tewsbury, p272). The luxury of the surroundings provides the illusion that lap-dancing clubs are not strip clubs, and yet the only entertainment available in the establishments visited was stripping and pole dancing.

*The Flying Scotsman*, though a public house, stages ‘striptease shows’ seven days a week. The dancers are paid in tips only after each performance by means of a jug

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<sup>35</sup> *The Flying Scotsman* is licensed as a public house, but with the same conditions as *Spearmint Rhino* with respect to conduct with the dancers/strippers.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.diamond-dolls.co.uk/diamond.htm>.

<sup>37</sup> [http://www.thetruffleclub.co.uk/page\\_club.html](http://www.thetruffleclub.co.uk/page_club.html).

collection. The dancers do a full strip lasting approximately three to four minutes, whilst customers stand around the stage observing.

## Organisation and Management

Information regarding the organisation of the clubs was difficult to obtain. The dancers appeared to know very little, and the managers were, as a rule, reticent to provide information, especially with respect to the financial arrangements between the dancers and the owners.

## General Observations

All clubs visited had a housemother who was responsible for direct management of the dancers. For many, this was the closest they got to management, and only a proportion of those asked actually knew who owned the club<sup>38</sup>. Housemothers, who are likely to be, or have previously been, dancers themselves, are responsible for: signing the dancers in for their shifts; inspecting the dancers' clothing and general appearance; collecting the house fee; and all other personnel matters pertaining to the dancers. The appointed manager controls the security staff.

Several of the dancers reported that they were sent text messages by the 'management' on the days they were needed to work. One dancer noted (GD2) that this meant she could not arrange other work, either in clubs or elsewhere. All dancers interviewed paid money to the owners in order to rent a space to dance; the amount varied across the clubs. Although the women are self-employed, they are required to perform pole and cabaret dances in the main club area at the request of management.

## Security and Club Rules

Although door staff are required to explain club rules to customers on arrival, this did not happen at all clubs, for example, at *Spearmint Rhino* in London. All Glasgow clubs verbally outlined rules at the door before entering. However, a dancer at *Seventh Heaven* (GD5) said: "They [customers] sometimes get told what they can and can't do, but sometimes, if it's a big group (and they are the worst) the security can't be bothered". General rules consistent across clubs were:

- No touching the dancers
- No use of cameras, including those on mobile telephones
- No abusive behaviour
- No drugs or weapons

In one Glasgow club, there were no security staff in the private dance area or VIP room, although the club rules stipulate that dancers are supposed to be accompanied by a bouncer throughout the session. However, out of the four clubs in Glasgow, only one strictly adhered to this policy.

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<sup>38</sup> It was considered that asking about the club owners might raise suspicion, therefore it was only discussed with those who raised the issue.

All four Glasgow clubs allowed the 'no touching' rule to be broken. One dancer (GD9) explained, "When I first started working here the rules were always strict. Now the customers get away with much more, because the bosses know the police aren't watching".

There is also evidence of negligent security from former staff members. In 2003, a former security chief at the *Spearmint Rhino* club in Uxbridge, West London, Johnny Singh, gave evidence at a tribunal stating that management at the club took the attitude that:

Anything went as long as it made money...bosses turned a blind eye to girls fondling each other on stage, groping men and committing sex acts. During my time there, I saw constant drug abuse, prostitution and sexual misconduct. I couldn't do anything to stop it.<sup>39</sup>

Club management tend to place responsibility for the breaking of house rules solely on the dancers. A dancer at *Seventh Heaven* explained:

If management turns a blind eye to some of the girls getting away with things, and then someone else tries it who they don't like so much, they come down hard on her (DG1).

A bouncer at a Glasgow club said during interview, "I throw at least one guy out every shift, usually for getting fresh with the dancers" (GS4).

Throughout the visit to *Spearmint Rhino*, at least one visible security guard was in the main body of the club, and one in the lobby. It was noted that there was a security guard present in the private dance area, but no evidence of security cameras. There was also a member of staff in the men's toilets, but it was unclear whether or not this was for security purposes, as he was handing out towels and soap and asked each customer for a tip on their way out.

## VIP and Private Rooms

If anything's going to go wrong, it will be in the VIP or private rooms. You have to trust the integrity of the person who is in charge of security, but you can never be sure a blind eye is not going to be turned.

Most venues have a VIP room, because it promotes intrigue to the customer who will go there and maybe look for something more, because of the secrecy (Police officer, interview, August 2004).

In some lap-dancing clubs customers are offered 'table dances' (see Section 1), but the majority of one-to-one dances are conducted in a curtained-off area, sometimes with booths. VIP rooms are distinct from 'private dance areas'. Services on offer here,

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<sup>39</sup> Sara Nuwar, 2003, 'Sex and Drugs... For Sale: Security Boss Lifts the Lid on Sleazy World of Celebrity Stripclubs', *Sunday Mirror*, September 14.

according to several dancers and customers in both the Glasgow and London clubs, include complimentary champagne, continual 'intimate' dancing for up to one hour, comfortable sofas for the customers, chatting and, according to one customer (GC5) in a Glasgow club, "full sex for £200".

Apart from at *Legs' n' Co*, there appeared to be minimal security measures in the private dance areas. In general, 'private' areas are not completely private. It is usually possible to see, at least partially, other dancers and customers, depending on the particular seating arrangements. As the manager of *Club Crème* in Bristol explained:

We have curtains that are drawn around the pole. You can see through it, but it gives the customer the illusion that it's a private dance, but it absolutely isn't. There is only one reason why you have a cubicle. It's because touching is going on and all sorts (Interview, July 2004).

The private dance is the only legitimate way for the dancers to make money in the clubs. The intermittent 'cabaret', and individual pole dances by selected dancers that take place in the main club area, serve only to advertise the dancers and entertain customers. The dancers are not paid for these activities. In *Diamond Dolls* and *The Truffle Club*, some dancers were observed pulling men up from their chairs and into the private area; on both occasions the customers were protesting that they did not wish to pay for a private dance. Dancers feel pressurised to secure dances with as many of the customers as possible, especially if they are in debt to the club. The 'house fee' ranges from £35 to £85 per night in Glasgow, and from £85 to £100 in *Spearmint Rhino*. There is no guarantee, even on busy nights, that the dancers will earn enough to cover their costs, let alone generate income.

*Legs' n' Co* is a small club with a tiny stage. On the night it was observed that there were at least 30 dancers working, and only 40 to 50 customers at the busiest time. Competition amongst the dancers was high. Douglas Moffatt, the owner, claimed that "it is difficult finding decent girls to dance even now, and that could become impossible with other clubs opening. We have already reached saturation point" (Interview, June 2004).

All four clubs in Glasgow had at least one VIP room where customers could buy between fifteen minutes and half an hour of the dancers' time in total seclusion. Terms and conditions for using the rooms varied. At *The Truffle Club* three of the dancers spoke of the 'private room' upstairs that had no cameras or security, "Just me and you" (GD5). Rates were £55 for fifteen minutes, and services on offer in the VIP room included fully nude dancing or "just a chat".

A member of staff (GS2) at *Diamond Dolls* stated that there was no prostitution allowed in the VIP room, but revised her story later in the evening, and disclosed that the security staff 'turn a blind eye' when certain dancers go into the room with a customer.

The VIP room at *Legs' n' Co* was supervised by a security guard, who remained in the room when it was being used. However, one of the dancers said that there were "two or three" women who were known to offer sexual services, and that when these women used the room there was no security. The room had no CCTV camera. Observation

revealed that the room contained a small bowl filled with several mixed condoms. During the course of the evening eight individual men used the VIP room.

Three dancers at the club offered information about the VIP suite in *Spearmint Rhino*. One dancer asked if her companion would be interested in “some proper privacy and special attention” (LD1), but did not mention sexual services.

The *Spearmint Rhino* Code of Conduct for Dancers, drawn up by the Charing Cross Police Clubs and Vice Unit and agreed by the club, stipulates that the dancer must dress between each dance. There was evidence that this does not always happen. For instance, one customer claimed that he observed two dancers move from one dance to the next without putting any clothing on (LC1).

All three dancers interviewed at *Spearmint Rhino* offered information about the VIP suite there. One dancer asked the researcher if her companion would be interested in “some proper privacy and special attention” (LD1), but did not mention sexual services. The other two dancers discussed it in the context of the various ways in which they made their money in the club. There was no private room used by customers or dancers at the *Flying Scotsman*.

A legal representative of several lap-dance clubs in the UK described how VIP rooms are sometimes used for ‘role play’.

I have some clients where in their clubs they have separate rooms set up as fantasy – maybe into an office where the girls will dress up as a secretary and the guys sit behind a business desk. These guys leave thinking the women adore them. If you’re a middle-aged overweight guy having trouble with their wives and kids, then this can be great for them (Interview, August 2004).

## Working Conditions

None of the dancers interviewed in the Glasgow clubs were satisfied with their working conditions. No club had a dedicated dressing room for the dancers, nor did they provide facilities for refreshments away from the public areas. In *Legs’ n’ Co*, the women’s toilets were used as the staff/dressing room. In *The Truffle Club*, one dancer complained that the dressing area was open to male members of staff, who would walk in and out during the course of the evening. There were no water coolers or fridges in which to keep drinks, even though this is a condition of the license for *Seventh Heaven*, *Diamond Dolls* and *The Truffle Club*. As a result, the dancers have to purchase drinks from the bar at full price.

In *The Truffle Club*, three of the dancers complained about being very cold because of the vigorous air conditioning, and the fact that they were required to wear minimal clothing, whereas in *Legs’ n’ Co* two of the women said they were regularly too hot because the club was poorly ventilated and sometimes overcrowded.

The dancers interviewed at *Spearmint Rhino* said they were satisfied with the working conditions, while those interviewed at *The Flying Scotsman* were not. One dancer (LD4)

explained that the women had to change clothing in the bar area, next to the stage. There was no staff room, and the stage was partly visible from the street.

At the *Flying Scotsman* the dancers do not have access to a dressing room and are expected to change clothes on the stairs behind the stage. There is no air conditioning or access to drinking water. One dancer admitted, "It's a shit place to work. You know you've sunk low" (LD4). However, later in the evening, she said she would far rather work at a strip club than in lap-dancing clubs because:

You have to sit there all night with some sweaty bloke trying to paw you, and make out he's God's gift. It's really hard keeping that smile on your face when he's talking about the most boring things. It really feels like prostitution, whereas this is more straightforward (LD5).

### Terms of Employment

All dancers in lap-dance clubs are self-employed, relying on tips and income from private dances. Dancers pay between £35 and £100 per night to the club management for 'rent' of the facilities<sup>40</sup>, such as the poles, cabaret areas, private dance booths and VIP suites. Weekend rates are higher, and there are sometimes other conditions imposed. For example, *The Truffle Club* management reserve the right to increase the rate by £10 if the club is especially busy. All of the women interviewed reported that they had often lost money by working at the club when their earnings failed to cover rent, clothing, travel, drinks and childcare. Some club owners allow debt to accumulate, which can leave the dancers desperate to 'catch up'. As one dancer put it, "Although some of the girls – the really pretty ones who are well-stacked – can make a fortune at times, most of them struggle to make a proper wage" (GD1).

In addition to daily expenses, dancers at the four Glasgow clubs, and *Spearmint Rhino*, London, are advised to purchase specialist clothing from an individual visiting the club who runs her own business<sup>41</sup>. In at least one club, the women are explicitly told that they should not buy clothes from anywhere else or make their own, in case they do not fit the 'house style'. Most clubs also specify particular shoes that several of the women refer to as 'porn shoes'. They are tall platforms with spiked heels that are apparently 'very uncomfortable' to dance in.

Interestingly, *Club Crème* in Bristol, which recognises the GMB branch for dancers, has a different regime:

We only take £10 a night from the girls, whereas a lot of the clubs are taking a huge amount of commission. I think the cost should be capped. If they want to, then they can pay us a commission of 15 per cent rather than the £10 per night (Interview with manager, July 2004).

This manager also encourages the dancers to access the club's accountant to ensure that their finances are in order, and their money properly managed:

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<sup>40</sup> This can be as high as £100 in some London clubs.

<sup>41</sup> This did not appear to be the case at *The Flying Scotsman*.

Then the girls are eligible for mortgages and be responsible. It's about not using and abusing them (ibid).

Interestingly, at *Lap Attack*, the first UK lap-dancing club for women featuring male dancers, the dancers chosen to do a performance before private dances go on sale are paid a set fee.<sup>42</sup>

Further problems identified by the dancers interviewed ranged from threats of physical violence from customers and demands for sex, to practical health and safety issues. The lighting is poor in some clubs, changing rooms are overcrowded and the poles that they touch and dance around are often cleaned with detergents that irritate the skin, causing minor burns (Interview, GMB, May 2004).

All four clubs in Glasgow have in-house rules regarding the type of clothing worn by the dancers at certain times of the evening. At *The Truffle Club* and *Legs' n' Co*, the dancers have to change at a certain time in the evening, from 'long clothing' into 'short', which means changing from extremely revealing clothing with some kind of long train, into hotpants, bikinis, schoolgirl and nurses uniforms. Many of the dancers were convinced that these are rules imposed by the licensing boards, rather than club owners. One dancer commented that "The council (sic) make us wear longer clothes that cover up more earlier in the evening." In fact, these rules are imposed by management. There was no evidence of these dressing rules at *Spearmint Rhino* or *The Flying Scotsman*.

Two of the dancers stated that management regularly chose their outfits, and that they were given no choice about wearing them. "I have two children, who I have to support by doing this. I feel really yucky prancing around in a school uniform, because I feel I'm encouraging perverts who come to the club to abuse children" (GD13). A dancer at *Seventh Heaven* commented that there was undue pressure on the dancers to "...look like sluts. They want us to dress like real tarts, and we are told to show as much 'tits and arse' as possible" (GD4).

In *The Flying Scotsman*, London, the women rely on tips collected in a glass immediately after a dance. Customers were observed tipping between 20 pence and one pound. As one customer, who said he visits a number of strip and lap dance clubs in central and east London, explained:

The girls work two or three clubs and pubs a night. They earn about £5 a dance here if it's a good night, and are on about four times a shift (LC1).

## Unionisation

In 2001, 'erotic dancers', and others working in the sex industry, were invited to join the GMB. The GMB has adopted the International Union of Sex Workers (IUSW) definition of 'sex workers', which encompasses "any worker who used their body and/or their sexuality to earn a living". The 'sex workers' branch has approximately 150 members, mainly lap and table dancers. The union has signed recognition agreements with two

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<sup>42</sup> The researcher visited the club on two occasions for the purpose of other research.  
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lap-dancing clubs<sup>43</sup>, and maintains that working conditions and terms of employment have since improved. Codes of conduct and grievance procedures have been introduced, and union representatives have been elected within those two clubs. The GMB collaborated with the IUSW in drawing up a code of conduct for table dancers, health and safety issues and guidance on how to implement grievance procedures against management and employees.

The GMB identifies the most commonly raised issues by the women as: inadequate changing areas; break times; sexual harassment; repetitive strain injury and back problems; and chemical rashes (caused by the cleaning agent used to clean the pole). The GMB is also concerned to put measures in place that would enable the dancers to identify customers and clubs with reputations for violence, abuse, coercion and exploitation.

There is opposition within the industry to unionising dancers. A representative of GMB London, explained, "It is not something that the club owners could have dreamed up. The majority are not used to thinking about the dancer's rights at all" (Interview, May 2004).

The manager of *Majingo's*, commented:

It's funny, but when we first took up with the GMB, a lot of the girls wanted to join. It's almost worked against the GMB now, because the girls are not that bothered [to join a union] because they know they get treated properly here. There are benefits though. I'm about to ask the GMB to send a rep down here for the dancers' meeting (Interview, May 2004).

The manager of *Club Crème* was deeply critical of clubs who resist unionisation:

Often a club owner will think – 'I'm sick of these girls, let's get a whole new lot in', whereas the girls will have no say in it. That's not fair. I want to liaise with other club owners so that if girls want to relocate, we can give them a list of clubs where she can go and apply. We can give you a reference, and they know they can go somewhere safe. Therefore we can all get a new turnover of girls and everyone's happy (Interview, July 2004).

She was also concerned about the lack of rights and protection afforded to the dancers in a largely unregulated industry:

When the local authority looks at giving a license they look at the premises, the person holding the license, and health and safety. It's the only industry where the people working there are completely ignored, and have no employment rights. I'm trying to make employment standards part of the license conditions (ibid).

The issue of unionisation of lap dancers is, on one level, a complicated one. For those who argue that 'erotic dancing' is adult entertainment, and not a sexual service, this group of 'workers' should have access to the same level of employment rights and

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<sup>43</sup> *Manjingo's* in London and *Club Crème* in Bristol.  
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protection as workers in other sections of the economy. An alternative position, however, is that lap-dancing clubs are part of the sex industry, and that, contrary to the view held by organisations such as the IUSW, lap dancing does not constitute 'legitimate work'. Unionisation of any aspect of the 'sex industry' would legitimise the club owners, customers and clubs themselves.<sup>44</sup>

There is little doubt that improving working conditions and contractual arrangements for the dancers would, nevertheless, be of benefit, at least in the short term.

## Coercion

From the observations and interviews conducted for this study there was no evidence of direct coercion of the dancers by management into working in the club, or providing sexual services. However, a number of factors contribute to the possibility of the dancers being pressurised into offering, or agreeing to, sexual services without direct instruction from management. Many agree<sup>45</sup> that as more clubs open, competition becomes fierce, which can result in the dancers adopting more proactive strategies in order to persuade customers to purchase private dances.

Dancers and former dancers in the UK and US have spoken of their experiences of levels of coercion involved in the lap-dance industry. 'Megan'<sup>46</sup> (not her real name) was interviewed as part of a study on lap dancing by the Lillith project (Lillith 2003). She discussed the tactics used by the management of the club she worked in:

We were seen as belonging to the club. Drugs were available if you wanted them... We were offered 'other work'. I was offered £700 to do one night at *Stringfellows*, with 'some clothing'. Girls would tolerate hassle to a point and didn't make a fuss (Lillith, 2002).

Kelly Holsopple, a former stripper in the US who interviewed 18 dancers, also found evidence of violence and coercion towards the women.

Men associated with strip clubs use force and coercion to establish sexual contact with women in stripping, proposition women for prostitution, intentionally inflict bodily harm on the women, and expose themselves to the women (1998).

However, there are those who argue that the dancers are in control of their 'working lives' and practice agency within their work (Gantt, 2002).

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<sup>44</sup> See Julie Bindel, 2003, 'Sex workers are different', *The Guardian*, July 7, and Ana Lopes and Callum Macrae, 2003, 'The oldest profession', *The Guardian*, July 25.

<sup>45</sup> The owner of *The Truffle Club* stated that all four club owners in Glasgow were opposing the two license applications recently submitted to the licensing board, because this would cause a 'saturation'.

<sup>46</sup> Cited in Lillith, 2003, *The Truth about Strip Joints*.

## Views and Perspectives

### Club Owners/Managers and Staff

Six club owners/managers were interviewed, and one member of security staff. Additionally, bar staff were spoken to, on two occasions at length, during club visits. One bouncer agreed to give an interview, but asked not to be named. Club owners/managers tended to be cautious, apart from the two with unionised dancers. The former manager of *For Your Eyes Only*, the UK's first lap dancing club, was also interviewed in order to clarify the historical context of the trade.

All club owners denied that the lap dancing business was part of the sex industry, but all, without exception, accused other club owners of running disreputable clubs offering sexual services. Their own clubs, in contrast, were seen as part of the leisure industry.

One owner was critical of the way other clubs are run, and believed he treated his dancers with respect:

What you've got to understand is that running girls [the dancers] is not as easy as people think. They're like cats – more intelligent than you think, but sly with it. Mind you, treat them well and they'll stick with you (Interview, May 2004).

The manager of *Diamond Dolls*, Glasgow, was opposed to the opening of more clubs in the city, and claimed that the other three clubs were in agreement with him.

If a man wants to go to a lap dance club he's got plenty of good quality ones to choose from. If you open up more clubs, they might not be as well run, and irregularities might occur (Interview, May 2004).

### Dancers

During an observational visit to *The Truffle Club*, GD1 stated that she was pleased to have a female customer to talk to. She then offered a private dance, explaining that dancers assume that any women in the club are curious about sexual contact with another woman, and consider lap-dancing clubs to be safe and easy environments within which to 'experiment'. Private dances in all four clubs in Glasgow were offered by between one and four women, who generally said that dancing for women was preferable to being 'groped by sweaty men' (GD9).

Nine of the Glasgow dancers said they were students, dancing to finance their studies. However, there was some doubt, since almost all became very confused and inconsistent when asked about their courses. One dancer was a single mother unable to get other work, and two said they did it to expand their talents in dance and performance, hoping it might lead to entry into the mainstream entertainment industry.

Two of the 'students' also did 'glamour modelling' and said there were other dancers who did this. GD5 explained that the club owners encouraged the women to model for 'adult' publications, as it is good for business. "If my picture is in the *Sunday Sport* and it

says I work at a certain club, the men who like the look of me might decide to come and see me in the flesh. Therefore, the club only allows you to do it if you can guarantee mentioning the club" (GD2).

One woman talked about being "pressurised" into glamour modelling by management. She also spoke of "some of the girls" being upset at discovering that photographs of them had been used to advertise the club without their knowledge or consent (GD15). There was also evidence of some customers having used their mobile telephone cameras to take pictures of the women whilst naked. A member of security staff in *Legs and Co* explained the 'no mobile telephone' rule, of the club:

Some of the blokes were taking 'photos of the girls while they were performing, and the girls got upset. One customer was joking he was going to put a naked picture of her on the Internet (GS1).

All venues visited had a ban on the use of mobile telephones with cameras whilst on the premises.

Seven of the Glasgow dancers spoke about the way their bodies were constantly 'policed' by the housemother and other members of staff. One dancer said:

I started to go to the gym recently to get fit. This is such an unhealthy lifestyle in many ways. We're drinking every night, breathing in smoke, and eating takeaways. I was told by the housemother that I wasn't allowed to continue, because I was starting to develop muscles, and the men don't like that apparently (GD1).

One dancer said she had been expected to have breast implant surgery by the management when she began working there. "The housemother told me my boobs were too small, and that I should get them seen to. I never did anything about it, but it still hangs in the air. Sometimes the bouncers make rude comments about 'fried eggs'" (GD1).

A dancer at *Legs' n' Co* said that some of the dancers suffered from bulimia and/or anorexia, and have low self-esteem. "If anyone has a tiny bit of cellulite, or is slightly overweight, she is pulled by management and told to do something about it. That can make you feel like shit. It's as if they own our bodies. We're even told when to shave our public hair" (GD11). Six women overall across the four clubs had breast enlargement scars under their arms.

One woman admitted there was some drug use among the dancers. "Not here, but other in clubs I worked in, some of the women would be using cocaine or amphetamines, either to keep their weight down, or keep awake during the night shift I suppose" (GD11).

Although some dancers would say that their partners did not like them working in the clubs, a number indicated they were the main breadwinners, and that their partners suggested that they do it. One dancer from south eastern Europe explained how she began working at *Spearmint Rhino*.

We had lots of debts and he was not able to find a job, so he told me, "go and work in a hostess club, the girls make a fortune", so I came for an audition and was offered the job. I don't mind it but it's not what I want to be doing in two years time (LD2).

A dancer at *Spearmint Rhino*, London, explained the fine line she has to balance in keeping the customer interested, without crossing too many boundaries.

It can be difficult when they are saying "will you see me outside of here?" and you know you don't want to, but you don't want to offend them as they are your meal ticket (LD2).

All three women at *Spearmint Rhino* identified having to "massage men's ego's all evening" (LD3) as the hardest part of the job. One dancer explained:

The dancing, and even taking your clothes off, is easy. You just cut off and become someone else. But having to plaster a smile on your face, and pretend the men are fascinating is exhausting sometimes (LD1).

Several of the dancers used alcohol in the clubs, and in all of the clubs visited, as aside from *The Flying Scotsman*, one or more dancers stated that management encouraged the use of alcohol, primarily by making it a condition for the dancers to accept any alcoholic drink customers offered to buy them. Thus, management are profiting from the dancers' alcohol use.

## Customers

Oh, they're lovely mainly. Some get a bit raucous, but they are generally respectful. They just want to be made to feel a bit special (GD14, 10pm).

They come in all arrogant but leave like little boys. They are bastards who think they are God's gifts. I despise them (GD14, 1 am).

The dancers interviewed all expressed ambivalence towards the customers. Without exception, when first asked how the customers behaved towards them, the dancers would be very positive about them, but later in the conversation would admit to a variety of problems in their interactions with them their comments were made exclusively in relation to male customers. Common complaints included:

- Drunkenness
- Heckling during cabaret shows
- Trying to grab the women during private dances
- Asking for sexual services
- Touching their own genitals
- Trying to barter down prices for private dances

Although many lap-dance clubs target their advertising to the 'corporate sector', mainly men employed in city finance and law firms, with the exception of one customer in *The Truffle Club*, none of the twelve interviewed in Glasgow were corporate businessmen.

The 15 customers interviewed ranged in age from eighteen to sixty. The majority were white and living in the UK; two thirds (n=10) had partners and almost half (n=7) had children. Nine had been to the club, or another lap-dance club, on at least one previous occasion.

In conversation with the men the researcher was honest, saying she was bored and self-conscious, and thought the clubs a bit 'seedy'. All, to an extent, sought to offer reassurance that the club was "respectable" in the words of one customer, and "just a bit of fun – won't harm anyone" from another.

Alcohol consumption was high amongst a significant proportion of the customers in all four clubs, but especially *Diamond Dolls* and *Legs' n' Co*, and many of them had come there after drinking elsewhere. One customer in *Diamond Dolls* said he had to "get pissed" before going to the clubs, because he did not otherwise have the confidence to walk in. "When I'm pissed, I feel like the women are chatting to me because they fancy me, but sober I know they wouldn't look twice at me if I wasn't paying them" (GC8).

Some of the customers said they were visiting from out of town, and that hotel staff or colleagues had recommended they visit one of the clubs. A middle-aged salesman (GC12), at *Legs' n' Co* on his own, said he felt very uncomfortable, admitting, "Most of these girls are young enough to be my daughter". Despite such apparent misgivings, he had visited the club three times, and commented that he had come across "quite a few foreign girls from Russia or wherever."

All twelve customers in Glasgow, and one in London, suggested going on a date with them at some stage during the conversation. One said he had had sex with "loads of the women", but that it was nice to meet a "real girl" as opposed to a "siliconed prostitute" (GC4).

During conversations, the question of why the dancers chose to lap dance for a living frequently arose. Answers included: "because they earn a load of money" (n=6); "they like showing off their bodies" (n=2); "they can't get work anywhere else" (n=2); and "they are probably prostitutes" (n=1). One said he did not know, and did not care. When asked why they came to the club, eight said, "to watch beautiful girls", two said, "to relax", two "to have sex" and three because their friend(s) wanted them to come.

No customers were interviewed at *Spearmint Rhino*<sup>47</sup>.

Two customers at *The Flying Scotsman* (spoken to individually) said that they did not want to be there, but had gone because work colleagues had wanted them to, or had put pressure on them to come<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> None of the customers approached the researcher, and none seemed approachable  
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## Corporate Membership

Although a popular perception of lap dance clubs is that they cater largely to corporate businessmen, little evidence was found to substantiate this. Although *Spearmint Rhino* provides a limousine service for selected city firms with membership, as well as a number of other membership benefits such as discounts, people on expense accounts tend to dominate the clientele base only on certain evenings<sup>49</sup>. Until 2000, employees of ICAP, the inter-dealer broker, were able to claim lap-dancing services on their expenses<sup>50</sup>.

Ten 'city businesses', including banks, stockbrokers and law firms, were contacted and asked if the firm had corporate membership of any 'Gentlemen's Clubs'. None of the firms admitted to doing so.

## Journalists

Eight journalists who had written substantive features or news reports on lap-dancing clubs for national UK publications were interviewed in order to supplement the information gathered for the literature review and desk-based research. They volunteered information on the following:

- Links between one lap dancing chain and organised crime
- Dancers offering sexual services
- Sexual activity taking place on the premises between dancers and customers
- Degrading behaviour of customers towards the dancers

J2 visited eleven clubs across the UK, and concluded that lap-dancing activities distort the customers' views of women.

The men would look at me with contempt, because set against the Barbie Dolls I looked so unsexy. They would look at me as if I wasn't a real woman (Interview, July 2004).

All had either observed irregular activity at the clubs, or had been told of it by the dancers or customers.

Within the terms in which the lap dancing industry has set itself up as respectable it succeeds. If we measure respectability by the girls being pretty and earning OK money, and the men being salaried, then it succeeds, but that's not what makes prostitution prostitution (J2).

The club owners in some cases are criminals with proven links...another question is who is financing the global expansion of strip club brands, and are police doing money laundering checks? Look at *Rhino* Prague: the world's first casino

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<sup>48</sup> All four customers were working on aspects of the King's Cross Development, and were living away from home

<sup>49</sup> Becky Barrow, 2003, 'Lurid tales of drugs, bullying and sex in the City', *Daily Telegraph*, June 28.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Beales and David Wells, 2004, untitled, *Financial Times*, July 16.

combined with a strip club. CO14 were worried about this in 2002, and now Stringfellow has proposed it too! (J8).

## A Front for Prostitution?

Much public disquiet about lap-dancing clubs stems from the belief held by some that they are a front for prostitution. There has certainly been evidence of sexual services being on offer, and carried out, in certain clubs.

An investigation by the *Glasgow Herald* found that women were dancing naked while fondling their genitals, and making full body contact with customers, and that men were stripping in the public bar showing their genitals in return for free drinks and dances<sup>51</sup>.

*Spearmint Rhino* has been the subject of allegations of prostitution and unlawful employment practices since it first opened almost five years ago. In 2002, an undercover police operation found evidence that the "no touching" rule was being breached. Two of the officers were offered sex with women at five hundred pounds for thirty minutes in a private room<sup>52</sup>. The club subsequently hired a former police detective to oversee security.

There is absolutely no prostitution allowed on the premises, but that's not to say that the girls don't make private arrangements with customers to meet outside the club. If they were found to be doing that, though, they'd be out (GS4).

A member of the IUSW explained one of the ways in which some dancers can feel under pressure to provide sexual services:

If a girl is having sex for £5, the other girls get really pissed off because they then have to do it for £5...and if one girl in a strip club is having sex, the others have to do it to make money.<sup>53</sup>

This study has revealed the complex process and set of conditions in which dancers become more susceptible to requests or suggestions to sell sex. The lack of employment rights, for some women the experience of accumulating debt, expectations of the customers, fierce competition, and a link in public perceptions between lap dancer and stripper/prostitute, create an overall climate where the selling and buying of sex on the premises becomes more likely, as the diagram on the next page illustrates :

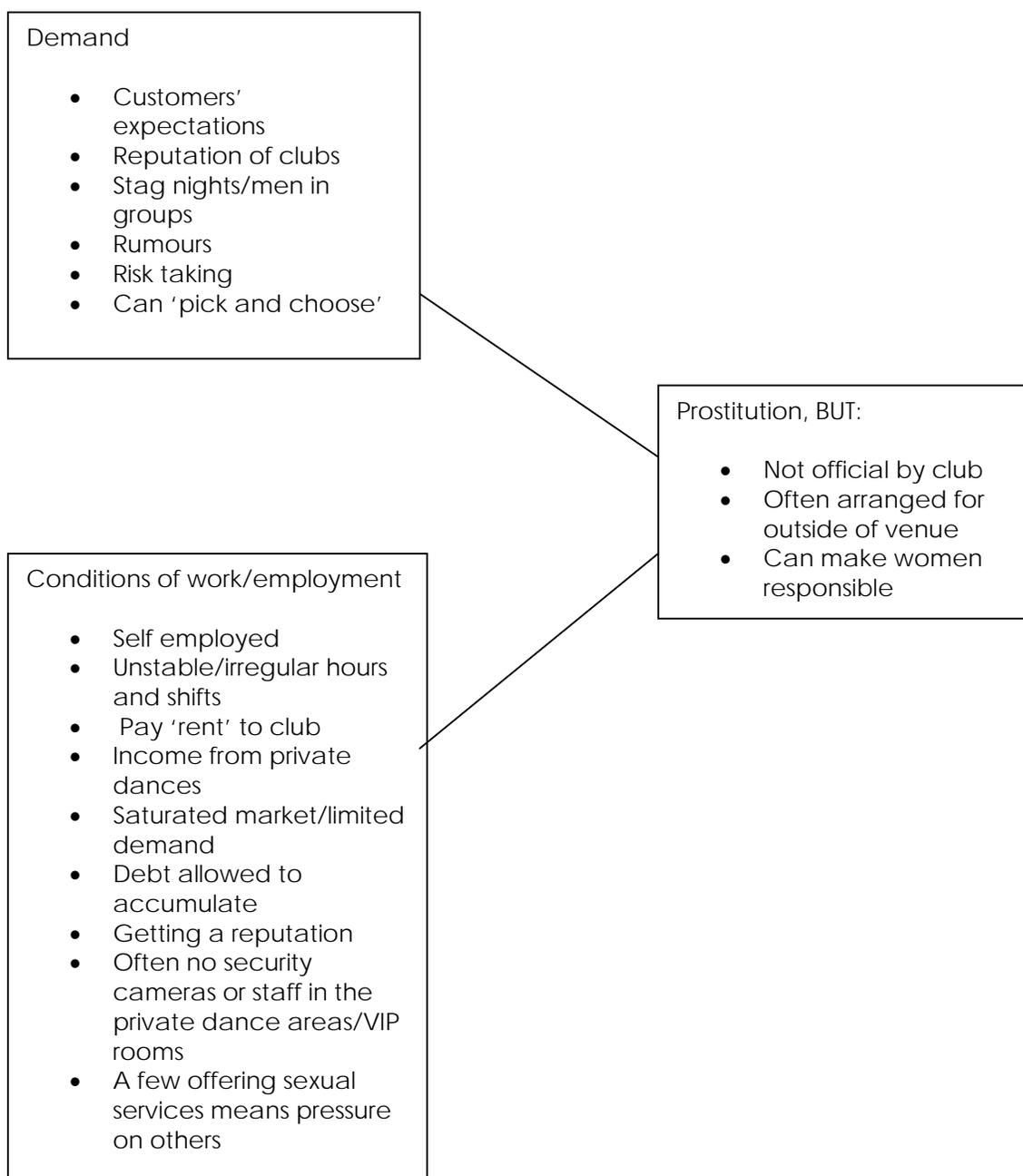
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<sup>51</sup> Iain Wilson And Billy Briggs, 2002, 'City powerless to act against lap-dance club', *Glasgow Herald*, October 4.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Verkaik, 2004, 'Spearmint Rhino hires ex detective to clean up club's act', *The Independent*, April 29.

<sup>53</sup> Neasa MacErlean, 2002, 'Sexual union', *Observer*, July 28.

Figure 1: X



In all of the clubs visited, there were indications that the dancers would attempt to maximise their earnings by extracting as much as possible from each customer they had contact with. A proportion of club owners, customers and dancers spoke of how there are too many clubs/dancers and not enough customers, especially during early evenings and mid-week. This, coupled with the high cost of 'renting' space in the club, can contribute to the dancers feeling under significant pressure to earn enough money to cover club fees and wages.

There was also some evidence of pressure on the dancers from management to create an impression of sexual availability. Several of the dancers interviewed stated that a number of customers assume they will agree to provide sexual services. A lawyer representing several lap-dancing clubs and chains in the UK also indicated that management encouraged this state of affairs. In explaining how he defended one London club against police claims that sexual services were being offered on the premises, he said:

We said [to the magistrates at the court hearing] that the girls offering sexual services were part of the act, the fantasy, with no following through. No one was chased down the street. The police officers never did meet up with any girls. That's where they went wrong (Interview, August 2004).

Some dancers appeared to exploit the naivety of some of the customers in order to ensure earning money. One example was a customer interviewed at *Spearmint Rhino*, who explained that he asked a dancer for a private dance, but that two women walked him through to the private area and both began to dance for him (LC1). He was not asked how many dances he wished to purchase, nor informed when one dance 'ended' and another one begun. After ten minutes, he was informed that he had purchased four dances from two dancers, and therefore owed £160. He was later told by the dancers that he also owed a £400 'hostess fee', because the two women had been talking to him at his table for one hour. Although the club does offer a hostess service at £200 pounds an hour, club rules state that customers should be asked after a period of approximately 20 minutes if they would like company for an hour, during which the customer can request non-stop dancing. Alternatively, if the customer is dining at the club, he can request the company of a dancer, for the same hourly fee. A member of staff explained the club rules regarding hostess fees:

A girl can't charge just for sitting with a customer. That's what they expect to happen anyway. Unless he calls her over and asks for hostessing, or agrees to it when asked, then there is no charge for chatting. Besides, everything has to be agreed between dancer and customer beforehand (Interview, August 2004).

LC1 said he had:

...no idea that I was going to be charged for the two girls talking to me. They came over and struck up the conversation. I was with a colleague, not on my own, but I couldn't be rude and turn them away. Then they charge me £400 for the privilege (LC1).

LC1 remembered that at the beginning of the conversation, one of the dancers had told him she made "most [of her] money from hostessing" (LD2). The customer asked what she meant and she replied, "like accompanying them to the restaurant. LC1 refused to pay the amount requested, but gave the dancers £40 each when they complained that this was the only money they were likely to earn all night because, "there are too many girls in this evening" (LD3).

At the *Flying Scotsman* there was evidence of dancers and customers making arrangements to meet outside the venue. During the course of the visit, two customers left with a dancer after spending time talking in the venue. One customer said that:

Now that the police are clamping down on kerb crawlers it's easier to come in here and pick up a bird. Some of them used to work the Cross, but come here now, because it's the same punters. Everyone knows you can get one here (LC4).

A poster was displayed in the pub entrance warning customers of the presence of undercover police officers targeting customers kerb crawling in the King's Cross area.

One customer stated that the venue had previously had trouble with men attempting to procure younger dancers into prostitution. Pointing to a man who had been at the venue for approximately three hours, he said:

Look at him. He's at it. I've seen him before and he is always after the young ones. Every one knows he's a pimp (LC3).

There was evidence from the interviews with dancers and customers of sexual services being available in all four clubs in Glasgow, and at *The Flying Scotsman* in London.

Two dancers, from *Diamond Dolls* and *Seventh Heaven*, said the main reason why some of the dancers might either offer sexual services, or agree to provide them, is debt, rather than a desire to make large amounts of money. Many of the dancers initially decided to start working in lap-dancing clubs because they had been told that it was lucrative. Two of the women said they had been told by club owners and other dancers that they could earn in excess of three hundred pounds per shift.

All of the dancers interviewed for this study insisted they did not offer sexual services but admitted there were women who were known to be willing. One explained, "The problem is that once you say 'yes', it becomes impossible to then say 'no'. The managers know it goes on, but pretend they don't. The bouncers are told to turn a blind eye" (GD1).

Approximately half of the customers in Glasgow came to the club looking for sex. Four of the regular visitors claimed they had had sex with a dancer on the premises, and a further two said they had arranged liaisons outside of the club with the dancers by swapping mobile telephone numbers.

GD 3 claimed that home visits were only available to regulars who were known and trusted by the dancers and management, and yet one customer was offered one on the first visit (GC4), as was one customer on his second visit. "Twenty pounds for a couple of dances is enough to spend for me" he said, "but I keep being stung for a home visit and a VIP session by one or two of the girls" (GC2).

There was no evidence of the selling of sexual services in *Spearmint Rhino*, London, on the premises. The three dancers interviewed were all adamant that the VIP suite was only there to ensure that particularly solvent customers had additional opportunities to

spend money. However, all three claimed that there were some dancers who offered sexual services to customers, and that customers regularly asked if 'extras' were on offer. One dancer explained that management had given the women strict warnings about their personal conduct with the customers in the light of public scrutiny.

We were told that undercover police are in here three times a week, because of the investigation last year. Also, that there are journalist posing as customers trying to catch us out. So no way can we offer extras. We just give our numbers to them if they look rich enough, and meet them later (LD1).

Another dancer explained how she would seek to prolong the interest of customers so they would continue to pay for private dances, or accompany her to the VIP suit for an even higher cost.

There was also evidence that some of the dancers were involved in coercing money from customers. During the visit to *Spearmint Rhino*, two dancers, whose interviews lasted roughly one hour, later asked to be paid £200 for the 'hostess fee'. When the club was telephoned after the visit to check the prices of various services, the member of staff spoken to stated that:

If you find a girl you really like, and you want to stay with her for an hour, you agree with the girl, and then it's £200 per hour, but that's continuous dancing for the guy.

The member of staff was asked if the women were allowed to charge for just sitting and chatting, without making a prior arrangement, to which she replied, "no, no, no, definitely not" (Telephone conversation, July 2004).

As outlined in one study (Egan, 2003) focusing on the centrality of fantasy and illusion in the dancer-customer relationship, many of the dancers are aware that their role is to allude to the possibility of a sexual encounter with the customer. As one dancer explained:

Customers want to be charmed into thinking I want to have sex with them, that's why they come here rather than go to a brothel. In a brothel it's a straight cash transaction. Here, there's the illusion that we find the men attractive. So they stay until they can persuade us to go out with them on a date, which we don't (LD2).

In conclusion, there was evidence that sexual services were on offer from some of the dancers in some of the clubs. The approach that seems to be adopted by some security staff, and the reassurance by club managers to the police and other authorities that any dancer found to be offering or engaging in sexual services means that the dancers are held totally responsible for these activities. So long as club managers assure the police and others that any dancer found to be offering or engaging in sexual services will be dismissed, places the onus for behaviour onto the dancer. At the same time, the 'push' and 'pull' factors for the dancers outlined in the illustration above remain in place. Whilst both these conditions exist, it is likely that some lap dance clubs will continue to 'facilitate', albeit in a surreptitious manner, the provision of sexual services.

## 8. Clubs in Context

Widespread opposition to lap-dancing clubs has been voiced by a number of agencies and from a range of perspectives, including women's organisations, law enforcers and residents' associations/members of the public.

There is also support for such clubs from individuals, for example, those using the club facilities<sup>54</sup>, and bodies such as the UK Network of Sex Work Projects<sup>55</sup> (UKNSWP) and the Scottish Prostitutes Education Project<sup>56</sup> (SCOTPEP). A representative from UKNSWP said:

We do not think lap dancing is demeaning to women per se. If the women are informed as to the type of establishment lap dance clubs are, and chose to work in them, then it's OK (Interview, August 2004).

## Neighbours and Neighbourhoods

In order to gain a 'snapshot' sense of public opinion, a total of 20 individuals were polled outside three lap-dance clubs: *Seventh Heaven* and *The Truffle Club* in Glasgow, and *Spearmint Rhino*<sup>57</sup>, London. Three-quarters (n=15) said they would rather not work or live in an area near a lap-dancing club. A range of reasons were given, including: "I do not want to see scantily clad girls on my way home"; "I think it is demeaning to women"; and "I do not want stag nights taking over the town centre". Almost one-quarter said they did not mind (n=4) and one did not know there was a club in the area.

All those polled near *Seventh Heaven* were negative about the club's presence. One respondent said that customers leaving the premises had propositioned his partner outside it. Another had observed a bouncer having a 'fierce row' with a customer outside the club. Of those spoken to outside *The Truffle Club*, only one was uncritical, saying that the club's existence had "improved night life" (GP10).

One woman questioned worked in a restaurant near *Spearmint Rhino* until approximately 1am five nights a week. She walked past the club on her journey home, and said:

I always feel intimidated by the club and the customers coming in and out. I have been insulted by them, and even the bouncers sometimes. The men in groups are the worst. One of the young waitresses was flashed at by a stag group (LP5).

Another respondent lived in the block of flats above *Spearmint Rhino*.

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<sup>54</sup> This includes customers, staff, and those linked to the business, such as breweries, advertising agencies, dancers' agents and the dancers themselves. However, a number of the dancers were critical of lap-dance clubs, and some were ambiguous.

<sup>55</sup> A non-profit, voluntary association of agencies and individuals working with people in prostitution.

<sup>56</sup> Scottish Prostitutes Education Project, based in Edinburgh.

<sup>57</sup> *Spearmint Rhino* is the only club among those visited that is situated next to residential housing.

I would not have bought the flat if I had realised the level of disruption the club would cause. The noise is unbearable (LP2).

One described his embarrassment at living so close to the club.

I don't invite my friends back very often, as they are always commenting on how tacky the club is, and suggesting it is my local (LP3).

## **Glasgow Chamber of Commerce**

The Glasgow clubs are all in the city centre, and are located close to businesses but not residential dwellings. The Chamber of Commerce (CoC) has objected to the opening of all four clubs, on the grounds that their presence will have an adverse effect on Glasgow's image, and negatively affect trade.

In May 2003, Glasgow CoC conducted a snapshot survey of fifty-two city centre businesses and found that three-quarters (n=39) believed that lap-dancing clubs would damage the reputation of the city. The survey also showed that almost half (n=19) of respondents were concerned about the safety of their staff in the vicinity of the clubs.

In a press release marking the publication of the survey, CoC chief executive stated: "The results of this survey bear out my initial opinion that such businesses could be counter-productive to the image of the entire city centre.<sup>58</sup>" The current Policy Manager at the CoC noted: "Businesses in Glasgow do not want lap dancing clubs in their city. They attract the wrong kind of business, and keep the right kind away" (Interview, May 2004).

## **London Businesses**

A small telephone poll of four local London Chambers of Commerce, affiliated to the wider London CoC, revealed that they had received no complaints from members regarding lap-dancing clubs. However, a representative of a London business membership organisation<sup>59</sup> confirmed that it "does not have any lap-dancing clubs in membership and our board reserves the right to refuse membership to any organisations without giving reason".

## **Media Coverage**

Since the advent of the first club opening in the UK, the press, both tabloid and broadsheet, has taken a significant interest in lap-dancing clubs. As with much press reporting, the focus of the articles and news items seems to be polarised, with opinion divided between those who consider lap-dancing clubs unproblematic, and those condemning them. The main reasons that have been put forward for not opposing the clubs are:

- It is not prostitution, but 'entertainment'

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<sup>58</sup> Press release dated 5 June 2003.

<sup>59</sup> This organisation wishes to remain anonymous.

- The women work in a nice environment, and are there freely
- The customers are a 'better class' than in some other clubs
- It is 'good, clean fun'

The main reasons advanced in opposition to them are:

- They overlap with/are a front for prostitution
- They encourage men to sexually objectify women
- People/other businesses do not want the clubs in their area
- Lap dancing is demeaning to women, and can encourage sexual violence/abuse

Much of the coverage in the tabloids, and, to a lesser extent, the broadsheets, can be described as salacious and focuses primarily on the dancers. There have been, however, a small number of reports and features, identified for the purposes of this study, that could be considered thought provoking and informative, for example because they provide factual evidence based on interviews with those working in and visiting the clubs.

## NGOs

In Glasgow, women's groups that focus on violence and exploitation are united in their critique of lap dancing clubs, believing them to constitute exploitation of women<sup>60</sup>. The Women's Support Project (WSP) said it is regularly contacted by members of the public concerned about the effect the clubs are having on their city. The coordinator explained:

Women avoid the areas where the clubs are. There's a very popular pub near one of them that my friends and me used to go to regularly, but since the club opened I haven't been back since. There are tales of groups of drunken men who are all fired up to sexually humiliate women, so we don't want to bear the brunt of it." WSP also have anecdotal evidence of women being moved around the country to work in different clubs, in order to fill spaces created by the transient nature of the business (Interview, May 2004).

One woman who contacted the WSP expressed her concerns about her daughter who had recently started work at one of the clubs, saying that her biggest worry was that her daughter might be sexually assaulted. She told the support worker that, "If she were to be, who would believe that she didn't ask for it? She works in a lap-dancing club, which everyone knows is like prostitution".

Some members of the lesbian and gay communities in the North East of England have also expressed concern over the atmosphere created by lap-dancing clubs in areas where gays and lesbians socialise. The Gay and Lesbian Matrix in Newcastle formally objected to an application for a license to open a club in the gay area of the city, arguing that activities in the club could provoke homophobia. Gay business owners

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<sup>60</sup> The Scottish Coalition Against Sexual Exploitation was formed in 2004 out of concern regarding the expansion of the 'acceptable face' of the sex industry, namely lap dancing clubs.

expressed concern that opening a club that could be viewed as 'aggressively heterosexual' might discourage lesbian and gay people from visiting the area, and that that single women in the area might encounter harassment from people visiting the club. A spokesperson for the group told Newcastle's licensing magistrate, "It's an area that attracts gay people from all over the country every night of the week and they feel safe there. This would put that in jeopardy"<sup>61</sup>.

The Scottish Coalition Against Sexual Exploitation (SCASE), which brings together organisations and individuals in Scotland who share a concern about the harm caused by sexual exploitation of women<sup>62</sup>, also objects to the presence of lap-dancing clubs. SCASE considers the normalisation and expansion of the sex industry to be harmful to women in general.

We view lap dancing as being part of a spectrum of commercial sexual exploitation which contributes to a culture in which women are viewed as objects available for the sexual gratification of men. We would argue that commercial sexual exploitation, which includes lap dancing, pornography and prostitution, is inextricably linked with both the prevalence and the acceptability of sexual violence within our society. Any work around sexual violence must have as its objective the eradication of rape, and we will not achieve this until we tackle the root causes of this violence: namely men's attitudes to women, and society's tolerance and encouragement of these attitudes (Correspondence, 2004).

In England, women's groups that have been proactive in their opposition to lap-dancing clubs are the Lillith Project, OBJECT and the Sheffield Women's Forum, all of which were contacted for the purposes of this study.

A representative of the Sheffield Women's Forum, which conducted a straw poll of women in the city centre near to where a lap-dancing club had recently opened and advertised, stated that:

In general, women in Sheffield do not want these clubs in their city, and nor do they want to walk past the billboards advertising the clubs using naked women. There's enough pornography around as it is (Interview, May 2004).

OBJECT, which describes itself as 'challenging the portrayal of women as sexual objects'<sup>63</sup>, is critical of lap-dancing establishments because they "encourage the normalisation of pornography and misogyny (Interview, May 2004).

Little work has been done in the UK on the prevalence and nature of lap-dancing clubs, or the social consequences of them, and yet there has been significant criticism

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<sup>61</sup> Ben Townley, 2004, 'Newcastle gay bars fight lap dancing venue', *Gay.com UK*, 4 February.

<sup>62</sup> The following groups and organisations are affiliated: Women's Support Project; Rape Crisis Scotland; Glasgow Rape Crisis; Glasgow Women's Aid; East Lothian Women's Aid; Dumfries and Stewarty Womens Aid; East Dumbartonshire Womens Aid; Glasgow Simon Community; WISE Women; Womens Rights Education; Network Open Secret; Gartnavel Hospital Adolescent Unit; Quarriers Reach Out Project; Quarriers Family Resource Project; Routes out of Prostitution; SAY Women; Base 75; SWAP Project; Polepark Family Services; Rape and Sexual Assault North East; Edinburgh CC Equalities Unit; plus a number of individuals.

<sup>63</sup> <http://freespace.virgin.net/object.objects/>.

of the clubs and their activities from a number of perspectives and organisations/individuals. In order to properly assess public opinion, and the effects of such clubs on society, further research is needed.

## 9. Conclusions

This study on lap dancing is the first of its kind in the UK. It is based on observations within six clubs in Glasgow and London, and interviews with dancers, customers, club owners and others with various degrees of involvement in, or knowledge of, the 'lap-dance industry'.

It can be concluded, from the body of evidence obtained from dancers, club owners, customers and police officers, as well as general observations during club visits, that some lap-dance club owners and managers create a context in which the buying and selling of sexual services may occur. As described in this report, club owners tend to absolve themselves of any responsibility if sexual services are found to be on occurring or being arranged on the premises, yet at the same time there is some indication that they encourage the dancers to project an air of sexual availability to customers. By making it difficult for the dancers to earn an adequate living legitimately, through requiring the payment of 'rent' for each shift worked in the clubs, and by hiring excess numbers of dancers at any one time, club owners and managers also create a series of structural conditions that can lead some dancers to offer sexual services in order to survive financially. This is not to say that there is evidence of significant numbers of dancers engaging in prostitution activities, but that the clubs are run in a way that both implicitly encourages the customers to seek sexual services from the dancers, and means that some dancers will offer them.

On the basis of information provided by dancers and customers in particular, it could be argued that activities within lap-dancing clubs are in direct contradiction with attempts to promote equality between men and women, and could contribute to hindering further progress in this area. During the course of this study, there were instances where customers were observed sexually objectifying and exploiting dancers. The way that lap-dance clubs are organised, and the conditions that the dancers operate in, appear to reinforce gender inequality, and normalise men's sexual objectification of women.

Although occasionally female customers attend the clubs with male partners<sup>64</sup>, the clubs cater for a male clientele. No entertainment is provided other than stripping, whether pole dancing, cabaret performances or private lap dances. The predominant sight within the club is of semi-naked women pole dancing, sitting with customers or mingling with other dancers in the club area. Women's breasts are constantly on display. It could be argued, therefore, that the clubs should be viewed and licensed as sex establishments and subject to the same controls.

In opposing licensing applications for such clubs, Glasgow City Council is taking a stand against one of the most 'normalised' and veiled sections of the commercial sex sector.

This study concludes the following main points:

- Contrary to the opinion of club owners interviewed for the purposes of this study, lap-dancing clubs can be seen as part of the sex industry

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<sup>64</sup> During the six visits only two female customers were observed in one of the clubs.  
Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit  
London Metropolitan University

- Lap dancing is becoming increasingly normalised
- Activities within the clubs can be seen as detrimental to gender equality
- The buying and selling of sexual services does occur in some lap-dance clubs
- Current licensing conditions appear inadequate
- Working conditions and terms of employment of lap dancers are inadequate and problematic
- There is strong evidence that dancers can suffer humiliation and sexual harassment on a regular basis, from customers and staff/management
- There is a strong public lobby opposing lap-dance clubs in the UK and elsewhere
- Many dancers begin working in lap-dance clubs through lack of real choice
- The requirement for dancers to 'glamour model' to advertise the club, and the evidence that some customers take covert photographs of the dancers whilst naked, suggests links between lap-dancing clubs and pornography

In order to address the main issues raised, the following recommendations should be considered.

### **Recommendations**

- Local authorities/governments should be given greater powers in relation to licensing
- The clubs should be licensed under the same conditions as sex shops
- The numbers of licenses granted should be restricted
- Licensing conditions should be applied to advertising of the clubs and related activities
- Specific licensing conditions should be introduced to address issues of employment practice and working conditions for the dancers
- Licensing, codes of conduct for dancers and club rules/conditions should be regularised
- The rules of the club and the licence should be prominently displayed in all lap dance venues, including at the entrance and on tables and bar areas
- Clubs should be subject to regular, obligatory checks by undercover police officers
- Dancers' 'rent' payment to management should be abolished
- VIP suites and curtained areas should be eradicated
- CCTV coverage should be introduced throughout the performance, including in the seating areas
- Central governments should fund research on the social consequences of commercial sexual exploitation, which should include lap dancing
- Central governments should fund public awareness campaigns on sexual exploitation

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## 11. APPENDIX 1

### LONDON METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY CHILD AND WOMEN ABUSE STUDIES UNIT

The Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit (CWASU), University of North London (now London Metropolitan University) was founded in 1987, to develop feminist research methodologies, theory and practice, especially in relation to connections between forms of sexualised violence. CWASU now has a national and international reputation for its research, training and consultancy work, which involves a creative combination of large and small scale research projects, training, policy development and networking, bridging the worlds of academia, policy, practice and activism. The Unit has completed over 30 research project's. Recently completed projects include:

- An evaluation of a programme for domestic violence perpetrators
- A review of current practice on sex offender registration and community notification funded by several national children's charities
- With colleagues at three UK universities, a study investigating children's understandings and experiences of domestic violence funded by the ESRC
- The first contemporary investigation of trafficking of women into the UK for the purposes of sexual exploitation funded by the Home Office
- A self training manual on violence against women funded by the Council of European Police and Human Rights Programme
- An overview of sexual exploitation of children in Europe funded by the European Commission's STOP programme
- A study of attrition in reported rape cases in Europe funded by the European Commission's DAPHNE programme
- A review of research of the investigation and prosecution of rape cases commissioned by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate.

Professor Liz Kelly, CBE, Director of the Unit, chaired a Council of Europe Group of Specialists on combating violence against women and girls and was a member of the external advisory group for the Home Office Sex Offences Review. She is currently a member of the Metropolitan Police Independent Advisory Group on serious sexual offences and an academic consultant to the European Women's Lobby observatory on violence against women. The units are special advisors to the British Council on violence against women and are the seminar directors for their international seminars on violence against women. In this role they have delivered training and consultancy to government and NGO's in a range of countries including Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Jordan, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Spain and Uganda. CWASU staff have spoken at numerous national and international conferences.

Julie Bindel has been involved in the field of violence against women since 1980, as a campaigner, trainer, writer and researcher. She has worked on projects funded by the UK government's, Department for International Development and the Home Office, as well as European bodies. Julie has designed and implemented training on child protection, rape, prostitution, trafficking of human beings, best practice in social work and sexual violence in conflict situations. Julie was a member of the European

Commission Expert panel on trafficking and the Sexual Offences Consultation Group at New Scotland Yard.

Additionally, she writes regularly for the UK press on issues relating to violence and abuse of women and children, mainly for the Guardian newspaper and has published a number of articles and chapters in books and journals. Julie is the co-editor of *The Map of My Life: The Story of Emma Humphreys*, Astraia Press, 2003.