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Poles apart? A comparative analysis of female university students and graduates working in the UK stripping and hospitality industries.

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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Last but by no means least, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my Dad and Nanna June who are sadly no longer with us, but who continue to play an important role in my life.

## Declaration

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## Abstract

This is a longitudinal, comparative study which explores 39 women's experiences - over time and retrospectively - of becoming a university student and waitress or stripper and latterly a graduate in the UK. The research addresses a gap in existing sex work scholarship by looking at what happens after university for students working as strippers and extends the scope by looking at this in comparison with students working as waitresses. I have taken a multidimensional approach to explore how different roles and identities intersect and how plans and imagined futures/selves evolve over time. I focus on women's decision-making processes and experiences as they remain within or leave their respective part-time 'student jobs' and enter alternative careers, or not.

Applying concepts such as emotion, affect and relationality, findings from this thesis challenge theories of individualism and research which frames students/graduates as isolated, 'rational' actors. The analysis extends beyond work and education taking into account women's personal lives and relationships which are then situated within the broader socio-political and economic context of austerity and youth unemployment. This offers a more complex way of knowing women's lives by locating sex workers as people with experiences outside of the sex industry. Furthermore, by addressing a much wider range of (gendered) issues relating to student/graduate transitions than are currently given space. For example, sexual assault, health, pregnancy, caring responsibilities, intimate relationships and bullying.

Women's (middle-class) expectations of their future lives/selves did not always match their material realities. However, I argue that if we continue to measure the value of jobs or women's experiences post-university against the dominant middle-class standard, working-class women will always be seen as inferior/lacking/deficient; regardless of what they do. Participants in this study were acutely aware of how they were positioned by the 'middle-class judgmental gaze' and as such, did not consider themselves or their jobs to be 'real', 'proper' or 'good enough'. I argue for a more nuanced understanding of classed experiences and against the (over)use of the 'deficit' approach to class analysis which crudely positions working/middle-class lives as oppositional; with the former always wholly negative. Indeed, when taking different value systems into account, women's lives become *more* than their 'destinations' after university.

Finally, this thesis includes the first systematic comparative analysis of stripping and waitressing and challenges the assumption that stripping, and sex work, are inherently different and Other to ‘mainstream’ labour. I do not claim that these jobs are simply one-and-the-same. Instead, I look at similarities and differences, asking why these exist and what this means for theorising gender, class, work and employment more broadly. Findings demonstrate how the increased closure of strip clubs – under the guise of gender equality – has done little to tackle the causes of sexism while at the same time making the work more difficult and dangerous for women. By foregrounding women’s voices as workers/students/graduates, the data adds to existing sex work scholarship and to debates on Higher Education, strip club regulation and sexual harassment in the workplace, which are areas currently being (re)addressed by governments.

## Key to abbreviations

CGT- Constructivist grounded theory

NTE- Night Time Economy

SEV- Sexual entertainment venue

SH- Sexual Harassment

TSSWP – The Student Sex Work Project

ZHC – Zero Hour Contract

# Chapter One: Introduction

## Students and sex work

In the early 2000s, while completing her PhD, Dr Brooke Magnanti published the blog *Belle de Jour: Diary of a London Call Girl*. The blog attracted widespread media attention and was later turned into a (UK top 10 best-selling) book and adapted into the ITV show, *Secret Diary of a Call Girl* (Magnanti, 2019). Nearly 20 years later, the student by day, sex worker by night phenomenon is still hitting headlines and TV screens (see Lister, 2019; Hall, 2019; Busby, 2018). Most recent examples include the April 2019 Netflix series *Bonding*, based on the life of a student/dominatrix (Netflix, 2019). In June 2019, Channel 5 aired a two-part series titled *Student Sex Workers* (episode one: *Stripping to Study* and episode two: *Porn Star Graduate*) (Channel5, 2019). Sanders and Hardy (2015:748) argue that this (prolonged) interest stems from a broader cultural fascination with sex work(ers) and that students do not fit the ‘downtrodden, drug-addicted, street, victim’ stereotype.

Sensationalism aside, with the ever-rising cost of living combined with increasing tuition fees and cuts in financial support for students, engagement in sex work while at university highlights an important, gendered and potentially classed issue in Higher Education (HE) which requires further exploration. There have been several small-scale studies (Roberts et al., 2007; 2010), however, in 2015, Sagar et al. published findings from The Student Sex Work Project (TSSWP), the first large-scale research carried out in the UK. The aim was to map the extent and characteristics of students engaging in sex work as well as their motivations, experiences and needs. Findings revealed that approximately 5% of all students engage in some form of sex work while at university (Sagar et al., 2016:16). Based on 2018 UK student numbers, this amounts to approximately 117,000 students (UUK, 2018). Yet, as with all sex work population figures, due to the stigmatised nature of the work, this is likely to be an underestimation.

In 2015, I carried out small-scale qualitative research on the topic for my master's thesis. The study looked at how 9 female university students in the UK sex industry (working as strippers<sup>1</sup>, escorts and webcam models) negotiated the stigma associated with their work (see Simpson and Smith, forthcoming). I found that all 9 women planned to leave the industry on completion of their degree and the assumed transience of sex work helped students to neutralise the negative effects of stigma. Findings support research with students in the US (see Trautner and Collett, 2010; Haeger and Deli-Amen, 2010) who also considered graduation to be the benchmark for when they planned to leave the industry indefinitely. However, there was no research looking at what happens after university for student sex workers. The majority of existing scholarship focused on trajectories into the sex industry for students and their experiences of sex work while at university. Thus, despite recent academic interest in both student sex work and the issue of exiting sex work (Oselin, 2014; Bowen, 2015, 2018; Ham and Gilmore, 2017), the two research areas were yet to meet.

The idea of going to university and obtaining a degree is increasingly 'sold' to young people as a passport to better-paid jobs and social mobility. To compete in the labour market, more individuals than ever before are investing – financially and otherwise – in HE (Tomlinson, 2008). Furthermore, a large proportion of students are also engaging in part-time work and juggling multiple, often competing demands under the assumption that this is a short-term struggle to achieve 'success' (Christie, 2009). Yet, given the hyper-competitive nature of the graduate labour market, combined with relatively bleak employment prospects, research suggests that finding a 'graduate job' has become increasingly difficult (Tholen, 2014). This suggests that sex work may not be as short-term or transient as initially planned or assumed by

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, the terms erotic dancer, dancer and stripper are used interchangeably in reference to women working in the stripping industry. All terms were deemed appropriate as they were also used interchangeably by respondents during interviews. However, two women specifically requested that I stopped referring to stripping as dancing as they also worked as dancers in other capacities and considered the two forms of labour to be different. I do not use the more Americanised terms lap-dance/r/ing as this is not licenced in the UK (Sanders et al., 2015).

many students. Indeed, research by Hardy and Sanders (2015:131) found that graduates working as erotic dancers often continued working in the industry even when they had found jobs aligning with their future career aspirations. This was to boost income which women found to be insufficient due to the growing mismatch between graduate status and employability.

### Danielle's story

The initial aim of this thesis was to address a gap in existing scholarship by exploring what happens after university for student sex workers. Before embarking on this project, I conducted a small pilot study by re-interviewing Danielle, a participant from my master's research. I made notes from the first transcript and we reflected on what had happened in the 12 months since we had last spoken. We discussed how Danielle's (and my own) plans, hopes and ambitions had evolved and changed over that time. The following section of this chapter includes a brief overview of Danielle's story as a precursor demonstrating how and why this pilot study shaped the methodological, conceptual and analytical decisions made throughout this thesis.

I interviewed Danielle for the first time in 2015 about her experiences of working as an erotic dancer while studying at university. At the time, Danielle had worked as a dancer for four years, she was 25 years old and self-identified as a white, British, working-class woman from the North of England. She had recently graduated from her undergraduate (UG) degree and was awarded a 2:1 from a prestigious London university. Danielle had also qualified and started working part-time as a personal trainer (PT) while studying and working as a stripper. The PT job was not for financial purposes but to avoid any gaps in her employment history and as a Plan B (in addition to her degree) to ensure that she would not become 'trapped' in stripping long-term.

Within political and popular discourse as well as certain scholarship on sex work, it is assumed that stripping is something women *should* leave. Furthermore, that women typically

become ‘trapped’ in stripping as the work can be highly lucrative in comparison to other jobs; particularly for women with few alternatives (Barton, 2006; 2017). Although it has become more difficult for graduates to find employment, it could be assumed that due to their credentials, graduates do have options outside of the sex industry and do not face the same potential ‘trapping’ factors as a result. Nevertheless, Danielle was aware of this ‘risk’ and had devised a strategy to help her leave when she felt the time was right. She described herself as hardworking and it was clear that she did not want to be perceived as lazy or as not having earned her income which could be an attempt to disassociate from negative stereotypes historically associated with the working-classes (Tyler, 2008).

“I’m not a lady of leisure who can’t be arsed to work. I got myself the PT job to prove to myself that, you know, I can still grit my teeth and work for it [money] and that job really proved it. They were making me stand on the street and hand out leaflets which I hated but it was kind of like, you need to do this for yourself and to prove to yourself that, you know, you’re not gonna get sucked in and you can walk out of it [stripping] and leave it when the time is right... also when I go for a graduate job they’re not gonna be like ‘Oh, so your CV says you’ve done nothing for the past few years’ (laughs)” (Danielle, dancer).

Danielle lived in London with her male partner of three and a half years. She planned to continue working part-time as a PT and dancer while she was looking for a ‘graduate job’. However, she was not sure what graduate job she wanted, nor how to obtain such employment. Her longer-term plan was to save enough money with her partner to move back to the north and buy a house together by 2017.

When I re-interviewed Danielle around 12 months later in 2016, her life and plans had altered substantially. She had not yet found a ‘graduate job’ and had continued stripping and occasionally working as a PT. When I asked about her decisions and experiences post-university, her narrative around work had shifted from ‘hardworking’ to ‘living the easy life’.

“I just thought, like, why go and work your butt off and get paid next to nothing [in a ‘graduate job’] when you can do next to nothing [stripping] and get paid shit loads?” (Danielle, dancer).

At the time of the second interview, Danielle had very recently quit her job in the strip club. Her partner had given her an ultimatum: their relationship or her job as a stripper. She assumed

he was bluffing and refused to quit. When he ended their relationship, Danielle left her job, however, she stated that by that point it was too late. Danielle was in the midst of moving out and finding a new home in London. Even though she was paid ‘only pennies’ as a PT compared to the money she was earning as a dancer, she felt unable to return to the strip club stating that she was angry and ‘resent[ed] stripping for what it ha[d] done to [her] relationship’. Overall, Danielle constructed her break-up as a catalyst for change as she frequently mentioned starting ‘afresh’ and ‘saying goodbye’ to her former self where she was ‘living in denial and avoiding reality’. Danielle’s new plan was to use the money she had saved for a house deposit to go travelling. She felt that time away from the UK would provide her with space (geographical and psychological) to discover what she wanted to do with her future. Similar to the first interview, Danielle’s new plan when she returned to the UK was to look for a ‘graduate job’, but again, she was unsure exactly what job or how to find it.

This excerpt offers a glimpse into experiences of emerging adulthood in contemporary society which is commonly filled with periods of exploration and uncertainty (Arnett, 2016:227). Furthermore, Danielle’s narrative demonstrates how graduate experiences are much more than ‘outcomes’ or ‘destinations’ post-HE. Simply looking at whether or not Danielle had quit or continued working as a stripper after university would tell a very one-dimensional story. Contrary to theories of individualism (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1991), her decision and meaning-making processes and subsequent actions were highly relational and emotional rather than ‘rational’ and isolated. Danielle acknowledged that her life would have been easier (financially) if she returned to stripping, however her anger, resentment and essentially, heartbreak, over the loss of her relationship prevented her from going back *at that point*. That she was able to leave and choose not to re-enter alluded to her position of relative privilege. Nevertheless, while most people work due to dull economic



compulsion, money is not always the only reason why women enter or remain in stripping (c.f. Colosi, 2012).

Following the second interview with Danielle, I realised that her experiences and the ‘problems’ she had faced post-university (i.e. breakdown of relationships, moving home, plans to travel, uncertainty regarding future) were not necessarily exclusive to sex workers. Thus, any claims that I made about student/graduate sex workers could be potentially misleading and suggestive that sex workers are somehow unique or different from other graduates. While this may be the case, to be able to identify and explore how working in the sex industry impacts graduate transitions, it is important to look comparatively and to also examine what happens after university for women working in ‘mainstream’ student jobs, such as waitressing.

### The socio-political context of the study: Sex work in the UK

Although sex work is an umbrella term for all sexual services including escorting, webcamming, telephone sex among others, I have chosen to focus specifically on students engaged in stripping and to compare experiences with students working as waitresses for several reasons. Firstly, stripping and waitressing are comparable as they are both legal forms of labour carried out within the broader night-time economy (NTE) in the UK. Stripping and waitressing are ‘low-skilled’, feminised jobs which require workers to perform similar forms of immaterial labour (i.e. emotional, aesthetic, sexualised, interactive, affective)<sup>2</sup> (Sanders and Hardy, 2014:123; Coffey et al., 2018). Waitressing/hospitality remains one of the most common part-time jobs students engage in while at university (Evans et al., 2017:284). When I started this research in 2015, erotic dance was considered to be one of the most popular areas of the sex industry for students to work in, most likely due to the non-contact nature and *relative* social acceptance of the work (Roberts et al., 2013:357-358). Indeed, Hardy and Sanders

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1 for an explanation of the practicalities involved and the difference between working in a strip club and strip pub. Furthermore, differences in the experience of waitressing in restaurants, for an agency and waitressing in a strip club.

(2015:126) found that a substantial number of erotic dancers in their sample were also students<sup>3</sup>. However, this may no longer be the case as there has been a shift to online sex markets including services mediated by the Internet such as webcamming (Rand, in print). Furthermore, due to a (resurging) backlash against the stripping industry, there has also been an increased closure of strip clubs across the UK over the past decade (Rhodes, 2018). This has not only reduced employment opportunities for women but has also re-intensified the stigma associated with the work.

There have been ongoing campaigns to eradicate the stripping industry in the UK<sup>4</sup> starting in 2008 with pressure group *Object* and more recently by *Not Buying It!* and *Zero Option*. In 2019, a series of sting-operations were initiated in strip clubs across London, Manchester and Sheffield. Men were hired by campaign groups to pose as customers and to secretly record women at work in an attempt to ‘prove’ that “...to earn even £20, women *must* provide sexual contact and perform sex acts in so-called Gentlemen’s Clubs” (Not Buying It, 2019, emphasis added). The material gathered was then presented to local authorities in an attempt to have licences revoked with immediate effect<sup>5</sup>. Trade union United Voices of Workers has likened such campaigns to revenge porn as recordings were taken and used without dancers’ consent leaving women at risk of losing their jobs and being publicly outed as strippers. Indeed, several dancers stated that they had faced online abuse as a result of the campaigns (Parvin, 2019).

A similar neo-abolitionist stance against the sex industry is also taken by the UK government. Sex work is constructed as sexual exploitation, inherently abusive and conflated with modern slavery and human trafficking (Scoular and Carline, 2014). This is evidenced by

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<sup>3</sup> Almost one third (28.7%, n=50) of dancers were students. The majority were in HE (55.3%, n=26) and on UG programmes. 44.7% (n=21) were in FE or private vocational courses (Hardy and Sanders, 2015:126-127).

<sup>4</sup> Campaigns against the stripping industry will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Two and Seven.

<sup>5</sup> Spearmint Rhino (Sheffield) had its licence renewed following the council’s ruling that the covertly recorded footage should not force its closure (for full story see Wolfe-Robinson, 2019).

the 2019 report, *The Limits of Consent: Prostitution in the UK* by Conservative Party Human Rights Commission. Within the report, recommendations are made to ‘end demand’ by criminalising the purchase of sexual services. However, Chair of the report, MP Fiona Bruce, has been criticised by sex work scholars for dismissing a wealth of peer-reviewed research on sex work. Rather than basing policy recommendations on empirical data, Bruce ends the report by stating that ‘evidence only takes you so far’ and instead advocates an approach based on (subjective) ‘ethics’ and morality (Sex Work Research Hub, 2019).

The assertion that sex work is inherently exploitative, oppressive and fundamentally different to other forms of work is not based on direct comparisons between sex work and other types of human service work (Sanders et al., 2013). There is a growing body of scholarship which highlights – in a more abstract sense – the similarities in the types of labour performed by sex workers and workers in other occupations (Lever and Dolnick 2010; Ditmore et al., 2010; Bernstein 2007; Sanders 2005; O’Connell Davidson 1998). Furthermore, scholars have combined separate studies to compare stripping and hairdressing (Sanders et al., 2013). However, this thesis incorporates the comparison between sex work and mainstream labour into the research design to produce the first systematic comparative analysis of stripping and waitressing. By doing so, the aim is to explicate what exactly is ‘different’ about stripping but also, what makes this form of labour similar to ‘mainstream’ work (and to waitressing specifically) based on empirical data.

### Outline of the study: Research aims and questions

This is a qualitative longitudinal, comparative study which explores 39 women’s experiences of transitioning through education and becoming a student, working as a waitress or stripper and latterly, becoming a graduate in the UK. I have interviewed 13 women at two points in time, first in their final year of university and secondly, around 12 months after they have finished studying. The longitudinal data has been combined with data from four

interviews with women in their first or second year of HE as well as 22 retrospective interviews with women who have experienced living as a graduate for a longer period (between one to 10 years)<sup>4</sup>. There are three separate, interconnected sets of questions which have guided this study starting with women's transitions *into* HE and part-time employment.

1. How do women make sense of their transition into HE?
  - a. What factors shape their decisions to enter university?
  - b. How do women experience the process of becoming a student?
2. How do women experience work as waitresses or strippers while at university?
  - a. Why do women choose waitressing or stripping specifically?
  - b. How do students negotiate the competing demands of work, university and their personal lives?

I do not claim that these jobs are simply one-and-the-same. Instead, I look at similarities and differences, asking why they exist and what this means for work and employment more broadly. The aim is to support women in both industries as workers and to prioritise their voices and experiences, which in the case of strippers, have been routinely ignored and dismissed within policy debates (see Sanders et al. 2015). This adds to the tradition of de-specialising sex work and challenges sex work stigma which affects all women; albeit, very differently. To do so, I explore the following questions:

3. What are the similarities and differences between erotic dance and waitressing in regard to:
  - a. The types of labour performed by workers
  - b. The labour processes and relations in restaurants and strip clubs/pubs

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<sup>4</sup> In Chapter Three I will discuss the reasoning behind using the different interview methods in more detail.

Finally, this research addresses a gap in existing sex work scholarship by looking at what happens after university for students working as strippers. I have extended the scope further by comparing experiences with students working as waitresses and by asking:

4. How do women experience the process of becoming a graduate?
  - a. How do they imagine their future lives/selves and how does this compare with their lived realities around 12 months after they have finished university?
  - b. How do participants experience leaving or remaining within a part-time job assumed to be transient?
5. How do women experience entering the ‘graduate labour markets’?
  - a. How does involvement in stripping and waitressing during HE affect female students’ labour market transitions upon graduation?

Rather than focusing on work *or* education only, this study adopts a multi-dimensional approach taking both facets into account in addition to respondents’ personal lives. In doing so, this responds to calls by Sanders et al. (2018:26) to analyse the multiple, intersecting social categories that sex workers inhabit. The authors argue that what is typically missing from the analysis of the sex industry is the location of sex workers as people who have lives, relationships and experiences outside of sex work. Furthermore, there is a need for deeper, more complex analysis which looks at the socio-cultural and political context in which sex work is carried out (c.f. Agustin, 2005). Similarly, this project also responds to Finn’s (2015: xiii) ‘challenge’ to sociologists to write and represent a much broader range of issues relating to HE and graduate transitions than are currently given space. For example, the focus is often limited to ‘who ends up where’ after university and why and so she asks, “...what *else* can studies of educational transitions do and, indeed, what more can be done to reveal ‘the things, moments, events, experiences that *matter*’ in the everyday lives of students and graduates”.

## Parameters of the study

Feminist debates on whether or not stripping is a form of labour or violence against women (VAW) are complex, divisive and such polarisation can be unhelpful. O'Connell Davidson (2002:85) argues that both 'camps' disallow the possibility of supporting the rights of those who work in the sex industry as workers, while at the same time remaining critical of the socio-political inequalities that underpin market relations in general and sex work in particular. This debate will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter. For now, it is important to state that I have conceptualised stripping as a form of labour rather than VAW or sexual exploitation. I acknowledge that by taking this stance and by using language such as 'sex work(er)', I have also taken a politicised position which has shaped the entirety of this thesis. However, by acknowledging that sex work is a form of labour, this is not, as Hardy (2013:44) argues, a normative judgement or a claim regarding the value of the work (i.e. that it is 'good' or equally 'bad'), but only that it is in itself *work*.

The study was restricted to individuals who self-identify as women. During the recruitment stage, I did not specify nor limit participation based on gender identity, however, all 39 women who have taken part in this study were cis-gender women<sup>5</sup>. I have chosen to focus on women's experiences because stripping and waitressing remain female-dominated occupations (ONS, 2018b). I acknowledge that there are waiting staff and dancers of different genders. Furthermore, that the stripping industry has become more diverse and now caters to women and non-heterosexual customers (see Pilcher, 2017). Indeed, the first LGBTQI+ strip club opened in London in July 2019 (Wakefield, 2019). Nevertheless, the vast majority of dancers are female, customers are (heterosexual) men and many strip venues continue to prohibit female customers from entering unless escorted by a man (as will be discussed in Chapter Three) (Sanders and Hardy, 2014:15). This research opens up questions relating to the

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<sup>5</sup> I will discuss how I have conceptualised gender in more detail in Chapter Three.

experiences of men, people who identify as non-binary/gender-fluid and transgender men/women who are also students/graduates working within different forms of sex work and ‘mainstream’ labour.

Secondly, women are statistically more likely to go to university than men and women are more likely to work part-time while studying (HESA, 2019a). Despite, (primarily white, middle-class) women’s educational ‘advantage’, women continue to experience discrimination in employment including in regard to their pay (Phipps, 2017a:10). As a result, becoming a student, working student (waitress and stripper specifically) and becoming a graduate are gendered and unequal experiences which require exploration. I have chosen to carry out qualitative research to redress the quantitative focus of graduate transitions literature and to provide rich, in-depth data on the micro and subjective, rather than broader trends.

### Outline of the thesis

In the subsequent chapter of this thesis, I bring together somewhat disparate literature. First, I draw on scholarship from the field of education, and HE in particular, with a specific focus on student/graduate transitions. Secondly, I turn to research on work and employment and sex work. Given the breadth of literature, Chapter Two is by no means an exhaustive review. Instead, I discuss specific issues that this research seeks to address. For example, the neoliberal marketisation of HE, students and part-time work, the rise and subsequent fall of the stripping industry and ‘exiting’ sex work. During this thesis, the #MeToo movement took spread globally which has since prompted the government to (re)address sexual harassment in the workplace. Furthermore, the Presidents Club charity-dinner scandal hit headlines and as mentioned, there have been ongoing campaigns to eradicate the stripping industry as well as new legislation introduced in Scotland targeting strip clubs. As a result, the chapter has been continually adapted in response to ongoing changes. This does mean that the research is timely

and within the chapter I discuss how the study adds to and extends existing knowledge and debates.

Chapter Three includes an outline of the ontological and epistemological stance taken in this research and a discussion of how the research design has affected the knowledge produced. I provide a detailed reflexive account of carrying out ‘dirty research’ and of the challenges I faced when trying to recruit participants. This became an important part of the research process which in itself produced data/findings. The chapter also provides a more detailed explanation of the approach and methods I have used, how the data was analysed and the ethical implications of the study.

The three analysis chapters are organised and presented in timeline form. In Chapter Four, I start by discussing the data gathered during the first round of interviews relating to women’s experiences of becoming a student and entering their respective student jobs. I explore what factors influenced participants’ decision and meaning-making processes on entering HE and how women negotiated their multiple, competing roles/identities. In doing so, I demonstrate the potentially ‘new’ ways women are engaging with university (for example, positioning university as a side-hustle). The analysis challenges scholarship which reproduces the highly problematic notion of a normative/ideal student. What becomes clear from the data is that students are not homogenous and that the experiences of working/middle-class participants were varied rather than polarised. Throughout, I argue that the dominant ‘deficit model’ hinders our understanding of class and how it plays out in the context of the university.

In Chapter Five, I compare student experiences of working as waitresses and strippers. For purposes of continuity, the chapter is also presented in a linear timeline form. This starts with the more practical elements of both jobs, for example, getting in, getting ready for work, working hours and getting paid, followed by a discussion of the relational and interactive elements of the work. For example, I discuss participants’ relationships with co/other workers,



management and customers and how they were negotiated. The chapter highlights the convergences and divergences of waitressing and stripping and challenges the assumption that the latter is unique and therefore not comparable to other forms of labour. By looking across the two different types of work, I demonstrate how/why we must remain critical of waged work and gendered/classed power dynamics more generally; rather than constructing strip clubs as distinctly sexist places (Sanders and Hardy, 2014:170).

Chapter Six discusses the data gathered during the second round of interviews and women's retrospective accounts of becoming a graduate, entering the graduate labour market and of leaving/remaining in waitressing/stripping after university. In this chapter, I demonstrate how experiences were not as clear cut as 'in' or 'out' of the sex or hospitality industries. I argue that by focusing on supposedly 'objective' outcomes, we run the risk of producing one-dimensional stories which disregard the emotionality and relationality of women's decision-making processes and subsequent actions/choices/experiences. Many women's plans, expectations and imagined future lives/selves did not always go to plan or match their material realities. Following on from Chapter Four, I argue that by crudely measuring women's experiences against a classed normative standard, working-class women's 'outcomes', regardless of what they do, will always appear lacking/deficient/inferior. However, by taking into account different value systems, women's experiences and lives become meaningful.

Chapter Seven concludes this thesis by bringing together and abridging the arguments made in the previous chapters into overarching themes covering issues such as expectations versus realities, precariously overworking and escapism, degrees on the side and finally the (de)valuation of (un)proper jobs, bodies and experiences. The final chapter demonstrates the contribution this research has made to current academic knowledge in the field of education, work and employment and sex work scholarship. This thesis ends with a discussion on the

future of stripping, waitressing and HE as well as providing recommendations for policy change and areas for future research.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Introduction

This thesis explores women's experiences of transition into, through and out of HE, waitressing and stripping. When scoping the literature, my approach was eclectic starting with theory and research situated within the sociology of education, and HE in particular. I then moved to scholarship on work and employment, focusing on sex work and waitressing as well as the types of labour involved (emotional, affective, aesthetic, embodied and sexualised). Finally, I turned to feminist literature on identity and the self in relation to gender, class, race and sexuality. During the data analysis phase, I found myself drawing heavily on the sociology of the family and emotions as key themes and concepts emerged from the data i.e. relationality. In this chapter, I aim to bring the various, disparate literatures together to situate this research and to demonstrate how the study contributes to and extends current knowledge across the different fields.

### Becoming a student

#### *The neoliberal university and the student-consumer*

In 2017, during a Conservative party conference, then UK Prime Minister Theresa May pledged to review university fees and student loans. However, due to (a preoccupation with) Brexit, the review was delayed on several occasions. In May 2019, two months before stepping down as prime minister, May publicly criticised her predecessor David Cameron who in 2015, removed maintenance grants<sup>6</sup> and increased tuition fees to a maximum of £9,250 per year. May claimed that the HE system 'does not work for everyone' and 'pressured' her (at the time, undetermined) successor to reduce the burden of student debt. May's claims were based on a government-commissioned report by former equities broker, Philip Augar which assessed post-18 education and funding in the UK. The bearing of the report came under question as there

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<sup>6</sup> In 2017, bursaries for student nurses and midwives were removed (Roberts, 2018:34).

was no guarantee that any of the recommendations would be implemented by the new prime minister (Department for Education, 2019b; Guardian, 2019). The report addressed two key areas of debate including student funding and debt, and the value and purpose of the degree for taxpayers and students-as-consumers. While such matters are not ‘new’, they remain unresolved.

The neoliberal transformation of the university is well documented (Taylor and Lahad, 2018; Ball, 2012; Berg et al., 2016). Over the past 30 years, UK governments have sought to expand and diversify HE through processes of marketisation while at the same time reducing public expenditure. This has shifted the cost/risk/burden (to some extent) away from the state and onto students and their families. The average student debt now stands at over £50,000 and it is estimated that 75% of students will never fully re-pay their loans (Roberts, 2018:34). The *value* and purpose of HE has been (re)conceptualised within government and educational discourses as a private product rather than a social good. Within this logic, there is seen to be no reason why the individual should not pay for their education, particularly as HE is ‘sold’ on the pretext of a significant premium in lifetime earnings (Holmes, 2013; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007).

Based on the Graduate Labour Market Statistics (GLMS) (Department for Education, 2019a), the median graduate salary (£34,000) was £10,000 more than for non-graduates. This is unsurprising given the significant changes in the labour market over the past 20 years in terms of occupational structures. Having a degree is now a prerequisite for many jobs, including for those which a degree was not traditionally required (Tholen et al., 2016). However, not all graduates fare as well as the GLMS suggests. Female graduates are expected to earn on average £9,500 less than their male counterparts<sup>7</sup>. Given that the average difference in annual salary

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<sup>7</sup> Male graduates earn on average £38,500. This is £9,500 more than female graduates, £12,000 more than non-graduate men and £18,500 more than non-graduate women (Department for Education, 2019a).

between female graduates (£29,000) and male non-graduates (£26,500) is £2,500, this suggests that it is the intersection of gender and education which remains the key factor influencing income, rather than education alone.

Within the field of HE, scholars continue to point to the potential dangers of universities becoming increasingly market-driven and the degree being valued for metrics and labour market returns only (Tomlinson, 2008). The student-consumer has emerged as a prominent figure within current debates. Nixon et al. (2018) carried out 22 qualitative interviews with students from one research-intensive university to uncover how marketisation has impacted student experience. The authors argue that by framing the university-student dyad as a service provider-customer relationship, this produced feelings of entitlement and customer sovereignty among students. For example, students referred to themselves as ‘paying customers’, to the precise cost of individual lectures<sup>8</sup> and many students stated that they had ‘better things to do with their time’ than attend university or engage in university-related work i.e. socialising, going to concerts or to the cinema. While the middle-class bias within the sample is briefly acknowledged at the end of the paper, the authors imply that such findings represent the student mentality/experience more broadly.

Although students have become educational/credential consumers, this does not automatically translate to all students feeling entitled and reducing their degree to just another commodity in the marketplace. Indeed, Tomlinson (2017) carried out a similar study, this time with 68 undergraduate students across seven UK universities. Findings suggest that the student-consumer mentality was not universal. Rather, student attitude and approach to HE was varied and appeared on a spectrum. This ranged from students as active service users, ambivalent students and those who resisted being positioned as consumers. Nevertheless, Nixon et al.’s (2018) use of middle-class students as a proxy for the entire student body is not uncommon.

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<sup>8</sup> Students in the sample stated that lectures were worth £35 (Nixon et al., 2018:933).

Loveday (2015) argues that what it means to be a student or notions of the ‘ideal’ student are still based on traditional elite/middle-class students/discourses.

### *Equality and diversity regimes*

In 2017-18 there were 2.34 million students and 164 HEIs in the UK which are differentiated both horizontally (programmes, subjects, links to industry) and vertically (reputation and prestige) (UUK, 2018). The UK government’s measure of participation rate reached an all-time high of 50.2% of young people undertaking a sub-degree, first-degree or post-graduate degree by the age of 30 in 2017/2018 (Department for Education, 2019b). Given the shift from an elite to a highly stratified and expanded system, combined with the increased ‘diversification’ of the student population, any generalisations made about student ‘mentality’ or experience are highly problematic.

Universities remain deeply unequal and widening access to HE for working-class and black, minority ethnic students has not ‘solved’ the problem of inequality. Reay (2016) argues that the biggest concern is now one of restricted access and a question of ‘who goes where’. By opening up the university to the ‘masses’, this has produced on-going struggles for class distinction resulting in elitism and discrimination as ‘non-traditional’ students are (still) excluded from high-status institutions. Scholars continue to problematise educational and political rhetoric around ‘Widening Participation’, ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusiveness’ which encourages ‘non-traditional’ students to simply ‘choose’ university, change/adapt and to *better* themselves and their futures (McLellan, 2016). Taylor (2010) argues that based on the extortionate price-tag of ‘investing’ in education, such equality regimes appear insincere. Importantly for this research, Widening Participation approaches produce certain identities and materialities. For example, Taylor (2010) asks, who is diverse and what does diverse feel like? Diversity becomes embodied and such bodies ‘stand for’ universities ‘doing diversity’. Yet, the same bodies are also seen as problematic, failing, incompetent and as sites and subjects of difference who are monitored and managed by quotas. Diversity is something that is added in

and involves change on behalf of the ‘outsider’, not the institution. “Where white middle-classness, heterosexuality and able-bodiedness are frequently left unproblematised, not the subject of diversity but simply subject to diversity” (Taylor, 2010:4).

The majority of research on HE has focused on the (re)production of inequalities, something which has and continues to play an important role in understanding the potential risks, challenges and barriers faced by ‘non-traditional’ students. Scholars adopting this approach tend to draw on social positioning and critical education theories but most overwhelmingly, on Bourdieu’s (1987) conceptual framework of habitus, field and capitals (economic, cultural, social, symbolic) (c.f. Donnelly, 2018). Research continues to reveal the fraught relationships working-class students have with education, how their habitus is characterised by low confidence, uncertainty and when faced with the unfamiliar HE field, they struggle to ‘fit’ and remain peripheral as a result (Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003; Reay et al., 2005; Reay, 2018). In many ways, this thesis supports and adds to this body of scholarship by demonstrating how respondents’ experiences and decision-making processes were both classed, gendered and thus, unequal. However, at the same time, I also challenge the ‘deficit model’ adopted by scholars which understands working-class women in regard to what they are *not* i.e. *not* traditional, *not* middle-class, *not* privileged, *not* prepared and, therefore, as always, already lacking (Smit, 2012).

Within much literature on student transitions, middle-class students are continually constructed as having straightforward, linear trajectories and working-class students are seen as troublesome/problematic. I have found the work of Davey (2012) and Finn (2015) particularly useful in complicating student experiences as both scholars avoid the ‘crude’ positioning of working-class/middle-class students as oppositional. By considering class dynamics on a spectrum rather than binary, this offers a more nuanced account of classed experiences in HE. I have also found Abrahams and Ingram (2013), Christie et al. (2005)

Holdsworth (2009) and Evans' (2010) research with working-class, 'living-at-home' students helpful in understanding how 'non-traditional' experiences/lives are constructed in relation to middle-class ideas of being a student which renders the former as inferior by comparison. This is by no means an attempt to deny existing inequalities but rather to demonstrate how alternative experiences are equally valid. This thesis adds to the literature which focuses on how to support and integrate all students, rather than on how working-class lives should change to suit the supposed immutable neoliberal institution. Findings from this study explore how students are forging potentially 'new' ways of being a student in response to the neoliberalisation of HE and work/employment. By taking this approach, I explore the complexities of student experiences and how their lives are made meaningful; while at the same time preserving students' dignity (Finn, 2015).

### Becoming a working student

Most research on students and part-time work is quantitative with the aim of uncovering large-scale trends. Studies have shown that the number of full-time students engaging in part-time employment has continued to rise in the UK and abroad (Boyce and Stone, 2015; Hall, 2010; Morrison, 2009). Following an increase of more than half a million students in part-time work from 2000 to 2010, it is estimated that the student term-time workforce now stands at more than one million<sup>9</sup> (Green et al., 2015). Importantly for this research, it is female, first-generation students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are the most likely to work part-time (Metcalf, 2003). Indeed, recent data from the Labour Force Survey highlights the gendered nature of becoming a working student. From March to May 2019 there were 47% more female students working and studying (641,000) than male students (436,000) (ONS, 2019c). The growth in student numbers, changes to fees, funding and an emphasis on the

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<sup>9</sup> Figures included school-aged and FE students and do not include students on zero-hour contracts (ZHC) or the self-employed (ONS, 2018b).



acquisition of ‘employability and skills’ while in HE, have all been key drivers in the increased labour supply of university students<sup>10</sup> (Green et al., 2015).

### *Motivations*

Research on both student sex work and mainstream work has consistently found that students are primarily financially motivated to work. This is to maintain a particular lifestyle, avoid/reduce debt or for economic necessity (Robotham, 2013; Curtis, 2007; Roberts et al., 2007a, 2007b, 2013). What is arguably missing in scholarship on students and mainstream work is a focus on the emotional – as well as practical – motivations behind why students choose to work and why they opt for certain jobs and not others. Research on student sex work on the other hand, highlights that alongside flexibility, cash-in-hand, increased autonomy, earning potential, fewer working hours, students also cited anticipated enjoyment, sexual pleasure and fun (see Roberts et al., 2013; Sagar et al., 2015a:35; Sanders and Hardy, 2015)<sup>11</sup>.

### *Working hours and schedules*

Findings suggest that students work anywhere between 12 hours (Salamonson and Andrew, 2006; Carney et al., 2005; Metcalf, 2003) to 23 hours per week (Kulm and Sheran, 2006). Scholars have argued that it is important to treat figures with caution as many students do not work a set number of hours in any given week. For example, students reported working 8-9 hours one week and 20 hours another (Robotham, 2013:436). However, findings from this thesis suggests that existing figures significantly underestimate the actual number of hours worked by some students.

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<sup>10</sup> This has also coincided with important changes in demand in the labour market including the sectoral shifts from manufacturing to services, a reduction in full-time permanent manual work, and an increase in temporary part-time opportunities which has tended to benefit those considered to be ‘flexible’ workers i.e. students and migrants (Green et al, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Since Barret’s anecdotal evidence of students engaged in prostitution in 1997, research on student sex work has been carried out in the UK (Roberts et al., 2007a, 2007b, 2013; Sanders and Hardy, 2013; Sagar et al, 2015, 2016), Australia (Lantz, 2005; Pickering et al, 2009), Canada (Sinacore et al, 2014), Germany (Betzer et al., 2015), the US (Trautner and Collett, 2010; Haeger and Deli-Amen, 2010) and has also been reported in France (Duvall Smith, 2006). Scholars across the globe have found similarities regarding student motivations and experiences.

There is an implication within the literature that students ‘choose’ when they can/cannot work. For example, Robotham (2013:439) found that students are *more* likely to work in their second and final year, whereas Darmondy and Smyth (2008) argue that students are *less* likely to work in their final year of study due increased academic pressures. Similarly, Evans et al. (2014:88) argue,

“...*some* students are clearly more susceptible to persuasion from managers asking them to work overtime than others...there is an apparent compromise being made which sacrifices the longer-term benefits of study against the more immediate financial gain offered through work. Some individuals do ignore excessive demands of their employers and project into the future, anticipating a financially rewarding full-time job” (emphasis added).

The authors warn universities that any initiatives seeking to ‘maximise outputs’ may be undermined by students ‘failing’ to fully engage in their academic studies to accommodate part-time work. Evans et al. (2014:83) state that in their study on students and part-time work, all interviewees were treated homogenously<sup>12</sup>. However, with no mention of class, this individualises structural inequalities and blames ‘some’ students for their ‘lack’ of commitment. On the contrary, findings from this thesis demonstrates how ‘choices’ or ‘priorities’ made by students were complex, fluid and constantly (re)negotiated. Despite Evan’s et al.’s (2014) assumption that all workers share the same capacity to ‘ignore excessive demands of employers’, I argue that this disregards how refusing to work does not have the same ramifications for all workers.

Although there is a growing body of literature acknowledging that individuals are no longer *just* students, the majority of studies explicitly state or implicitly imply that university is, or should be, a student’s main priority. This thesis is more aligned with Brennan and Patel (2008) and Christie et al. (2005) who instead highlight the multidimensionality of student’s

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<sup>12</sup> The authors argue that because they interviewed 30 respondents, to take into account age, gender, module options, ethnicity etc. (there is no mention of class), that this could have led to ‘spurious assumptions’ and as such, “The interviewees were therefore treated homogenously”. The authors appear to have applied a more quantitative/statistical approach to understanding their qualitative data (Evans et al., 2014).

lives and the importance of understanding students holistically. For example, Christie et al. (2005) found that ‘non-traditional’ students considered themselves to be ‘day students’ and approached university like a 9 to 5 job. Students with busy schedules established clear spatio-temporal boundaries to separate home, work and university. Similar examples of boundary maintenance were reported by Brennan and Patel (2008). Yet, given the intensification of neoliberalism within and outside of the university, combined with students’ increased time and money constraints, findings from this thesis suggest that demarcation may no longer be the most ‘efficient’ or feasible strategy.

### *The impact of working and studying*

Scholars have continued to highlight the negative impact part-time work has on students, particularly in relation to their academic performance. For example, research has found that irrespective of the university attended, part-time work had a detrimental effect on both final year marks and degree results (Humphrey, 2006; Barke et al., 2000; Lindsay and Paton-Saltzberg, 1996). Outside of the classroom, Crozier et al. (2008:175) argue that part-time work also negatively affects student experiences. In contrast to their middle-class peers who are able to prioritise ‘clubbing, socialising, going on weekend trips etc.’ and who are able to just ‘be’ students, ‘non-traditional’/working students ‘miss out’ on the fun elements of student life and feel disadvantaged as a result (c.f. Christie et al., 2005). This thesis complicates existing arguments by demonstrating how student motivations to work, job choice, working-hours and their active blurring of boundaries meant that, regardless of class position, students were able to have fun, get pissed and still get paid. Yet, doing so carried serious implications for women’s health/wellbeing.

### *Student sex work and stigma*

The key difference within literature on student sex work and mainstream work is that the former is heavily stigmatised which distinctly and negatively shapes experiences of being a working student. Indeed, Sagar et al. (2015) found that student sex workers fear stigmatisation

and that the most important, negative aspect of the work is the need to keep their job a secret. Over the past 30 years there has been an abundance of feminist, queer and critical race scholarship which has analysed whore stigma faced by sex workers (Chapkis, 2018:96; Pheterson, 1993). Although there are many different uses and conceptualisations of stigma (with scholars typically drawing on Goffman's (1963) seminal work), Bowen and Bungay's (2016) definition encapsulates the application of the concept throughout this thesis.

"Stigma [is] a socially constructed, context-specific experience of Othering that devalues one's identity, social contributions and potentiality in ways that limit how one can interact within one's world of socio-structural relationships. Stigma is a social process embedded in discourses and relations of power wherein dominant groups use it to select, impose and reinforce their ideals about the ways in which others are allowed to *be* in the world" (Bowen and Bungay, 2016:187).

Victorian reformers who sought to name, quantify and control working-class women's bodies and sexualities brought the abject figure of the 'prostitute' to life. Whore stigma is, therefore, inherently gendered, classed, racialised and associated with dirt, bad morality, contagion, danger, disorder and pathology (Skeggs, 2004:10). This historical, rigid gendered hierarchy is still applied to all sex workers to varying degrees (Benoit et al. 2015; Weitzer, 2010) and is maintained through social and cultural institutions, for example, law, the media, education, family, religion. This provides specific sites for the (re)production of harmful binaries such as Madonna/whore, good/bad girl, free/commercial normal/perverted sex (Kong, 2006:426). Sex workers become those who are not us and who in not being us, endanger what is ours. Through processes of Othering, this means that not everyone can inhabit the us/we in all contexts creating an us/them (Ahmed, 2004:1-2). Othering is not merely symbolic and to be labelled a whore has very real, fatal, consequences including hostility, violence and even death as a result of their Otherness (Kinnell, 2008).

Stigma is not static, individual or uniform but rather complex and dynamic (Hammond and Kingston, 2014). Indeed, the 'double nature' of the stigmatisation process means that individuals not only experience stigma in social interactions, they also feel stigma internally as

they process and interpret their encounters (Bowen and Bungay, 2016:187). The strategies employed by sex workers to neutralise whore stigma are well documented (Sanders, 2004, 2005, Koken, 2011; Cornish, 2006). However, there appears to be less scholarship focusing on how university students – as a unique demographic – experience and negotiate occupying both stigmatising and privileged social categories/roles.

There have been two key studies which have focused on students, stigma and erotic dance in the US. From a social psychological perspective<sup>13</sup>, Haeger and Deli-Amen (2010) found that all students experienced cognitive dissonance as a result of stigma and negative stereotyping. Yet, their pre-deterministic approach renders their findings questionable. For example, by asking students *how* their work *has* affected their morals and values, such loaded and presumptuous questions could generate responses which provides ‘evidence’ of cognitive dissonance. Furthermore, regardless of the responses they received the authors argue,

“...even if women working in the sex industry did not feel it was degrading or in a contradiction with their morals, they could still experience cognitive dissonance from the threat of being stereotyped by others” (Haeger and Deli-Amen (2010:4-5).

Alternatively, taking a symbolic interactionist approach, Traunter and Collett (2010) identified three key stigma management strategies employed by students. Firstly, by drawing on their positive, alternative identity as students, this helped women to neutralise the negative effects of stigma. Secondly, by disidentifying with the stereotypical stripper lifestyle (involving alcohol and drug-taking) and from dancers who considered stripping to be long-term, students were able to distance themselves from the ‘dirt’ associated with their job. Finally, by assuming that stripping was only a short-term ‘student job’, this sense of transience and paying their way through college helped women to maintain a positive sense of self. The findings share

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<sup>13</sup> An example provided by the authors of cognitive dissonance is someone who believes that smoking causes lung cancer and views themselves as a healthy person yet continues to smoke. Since their behaviour and beliefs are contradictory to each other, dissonance is produced. Dissonance is said to be inherently psychologically uncomfortable causing the person in question pressure to reduce it (Haeger and Deli-Amen, 2010:4).

similarities to my previous research outlined in Chapter One (see Simpson and Smith, forthcoming) while also highlighting gaps which this thesis has addressed i.e. what happens after university for student sex workers?

Referring back to a point made earlier in this chapter regarding the problematic notion of an ‘ideal’ student, I am aware of the dangers of proposing/reproducing an ‘ideal’ or ‘respectable’ stripper. While I am interested in women’s experiences on a micro and meso level, I do not propose individual coping strategies as the ‘solution’ to whore stigma. Instead, I seek to focus on waitresses, who in many ways ‘fit’ Pheterson’s (1990:21) description of the patriarchally defined ‘good girl’ and as legitimately functioning ‘to model subservience’,<sup>14</sup> and compare this role to the ‘bad girl’ stripper. In doing so, I hope to subvert deeply entrenched and harmful binaries, processes of Othering and whore stigma by placing gender, class and racial inequalities at the centre of the project (Chapkis, 2018).

### Poles apart? The labour involved in stripping and waitressing

Debates on the sex industry have remained heated and polarised. On the one hand, radical neo-abolitionist feminists argue that all forms of sex work are inherently exploitative and a form of patriarchal VAW (Coy et al., 2019; Bindel, 2017; Jeffreys, 2009; Barry, 1995). At the other end of the spectrum, scholars and activists have argued that sex work is potentially empowering and that if legal systems were changed, sex work would be a job like any other (Chapkis, 1997; Jenness, 1998). Given that both ‘camps’ are reductive and ignore the multidimensionality of human experience, I would like to focus on the scholarship seeking a ‘reconciliation’ (Chancer, 1998) between the two extremes, moving beyond the binaries and towards scholarship producing more nuanced debate (see Hardy, 2013; Sanders et al., 2018; Pilcher, 2017; O’Connell Davidson, 2014).

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<sup>14</sup> Existing research has found that waitressing is often conflated with servitude (Paules, 1991).

In the 1970s, Carol Leigh coined the term sex work to shift the debate away from morality and towards labour. However, framing sex work as work is more than semantics. How sex work is defined (i.e. as work or violence/exploitation) shapes the relationship sex workers have to the state and determines whether or not they have rights or access to benefits and protections (Berg, 2014:698). As sex work involves the exchange of labour for some form of capital or financial gain, Hardy (2013:44) argues that sex work *is* a form of work. Yet, whether or not sex work is a job like any other remains contested. Indeed, Brents and Sanders (2010:58) claim that despite attempts to become an integrated part of the NTE, sex businesses have always relied on a profited from their transgressive nature to lure clients. Thus, to maintain profitability, sex businesses must also remain that little bit deviant and different from all other leisure pursuits.

Based on existing literature, there are striking differences between the sex industry and mainstream work. Most notably, sex workers are legally and discursively Othered which results in hostility, violence and murder (Sanders et al., 2018). However, it could be argued that violence/stigma are consequences of Othering rather than inherent to sex work per se. What could be seen to mark sex work as inherently ‘different’ then is the nature of the work. A common (mis)conception of sex work is that it involves the sale of the body and thus, the self in a very real and unique way (c.f. Pateman, 1988). This reduces women to mere docile bodies/orifices and strips individuals of selfhood and agency. In opposition to this view, it is argued that sex workers are selling a form of labour which is detachable from the self and therefore a commodity to be sold. Yet, as the body is central to *all* work, Hardy (2013:4647) argues that it is a liberalist myth that workers can detach themselves from their labour like they can from their property. Most people – rather than sex workers specifically - have to submit their will to their employer to some extent in order to survive due to dull economic compulsion. To work requires a mental and physical bodily capacity and in the case of sex work, it is argued

that *sexual labour* is sold during this exchange (involving further labour processes which will be discussed in the following section i.e. aesthetic, emotional and affective labour).

Most discussions on the sexual labour involved in sex work tend to be based on prostitution which ignores the diverse nature of the sex industry. Any essentialist claims about the intrinsic nature of the work or a unified sex work(er) experience, whether oppressive or liberating, clashes with the reality of *variation* in sex work (Weitzer, 2010:3). For example, while many forms of body work require workers to touch customers/clients (see Wolkowitz et al., 2013), it is argued that sex work involves two bodies touching each other and it is the touch *back* from the client/customer which renders sex work *different* (Hardy, 2013:4849). However, there are clear regulations which prevent dancers and customers from touching. While research suggests that customers and workers break/circumvent no touching rules (Colosi, 2012:89-90), in theory, touching/touch back is not an intrinsic part of stripping. Furthermore, dual direction touch is not part of other forms of sex work such as, peep shows, webcamming and some forms of pornography.

There is now an established literature which acknowledges that ‘legitimate’ work has become routinely sexualised and involves sexualised labour. For example, Adkins’ (1995) seminal study on different forms of gendered work in the leisure industries, highlights how female employees are expected to flatter, flirt and provide hetero-sexualised feminine attention to male customers as part of their job (c.f. Hancock and Tyler, 2007; Tyler and Abbott, 1998). In response to such claims, scholars have argued that the sexualised labour in service sector roles still differs from sex work which is ‘inherently sexual’ whereas the former simply becomes ‘imbued with sexuality’ (Warhurst and Nixon, 2009:386). Yet, Pilcher’s (2017) study with male and female strippers demonstrates how there is nothing *inherently* sexual about erotic dance performances. On the contrary, specific acts also *become* sexualised (or not) by the way they are read by customers and through the meanings attached to such acts by dancers. What



becomes understood as sex work or sexualised labour is socially constructed, ever-changing and is usually not based on how workers actually understand their labour (Berg, 2014:697).

Given the range of jobs in contemporary society which involve displaying the body and emotions (see Mears, 2014), Brents and Hausbeck (2007:425) argue that it is no longer useful to think of stripping (or sex work) as the generalised Other to mainstream work. Assumptions about the distinctiveness of sex work are, however, rarely based on direct comparisons between sex work and other types of service work. Similar to this thesis, the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP) (2019) carried out interviews with 16 women (two sex workers and 14 ‘mainstream’ workers<sup>15</sup>) to challenge the idea that sex work is inherently exploitative and unique. Findings revealed that ‘women’s work’ outside of the sex industry involved low-pay, zero-hour contracts (ZHC), poor working conditions and sometimes violence at work. Overall, the ECP (2019) argue that with few alternatives to the sex industry for many women, sex work is often a better option than most low-paid/low-skilled jobs in regard to pay and flexibility. Furthermore, without addressing issues of poverty and austerity which disproportionately affect women, it is dangerous and irresponsible of the state to advocate for further criminalisation and thus, the increased marginalisation of sex workers.

In an attempt to destigmatise sex work and build respect for workers, activists have argued that sex work is socially valuable in meeting human needs (for example, sex workers working as sex surrogates for disabled clients), or as a form of art/self-expression. However, O’Connell Davidson (2002:93) argues that “...a person’s human, civil and labour rights, and their rights to respect and social value as a human being [should] not [be] contingent on whether or not they perform labour that is socially valued”. Indeed, while fighting for the recognition of sex work as a form of labour helps to address issues such as working conditions, Weeks

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<sup>15</sup> This included two women working in prostitution and 14 women working in jobs typically carried out by women i.e. waitress, bartender, teacher, retail worker, personal assistant, nurse, midwife, cleaner, care/support workers or hairdresser (ECP, 2019).

(2011:13) contends that this ‘legitimizing’ discourse of work does not challenge the nature of *all* work under capitalism. Framing sex work as ‘work like any other’ implies that work itself is unproblematic and leaves the exploitation and coercion within waged work unquestioned. It is important to argue for dignity, respect and the value of sex work as equal to other forms of work, while at the same time challenging the institution of paid labour itself. Hardy (2013:556) calls for a more radical sex work politics and for the acknowledgement that universal protection *from the market* is more pertinent than the valorisation of sex work as a commodity in the mainstream labour markets. By carrying out a comparative analysis of stripping and waitressing, this thesis adds to such debates and argues against sex work exceptionalism. In Chapter Five, I unpack aspects of both jobs which are universal under capitalism and specific to gendered work, as well as discussing what elements could be considered ‘unique’ to stripping/sex work and why.

There is an abundance of scholarship which demonstrates how the bodies and identities of waitresses and strippers are not incidental and that the labour performed in both jobs is far from neutral. Employee looks, emotions and behaviour, play an integral role in service sector work adding value and profit for *employers* but often remain unpaid (see Cohen, 2019 for overview of labour types). Research has shown how women in both waitressing and stripping perform a complex mix of emotional, aesthetic, interactive and affective labour within particular sets of gendered and hetero-sexualised power relationships (Pilcher, 2017; Dowling, 2012; Coffey et al., 2018; Pasko, 2002). As the multiple types of labour carried out by waitresses and strippers are a key concern of this thesis, I will return to discuss this area of scholarship in more detail in Chapter Five.

The socio-cultural and political context of stripping and hospitality in the UK

Beyond individualised and financial motivations, there are a number of broader socio-economic and cultural shifts which have taken place over the last 30 years, coinciding with

more tolerant attitudes towards sex, sexuality and gender, which are linked to the reasons why students are engaging in stripping *and* waitressing (Sanders and Hardy, 2015). Without rehashing the ‘sexualisation of culture’ debates which are divisive and can be found elsewhere (Gill, 2012; Evans et al., 2010; McRobbie, 2004), scholars are in agreement that the sexually explicit has become a normalised part of everyday life in the west. Attwood (2009:2) complicates and unpacks the term ‘sexualisation’ to include,

“...a contemporary preoccupation with sexual values, practices, identities, a public shift to more permissive sexual attitudes, the proliferation of sexual texts, new forms of sexual experience, the apparent breakdown of rules, categories and regulations designed to keep the obscene at bay, the fondness of scandals, controversies and panics around sex”.

The literature shows how the sexualisation of culture is a neoliberal, capitalist phenomenon tied to consumerism, celebrities<sup>16</sup>, and individualism/individual ‘choice’ (Gill and Orgad, 2018:1316). Such shifts affect students as sexual labour has become more acceptable not only as leisure, but also as work (Sanders and Hardy, 2015). Indeed, it is now the norm rather than the exception that young women ‘prosume’ sex (both producing and consuming) through fashion, leisure<sup>17</sup> and social media. For example, young women commonly post sexually explicit content online and ‘ordinary’ users are able to monetise their aesthetic/sexualised labour due to the rise and prominence of online influencers and micro-celebrities (Drenten et al., 2019:1; Khamis et al., 2016). Furthermore, the use of dating and hook-up applications has also encouraged more permissive attitudes toward sex/sexuality and has queered the binary between non/commercial sex, particularly when paying for membership/additional features to enhance the likelihood of finding love/sex/intimacy (Tyler, 2015).

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<sup>16</sup> One celebrity example who encapsulates this shift is American rapper, Cardi B who “...has gone from stripper to Grammy-star” (BBC, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Heavily cited examples include British retail chain Ann Summers which sells sex toys and porn targeting young women (Phipps, 2014:79), trends such as ‘pole fitness’ (Holland, 2010) and ‘stripper-chic’ fashion i.e. Perspex heels.

Alongside such shifts, sex businesses and strip clubs in particular also became a (somewhat) normalised part of the NTE in the UK. As the purpose of the city moved from manufacturing to services, during the 1990s Britain witnessed a boom in the creation of 24-hour leisure cities and in the number of bars, nightclubs, pubs and restaurants. Strip club owners were able to exploit regulatory changes and neoliberal policies which encouraged free-market economics and entrepreneurship (Brents and Sanders, 2010:46). To appeal to a wealthier, middle-class clientele, strip club owners moved away from the working-class pub image to a more Americanised system in an attempt to disassociate with 'seedy backstreet strip joints' and by branding themselves as 'gentlemen's clubs' (Sanders and Hardy, 2015:760). By mimicking the style of mainstream businesses and through upscaling, strip clubs adopted a more 'luxurious' image (Brents and Sanders, 2010:43) which also attracted 'new faces' to stripping, in the form of middle-class women and students (Bernstein, 2007)<sup>18</sup>. Importantly, such changes were reflective of the NTE more generally, as mainstream alcohol-based venues were also redesigned to compete with the emerging rave culture in the late 1980s which 'lured' young people away from traditional pubs (Haydock, 2016:1059).

During the early to mid-2000s, there was a rise in (classed) conflicts and 'revanchist' campaigns over the 'colonisation' of urban space by unruly, vulgar bodies who did not 'fit' with gentrification plans (Hubbard, 2008:324). Students and strippers (who are not mutually exclusive) lie at the heart of two, ongoing campaigns. As the NTE is heavily occupied by student populations and has become a key part of student-life in the UK, students have been targeted and blamed for the anti-social, binge-drinking 'mono-culture' which has (ostensibly) developed and for the 'demise' of middle-class spaces (Diaz-Fernandez and Evans, 2019:2; Hubbard, 2013:266; Beech, 2018). Studentification campaigns have had varying levels of 'success' with some universities taking a paternalistic stance and punishing students for

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<sup>18</sup> The increase of students as a source of labour supply for strip clubs has made it more difficult for other women to obtain work and to maintain bodily boundaries with customers (Wolkowitz, 2006:142).

‘antisocial’ behaviour through fines and other disciplinary action such as compulsory awareness courses and community cohesion initiatives (Smith, 2008a). While governments have continued to publicly condemn ‘binge’ drinking, paradoxically, alcohol regulation has also become increasingly relaxed over the years as the onus is shifted to individual drinkers (Haydock, 2016:1057). Given the economic value of alcohol to the economy, there has been a reluctance to regulate the NTE as the UK's fifth biggest industry which generates approximately £66 billion per annum and accounts for 8% of employment (Night Time Industries Association, 2019).

On the other hand, feminist campaigns against the ‘growing tide’ of strip clubs led to clauses being added to Section 27 of the *Policing and Crime Act 2009* and strip clubs becoming regulated under criminal law. Although strip clubs have always been subject to increased surveillance, scrutiny and special conditions, prior to 2009, stripping venues were regulated under the Licensing Act 2003 and were considered a (sexy) part of the leisure industry in a similar way to restaurants (Colosi, 2013:244). Local authorities in England and Wales must now consider licensing strip clubs as ‘sexual entertainment venues’ (SEV) or ‘sex establishments’ (SE)<sup>19</sup> and can cap the number of SEVs to limit the number of clubs in the local area. If councils decide that the appropriate number is zero (known as nil policy), no SEV licences are granted (Colosi, 2013:249)<sup>20</sup>.

Sanders and Hardy (2014) argue that most dancers welcome regulation as a means of improving their working conditions and putting an end to managerial exploitation in the form of high, arbitrary fines, house fees and other punitive measures. However, the key problem when introducing this new legislation was that workers voices were silenced and the concerns

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<sup>19</sup> Changes were not compulsory, however the vast majority of local authorities have adopted the provisions with 89% doing so by November 2011 (Hubbard and Lister, 2015:146).

<sup>20</sup> In April 2019, similar legislation was introduced in Scotland and public consultations have been launched in Glasgow and Edinburgh this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven when discussing the future of stripping.

and impact of strip clubs on women outside of the industry (as the ‘moral majority’) were prioritised instead. The authors argue that as the legislation was based on a moral agenda to ‘end demand’ - which reflects an overly simplistic gender politics and ignores differences between women - this has proven to be something of an ‘empty shell’ for improving dancers’ labour conditions. The data discussed in Chapter Five presents a more recent snapshot of the current state of the stripping industry in England almost 10 years on from the introduction of SEV licences. Indeed, there has been a steady decline in the number of licences issued from 386 in 2013 to 256 in 2018. The local authority of Westminster (which includes Soho, an area infamously tied to the sex industry) has seen the biggest fall in active licences from 31 in 2013 to four at the beginning of 2018 (Rhodes, 2018).

There are ongoing campaigns seeking to ban the stripping industry which is equated with the sexual exploitation of women. However, it appears that the main concern is tackling ‘sex’ rather than sexism or reducing harm against women. For example, *Not Buying It!* claimed to have footage of women breaking the no touching rule with customers, engaging in oral sex and ‘touching themselves sexually’. The pressure group argue that the recordings provide ‘evidence’ of the extreme harm and abuse taking place in strip clubs. However, the frequent reference to ‘prostitution’, ‘blow/hand-jobs’ and young women, ‘straddling [men] and grinding on [their] crotch’ (Not Buying It, 2019) is indicative of a personal/moral repugnance at the ‘ickiness’ of specific acts which lies behind many objections to sex work (Wolkowitz, 2006:11). Problematically, calls to ‘rid’ the streets of strip clubs generate what Lowman (2000) refers to as a ‘discourse of disposability’ whereby sex workers are considered to be a form of pollution/waste. This has the effect of legitimising hatred, violence and hostility towards women which is then deemed justifiable due to the ‘nuisance’ caused by sex work(ers) in neighbourhoods (Kinnell, 2008). Sanders and Campbell (2007) argue that when hostile attitudes are supported by governments and policy approaches, ideas of sex work as wrong or

shameful are reinforced and sex workers become targets because of their moral, social and political marginalisation.

Neo-abolitionist struggles to ‘end demand’<sup>21</sup> fail to address the wider social and economic inequalities which have led to an increase in the supply of dancers. For example, the rise of tuition fees and a reduction in government support is likely to have impacted the number of student strippers. More broadly, cuts and austerity, increased benefit sanctions, the introduction of universal credit, public sector wage stagnation, the rise of precarious work and a lack of alternative employment opportunities all disproportionately affect women and play a central role in why women continue to engage in sex work (Hardy, 2019; Phipps, 2017b).

Indeed, the work of Sanders and Hardy (2014) demonstrates how it is not necessarily ‘customer demand’ which keeps clubs open but rather, the supply of dancers. The micro-economics of clubs and methods of extracting surplus value from dancers through high house fees, fines and commission (typically 30%), has allowed the stripping industry to remain relatively ‘buoyant’, despite declines in corporate and customer spending (c.f. Cruz et al, 2017:9). As (falsely) self-employed/independent contractors, dancers pay to work and are not paid a base wage. Given that women start work in a deficit, (unsurprisingly) 70% of Sanders and Hardy’s (2014:72) sample reported *losing* money by going to work or leaving work in debt to the club. To extract money from dancers, clubs ensure that a high number of women work at one time which increases competition among women. This neoliberal business strategy adopted by managers/owners has shifted the risk and the cost of keeping clubs open on to workers. By comparatively analysing stripping and waitressing, in Chapter Five, I extend the argument made by Sanders and Hardy (2014) which challenges the simplistic call to ban strip clubs given that,

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<sup>21</sup> Recent calls to ‘end demand’ are indicative of the renewed strength of neoliberal-conservatism in the west and the increased social control over women’s sexuality. Other examples include a backlash against reproductive rights and the rise of extremist right-wing parties that cater to traditional gender ideologies and racial inequalities (Vanwesenbeeck, 2017).

“...closing strip clubs has the effect of kicking away the ladder for dancers who are using stripping as one of a few ways to pay for their education... or condemning women to work in the low-paid service jobs in which sexual harassment is widely noted by customers, managers and co-workers alike. In rendering strip clubs uniquely sexist sites of harassment and sexism, such an approach obscures the common sexism and harassment faced by women across the labour market and its pervasive prevalence in the service sector in which female workers are routinely sexualised” (Sanders and Hardy, 2014:170).

### *#MeToo and the universality of sexual harassment and sexism*

Existing research has shown the high prevalence of sexual harassment (SH), groping, inappropriate or unwanted sexual attention (predominately) by men against women in hospitality and stripping (Mellgren et al., 2017; Nicholls, 2017; Barton, 2017). Women in both industries are expected to ‘pander’ to male customers, and sometimes to accept harassment to avoid negatively impacting the service provided (Adkins, 1995; Wolkowitz, 2006). Research suggests that SH is normalised and dismissed as something that ‘just happens’ in service work (EHRC, 2018). However, SH and assault are not limited to particular workplaces as demonstrated by the global #MeToo movement in 2017. Furthermore, research continues to show how SH is not only an issue at work but is pervasive on the street, public transport, university campuses and in the NTE (Bates, 2014; Phipps, 2017a; Vera-Gray, 2016; Gekoski et al., 2015). #MeToo is not the first or only campaign against SH. Starting in 2011, the transnational SlutWalk movement has continued to fight for an end to rape culture, victim blaming and slut shaming. Although the public image of the #MeToo movement focused primarily on highly paid (white) actresses/entertainers and women in the media, paying less attention to the mass of women who are less privileged and arguably more vulnerable, #MeToo has raised awareness, re-generated debate and created some form of action. Importantly, Gill and Orgad (2018) argue that the movement represents a shift away from highly individualised discussions and moral panics around ‘sexualisation’ to a more politicised understanding of power relations.



Research carried out by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (2018:2) found that “...no workplace is immune to sexual harassment and a lack of reported cases does not necessarily mean they have not occurred.” The study revealed a number of key findings which are relevant to this thesis. Firstly, almost all cases of SH were against women by male colleagues or customers/clients/service users. Secondly, there was a reluctance to report SH due to fear of: losing already precarious jobs, further victimisation, reports not being taken seriously and a lack of appropriate reporting procedures. Moreover, when SH reports were made, no action was taken in half of the cases, complaints were minimised, women were blamed, silenced or cases were dismissed as a ‘men having a laugh’ or ‘boys being boys’. Overall, the report found that ‘laddish’ workplace cultures normalise SH and that when women do report harassment, they are viewed negatively or even ostracised.

Despite representations of men who frequent strip clubs or pay for sexual services as being violent, deviant or even pathological (Jeffreys, 2008; Farley et al., 2017), the #MeToo movement and subsequent convictions of *some* powerful men (see Carlsen et al. 2018) exposed how SH is not committed by particular ‘types’ of men. While it is usually black and working-class masculinities which are pathologized (Sanders and Hardy, 2014:171), recent scrutiny has turned to elitist/middle-class laddism particularly on university campuses and in the NTE (NUS, 2013:28). Expressions of elitist, sexist and homophobic masculinity are far from ‘new’ and instead reflect the centuries-old all-male *Bullingdon Club*<sup>22</sup> commonly associated with copious amounts of alcohol, violence and vandalism of restaurants/bars/pubs and numerous accounts of sexual assault by male members (Proudman, 2015). Similarly, in 2018, the Presidents Club Charitable Trust ‘scandal’ exposed more ‘high-profile’ men and the SH of female waiting staff. Two Financial Times reporters worked undercover as hostesses and stated

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<sup>22</sup> High-profile former members (worryingly) include former prime minister David Cameron and current prime minister Boris Johnson.

that they were repeatedly groped, propositioned for sex and that one attendee exposed his genitals to her. Agency workers were told to wear ‘black, sexy shoes and underwear’ and hired on the basis that they were ‘tall, thin and pretty’ (Marriage, 2018).

Ram’s (2018) review of literature on hospitality, tourism and organisational behaviour, highlights the long history of research focusing on ‘diagnosing and solving the problem’ of SH. Scholars have proposed (highly problematic) ‘immediate and easy’ solutions to prevent SH by customers including, changing women’s uniforms from sexualised dresses/skirts to shirts and trousers, allowing female staff to work in pairs and hanging posters in spaces used by customers prohibiting or warning against SH. Other ‘solutions’ include training female employees in problem-solving and listening skills to help staff learn the difference between what is considered ‘friendly’ and ‘seductive’ behaviour towards customers (Karatepe, 2011). However, by drawing on empirical data, this thesis demonstrates how the problem of SH and therefore the solution, does not lie with women.

In response to the #MeToo campaign and subsequent reports of SH, on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2019, the UK government led a public consultation (ending 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2019) to determine how to prevent SH in the workplace. At the time of writing, SH was included within the Equality Act 2010<sup>23</sup> which prohibits employers from harassing their employees<sup>24</sup> and holds employers legally accountable for harassment carried out by their employees at work; unless employers had taken ‘all reasonable steps’ to prevent it from happening (Legislation.gov.uk, 2010). However, the law is less clear when it comes to the SH of employees by customers. The government state that employers have a responsibility to protect their staff, particularly where they know or ought to have known that their staff may be at risk, but that the current legal

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<sup>23</sup> Within Section 26 of the Equality Act, SH includes unwanted conduct of a sexual nature (this includes unwanted conduct based on or related specifically to age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion/belief, sex, sexual orientation) that has the purpose or effect of violating the victim’s dignity, creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment (Legislation.gov.uk, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> While erotic dancers are self-employed contractors rather than employees, dancers are entitled to protection as employees under anti-discrimination provisions within the Equality Act 2010 (Cruz, 2013:467).

landscape needs to be simplified. Despite the acknowledgement that SH is systemic, and while the consultation and recommendations appear to signal a step in the right direction, the government are already reluctant to responsibilise businesses/employers. Indeed, the government have stated that they require ‘compelling evidence’ that any changes would be ‘effective’ before they are willing to take such a significant step (Government Equalities Office, 2019:10). This suggests that ‘changes’ to tackle SH should remain undistruptive and thus, “...capitalism, neoliberalism and patriarchy friendly” (Gill, 2017:618). For example, by providing SH training, introducing policies or codes of conduct. However, as I discuss in Chapter Seven, while the aforementioned changes within workplaces are necessary, they do not go far enough.

### Becoming a graduate: Graduate transitions from university to the labour market

What happens after university for graduates has become an increasingly hot topic in education and government discourse. Graduates are now seen as key players in maintaining the country’s competitive edge in the global market/knowledge economy (Tholen et al., 2016:1). Furthermore, because governments, students and families have made greater economic investments in HE, through up-front loans which are repaid from post-graduate earnings, employment outcomes have become even more important (Holmes, 2013:539). In 2017, the government introduced the ‘Teaching Excellence and Student Outcome Framework’ (TEF)<sup>25</sup> to encourage competition among institutions and to justify high tuition fees by holding universities (to some extent) accountable for providing students with ‘value for money’. Universities compete and are now rated either gold, silver or bronze based on the assessment of a selection of metrics. This includes the destination of their graduates - whether they are employed and if they are employed in graduate/high-skilled jobs – six months after their

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<sup>25</sup> The TEF applies primarily to English, public funded universities.

studies<sup>26</sup>. The Department for Education (2016b) claim that TEF allows students to make better choices about where to study, which means that graduate destinations now have reputational and financial implications for institutions. Providers with TEF ratings are able to charge up to £9,250 per year for full-time courses, whereas those without can charge a maximum of £9,000.

It is clear within the literature that the transition from HE into employment - and ‘graduate-level’ employment more specifically - is not straightforward for many individuals. Even prior to the relatively recent global economic downturn, large numbers of graduates experienced difficulty in gaining ‘suitable’ employment (Holmes, 2015:221). Holmes (2013) identified three main approaches - *possessive*, *positioning* and *processual* - to understanding graduate ‘outcomes’ within existing literature. The first and most dominant approach within political and educational discourse is based on the meritocratic assumption that each graduate’s success/failure in the labour market is the result of whether or not they have acquired the ‘correct’ skills and attributes while at university. However, this possessive approach implies the graduate labour market is a level playing field and that individuals have equal access to the same high-paid ‘desirable’ jobs which ignores geographical differences, demand-side factors, the buoyancy of the market and most importantly, structural inequalities (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006:308-9; Crisp and Powell, 2017).

The ‘social positioning’ approach on the other hand looks at who ends up where and why, with a focus on class, gender, race and ethnicity. Scholars have produced valuable research which demonstrates that far from equalising access to the labour market or enhancing social mobility, education largely (re)produces social (dis)advantage and stratification. The

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<sup>26</sup> This metric was based on the HESA ‘Destination of Leavers from Higher Education’ survey (DLHE) which has been delivered since 1994/5. However, HESA acknowledged that this while the survey provided a picture of what graduates go on to do after university and how this has changed over time, given that it was only six months after graduation, this showed only a narrow picture. Between July 2015 and June 2017, HESA conducted a major review of the survey which since changed to the Graduate Outcome (GO) survey. The new survey will collect data from all graduates who completed a HE course in the UK after August 2017. Importantly, the survey is now delivered 15 rather than six months after university and the results of the first GO survey will be published in 2020 (HESA, 2019b).

most extensive, longitudinal UK studies on graduate transitions into the labour market include the 'Futuretrack' project (Purcell et al., 2012) and 'Paired Peers' (Bradley et al., 2017). Despite being published five years apart, findings remain starkly similar highlighting how gender and class continue to shape trajectories after university, and how structural inequalities are both deeply rooted and resistant to change.

Predictably, both studies found that female graduates are paid less, that certain 'top professions' (most notably law) remain male dominated and that male graduates progressed quicker in their careers than women. Middle-class graduates were more likely to secure employment in their chosen professions than their working-class counterparts due to a 'cumulative pattern of advantage' (Purcell, 2012:192). For example, middle-class students are more likely to go to prestigious universities, to study subjects leading to better paid jobs, have less, if any, personal debt and are able to build their CV while studying by taking part in extra-curricular activities valued by employers. Upon graduation, middle-class graduates are usually based/could afford to live in London which provided more opportunities for employment and they are able to rely on the 'Bank of Mum and Dad'. This financial support then allows individuals to resist exploitative employment, to take more risks and to avoid 'settling' for a particular job due to economic necessity (Bradley et al., 2017:14).

While Bradley et al. (2017:19) found that working-class graduates were able to achieve professional jobs in areas such as engineering, teaching and finance, especially with Russell Group university degrees, Freidman and Laurison's (2019:21-22) research suggests that obtaining graduate employment is not the end of the story. Even when working-class students attend Oxbridge, the authors found that this does not remove class (dis)advantage in the labour market. While the 'cumulative pattern of advantage' outlined above highlights more 'obvious' steps to privilege, Freidman and Laurison's (2019) study sheds light on the hidden and insidious mechanisms which continue to 'propel' some people forward while holding others behind. For

example, the authors refer to the ‘glass slipper’ to describe the middle-class luxury of fitting in within certain workplaces, and to ‘polish’ in regard to dress, accent and tastes. Findings suggest that hiring and career progression were rarely based on expertise required for most jobs and were instead based on homophily and the ‘invisible hand (up)’ i.e. networks. Overall, Friedman and Laurison (2019) argue that similar to the infamous gendered glass ceiling, working-class people face an invisible ‘class ceiling’ which prevents them from achieving the same rewards as their middle-class counterparts. Indeed, the financial gap remained even when accounting for a person’s educational credentials, hours worked and their level of training and experience.

The social positioning (deficit) approach – which is the most prominent within academic scholarship - highlights how people’s class origins and their ‘destinations’ remain doggedly persistent in contemporary Britain. Friedman and Laurison (2019) refer to class as ‘deeply sticky’ with resources (or lack thereof) from one’s class shaping the life course well beyond finding a job/career. Class is described as having a ‘lingering’ effect given that intergenerational class inequality is continually reproduced.

“...class origin shapes who you are in ways that a simple change in circumstances – having more money, a university education or a better job than your parents – will not necessarily erase” (Friedman and Laurison, 2019:17).

There is a taken-for-granted assumption that individuals will or should want to rid themselves of their (working)class but that they struggle to do so, or never truly can and that this results in further disadvantage. Based on the literature outlined above, working-class lives are presented as hopeless, bleak and lacking in everything that is perceived to have value. Even when individuals obtain different forms of capital or credentials, they are *still* lacking by virtue of being working-class. The inscription and naturalisation of working-class lives and experiences as deficient is well documented (Tyler, 2013; Loveday, 2016; Plummer, 2000; Walkerdine, 1997). While there is no virtue in poverty or in experiencing cultural violence, narratives of ‘lack’ rob working-class people of any moral value (Lawler, 2005:434). Problematising the

normalcy of middle-class and neoliberal ideals is not an attempt to romanticise working-classness but to challenge the assumption that being or becoming the ideal middle-class or neoliberal self-of-value is always desirable or the only way to be in the world.

“Just as challenges have been mounted to the silent normalisation of such privileged positions as whiteness, heterosexuality and masculinity, it is important to challenge and to go on challenging the assumption that middle-class dispositions, tastes and bodies are, by definition, the ‘right’ ones” (Lawler, 2005:443).

Importantly, neoliberal policies and austerity measures - which have produced relentless conditions of precarity and competition - affect society as a whole, not just the working-classes. Yet, the hidden and more obvious injuries of neoliberalism are not experienced equally by all in society which is why class remains important. Scholars have argued that as neoliberalism becomes an ethic in itself (Harvey, 2005), individuals have a moral duty to strategically become ‘the proper subject of value’ through, for example, risk-taking, entrepreneurialism and the self-accrual of credentials (Gill, 2014; Wacquant, 2002). Those who fail to accumulate ‘value’ are constructed as a drain on resources which is why the normative middle-class self is the neoliberal ideal subject par excellence (Tyler, 2015). This ideal subject of value is then mobilised as a class project, acting as a form of governmentality disguised under the veil rhetoric of individualism, choice, freedom and social mobility.

There was a notable shift away from scholarship on class in the 1990s and a turn to theories of individualism (most notably Giddens, 1991). Since returning to class analysis, scholars have readdressed the question, ‘*what is class?*’ However, Tyler (2015) argues that this is the wrong question and instead asks, ‘*what is the problem that class describes?*’ The answer being, inequality. Emancipation projects are complex and contested within the literature. For example, Frazer (1997) argues that working-class people require both redistribution of resources to tackle economic/material inequalities as well as recognition to redress cultural injustice and symbolic violence. Yet, to achieve both would require the denial and acceptance of exceptionality which can be problematic and essentialist. Similar to arguments made above

regarding an ‘ideal’ stripper, claiming a ‘good’ working class identity runs the risk of further pathologizing representations of underclass chavs and an (un)deserving poor. On the other hand, Tyler (2015:507) contends that if we understand class as the struggle *against* classification, there is no need to differentiate between recognition-redistribution. Thus, the most effective forms of class analysis are not concerned with the measuring of people/groups to ‘fit’ class categories (or not), but rather, analysis which seeks to expose and critique the consequences of classificatory systems and the forms of value, judgement and norms they establish in society.

Skeggs’ (1997) seminal ethnography with working-class women demonstrates this point clearly as women in the study dis-identified with their working-class status and attempted to claim respectability, not to be seen as middle-class, but to defend themselves from the middle-class judgmental gaze which had misrecognised them as pathological. This thesis extends such arguments by highlighting the tensions and contradictions women experienced as they negotiated their moral duty to become neoliberal subjects, while at the same time being positioned as improper and lacking. Indeed, drawing on the work of Skeggs (2011), Chapter Six complicates and challenges the binary thought running through dominant circuits of value providing examples of how different values can and do co-exist.

Existing literature on graduate transitions tends to focus on social mobility, underemployment, over-education and whether or not the labour market can absorb the growing number of graduates (see Tholen et al., 2016). However, scholars adopting the final ‘processual approach’ to this area of study have instead sought to connect micro-level experience with structural factors highlighting how graduate transitions and emerging identities are dynamic, ambivalent and creative, as well as socially patterned (Holmes, 2013). For example, Finn (2015) explored how opportunities and constraints are understood and experienced by addressing matters which go beyond ‘objective’ measures/outcomes after



university. This included a focus on mental health, bereavement, faith and sexuality. In doing so, she found that issues such as ‘underemployment’ are not always involuntary or considered to be troubling for many working-class female graduates. Indeed, what is considered to be a ‘good job’ remains subjective and does not always align with dominant understandings i.e. elite, high-paid, high-powered jobs. Similarly, this thesis extends the scope of current graduate transitions scholarship further by discussing additional, often overlooked factors such as sexual harassment/assault, domestic violence, pregnancy/parenthood and caring roles. Given that trajectories are considerably diverse, it is important to understand how the period after university is negotiated by graduates. For example, how aspirations and ‘social mobility’ are lived out in everyday life, how decisions are made meaningful and how success or failure is measured and understood by graduates themselves.

### Transitions out of the sex industry

Ham and Gilmore (2017:749) observe that while there is a growing body of literature on women’s employment transitions in a range of occupational sectors (see Jenkins, 2006; Gash, 2008; Maher, 2013), the strong political emphasis on getting individuals *out* of sex work makes this form of labour particularly unusual in the career transitions field. Career transition programmes tend to focus on assisting entry *into* a new occupation or full-time work rather than exiting or leaving a specific industry. Unlike most jobs, sex work is considered to be a deviant *identity* rather than employment. This is based on the radical feminist link between body-sexuality-self which means that sex workers are seen to sell themselves and their bodies (as objects) in a very real way (Hardy, 2013:45).

Academic and political focus on ‘exiting’ sex work has been geared towards the more visible street-based sex worker. Research suggests that individuals struggle to leave this form of sex work due to homelessness, alcohol or drug dependency, third party coercion/exploitation/abuse, lack of employment alternatives, stigma, limited education,

dependents to support, poverty and having a criminal record (see Hickie, 2017). Leaving the sex industry is therefore commonly conceived as an ‘escape’ from trauma or exploitation and thus, something women *should* leave. Women in this thesis were in a relatively ‘stronger’ position in terms of their race, class, education and income than many street-based sex workers. This meant that their experiences differed substantially. Sanders (2007:91) argues that our understanding of ‘exiting’ should reflect the diversity of sex work(ers). By focusing on students/graduates, this research contributes to the relatively limited literature on transitions out of sex work for those working in indoor settings and positioned at a socio-economic midpoint, as not ‘elite’ nor in poverty (c.f. Bowen, 2015:434; Ham and Gilmore, 2017; Law, 2013; Maher et al., 2013; Sanders, 2007).

‘Exiting’ is rarely the main focus of research (Sanders, 2007:75) which explains the somewhat lack of scholarship on women’s experiences of leaving stripping specifically. For example, by focusing on why women continue to seek work *in* stripping, Hardy and Sanders (2015) also discuss women’s transitions *out* of the industry. To date, in the UK, Colosi’s (2012) ethnography remains one of the only in-depth studies to directly address the issue of exit for dancers. Scholars in the US such as Barton (2006, 2017) and Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale (1998) have explored the issue of becoming ‘trapped’ in stripping as women with limited education, skills and few options for employment outside of the industry find it difficult to leave. There is a distinction made within the literature between ‘career’ and ‘goal-oriented’ dancers. Scholars are in agreement that rather than being a dead-end job or career, goal-oriented dancers – typically students - consider stripping to be part-time, temporary and something which sustains aspirations outside the industry ensuring long(er)-term future security<sup>27</sup> (Lewis and Maticka-Tyndale, 1998; Hardy and Sanders, 2015). Indeed, students in Trautner and

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<sup>27</sup> For example, stripping is strategically employed to cover the costs of education, training and to supplement wages in other sectors.

Collett's (2010) US-based research made clear 'exit' plans and most considered graduation to be the benchmark for when they leave would leave the industry indefinitely.

Students in Hardy and Sanders (2015) sample referred to having a 'five-year plan' which involved earning as much money/capital as possible and/or trajectories outside of the industry and then leaving. However, the authors also state that plans may not always work out as some graduates continued stripping longer than they had anticipated. As existing research focuses on women who continued stripping, this thesis extends current scholarship by exploring the experiences of women who had already 'exited' the industry and not returned from between one month and four years. To nuance and complicate the idea of 'exiting' further, the data is combined with interviews with women who had initially planned to quit but continued stripping, as well as interviews with those who have transitioned in and out of the industry over time. In doing so, this thesis highlights the importance of temporality when researching exiting and in shaping how women are able to reflect on their past/present/future engagement in stripping.

Although the focus is not specifically related to stripping, I have found Bowen's (2015) research with 17<sup>28</sup> indoor sex workers in Vancouver helpful as the analysis also complicates binary understandings of 'exit'. For many individuals in Bowen's (2015) research, sex work was not as clear cut as 'in' or 'out' of the industry. Engagement with sex work ranged from 'sex work no more', 'sex work maybe' to 'dual-life'. The concept of 'dual-life' is important in regard to this thesis as Hardy and Sanders (2015) found that many graduates continued stripping alongside other careers to supplement low incomes. Bowen (2015) argues that individuals working in sex work and 'square work' transgress the border between stigmatised labour and conventional work. However, by referring to 'square' work and sex work as dual,

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<sup>28</sup> 10 participants worked primarily as in- and outcall escorts for agencies; others worked as independent sex workers, dancers, and porn actors. Off-street sex work experiences included the following: massage in "rub and tugs," bondage, domination, sadomasochism, live erotic performances, and tickle torture.

this can reinforce rather than challenge binary thought as the two forms of labour become fixed, oppositional categories (see O'Connell Davidson, 2013:177 for debates on dualisms). Indeed, Sanders and Hardy's (2014:125) research suggests that women who work in both mainstream jobs and sex work often do so in different ways which means that this category of 'dual-life' is itself, not fixed. For example, the authors refer to 'careerists' who strip to help specific career goals outside of the industry, as well as 'moonlighters' who strip to supplement low wages in other jobs. This thesis adds to existing debates by emphasising the interdependent – rather than separate – nature of the sex worker and student roles/identities and how this was experienced and negotiated by women.

### Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to bring together scholarship in the fields of HE, employment and sex work in order to situate this study and to frame the arguments made throughout. I have identified a gap in existing scholarship which this thesis will address by looking at what happens after university for students working in the sex industry. I then extend the limited scope further to include students working in 'mainstream' employment sectors and to compare experiences across the two industries. There appears to be an overuse of certain theories – i.e. the social positioning/deficit model – in the literature on students/graduates which arguably reproduces rather than disrupts harmful dualisms and class inequality. Similarly, in this chapter I have also sought to expose and challenge further problematic binaries which can lead to the socio-legal Othering of sex workers. By drawing attention to the scholarly work which adopts a processual and relational approach to the understanding of university and work, the aim of the remainder of this thesis is to examine what else matters and what more can be said about students/graduates/sex workers than is currently given space. In the following chapter, the key theme of 'Othering' continues as I discuss my experiences of trying to carry out 'dirty' research.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### Introduction

This chapter discusses the “...difficult, messy, fraught, emotional, tiring and yet rewarding process” (Skeggs, 1994:2) which has characterised this research. I will start by outlining the overarching research questions and the feminist ontological and epistemological stance taken. As this study was far from a linear process, I must then deviate from the standard structure and jump ahead to my reflexive account of carrying out ‘dirty research’ and to a discussion of the recruitment process. The challenges faced throughout the project became a central part of the fieldwork and unintentionally produced important findings. I hope that this slight detour helps to explain and clarify my subsequent decisions, choices and the changes that were made to the research design. Being reflexive and transparent about what we do and how we do it is important in allowing others to understand the background to any claims that are made and to the knowledge that is produced. Furthermore, discussing attempts (within and outside of the academy) to block, phase-out and undermine this research, adds to the feminist tradition of breaking silences and speaking out, demanding that women’s voices be heard, recorded and included (Stanley and Wise, 1993; Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010). This chapter also outlines the methods used and provides a summary of participants’ demographic information. This is followed by a discussion of how the data was analysed and the ‘conceptual tools’ I have used to help understand and explain participants’ experiences. Due to the structure of the chapter, I have interwoven a discussion of the ethical implications of this research throughout.

### Research questions and areas of enquiry

Based on the pilot study outlined in Chapter One, the original aim of this research was to explore women’s experiences over time and of leaving university, becoming a graduate and entering the graduate labour market. Given the lack of research looking at what happens after university for student sex workers, I wanted to take an inductive, data-led approach. The initial

plan was to carry out face-to-face interviews with female students in their final year of university (UG or PG) and to re-interview the same women around one year later as graduates. As Summer Term ends around May/June in most UK Universities, I planned to carry out the first interview in December 2016 – March 2017 which is around three to six months prior to students finishing university to avoid interrupting final year assessments. The second interview was scheduled around January 2018 – April 2018 and six to 12 months after participants had completed their degree. This was deemed to be an appropriate timeframe given that most data on graduate destinations was - at the time - gathered six months after students had finished university (HESA, 2019b). I was able to complete both rounds of interviews with 13 respondents (10 waitresses and three dancers, see Table 2). However, due to a number of difficulties faced at the recruitment stage, which will be discussed throughout this chapter, the original research design was adapted to ensure that the study was able to proceed while still addressing the following overarching research questions<sup>29</sup>:

1. How do women make sense of their transition into HE?
2. How do women experience and negotiate multiple roles/identities i.e. being a student, waitress/stripper and their personal lives?
3. How do women make sense of their experiences of becoming a graduate?
4. What are the similarities and differences between waitressing and stripping?

### Theoretical Stance

I have drawn on a variety of sources rather than strictly aligning myself with one school of philosophical thought. The use of different theories which *appear* incompatible may ‘disturb’ some theorists, however, Skeggs (1995:197) argues that the refusal to be contained by knowledge categories can lead to the breaking down of disciplinary boundaries which have

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter One ‘Outline of the study: Research aims and questions’ section for detailed version of research questions.

restricted scholarship. Importantly, this also works towards debunking the myth of epistemological and methodological purity. I have drawn inspiration from critical theory which brings issues of power and inequality to the centre of the research and problematises taken-for-granted understandings of identities, practices, institutions and structures (Carspecken, 2008). I have found interpretivism (Smith, 2008b), symbolic interactionism (Polk, 2017) and social constructivist approaches (Slater, 2017) particularly useful in understanding how women construct meaning in their lives and how they make sense of their experiences, actions and interactions. From these meanings, we are able to then proceed in developing a better understanding of the social world.

I have drawn most heavily from feminist theory and while there are many different ways of being feminist, one commonality is that women's issues, concerns and lived realities are placed at the centre of the inquiry. Furthermore, feminist scholars typically explore how gender intersects with other axis of inequality (Hesse-Biber, 2012:2). Given that sex workers lived realities are routinely ignored and misrepresented (Wahab, 2003: 626; Cusick et al., 2009: 707), I wanted to bring women's voices to the fore of this study and to take women's experiences as a starting point. When women started sharing their experiences, they were able to collectively make sense of their gendered lives through new concepts. For example, experiences of a 'bad marriage' were later re-conceptualised as experiences of domestic violence. This had a powerful political impact inciting resistance and change and gave rise to the understanding that the personal is political (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002:127).

Feminist scholars have long sought to correct and validate women's lived realities as traditional, androcentric 'knowledge' positioned both women and their experiences as Other to that of men (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1997:566). Following the work of Skeggs (1997), I argue for the importance of experience as a means of understanding how individuals occupy the category 'woman' in many different ways. The category 'woman' being raced, classed and

produced through power relations and struggles across different spatial-temporal sites. Although ‘experience’ may appear to be a common-sense concept used in a variety of ways to refer to feelings, events or subjectivity, what constitutes experience remains deeply contested.

From a feminist post-structuralist perspective, Weedon (1997) argues that what an experience means to an individual is the result of the discourses available to them at the time. The fact that the personal experience of a ‘bad marriage’ can be re-written as domestic violence, highlights plurality of meaning and how political consciousness can alter what is discovered as ‘reality’. This means that our experiences are never fixed and are always already an interpretation, and also in need of interpretation. Experiences have to be expressed in some form of language (oral, written, body, sign) which is already part of a certain way of thinking within a particular epoch and milieu. It is therefore commonplace for those who wish to hold on to the importance/study of experience to face the objection, “...you cannot really study experience, because all experience is mediated by language – therefore one can only study language or discourse i.e. representation” (Csordas, 1994 cited in Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002:124). Nevertheless, while gendered, classed and racialised social relations and subjects may be discursively constituted, this does not mean that they do not exist and that they do not have real, material consequences. For example, affect, embodiment, violence and material resources produce experiences that are arguably *more* than language alone.

Using the example of rape, Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002:129) argue that accounts build up not ‘facts’ but knowledge of what experiences understood as rape are like. Similarities reveal what happens, feelings felt, the language in which individuals are able to express such experiences and how common the experience is. The experience of rape can, however, also be an extra-discursive reality that someone may feel but have no language for knowing. The authors argue that without experience there could be no general knowledge of what rape is. The political impact of feminism stemmed from allowing women outlets to express initially



inexpressible personal experiences. While experiences of rape cannot be known without being conceptualised through language, I agree with Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) that theory, language and discourse cannot wholly constitute what certain experiences are.

Rather than simply reflecting and validating women's accounts, Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1997:573) argue that as feminist researchers, we must also directly challenge taken-for-granted experience. For example, the 'normalness' of sexual harassment in the workplace, middle-class privilege or whore-stigma. It is axiomatic to feminist researchers that women's experiences are listened to and treated respectfully. This is particularly important for sex workers and working-class people whose experiences are represented as lacking value. Nevertheless, respect does not mean simply taking accounts as 'truth'. Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1997) maintain that the role of the feminist researcher involves more than listening and agreeing. Respectful and attentive listening is the beginning not the end of the process as merely reproducing accounts does not do justice to the complexities of women's lives/decisions. This has been referred to as demonstrating a 'critical respect' for respondents (Gill, 2007:78). Yet, I agree with Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1997) that regardless of socio-political or theoretical standing, feminist scholars do not have the authority to decide for other women what their experiences actually are. Instead, the stories which are told by interviewees must be contextualised and situated as a means of identifying patterns, variability and silences.

### Reflexive account of carrying out 'dirty' research

There is a fine line between reflexivity and pointless or narcissistic self-indulgence (Sanchez Taylor and O'Connell Davidson, 2010; Ahmed, 2010). However, I amongst others (see Pilcher, 2017; Kingston and Hammond, 2014; Irvine, 2014; Scharff, 2010) believe that it is important to document the trials and tribulations faced when carrying out social research, and sex work research in particular, as a means of exposing, challenging and working towards overcoming, harmful practices which directly (re)produce stigma towards sex work(ers); and

by default, sex work research(ers). Reflexivity in this sense is never simply ‘self-reflection’. Instead, it becomes a pedagogic process which reflects on the kind of world that we live in (Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010:5). Schraff (2010:91) argues that reflexivity can allow for public/academic scrutiny by providing detailed information on the decisions made and the dynamics that took place throughout the research process. To be reflexive involves a reflection on how the data gathered and the knowledge produced may be affected by the researcher’s own, inescapable personal biography. ‘Good research’ should account for the conditions of its own production (Stanley and Wise 1993:228).

Some of the challenges faced throughout this research process are neither new nor idiosyncratic. Sexualities research has a long history of controversy dating back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century when British sexologist Havelock Ellis sparked disputes over the ‘obscene’ nature of his work (Irvine, 2012:28). Since then, sexology has continued to suffer ridicule and delegitimisation as a result of the ‘risqué’ subject matter (Tiefer, 1995:192). Similarly, Alfred C. Kinsey’s sexual science caused conflict in the US during the 1950s (Irvine, 2012:28) and the emergence of gay and lesbian and porn studies faced widespread political and ethical opposition (Plummer, 1975, 1981; Smith and Attwood, 2014; Israel, 2002).

As a result of socio-cultural and institutional anxieties around sex and sexuality, scholars pursuing research on different forms of ‘dirty work’ continue to face marginalisation and discrimination (Irvine, 2014). For example, academics have had “...their reputations destroyed, lost their jobs and faced legal sanctions for teaching or researching porn” (Jenkins, 2004:2). Despite such areas of scholarship expanding, diversifying and becoming more legitimate over time, Braun (1999) argues that questions and assumptions about sexuality researchers and their relationship to their topic often continue to ‘haunt us’. Reavey (1997:553) has also discussed how they were positioned in relation to their research on child sex abuse with questions/assumptions made about their past and the potential ‘skeletons in their closets’.

The stigma researchers face through association is in no way comparable to the stigma experienced by sex workers themselves<sup>30</sup>. Nevertheless, Hammond and Kingston (2014:340) argue that carrying out sexualities research is similar to sex work in that one of the biggest challenges is coping with other people's reactions. It has been well documented that sex work researchers are often met with mixed emotions/reactions and/or are not always taken seriously. This suggests that there is something intrinsic about sex work (research) itself making it an 'unworthy topic' of study. Pilcher (2017:xv) asks, "...what is it like to 'embody', or be constructed and positioned by others as a 'sex work researcher' both within and outside the academy?" During the course of conducting the research discussed here, I have been met on numerous occasions with laughter, ridicule and (bad) jokes. For example, I received the following email within an hour of distributing flyers and posters advertising my research.

Dear Jessica,

I have read your poster and I am rather delighted to hear that you are looking for someone to assist you. With several years of experience in night clubs all around London I feel I am the right candidate to evaluate your dance performance and skills. Contact me at any time (first email).

Dear Jessica,

I'm terribly sorry but my friends took the phone and wrote this e-mail, in order to make a joke to me!!! (second email 10 minutes later).

I also experienced people laughing, whispering or shaking their heads disapprovingly when I distributed flyers in public which included the words 'erotic dancer'. As this became a recurring experience, I started to feel embarrassed and this made the task more emotionally difficult and even daunting. I found myself asking friends and colleagues to come with me to provide support.

Another common experience sex work researchers share is the questioning of *why* we are interested in such a topic. For example, after providing an(other) explanation to *why* I am researching this area while presenting at a PhD/ECR event, the first question I was then asked

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<sup>30</sup> See Colosi (2012) for a discussion on negotiating both sex worker and researcher identities/roles.

from a (male) member of the audience was, '*so, why are you interested in stripping?*'. As I am studying two occupations, this question reveals that this is not random. Indeed, during the full research process, I was never asked why I am interested in waitressing. I have been asked on several occasions whether I am currently or have previously worked in the sex industry. Would this 'justify' my interest? Or, as Price-Glynn (2010:199) argues, are such questions for titillation rather than substance? Interestingly, Price-Glynn (2010:199) has shared a similar experience: she was frequently asked if she had worked as a stripper but was never asked if she had worked as a nurse (the subject of her previous research). I have heard countless anecdotal stories from sex work researchers who are asked the same questions or are subject to similar assumptions. As Pilcher (2017:xvi) argues, even if sex work researchers were/are working in the industry - as many have done and continue to do so - why should this delegitimise the subject of their research given the advantages of 'insider' knowledge?

Having been asked this question for several years, I have become accustomed to, and even expect, certain reactions when 'coming out' about my research. I now have an 'appropriate script' which I stick to. I alternatively opt for more generic responses when asked about my research such as, 'female graduate employment' in order to avoid unwanted responses or feeling I *have* to explain myself/my political stance on sex work. Based on past experience, this can quickly turn into a heated debate on morality where I am expected to succinctly justify the existence of the sex industry. Pilcher (2017: xviii) writes about her experiences of self-censorship as she would often tell people that she studied 'gender in the workplace' rather than female spectatorship in lesbian strip clubs and male strip shows. However, we are complicit in what she argues is the 'further silencing' of our field of study. This is not surprising as sexualities research is often viewed as lacking rigor, illegitimate (Tiefer, 1995), suspect (Reavey, 1997) and embarrassing (Braun, 1999). Importantly, Braun (1999:371) argues as feminists and as those researching stigmatised/marginalised areas,

“[D]o we have some moral obligation to be unapologetically committed to the feminist research we do? Committed in a way which signals our pride and our dedication both to feminism and to our particular research topic. Because, if we cannot talk about it, cannot argue for it, cannot be proud of it, who can and who will?”

## Recruitment process

Rather than remaining in any way rigid with the methodological approach, this thesis has been continuously adapted in response to the challenges faced throughout the fieldwork process. A variety of methods were used in an attempt to gain access to students working in the stripping and hospitality industries. I have included a discussion of both the successful and the not so successful recruitment methods to highlight how, despite claims of stripping becoming somewhat ‘normalised’ (Brents and Sanders, 2010), the deviancy/stigma associated with stripping and research on this topic remains entrenched in and outside of the academy. Furthermore, by including the unsuccessful methods and the difficulties faced, this study adds to a long tradition within feminist research of outing secrets, breaking silences, and speaking out, demanding the usually unseen and unacknowledged be made visible and heard (Stanley and Wise, 1993; Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010).

### *Online forums and social media*

I started the recruitment process in December 2016 by creating two research flyers<sup>31</sup> which were posted separately onto *The Student Room* (TSR) one of the largest, online student communities. The research was specifically posted on the ‘*Student Surveys and Research*’ forum. The website explicitly describes this as, “*A place to post dissertation surveys and other academic research.*” All threads must be approved by a moderator before they are visible to other users. Somewhat unsurprisingly, the flyer targeting waitresses was approved and the flyer for erotic dancers was declined and removed from the forum. I contacted TSR team via email to reassure the organisation that I was a student myself, that I had posted the flyers in the

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<sup>31</sup> See Appendix 2 and 3 for copy of flyers.

appropriate forum, that stripping is a legal form of labour in the UK and to ask why one flyer was approved and the other was declined/removed. I received the following response via email.

“Thanks for contacting us. Your post, which is requesting interviews from students who worked as erotic dancers, does not meet our community guidelines. Although we allow an open discussion around sex and relationships on our site, this, unfortunately breaks our guidelines as we are ultimately an educational site” (TSR).

On the same day, and without explanation, the flyer targeting waitresses was also removed from the forum. Following this attempt to block my research/recruitment, I replied to TSR team to argue that while erotic dancing could be seen to involve sexualised labour/interactions (similar to many other forms of ‘mainstream’ labour), this should not necessarily mean that this work is directly linked or solely restricted to discussions of ‘sex’ and ‘relationships’. Indeed, some sex workers do not associate either sex or relationships with their work (Sanders, 2005b:327-8). Secondly, as I had read the community guidelines prior to posting the flyer, I requested further information as it was not clear how/in what ways either flyer was not in compliance with any of the rules/regulations set out on the website. Finally, I agreed that TSR is an educational website whereby students, like myself, sign up and post advice, comments and requests to one another – creating content and (indirectly) revenue for the organisation - regarding educational matters. I was then told that the flyer to recruit waitresses would be put back onto the forum that day and that there would be ‘further discussion’ regarding the flyer for erotic dancers. TSR also offered some ‘advice’ regarding my recruitment methods which was the most telling of the actual ‘problem’.

“What I would advise is that members of the TSR community are unlikely to have worked in the industry, so you may not get the response you expect and you would most likely be far more successful sourcing your research from another forum” (TSR).

TSR boasts to be ‘*The UK’s biggest and most popular education website used by over 70% of all students every year*’ (TSR, 2016). At the time, there had been recent, widespread media coverage in the UK relating to student participation in the sex industry based on findings from TSSWP (Sagar et al., 2015). It is therefore unlikely that TSR would be unaware of the fact that

students participate in the sex industry. Nevertheless, the assurance that none of *their* members would be strippers and the advice to take my research *elsewhere*, demonstrates a clear attempt by the organisation to rid themselves of the dirt associated with this research and with sex work more generally. This is most likely in fear of stigma through association and potential disrepute or negative media attention.

I then posted information about the research onto popular forums created and used by sex workers. Given the persistent, negative representation of sex work(ers) in the media, government reports and some academic research (discussed in Chapter One), many sex workers are (rightly) suspicious of the intentions of researchers and journalists. Arguably, the most important concepts for qualitative researchers are credibility/trustworthiness and approachability i.e. nonthreatening/safe when recruiting participants, however it was difficult to establish either online without face-to-face interaction (Hordge-Freeman, 2018:4). The following extracts are some examples of the responses that I received from forum users.

**Forum User One:** What is the interest with college students and adult work??? I mean, I don't mind helping out here and there I just don't see the fascination.

**Forum User Two:** Because they can make money out of it. These academic studies are all well and good but at the end of the day they inform wider drives to regulate and tax our industries while increasing competition.

**Forum User Three:** The game is sold, not told.

**Forum User Four:** I agree. The best way she can learn about the industry is as a customer and dancer, not sitting on the side-lines doing sterile interviews

Valuable ethnographic research has been conducted by female researchers in strip clubs (Pilcher, 2017) and by researchers who have also worked as strippers (Lister, 2015; Colosi, 2012). I was advised on a number of occasions to find work as a stripper or waitress in a strip club to provide access to potential respondents. While the researcher's body is often absent from discussions of fieldwork, as if they are disembodied (with the exception of scholars such

as Ellingson, 2006; Harris, 2015; Hordge-Freeman, 2018), my body and appearance came under scrutiny throughout the research process. I noticed that people would scan my body before asking if I was or had been a stripper. I felt forced to reflect on why, as a young, able-bodied woman, I did not at least audition for the role, especially considering that I had worked as a waitress prior to and throughout this research.

As stripping involves displaying the naked body, I found myself evaluating specific parts of my body and questioning the meanings I attached to my appearance which was an uncomfortable process. This affective, emotional and embodied experience has shaped the knowledge that has been produced as I chose not to audition. I realised that regardless of how I felt about my body, the assumption that I – or indeed any woman – can simply find work as a dancer ignores the stringent rules on appearance within strip clubs. Although there is variation among strippers, there is also an industry standard and research has continued to show the immense pressures some dancers face in trying to obtain/maintain a ‘Barbie Doll’ appearance (Bradley, 2008:509; Bradley-Engen and Ulmer, 2009). As will be discussed in Chapter Five, a number of respondents in this research were refused work based on their appearance.

Returning to Forum User Three’s comments, there are several groups of people who (in)directly earn a living from sex work(ers) (see Sanders, 2008a) including academics. Skeggs (1994:88) argues that as scholars build careers for themselves from the experiences of their participants, this is a ‘debt that can never be repaid’. As the completion of my PhD and (hopefully) my subsequent career advancement is reliant on dancers’ participation, I wanted to try to redress the imbalance (slightly) by offering respondents a modest £10 gift voucher<sup>32</sup>. However, the act of ‘gift giving’ (see Oakley, 2016) between myself and respondents did not feel unidimensional and instead became more reciprocal. For example, Ashley (dancer)

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<sup>32</sup> I initially proposed £10 in cash rather than a voucher as I did not want to dictate how women spent the money. However, for ‘ethical purposes’ vouchers were considered to be more appropriate by my institution. I was able to offer e-vouchers which meant that respondents were able to choose where the voucher was used.



informed me at the end of our interview that she was training to become a qualified pole instructor and that she was teaching and video-recording a class the following day as part of a summative assessment. She told me that she needed one more student for her class and asked if I would be willing to help her by taking part. I agreed, warning her that I could not pole dance and I was assured that the class was for beginners. Her request demonstrated how, again, my body, age, gender and 'studentness' shaped and facilitated our rapport. The following day, I realised that the back and forth nature of 'gift giving' and receiving was extended further when Ashley introduced me to one of her friends who had worked as a dancer while studying and she agreed to take part in the research. While reciprocity in research does not mean an 'equal exchange' (Rubin and Rubin, 1995 cited in Goodrum and Keys, 2007:256) this can help to redress the unequal power in the research relationship.

The use of online forums was not successful in recruiting participants, however social media platforms – Twitter and Facebook – on the other hand were useful resources in finding participants (n=4 dancers n=1 waitress). I was able to post both research flyers online and they were re-tweeted/shared by 73 users. I also used hashtags which were popular at the time to add the flyer to archived conversation threads increasing the likelihood that they were seen by potential respondents.

#### *Universities, Student Unions and student societies*

Following my own institutions guidelines for external researchers wishing to recruit participants from the student body, I contacted the ethics committees<sup>33</sup> (or equivalent) of 15 universities across London requesting permission to post flyers in communal areas used by students and/or in any areas the university in question deemed appropriate. For reasons of comparability and feasibility, I initially restricted my research to students living and studying in London. However, this was later extended to students outside of London - due to difficulties

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<sup>33</sup> On 9<sup>th</sup> March 2016, this research was granted ethical approval by City, University of London see Appendix 4.

in recruiting participants - and a similar process was carried out with universities across England and Wales<sup>34</sup>. Emails sent to universities outside of London included a request to circulate the flyer via student mailing lists. The email included:

1. A justification for why students from said university needed to be recruited for the study
2. A copy of my completed ethics application form
3. Evidence that the study had received ethical approval
4. Copies of consent forms and information sheets<sup>35</sup>
5. Details of intended recruitment methods
6. Copies of both flyers
7. Evidence that suitable insurance arrangements were in place<sup>36</sup>.

There was a general reluctance among most universities to provide a yes/no response to my request and a clear attempt to avoid responsibility/liability due to uncertainty regarding the reaction the flyers could *potentially* provoke both internally and externally. The decision appeared to be ‘too risky’ for some individuals who did not want to be accountable, while others directed me to more senior members of staff, different departments and/or asked for additional evidence to ‘prove’ that my research was ‘credible’. Overall, I found this to be a delaying/time-wasting exercise as ultimately the answer was no. Roberts (2018:44) found similar ‘delaying tactics’ were used by institutions to time out projects on student sex work to ensure that he was unable to conduct the research. Similarly, Hammond and Kingston

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<sup>34</sup> The methods were also adapted at this stage which will be discussed in the following section.

<sup>35</sup> See Appendix 5 for copy of the consent form and Appendix 6 for participant information sheets.

<sup>36</sup> When attempting to gather evidence that this research was covered by City, University of London’s insurance policy I was accidentally copied into an email which read, “*Another request for insurance approval please – this one is slightly out of the ordinary!*” At almost every point, this research has received a (negative) reaction of some sort which in this case appears to be either another joke, a sense of shock or even a forewarning to the insurer. Similarly, when ordering sex work related books and resources to the Library at my own institution, I was told by a (male) member of staff that I had caused ‘quite a stir ordering *these types* of books’, that everyone was talking about ‘the person who had ordered loads of books on strippers’, and that he doesn’t usually read ‘the boring books on finance’ but that he and others had ‘made sure to have a flick through’ mine. At the time, this made me feel uncomfortable.

(2014:343) also discuss continuously feeling that they had to justify and legitimise their research. It is argued that as sex work is in many ways seen as lying outside the boundaries of acceptable sexual behaviour/morality and is often considered a dishonourable means of making money, research into such a topic is also held in less regard (Hammond and Kingston, 2014:337). I received the following responses via email from universities across London.

“I will need to discuss with the sabbatical officers if they are okay to have this advertised in the communal areas, but I don’t know what the chances of anyone responding are given it is such a sensitive issue” (University A).

“[University B] is not able to approve your request to advertise your research in the College. Under our research ethics policy, this project would be classified **as extremely sensitive** and would require approval by the full College Ethics Committee” (own emphasis, University B).

“Your request is simple enough. However, our campus actually does not allow for posters to be put up (strange as it sounds). I am also not willing to take responsibility for your engagement at [University C] even though I am sure you are a perfectly responsible, etc. individual” (University C).

“Generally, we are open to helping researchers from other universities but in this case, I am afraid we cannot. While I perfectly understand that this is a legitimate area of research there is a potential problem of managing responses to the proposed posters. If this were a [University D] project we would not have such posters and we would ask the researcher to develop other, less public, forms of recruitment... These posters might, potentially, give offense to some students/staff and we would have no way of giving an explanation of why they are necessary/important or how they have been approved. I am sorry that [University D] cannot help with this research but I cannot approve, in the name of the University, this recruitment of our students on campus” (University D).

“Thank you for providing confirmation that City University of London’s Research Ethics Committee has ethically approved your study and that all aspects of your research are covered by City’s insurance brokers. However, given the sensitive nature of the research, Professor X has declined to grant approval for you to recruit [University E] undergraduate students to your study” (University E).

The extracts support Sagar et al.’s (2015:401) argument that attempts to block research or publicity relating to student sex work should not be seen as distinctive/individual responses from HEIs. Research on the topic is seen as a risk to the ‘brand’ of the university and is therefore actively discouraged by management and/or blocked under the guise of ‘ethics’ (c.f. Roberts, 2018). As noted, sexualities research is one of the few topics automatically seen by ethics

committees as ‘sensitive’ and subject to enhanced scrutiny. While there are numerous definitions of what constitutes ‘sensitive research’, with the exception of University D, it is unclear what it is about the research that renders it ‘sensitive’. Is it the topic itself? The methodological approach? The potential ‘consequences’ of the research? Undoubtedly, there are certain ‘risks’ when undertaking any research with human participants. However, avoiding research deemed ‘sensitive’ also has risks of its own by further silencing certain voices/experiences (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). As will be discussed in Chapter Four, it appears that universities are more concerned with ‘potentially, giv[ing] offence to some students/staff’ (University D) at the expense of discriminating, excluding and disciplining *Others*.

Institutional hostility and silencing mechanisms can have a damaging effect leading to an unwillingness to carry out research on certain areas. Unreported, anecdotal examples include prospective PhD researchers in a number of universities who were advised by senior members of staff that researching the sex industry will inhibit their academic career (Roberts, 2018:61). This could also explain why student sex work remains under researched in the UK. Blocking or silencing ‘taboo’ subjects maintains the status quo (stigmatisation and discrimination) by suppressing discussion of ‘controversial topics’ (Braun, 1999:369). Agustín (2005:627) argues, those without moralistic views consider generating a deeper understanding of the cultural meanings of sex (in its broadest sense of the term) to be an obvious and positive contribution to knowledge,

“[Yet] ...even those who believe sex should *never* be commercialised, research into its meanings should be important, for how will society stop, ‘control’ or otherwise govern such widespread activity without understanding how and why it goes on?” (own emphasis, Agustín 2005:627).

Overall, HEI’s have not only had very little to say about student involvement in the sex industry but most have avoided the topic completely<sup>37</sup> (Sagar et al., 2015:401). Given recent

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<sup>37</sup> Roberts (2018:47-48) calculated that each institution receives on average between £5.16 and £6.41 million from student sex work which he refers to as the ‘sexualisation of HE’.

research (see Sagar et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2007a, 2007b; 2010; Sanders and Hardy, 2013), it is now incontestable that a substantial number of students *are* involved in some form of sex work while at university. The ongoing assertion/assumption that '*student sex work does not happen at this institution*' is no longer admissible. If universities consider PhD research (which has both ethical approval and is covered by insurance) on the topic to be 'too sensitive', potentially offensive, or as a 'threat' that could bring the institution into some sort of disrepute (see Cusick et al., 2009), it raises serious concerns about the stance the same universities take towards their own students who are engaging in sex work. Sagar et al. (2015:401) argue that it is of great importance that HEI's do *not* take part in stigmatising/discriminatory behaviours against students. Indeed, universities have a role in protecting students involved in sex work in the same way they have policies to protect other minority groups.

I was able to post a number of flyers in one Central London university (in elevators, toilets, message boards etc.). What came as a surprise was that flyers targeting erotic dancers were defaced, ripped down and left on the floor or put in the bin. I am unable to say with certainty whether this was by students, staff or both. I attempted to re-post the same flyers on a number of occasions to find the same thing happen again. The flyers were posted alongside others requesting participants for what could also be deemed 'sensitive' research. For example, research on experiences of cancer, mastectomies and alcoholism. Nevertheless, it was experiences of working as an 'erotic dancer' that students/staff considered to be sufficiently unacceptable that almost all flyers were taken down without permission. After discussing this matter with several members of staff and other students, I found that both sex work research and the tearing down of research flyers were *not* commonplace at the university. Students carrying out '*standard or normal*' research do not usually have these issues.

I assumed that 'convincing' Students Unions (SUs) and student-led pole dance societies to share my recruitment poster would be easier, as the NUS (2016) published a report calling

for SUs/HEIs to support student sex workers and had publicly supported the decriminalisation of sex work. While I was able to post flyers in four London SUs and one SU outside of London agreed to share the flyer via social media, other SUs shared a similar sentiment to universities.

“Due to the nature of your flyers and the subject content we would deem these as inappropriate for distribution in our venue” (SU, London).

I also received the following emails from two student-led pole dance societies.

“I’m afraid that *anyone associated with being a stripper is asked to leave our club as we are a sports club*. May be best to email strip clubs directly” (emphasis added, Pole Dance Society - University G).

“Unfortunately, as a University Society *we have been working hard to shake off the idea that all pole dancers are strippers* and sharing your flyer with our members would mean compromising that image. Although all our members are fully aware that not all pole dancers are strippers, *the problem is* not everyone on Facebook thinks the same way... I hope you understand that although we would love to help, we can’t put our Society in such a delicate position” (emphasis added, Pole Dance Society - University H).

Both societies have appropriated pole dance from strippers and are now attempting to ‘*shake off*’ and clean up the associated dirt. However, this clean up and the exclusion of ‘*anyone associated with being a stripper*’ perpetuates the harmful good/bad girl divide and reinforces an implied hierarchy which suggests that those who are not strippers are morally superior. Indeed, attempts to distance ‘pole fitness/dance’ from stripping has become a ‘trend’ on social media. Women have started to use the #NotAStripper on posts as a way to claim respectability. It appears that the fear of reputational ‘damage’ leads to the potential exclusion of student strippers and this extends to all aspects of the university, including student-led organisations. Overall, I was able to recruit seven waitresses via recruitment posters/flyers.

### *Key informant sampling*

I contacted the co-founder of a London-based sex worker collective who acted as a gatekeeper, and I was introduced to nine dancers via the Facebook instant messaging facility. Some dancers considered their participation in certain research projects to be of political importance. I informed the co-founder of the collective that I would provide a summary of the

key findings from this research which they could use at their disposal. As researchers, we have a responsibility and accountability to our participants not to simply walk away with their stories (Henderson et al., 2012:17). While I am hopeful and committed to ensuring that this research has some broader impact, I was careful not to over-promise the extent of socio-political change that this research will/could incite. Being part of a collective could reflect women's commitment to stripping which could impact on the length of time that they have worked in the industry and this may not be 'comparable' to student sex work populations more generally; who may be less invested in the work. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents were recruited via referrals which meant that the sample became more varied and 'random', in that some women were students/graduates/stripping/no-longer stripping and of a wider age range. The most effective recruitment method was the snowball/referral/network sampling strategy (n=6 dancers, n=11 waitresses, n=2 dancer/waitress).

#### *Strip clubs and restaurants*

I was advised by the co-founder of the collective *not* to hand out flyers or try to recruit women in strip clubs given that dancers pay to work and so the time spent discussing this research could be spent making, rather than losing money. However, by that point, a female colleague and I had already *attempted* this method but were denied entry by male door staff at four different strip clubs in London. When approaching the clubs as potential customers, we were almost instantly infantilised by the security staff and told 'not tonight girls' (on more than one occasion). I then informed the door staff about the study and most agreed to distribute flyers to dancers. We left the clubs unsure whether the flyers would be handed out and also unsure why we were not allowed inside. While I had frequented strip clubs outside of London for research purposes, and despite the stripping industry becoming more diversified in recent years, now catering to female and non-heterosexual audiences (Pilcher, 2017), it appears that on the whole, strip clubs remain 'gentlemen's clubs'. In Chapter Five, I compare strip clubs and restaurants as profit-oriented businesses part of the broader NTE. Yet, as we were not

denied access to any restaurants, bars or pubs when attempting to leave flyers to recruit waitresses, this suggests that there is *something* distinct about strip clubs in comparison to other businesses.

## Methods

As mentioned, I was able to interview 13 respondents in their final year of university and re-interviewed the same women around 12 months later to discuss their experiences of becoming a graduate. The initial plan was to carry out face-to-face interviews. However, given the difficulties in recruiting participants, the geographical scope was extended to the UK<sup>38</sup> and the telephone and Internet were incorporated into the research. Potential respondents were given three options and asked to choose their preferred mode of interaction from face-to-face if in London (n=12), telephone (n=26) or Skype (n=1<sup>39</sup>) (camera optional). All in-person interviews took place in public spaces, usually cafés or on university campuses. Although this type of interviewing is generally preferred in feminist research, as stripping remains stigmatised, the use of the telephone and Skype could be more preferable for some women who may be reluctant to take part in face-to-face interviews due to fear of judgement or disclosure of their identity.

Jenkins (2010:98) found when researching sex worker populations that providing options can be beneficial as many interviewees stated they would have refused to participate if the research was face-to-face: 65% (n=147) of respondents chose online interviews whereas only 35% (n=79) agreed to be interviewed in person. Admittedly, non-verbal cues and what is *not* being said through body language are lost in telephone and Skype (without camera) interactions making such methods potentially limiting. Nevertheless, in-person interviews are

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<sup>38</sup> Four respondents were Scottish and did not pay tuition fees but did accumulate some student debt through student loans; although this was substantially less than English and Welsh students. One Scottish respondent was in the final year of her master's degree at an English university and had paid tuition fees and accumulated more debt as a result.

<sup>39</sup> As the respondent chose to use the camera facility, the interview felt more like a face-to-face interview than telephone interviews.



not always the most feasible, sensitive or productive way of communicating with women about their lives/experiences. People may find face-to-face interviews embarrassing or uncomfortable and so rather than acting as a barrier, the telephone and Internet could potentially reduce inhibition for respondents, drawing on unheard voices of women who would typically refuse to participate in social research. I wanted to ensure that respondents felt comfortable during the interview and providing options allowed women more freedom and control over when and where the interview took place.

Participants were provided with information about the research and I was able to obtain verbal (recorded) and written consent from all 39 women. All names and other identifying information have been changed to protect women's anonymity. The private, instant messaging facility on WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter became an effective way to remain in contact with participants. I was able to send information about the research, answer any questions and (re)arrange interviews to suit respondents' busy/ever-changing schedules. This form of contact was also helpful in building a sense of familiarity with women prior to the interview. Furthermore, for those who opted for face-to-face interviews, as they had already seen my profile photograph and vice versa, this made it easier and less daunting when meeting for the first time in a public place. Social media was also considered to be the most reliable way of re-contacting women regarding the second interview as many participants assumed that they would be living abroad by that point and may not have the same mobile phone number or email address.

The main ethical 'dilemma' that I faced was when a number of women extended an invitation to become 'Facebook friends' or to follow my personal (rather than 'professional') Twitter account. Reich (2014:3) argues that accepting such requests can blur professional and personal boundaries but more importantly, this can also confuse what information has been 'freely given' by participants and what I could have gleaned from having access to their social

media accounts. Accepting such requests would have provided participants access to a textual and visual representation of my online ‘personal self’ which included photographs of my family, friends, partner and life outside of academia. I reflected on the potential consequences of the multiple flows of information and I chose to accept the requests for a number of reasons.

I considered this to be one way to rebalance the asymmetrical researched/researcher dynamic whereby the former is expected to divulge in-depth personal information while the latter remains ‘detached’. Indeed, Watts (2008:7) states that, “[r]apport is mutually constructed between people who can empathise with each other and is developed through a willingness of each to look into the world of the other”. My ability to interview participants and to yield in-depth data and personal details about their lives was dependent on building relationships of openness and trust. I did not want to offend my participants by denying or ignoring their request and wanted to give them the opportunity to ‘vet’ me prior to taking part in the study. As mentioned, this may be particularly important for sex workers who may be suspicious of researchers. To negotiate this situation and feeling that I could potentially take ‘too much’ information from participants, I did not extend friend requests myself. Furthermore, I purposely avoided engaging in what Reich (2014:10) refers to ‘presearch’. This involves researchers collecting and using information found online about their participants – prior to or following interviews - as a way to ‘triangulate’ data.

The initial research project was limited to final year students, however as the main area of inquiry was experiences post-university, I extended the scope to include one round of interviews with women who had already graduated and who were able to provide retrospective accounts of their transitions through HE and into the labour market. The key requirement for participation was having worked as a waitress and/or dancer while studying. There was no requirement to have stopped or continued working in either industry. In total, I completed 52 interviews. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the number of respondents according to their job

and education status who took part in the first round of interviews. Table 2 re-states the number of final year students who ‘fit the criteria’ to take part in both interviews (n=18), the actual number of participants who took part in the second interview as new graduates (n=13), and the number of women (n=5) I was unable to re-contact/re-interview<sup>40</sup>.

**Table 1: Summary of Respondents in Interview One**

| <b>Role</b>     | <b>First/second<br/>year<br/>students</b> | <b>Final year<br/>students</b> | <b>Already<br/>graduated</b> | <b>Total:<br/>Interview<br/>one</b> |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Waitress</b> | 0                                         | 13                             | 5                            | 18                                  |
| <b>Dancer</b>   | 4                                         | 4                              | 11                           | 19                                  |
| <b>Both</b>     | 0                                         | 1                              | 1                            | 2                                   |
| <b>Total</b>    | 4                                         | 18                             | 17                           | 39                                  |

**Table 2: Summary of Respondents in Both Interviews**

| <b>Role</b>     | <b>Interview<br/>one-<br/>Final year<br/>students</b> | <b>Interview<br/>two-<br/>New<br/>graduates</b> | <b>Dropped<br/>out of study</b> |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Waitress</b> | 13                                                    | 10                                              | 3                               |
| <b>Dancer</b>   | 4                                                     | 3                                               | 1                               |
| <b>Both</b>     | 1                                                     | 0                                               | 1                               |
| <b>Total</b>    | 18                                                    | 13                                              | 5                               |

<sup>40</sup> See Appendix 7 for Table 3: Participant Demographic Information Dancers. Appendix 8 for Table 4: Participants Demographic Information Waitresses.

Drawing on the work of feminist narrative researchers and those carrying out life story/history research (see Stanley, 2016; Miller, 2017), I found that combining the longitudinal and retrospective interviews meant that I had gathered data from experiences of those who had lived as graduates from between one and 10 years. Frank (1995) argues that the passage of time facilitates a reflexive grasp on events such that experiences can be narrated in different ways. Indeed, those who had recently graduated offered different perspectives and insights in comparison to those who had lived as graduates for longer. One ‘limitation’ of retrospective accounts is that they are reliant on participants’ memory and ability to recall the past. However, I do not consider participants narratives to be ‘facts’ of how things were, but rather a meaning-making system as women attempt to construct a coherent life story based on a chaotic mass of perceptions and experiences over the years (Berends, 2011:2). This has allowed me to explore women’s decision-making processes and how and why plans and imagined futures/selves evolve over time.

Regarding the first round of interviews, the question guide remained semi-structured allowing for some standardisation in questioning participants, but also for some flexibility. The questions were mostly open-ended to invite respondents to both reflect on their current lives and anticipate the future. The first interview was based on five broad categories:

1. Becoming a student
2. Working as a waitress and/or dancer
3. Being a working student – negotiations of the two identities/roles
4. Plans for the future
5. Demographic information

For those who took part in a face-to-face interview and who struggled to imagine their future lives/selves, I provided the option of drawing a timeline<sup>41</sup> on a blank sheet of paper. I

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<sup>41</sup> See Appendix 9 for copy of one example timeline.

suggested that participants start by plotting anything significant. For example, upcoming events or changes in their lives over the next 12 months, to help generate conversation. Unlike the majority of researchers who use timelines to look at participants' past lives/selves (Adriansen, 2012), the timeline became a tool to help students imagine and construct (both verbally and visually) their potential futures, rather than to build 'facts' based on events that had already happened.

However, one problem with timelines, and with transitions research more generally, is that it can reproduce narratives of progress and development (Finn, 2015:153). I had informed those potentially taking part in both interviews that I would transcribe our conversation during the first interview and that I would make notes so that we could then revisit what was said during the second interview. This was quite exciting for some participants who stated that they were looking forward to seeing what they were able to 'achieve' in that time. For others, the prospect of plans/ambitions 'failing' was particularly daunting and emotional. Interviews are deeply affective practices as they generate emotion in both the interviewee and interviewer. The process of recollection and imagining futures is also affective as people re-live or anticipate emotions and as they narrate or construct stories/selves (Loveday, 2016). This experience can be at the same time painful and enjoyable. Those coming to the end of their degree often stated that the interview was productive and provided them with time and space to think about and discuss their futures.

There is a wealth of literature that I was able to draw on to help to establish an 'approach' to manage sensitive disclosures and emotions (both participants and my own) during the interview (see Dickson-Swift et al., 2008). I was aware that SH is prevalent in both waitressing and stripping and have experienced this myself when working in different capacities within the NTE. Nevertheless, I found the number of disclosures and the normalisation of SH difficult to process. Many women did not appear/sound upset or distressed

when talking about their experiences of harassment. Most women considered this to be a normal part of their job which I found to be concerning. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the interview, this stressed the importance of creating a safe space for women to talk about their emotions and experiences. As the majority were telephone interviews, women were usually in their own home. However, the lack of face-to-face contact made it difficult to comfort women who did become upset and I had to carefully consider my responses and rely heavily on the tone of my voice. If/when women became upset, I suggested either changing the subject, ending the interview and made sure to thank participants for sharing their stories. When necessary, I also suggested support services.

The aim of the second interview was to elicit narratives relating to experiences of becoming a graduate. Following a discussion and reflection on the notes from the first interview, the remaining interview questions were heavily based on women's responses and trajectories. Unlike the first round of interviews, I did not stick to a set of interview questions. Each interview lasted around one hour. Respondents who had already graduated were asked the same questions as those who had taken part in both interviews; however, this was condensed into one interview which lasted approximately 90 minutes.

### Participant information

Not all respondents 'fit' the specific demographic requirements sought within the original research design i.e. final year HE students. Nonetheless, I have included their interviews in the dataset as they produced valuable insights. For example, four dancers were first or second-year students and were able to discuss their experiences of becoming a student and stripper as well as their imagined selves/futures after university. Two dancers were in their final year of vocational courses rather than UG degrees. Their experiences were considered comparable as the courses were three years, paid via a loan and undertaken in FEIs. Both

women had access to Advance Learner Loans from Student Finance England and the structure of their courses were comparable to courses undertaken by foundational degree students.

The 39 women<sup>42</sup> who took part in this research self-identified as cis-gender women. I have understood gender throughout this thesis as structure, discourse, materiality and performance. Gender must also be understood as intersectional to account for the co-constitution of social categories which produce different subjectivities and experiences. The main focus within this research was the intersection of gender and social class. I took a multi-factoral approach to class and as respondents were students, I primarily focused on their parents' highest qualifications, occupations, geographical location (where participants were born/raised/live now) and if their parents were homeowners. Furthermore, I asked whether respondents' friends had gone to university and to self-define in class terms (unsure, working-class, middle-class, elite). I then categorised respondents into working-class (n=16), intermediate (n=9), middle-class (n=14) (see Bradley et al., 2017).

As I have discussed throughout this chapter, despite attempting a variety of recruitment strategies, an overwhelming majority of respondents in this study identified as White British (n=31). The whiteness of my sample is likely to reflect the whiteness of the social category 'student' as 75% of UK domiciled students<sup>43</sup> are white (HESA, 2019c). Furthermore, the category 'stripper' is also predominately white in the UK (Sanders and Hardy, 2014:39-40) and racism within strip clubs has been well documented by scholars as 'white' remains the 'ideal' industry standard (Price-Glynn, 2010; Brooks, 2010; Bradley, 2008). What is more surprising is the lack of ethnic/racial diversity among waitresses considering the high percentage of BME workers in hospitality (ONS, 2018a). Given that most respondents were recruited via referrals,

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<sup>42</sup> For a breakdown of each woman's demographic information including race, nationality, age, class, education, number of interviews, format of interviews, status (job/education) at the time of interview see Appendix 7 and 8.

<sup>43</sup> HESA (2019c) only collects data from UK domiciled students. 1,417,860 of the 1,884,575 students are white which is the equivalent of 75.2%.

this may reflect participants' networks. In Chapter Five, I discuss the privileging effects that race/ethnicity/nationality had on women's experiences at work. Sexuality also played an important role in the strip club and restaurant dynamic and as the majority (n=35)<sup>44</sup> of respondents stated that they were heterosexual, this also provided women an additional sense of privilege.

## Data Analysis

The 52 interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and stored on a password protected computer. I transcribed the first 39 interviews but due to time constraints, the Department of Sociology at City agreed to pay for the transcription of the final 13 interviews. NVivo software was used throughout this project to organise and code the data thematically. I have been inspired by Charmaz's (2017) constructivist grounded theory (CGT) and the application of this method for critical, feminist inquiry. Unlike traditional grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), Charmaz's (2017) CGT aligns with my own ontological and epistemological stance by rejecting positivism and the idea of objective/neutral research. I have not taken a strictly CGT approach as I have applied some existing theories to my data as well as generating 'new' theories. Instead, I have used certain tools and principles outlined by Charmaz (2017). In a practical sense, this involved taking an inductive approach, listening to women's stories, reading the data closely, the development of tentative interpretations and the creation of codes which were eventually refined into themes. CGT also involves a 'constant comparative method' as the researcher compares data with data, codes with codes and codes with categories.

Although this section is at the end of the chapter, as discussed in Chapter One, the data analysis process started during the pilot study. Furthermore, during the recruitment stage I also unintentionally gathered and analysed data in the form of emails and messages from

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<sup>44</sup> Three women stated that they were bi-sexual or that their sexuality was 'fluid' and one woman did not respond to the question.



universities, forum users etc. which, initially, I did not consider to be ‘data’. Following this, I returned to collect and then analyse two additional rounds of interview data making the overall process iterative and ongoing rather than linear, separate or the final stage. The iterative nature of the CGT method demonstrates how our analysis is only ever partial.

As noted, I chose not to gather ‘presearch’ (Reich, 2014:10) or to explicitly use any information from respondents’ social media profiles in the analysis of the data. However, as their social media posts would appear on my newsfeed, I was regularly updated with the changes in participants’ lives. I found the continuing waves of new information, on top of the large amount of data gathered, both overwhelming and difficult to manage; while at the same time trying to attend to the complex and multi-layered nature of each woman’s story on a micro, meso and macro level. Indeed, longitudinal scholars, Henderson et al. (2012) and Finn (2015) have also discussed the lack of ‘analytic closure’ researchers face as there seems to be no end to the data. The biggest challenge was trying to capture the fluidity and ever-changing nature of women’s lives while still needing to write and document their experiences for the purpose of this thesis which felt fixed and permanent. I was initially concerned that I would not have ‘enough’ data, especially if respondents were to drop out of the study by the second interview. However, I realise that my sample size was potentially too large for the type of multi-dimensional analysis that I wanted to carry out.

I consider my data and findings to have been co-constructed between myself and my participants. I do not claim to have ‘discovered’ the findings or that they represent ‘objective truths’ (Charmaz, 2017:38). As the power of representation lies with the researcher, to ensure that I was ‘accurately’ representing women’s voices, this required critical reflexivity and continually questioning the data and my understandings of it. Charmaz (2017:36) argues that the most important preconceptions to excavate are the ones we take for granted, hidden and naturalised often stemming from positions of class, gender, race etc. As I discuss in Chapter

Four, my own personal experiences and preconceptions initially hindered me from representing the social world as my participants experienced it. There are multiple ways the data could have been read and interpreted which I have discussed at certain points throughout the thesis. As mentioned, research can only be partial in its data collection, findings, and in our understandings of our subject area. Yet, through this acknowledgement, as social researchers we presume our ‘non-innocence’ and therefore produce ‘responsible knowledge’ (Blakely, 2007:63).

### Conceptual Toolbox

To present a multidimensional account of young women’s lives, I have examined constructions of the self, identities and experiences, as well as decision and meaning-making processes in relation to HE and the labour market. In taking an exploratory, inductive approach, I have drawn on a number of overlapping concepts – relationality, temporality, emotion, affect, embodiment - which have emerged from the data and have become part of my ‘conceptual toolbox’ (Smart, 2016:16).

#### *Relationality*

It is important to note that I did not set out to take a methodologically relational approach to this study (unlike the research below on private and intimate life which has been useful in helping to make sense of the data). I have been inspired by the work of Kirsty Finn (2015, 2016, 2017), Carol Smart (2016) and Jennifer Mason (2004) and their relational approach to understanding social life. Relationality as a concept has its roots in feminist philosophy (Smart, 2010) and is described as a mode of thinking and reflecting which influences our decisions, actions and choices as relational selves (Finch and Mason, 2000). The focus on relationality challenges theories of individualism put forward by scholars such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), Bauman (2000) and Giddens (1991) which perpetuate neoliberal values of self-interest, personal responsibility, risk-taking etc. Redshaw (2013) argues that theories of individualism conceptualise the self in masculine terms, as dis-embedded/isolated,

autonomous and ‘rational’, privileging separated-ness over connectedness and ignoring the ways that individuals are enmeshed within relations of interdependency.

Focusing on the relational does not mean denying the impact of neoliberal discourses and processes of individualism. I argue that respondents’ narratives are socially and culturally situated and shaped by wider discourses which delimit what can be said, what stories can be told and what will ‘count’ as meaningful (Finn, 2015). Nevertheless, I also argue against overstating the discursive effects of individualism and ignoring respondents’ highly relational concerns. Based on the data, it was clear that young women’s lives and trajectories became meaningful in the context of other people’s lives. For instance, there was more ‘we’ speak than expected, highlighting how individuals should not be seen as isolated given their shared decision-making and priorities. Other people (family/friends/partners/co-workers/children), their stories and lives are sometimes just as important as the main ‘protagonist’ in the study (Smart, 2016:23). However, when referring to relationality, this is not always in reference to purely positive and unproblematic relations and interactions. Indeed, some relationships were unequal and required negotiation.

### *Temporality*

Temporality is at the crux of longitudinal research. As mentioned, transitions research can produce narratives of progress, however by drawing on retrospective accounts, reflection on the past and present were equally important. Griffiths’ (1995:2) metaphor of the spider’s web has been particularly useful in thinking about the self as an intricate entanglement between different notions of past, present and imagined future ‘selves’. This metaphor is also helpful in tying temporality with the concept of relationality as the web is made up of countless strong (and weak), flexible strings which are connected to surroundings and circumstances (geographically but also in relation to structures of class, gender, race as well as personal biographies). The ‘stickiness’ of the web analogy and the difficulty of disentangling and becoming completely autonomous from different ‘selves’ became visible when analysing

women's experiences of leaving or staying within their respective forms of employment (which will be discussed in Chapter Six). Using the concept of temporality to understand constructions of the self helps to frame personhood as a process of being and becoming which is never complete and always responding to changing social contexts (Jackson, 2010).

The work of Hardy and Sanders (2015:121) and their temporal approach to sex worker agency has also been useful in understanding women's mobility within and out of the sex industry *and* waitressing; as well as other forms of labour. Without denying female agency or dismissing the structural conditions that shape such decision-making powers, it is argued that entry into/work within the sex industry (and other industries) is based on differing degrees of past, present, and future desires.

#### *Emotion, affect and embodiment*

Emotions and affect are disputed concepts, however for the purpose of this thesis, I will outline the ways I have interpreted and applied both concepts to the data. For this, I have drawn on Burkitt's (2014, 2018) and Wetherell's (2012:5) conceptualisations of emotion and affect as relational, embodied meaning making which are inextricably linked to the semiotic and discursive. Burkitt (2018) argues that affect and emotion are socially and relationally produced rather than 'irrational', pre-social or purely individual/internal states. Emotions are conceptualised as patterns of relationships between the self and others and the self and the world which give meaning and value to situations, people, things and how they affect us. There are few, if any, experiences/activities which are not accompanied by feelings and emotions. Our emotions are constantly changing and making our lives meaningful as they express our tastes and help us to orientate ourselves.

Affect on the other hand is taken to mean the embodied capacity to be affected by other bodies, to change and/or be moved by feeling and emotion from one state to another in relation to someone/something (Wetherell, 2012). Affect was generated by respondents' bodies and due to the relational nature of stripping/waitressing, women were also affected by other people (and

things). This refers to our ability to generate moods and ‘atmospheres’, which is particularly important within the hospitality and stripping industries.

## Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to document and make sense of the messy and emotional process which characterised this research. By acknowledging the role of the researcher, I do not claim that the ‘knowledge’ produced and discussed throughout this thesis is ‘objective’, or that I have discovered the ‘truth’ about reality/society/my participants. The data and data analysis are instead considered to be co-constructed, partial and open to multiple readings. By remaining transparent and evaluating each step of the process throughout this chapter, I hope to have clarified my own decision-making processes and in doing so, justified the subsequent adaptations to the research design.

At this point in the thesis, waitressing and stripping have not been given equal attention. The challenges I have outlined felt all-consuming and it was difficult to not take the hostile response to my research personally. There were times when I considered changing my research topic based on the reaction that I continued to receive. Yet, at the same time, I also felt that it was important to prioritise and expose the unexpected data/findings that had been produced. By scrutinising the fieldwork process, I was able to reveal a lot about the ‘field’ itself and the general, rather than idiosyncratic, repugnance and intolerance towards sex work(ers). Furthermore, the widespread prioritisation of ‘respectability’ and ‘reputation’ over respect for *Others*.

Through reflexive and critical engagement with the data, I hope to have accurately represented women’s voices and experiences discussed in the following chapters. As noted, the three analysis chapters are presented in a linear timeline form. Chapter Four starts at the beginning of women’s transition through HE by discussing the data collected during the first round of interviews and of women’s experiences of becoming a (working) student.

## Chapter Four: Becoming a Student

### Introduction

This chapter contributes to the literature on student transitions into HE in three ways. Firstly, despite common conceptualisations of students as ‘rational’, isolated consumers (c.f. Nixon et al., 2018), the data suggests that decision-making processes are far from individualised and are instead, relational, emotional and shaped by factors which go beyond the economic or educational concerns of students. Secondly, I explore the various strategies employed by women and the dynamic ways that they engage with university, work and leisure which ‘deviate’ from the ‘normative’ student-university dyad. Finally, I problematise the two dominant representations of students as either a homogenous/unified (middle-class) category or working-class and middle-class students as oppositional. By highlighting the complexity and heterogeneity of classed experiences, the aim is to offer a more nuanced account of student transitions.

### *‘Everyone goes to university’*

Data from this research challenges the crude positioning of middle-class transitions and experiences of university as oppositional to working-class, with the former portrayed as seamless and the latter as fraught (c.f. Davey, 2012). For example, Reay (2016:135) argues that university is so taken-for-granted by middle-class students that it is a ‘non-decision’ and simply ‘what people like us do’, whereas for working-class students, university is a very deliberate and ambivalent choice. However, when I asked respondents how they made their decision to go to university, regardless of class position, the majority of women did not have a clear rationale and instead, considered university to be the obvious, logical next step in their lives. This was based on the assumption that *everybody* (real and generalised others) goes to university.

“I was very academic at school, so it was always something I was gonna do. I was always the bookworm, so it was, erm, like the logical step” (Stephanie, waitress/working-class).

““Cos everyone else did (laughs). I didn’t know what I wanted to do and everyone else went to uni so I was like, well I might as well” (Brooke, dancer/waitress/working-class).

“I just think you sort of, it’s put to you, like, you go to school, you go college, you go uni. So, I dunno why, I always had in me head that’s what you do and that’s what I did...especially if you’re not stupid or you don’t go and do something hands-on. I feel like that’s the route you’re meant to take” (Kate, waitress/working-class).

Not *everybody* goes to university and as working-class first-generation students, going to university is not as ‘obvious’ as Kate implies. This highlights how decisions were in-part, shaped by wider, dominant discourses (outlined in Chapter Two) which have normalised middle-class values and expectations of going to university (Gillies, 2005; Christie, 2009:127).

As with all choices in life, there is a constant tension between macro/structural forces - for example, the socio-political climate at the time - and individual agency. However, in her more recent work, Reay (2018:531) argues that as more jobs now require higher levels of education, going to university is no longer a choice for working-class students, but rather a necessity. Indeed, several women in this research were career-driven and university was seen to provide access to the high-paid, better jobs. Due to the expansion of HE and credential inflation, intra-group differences among students/graduates have become more important. Middle-class families have also intensified their efforts as means of securing advantage for their children (see Purcell et al, 2012; Bradley et al., 2017). Thus, class inequality in HE is no longer about exclusion *from* the system but exclusion *within* it (Reay, 2018:531). This was apparent within the data as although most respondents expected to go to university, their choice of *where* to study was not a free choice.

“I looked at, erm [post-1992 university A], which didn’t give me an interview so that was already precluded to me (laughs). I looked at [Russell Group university] but I didn’t apply for that because I just didn’t like the vibe. I went for an open day and it seemed quite, erm I dunno, quite, not quite, erm, my environment, not quite as *diverse* as I would like it. Erm and then where else did I look, I looked at [post-1992 university B] as well and I got an offer from there but then I prefer [University of London member institution]” (Anna, waitress).

Anna's (waitress/working-class) quote highlights the embodied nature of class which has affective qualities. Several respondents referred to a specific 'atmosphere' during open-days or to the 'feel' of a university which shaped their decisions about where to study. Choices are, therefore, not always purely 'rational' or strategic but are also affectively and emotionally driven. Importantly, as a working-class woman from Italy, Anna (waitress) considered herself to 'fit' somewhere in-between the two extremes of the 'elite' and 'new' institution rather than at either end of a binary.

Sarah, Sophia and Ashley (dancers) described themselves as 'middle-class and privately educated'. However, as Sophia and Ashley (dancers) were EU students this complicates their class position as they may not be straightforwardly 'middle-class' in the context of the UK. Nevertheless, their parents were university educated and had high-status careers (Sophia's mother was a lawyer, and Ashley's mother was a university professor) and based on their narratives, their families shared the same value system and parenting practices as middle-class parents in the UK. For example, their daughter's 'success' was tightly monitored and fretted over. Both mothers sought to pass on their privilege to their children and at the same time, appeared to worry about an increasing threat of downward mobility (Gillies 2005). For all three women, university was considered to be 'non-negotiable' - and similar to the argument above (Reay, 2016) – something that 'you just do', regardless of whether or not you might actually want to do it.

Sophia and Sarah (dancers/middle-class) had a more fraught and intermittent relationship with university. Sophia initially started university, dropped out halfway through her course and then returned as a mature student over 10 years later. When I met Sophia, her passion for dance and performing was almost palpable. Since dropping out of university, she had been working in different capacities as a dancer, however this was not something that her mother considered to be a suitable 'career'.



“I’m a really good dancer, you have to play with what you’ve got (laughs). Dancing really suited me, it suited my personality, it suited me the way that I didn’t really have much of a plan. But my mum wouldn’t leave me alone with getting a degree...my Mum is a lawyer, she’s studied a lot, she’s very intelligent, she was like, ‘What are you going to do with your life?!’ ‘You know, you’re not going to be young forever!’ So that’s one of the reasons I did a degree too ‘cos I was like the moment I gave her my degree, the moment I got it in my hand I was like, ‘This is yours, now leave me alone’ (laughs)” (Sophia, dancer).

Sophia talks of handing her degree over to her mother both literally and figuratively which demonstrates how her choice to go to university was shaped by pressure and conflict as her mother’s hopes and desires eventually took precedence over her own. Sophia’s experience deviates from dominant understandings of middle-class transitions as seamless or linear and highlights how decisions about HE, are relational and rarely made in isolation.

Similar to Sophia, Sarah (middle-class) actively delayed her entry to university by taking a gap year to travel. She returned at the age of 20 and was interviewed for a place at the University of Cambridge. As her application was unsuccessful and her plans were involuntarily changed, she decided to travel again. Sarah stated that going to university was never a question of *if* but rather *when*. After three years, her family were becoming impatient and so she re-applied and was accepted to study at a plate-glass university. Sarah felt that she struggled to fit in as a mature student (aged 23) and similar to Sophia, she dropped out halfway through her course. Due to continued pressure from her family to gain qualifications, she then reappplied to university at the age of 25, this time to a post-92 institution which had a larger in-take of non-traditional and mature students. Relaying this story is not an attempt to show Sarah’s (dancer) ‘downward spiral’ in terms of university prestige, but instead to highlight another example which challenges the portrayal of middle-class student trajectories into university as homogenously unproblematic (Davey, 2012).

By complicating our understandings of student trajectories and experiences, this can help to challenge unhelpful and simplistic binary thought. For example, Christie (2009:131) argues that the traditional middle-class student accepts the value of university education, has

access to resources and as a result, their experience is one of emotional security. While Ashley's (dancer/middle-class) transition was linear, her experience was far from 'carefree and confident' as implied in existing scholarship.

"I had like no love and no passion and no interest in it [university] at all...I realised like, shit! This is a mistake! But at the time I definitely didn't have the balls to quit because when I finished school there was the added [familial/societal] pressure, you finish school, you go to university and straight to university and *everybody* goes to university... oh my God, like if I went to London and like a month later was like, 'I'm quitting', if I go back to [home country] neighbours would be throwing stones at me (laughs). Like that literally would be happening. So, I was like I have no choice, I'm staying so I can say I've done it" (Ashley, dancer).

Despite feeling unhappy and even trapped, Ashley continued to keep up appearances as she feared the potential shame of being seen by others (real and generalised) as a failure. It is clear that for certain people, at certain ages, HE is not the right option. Ashley and Sophia may have felt added pressure in comparison to British middle-class students as their families had invested – financially and emotionally – in their move to the UK and in their education/success. For example, Ashley stated that her mother had always ensured that she attended the 'top, best, elite, private schools' in her area and that she took great pride in Ashley's academic achievements.

While families can be a source of support for young people, they can also feel like, or be experienced as, an obligation. Gillies (2005) argues that middle-class parents often approach their parenting like a 'project'. This was clear from Ashley's narrative. She stated that she regularly argued with her mother, "I'm just like can you please stop like teaching me how to live my life". Moving to the UK and undertaking a degree carried multiple, contradictory, meanings for Ashley. On the one hand, her degree felt constraining, however on the other hand, her mother was 'no longer on [her] back' (for the next three years at least) and this emotional space, combined with geographical distance was described as liberating. Ashley stated that she gained a sense of independence in that "[her] Mum knows very little about [her] life now".

### ‘I wasn’t a *real* student’

The data suggests that dominant ideas around what it means to be a student have barely changed despite the growing ‘diversification’ of the student population. This has resulted in the formation of several binaries, such as traditional/non-traditional, home/away, full-time/part-time and young/mature. No woman in this research felt that they fit the ‘ideal’ student image and while they considered themselves to be students and adopted a student-identity, many respondents did not consider themselves to be ‘real’ students. By taking into account women’s personal life and private matters (see Finn, 2015), the data shows how decision-making processes and transitions to university are also shaped by factors *beyond* more obvious economic and/or educational concerns.

Chloe (waitress/working-class) lived with her parents while she completed a two-year foundational degree at her local college followed by a top-up year at a local university. Previous research has shown that students with fragile/unconfident relationships with education (read: working-class) tend to opt for this more familiar and supportive route as it is considered to be less ‘risky’ financially and culturally (Reay et al., 2013:111)<sup>45</sup>. While both educational and economic factors played an important role in shaping Chloe’s decision, her choice was also heavily impacted by her experience of domestic violence with a former male partner throughout her A-levels.

“I wasn’t all together then. That’s why I regret it [not moving away for university]. I think if things had of been different in me life then I would of done better at me A-levels and actually stuck in and went to uni and I would of moved away... I don’t feel like I’ve had a proper student life if you know what I mean ‘cos I lived at home and ‘cos I didn’t go to uni properly” (Chloe, waitress).

University transitions are both classed *and* gendered (see Evans, 2010). Being a victim of, and ultimately surviving this highly gendered crime, appeared to influence her decision more than

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<sup>45</sup> Chloe and Victoria’s fees were around £2,500 per year for the first two years and £7,800 for the final top-up year totalling £12,800 in comparison to university fees which would have cost up to £27,000 at the time, making this route around £14,200 cheaper.

money or confidence as her desire to remain close to her family who were supporting her, emotionally and in other ways, through this traumatic time took precedence over having a ‘real’ student experience.

Similarly, Victoria (waitress/working-class) also completed a foundational degree and top-up year at her local FEI.

“I didn’t really do the whole student life thing, like lived away and stuff like that. So that’s probably one thing I regret” (Victoria, waitress).

As working-class first-generation students, both women stated that they regretted their decision to stay at home and not move away for university. By comparing their experiences to ‘real’ (read: middle-class) students, their own university experience becomes invalidated. The simple transference of middle-class expectations of university onto working-class women does not take into account the very different material circumstances. This has real effects as Chloe and Victoria (waitresses) were left feeling that they had missed out/were lacking. Victoria (waitress) described herself as a failure as she started studying, dropped out and later returned to education.

“I’m a pure drop out (laughs). When I went back [to education] this time, I thought, right I need to really stick at something here. So, I did health and social care again from the start” (Victoria, waitress).

As students are constructed by the state as autonomous, rational actors with choice (Nixon et al., 2018), ‘choosing’ to drop out or failing to complete a degree becomes an individual failure. Indeed, Victoria describes herself as ‘a pure drop out’ and blames herself for her apparent inability to ‘stick’ to anything. What is not mentioned is that Victoria was in a position of financial precarity, she was working part-time in two restaurants and was also a full-time carer for her father. External pressures made ‘sticking’ in education far more difficult than for many other students.

Universities continue to impose the same demands on all students without any concern for such structural inequalities. What remains missing in HE is an acknowledgement of the impact care work - performed primarily by working-class women - can have. Evan's (2009:352) argues that working-class women's investment in family networks and their willingness and desire (or I would add, obligation) to perform such care work remains largely unrecognised and is not accounted for in the structure and culture of the university system. Victoria's desire, necessity and/or obligation to care and to earning an income were a central part of her decision-making regarding university and geographical mobility.

### Experiences of the 'student lifestyle'

Christie (2009:131-2) found that working-class students felt that they had missed out on the social aspect of university-life due to financial precarity, part-time work and other commitments. Indeed, a review of the international research on first-generation students found that they did not become as involved in student life as other students (Spiegler and Bednarek, 2013). Reay et al. (2001, 2005) argue that the social experience is central to middle-class students' motivation for going to university making them as concerned about their social life and making friends as they are about their studies. Middle-class students are said to prioritise activities such as going 'clubbing' and see university as about opening up opportunities, meeting new and different people and developing their identity. At the other end of the spectrum, working-class students are said to strategically opt out of such activities and avoid or limit their engagement in the university milieu.

On the contrary, data from this research suggests that regardless of the 'type' of university or class position of students, the majority of women considered the social aspect of university to be just as, if not more, important than studying. When I asked Kate (waitress/working-class) what she had enjoyed about being a student she replied,

"Moving to a new city, going out *all* the time (laughs), meeting everybody, the student life generally, the academic side was just a bonus" (Kate, waitress/working-class).

The ‘public story’ about university has shifted particularly within popular culture<sup>46</sup>. Students in this research frequently described their experience at university as ‘fun’ or even ‘wild’. Respondents clearly enjoyed socialising with new people, not having any ‘real’ responsibilities and having a student loan for financial support.

"You meet new people and you get to just go out every night and you're allowed to and you can do stupid shit and spend money on stuff that you shouldn't because you know you're gonna get another loan, it's just freedom" (Brooke, dancer/waitress/working-class).

University was also an opportunity for identity exploration/formation for working-class students. Respondents referred to gaining a sense of independence, growing up and becoming more confident (Phillipa, dancer). Age appeared to shape women's experiences in this context more than their class with ‘mature’ students claiming that they had passed the clubbing/party stage in their lives associated with being young and a student.

“I’ve loved meeting so many different people, I’ve met so many like lifelong friends that I’ll have for the rest of my life. I wasn’t out *every night* partying all the time like the others but it’s just a really good experience” (Phoebe, waitress/working-class/mature student).

Crozier et al. (2008:174) contend that middle-class students are able to enhance their privilege at university not only through knowledge but in terms of their social and cultural capital as they establish networks. Working-class students on the other hand are said to choose ‘new’ universities where they can live and study with ‘people like them’. The authors argue that by failing to widen their social circle, this reinforces their low social capital, constrains their experience and leads to further disadvantage. By understanding friendships/relationships as a (middle-class) resource or form of capital which students are able to accumulate at university highlights more invisible forms of advantage embedded within the HE system (see Friedman and Laurison, 2019). Yet, at the same time, regardless of class, respondents in this research

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<sup>46</sup> For example, comedy drama series *Fresh Meat* follows the lives of six students ‘*embarking on the most exciting period of their lives so far*’ (Channel4, 2011).

described the close connections, meaning and emotional support gained from friendships/relationships they had established at university. By only focusing on what/where friendships/relationships can get you (see Finn, 2015:62), this ignores the emotional and personal significance of such relationships which were not simply a form of self-accumulation or understood as ‘disadvantage’. Friendships at university mattered to women as they were considered to be lifelong relationships. The shared experience of university tied people together and such relationships became a central part of their experience. Making friends, fitting in and having fun at university appears to be a priority for many people, regardless of class. However, for the women in this research, relationships had the potential to be both strategically *and* symbolically important.

### Becoming a working student

*‘I’ve always been (hard)working’*

Historically, students did not work alongside their studies and this is often still the case within many elite institutions (Brennan and Patel, 2008:21). For that reason, all 39 respondents ‘deviated’ from the ‘ideal’ student image by virtue of their part-time job. Most respondents had engaged in paid labour prior to becoming a student. Indeed, working-class respondents emphasised how they had always worked and claimed this was the result of their hard-working nature, a good work ethic and desire to keep busy. Women took pride in the young age that they entered the labour market with some starting work as young as 12.

“I’ve always been working. I’ve been working since I was like 12... I was getting paid something like fucking £12 a week. When I was 13, I had a job washing dishes I got paid £3.35 an hour... I really have like worked *hard*... I’ve done like proper fucking like slave labour style work by the time I got to [university] I’d already done my fair share of like crap, shite jobs” (Olivia, dancer).

“I was always pretty used to like *really* hard work ‘cos I’ve been working since I was 15 and I’ve always been brought up to know that like, if I make the money I’m earning then I’m spending it because I’ve earned it...I’ve just always had that mind-set where like you know nothing was too hard and I would just do it, you know” (Lucy, waitress).

“I think it’s important like getting up in the morning, going to work, being responsible, making money, but I’ve always worked. I’ve worked since I was 15... my Mum just wanted me to like

learn the value of money... I'm used to it like I just think it's really, really helped me, like I have a good work ethic, like I don't mind working, I've never phoned in sick at work" (Phoebe, waitress).

Lehmen's (2009) study on the experiences of working-class, first-generation students in Canada also found that participants reconstructed structural disadvantage to an individualised moral advantage in similar ways. In having to work from a young age and in typically working-class jobs – described by Olivia (dancer) as 'crap, shite, slave-labour' – Lehmen (2009) argues that individuals consider themselves to have earned first-hand experience of the 'real' world of work, specifically in comparison to their peers who have not had to work as hard. Respondents expressed a sense of moral advantage as they describe themselves as *more* mature, responsible and independent. Furthermore, many women considered their families to have passed on a working-class stoicism which was understood as admirable.

*(Blurring) the boundaries between university, work and 'life'*

The majority of women stated that the most negative aspect of becoming a student was having a limited income and struggling financially. The extent of financial hardship differed based on family support, access to student finance and other forms of external funding, spending habits and living expenses. The income they generated from their respective jobs also differed depending on the number of hours worked, the amount they were paid and the type of job they had which not only differed between waitressing and stripping but also between individual waitresses and strippers. While some women worked to maintain a certain standard of living, for others, working was a means of survival as student finance was not enough to cover their outgoings.

"Just the money situation like it's really, really difficult. I've not got like an expensive lifestyle or anything, like I can do without and I still struggled. It was just not a nice feeling but everyone's in the same boat which is, you know, you're not the only person and so I suppose that's a good thing" (Phoebe, waitress/working-class).

Phoebe (waitress) acknowledged that her financial precarity was a constraint, however she also felt that her experience of relative poverty was a shared student experience (real and generalised



others) rather than individualised. Phoebe's assumption that all students are in 'the same boat' is likely to reflect her own group of friends and the demographic of students at her university who are also 'like her'/in the same position (c.f. Reay et al., 2008).

Admittedly, I was surprised to learn that struggling financially was not a strictly working-class experience. Indeed, Zara (strip club waitress/middle-class) described herself as being 'doubly punished' as she did not receive full financial support from Student Finance, which is means-tested, nor did she receive financial support from her parents.

"I did feel like why can't I get any money? It just adds to the stress of university life. I'd never ever say for a minute that I wish that I didn't have to work while I was a student, I've always worked. I'd hate the thought of not working and not having money that's mine and I've earned it, but I do kind of wish I didn't have a lot of the stress that obviously you face through having to work 30 hours a week as well as trying to get your degree" (Zara, waitress, strip club).

Evans et al. (2014:83) argue that some students prioritise part-time work and immediate financial gains over the longer-term benefits of university. Furthermore, that the same students 'lack the commitment' to fully engage in their studies to accommodate their work. While the authors individualise structural inequality, far from lacking commitment, many women in this research struggled with the demands of both work and university which produced intense feelings of worry and guilt.

"It's always playing in the back of your mind. I was like, 'I shouldn't be at work, I should be doing uni work rather than this' [waitressing]. It's kind of a waste of my time. Obviously, I know I need to work, and I need to earn money. If I went in and it was dead and there's like three of us just standing around it's like ah! I could be writing my dissertation right now or I could be revising, that I found quite tough" (Lauren, waitress).

Similar to students in Christie's (2009:133) research, respondents were envious of those who were privileged enough to 'just *be* a student'. Scholars have consistently found that students create spatio-temporal boundaries between different aspects of their lives (see Brennan and Patel, 2008). For example, students in Christie et al's (2005:13) research considered themselves to be 'day students' and treated university like a 9 to 5 job. This helped students to maintain clear boundaries between university, work and their personal lives. Similarly, Rachel (working-class/dancer) sought/struggled to establish temporal boundaries by working and going to

university on separate days. Strict boundaries were important for Rachel, practically and psychologically, as she attempted to juggle three emotionally laborious forms of work (motherhood, a counselling course and working as a stripper) which made it difficult to switch from one identity/role to the other.

“Stripping is just one side of me, it’s one aspect of my *self* but there’s different parts. I’ve got different faces, you know. I think everyone does. People are daughters, or mothers, or they’re friends, you know whatever it is. But I couldn’t just change like from one to the other...I was finding I wasn’t getting college work done. I felt quite chaotic I was all over the place, my head felt cluttered. So there was a lot of time management involved and it’s very busy. I just found all I was doing was working and studying. Like when people were talking about how their weekends had been and what they’d done, mine was just like, I’ve been working or studying, there was nothing else. So, it’s so difficult to have any kind of self-care or go out and do anything” (Rachel, dancer).

Rachel’s quote tells quite a different story to respondents in the previous section. Despite searching endlessly for a sense of equilibrium she described feeling chaotic. Not only was she juggling more responsibilities than most students, but she also felt unable to put anything down. Several students were physically and mentally pushed to their limits with feelings of sleep deprivation and burn-out.

“I don’t sleep a lot, but I like to keep busy...I want three jobs it gives me something to do with my time...more often than not I crash and burn. Every now and again I will literally crash and then I’ll take like a weekend off or something, get myself back together, and do it again” (Brooke, dancer/waitress).

“Dancing, waitressing and university, that was a really, really fun period in my life called the insomnia period (laughs). Basically, you get up at 5am you go and do your waitressing until midday then go to university until, last lecture ends at about 5/6pm-ish and you come home have a nap, shower and head off to the club at 7/8pm-ish come home 3am-ish” (Gemma, dancer/waitress).

Brooke and Gemma’s (dancers/waitresses) quote illustrate a broader theme of the normalisation and even valorisation of over-working among women in this study. As Gemma’s (dancer/waitress) quote demonstrates, women’s lives were in a constant state of flux as they moved from one workplace to another. Respondents struggled to establish a ‘balance’ because of a lack of fixity in their different schedules. For example, the number of contact hours and

time they were expected to physically attend university varied<sup>47</sup>. The time they were expected to study changed depending on assessments and final year dissertations in particular. Some students were also expected to engage in unpaid internships and placements at different points throughout the year which were sometimes equivalent to full-time working hours. As waitresses, respondents either worked shifts, were on ZHC or worked on an ad-hoc basis as agency staff. Women working as self-employed strippers also had varied working patterns.

In theory, students were expected to ‘be available’ and to prioritise seminars and lectures which typically take place Monday to Friday 9:00-18:00. This meant that respondents had to find non-standard work with ‘flexible’ (typically ‘unsocial’) hours to fit around university. It was assumed by respondents (and potentially employers) that as managers were often ‘flexible’ with their working schedules, that they were ‘obliged’ to return this ‘favour’ by being flexible and available to work as/when they were needed in the restaurant/strip club i.e. to cover a shift or work additional hours. With no mention of class, Evans et al. (2014:88) argue that *some* students are more ‘susceptible’ to persuasion from managers asking them to do overtime, whereas others can ignore excessive demands of employers and focus on their future by prioritising university. However, failure to comply to manager demands can have negative repercussions for employees; particularly those with unstable or no employment contract. Respondents stated that turning down additional work was often reflected in the following rota as management favoured those who had ‘helped out’ and ‘punished’ those who refused to work by giving them fewer or unfavourable shifts.

Participants’ working week varied and was subject to change (in regard to days and hours). As noted, this made any attempt at finding a balance futile given that they were not always sure when they would be required to engage in work as students, waitresses, strippers

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<sup>47</sup> The actual time students are (un/officially) expected to be studying/at university varies. For example, for council tax purposes it is a minimum of 21 hours per week. Some university websites state 32-36 hours per week, 2 hours of self-study for every one contact hour. UCAS (2019a) recommendation to postgraduate students is, “...the idea is that, as a full-time student, your commitment to study is above six or seven hours per day.”

or other capacities i.e. mothers and/or caregivers. In addition to – and often the result of – temporal changes in both work and university, respondents' income was also subject to change and varied weekly/monthly making financial planning and organisation difficult. In an attempt to regain a sense of stability and control over their busy schedules, several women stated that they tried to account for every minute and to remain *constantly* 'productive'.

“So, *every minute* of my day has to be used productively. I've learnt how to be much more efficient which, in the end, is a good thing. It's just good for your life in general” (Holly, dancer).

Neoliberalism demands high productivity in compressed time frames which - similar to Weber's (1958) analysis of the Protestant work ethic – commands self-disciplining individuals to dedicate their lives to constant, methodical work as if it were a calling or a moral duty. It is clear that Holly was not only pushed to reduce idle time but to also reframe overworking in positive terms and as something which is useful and worthwhile. This sense of Puritanism has continued to haunt our understandings of work and our consciousness as employees (Weeks, 2011). Feeling pressured to remain constantly busy has arguably intensified over the past forty years becoming an accepted indicator of 'getting it [life] *right*' (Davies and Bansel, 2007). To maximise their level of efficiency, rather than separating work, university and 'life', some students actively blurred the boundaries between the multiple dimensions of their lives. For example, several women reported bringing their university work to the restaurant or strip club to read during quiet periods.

“I'd just like take some reading for uni and then sometimes I'd get more work done sat there [in the strip club] 'cos I'd have nothing else to do. So sometimes it really did work in my favour and you know, like I'd sometimes brought my laptop and sat and done work there knowing it was gonna be a quiet Monday night or something” (Zara, waitress, strip club).

The active blurring of boundaries between work and other aspects of life has become a common facet of post-Fordism. Workers are increasingly expected to invest more of their time and 'self' into their work (Coffey et al., 2018:729), or to resist the idea of working for money alone. Participants also blurred work/leisure and considered working in the NTE to double-up as

time/space to socialise and enjoy the ‘carnavalesque atmosphere’ of the strip club or restaurant while at the same time earning/saving money. Indeed, work is increasingly posited as a key site of self-fulfilment, fun and pleasure which will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Five. This positive framing of overwork perpetuates the idea that work *should* be ubiquitous in our lives and overworking was taken-for-granted and expected by students. However, Weeks (2010:43) argues that in order to challenge this understanding, as a society, we must first think of overworking as *strange*.

#### *Consequences of blurring boundaries for student sex workers*

Based on the data, it appeared that universities were largely non-responsive to working students and rarely made adjustments to meet students’ needs. Instead, students were expected to be flexible/adaptable/fit around the supposedly immutable university timetable. As I will discuss in the following chapter, many women – waitresses and dancers – were able to draw on their student identity in their respective workplaces to ‘pass’ and claim respectability in response to the judgemental middle-class gaze. However, if/when the stripper identity blurred with the student identity within the realm of the university, this had extremely negative repercussions for some women. While previous research has highlighted the prevalence of gendered student-to-student bullying on campus, including slut-shaming (see Armstrong et al., 2014), student sex workers are likely to face further, specific discrimination due to their involvement in the sex industry and the associated ‘whore-stigma’ (Pheterson, 1996). This claim is supported by Phillipa’s (dancer) experience of being targeted and outed by another student who took photographs of her without her permission while she was at work. This ‘evidence’ was later reported to senior management within the university and Phillipa was ‘punished’ for her gendered transgression.

“They [Head of Department, HoD] called me in and they were really judgemental. She had these photos of me and she was like, ‘What would your family and friends think of you for doing this?’ Which is an absolutely outrageous thing to say to someone. That’s her personal opinion; I’m not doing anything wrong. She just said it was like unprofessional which is absolute bullshit and I had to write 1,000 words of why I was in the wrong so I could go back

[to university]. I was basically suspended for a while and I took the choice, it was my choice to leave, but I did have to write 1,000 words to say that these pictures weren't acceptable. They're not even bad pictures it's just me dancing... I went and spoke to student services and I spoke to the head of nursing to see what they thought about it and they did say like because it comes under sex work, any student doing that would have to do a fitness for practice document which is ridiculous because dancing's not gonna affect the way I nurse, it's absolute bullshit. It was awful. I was really scared to go back to uni. I was really anxious about it but now I am back, I'm in a brand-new cohort, so no one knows me, I'm starting afresh. So I am much happier now, but it was *horrible*, it was really hard" (Phillipa, dancer).

Despite the majority of institutions in the UK having codes of conduct which makes behaviour that brings the university into 'disrepute' a disciplinary offence, there are no specific policies relating to student engagement in sex work (see Cusick et al. (2009) for research on universities in England and Scotland and Sagar et al. (2016) regarding Welsh institutions). As a student nurse, Phillipa was also expected to adhere to professional codes of practice. The Nursing and Midwifery Council Guidance on Professional conduct demands that a student's "...behaviour and conduct inside *and outside* of the university and clinical placement, including your personal life, may impact on your fitness to practice and ability to complete your programme". Furthermore, clause 54 demands that students "uphold the reputation of [their] chosen profession at all times" (Sagar et al., 2016:410).

What marks a student as 'unfit for practice' is vague, left to staff interpretation and in Phillipa's case, based on harmful, sexist representations of sex workers as 'bad women'. The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) does not appear to formally align with such views as they publicly support both the decriminalisation of sex work and the need to rid sex workers of stigma/shame/victimisation which demonstrates how 'fitness' should not be interpreted this way. The irony is that Phillipa was working as a dancer to fund her degree. Given that there is no longer an NHS bursary for students on nursing, midwifery or Allied Health Professional courses, it is likely that other students may also turn to different forms of work as a result. Phillipa described facing psychological distress as she was forced to postpone her studies and put her life on hold to avoid further stigmatisation and exclusion. While Phillipa chose to return

to the same institution, despite the mistreatment that she experienced, not all students may have felt able to do so which could have long-term and far-reaching effects on a student's prospects.

Given their 'stronger' social standing as students, some women felt able to come out and were able to negotiate the stigma associated with being a student due to their more respectable social standing as white, middle-class students. Drawing on their other identities allowed some women to resist stigma and attempt to transform their student sex worker image through information/education/consciousness raising. As I discuss in more detail in the next chapter, many women in this research, by virtue of their university courses/being a student, considered themselves to be politically active/engaged and this had a direct impact on their everyday experiences at university and work. For example, Gemma (intermediate/dancer/waitress) stated that she and a fellow student sex worker tried to take action at their university by writing an article for their university's student newspaper. They also created an anonymous forum for student sex workers as a source of peer support and formed a 'sex-positive' student society. The aim was to challenge stigma and to educate both staff and students on how to respond to students working in the sex industry. The article was successful in bringing the issue to the attention of senior members of staff. However, rather than supporting students politically, the university sought to 'rescue' students from the sex industry.

"The response from the university about it was like, 'Oh yeah, we'll help these students leave these jobs' and it's like well, what if they don't want to leave? Would you say that to a student who was working as, you know, like a waitress or anything else? Would you say, 'Oh yeah, no don't worry we'll help you leave the job'" (Gemma, dancer/waitress).

Gemma and other students (see Lister, 2019) do not want more paternalism or top-down rescue missions. Again, beyond the more obvious matter of providing proper funding and financial support for students, institutions need clear policies affirming that students will not be expelled from their course for being, or having been, a sex worker.

## University: 'main thing' or the new side-hustle?<sup>48</sup>

Respondents negotiated university, work and other commitments in a variety of ways which 'deviated' from the 'normative' student-university dyad. For many women, university and their part-time jobs as waitresses/strippers were interdependent. Their paid work was considered to be a temporary means of supporting their more important goal of obtaining a degree. However, for others – dancers specifically – it appeared that the opposite was true. Rather than university being their 'main thing', instead it was positioned as a 'side-hustle'. This refers to work that is typically done 'on the side' of other forms of labour, during free time, on weekends, evenings, not only to supplement income but also as a capital accumulation strategy in preparation for other livelihood opportunities (Mwaura, 2017). For example, Holly (dancer) was a full-time International student who had multiple hustles. Similar to the students in Christie's (2009) research, Holly did not want university to become 'the be-all and end-all' in her life as she wanted to be '*more than just a student*'.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Ashley (dancer) was unhappy on her course but felt that she *had* to complete her degree due to familial pressure. University became something she did on the side of other more important things such as stripping; rather than the other way around.

"Very quickly I went from this responsible student who had to work a couple of days a week just to support myself to a full-time stripper who also went to university, like, when she *had to*" (Ashley, dancer).

Cassie's (dancer) main priority and overall goal was to become a professional dancer which typically does not require a degree. Cassie acknowledged that pursuing a career in dance is difficult, competitive and relatively short-term which renders this career-path 'risky'. As all labour market success/failure becomes individualised, young people and their families are

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<sup>48</sup> The 'side-hustle' as a concept will be problematised in further detail in Chapter Six.



encouraged to protect themselves from uncertainty. Cassie considered investing in credentials to be one way she could minimise the potential negative repercussions *if* her dance career ‘failed’. Having a degree was seen as a back-up or Plan B which offered a sense of security.

"I wanted to have qualifications because I feel as a dancer, you need some backup and you know to not have a degree is quite risky. I think you stand a better chance when you've got one, I kind of wanted this [degree] as a base" (Cassie, dancer).

Emma (dancer/intermediate) was at the other end of the spectrum to a full-time student, part-time worker as she considered university, or more specifically Student Finance, to be a source of financial support helping her to pursue her ‘main thing’ which was her work as a performer (outside the stripping industry, but also related). I have conceptualised university as a side-hustle in this context as it becomes a capital accumulation strategy in preparation for other livelihood opportunities. Indeed, rather than working in order to study, Emma was studying in order to fund her work in the creative industries.

“I just applied [to university] at the time because I really wanted to stay in London and pursue performing and like events producing and stuff. So I applied because I was like ‘Oh, I’m gonna have a loan and it’s going to help support me and I will have to study but it’s kind of better than working like an eight hour job somewhere like every day for like minimum wage and then also trying to pursue dance’. It’s kind of worked out better for me this way. It is harder, I’m kind of failing but just about scraping a pass. I’m just *so* passionate about that side of things [performing] but it is kind of good to show that you can commit to something in that way... in November, I was working a lot and I just thought I was going to drop out again (laughs) ‘cos I just didn’t go to uni for like a term. Then a month ago, I was like ‘No, I need to go back’. So, I went and I’m not as present as I should be, but I think my tutors know that and like the rest of my peers. I have a whole other career so I’m not going to feel bad about it because I have something that they don’t. But it’s *very* difficult to work and study” (Emma, dancer).

There are several factors to address here and arguably, multiple, different ways of understanding Emma’s experience. On the one hand, Emma could be seen as the ‘ideal’ self-governing, enterprising neoliberal subject. For example, she has made a *rational* cost-benefit analysis whereby accruing high-levels of student debt (a debt which has become normalised and expected) is the better option than working in several low-paid jobs. Emma appears to have found a ‘solution’ to her (individual) ‘problem’ by investing in her future and risk-taking

(Marques, 2010:319). However, by becoming financially dependent on the continuation of her student loan, dropping out or failing her course were no longer seen as ‘options’ which was (unsurprisingly) experienced as severely stressful.

Finn (2015:25) argues that understanding people’s lives through individualising discourses portrays young people as rational actors, devoid of emotion. However, similar to other ‘creative’ workers i.e. actors, musicians, artists, designers, Emma was pursuing not only a career in performance but also, her ‘passion’. Several dancers also constructed dancing/stripping as art/creative work which required skill and commitment to hone their craft. The high level of commitment, hard work and stress (and debt) described by Emma in order to pursue her career may be characteristic of creative work(ers) more broadly rather than unique to student strippers. For example, Cohen (2019) argues that the social construction of creative work not as ‘work’ but as a labour of love, often leads to high levels of ‘self-exploitation’ as individuals are required and willing to work long-hours, endure unpaid internships and repeated insecure contracts in order to be able to continue ‘doing what they love’ (c.f. Sandoval, 2018). Yet, this fails to address how and why it is far easier for some individuals to pursue certain career than others (this will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Six). Moreover, this example brings the purpose and value of going to university under serious question if individuals are entering HE (and high levels of debt) not for educational, or even occupational purposes, but rather as a means of income generation.

## Conclusion

The data that has been discussed throughout this chapter was generated from the first conversations that I had with respondents regarding their transitions *into* HE. During the 39 interviews, I heard stories of injustice, some of which were shared, others which were unique to student sex workers. I wanted to expose and critique the HE system that continues to perpetuate deep-seated class and gender inequalities. I assumed that to do so, I should focus on

women's negative experiences, as this would somehow strengthen the argument that I was trying to make. I realised that in looking for misery, that was exactly what I found (Lawler, 2005:434). I had disregarded data that contradicted the coherent story that I was trying to tell and had (re)presented the lives of working-class respondents in the same manner as much existing literature and as lacking and bleak. Furthermore, by restricting my focus to the 'problematic' working-class respondents, this meant that I overlooked and oversimplified the experiences of middle-class women's lives.

By returning to the data and changing my approach, I have instead attempted to capture the complexities and multiple rather than singular meanings of women's decision-making processes and experiences of becoming a student. For example, women's lives were constrained by their class and gender as they struggled financially and were, at times, unable to juggle competing demands. Contrary to most literature which suggests that students establish clear boundaries, women in this research actively blurred work, university and leisure. This normalised overworking and led to experiences of sleep deprivation and burnout as "every minute of [their] day ha[d] to be used productively" (Holly, dancer). At the same time, university was experienced by the same women as liberating, transformative and fun. New identities and important relationships were forged which made women's experiences meaningful. The data suggests that decisions to enter university are not purely 'rational choices' made by students-as-consumers based solely on educational or financial concerns. Indeed, decision-making processes were emotional as women's personal lives and private matters are not background to, but play a central role in, their experiences of transition to HE (Finn, 2015).

The data in this chapter challenges scholarship which crudely positions working-class and middle-class experiences as oppositional. This is by no means an attempt to claim that experiences are the same or to downplay or deny inequalities which are rife in the HE system. Instead, I hope to provide a more nuanced account while at the same time challenging the

middle-class lens through which we understand the current student experience. As will be discussed throughout this thesis, it is taken-for-granted that people should aspire/desire to be middle-class and that middle-class is the 'right' way to 'be' (Lawler, 2005:442). Universities assume that studying is or should be every students' 'main thing' which disregards the multiple, dynamic ways that respondents engage with university in response to the neoliberalisation of university and work which is further compounded by structural inequalities. Thus, dominant ideas around what it means to be a student did not reflect the lived realities for almost all respondents in this research. Institutions by and large appear impermeable to change which continues to force the 'non-traditional' to adapt and become students (read: middle-class) which, evidently, they can never truly be. As mentioned, this thesis is structured as a timeline and the following chapter continues this theme by comparatively analysing women's experiences of getting in and getting on in their respective 'student jobs'.

## Chapter Five: A Comparative Analysis of Stripping and Waitressing

### Introduction

This chapter adds to the field of HE, sex work and work and employment as the first qualitative, comparative analysis of waitressing and stripping in the context of the UK and student workers. The majority of research on the topic of students and part-time work is quantitative. By taking a qualitative approach, this provides a deeper insight into current student employment pressures as well as women's experiences of two different but common 'student jobs'. This chapter is (loosely) organised in a timeline form starting with how and why students enter the hospitality or stripping industries, their experiences of getting ready for work and getting paid. I then apply Bakhtin's (1984) conceptualisation of the carnivalesque as a theoretical framework drawing together the two workplaces as part of the wider NTE to compare women's experiences of waitressing and stripping. Finally, I discuss the interpersonal relationships respondents established with management, co/other workers and interactions with customers. By analysing both the convergences and divergences found within the data, findings reveal the different ways that women are expected to negotiate particular gendered, classed and hetero-sexualised power relations. Furthermore, how certain labour becomes invisible and simply part of being a (young) woman (c.f. Wolokowitz, 2006). Overall, the aim of this chapter is to 'de-exceptionalise' sex work (Hardy, 2013) and to explore what the analysis means in relation to both jobs individually and for the theorising of work, class and gender more broadly.

### Getting in

#### *Why stripping or waitressing (or not)?*

During the interviews, it was clear that this was not the first time that participants had been asked why they had chosen to work as erotic dancers. In comparison to waitresses, dancers provided lengthier, more detailed and even somewhat pre-scripted responses. Charlotte (dancer) appeared slightly annoyed when I asked her about her decision to enter stripping as

she felt that this was an interrogation of her integrity rather than a question relating to her work as a dancer.

“With this, like your question is like, ‘What sort of person are you that makes you do this?’ I think I’ve always had an interest, well like a fascination with like you can call it the underbelly...I think of women as like goddesses and I love to feel empowered and that was a big thing for me” (Charlotte, dancer).

The aim of this thesis is not to uncover whether Charlotte’s statements are ‘true’ and if stripping is empowering, or not. As Barton (2006: xi) argues, exploitation *or* empowerment debates recreate an unhelpful polarisation which is inadequate to the task of understanding dancers’ lives. Looking instead at why respondents create certain narratives and not others can tell us more about the ways in which stripping is understood and experienced individually and collectively. For example, being asked the same potentially presumptuous question on countless occasions may lead Charlotte (and other women) to feel that she has to justify her work to neutralise the stigma and negotiate the associated devaluation. Drawing on discourses of stripping as ‘empowering’ can assist women in reconstructing their job in more positive terms.

Similarly, Sophia (dancer) used humour as a tactic.

“I never had a problem with nudity or sexuality because my family is from [European country] we don’t wear very much anyway (laughs) and I was like ‘Oh! Someone is willing to pay to see my tits? That’s fucking awesome’. I was like, ‘I’ve been showing them for free in [European country]’ (laughs) and they’re really great tits, so, hey, it made perfect sense! (laughs)” (Sophia, dancer).

Sophia rationalises her choice to enter stripping by framing the work as a logical and obvious choice given that displaying the naked body is something, she – and importantly other women – will do regularly in other contexts without remuneration, so why not? Sanders’ (2004) research with women working in prostitution found that joking often helped to relieve anxiety when discussing difficult subjects and feelings related to their work. From Sophia’s narrative, it is not clear whether or not her decision to enter stripping was difficult or distressing. Nevertheless, Sophia stated that she was regularly asked this question, including by customers

at work and her use of humour could help to construct a more palatable, light-hearted script making it an easier response.

Findings support previous research on student sex work which highlights the multiple, diverse reasons behind why women enter the industry (Sagar et al., 2015). For women in this thesis this included, the potential for high earnings, fun, excitement, curiosity, wanting to express their sexuality, freedom, flexibility, increased autonomy, that they enjoyed dancing/pole/performing, being able to drink alcohol and socialise, they didn't want a 'normal job' and that they particularly liked the glamour/'stripper look' (e.g. makeup, shoes and outfits). Some women stated that they had a 'fascination' with stripping from a young age (Charlotte/Nikki) and an idealised 'very rosy' preconception (Daphne) of what it would be like working as a stripper.

Sex work scholarship has complicated understandings of why women enter the sex industry going beyond the more obvious financial motivation and highlighting both practical and emotional drives (see Colosi, 2012). However, existing research on students and 'mainstream' part-time work has a tendency to overstate financial necessity and practicalities such as flexibility and a desire to strengthen CVs (see Richardson et al., 2009; Evans et al., 2014). This ignores how emotion impacts decision making and fails to address why students choose specific 'student jobs' and not others. Similar to dancers, students chose to work as waitresses specifically and within the NTE as the role/atmosphere was considered to be fun and importantly, *more* fun than 'call centres or retail'. Students wanted to be a *part of* 'the hustle and bustle' and wanted to be able to interact with customers, co-workers and enjoy the atmosphere.

"Cos you get to talk to customers, you can stand and chat, have a laugh, whereas if you're in retail or a call centre it's less time to communicate with people in that way" (Ellie, waitress).

"It's a really social job everyone I work with is a student, so I've made lots of friends doing it and then you see, like, the regulars who come in like you kind of like make friends with them. It's a really, really fun job as well cos there's club nights and things like that, it's just a good atmosphere" (Zoe, waitress).

Zara (waitress, strip club) worked as a waitress in a strip club and was therefore a particularly interesting case for this research. While women are regularly asked why they work as strippers, both Zara and I on the other hand were regularly asked why we are *not* strippers which generated an interesting discussion as we were able to unpack and make sense of these assumptions together. Zara stated that she watched dancers earn ‘£20 in two minutes’ and despite the fact it would take her around three hours to earn the same amount, the earning potential did not outweigh the very real effects of people knowing that she was a stripper. This adds to the argument that women do not simply enter the industry for rational and economic reasons as decision-making processes are also emotional and relational.

“I just don’t have it in me. I think no matter how much I know what goes on in that job [stripping], I don’t think I could ever deal with just, you know, people knowing that I was a stripper. I know that’s very stereotypical but I think that’s just the way I think and you know it’s a job that not everybody can do because everybody would do it, you know, if everyone could earn a couple grand a week, why wouldn’t you do it? But there’s just them additional motivations that I just don’t think I have” (Zara, waitress, strip club).

Zara could have chosen to work as a waitress in a restaurant and she would have been paid roughly the same hourly rate (there was no premium for working as a waitress in a strip club). However, she chose to work in a strip club and not a restaurant as she considered this to be ‘hilarious’, ‘fun’ and ‘exciting’; particularly as she had never frequented a strip club before. Working as ‘*just a waitress*’ and *not* a dancer allowed Zara to experience (to some extent) a similar thrill to that of dancers working in a sexy, taboo environment without facing the same level of stigmatisation. Yet, due to Zara’s close proximity to such ‘deviancy’ she - and even her family - experienced a certain degree of stigma-by-association (see Phillips et al., 2011:628).

“Me Mum’s friends are always like ‘Oh! Your daughter works in a strip club? She’s not *really* a waitress, is she?’ People do kind of jump because I’m like a student who works in a strip club people don’t even for a second consider the fact that there are actually other people who work in strip clubs except strippers. They immediately think you’re a stripper and you know sometimes I’m just like ‘Oh well, I’m glad you think that I could be one (laughs)’... but then I think well what would they say if I was a stripper... people who pass opinions and what not are



always the people who've never been in one [strip club] and who never will ever probably go in one" (Zara, waitress, strip club).

Zara assumed that because she was a student that people were *more* likely to assume that she was also a stripper. She developed her own techniques to manage other people's misinformation, stereotypes and to 'reassure' them during somewhat negative interactions, that she had not transgressed this gendered boundary. Although Zara felt able to challenge people's misconceptions, she stated that some of her co-workers also working as waitresses feared stigma (by-association).

"A lot of the girls I work with as waitresses, they don't even tell their parents that they waitress in a strip club. They say they work in a bar and I'm like 'Well why?' It doesn't really make sense because I'm not a dancer and even if I was, it's not an issue. But for them, I've said like 'You know you're not a dancer, you're a waitress, what's the issue of telling anyone where you work?' They're like, 'I just don't want anyone knowing I work here'" (Zara, waitress, strip club).

This example sheds light on the far-reaching effects and power of whore stigma. Fear of stigma *through association* (or that people would assume they were 'really strippers') appeared to have very real, policing effects for women. Indeed, Zara described her co-workers as adopting the same stigma management strategies as sex workers, for example, secrecy and lies (Sanders, 2005a:116).

#### *Auditions and Trial shifts*

Respondents had worked as waitresses from one to 14 years and as strippers from one to 15 years with an average of six years working in each industry. Waitresses tended to enter the role at a younger age (around 15 years old) whereas dancers – due to legal age restrictions – entered stripping between the ages of 18-25 with an average starting age of 19. Helen (dancer) also worked as waitresses in a strip club, however unlike Zara (waitress, strip club), within six months she started stripping. Colosi (2012) describes Helen's entry route as 'occupational association' whereby women start stripping due to an association with or involvement in the sex industry. This was also the case for Gemma (dancer/waitress) and Grace (dancer) who

worked as webcam models before applying to work in a strip club. For Gemma, her previous work experience meant that she ‘wasn’t shy’ when performing sexual labour or being naked in front of an audience.

Before respondents were formally hired in strip clubs, they were typically required to pass an audition/working audition. It was assumed by both Daphne and Abbie (dancers) that they would be required to perform on stage to demonstrate their dance/pole ability. Instead, the audition at one strip club involved lining up alongside other women in a ‘brightly lit’ changing room, removing their clothes and one male owner ‘having a quick look’ at each woman in their knickers.

“[The owner] was just like ‘Right, take your clothes off’ and then you turn around and he’s just like ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, it’s just like, creepy” (Abbie, dancer).

Daphne compared the process to a doctor’s appointment describing the audition as ‘clinical’ as the owner ‘inspected’ each woman. Those who were then able to hold a conversation while almost naked were asked to complete a form and started working the following day. The owner was unaware whether any of the women hired could perform on stage or pole dance, suggesting that for some clubs, this is not an important or necessary component of the job.

As strip clubs are able to generate profit by employing more dancers and charging house fees, taking commission and arbitrarily fining women, Sanders and Hardy (2012:526) argue that strip clubs hire women who meet ‘minimal aesthetic standards’ regardless of their dancing/pole skills to lower entry barriers and encourage women into stripping. This leads to the further devaluation and deskilling of the work. Indeed, Laura (dancer) – who had worked as a stripper for 12 years – stated that she had witnessed a ‘drop’ in the standards of pole ability in recent years as clubs *now* hire ‘absolutely everyone’. Holly and Daphne (dancers) had entered the industry more recently and had both worked as strippers for less than two years at the time of interview. Interestingly, both women stated that they struggled to find work as

dancers despite being young – aged 18 and 21 at the time of applying - and meeting normative standards of attractiveness. Similarly, Rachel and Olivia (dancers) also struggled to find work as a result of their weight with one woman being considered ‘too fat’ and the other ‘too thin’. The fact that Holly is of Chinese heritage and that Daphne had a more ‘alternative’ look with piercings, tattoos and brightly coloured hair, should not be ignored. Far from hiring ‘anybody’, strip clubs hire particular bodies which are usually white, young, slim and female. While not all workers fit this ideal, it remains an industry standard (Price-Glynn, 2010:114). Race and class disparities in sexualised ideals have been well documented (Egan, 2006; Wesley, 2003). Bradley (2008:511) argues that women of colour and working-class women are typically viewed as ‘undesirable’ based on racist/classist stereotypes. Furthermore, that most clubs instead associate themselves with whiteness and bodies which carry higher ‘value’ leaving fewer opportunities for work for those who cannot attain this white, ‘Barbie doll’ image. This point will be developed later in the chapter.

The *idea* that ‘anyone can do the job’ was also shared by waitresses. One of the key motivations for women entering waitressing was that it was assumed to be an easy job to do, to find and due to the high staff turnover within restaurants, respondents were able to start work immediately or very soon after applying. For example, Phoebe (waitress) moved to London, sent a text message to a friend who worked at a restaurant and within a few hours she was offered a job and started working the same day.

“I wasn’t worried about getting a paid waitressing job. I’ve done it for enough years, I could have worked anywhere, and I was willing” (Phoebe, waitress).

“Waitressing is the quickest and easiest job to get so, like, I just needed money quite urgently” (Lilly, waitress).

“It was convenience more than like active research for it, the job, it was handed to me (laughs)” (Stephanie, waitress).

“[The hiring process] was pretty easy. They were really desperate for staff...there was a trial shift, but I was rubbish. Honestly, it was just they were desperate (laughs)” (Hannah, waitress).

In regard to their most recent job as a waitress, only nine respondents had some prior experience of working in restaurants which suggests that, like stripping, experience is not mandatory. Despite having no previous waitressing experience, Kate (waitress) stated,

“I felt like they’d take *anyone* on. So, they’re gonna take *me* on (laughs)” (Kate, waitress).

The implication that ‘anyone’ can do either job disregards issues of (dis)ability and underestimates the physical labour involved. Again, similar to strip clubs, far from hiring ‘*anybody*’, existing literature suggests that restaurants also hire specific types of gendered and racialized bodies who were considered ‘appropriate’. In service occupations the gender, race, age and class of the worker becomes part of what is sold (Adkins, 1995:8). Employers’ practices of hiring ‘attractive’ women in this context are also well documented in areas outside of stripping and waitressing (for example, airline stewardesses (Hochschild, 1983); secretaries (Pringle, 1988); tourism workers, (Adkins, 1995)).

While dancers were able to (potentially) earn money during a working audition and realising the earnings on the first night encouraged women to continue stripping, waitresses on the other hand were expected to undergo unpaid trial shifts (with varied hours) before they were formally employed. Waitresses working for an agency (n=2) were expected to undertake a seven-hour unpaid selection/training day. Following this, Emily (waitress, agency) was then required to work a five-hour unpaid shift which she was told covered the cost of the health and safety training. Within this particular agency, all workers were awarded a Chartered Institute of Environmental Health Level 2 certificate in food safety. It is not clear why workers were expected to complete and also *pay* for such training as they were not responsible for preparing or directly handling food. Respondents working in restaurants were not required to have the same qualifications.

Eve (waitress, agency) was informed by another agency that her first *three* shifts were considered to be ‘trial shifts’ and that she would receive only £5 per hour. Trial shifts within this particular agency were much longer than standard trial shifts and could range from four to 12 hours. Following the three 10-hour trial shifts, Eve was then paid £9.75 per hour which was higher than waitresses working in restaurants who were typically paid minimum wage. Yet, the agency had already received their commission for providing staff to their clients and through this exploitative ‘trial shift’ system, the agency then gains an additional £4.75 per hour for every worker they send to a client during this period. Importantly, this trial shift system not only financially benefits employers but also leaves workers having to ‘prove’ themselves worthy or alternatively, facing dismissal without any explanation or pay.

### Getting ready for work: Aesthetic labour and respectability

Colebrook (2006:132) argues that producing reductive, moralistic arguments relating to aesthetic labour - both within and outside the workplace - as being ‘good’ or ‘bad’ for women can be unhelpful. In this section, I explore how female appearance is defined within the strip club and restaurant and how this intersects with class, gender and value. Pressures to look a certain way affect *all* women (Elias et al., 2017:38), so rather than focusing on the *type* of (natural/excessive) display only, I aim to uncover how being paid to look a certain way is experienced by waitresses and strippers. Aesthetic labour was framed by respondents as both pleasurable and as a form of coercion. Yet, the two were not mutually exclusive highlighting how all human experience should remain open to multiple meanings and readings.

Within interactive service work, workers are required to ‘look good and sound right’ by embodying the company image as they become part of the product on offer (Witz et al., 2003; Warhurst and Nickson, 2009:388-9). This involves management of appearance and depending on the company, workers must engage in different levels of aesthetic labour to ensure that they look the part. Aesthetic labour is defined as “...the mobilisation, development

and commodification of the embodied capacities and attributes of employees to produce favourable interaction with customers” (Nickson et al., 2001:176). To (re)create the expected ‘stripper look’, this required high levels of bodily discipline, labour and management. Dancers described labouring on the surface of their bodies by applying false tan, a full face of makeup including foundation, contour and highlighting products, bronzer, false eyelashes, eyeshadow and lipstick. Participants described the micro-management of their appearance by employers down to the colour of their finger and toenails. For Laura’s (dancer) employer, nails could only be painted red, no other colour. In regard to body maintenance, respondents would wash, dye and style their hair often adding hair extensions or a wig. They would also exfoliate their skin, moisturise – but not too much to avoid greasing the pole – and some women used sunbeds to achieve a ‘tanned whiteness’ (Price-Glynn, 2010:115). Several respondents went into great detail about, and seemed to resent, the hair removal processes which involved shaving or waxing their underarms, legs and ‘where the sun don’t shine’ (Holly, dancer).

“I go in the shower and wash my hair for the first time in a week (laughs) ‘cos I won’t otherwise and like shave everywhere. You’re kind of like bending over, spreading your arse cheeks shaving your arsehole, getting the leg hair, plucking your toe hair, getting those pesky little ones, exfoliating all the stubble so you can shave it better... I wouldn’t ever you know do a full shave job if I was just going on a night out. Oh! And putting the eyelashes on is tedious as well (sighs)” (Nikki, dancer).

The stripper look is intentionally excessive as dancers are supposed to represent a hyper-sexualised ‘ideal’ or fantasy girl image and thus, not women that customers encounter on a daily basis (Bradley, 2008:509). However, for waitresses the prescribed ‘look’ varied. In contrast to dancers, some women were instructed by management to present in a ‘natural’ or ‘neutral’ manner in order to appear ‘presentable’.

“[Nail polish] can be really obvious so you can’t have like bright red nails. They don’t mind if you have the French manicure but then makeup, they specify like neutral or sort of natural looking” (Eve, waitress, agency).

The expectation that waitresses look ‘natural’ is different from women being in their ‘natural’ (unruly) state. To *appear* natural (and still normatively attractive or feminine) requires labour.

Regardless of the ‘look’ – excessive or natural – prescribed by management, both presentations require workers to engage in aesthetic labour. Yet, the labour involved in ‘looking natural’ remains largely invisible in comparison to the more ‘obvious’ labour involved in re-creating the stripper look. It is precisely this ‘obviousness’ of the aesthetic labour, and the attention given to one’s appearance, and to fakery specifically, which results in the devaluation of women who are considered ‘excessive’; as this is also associated with vulgarity, bad taste and as trivial (Skeggs, 2001:297-8).

Women in both sectors were paid to conform to expected displays of femininity which sometimes – but not always - meant contorting and squeezing themselves into pre-made ‘waitress’ or ‘stripper’ moulds. At times this was described as feeling different to their typical gendered presentations outside of work. For Phillipa (dancer), the act of putting on make-up began to signify ‘going to work’,

“When I’m not at work or not going out I don’t bother wearing any makeup, I look dead scruffy. I literally look like two different people. People expect strippers to be super glamorous, but I’m not (laughs). I feel sorry for my boyfriend really ‘cos I look like a different person going to work then he has to put up with me looking like crap all the time (laughs)” (Phillipa, dancer).

Yet, whether management prescribed an excessive and sexualised or ‘natural’ aesthetic, the underlying message remained the same. Both strip club and restaurant owners/managers attempted to claim respectability for their businesses through the bodies and presentation of their female employees. Indeed, the bodies of workers became an extension or depiction of the image owners/managers were trying to present to customers. Respondents were left walking a tightrope in an attempt to (re)create the ‘right’ kind of look with potential repercussions if they got it ‘wrong’. For example, waitresses were instructed to look ‘presentable’ (read: respectable) and were prohibited from wearing clothing which displayed their armpits, shoulders and/or midriffs.

“[Restaurant owner] changed the dress code ‘cos I used to wear cropped tops and they were like, ‘Well, you can’t do that’ and I was like ‘Fair enough’ I can’t argue with that” (Brooke, dancer/waitress).

Although there was some variation based on the style of the restaurant (i.e. casual or fine dining), waitresses were typically required to wear all black, mid/long-sleeved shirts, knee-length skirts or trousers and ‘smart’ black shoes. While Anna (waitress) had more autonomy over her uniform, the issue of respectability remained.

“[The owner] is very flexible, he’s just like ‘Oh it’s up to you *just be presentable*, don’t come naked’ (laughs)” (Anna, waitress).

Similarly, strip club owners have continued to make great efforts to change the image of stripping through processes of upscaling and gentrification. To project this respectable image and to appeal to a middle-class clientele, all dancers were instructed to wear ‘elegant ball gowns’ until midnight/1am – what could be described as the strip club watershed – when they were then permitted to change into three-piece lingerie, often with stockings which was considered a more ‘high-end look’ and thus, remained ‘classy’. The majority of dancers opposed the idea of wearing long dresses and management expectations to look ‘classy, elegant, sparkly and unique’ (Daphne, dancer). Daphne found this particularly amusing as she stated that no stripper outfit *should* be classy. Emma also rejected the idea that strippers were not allowed to wear *stripper shoes*.

“You have to wear long dresses, you know sophisticated (laughs) with inverted commas (laughs) so no like plastic stripper shoes which I think is ridiculous because you’re a stripper so you should be able to wear stripper shoes (laughs)...lots of clubs like to pretend that they’re not strip clubs and it’s like something else and it’s like, no! (laughs)” (Emma, dancer).

While dancers attempted to gain respectability for themselves in other ways, the claim for respectability through appearance was projected by management/club owners *not* dancers. Respondents did not consider their appearance at work to be respectable and importantly, nor did they want to dress in the ‘elegant’, ‘classy’ or ‘sophisticated’ fashion prescribed by management. Respondents instead referred to their appearance as ‘glamorous’ or ‘sexy’. Indeed, Laura (dancer), fought to look and dress like a stereotypical stripper at work. Wearing



‘elegant’ clothing was considered antithetical to/prevented her from looking and feeling like a stripper and embodying her ‘stripper self’ (c.f. Sanders and Hardy, 2014:18).

“We had to fight to wear lingerie because with a dress it’s so awkward. I mean, I would never feel like I’m a stripper in that kind of dress. I don’t feel like that at all, it doesn’t give me that energy...we’re not allowed to wear clear platforms, stripper heels, they’re not allowed to be clear. You need to have that kind of sense of creativity in how to dress and to look sexy and sassy at the same time” (Laura, dancer).

Dancers attempted to circumvent such rules by wearing see-through or mesh dresses, and Holly (dancer) was able to bypass this rule completely due to her manager’s ignorance regarding her ethnicity.

“I’ve gotten away with something though which is really funny because it’s a little bit racist because I’m not Japanese (laughs) but I’m Chinese so I can get away with it. I wear lingerie with a matching kimono on top so it’s like lingerie, like a nice set, matching set with thigh highs and everything but I just throw a kimono on top and it works. So, I can get away with that” (Holly, dancer).

As a result of racialised stereotypes and eroticised fantasies (see O’Connell Davidson and Sanchez Taylor, 1999), Holly (dancer) considered her Chinese heritage to be her ‘unique selling point’ in an overwhelmingly white industry. While dancers are able to ‘cash in’ on their exotic otherness, this also benefitted management by broadening the range of racialised erotic fantasies available to customers.

The expectation that women should look a certain way within a strip club has received much attention particularly in regard to the (assumed) negative effects (Jeffreys, 2008). Yet, there has been less attention given to the impact on women who are expected to look ‘natural’ or appear ‘neutral’ at work which is instead considered to be unproblematic. Emily (waitress) and Gemma (dancer/waitress) stated that they felt dehumanised as waitresses not because they were visually objectified, but because they were expected to remove or downplay what they considered to be important elements of their personhood; their gender and sexuality.

“I don’t like the, so, we don’t get to wear, so you have to like completely strip down, so like no earrings, not much makeup, you have to have your hair scraped back, you have to wear just a black shirt and black trousers and so you feel sort of, quite, just like a sort of blank person who’s just there to serve. Like, you’re not supposed to have any character, we’re not supposed to like joke around or anything. So, it’s a bit like, erm, dehumanising I guess ‘cos we’re all in like man

shirts and like school trousers (laughs). So, I think our womanhood is like, played down” (Emily, waitress).

Both women referred to feeling invisible and Gemma stated that she even felt ‘subhuman’ when working as a waitress as she was also instructed to appear ‘blank’. Women’s (not men’s) bodies are markers of respectability and also pose the risk of ‘sexuality’ seeping into the restaurant (Brunner and Dever, 2014:464). Owners/managers often opted for an androgynous presentation for their staff - which could be considered masculine rather than gender neutral – to ‘protect’ the image of their business from potential devaluation. While at first glance expectations to appear natural seem preferred, for a number of respondents this demand was not experienced as such. Indeed, managerial efforts to remove ‘evidence’ of workers gender and sexuality can have the effect of stripping workers of their sense of self.

Participants were not merely cardboard cut-out waitresses/strippers. Engaging in aesthetic labour to produce a specific look was not only physical, it also produced specific emotions which required management (Entwistle and Wissinger, 2006:784). Further emotion management was also needed if/when women did not ‘fit’ or comply with the prescribed ‘company image’. For example, Rachel (dancer) was refused work as she was considered by management in several establishments to look ‘too fat’.

“They’ve just said, like, ‘No you’re too fat’. It can be a bit demoralising like that it’s quite annoying ‘cos I know that I can make money, I know that I’m good at my job” (Rachel, dancer).

Strippers are typically required to maintain a slim physique. However, women face a tightrope as Olivia (dancer) was refused employment because she was considered to look ‘too thin’.

“I did like an afternoon back [at the strip club] and she [manager] was like, ‘You’ve lost too much weight. You just look like a skeleton on stage and it’s not you, you don’t look healthy’. So, she didn’t wanna have me back. It was a *big* blow because then I was like ‘Fuck! What am I gonna do for money now?’ There was really not anywhere else that I wanted to work” (Olivia, dancer).

In order to find work as a stripper, it is clear that simply displaying one’s semi-naked/naked body is far from enough (Piltcher, 2017:142). Facing criticism and rejection of their physical

appearance produced negative emotions for both Rachel and Olivia (dancers). Like the catwalk models in Entwistle and Wissinger's (2006) study, strippers are unable to walk away from (part of) their 'product', which is their body. Conforming to a certain ideal is not a simple superficial performance at work but is an on-going process which takes place outside of work as well. Respondents reported 'disciplining' the body through diet, exercise and plastic surgery, something which is not uncommon among dancers (see Bradley, 2008:510).

While waitresses did not disclose being directly denied employment based on their appearance, they were disciplined by management in similar ways. For instance, management regularly scrutinised workers bodies in terms of weight and appearance.

"The managers used to comment on me appearance as well, so I used to feel like I had to make more of an effort... Well, me manager at [Restaurant A], he had far too much to say...he used to just comment on like (sighs), more so me weight and stuff like that so I always used to feel like I had to make an effort like with the way I looked because I thought that he thought I was like a bit chubby... I would always like put a full face of makeup on I would always make sure I had like false eyelashes on and stuff...I do remember this one time he [manager] like, I can't remember everything he used to say but he used to just have sly little digs. This one time, this comment always stays in me mind, like this woman walked in she was absolutely massive this woman, he was like 'Two of you would make her' and laughed. I was just like, 'Why even say that? Why?' He would comment on if I looked like a bit of a scruff that day, he, he would always mention something" (Victoria, waitress).

"If I turn up looking like shit, they'll [management] tell me, 'You look like shit' and then I'll be like 'Ha ha!' and erm, just have to carry on with my day (laughs). Sometimes they tell me to put on some make-up, but I don't give a shit. If I come in really hungover, I'm kind of like, 'Fair' (laughs)" (Hannah, waitress).

The discipline exerted by management in order to compel workers to comply and present themselves in ways deemed 'acceptable' had problematic repercussions and impacted on how some women developed particular relationships with their bodies. For example, the need to maintain or present a specific body-type to be able to find work as a stripper led several respondents to undergo or consider certain types of surgery. For example, liposuction, breast augmentation and abdominoplasty. Furthermore, aesthetic labour is another example of the unpaid work carried out by employees which benefits employers. Laura (dancer) stated that it would take her around two hours to get ready for work and that this was 'a real killer' if/when

she did not earn any money or left work in debt to the club. Sanders and Hardy (2014) argue that as aesthetic labour is a requirement to be able to work in a strip club/pub, this labour should be taken into account when discussing dancers' earnings. For waitresses on the other hand, as their expected look was 'natural' or more closely aligned to their typical displays of femininity outside of work, this labour becomes invisible and was considered by participants and management as simply an expected 'part of being a (young) woman'.

### (Getting) working hours

Irrespective of their job, women worked on average over three times the government's recommended 10 hours per week for students and more than double the 15 hours recommended by most course providers (UCAS, 2019b). The majority of dancers (n=12) stated that they worked three to four nights per week during term time and on average 32 hours per week for those working four shifts. Waitresses with contracted hours worked between nine and 60 hours per week with a weekly average of 28 hours. However, the actual number of hours worked by dancers varied depending on strip club opening and closing times, the time dancers arrived at work and whether or not they were able to leave early (which was at the manager's discretion on the night). While certain strip pubs and clubs allocated set shift times, others allowed dancers to arrive to work at their own leisure and instead, charged house fees based on the time they arrived. For example, one club charged an £80 house fee on a weekend if Abbie (dancer) arrived at 8pm and this figure increased by £10 per hour (e.g. £90 at 9pm). This 'strategy' generated more profit for the club through fees and by 'encouraging' dancers to start work earlier, this made clubs appear busier and more appealing to customers.

Most dancers stated that they maintained flexibility and autonomy over the number of hours they worked. Yet, most pubs/clubs expected women to commit to a minimum number of shifts per week and either one Sunday or weekday (usually Monday) per week. Although most participants stated that they enjoyed/preferred being self-employed, Cruz et al., (2017:276)

argue that dancers are in fact working under conditions of faux self-employment as they face high levels of control and discipline from management similar to that of an employee<sup>49</sup>. Similarly, waitresses on ZHC, working via agencies or without contracts (i.e. cash-in-hand workers) frequently stated that they enjoyed having no obligation to work – unlike contracted workers – and that they could refuse to work in ways other employees could not. However, if management/agencies assumed that waiting staff were unreliable this could negatively impact on the amount of work that they were allocated. Similar to other ‘gig-workers’ - for example, Uber drivers – agency waitresses had their own online profile – including a photograph - and employers were able to ‘rate’ their performance and request to have certain workers return to their events/company.

“Once you establish yourself as a fairly decent worker, then it’s quite easy to get jobs. The agency just views your profile and like, they’ll know me by now and they’ll know that I’ve worked there for quite a while and there’s like comments from managers on your profile saying like ‘This person is good’ or ‘This person is bad’ (laughs). I got favoured by [company name] which was weird ‘cos it was an 11-hour shift, I’d only had like two hours sleep, I was hungover and for some reason they liked me (laughs)... you can cancel a shift like two days before, I’ve called in sick a few times but you can’t get away with that too much you get like three black marks on your profile, so like, if you call in sick, that’s one black mark against your name and if you get three of them then you get suspended for like six months or something. But it is quite flexible, generally” (Emily, waitress, agency).

Although Emily had ‘established’ herself as a ‘decent worker’ and still considered the agency to be flexible, this quote also demonstrates how in an era of feedback and evaluations, workers are left as Milland (2017: 230) describes, ‘walk[ing] on eggshells’ to ensure positive feedback and thus, continued work. Furthermore, that there are clear ramifications for being an ‘unreliable worker’.

Adding to the discussion in Chapter Four, several women had very hectic schedules which often resulted in sleep deprivation. Abbie (dancer) outlined a typical ‘busy day’ as,

10:00 – 16:00: University

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<sup>49</sup> Without being granted any of the benefits or protections that employees/workers are able to enjoy i.e. protection from unfair dismissal, holiday/sick pay etc. (Cruz et al. 2017:276).

16:00 – 18:00: Travelling home, getting ready and travelling to work  
19:00 – 03:00: Work at strip club 1  
03:00 – 07:00: Work at strip club 2

Similarly, Lucy (waitress) studied and worked the following hours three times per week. Sometimes this was mixed with morning shifts requiring her to wake up at 5am to start working 7am-1pm. Overall, Lucy stated that she worked around 42 hours in the restaurant and 23 hours at university which is a total of 66 hours per week, excluding additional work outside of the classroom.

09:00 – 17:00: University  
17:00 – 18:00: Travelling home, getting ready and travelling to work  
18:00 – 01:00: Work at restaurant

Only a minority of waitresses (n=4) stated that they *chose* to work rather than relied on the income generated from waitressing. Such (middle-class) students referred to parents/family members who supported them financially which enabled them to reduce their hours or to stop working if/when they wanted to focus on assignments, or when preparing for exams.

“I think for me, I know some people that I work with, the money is like more important but for me it was like, I don’t work so that I can pay my rent and bills, like I would just about be ok if I didn’t work. For me, I worked so that I can like I can go on nights out and I can go for dinner so if I just don’t get very much pay one month I can still go home for Easter for a couple weeks it just means that when I get that pay I’m just gonna have to be a little bit more careful with the nice things that I would normally do” (Eve, waitress, middle-class).

Most strippers, regardless of their class position, stated that they were able to strategically save money given their higher earnings. This meant that dancing provided some (not all) women with the freedom to stop working as/when they needed to. However, other students worked more than one job in order to meet basic living expenses while studying. For example, Gemma (intermediate) and Brooke (working-class) worked as both waitresses and strippers, Katherine (intermediate) worked as a waitress and a podium dancer, Chloe (working-class) worked at two restaurants and Lilly (middle-class) had three part-time jobs (waitressing, live modelling and working with children) while studying. Almost 10 years ago, Hall (2010) argued that in the

absence of any moves by governments to provide proper financial support for students, universities need to recognise and respond to the increasing demands placed on full-time students by part-time work and to implement procedures to assist working students. Based on the data, it appears that this matter is yet to be adequately addressed by HEIs.

## Getting paid

*Time, labour, money: Is it worth it?*

Sanders and Hardy's (2012:525) research suggests that the earning potential within the stripping industry has significantly decreased in the UK since the start of the economic crisis in 2008. Given the current state of the stripping industry – discussed in Chapters One and Two – it is likely that a dancer's earning potential has not improved. Despite such decreases, one important difference between stripping and waitressing was that dancers still earned, and had the potential to earn, considerably more money in a shorter period of time.

“I used to work in a bar, and I was making £200 a week and in my first shift [as a dancer] I made £70 in four hours... I remember even though it wasn't loads it was more than I ever earned in four hours you know, and this is 2002 that's like quite a few years ago and even today £70 for four hours is still pretty good pay. So back in the day, even more I'd say like £130 now maybe something like that... in other jobs it seems like you work a lot for the money you get. I don't mind working, I love working but I feel like work normally is very exploitative, it's very exploitative. I think with stripping, I feel like it was more fair 'cos of the amount of time you work for the money you make. I don't think the money for me was particularly amazing, but it was fair, it was fair” (Sophia, dancer).

Stripping is often represented as (sexual) ‘exploitation’ primarily based on the ‘type’ of labour involved (see Jeffreys, 2008). However, the type of exploitation that Sophia was most concerned about was the exploitation faced by all workers within capitalist systems and the dull economic compulsion to work. Sophia considered stripping to offer a better trade-off between money earned and time spent working which she felt was less exploitative and ‘more fair’ than hospitality. Emma (dancer) also considered her job to be well-paid based on her age and student status. However, she also acknowledged that her income was not only precarious

but also potentially stagnant, if not depreciating, given that income earned in the stripping industry is often linked to looking youthful/attractive.

“When you think about it long term, so say I was like making like £500 a week, I wasn’t paying tax but it was like 24k a year. It’s not like that much is it in the grand scale of things. Like, for a young person, it is quite a lot but like, you know, in 10 years’ time you wouldn’t want to still be on that same wage...so in that perspective, it’s not a lot of money...it’s the kind of emotional labour of it as well ‘cos like I think on days when you used to make like loads and loads of money it’s kind of worth it but when you’re getting a bit like down about it and you’re not making that much money it’s like, well, it’s not really worth it” (Emma, dancer).

While the time versus money trade-off may have been considered by some respondents as ‘fair’ - as Emma’s quote demonstrates - others questioned whether or not their income was in fact ‘worth’ the *labour* involved.

“I mean it was pretty soul destroying when you’re just sat there all day and you’ve only made 30 odd quid for getting all your bits and pieces out. I was taking a risk you know, I mean, if obviously professionally people know that this [stripping] is what I did, it was part of my PhD, but you know, my family don’t know and I never want them to know and that’s why I’m careful about pseudonyms and identifying information” (Grace, dancer).

“To me it’s [income] bad but if I told anybody else, they’d be like, ‘What?!’ (laughs), I tell my boyfriend and he’s like, ‘That’s good!’, I’m like, no it’s not, not for what we’re doing” (Cara, dancer).

For some women, the potential benefits of earning more money did not always outweigh the emotional risks. Waitresses were paid (on average) a substantial amount less than dancers (usually minimum wage) and they also questioned whether their pay was worth the labour involved; particularly when dealing with sexual harassment and abusive customers (this will be discussed further later in the chapter). On the whole, all respondents expected to work in low-skilled jobs with lower wages and even in bad conditions while at university as almost a rite of passage. If students consider themselves to be cheap, disposable labour and if they assume that their respective work is only temporary, this could also inhibit their ability to resist or challenge mistreatment. Furthermore, if it turns out that the work is not as short-term as they initially assumed, this could have longer-term negative effects in regard to their working-conditions and sense of self.



### *Precarious pay*

Although a dancer's income was typically higher than that of a waitress, it was also precarious due to the unpredictability of custom, house fees and potential fines. Some women paid additional agency fees which meant that dancers were already at a financial loss before they had even started work. Lister (2015:51) compares dancers' wages to the 'Russian Roulette' as their earnings are at the same time unpredictable and potentially limitless. Most waitresses on the other hand were issued formal contracts, paid a set rate per hour and guaranteed an income regardless of tips. However, rather than considering waitresses' income as stable and strippers' income in oppositional terms and as insecure, it is more accurate to think of precarity on a continuum; particularly as not all waitresses were in the same position.

At one extreme, Lilly (waitress) worked cash-in-hand with no formal contract which meant that her shifts and income were not guaranteed. In comparison to other waitresses who had more autonomy in negotiating their shifts, Lilly was not able to choose when she worked but was informed by management as/when there were shifts available. This made it difficult to plan and budget and the informality of her job seeped into other aspects of her role, as she would often work without a break. Similarly, Eve (waitress, agency) stated that all agencies can cancel shifts when workers are no longer needed without any explanation. Furthermore, even when she was allocated a 10-hour shift, this did not guarantee 10 hours pay as agency waitresses were always the first to be sent home if/when management felt they were not needed.

### *'Instantaneous' pay*

Both waitresses and strippers chose their respective forms of employment in contrast to other part-time work based on the speed of pay. Most waitresses were paid weekly or monthly

into their bank accounts<sup>50</sup>, Phoebe and Lilly (waitresses) were paid ‘cash-in-hand’ which they both preferred as they received payment after each shift.

“...the pay isn’t why I do it its more kind of the speed of the pay if I can get it right there on the night that’s why it’s good to do” (Lilly, waitress).

Rebecca (waitress) particularly enjoyed that her tips were paid at the end of each shift meaning ‘...you can just nip to Tesco after work’. Grace (dancer) also stressed the importance of instant cash in regard to stripping.

“I remember talking to my partner at the time and he’s just like, ‘You know we’re up shit creek, you’re gonna have to do this [stripping] you know, ‘cos we need money *right now*’. I mean, you know, as much as it’s quite degrading to say, and I would never say it in a professional capacity, you know, there was times where I would come out of the [strip club] where I worked and the money that I had would be the money I would take across the road to Tesco Express and that would get our tea that night. So, it was very much that instantaneous nature of cash in hand...it wasn’t the gold mine that a lot of people think it is. The point was that it wasn’t any worse paid than the shitty minimum wage jobs and there was times where it was just the same amount but you got the money straight away, there wasn’t any of this pissing around waiting until the end of the month for pay day, do you know what I mean? Or, like every fortnight with Domino’s pizza or McDonalds paid you every fortnight. You had the money; you could go to the shops straight away. So that was a massive reason and, in my opinion, the reason why you will never ever, ever eradicate the sex industry, ever, because it’s instant money” (Grace, dancer).

The potential precarity of waitressing and stripping put pressure on students, however this was not experienced equally by all participants. As Grace’s quote demonstrates, for some women, instant payment was less of a ‘perk’ and more a necessity for surviving while at university.

#### *Extra pay: The hustle*

Respondents were also drawn to waitressing and stripping - in contrast to other jobs - due to the potential to earn *more* than a set amount each shift. For dancers, there was no limit

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<sup>50</sup> When respondents received their tips also varied. Some women were given cash-in-hand tips either at the end of their shift, week or month. When customers paid by credit/debit card, the typical 12.5% gratuity was usually added on to workers’ weekly/monthly wages. When I first started this research in 2015, there had been a recent media scandal which had exposed well-known chain restaurants for routinely profiting from employee tips paid by credit/debit card. At the time of interview (December 2016), Lauren (waitress) stated that she did not receive tips paid by card. The government and trade unions have since developed a Code of Best Practice and most chains have stopped this practice (BBC, 2018). However, over the years that women had worked as waitresses they may have lost out on a substantial amount of money due to such practices with no access to recourse.

on how much they were able to earn and for waitresses, this potential additional income was earned through tips. Amy (waitress) stated that she would often earn over £100 per week in tips which was similar to her weekly wage.

“...the tips, it’s like an extra, so you’re earning like an hourly rate plus like a couple hundred pound in tips and that’s a lot when you’re a student, it’s like another wage’ (Phoebe, waitress).

“...it’s [tips] one of the main reasons we all kind of do it ‘cos you can get sort of like an extra couple hours wages just through tips which is also nice and a sort of bonus” (Ellie, waitress).

While strippers were primarily paid for individual dances and time spent in VIP booths, Laura (dancer) stated that dancers could also make additional income by simply asking customers for money which could be considered as ‘extra’ in a similar sense to that of waitresses earning tips.

“...you can earn money from anything. You can ask clients to give you money which happens often. I’ve seen girls, they don’t care, they give zero fucks...they would ask, ‘Can you please give me some money so I can top up my oyster?’ Or, ‘My electricity will be cut off tomorrow, can you give me money?’ (laughs). Seriously, and it works that’s the thing, it works (laughs). I can’t do it, but yeah, it works!” (Laura, dancer).

Laura’s quote refers to ‘hustling’ which is well documented among dancers (Sanders and Hardy, 2014:123-7) and involves a combination of aesthetic, emotional and sexualised labour. As mentioned in Chapter Four, due to the rise of precarious work, the gig-economy and self-employment/entrepreneurship, hustling and having multiple side-hustles has become a somewhat common facet of (neoliberal) life for many people, not just dancers. While people (typically working-class women) have always ‘cobbled together’ different streams of income and engaged in various forms of low-waged work as a means of getting by (see Thieme, 2018; Van Doorn and Velthuis, 2018), the difference is that ‘hustling’ (in the broadest sense of the term) has been reframed in more positive terms indicating an ‘entrepreneurial spirit’.

Hochschild’s (1983) seminal work on emotional labour has been developed by countless scholars to demonstrate the different ways that workplaces are infused with emotion. It was evident from the data that emotional labour was an important and expected part of both waitressing and dancing as participants were required to manage and manipulate their own

feelings and displays of emotions as well as those of the customer. While individual dancers/waitresses are able to benefit financially from their emotional labour, it is essentially unpaid despite the major commercial advantage of emotion work for employers. Dancers were expected to engage in more emotional labour than waitresses. Profit-enhancing strategies employed by management (such as rostering more women to work at one time) not only increased the income for the club (through house fees etc.) but also increased competition among dancers making their ability to talk the talk and ‘hustle’, even more essential in order to make money. For ‘older’ dancers such as Rachel (age 38), hustling and being able to engage emotionally with customers became more important, as she was less able than younger dancers to rely solely on her appearance to earn money.

To hustle<sup>51</sup>, dancers must read customers and determine what kind of ‘act’<sup>52</sup> will generate the most money. Colosi (2012:103-7) found that dancers engage in a combination of four acts which play on heterosexual male erotic expectations of the stereotypical stripper identity. This includes the ego boost, the empty promise, the pity plea - outlined in Laura’s (dancer) quote above involving the fabrication of a sob story for money - and the bimbo act (or what Holly (dancer) refers to below as ‘dumb slut’) where dancers perform playful almost childlike gestures by flicking their hair, giggling, pouting and dumbing themselves down to manipulate the emotions of customers; allowing them to believe they are in a position of superiority, intellectual and otherwise.

“So, a lot of girls just do dumb slut and that works for some guys because that's what some guys are looking for. I'm not capable of doing dumb slut that well because, this sounds terrible but it's true, I come off too educated so it's not believable when I do it, it's not a true fantasy. I just try approaching guys as if, especially if they're a little younger, as if I'm one of the boys and that works for me it involves a little bit more talking but I don't mind and then sometimes if I'm

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<sup>51</sup> One extreme, and somewhat valorised, instance of strip club hustling in New York has received recent media attention and the story has been adapted into Jennifer Lopez’s 2019 movie *Hustlers*. The film is based on a group of strippers who allegedly ‘hustled’ a number of wealthy Wall Street clients in the early 2000s (IMDB, 2019).

<sup>52</sup> Interactions and relationships with customers were complex and not always considered to be cynical. Waitresses and dancers described forging ‘genuine’ relationships typically with regular customers and some extended outside the workplace.

feeling a little bit down on energy very you know quiet, it's more intimate 'cos then they have to come in closer to talk to me and it's just very like soft and girl next door and some guys like that too... so what marks you as good or bad at this job is whether or not you can do it all, you got to be able to tell within like two minutes of talking with somebody what kind of person they're looking for and what kind of person they're willing to pay for and then you become that" (Holly, dancer).

Rather than seeking to elevate the customer's ego by positioning herself as inferior, Holly (dancer) sought to gain a sense of parity with customers by becoming 'one of the boys'. Indeed, several participants stated that they actively told customers that they were students as a means of negotiating stigma and displacing negative stereotypes of strippers as 'stupid bimbos'. Drawing on their socially accepted identity as students (see Trautner and Collett, 2010) rather than a manufactured stripper identity, students were able to claim a level of respectability unavailable to non-student sex workers. The educated (but still young/sexy) student act has the potential to attract a premium and was a successful marketing strategy employed by students.

One area which has received less academic attention is the cynical acts carried out by waitresses in their interactions with customers. Similar to 'dumb slut' or the 'bimbo act' (Colosi, 2012:103-7), Lilly (waitress) stated that she often acted 'girly, ditsy and flirty' with male customers to earn tips and to dodge potential repercussions for any mistakes she had made at work.

"I dunno if this is maybe more my personality but say if I mix things up or like I make a wee mess or sometimes when I've like spilt something near or over a customer, like, I'll kind of just be like, 'Oh my goodness, I'm so sorry!' And actually, be like dittry and really girly and kind of like 'Oh my goodness, I'm so sorry!' and like flirty and then it means that they, I'm more likely to be like forgiven in a way (laughs). Whereas, I've seen male colleagues be like really shouted at by people if that's been a situation, they would be the ones that would get like a bollocking essentially" (Lilly, waitress).

Although Lilly considers this to be her own personality or individual strategy, the similarities may suggest that such 'acts' are not exclusive to labour considered 'hyper' feminine or sexualised but are instead learned and a part of women's everyday repertoire when negotiating hetero-sexualised power relations.

Hochschild (1983) emphasises the appropriation and transformation of employee feelings by management to create ‘feeling rules’ that prescribe the required emotions between employee and customer. In restaurants, waitresses are typically expected to appear enthusiastic, energetic and engaging. However, Lauren (waitress) adopted her own, inverse tactic to earn tips by instead acting tired and overworked. Similar to the stripper ‘pity plea’ act (Colosi, 2012) involving the fabrication of a ‘sob story’ for money, Lauren generated feelings of sympathy and pity to manipulate customers into ‘helping her out’ financially.

“If you’re not that busy you can just dawdle around and have a chat with people but if its busy, obviously with all the service steps you’ve got to stick to you can’t really be that personal with people. I’ve noticed that if you look tired and overworked you do get more tips (laughs). I think people just feel sorry for you they’re like, ‘Aww! She’s had a hard day, give her a couple of quid’ (laughs)” (Lauren, waitress).

Based on the number of hours respondents worked alongside university, it would not be surprising if Lauren was *genuinely* tired and overworked. By *not* acting in the enthusiastic manner expected of waitresses, her act may in turn appear to customers as more authentic. Nevertheless, it is the cynical nature of the act and the performance to boost tips which makes the performance similar to those adopted by strippers.

#### *Paying attention*

Part of what is sold in strip clubs and restaurants is *attention* which, again, requires a combination of aesthetic, emotional, sexualised labour in the form of conversation, flirting, humour and the more general display and performance of normative, female heterosexuality in exchange for money (Coffey et al., 2018). As mentioned, workers must read customers to decipher what kind of attention they are looking for and respond appropriately. Interactions between customers are relationally negotiated through intersubjective encounters which means that the ‘product’ sold is dependent on the social dynamics and context (Sanders and Hardy, 2014:135).

“As long as you’re attentive to people I’d say that if you’ve made like a relationship with them then they’re more likely to tip you if they feel like they know you a little bit...if it’s been like

reasonably quiet and you've had a chance to chat to a table and get to know them a bit and laugh or whatever then they'll tip more because they feel like they've got a good relationship with you" (Stephanie, waitress).

Stephanie's (waitress) quote is a clear example of the "mobilisation, performance, and enactment of subjectivities and social relationships" to produce value (Coffey et al., 2018:729). Yet, attention is indivisible from the socially marked body of the worker. Indeed, strip club patrons do not seek sexualised attention from 'any old body' but from socially desired bodies – white, young, slim etc. – otherwise, it would not matter whether the dancer was 21 or 70 (O'Connell Davidson, 2014:521). Participants in both strip clubs and restaurants frequently cited examples of when the product of their labour – attention – was (mis)interpreted by customers as interest extending beyond the service encounter. This (mis)interpretation is not incidental but is the direct result of the socially marked bodies of workers.

"Sometimes you would have like male customers that come in and they assume that like you are interested in them because you are a woman and you're nice but actually it's not at all like that. I'm nice because this is my job, like I am nice because I get paid to be nice to you and not because I like you. But sometimes that happens, I don't like it sometimes it's like 'Oh, she's being really nice to me she must be interested let me just be sleazy' and I'm just like, 'No actually I'm nice because we're interacting as two persons and I'm providing you a service, that's it'. Yeah, so that I don't like, people just think you're interested I'm like 'No! (laughs) no, sorry' (laughs)" (Anna, waitress)

Lilly (waitress) found that her attentive, interactive labour was also (mis)construed by female customers as an attempt to make sexual advances to their male partner.

"Interestingly, women, if they're in [the restaurant] with their partners, will get a lot more protective and a lot more catty. I get on with everyone, but I have very different reactions to women on their own or women in groups than I do with women and a partner. So, I always make sure when I'm speaking to a man and woman that I'm more so directly speaking to the woman than I am the man to kind of make sure to get onto her side to be like no, I'm not trying to flirt with your man I'm very much looking at you and interacting with you and asking you because I don't want you to get the wrong idea because so many times I think that's happened before in the past" (Lilly, waitress).

Lilly specifically altered/tailored her approach to 'get on side' with female customers and to downplay or manage the potential 'threat' her labour and sexuality – quite literally – brought to the table.

While most women stated that they actively engaged in sexualised labour and cynical performances at work to increase their income through tips, Victoria and Hannah (waitresses) clearly differentiated their cynical non-sexualised emotional labour i.e. being ‘nice’ to boost their tips from flirtatious/sexualised interactions.

“I used to just stand and talk to customers and stuff just have a bit of craic on with them basically... I would always make sure I was being nice, do you know what I mean, I wouldn’t be like a geet huffy cow (laughs) especially not in [Restaurant 2] because obviously I knew that you could make good tips...I probably did flirt ‘cos I am a flirt, but erm I never ever thought like I’m gonna flirt so they’ll tip me. I can’t really remember thinking like that, no...if they were good looking, I was flirting ‘cos I was flirting, not for a tip (laughs)’ (Victoria, waitress).

“I will be nicer to people if I know there’s a chance of getting tips, then I’ll be nicer (laughs)...I am quite a natural flirt anyway (laughs) so like I think sometimes like flirting with like customers if they’re funny can be enjoyable kind of just makes it more like entertaining but like yeah that’s about it and occasionally I guess like occasionally with like another waiter but that’s only ever... I’ve never done it like cynically (laughs)” (Hannah, waitress).

Both women considered flirting and sexualised interactions with (good looking) customers to be acceptable, ‘natural’ and part of their personality. What was considered ‘unnatural’ then was sexualised labour for financial reward (i.e. sex work). Despite the increased blurring of conventional and commercial sex (for example, paid-for online dating websites and hook-up applications (Tyler, 2015)), symbolic boundaries between good girls (being *nice* for money) and bad girls (flirting for money) remain very much intact.

### Relationships in the restaurant and strip club

#### *Management*

Relationships with management varied. Rebecca (waitress) appeared to have a good relationship with her male manager and she particularly enjoyed his efforts to promote ‘team bonding’ amongst waiting staff. Indeed, several waitresses considered free/subsidised staff nights out - designed to ‘boost morale’ - to be a perk of the job. However, ensuring that staff were friends or felt part of a team was equally beneficial for management. For example, when referring to the close relationships she had forged at work, Rebecca mentioned a sense of team spirit whereby all waiting staff work together and help one another with tasks. Although this



was experienced as a positive part of the job, such bonds could also provoke feelings of guilt and often meant that staff would work ‘above and beyond’ to avoid ‘letting the team down’.

“I would never leave work with something half done ‘cos I don’t want to leave them [co-workers] to do it. Like, why should I get to go home, and they have to stay? We would always just be like ‘Oh, we’ll all just stay to get it done’. Even though you probably don’t need three of us here to do the job, it’s gonna be quicker if we all do it together.” (Rebecca, waitress).

Generating a sense of collective responsibility and associated guilt amongst employees was one indirect technique employed by management to extract surplus labour from waitresses. However, as Rebecca’s workload steadily became more than she had initially agreed to work, the combination of waitressing and university became too much. When she attempted to prioritise university, this led to *additional* feelings of guilt that she was unable to meet all of her manager’s demands.

“I just couldn’t, I couldn’t do both [university and work] anymore ‘cos [management] wanted too much from me and I just didn’t have the time...it wasn’t even going to work it was just feeling like you were letting someone down and like the arguments all the time I said ‘Oh I couldn’t work that day’ but you’ve been put in and then all of a sudden it’s your problem” (Rebecca, waitress).

Rebecca was responsibilised for not only ‘letting the team down’ but also for organising her own shifts. Several participants stated that they were part of a staff group message via WhatsApp or Facebook and that managers instructed workers to organise their shifts/cover amongst themselves. While this increased workers’ autonomy, it also shifted the onus of organising the rota away from management who are paid to do this work and onto employees who are not.

Victoria (waitress) also mentioned feelings of guilt and pressure from management as she was asked to work additional hours to ‘help out as a favour’ which she felt obligated to do. This resulted in Victoria (waitress) missing seminars and lectures in order to go to work or because she was too tired after work. Despite acknowledging that picking up extra shifts had impacted on her grades and her overall learning, Anna (waitress) stated that when her boss was

‘desperate’ for staff, she would work additional hours. Similarly, Lucy (waitress) felt unable to refuse managers requests to work.

“[Management] would sort of like need you at times and erm, you can’t really say no ‘cos there’s not many on the team and stuff. And then other times they would say, ‘Oh, can you open on this day?’ and you’d be like (sighs) ‘Yes, fine!’ (laughs)... ‘cos you don’t want to let the team down... it’s even more painful when you’ve got like a really nice team that you like so you don’t want to let them down... we were like a big family in there [restaurant]” (Lucy, waitress).

### *We are family*

Both waitresses and dancers frequently referred to the people working in their respective restaurant or strip club as ‘like family’. Given that the term family has connotations of responsibility, reliability and a sense of cohesion, it is likely that managers attempted to foster a family dynamic amongst their employees as a means of retaining and motivating staff.

“It’s the family environment in [the strip club] that I really like between dancers, bouncers, bar staff, the house-mum, so it gives you a sense of community like that as well... it’s like a family vibe and they are there to look after you but then there’s also a sense of they’re just like seeing probably pound signs above you... management is management probably in a lot of jobs as well it’s like easier just to be pleasant and friendly and all get on (laughs)” (Charlotte, dancer).

“We’re [all staff] such a family, they’ve helped me out from the very beginning” (Holly, dancer).

The ‘family’ respondents spoke of resembled the traditional/nuclear, patriarchal family structure with a clear hierarchy within both strip clubs and restaurants which infantilised waitresses and dancers who were represented as the children. For example, Ellie (waitress) described her team as ‘so close-knit’ and to a familial relationship with her co-workers referring to her male colleagues as ‘like [her] little brothers’. Similarly, Victoria (waitress) felt that her male manager played a paternalistic role as he would ‘look after’ female staff ‘protecting the girls’ from other male members of staff and customers. Stephanie and Ellie (waitresses) also referred to their male manager ‘stepping in to protect’ them from inappropriate male staff/customer behaviour or complaints, as customers tended to have more respect for them as men and due to their position as managers. Similarly, female managers were represented as mothers and tended to ‘discipline’ employees (children) as such.

“The man boss he’s pretty relaxed a lot more than his wife. He’s really sweet, he doesn’t tell me much to do I’m quite often going up to him and being like, ‘Oh, should I be doing this?’ or ‘Do you want me to go and get this ready?’ Whereas [female manager] is quite hands on and she’s (laughs), like, she’s lovely but she’s a bit of a control freak. Like she gave me like a half hour lesson on how to wash up the other day (laughs). Erm, but she’s also really nice. She tells me what to do and she’ll be more willing to tell me off if I do something wrong. What’s quite nice is their roles are quite different so whereas [male boss] his vibe is like a pal, [female manager’s] very much she’s got like a mother role and she goes around all of the people who are working and makes sure that that they’re okay and that they’re happy but also that they’re getting their work done and they’re doing it to a good standard. So, it’s yeah, very much more like a mother role on her part” (Lilly, waitress).

While there are different layers of management within strip clubs, dancers were managed by women referred to as house-mums whose role was, in theory, maternal, caring and feminised. Indeed, Laura (dancer) specifically likened the dancer – house-mum relationship to that of a mother-daughter relationship.

“The house-mum is really like a mum, if you need anything she’s there. If you need a tampon, she has everything if you need jewellery, she carried everything with her” (Laura, dancer).

Like family relationships, the work ‘family’ was not always harmonious. Several dancers rejected the concept of a house-mum stating that their role was unnecessary (Rachel, dancer). Cara (dancer) stated that some house mothers continued to dance and took advantage of their dual role. House-mums also became another layer of financial exploitation as dancers were expected to pay/tip the house-mum on top of paying house fees, commission and fines.

#### *Co/Other workers*

Research in the US suggests that students working as strippers actively distanced themselves from co-workers as a coping strategy to neutralise the negative effects of whore stigma (Haeger and Deli-Amen, 2010; Trautner and Collett, 2010). However, all 39 women in this research considered the friendships and emotional bonds they had built with their co-workers to be one of, if not the, best thing about their job.

“I personally work with a group of girls, especially in the pubs, they’re so sweet, they’re kind and they’re just regular people that have lives, they have kids...I have a lot of respect for them they’re like the best part [of the job]” (Holly, dancer).

“I’ve met my best friends through dancing. I didn’t meet anyone in [city] for a year until I started dancing then all my friends were dancers, they’re proper cool girls. We’re all, *honestly*, all us girls are really good friends” (Phillipa, dancer).

“...it’s a really social job, erm so everyone I work with is a student, so I’ve made lots of friends doing it [waitressing]... it’s like when your work friends become real, life friends, so it’s really good” (Zoe, waitress).

“I think that’s [co-workers] what makes the job, like everybody’s so nice to each other everyone’s so lovely I think it’s really nice that we all get along...I got some really great friends from it [waitressing]” (Rebecca, waitress).

“I love the people I work with which is one of the main things that I think is going to be really hard to leave” (Anna, waitress).

Waitresses and strippers typically work weekends and evenings which is a time people usually spend socialising with friends and family. As a result, participants stated that co-workers became *like* friends/family and such relationships were particularly important sources of support for students who were living away from friends/relatives for the first time.

Rachel’s (dancer) quote below demonstrates how the deeply embodied nature of stripping and the physical proximity between dancers leads to an emotional closeness. Without clothing acting as a physical barrier, Rachel described ‘letting [her] guard down’ and feeling ‘exposed’ and even ‘vulnerable’ in front of her co-workers which helped dancers to build a sense of trust and to bond more deeply.

“They’re the nicest girls I’ve met in my life, like they’re really genuine you know they’re not prudes so they don’t judge you like the rest, like a lot of people would. You’re kind of like, quite exposed, I suppose. You’re all in the changing room together naked, someone might be rude to you, so I find there’s a lot of bonding because your dignity is a bit, gone. Say you’re on your period, you know, and you’re like, ‘Can you see the Tampax string?’ It’s like that, you don’t get that kind of closeness or that kind of being exposed to other people in that way ‘cos being naked I think you’re quite vulnerable in a way and I think in a normal job, you’ve got your business suit on or whatever you don’t really let your guard down like that so I think we can bond quite a lot” (Rachel, dancer).

Both strippers and waitresses engage in different forms of ‘dirty work’ (see Tyler, 2011). The former is morally tainted while the latter is seen to carry ‘physical taint’ (close proximity to

‘dirt’ e.g. food waste/cleaning/rubbish) and ‘social taint’ (waitresses<sup>53</sup> as ‘servile’). Research suggests that dirty workers develop strong occupational/work group cultures<sup>54</sup> and this was evident within the data as participants described sharing both the pleasures and also the pains of their job as they forged ‘communities of coping’ (Tyler, 2011:1486).

“I think every single friend that I’m taking away with me from living in [university city], I’ve met through my job. I’ve got people on my course who I’m very friendly with, you know, we will graduate together but I think friends that I will genuinely stay in contact with are the people that I’ve met at work, ‘cos at work, you’re just 100% yourself... I think as well like the environment that we are in, working in a strip club and doing nine and a half hour shifts, it’s a job that only, I think, certain types of people can do and can deal with and I think obviously in that environment we’re all very similar people... we’re all in the same kind of zone as each other, we get each other and you know, like, when you’re in work you kind of, they’re the people that you speak to the most. We all have a group chat where we’re constantly talking on there. Yeah, just a really good support network really. Like I said, I probably made my best friends from work” (Zara, waitress, strip club).

Zara (waitress, strip club) stated that only a ‘certain person’ could handle working in a strip club as either a stripper or waitress. Furthermore, that it was no coincidence that she had established such good friendships as strip club staff are all ‘very similar people’. This sense of homophily was shared by participants as they clearly enjoyed working with people of a similar age and who were in a similar position. For example, co-workers were also typically students/graduates creating a sense of parity with colleagues, in contrast to the unequal relationship often felt with management and customers. However, as respondents focused on and built relationships with people ‘like them’, this also resulted in Othering co-workers who were considered to be *different*.

Participants stated that they had a ‘mutual respect’ for other workers, however, this ‘us versus them’ was most notable in relation to job type, gender, age, nationality, race and

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<sup>53</sup> As a waitress in a strip club, Zara’s job carries an additional layer of ‘social taint’ due to her close proximity and engagement with ‘stigmatised people’ (Tyler, 2011:1486).

<sup>54</sup> Strip clubs are historically deviant spaces within abject places (i.e. Soho) where stigmatised people work and play. They are typically experienced as, less/non-judgmental, tolerant/accepting spaces/places where people feel that they can be ‘100%’ themselves (Tyler, 2011:1482). I will return to this point in Chapter Six when discussing participants’ emotional transitions out of such workplaces and into rather different ‘mainstream’ occupational cultures.

ethnicity. Waitresses differentiated between their co-workers (those who had the same job) and other people working in different parts of the restaurant i.e. kitchen staff. This sense of difference was compounded by gender as kitchen staff were primarily male. Ellie (waitress) stated that male kitchen staff did not appreciate her role which made her job more stressful as she would have to ‘...convince *them* to do something that they should be doing anyway’.

“*We* appreciate how stressful *their* job is but I kind of feel *they* don’t appreciate *we* are under time constraints... *we* don’t just kind of go and take orders it is a lot more than that” (Ellie, waitress).

Interestingly, all 20 waitresses stated that the kitchen was a male dominated and sexist – even ‘aggressively sexist’ - environment. Women described feeling intimidated and reluctant to enter the kitchen avoiding the area if possible. Participants referred to bullying behaviour and exclusionary tactics employed by male kitchen workers as a means of setting boundaries where (ironically) the kitchen was not considered a place for women.

“Whenever I went in [the kitchen] and asked a question I was some kind of name, I was screamed out of the kitchen and I cried quite a few times, they were just mean and hurtful. I’d just be called like an effing little something, you know, like they would just swear at me and I was called every name under the sun, like they were nasty, they were mean...it was getting to the point where I already put up with that from customers but I’m getting paid to put up with that, I don’t have to take it from the staff too!” (Rebecca, waitress).

Despite making several complaints to management, Rebecca (waitress) stated that she was told to stop being emotional and overreacting, to reassess whether or not she had misinterpreted the comments with one male manager insisting that she should ‘lighten up’ and learn to take a joke. However, rather than encouraging women to employ individual, gendered responses to bullying at work, Hannah’s (waitress) quote suggests that experiences could be improved by managerial responses to sexist behaviour or SH highlighting how neither are an inherent ‘part of the job’ and can instead be designed out of the industry by building respect for *all* workers.

“[Kitchen staff] tend to be men, they tend to be like, no, they’ve always been men and a couple of them have been really very sexist. I’ve had like a couple of experiences of like, of a kitchen staff member who was like aggressively intimidating saying like just really disgusting things a lot of the time. I mean same with the waiters like they are like an inherently sexist group of men. The kitchen, it’s dominated by the head chef and they kind of create this environment

which sets them as sexist. It's not only like allowed but it's kind of like, its you're not accepted, certain men kind of like, you are cut out for the environment or you're not accepted by the other men in the kitchen environment, so it's kind of like perpetuating, self-perpetuates. But we've got a female manager now, it's been a better environment, like a less sexist environment is encouraged" (Hannah, waitress).

As will be discussed in further detail at the end of this chapter, unfortunately, the majority of participants described managers as failing to address the strained relationship between waiting and kitchen staff. Sexist behaviour towards participants was often downplayed as 'kitchen culture' and female waitresses were usually encouraged to be more understanding of the pressures faced by kitchen staff.

Age was another important factor which heavily impacted on relationships between workers. Nikki and Emma (dancers) stated that as new starters they initially struggled to make friends which they attributed to being young, in a different place in their lives and not having much in common with older non-student dancers. Laura (dancer) on the other hand, had worked in strip clubs notably longer and differentiated herself from younger dancers who she considered to be of a 'lower quality' and who had changed the atmosphere/environment of working in strip clubs.

"The thing is, the quality was much higher then [when she started dancing 12 years ago] (laughs) than now (laughs). 'Cos the good people that you would work with back then, they don't work anymore. Obviously, of course, in every job there are new people come in, but it's just a generation difference. So, it's the vibe, it's not the same like it was before" (Laura, dancer).

Colosi (2012) refers to this as the 'stripper hierarchy' as she describes the tension between 'old school' dancers who were accustomed to, or even set the rules and ways of working in the strip club which 'new girls' had not yet learnt, highlighting another more concealed layer of subordination student/younger women may have to negotiate.

Some white British respondents also Othered co/other workers based on race, ethnicity, and nationality.

"You get some really, really nice girls but it's usually the older ones and the Romanian ones who aren't very nice. Sounds a bit racist, but they just, I dunno, there's a lot of Romanians here and 'cos they are, they've come here to do this job, make their money and go home, they're

really kinda, can be quite catty about it. They're just very kind of like piranhas when the customer comes in, they're just straight on them" (Abbie, dancer).

"In London, the industry is dominated by Eastern Europeans and Romanians I mean [in other city] it's very white and like very non-multicultural. So, when I went to London, it was a lot more multicultural in the clubs. I wasn't used to being around people who weren't, like, English. Lots of Brazilians as well so that affected things because they are very ruthless and they will do a lot more, like they'll offer a lot more like extras and stuff. I think that still kind of happens in [other city] but like it was a lot more under the carpet" (Emma, dancer).

Participants reiterated the idea of the 'Eastern woman with loose morals' which has the effect of bringing the erotic Other to life; while at the same time dehumanising her. Indeed, migrant workers were described as 'sharks', 'piranhas', 'ruthless', ready to 'pounce' and willing to do 'anything' for money. In dehumanising Other workers, respondents were able to position themselves as the opposite and as *civilised/respectable*, producing racialised privilege (Penttinen, 2010:34). The interviews were carried out amidst the Brexit referendum and during a time of heightened xenophobic propaganda/anti-immigration rhetoric which was widely distributed across the country intensifying feelings of difference amongst British and migrant Others (see Rzepnikowska, 2018; Guma and Jones, 2018). While this is not an attempt to justify racism, particularly as the Othering of migrant workers is not uncommon nor unique to stripping (as will be discussed below), this additional context to the quotes may, in-part, explain why women felt able to make such comments/assumed I/others would agree during this time.

Stephanie (waitress) felt that her gender and nationality played an important role in how she was treated by customers in comparison to her male, Polish co-worker.

"I work with quite a lot of Polish people, without like being mean, particularly the older people they tend to like not respond as well with the Polish people, because, obviously, like the accent and things and they can't understand them as well...I would have said they get on with me better because I'm a girl, but then I don't know if it's also they get on with me better because they understand me better. We've got quite a few regular customers and yeah, I think with older people they definitely prefer to have a girl serving them. We've got one lad that's really cocky and like you can tell he rubs so many people up the wrong way. One Pole, one of the Polish lads, whose English isn't particularly good. So, he gets into difficulty quite a lot with the older customers that don't understand him. I dunno, I think they just like you to be chatty to them and make them feel comfortable but acknowledge that you are serving them. They don't like, they don't want you to be, like too cocky with them and *too pally*" (Stephanie, waitress).



As a ‘girl’, Stephanie’s body is socially marked and read by customers as more authentic in the role of ‘servility’ (O’Connell Davidson, 2014:521). Combined with her white Britishness, this made her familiar and thus, unthreatening to customers. Stephanie’s co-worker on the other hand, does not understand (how to behave/serve/act deferential) and is not understood (due to his accent) and this lack of shared understanding marks him as foreign and Other generating tension and feelings of discomfort for customers. This example also demonstrates how gender and race/ethnicity/nationality intersect as her male co-worker’s gender privilege disappears. Furthermore, it shows how age plays an important role in this context as Stephanie frequently refers to ‘older’ customers who are somehow ‘understandably’ old-fashioned (read: racist/sexist) and ‘prefer’ women who know their place.

### The (carnavalesque) working environment

I have found Bakhtin’s (1984) conceptualisation of the carnivalesque useful in drawing a common thread across the two different spheres of the restaurant and strip club. The carnivalesque has been used as a theoretical framework to explore a range of practices within the NTE including ‘binge drinking’ (Haydock, 2016) and the student event *Carnage UK* (Hubbard, 2013). The carnival has also been applied to different settings within tourism, leisure and hospitality including hotels (Pritchard and Morgan, 2006), festivals (Matheson and Tinsley, 2016) and the seaside (Webb, 2005; Chapman and Light, 2017). While scholars have examined the carnivalesque elements of strip clubs (Liepe-Levison, 1998), this lens has not been used to analyse waitressing or restaurants,<sup>55</sup> despite clear similarities.

Based on the data, it appears that students who had to work for financial purposes chose to work within carnivalesque spaces to avoid missing out on the stereotypical student lifestyle

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<sup>55</sup> Sherringham (2003) has used the carnivalesque to analyse McDonald’s restaurants. However, as fast-food establishments they do not hire waitresses.

which revolves around hedonism rather than purely education or work<sup>56</sup>. The carnivalesque is a world turned upside down, it is an opportunity for liberation from the mundane and the inversions/transgression of everyday norms. Medieval carnival was a space where an alternative social world could be *temporarily* created, free from constraints and responsibilities and where typical rules do not apply. Behaviour that was usually considered inappropriate was accepted and the key concern was the celebration of bodily pleasures and debauchery. The carnivalesque is therefore associated with grotesque, unruly bodies, excess and the consumption of copious amounts of food and alcohol as people gave into their animalistic, lowly bodily desires through eating, drinking, sex and excretion (Webb, 2005).

Respondents and their workplaces did not exhibit all elements of the carnival but rather ‘hinted at’ the ‘spirit’ of carnivalesque (see Chapman and Light, 2017). Indeed, as employees, their experiences are clearly not the same as customers. Furthermore, not all behaviour can be simply described as an expression of the carnivalesque and not, for example, unequal gendered and classed power dynamics. Nevertheless, I have found the lens of carnival helpful in understanding the affective atmosphere described by participants. This spirit was (re)produced by the bodies of workers and customers within both workplaces – to different degrees- which ‘rubbed off’ on workers, shaping their experience and (mis)behaviour primarily in relation to alcohol, drug use, sexual interactions with customers, violence and other transgressions.

#### *Escapism and the (un)predictability of ‘easy work’*

The carnival took place within a liminal time and space which meant that it was a temporary escape, separation and freedom from the mundane constraints and responsibilities of everyday life (Webb, 2005). Chapman and Light (2017) argue that, by definition, those who work in carnivalesque spaces are not taking part in the same temporary escape from everyday life as customers. However, both waitressing and stripping were framed by participants as a

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<sup>56</sup> See Pitcher (2006) for a similar discussion of students and the carnivalesque of spring-break/*Girls Gone Wild* in the US.

form of escapism and as a break from university and other everyday responsibilities. Respondents described their respective jobs as easy work, or even non-work for very different reasons. For example, given that many women started waitressing from as young as 15, they were accustomed to and enjoyed the routine nature of the job. They felt confident in the restaurant as a space/place and in their abilities to carry out their job effectively which meant that they 'don't have to think' at work (Hannah/Stephanie, waitresses).

"I actually enjoy the job you know. After I've been at university or in placement, that's what, 12 hours every day, I come into the restaurant and I'm just like, you know what, this is so nice. I know exactly where everything is, I know exactly what I need to do, I know exactly who I'm working with. I'm comfortable and I have no responsibilities apart from like making people happy, making sure they have their drinks, their food, their coffee, so that's really nice. Erm, but yeah, sometimes in placement I'm just like 'Oh my God! I don't know who I'm working with, I don't know where anything is!'" (Anna, waitress).

Waitresses framed their job in oppositional terms to their role as students where they felt less confident and as university required more 'mental' energy and effort. While waitresses enjoyed the routine and predictable nature of their work which allowed them to switch off, dancers on the other hand stated that they enjoyed the *unpredictability* of strip clubs in that no two nights were ever the same.

"I did definitely have the best time in my life when I was a stripper 'cos you can't predict a night. Like everything, every time is different so it was exciting obviously...it could obviously be stressful, it has pros and cons, I would say 50-50. But I do enjoy a lot of the meeting new people, socialising with the other girls, dancing" (Laura, dancer).

Dancers also contrasted their experiences of work and university with the former as fun, exciting and even wild and the latter as routine, boring and again, mentally challenging. Participants were able to switch off from university at work and enjoy the informality of the strip club in comparison to the professional university environment. The thrill and excitement of stripping was also related to the all or nothing 'Russian Roulette' nature of their earnings which were at the same time unpredictable and potentially limitless (Lister, 2015:51).

Emma and Daphne (dancers) described their role as 'being paid to party' and referred to themselves as 'professional socialisers'. Given their time and money constraints,

respondents felt that ‘being paid to party’ meant that they were able to have fun and engage in stereotypical behaviour associated with youth and being a student, while at the same time remaining ‘productive’ (in a neoliberal/capitalist sense) as they were (usually) earning money. Similarly, waitressing was also framed by respondents as a fun way to socialise without feeling guilty for not engaging in university work, as the monetary gain rendered this form of fun/socialising acceptable and productive, rather than idle and inefficient. As Ellie’s quote demonstrates, waitressing (like the carnivalesque) was a temporary *release* from everyday responsibilities and constraints.

“I really enjoy [waitressing]. Especially [in third year] where [university] has been really stressful and I’ve had a lot of academic stuff to do. I find it’s [waitressing] almost like a release from [university], it’s something different to do, getting to talk to like different people whereas if I spent like six hours of my day going out to socialise down the pub I could feel really guilty but if I’ve done six hours working [in the restaurant], I’m like, well that’s okay in my head it’s justifiable. So, yeah, it’s [waitressing] been almost like a release this year which has been quite good ‘cos [university] has been quite stressful.” (Ellie, waitress).

The carnival spirit is part of the ‘product’ which is sold in both waitressing and stripping and was described by participants as ‘a party atmosphere’, ‘buzz’, ‘vibe’ or ‘feel’ within the restaurant or strip club which blurred the work/leisure boundary. Importantly, the spirit of carnival does not just happen, it is produced by workers who engage in a complex mix of affective, interactive, emotional, aesthetic and sexualised bodily labour creating sensations, emotions and embodied experiences for customers and thus, value/profit for employers. Similar to strippers, waitresses also referred to themselves as hosts or their job as ‘like hosting a party’.

“There’s live music [at the restaurant] and it feels like (laughs), like for instance, I was saying to my pal the other day, when the other waitress left at half nine and until midnight it was just me serving the customers but I felt like I was hosting my own party. So, I was going around being like, ‘Oh can I get you another drink? Are you alright? Are you alright for beer there?’ and when everyone was leaving I was like, ‘Oh thanks so much for coming, thank you for coming’ (laughs) and I was like I’ve got to tone it down ‘cos it’s not my place but it was, it was still really nice, it’s a nice thing to do” (Lilly, waitress).

Like the carnival, restaurants and strip clubs are lived, bodily experiences as bodily pleasures and sensory gratification are primarily what is produced and consumed within such

spaces. Both activities are similar as they must be undertaken in the flesh and experienced in person. While customers could engage in similar activities from the comfort of their own home, they have chosen to frequent public spaces for attention, social interaction, the affective atmosphere and the sensual experience involving taste, smell, touch, sound, visual pleasures, awareness of temperature etc. Substances such as food, perfume, special clothing, music and lights also play an important role (Andrews et al., 2007).

Importantly, both jobs were not always experienced as fun or exciting. Waitresses and dancers also described being bored at work when custom was low. Participants referred to the physically and emotionally tiring nature of their job and to aching bodies, sore feet and feeling drained. For dancers, this was the result of wearing extremely high-heeled shoes and dancing/doing tricks on the pole which resulted in blisters, burns and bruises. Similarly, waitresses described continuously being on their feet for long periods of time which strained their back/legs and how carrying heavy and hot items resulted in burns on their arms/hands. Despite this, respondents still regarded their (historically working-class) job to be ‘easy’ highlighting the general devaluation of physical and emotional labour in comparison to university work (read: middle-class labour) which requires individuals to use their ‘mental capacity’ (as if the body and mind were two separate entities).

#### *Rules (are there to be broken) in the strip club and restaurant*

Strip clubs resembled the carnivalesque as spaces where normal rules and behaviour are temporarily suspended, or even inverted, so that people are able to behave differently; making it a space of transgression (Webb, 2005).

“I think the reason that I love my job, no matter what, no matter how shit it’s been is because I choose when I work, you don’t have to be professional, you can be yourself, you can go there you can get wasted, you can fall down stairs (laughs), you can have a nap in the corner, *if* you dodge the manager, you’re allowed to drink as well and it’s so informal. I mean, I can’t stand being professional for too long ‘cos I’m a bit whacky and a bit weird. So, I like to just be myself and be rude to customers and not have to say, ‘Oh I’m sorry you feel that way’” (Nikki, dancer).

Working within the NTE and within a leisure atmosphere/environment allowed employees to suspend usual distinctions between work and non-work to different extents. For example, customer behaviour rubbed off on employees who then acted in ways they could/would when outside of work e.g. by consuming alcohol (and illicit drugs in the case of dancers).

“The only real rules [in the restaurant] are no phones and no drinking on shift. Erm, they’re the only real rules, but they’re not always adhered to (laughs). What we’re supposed to do is make the drink and put it aside and save it for the end of the shift, but they just get drunk (laughs). I’ve never been called out for doing it (laughs), so far any way” (Zoe, waitress).

“I enjoyed getting drunk all the time and having a genuine laugh with everybody that was there. But I was a quite relieved to leave in a way, because all we would do is drink and then like serve people, and we were like, we were just drunk all the time really (laughs) (Lucy, waitress).

While Zoe’s (waitress) quote suggests that managers may have turned a blind eye to waitresses drinking on shift, such behaviour was not condoned or endorsed by managers in restaurants to the same extent as in strip clubs. Indeed, dancers stated that not only were they permitted to drink alcohol; they were encouraged by managers for profit related purposes. Ensuring that dancers are drinking alcohol while at work creates the desired affective (party) atmosphere and also encourages customers to continue to buy over-priced drinks. Daphne (dancers) stated that management discipline dancers if/when customers were paying for dances and not drinks and that they would instruct dancers to prioritise alcohol sales which is not part of their job. Rather than simply allowing dancers to drink, in some clubs there were strict rules around drinking. In Abbie’s (dancer) place of work, dancers were only allowed to drink champagne and only if it was bought by a customer. In order to pay for VIP time with a dancer, customers were expected to pay £100 per half hour to the dancer in addition to £250 for champagne to the club. Unsurprisingly, Abbie stated that this heavily curtailed her earning potential.

For most dancers, consuming alcohol was associated with having fun/partying and was considered to be an important and enjoyable part of their job. However, the expectation to drink (from co-workers, managers and customers) was not always experienced as positive. In contrast to the majority of respondents in this study, and in contrast to waitresses who consumed alcohol

as a form of workplace resistance, Holly (dancer) developed her own individualised tactics to resist having to drink at work.

“I don’t [drink]. I look at it like any other job, like it’s my job. You wouldn’t get drunk at your work, so why would I? I have drank, but it depends on my mood completely. This is what bothers me. Sometimes I get called out for *not* drinking because I’m not making the bar money. What I do is I try to get the bartender to make me a fake drink, but you can get called out for that. It’s very dangerous, especially if your customer looks at your drink and goes ‘That doesn’t look quite right’ you know I’ve seen customers get a bit fussy if someone made you a fake drink and they don’t think it’s got alcohol in it. I think drinking for guys is a real big part of the courting process it’s what they need for it to feel real. Fair enough. But I still don’t want to drink” (Holly, dancer).

Holly’s quote demonstrates how, on the whole, dancers are expected to behave in ways that would be unacceptable in other workplaces. By not drinking, Holly ‘risked’ exposing the commercial nature of the customer-dancer interaction and for managers, this risked both profit and negatively affecting the desired atmosphere. Indeed, Colosi (2012) argues that what makes stripping *distinct* to other forms of mainstream work is the availability of alcohol/drugs and the prioritisation of ‘getting pissed’/having a laugh. While Colosi (2012) admits that workers in other sectors also consume alcohol and/or drugs at work and engage in workplace resistance, it is the *prioritisation* of fun which makes dancing different. This research corroborates such findings as dancers regularly compared their job to a typical night out on the town. Nevertheless, the workplaces referenced by Colosi (2012) were largely office-based, where the social practices associated with stripping are less common; ignoring the experiences of workers in other NTE establishments.

Zoe and Lucy’s (waitresses) quotes above highlight how waiting staff were able to resist rules, have fun, bond with colleagues and the regularity of being/getting drunk at work suggests that this was also priority for *some* waitresses. Admittedly, waitresses were not able to ‘get pissed’ to the same extent or as openly as dancers. Stephanie (waitress) stated that waiting staff were regularly fired for drinking on shift or for coming into work drunk or hungover. Furthermore, not all waitresses wanted to get drunk at work as this made their job more difficult. Nevertheless, where there is a close proximity to alcohol, there is a likelihood that

workers will blur the boundary between work and leisure/fun. The consumption of alcohol and drugs in the workplace is well documented among tourism and hospitality employees (see Wood, 1997; Reynolds and Harris, 2006; Clapham and Light, 2017; Coffey et al., 2018; Kuenz, 1995; Sandiford and Seymour, 2013; Guerrier, 2006) which suggests that this is not something ‘unique’ to stripping.

Bradley-Engen (2009) argues that a dancer’s experience of stripping is heavily dependent on the type of club and whether it is a hustle, social or show club. Colosi’s (2012) ethnographic study was carried out in what could be described as a social strip club. However, since that time, there has been a rapid decline in the number of strip clubs in the UK and based on the narratives of women in this study, there may have also been a shift towards the hustle club system. As a dancer’s ability to earn money has declined, while at the same time competition among women has increased, Lister (2015) argues that dancers are often less focused on getting pissed and having a laugh at work than they used to and are now more focused on hustling and being able to earn money. Thus, as management rules and regulations have intensified within the strip club, ‘the prioritisation of fun as anti-work or workplace resistance’ may no longer be an option for many dancers and may no longer demarcate stripping as ‘different’ to other forms of employment.

#### *Rules, requirements or exploitation?*

Based on the data, it appears that in some strip clubs the rules were not only flouted by dancers but also by managers. Strip clubs – like restaurants – are places of work but are not always recognised or regulated as such. As outlined in Chapter Two, strip clubs are regulated under criminal law and subject to strict SEV licencing conditions. However, local authorities are able to set the conditions for their area which means that rules vary geographically (see Sanders et al., 2013). Codes of conduct or ‘house rules’ also vary across strip clubs and pubs and while respondents cited similar rules, many appeared arbitrary. During the analysis



process, it was at times difficult to discern whether certain rules were ‘house rules’, licencing conditions or if management were simply exploiting dancers and taking their money.

One important difference between waitresses and dancers is that the latter are fined for ‘rule breaking’. Dancers stated that they were most commonly fined for breaking the no touching rule and even when customers touched them without their consent. More trivial rule breaking included factors as micro as having chipped nail polish or chewing gum. Dancers were also fined for being late, missing a stage show or shift, being (too) drunk, taking drugs and respondents were also prohibited from using their mobile phones on the floor.

“They fine you for the most arbitrary shit. I got fined £20 for using my phone for like three seconds when it was dead. The same night I know for a fact there was fingering and blow jobs and cocaine going down in VIP and I was like, ‘You think you’re going to lose your license because I had my phone out for three seconds? No, you’re losing your license because you’re letting illegal shit happen!’ So, that sort of thing, that’s the real piss off” (Holly, dancer).

Several dancers stated that management frequently reminded them that the rules were in place to protect women in the club and to maintain their SEV licence. However, respondents also stated that all rules were broken on a regular basis and that management would ‘turn a blind eye’ if they were tipped.

“The manager would tell you the rules and they’d kind of like imply that there are ways of getting around them but they wouldn’t say it because they’re not allowed to say it in words but they would, you know, with body language or facial expressions to indicate that there were other things that could happen or you’d find out later on from other girls” (Emma, dancer).

“I think all of the rules are broken on a regular basis, definitely! It’s like £10 a fine if they catch me on my phone, if I’m rude to a customer, if someone touches me, but if they catch me doing drugs, I’m sent home... I was fined just on Saturday for letting someone touch me, but it wasn’t that bad...you can definitely tip people to look the other way (laughs)” (Nikki, dancer).

This suggests that rather than ‘protecting dancers’, the implementation of certain rules and fining women is another way of extracting surplus income/profit for management/owners, disciplining certain women and showing favouritism to others (c.f. Colosi, 2012). As Sanders and Hardy (2014) have argued, there is clearly scope to improve the working conditions within strip clubs/pubs as previous legislative changes ignored the concerns of dancers and what they consider to be the more problematic aspects of their job.

Participants did not consider exploitative conditions to be inherent to stripping but rather specific to the hustle system which they associated with the UK stripping industry in particular. As Sophia's quote suggests, exploitative working conditions had the potential to leave workers feeling dehumanised and alienated.

"I felt a lot more human working outside the UK, they treated the dancers with a lot more humanity so that felt good...the only place I've seen where they treat dancers like they're worthless so far has been the UK out of everywhere I've worked. Even in Spain, the money wasn't great, but they get you pissed, they wanted you to have fun, so even if you don't make that much money, you still get treated with a bit more humanity, you know. Managers exploiting dancers comes from the shame around sex work, it's seen to be such a shameful thing that they [management] take advantage of that, because they know that not many people is gonna stand for the strippers. Everyone's going to think, 'Well she's making enough money, so nobody really feels sorry for her'. If anything, it's more critical because they think 'Well it's her own fault for putting herself in that situation', you know" (Sophia, dancer).

As a 'self-employed contractor' working within a stigmatised industry, Sophia (dancer) felt that she had little if any access to recourse as strippers (and sex workers more broadly) are blamed for any exploitation that they face. Rachel (dancer) stated that even members of local authorities who claim to be 'protecting' women by ensuring clubs/dancers are 'abiding' by SEV stipulations, also manipulated dancers to suit their agenda.

"Guys from the council they'll come in [to the strip club] as plants ...it's really awful they'll try and find a girl, find out her situation, if the girl really needs money they'll push her and say 'Do you want to meet me after?' or say 'Go on give us a little touch, I'll give you extra money' and then they'll go and tell the council and the council will investigate the club more and if it keeps happening the club gets shut down... so that needs to be said because this is what people's taxes are paying for you know the guys that actually go into strip clubs and exploit the girls" (Rachel, dancer).

Although Rachel's quote is anecdotal, it appears plausible given the recent media coverage, outlined in Chapters One and Two, of undercover agents secretly recording women at work without their consent. While focus is usually on the exploitative stripper-customer dyad, this ignores other more insidious forms of exploitation described by respondents from local authorities, pressure groups and management.

## Hospitality or hostility?

The data from this research adds to the wealth of scholarship highlighting the ubiquity and normalisation of abuse, hostility and SH in both hospitality and stripping. Based on Ram's (2018) review of literature on hospitality, tourism and organisational behaviour, scholars have identified three key 'causes' of such abuse (cultural, structural and managerial) as well as three perpetrators/enablers (customers, managers and colleagues). In the following section, I demonstrate how some theories are also applicable to stripping while others perpetuate harmful, gendered myths.

### *The customer is always right*

Scholars have argued that the 'cultural causes' of hostility towards employees are the result of norms within and beliefs about the industry which are widely accepted by customers, employers and often employees themselves (see Ram, 2018). Indeed, waitresses and dancers faced verbal abuse from customers if/when the norms within the restaurant or strip club were not recognised or were in opposition to customer beliefs about the industry. For example, dancers enjoyed spending time with customers who understood the concept of a strip club and were aware of how dancers earn their income (i.e. through customers, not the club). Such customers were described by Daphne (dancer) as 'strip club educated' and tended to be older men seeking attention from young, attractive women. Several dancers challenged negative stereotypes of male customers as 'creepy old men'. Most women preferred to interact with older men who were considered to be more respectful. This was in contrast to descriptions of younger male customers frequenting strip clubs as a way to 'show off' and perform a particular heterosexual masculinity, typically through homosocial activities such as stag dos.

"You get a lot of older guys, the older the better, I think. People might think they're creepy, but they come in on their own and they're actually harmless. They just want company and they spend the most as well so they're quite nice...the 18-year-olds and stuff that come you know like they've just turned 18 they think they're class going to a strip club, they just don't treat you very well so they never ever spend, we [dancers] just ignore them when they come in" (Abbie, dancer).

Dancers also experienced emotional and symbolic hostility as a result of customers' own and broader cultural beliefs around stripping and of women working in the industry. For example, despite frequenting strip clubs, customers would often refuse to pay for dances due to their moral stance on stripping.

"I absolutely hate justifying my job to customers when they are there as customers it blows my mind as to why they come in at all... I know there was a surge of negative press about strip clubs and that has really affected people's thinking about them and the way they act when they're inside one like they'll go in but they won't actually engage in the entertainment side of things which is what we're [dancers] there for" (Daphne, dancer).

Daphne (dancer) stated that when attempting to justify her job, the situation would sometimes escalate and result in verbal abuse from customers. Daphne described situations where she had been reduced to tears as customers had gone into detail about how degrading her job was and how she should be ashamed of herself. As mentioned in Chapter Three, calls to 'get rid' of strip clubs which have received much media attention, combined with policy approaches which frame sex work as wrong or shameful fuel a 'discourse of disposability' which then reinforces negative attitudes towards sex workers (Lowman, 2000; Sanders and Campbell, 2007). As Daphne's quote demonstrates, this can then result in sex workers becoming targets of hostility and abuse even within strip clubs.

In contrast, Gemma (dancer/waitress) stated that customers would frequently tell her that she was *too* intelligent, pretty or good to be a stripper. While she was able to exploit customers' stereotypical assumptions about dancers, such comments were not considered complimentary or experienced positively by Gemma or other dancers who described similar scenarios.

"The worst customers are the ones that are like 'Oh, you're too good to be here' and I'm like, 'Well what if I want to be here?' It's the people that are like 'Oh you're too pretty to be a stripper' and it's like (sighs). Sometimes you just kind of play along with them a little bit, acting like you really need money so that they'll pay you (laughs). Most of the time you just kind of try to end the conversation and go off and find someone else who's actually there for you know, the reason of the club. I don't mind people kind of being there and being over the top sexual and flirtatious and stuff 'cos, well, it's kind of what they're there for, is for that kind of whole experience, you know. They come there and they pay to think that we want to have sex with

them even though we really don't (laughs). So, I don't mind those kinds of [sexualised comments]" (Gemma, dancer/waitress).

As students, participants have a capacity to displace negative stereotypes of strippers as 'unintelligent'. However, at the same time, this also has the potential to recreate hierarchies and problematic good girl/bad girl dichotomies with (middle-class) 'good girls' framed out of place in a strip club or as 'deserving victims' in need of saviour; while Other women are reduced to negative stereotypes. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the previous section, several dancers stated that they did not want to be framed by customers as 'good girls' in need of rescuing. Indeed, as Gemma's quote suggests, she wanted to perform sexualised labour as that was an enjoyable part of her job.

Rude and abusive customers were the rule and not the exception in both workplaces. Similar to dancers, waitresses stated that the 'worst' customers were those who did not understand how a restaurant works and who did not appreciate their job.

"I've had rude customers that's for sure, you see, my definition of a bad customer would just be someone who just doesn't understand like the way the restaurant works. If we've got 100 people in the restaurant, your foods not gonna be out in 15 minutes. I can't make it go quicker. I've had a customer before who's complained about me six times over one evening because as soon as he's put his knife and fork down, I've not taken his plate, because I've got other things to do! I've done everything I'm meant to do but he's just being picky... it can range from just nasty customers who are just unnecessarily rude people who just don't appreciate that you're there to do a job you're not there to make miracles and not everything's your fault" (Rebecca, waitress).

Participants stated that customers would complain to management in an attempt to bypass waitresses and their assumed low status and to ensure that waitresses were punished for not meeting customer standards of service. Waitresses also reported frequently crying at work as a result of customers who were swearing, aggressively shouting or making degrading comments.

"I think the worst thing for me is if you've said to them [customers] like 'Oh, the kitchens busy, the food, like, we're quite busy at the moment, service is going to be a little bit slower'. If you've already said to them expect like 25 minutes for your main course and at 22 minutes they're like 'Where's my food?!' and if you then say to them like 'Oh I'll go and check, it won't be more than another five minutes' and they keep giving you a horrible look as you walk past or keep hounding you like harassing you and giving you verbal abuse and things. We had one once that got quite heated. I'd already gone to the kitchen to chase up the food and they were

like shouting and swearing and you know you just think like that's not how you behave. Erm, but yeah, generally just being rude and abrupt 'cos it just makes you as a server not want to go back to that table knowing that you're going to get rudeness again" (Ellie, waitress)

'Cultural causes' for hostility from customers in restaurants – and strip clubs – appeared to be based on the 'enchanted myth of customer sovereignty' (Korczynski and Ott, 2004) which scholars have argued *encourages* customers to believe that they have elevated social status and control over the interaction as a result of their financial 'power'. Waitresses in this research also believed that 'the customer was always right' which had the effect of limiting their perceived ability to challenge abusive customers as they were expected to remain deferential.

"Even if I actually did think they [customer] were to blame, I would still apologise 'cos obviously the customer comes first, don't they?" (Victoria, waitress).

"I was always polite [to customers]. I'd never say anything back, just smile, you know, like a fake laugh 'cos as a waitress I would never have turned round and been like 'Don't speak to me like that' (laughs)... 'cos then I'd get in trouble because they'll go and say 'Oh your waitress has just told me to fuck off' (laughs) and then I'd get sacked (laughs)' (Kate, waitress).<sup>57</sup>

The perceived 'low-status' of respondents within the restaurant as *just a waitress* was compounded by structural inequalities as women's bodies are socially marked and read as being 'naturally' submissive (O'Connell Davidson, 2014:521). Respondents stated that customers would often 'look and talk *down*' to female waitresses implying a conflation of service with servitude.

"I've been called a silly little girl before by like an older gentleman... my supervisor is my age but because he's a man he didn't speak to him like that, so you know. But, it's not my place to be like 'That's rude don't speak to me like that'. So, I just walk away" (Rebecca, waitress).

"You get a lot of businessmen in [the restaurant] and you kind of feel like they look down on you for your role and a lot of them are quite rude. Not generalising like all businesspeople but they're the sort of people who seem to be that way and then you get like little old couples that come in and actually ask about you as a person, which is really nice" (Lauren, waitress).

"I think it goes back to that submissive woman thing, like people will talk to me in a certain way that they wouldn't talk to male waiters. They talk to me as a server, but they talk to the men as like a pal" (Lilly, waitress).

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<sup>57</sup> As Kate's (waitress) quote suggests, how women were able to respond to customers was in-part dependent on how reliant they were on keeping their job.

Similar to student sex workers (see Trautner and Collett, 2010), waitresses were able to draw on their positive, alternative identity as a student to negotiate stigma associated with their work and the devaluation attributed to working in a low-status form of employment.

“I felt like I was a peasant serving posh people, do you know what I mean? You want people to know that you’re not just that [a waitress]. Not that there’s anything wrong with waitressing at all. I just think there’s a stigma about it. You’ve got that sense of pride that you’ve got your degree and you wanna tell people about it and you want people to know I’m just doing this to make some money, it’s not forever. Sometimes I felt like people thought they were better than me and that used to frustrate me ‘cos I used to think well, I’m clever, I’ve got other things going for myself, like, I’m not just here forever. People used to sometimes treat you like you know, that you were stupid” (Amy, waitress).

By working in a historically working-class/low-status form of employment, waitresses and strippers were subject to the same negative stereotypes as working-class people. For example, that they are unintelligent and trapped in dead-end jobs with no (middle-class) prospects. I could feel Amy’s (waitress/working-class) frustration during the interview when she talked about having to ‘serve posh people’ which left her feeling like a ‘peasant’. Emotions such as resentment – referred to as ‘ugly feelings’ (see Ngai, 2005) – expressed by Amy towards those who had judged her as lesser/lacking were not merely personal and private but are symptoms of structural inequalities. Being shamed and feeling shamed demonstrate power imbalances where one judges and the other is (mis)recognised as deficient (Skeggs, 2011). Shame is embodied and class is lived, felt, emotive and can be degrading. Whether or not customers actually ‘looked down’ on participants, women felt devalued and different in the service interaction regardless. To counter feeling devalued, Amy described trying to ‘prove’ that she was of value/respectable (i.e. ‘I’m clever’/a student). However, Skeggs (1997:88) argues, that the problem with trying to ‘pass’ as respectable/middle-class is that it represents absolutely no challenge to the class system and reproduces hierarchies and evaluations which devalue and delegitimize working classness.

*It's part of the job: Sexual harassment and hostility at work*

Both waitresses and dancers considered SH to be an expected part of their job and unavoidable/inevitable in the hospitality and stripping environment where there is a mix of men, young women and alcohol.

“You’ve got to be really headstrong to go into this [stripping]. You can’t just come in here thinking like, ‘Oh it’s going to be men full of testosterone and alcohol and beautiful women’ you can’t go in there thinking ‘I’m not going to get groped or I’m not going to get something said about me’. Like, we don’t condone it, but I think, it’s sad in a way, but when it’s happened, I haven’t felt too phased by it. Which is a shame in a way” (Charlotte, dancer)

“I think it [harassment] comes hand in hand when you work in a pub though, you’re never like, *not gonna get it [harassment]*” (Lucy, waitress).

“It’s [strip club] the kind of environment that brings out the worst in men, like completely. You can put a nice guy in a strip club with alcohol and he’ll be a cunt” (Nikki, dancer).

The harmful idea that ‘boys will be boys’ is based on myths of sexual difference and biological/gender determinism which Garcia-Favaro (2015) argues are ‘backed-up’ by pseudoscientific discourses prevalent within popular culture. For example, the idea that men do not consciously grope women but that their behaviour is the result of their ‘testosterone’. Such myths not only divert liability away from men, they also frame the issue of SH as fixed and simply, a fact of life. Indeed, while participants did not accept that SH was ‘right’, they equally could not fathom how this behaviour could ever be prevented or stopped completely. Calls to ban strip clubs and alcohol (see Phipps, 2017a) rely on a similar logic of male behaviour as immutable. This implies that by ‘removing temptation’, men will simply return to being ‘nice guys’. Women on the other hand must adapt and become ‘headstrong’ in order to keep their job.

Participants in both industries stated they had been ‘groped’, ‘grabbed’, customers had ‘dry humped’ women at work, licked their faces and spat at them.

“I was like going to take cocktails to a group of guys and then like kind of got grabbed by another group of guys and they all, it was like they were all like, dry humping me and grabbing me. It was horrible. It was like the worst thing” (Lilly, waitress).



“I was quite new to dancing and this man spat on me twice and it was fucking horrendous and I was kind of new and I was a bit naive to it all. I walked out and I didn’t work for six months after that ‘cos I was really traumatised from it. It was like sexual assault it was awful. So, I told them [managers] they [customer] got kicked out but I dunno, I didn’t feel very supported from management to be honest. I think it’s just ‘cos I was new. But it was absolutely disgusting, I was naked, and he spat on me, *twice!*” (Phillipa, dancer).

Although management in both cases responded to each incident, both Lilly and Phillipa described feeling unsupported by management overall and that this resulted in them having to employ their own individual ad hoc responses to customer hostility which again places the onus onto women to adapt (quickly) and respond to potential danger. Dancers described a varied response to SH from management which ranged from customers being escorted out of the premise to managers fining and disciplining dancers for SH and unwanted touching from male customers.

“I had one guy who was really drunk, but even so, like he was just being awful, and he kept like going under my dress and grabbing my boobs. I was like stop! *I’ll* get in trouble for it and I got in loads of trouble. Because he kept buying loads of champagne, the club were kind of like ‘He’s fine!’ You know, they didn’t kick him out and I got in trouble for letting him touch me” (Abbie, dancer).

“They [management] don’t care about the girl’s safety they care about whether you’re letting customers touch you whether you’re sitting on their lap whether you’re giving out phone numbers they don’t care about what is happening to us. I’ve been attacked in a club before and nothing happened, like *nothing!* But, if I was to let a guy touch me, I’d be sacked, I’d be fined” (Rachel, dancer).

As both quotes suggest, management have few if any obligations to workers and as a result, they may prioritise profit-making over the wellbeing of their staff who are considered to be disposable and thus, replaceable. This lack of respect for dancers did not appear limited to the strip club. Rachel stated that she contacted both the council and the police following a separate attack when a customer smashed a glass in her face. Rachel stated that no action was taken against the perpetrator demonstrating how dancers are not always granted full citizenship and protection from the law as a result of their work. Laws criminalising such gender violence then become, as Arruzza et al. (2019:15) argue, a ‘cruel hoax’ if they turn a blind eye to the structural sexism (and racism) of the criminal justice system leaving in-tact harassment and abuse in the

workplace (alongside a myriad of other injustices). The physical abuse disclosed by dancers was far more frequent and far more serious than that of waitresses. O'Connell Davidson (1998:64) argues that what marks sex work as different from any other job is that there is no popular moral doctrine which encourages hostility towards any other group of workers (for example, waitresses), only 'dirty whores'.

Participants described some male managers or owners as 'inappropriate', 'sleazy', 'touchy-feely' or 'pervy' and Victoria (waitress) disclosed a case of SH by her male manager at work.

At [Restaurant 1], bloody hell erm well he [manager] did like feel me up a *little bit*... well I'm just too nice me, so I was just trying to laugh it off going like 'Ha-ha, get off me' sort of thing. But like, I felt *so* uncomfortable. He was just touching me, he was touching me bum, like he was going 'Oh you've got a nice bum you' and like having a little grope while I was like sweeping up (Victoria, waitress).

There are a number of factors (age, gender, position) leading to a clear power imbalance which was exploited by Victoria's male manager. Women were expected to manage boundaries with customers, managers and colleagues and to develop their own individualised strategies to negotiate structural inequalities. Most 'tactics' such as laughing and minimising the situation were commonly used by all women in the study (and likely, women more generally) rather than restricted to either workplace which made this invisible 'labour' not only 'part of the job' but also, part of being a woman.

Ram's (2018) review of hospitality and tourism literature demonstrates a clear focus within existing scholarship on finding 'causes' of SH in order to develop 'solutions'. However, the potential 'solutions' appear highly problematic. For example, Kensbock et al. (2015) argue that immediate and 'easy' activities to prevent SH by customers in hospitality include:

1. Changing the uniform of female workers from sexualised dresses/skirts to shirts and trousers
2. Allowing female staff to work in pairs

3. Hanging posters in spaces used by customers prohibiting or warning against sexual harassment
4. Training female employees in problem solving and listening skills to help staff learn the difference between what is considered ‘friendly’ and ‘seductive’ behaviour towards customers

As Zara’s (waitress, strip club) quote demonstrates, regardless of dress or conduct, women continued to experience SH at work in the restaurant and strip club.

“The amount of times the guys would be like ‘Oh you’re the best-looking girl in here can I not have a dance from you?’ And it’s like, it’s not even that it’s the fact that we’re fully clothed, dressed in black and they know that they can’t have us that they act up in this little you know persona that’s all it is. I’ve said some of the dancers genuinely are beautiful but it’s because like they’re available and we’re not and they’re like, ‘No, I want you’ well, I’m not a dancer... a lot of guys are like ‘Oh can you not just sit with me?’ And it’s like, ‘No, I don’t want to and two I couldn’t if I wanted to but it is more because it’s an idea of you want what you can’t have’ And it’s not just me, all the waitresses get it and we’re all young girls” (Zara, waitress, strip club).

Victim precipitation theories originating in the field of criminology have long been refuted. However, Cortina et al. (2018) argue that there has been a growing resurgence of such myths within industrial organisational psychology. For example, Waudby and Poulston (2017) argue that women with ‘certain personalities’ who dress and act provocatively at work are more likely to ‘attract’ SH and that young women ‘lack’ the skills to successfully repel SH in the workplace. This is a particularly troubling trend as such theories have the potential to influence workplace policies and practices. The ‘threat’ and ‘burden’ of SH continues to lie with women who are *still* blamed for ‘bringing sexuality’ into the workplace. It is clear that efforts to change women, rather than the world (Gill, 2012:741), fail to challenge or disrupt gender inequality.

### Reflexivity instead of resilience

Women in this study regularly experienced SH and endured poor and exploitative working conditions as waitresses and dancers. All 39 women could be considered ‘resilient’ in a neoliberal sense as they described individualised coping strategies allowing them to ‘bounce

back' in the face of adversity. Indeed, some women were even able to 'fight back' when inappropriately touched in strip clubs.

"Every now and then there'd be a guy that like would attempt to get handsy. I've never had more than just like a swipe of the boob and that guy I slapped in the face (laughs) and told him to sit on his hands" (Daphne, dancer).

Due to the more intense carnivalesque setting of the strip club dancers were able to match customer behaviour in ways that waitresses could not. However, this form of retaliation has the potential to escalate into worse violence making it a risky strategy which does not tackle the root cause of such hostility; the lack of respect for dancers. Nevertheless, as the title of this section suggests, rather than simply adapting and becoming resilient through individualised coping strategies alone, participants also engaged in critical (feminist) praxis which has the potential to disrupt rather than accept existing workplace relations and practices.

For many participants, going to university was an act of consciousness raising. Students were introduced to a range of social and political issues, feminist and other theories and were able to develop a deeper understanding – through their chosen disciplinary lens - of systems of power and structures of inequality. During the interviews, women critically (and eloquently) reflected on their own sense of self, experiences and positionality in relation to others. By reflecting on what they had learnt at university, this informed their work as waitresses and dancers and vice-versa. The following quotes from Emily and Hannah (waitresses) highlight examples of a frequently cited 'knowledge-practice loop' (see Rodriguez et al., 2016:214).

"It's very ironic 'cos at uni, I'm learning all about like oppressive capitalist structures and then at work, I'm like, part of the structure (laughs). I don't like that our gender is played down at work and like there's gendered roles so like, girls don't have to lift heavy stuff or like in some places they prefer women doing food and men at the bar, so there's definitely gendered roles" (Emily, waitress, agency).

"Since working as a waitress and having that experience [sexual harassment at work], I wanna do kind of like critical research for my dissertation of erm, like gender in the kitchen but like focus on the men (laughs). The head of the kitchen, generally, they kind of create this

environment which sets them as sexist. It's not only like allowed, but it's kind of like its you're not accepted as a woman" (Hannah, waitress).

As international relations and anthropology students, both women had been exposed to theories of gender and 'oppressive capitalist structures' which allowed them to understand their work as waitresses more critically. At the same time, Hannah's experience of SH and sexism at work in the restaurant also shaped her interests at university. This demonstrates another example of the blurring of work/university boundaries for students in this study and the interconnectedness of the two roles/identities.

Dancers also engaged in praxis by demonstrating the everyday relevance of what they had learnt at university and applying this to their work. This allowed Helen (dancer) to critically reflect on her sense of self and experiences in and outside the workplace.

"The one thing about psychology that I think a lot of people undermine is that it helps you so much in your social skills, in your day to day interaction, at work and in how you think about yourself. I think one thing you really do is you analyse yourself quite a lot when you do a course like that. People always say to me 'Oh you're really self-aware and you're really like grown up and together' and I think that is a combination of stripping and studying a course like that because you just become far more knowledgeable about how people perceive the world and all these kinds of things and it really opens your mind and opens your eyes to erm, to sort of, just different things" (Helen, dancer).

Similarly, Rachel (dancer) highlighted how her work as a stripper informed her knowledge and practice at college and through the process of becoming a counsellor. Scholars have pointed to the similarities between sex work and therapy, however, given the stigmatisation of the work, the skills and understanding of men that Rachel felt she had developed from working as a stripper were not recognised. The fact that she is able to make such comparisons shows further similarities stripping shares with different forms of mainstream labour.

"The best thing about my course is the progression, like the personal development it's a lot of personal progression especially on a counselling course. I already had skills relevant to counselling from stripping. There's a lot of people that have gone [to the strip club] with problems. I've spoken to people about, you know, spending too much money, I've had to say 'Stop! You've got an addiction' or people that have got alcohol problems, people that have just separated from their girlfriends have come in. I've met all sorts of guys that have, you know, I

can visibly see there's some issue there you know these people go to pubs and strip clubs, so it's actually developed my counselling skills. The only difference is when someone's in a counselling room they're actually concentrating on their feelings and when they're in a strip club they're trying to block them out. But I can visibly see this guy's got an alcohol problem or this guy's got a coke problem or something, you know, and I wish I could put that on my CV but I can't, just in case I don't get the job" (Rachel, dancer).

Sex workers have long been accused of suffering a false consciousness which suggests they are either deluded or simply unaware of their own exploitation (Overall, 1992:713). However, Olivia and Holly (dancers) were not only conscious of counter narratives which condemn their work, both women acknowledged and grappled with the tensions and possible contradictions of their work/lives through critical engagement with a range of feminist theory which they had been exposed to at university. Both women not only negotiated their own sense of self and position within the divisive sex wars debate, they also appeared to be much more accepting and tolerant of the opposing position, producing a more nuanced approach (particularly in comparison to the somewhat limited stance taken by many scholars).

"At uni I was kind of like reading all the feminist readings. I was kind of going and reading about Catherine McKinnon and Andrea Dworkin and then, the sex positive stuff, you know the sex activist movement in the 80s in California. I was kind of like, but this argument is to do with what you align, what your self-expression and sense of self aligns with and you're either sex positive or you're just not and that's fine but like you can't project one on to the other and be like 'Well that's wrong'. I learnt that actually, maybe it was just a difference of perspective. You just have to kind of accept the other as not you and that's a real challenge in life, I guess. During my art degree, I was making work about like the sex industry and porn and all this other stuff which I was kind of then trying to reconcile with my experiences as a stripper and trying to then re-explore that within my art practice" (Olivia, dancer).

"I believe you can do whatever you want with your body. But, I've learnt [at university] that this new wave feminism kind of takes away a really important part of feminism on the other side which is that you [strippers] are inherently contributing to the objectification of women and you are more damagingly associating your identity with your physical attributes. So, you may *feel* empowered, but you have to understand that what you are doing, on a larger scale, isn't actually helping. You aren't really breaking any stereotypes, you're not, you're not helping with stigma at all. You yourself may feel empowered to run your own business for example and these things do count, they do count. But you are a complex human being, you deserve to have an identity that is more than just 'I get naked for money'" (Holly, dancer).

As Holly's quote suggests, we are complex assemblages of multiple forms of race/gender/class consciousness and as a result, we may be conscious of certain structures of exploitation while

being potentially ‘mystified’ by others (Chatterjee, 2012:796). For example, while Holly’s gender and class consciousness was heightened due to her experience at university and as a stripper, it appeared that her awareness of broader racialised discrimination was less so.

“Stigma depends on what social circle you exist in and what context. I’m an artist, I’m a privileged, educated, young woman. I’m not part of, this sounds horrible but it’s true this takes part of like intersectionality, I’m not black and I’m not sort of mixed either, I’m not part of a group, a demographic of people that are stigmatised. I don’t have to be that private about this because that’s my privilege. I’m not white but I’m also not them. If anything, due to cultural stereotypes I think people find it more interesting that I am [stripping] as opposed to if I was some other version of myself because, culturally speaking, Chinese girls don’t do this [stripping]. They’re supposed to be really rigid but I’m just not. I don’t have to hide from like, for example, my relationships, my current sort of boy thing, boyfriend used to be a stripper too and when I first told him about this [job], I thought it I was going to get an earful and he was like ‘Oh I used to do it too it’s a good source of money’ (laughs). I was like, that was really easy, that went well, so stigma is there, but for me personally, it’s not that bad” (Holly, dancer).

Although ‘emancipation’ is of the person rather than piecemeal (Chatterjee, 2012:796), Holly regularly ‘checked her privilege’ and acknowledged that her experiences were not necessarily the same as her peers/co-workers due to the symbiotic relationship between her job and university which were further shaped by her positionality as a middle-class woman. Holly and other participants considered themselves to be politically engaged and were part of a sex worker collective. Although most women considered stripping to be short-term, they were also keen to build a sense of solidarity with co-workers in the fight for better working conditions and against stigma. The fact that participants were students/graduates and also part of a political collective is likely to be no coincidence/not unrelated.

Equally, Hannah’s (waitress) quote highlights the potential of self-reflexivity to incite both individual and collective resistance in the workplace in ways that ‘resilience’ does not.

“I engage in more emotional labour, but I think like ethnicity and class plays into it more than my gender. So, like a lot of the guys I work with who are Eastern European, I feel that as an English woman I am privileged and get preferential treatment from some of the customers and managers and that’s highly to do with my like ethnicity than it is anything else. For example, my managers treat them worse and they’re expected to do more. Or customers, if the kitchen have got it wrong and instead of being like ‘Oh, can I get something else?’ They’ll be like ‘(Sigh) this is *not* what I ordered! This is disgusting!’ They’ll like take out their frustrations on them and that’s when I find it really like peevish or if they’re incredibly, if they’re rude to one

of my waiter friends I get really angry ‘cos I have this particular waiter friend who’s from Hungary and he’s so nice and I just feel like a lot of people take the piss cos he’s not really like, he’s a bit socially awkward, so sometimes people treat him like he’s an idiot I find that really annoying” (Hannah, waitress).

There has been a notable growth in the idea or proclamation of millennials as the awakened generation in terms of their cognisance, intolerance and responsiveness to issues of social injustices (Cordes and Merskin, 2019:178) which appeared in the data. For many respondents in this research, being conscious was the result of also being a student highlighting the reciprocal relationship between work and university for students which has the potential to be more collective, disruptive and transformative than encouraging women to remain/be resilient in the face of adversity. The value of university is increasingly measured in regard to metrics such as grades, degree classification, graduate destinations, job type etc. which ignores other important benefits of HE. Participants also gained a critical consciousness and thus, a deeper understanding of the world and of their position within society.

## Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to analyse the convergences and divergences between waitressing and stripping based on a sample of 39 female students’ experiences. I have focused on decision-making processes on entering both industries, experiences of finding employment, getting ready for work, payment, working hours, labour processes and relations. I do not claim to have examined *all* aspects of both jobs and I do not wish to make generalising claims about either industry. I acknowledge that experiences of working in hospitality and stripping are diverse and can be heavily dependent on the specific venue. Nevertheless, participants shared similar experiences within and across both industries which were also shaped by their student status and positionality.

Although most people work for financial purposes, students were attracted to waitressing and stripping due to the ‘spirit’ of the carnivalesque which characterises the NTE.



The affective atmosphere was (re)produced by the bodies of employees (and customers) through a complex mix of aesthetic, emotional and relational/attentive labour. Both workers were required to read customers, respond appropriately and to produce a particular strip club/restaurant experience prescribed by management. The spirit of carnival rubbed off on students as they engaged in similar activities and behaviours as customers e.g. socialising, drinking alcohol. Given students' time and money constraints, working in the NTE blurred boundaries between work and leisure as their respective jobs became a form of escapism from the mundane responsibilities of university. While this was usually – not always – experienced positively by respondents, such findings have important implications as this blurring and the valorisation of overwork had detrimental effects including stress and burnout. Based on the data, it appears that getting pissed and having a laugh at work (Colosi, 2012) are not necessarily 'unique' to stripping and may no longer be a prioritisation for all dancers as their focus shifts to 'hustling'. Nevertheless, one important difference was that carnivalesque behaviour was not endorsed by management in restaurants whereas dancers were encouraged to drink; so much so, *not* drinking became a form of workplace resistance for Holly (dancer).

Both jobs were considered to be easy or even non-work and participants shared the belief that 'anyone' could be a waitress/stripper. This has the potential to perpetuate the idea of workers as replaceable and thus, disposable. The data suggests that far from hiring *any* 'body' management hired specific bodies. Unsurprisingly, strip clubs were more stringent on appearance and women were refused work in strip clubs based on their looks in ways waitresses were not. Women in both industries were disciplined by management through fat shaming and name calling if/when they did not 'look the part'. Getting ready for work and (re)creating the stripper look was notably more time, cost and labour intensive than the 'natural'/neutral look expected of some (not all) waitresses. Regardless of the expected look, management in both industries appeared to view women's bodies as both a threat to and opportunity for

respectability. Women were required to strive for ‘classy’ (read: middle-class) or ‘androgynous’ (read: masculine) displays and this curtailing of participants gender/sexuality/class was experienced by some women as dehumanising. Even in the strip club where women are expected to embody a hyper-sexualised ideal, excessive femininity was still considered to be a reputational risk.

Participants described a strong hierarchical structure in strip clubs and restaurants. Management in both workplaces appeared to engender a familial dynamic among staff by positioning themselves as parents and infantilising waitresses and dancers as children. This power imbalance was then compounded by age and gender (also race/ethnicity/nationality in the case of Other workers). The data challenges existing research in the US (see Trautner and Collett, 2010) which suggests that students disassociate from other dancers and the ‘stripper lifestyle’. Respondents described the close and meaningful relationships they had established with co-workers and this was considered to be one of the most positive aspects of their job. Women bonded with co-workers as they shared both the pleasures and pains of dirty work. However, building a sense of closeness with co-workers who were ‘like them’ produced distance between themselves and co-workers who were perceived as ‘different’ and Other; based primarily on gender, age, nationality/race and job role. Overall, the family dynamic was experienced positively by participants yet, at the same time, such relationships and closeness also produced a sense of collective responsibility and associated guilt which was beneficial for management in extracting surplus labour.

Waitressing and stripping are historically working-class jobs and as a result, participants were subject to similar negative stereotypes e.g. that they are uneducated with no (middle-class) prospects. Women in both industries adopted the same stigma management strategies by drawing on their alternative (middle-class) identity/status as students in an attempt to ‘pass’ and reclaim **respectability**. The judgemental gendered and classed gaze from

customers had very real effects producing feelings of shame. Hostile customers were the rule rather than the exception within both industries and such abuse as well as SH were expected by participants and considered 'part of their job'. Women in both industries referred to the inevitability of SH based on myths of sexual difference, biological/gender determinism and male immutability. Again, it was female workers who were expected to adapt and accept this 'fact of life' if they wanted to keep their job. Despite a worrying return to victim precipitation theories within industrial organisational psychology scholarship (Cortina et al., 2018), the data demonstrates how the problem of SH and therefore the 'solution' does not lie with women (or their dress or comportment).

The aim of this chapter was not to simply highlight commonalities in an attempt to state that both jobs are 'the same'. The act of displaying one's naked body to music and dancing is obviously not the same as serving people food and drink. There were also important differences between the two jobs. For example, dancers earned substantially more money than waitresses within a shorter period of time. As independent contractors, dancers started work in a deficit and this positioned women as competitors generating a hostile work environment (also leading to harmful Othering). Dancers did not feel they had access to recourse and that they would be blamed for their own victimisation. Unlike restaurant managers who sought to create a team/family dynamic insofar as this produces collective responsibility and guilt, strip club managers also promoted neoliberal values of individualism, self-interest and punitive financial penalties. In addition to managerial exploitation, dancers were subjected to whore stigma and moral taint in ways that waitresses were not, and it was this stigma and the negative effects which demarcated stripping as different. Indeed, dancers worked in secret to protect themselves from hostility and exclusion. While at work, they experienced more serious and more frequent physical, verbal and emotional abuse and the response not only from management but also external authorities such as police and LA appeared limited at best. While dancers were able to

challenge the myth of customer sovereignty and were hostile in return, this strategy was potentially risky and demonstrates how women were expected to create their own individualised strategies in response to structural inequalities.

To end this chapter, it is important to reiterate how critical consciousness raising within universities and the interconnectedness of women's student and worker status has the potential to encourage praxis and collectivism in the restaurant and strip club and to challenge workplace injustices. This point not only highlights the importance of education but also, how the value university and being a student cannot be measured by (unequal) metrics alone. In the chapter which follows, I continue to develop the final theme of value further when discussing women's transition out of HE and of becoming a graduate.

## Chapter Six: Becoming a Graduate

### Introduction

This chapter discusses the data gathered in the second interview and women's retrospective accounts of becoming a graduate. Although the data has been organised on the basis of participants' 'outcome' post-HE, interviewees did not always fit neatly or statically into one category. Rather than focusing solely on 'objective measures', my main concern is to instead uncover the meanings women attribute to their subjective experiences of transition through HE, into the graduate labour market and continuing or leaving their 'student jobs'. The aim is to highlight the multi-dimensionality of women's lives, and to explore how plans unfold and narrated selves evolve over time in response to changes in personal circumstance, as well as the broader socio-economic and political context. By taking a relational approach to graduate transitions, this chapter also sheds light on the role played by family, friends, partners, colleagues and generalised others which is typically missing from literature on both graduates and sex workers (Sanders et al., 2018; Finn, 2015).

### Still a student

#### *Further qualifications*

By the second interview, five of the 13 women in their final year of education were still studying. Three women were re-sitting their final year, whereas Stephanie (waitress) and Zara (waitress, strip club) had chosen to continue 'self-accruing' value and 're-investing' – financially and otherwise – in further qualifications. Their narratives echoed wider neoliberal discourse which directly links credentials with labour market returns and like many graduates, both women did not feel that their UG degree was *enough* to compete with other (real and imagined) graduates (Holmes, 2015:221; Tomlinson, 2008).

"It's so hard everybody's gonna have undergraduate degrees and then you know in a couple of years most people are just gonna go and get a masters because, you know, they're available now and you can go get them. So, I think it's just being ahead of the game and, you know, hopefully, I will get to where I want to be" (Zara, waitress strip club).

Zara could be interpreted as someone who is strategic', risk taking/risk averse. Indeed, her attempt to 'stay ahead of the game' mirrors Bourdieu's (1987) 'game of life' metaphor. However, while existing graduate-transitions scholarship tends to frame students/graduates as rational and isolated actors, what is missing from individualistic accounts is the role played by other people in shaping decision-making and opportunities in this context. By connecting the two rounds of research interviews together, it was clear that Zara's sister played an important and ongoing role in why she had entered HE and continued studying. Zara stated that she did not originally plan to go to university – she planned to travel – but that her sister, described as the 'shining academic in the family' inspired her to apply. *Together*, both sisters then created the plan to live, study and work together as waitresses in their home city while completing their master's degrees. The role played by parents and the 'Bank of Mum and Dad' is frequently mentioned in transitions literature, however there is less focus on sibship which differ substantially from other kin given the lesser hierarchical relationship. While Davies' (2011) research looks at the important role played by siblings in the lives of school students, based on Zara's example, it appears that siblings may continue to play a key role. For those who are the first in their family to go to university, siblings may be more of an emotional and practical source of support than parents.

#### *Re-sits and extensions*

Simply stating who ended up where and why - based on existing scholarship outlined in Chapter Two - would (unfortunately) render Victoria's (waitress/working-class) 'outcome' somewhat predictable. However, by focusing on her decision-making processes and delving deeper into her experiences, I hope that this will complicate her story and add depth to understandings of women's transitions through HE. Similar to most women in this study,

during the first interview Victoria planned to take a gap year<sup>58</sup> and to travel. For some women, this meant continuing waitressing/stripping and having time away from education and ‘real’ employment before ‘settling down’ and finding a ‘proper job’. For others this meant travelling for an extended period of time and potentially working abroad as a stripper/waitress.

Victoria was completing a foundation-degree which required a high number of unpaid work-based learning and during the interview, she explained how she was unable to complete her placement hours as she was studying, working and caring for her father at the same time. Instead, she fabricated the number of hours she had completed on her placement and she subsequently failed the core module. Ironically, foundation-degrees were designed to attract students already in employment and with other commitments. However, as existing research has already shown (Bainbridge, 2005; Tierney and Slack, 2005), this structure is likely to be even more challenging for those with multiple responsibilities.

By the second interview, Victoria’s plans had changed substantially. She did not have a straightforward entry into or transition through HE and as a result, she considered having to re-sit to be ‘wasting *more* time’ which increased feelings of pressure to find employment as soon as possible.

“I should have gone to my module leader and told him, but I was just obviously panicked, stupid me! But you learn from your mistakes, don’t you? I need to plan on getting a job, a career now after uni, I’m getting on now, come on! I’m 25 and I can’t get a job! If I fail this one as well, I’ll just be like yeah shove the degree up your arse, I don’t want it” (Victoria, waitress).

Victoria’s narrative demonstrates both the pervasiveness of individualism (as she frames her experience as a personal failure) and the dangers of promoting middle-class aspirations of going to university, without addressing the inequalities inherent within the HE system. However, somewhat unexpectedly, Victoria was one of the few women able to quit her student job sooner than she had anticipated. By the second interview she had become officially

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<sup>58</sup> Traditionally, travelling/backpacking was seen as a drifter’s route, however it has since become a popular and a sought-after pursuit for young people (Johan, 2009).

recognised as a carer and received a carer's allowance which was subsidised by her father. This financial support and access to a disability car provided a sense of freedom, additional time to focus on her degree and helped her to negotiate what she described as feelings of constraint. While much of the literature on youth frames young people as a negative drain on parents, implying one-directional support (Finn, 2015:118), on the contrary, Victoria played an active, supporting role in her father's life. This was not simply a reversal of dependence but rather, a more complicated form of interdependence.

The first time we spoke it was clear that Rachel's (dancer) initial plans on entering her course had already changed dramatically as she became pregnant and had an emergency caesarean before the end of her final year. Both the labour and birth were described as traumatic and her child was also diagnosed with several health problems which meant that they required additional care.

"The thing is, I paid for the course, and things happened after which were out of my control. Sometimes things happen, you know life happens. I shouldn't be rushing to get the coursework finished and then seeing clients in a state that I'm not fit to. I've got too many problems of my own, I can't" (Rachel, dancer).

Rachel's transition was highly gendered, relational and far from individualised. Her plans and decisions were continually renegotiated and centred around her new family. While Rachel's transition was shaped by parenthood, interestingly, the reason why she was unable to complete her course was more directly associated with her work as a stripper than her role as a mother or student; although all three were interconnected. The second time we spoke, Rachel had been granted an extension and was still studying. To pass her course she was also required to complete a set number of unpaid, placement hours. Rachel (dancer, 15 years) stated that she received a lack of support from her tutors and that she struggled to apply for placements as she was unfamiliar with the process and was unsure whether or not to disclose her work as a stripper.

"I never had to do that [application forms, CV etc.] in my life, so I found that really, really hard. There's a lack of support with it. It's kind of a one-size-fits-all, you know, you go and apply



for a placement and you'll get one and everyone's got CV's and work backgrounds and I haven't" (Rachel, dancer).

Rachel's tutors advised her to remain 'congruent' as a trainee counsellor by disclosing her work as a stripper. This was based on the assumption that counselling services would be 'more understanding' and less likely to discriminate, however this was not the case.

"Even in the counselling world I was judged negatively. It took me longer than most to get a placement which is why I got an extension... I went to a bereavement placement and when they found out what I did I saw her visibly coil up and her lips stiffen. Another place was actually a drug and alcohol place, they said, 'We don't mind it [stripping], but the agency might' so they didn't take me on. So, yeah, stripping impacted on me trying to get a placement" (Rachel, dancer).

The description of the interviewer having a noticeable, physical reaction (coil[ing] up and lips stiffen[ing]) to Rachel who embodies the Other, implies judgment, disgust and highlights how sex workers are intensely affective figures. Ahmed (2004:191) invites us to look at what emotions 'do' and in this instance, the interviewer's emotive response secures Rachel's position as an outsider in a very real sense as she was denied the placement. Emotions and embodied reactions should not be understood as personal/private but rather as social evaluations/judgments which function to maintain unequal power relations (c.f. Tyler, 2008). By the second interview, Rachel had managed to secure a placement and had created a counselling-specific CV which she stated was 'free from stigma'. She had also re-started stripping following her maternity leave which will be discussed in more detail in the following section. It was particularly difficult to capture the different ways respondent's lives and plans were constantly being re-imagined and re-negotiated. Smart (2007) argues that multidimensionality requires sociologists to address many issues, layers, places, times and meanings simultaneously; which is never truly possible.

## Still waitressing/stripping

*'I don't feel like an adult or a graduate'*

For most women, graduation signalled a shift away from their student-lives and student jobs as waitresses and/or strippers and a step towards the 'real' world of work, responsibilities and adulthood. Nevertheless, the same women, including those who had been graduates for a number of years, admitted that they still did not *feel* like adults. Brooke (dancer/waitress/working-class) had graduated from her PG degree almost 12 months prior to the interview, however she stated that she still felt like a student and that she was not ready for change. Instead, Brooke sought a sense of continuity to prolong her student-lifestyle. Linking back to Chapter Four, respondents did not always feel like or identify as students *or* graduates. Given the diversity amongst graduate experience, this is less surprising as it is not exactly clear what being a graduate is supposed to feel like for women.

"I don't feel like an adult or a graduate. I'm just not ready for it yet. I just don't want to do anything yet. I'm happy just riding out whatever is happening and then I'll work it out along the way. I plan to just go on a couple of holidays and just enjoy another couple of years chilling out before I have to be an actual real-life adult (laughs), 'cos I don't want to do that yet... I just hope when it [adulthood] happens, that I know it's happening. Probably when I'm in a job where I want to stay there forever and have my own car and that kind of thing and my own place. At the minute, I've got a house mate. I couldn't live on my own yet, but I feel like when I live on my own, then I'll be grown up" (Brooke, dancer/waitress).

Through processes of semiosis, Brooke referred to a blend of traditional and relatively 'new' (material) signifiers of adulthood for example, living alone as a young woman – rather than with a partner/children - as a sign of adulthood. However, given the current 'housing crisis' - which has made it increasingly difficult for many young people to become homeowners (Gallent, 2019) - more traditional signs of adulthood may have become less attainable. Furthermore, large-scale demographic changes including deferred entry into marriage, parenthood, increases in the number of people going to university and living/returning to live with parents longer, could mean that young people are likely to 'feel adult' later than in the past.

Arnett (2000) argues that individuals struggle to discuss the time in their lives between the ages of 18 and 25 as society has no real name for this period when young people are no longer adolescents, but not yet adults. The author defines this distinct phase in the life-course as ‘Emerging Adulthood’ (EA) where individuals seek to explore and adopt new experiences before taking on what they consider to be limiting and enduring adult responsibilities. This idea was apparent in the narratives of Brooke and Emily (waitress) who continued working within their ‘student-jobs’ to save enough money to go travelling. It was assumed by both women that travelling would not be possible later on in life when most people have formed long-term relationships, have children and/or face normative pressures to do so. Arnett (2000) delineates 18 as the marker for when EA begins, however, the end is more difficult to ascertain given that people evidently feel ‘adult’ at different ages. For the majority of women in this study, the age of 30 was repeatedly cited as the time when they – and others – should/will become ‘real’ adults.

As previously mentioned, transitions research can produce narratives of ‘progress’ and promote a neoliberal future-oriented approach to understanding women’s lives which renders the more present-located narratives as static and thus, ‘lacking’ (Skeggs, 2011). Indeed, several women in their early twenties stated that they did not feel a sense of urgency to end their current journey or to reach the destination of adulthood, which Emily imagined would entail a ‘soul-destroying office job’, dull, lacking in freedom and filled with responsibility and commitment.

“I can’t quite be bothered to get like an office job yet. Or anything sort of *that* soul destroying at the moment. I want a bit of freedom and then I’m gonna go travelling. So, I’m just gonna save up for that. I haven’t had that graduate angst, I’ve seen that in my friends, and I think I’ve been a bit more calm. I’m not inherently competitive so I don’t feel like I have to get on the career path, or on the top-level professional life yet. Maybe when I’m older. I think just at the moment I’m happy as I am, waitressing. I haven’t grown too worried just yet... I think it’s [waitressing] alright because I’m 22 and I’ve got my Australia plan. But I think if I had to come back from Australia and I was still working as a waitress long-term, I think if it becomes an end rather than a means, I think I’d start questioning it. But at the moment, it’s fine because I enjoy it. It’s quite social and it’s helped me do something I really want to do” (Emily, waitress).

While existing literature suggest that middle-class graduates are anxious to convert all of their time into generating cultural and social capital and in securing future advantage (Bourdieu, 1987; Skeggs, 2011:505), Emily (middle-class) disidentifies from her friends and their ‘competitive’ (read: middle-class) approach to work. Waitressing was framed as having simultaneously use-value in the present as she described enjoying her job ‘for now’, while at the same time the job was considered to be part of a future-oriented strategy which allowed her to achieve mobility (travelling) outside of the industry. Importantly, Emily’s parent’s economic privilege allowed her to adopt a more ‘relaxed’ attitude to work than most women. Indeed, she was able to live rent free and circumvent other expenses which ensured that her Australia plan remained her ‘main-thing’. During the first round of interviews, several women made similar plans to Emily i.e. to continue waitressing/stripping, to travel and be ‘adventurous’ (Hannah, waitress). However, due to differing economic/material circumstances, some women felt more pressured to reconfigure such plans or put them on hold.

There are a number of (limited) ways in which Brooke and Emily’s continuation in waitressing and stripping could be interpreted. For example, as stories of overeducation, underemployment, or more critically, of young women ‘lacking’ career aspiration, motivation or becoming trapped within low-skilled forms of work. However, such accounts of graduate experiences ignore the broader context and the embeddedness of graduate’s lives which impacts on their decision-making processes and subsequent choices. For example, Brooke had moved away from home to a northern city where she lived for four years while she completed her UG and PG degree. After university, she chose to remain living and working in the same ‘student-y’ area and by contextualising her narrative, it becomes easier to explain why and how she did not feel like a graduate.

“All my mates are here, I’ve built my own life here, my friends are still students so I haven’t really felt a change apart from the fact that I have to get up every day and go to work but apart from that, like, I still go out on weekdays, I just go into work hungover. I still see all my student friends, we still go to student bars and stuff like that, so I still live in a really student-y area, so I’ve not really felt a change at all” (Brooke, dancer/waitress).

Brooke's experiences are indicative of Arnett's (2000) ideas around EA. Her life was narrated as dynamic and filled with temporal and spatial movements as she shifted from multiple spaces/places of work/leisure to the next. She frequently referred to her party (read: unpredictable) lifestyle, travelling abroad and her lack of concrete future plans which implies freedom and fluidity. Yet, at the same time, Brooke's decisions post-HE were shaped by her rootedness within the northern city and by the important relational connections she had forged at university and at work. Despite having new and different responsibilities, she desired a sense of continuity and 'more of the same' as she felt settled. Unlike the majority of respondents – particularly those working as waitresses – Brooke had no plans to stop stripping as she described herself as 'happy for now'. Stripping is therefore not always/only a future-oriented strategy but also carries present-located value for some women. I am wary of reproducing binaries of mobility and stasis which renders the latter as problematic. Indeed, we must in many ways problematise this idea of having to continually move and 'progress'. The latter concept was developed in discourses of civilisation and points to those who *should* leave something (class/waitressing/stripping) behind to signal distance and thus, 'bettering' of oneself (Skeggs, 2019). I will return to this point when discussing the 'problem' with waitressing and stripping.

#### *Stripping/waitressing alongside other jobs*

Prior to graduating, Cara (dancer) had already quit her job as a stripper and had secured full-time employment working as a dancer on cruise ships. However, during this time she stated that she was 'scammed' by a counterfeit agency company and was also sexually assaulted. The latter, highly gendered experience was described by Cara as 'the worst experience of [her] whole entire life' and was something that altered her plans and trajectories in ways that she had not foreseen. Following this incident, Cara moved back to her family home and no longer wanted to travel. To regain economic security, she returned to stripping which was also not

something that she had envisaged herself doing at this stage in her life. Her initial intention was to work in the strip club for six months. At the time of interview, she had continued working in the same club for three years. Over this period of time, Cara had established a close relationship with one regular customer who latterly became her employer<sup>59</sup> outside of the industry; as he offered her a full-time position in her ‘dream job’ as a dance teacher working with children in schools.

As her (feminised) ‘dream job’ was also low-paid, Cara continued stripping to supplement her income which again, demonstrates how, rather than being a ‘dead-end’ job or a long-term career, stripping can be used strategically to create alternative futures and longer term security (Hardy and Sanders, 2015:132). Nevertheless, there were physical consequences which accompanied working a mixture of day and night shifts in two physically demanding dancing roles six days per week i.e. physical exhaustion/burnout. As well as emotional consequences as Cara feared that if her pupils’ parents were to find out, that this could hinder her career.

“I wouldn’t want them to know ‘cos they’d be like ‘Oh, I wouldn’t want a stripper teaching my daughter dancing!’ Which is completely irrelevant because they’re two different types of dancing. I wouldn’t even class stripping as dancing in my terms because it’s not, I actually dance (laughs)” (Cara, dancer).

This fear was shared by Charlotte (dancer) and Gemma (dancer/waitress) who also planned to teach/work with children.

“I wouldn’t put it [stripping] on my CV especially ‘cos I’m wanting to do teaching. There’s obviously such a massive stigma attached to like, being a stripper and then like, wanting to work with children” (Gemma, dancer/waitress).

“I just don’t think some mothers would be happy knowing that I work as a stripper with me teaching like three-year olds” (Charlotte, dancer).

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<sup>59</sup> This supports findings elsewhere demonstrating the productive relationships sex workers can have with regular clients (Sanders, 2008b).

It is important to unpack this ostensibly taken-for-granted assumption that dancers should not work with children. Stripping and all other forms of sex work are frequently associated with and reduced to prostitution, the most stigmatised form of sexual labour. This means that regardless of the type of sex work women engage in, they are subject to varying degrees of whore stigma (Benoit et al., 2018). Sex workers are commonly constructed as sites of infection and disease and in any given society, they are the Other from whom, women, men and (importantly in this context) children need protecting (physically and morally). With children representing innocence and purity and sex workers framed as polluting and corrupt, exposure to or association with the Other risks leakage (Smart, 1992).

Sanders and Hardy (2014:35-36) trace scholarship on stripping back to the 1970s which pathologized individual dancers as ‘deviants’<sup>60</sup>. Radical feminism has also played a role in conflating the sex industry with broader criminality, human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of women and children. This by default associates sex work with paedophilia (c.f. Nagy and Powell, 2016). Although participants did not necessarily agree with the negative beliefs about strippers being ‘unfit’ to work with children, they assumed that other people did, and this had the very real effect of producing feelings of fear and worry. It also altered women’s behaviour as they developed strategies to ensure potential employers did not find out about their engagement in stripping. For this reason, Cara stated that she was relieved that her boss was a strip club patron as this meant that he does/should/could not ‘justifiably’ have a problem with stripping.

“If I had never done stripping, I would have never met him [boss] and would never got this job. I love telling this story of how I got this job [dance teacher], he knows what I do, and he’s got no problem with it, *obviously* (laughs)” (Cara, dancer).

Cara’s quote suggests that dancers and customers are somehow equally ‘implicated’. However, existing research suggests that it is female workers rather than male customers who face the

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<sup>60</sup> Research on stripping is still published in *Deviant Behaviour* with Law (2019) being the most recent example.

brunt of stigma. Indeed, Pheterson (1996:48) argues that sex work stigma is gendered as a woman is ‘bad for who she is’ whereas a male customer is merely ‘bad for what he does’.

Waitressing was also used by participants in similar ways to stripping, and to advance alternative careers. Phoebe had worked as a waitress periodically for over ten years. Since graduating in 2016, she worked as waitress and an intern and by 2018, she secured a job in the fashion industry. Although she was working in her preferred career - similar to Cara – her (feminised) job was relatively low-paid and not enough to cover the costs of living in London. As a result, she continued waitressing on weekends to supplement her income. Rather than ending Phoebe’s story here and providing a one-dimensional account, it is important to add further layers to produce a more complex understanding of female graduate experiences. Phoebe (working-class) completed her degree in Scotland and moved to London as a graduate for more job opportunities.

“There’s no opportunities in Scotland. Plus, we [partner] have no kids or anything, so, may as well do it [move to London] now. But when I moved to London, actually I think I’m getting used to it now, but it was just hard like I’m *really, really* family oriented and it was just hard not seeing my mum every day. But you have FaceTime now, you have the phone. It is totally different, but you get used to it I suppose, you have to have like, your own little life” (Phoebe, waitress).

The quote above demonstrates how it is not simply class inequality, but also (worsening) spatial inequality in the UK which displaces individuals such as Phoebe. The continued London-centric imbalance and lack of attention/investment directed at any region outside of the capital pushes individuals to leave their homes/family/support networks. The emotionality and consequences of doing so should not be overlooked or downplayed. While living and working in London may be considered ‘desirable’ for some, as previously mentioned, several women struggled to cover basic living costs which continue to rise in the capital rendering overworking the only way to survive financially. For others still, living costs in London preclude this as an option; curtailing opportunities and life chances.



Despite working in both a full-time and part-time job with a mixture of day, night and double shifts, Phoebe stated that this was the ‘least’ she had worked in over five years. When reflecting on her engagement in waitressing, Phoebe stated that she was ‘always’ *planning* on leaving but that her plans never actually came to fruition.

“I’ve always been leaving (laughs), like I’ve always been working like ‘Oh my God, I can’t wait to leave, can’t wait to leave, can’t wait to leave, oh I’m leaving, oh I’m going to hand my notice in that’s it! I’ve had enough.’ Every day I’m leaving. But you never leave. You just always say things in the heat of the moment. I think it’s just that type of environment, like something can piss you off every minute of every day but at the end of the shift, you just work together as a team. Everyone’s been through the same shift as you have. But I’m always phoning [partner] crying and he just listens to me and he’s kinda the voice of reason. He’s like ‘Phoebe, it’s not forever’, or ‘Just think of the money’, or ‘Just think about this, it’s not your career you’re just doing it for this or that’ and he’s right, but I just need to hear it sometimes” (Phoebe, waitress).

Phoebe’s male partner was framed as the ‘voice of reason’ whose outlook was correct in contrast to her own emotional (read: irrational) response. Furthermore, he could be seen as a positive source of emotional support, encouragement etc. However, as I will discuss later on in the chapter, it is interesting how partners who supported women to remain in stripping are not viewed in the same way within existing scholarship, and likely, by broader society (see Barton, 2017:37).

Anna’s (waitress/working-class) parents on the other hand were not supportive and did not consider waitressing to be a ‘respectable’ job which heavily influenced her decision to enter HE and to obtain a ‘proper job’.

“They [parents] are like ‘Oh you’re gonna be a waitress all of your life?’ (laughs) Like that type of thing, yeah. I don’t talk to them about my job because, I dunno, just my mum she’s like ‘Oh you’re almost 27, you should have, like, a *proper* job by now’. They consider it [waitressing] like, not a proper job. I remember when I moved to London, my dad was the same he was like ‘Oh so what is your plan? Are you gonna be a waitress all of your life? Is *this* what you want to do?’. It’s not seen as a respectable job. But, I’m paying my bills, I’m like providing a service to people, people come and have a nice experience in the restaurant they eat nice food and they have nice interactions with us and between themselves so like I don’t see anything wrong with it” (Anna, waitress).

Rather than framing her job as lacking dominant symbols of value e.g. power, status, money, Anna challenges what she considers to be the misrecognition of her job by instead drawing on values of sociality and relationality rather than money or time spent on the self/self-interest. While paying attention to others is not a ‘gift’ to customers, as Anna is paid for her work, it is important to look for different forms of value (i.e. other-oriented rather than self-oriented) if we are to ever imagine other ways of being/working/living (Skeggs, 2011:50).

By the second interview, Anna had found a full-time job as a nurse and while it was clear that both Anna and Phoebe continued working in their respective restaurants to support their income in their other lower-paid, feminised jobs outside of hospitality, there were also emotional reasons which made the process of leaving waitressing more complicated, ‘sticky’ and difficult. As discussed in Chapter Five, relationships with co-workers were compared to kin/sibship. Anna and Phoebe had both moved to a new country to study and had remained in London after university. They described their colleagues as a key source of support, so much so, Anna considered her boss to be like a father figure. When her workload at the hospital increased, she tried to quit her waitressing job. However, given her close relationship with her boss, she described feelings of guilt which made her transition out of waitressing more emotionally challenging than she had anticipated.

“I’m working so much at the hospital but the first few months when I started my nursing job, I still had shifts [at the restaurant]. So, I was working four shifts a week [nursing] and doing shifts at the restaurant too because I did feel, I felt so responsible. I was just like, no one is there, and I know the job very well and he’s going to struggle, and he already works Monday to Friday. If then he also has to come Saturday and Sunday to work, he is never home. And he’s got a family as well, I was just like, ‘Okay, I guess I will help.’ In a way it’s just because he helped me out so much over the past few years, he *really* helped me. This is so cheesy, but he is kind of like a father figure to me” (Anna, waitress).

The narratives running throughout this chapter are highly gendered, but they also challenge masculine theories of individualism and neoliberal logic which reduces individuals to strategic, rational, self-interested and calculating beings. Indeed, the more we focus on such elements within the narratives of our participants, we run the risk of legitimising and reproducing such

ideas rather than trying to focus on aspects of social life which have not (yet) been fully colonised by capital. Importantly, this is not an attempt to romanticise all relationships as Anna's quote demonstrates how some relationships can be constraining, imbued with potentially unequal power and can produce feelings of guilt and responsibility.

### Why women *should* leave: The problem with waitressing and stripping

Most respondents did not consider waitressing itself to be problematic, instead it was the length of time or their age that was their main concern. As previously mentioned, 30 was continually cited as the cut-off point when waitressing/stripping were no longer deemed acceptable. Those who were near to or at that age felt a sense of shame that they were *still* waitressing/stripping<sup>61</sup>.

"I did *not* think I'd *still* be waitressing at this age. I didn't, I don't want to be a 29-year-old waitress. I don't shout from the rooftops, 'I'm a waitress!' If people ask, I tell them but it's not on my Facebook I'm a waitress or anything like that. It's the age thing, it's not just the job, like, I dunno, it just wasn't what I wanted to do. It wasn't a career, so, I didn't want people to think 'Oh she *just* works in a restaurant'. There's nothing wrong with it but for me, I didn't want people thinking, 'She's went to uni, she's done this, like how can she not get a job?' Do you know what I mean?" (Phoebe, waitress).

Despite the preoccupation with youth/age in the stripping industry, the age restriction of 30 was more prominent amongst waitresses and this was mainly due to the low earning potential. Those who had quit waitressing reflected on their former work and why they felt they *should* leave which revealed a number of taken-for-granted assumptions.

"Being a waitress when you're a student, I think more so, that's okay, if you've got a part-time job while you're studying. But I think generally *just* waitressing, I dunno like at certain ages I think it can be, I think people will look down on you for not having a proper job" (Victoria, waitress).

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<sup>61</sup> As Phoebe's (waitress) quote demonstrates, several first-generation students felt pressure to become 'someone' or do 'something' with their degree. I will return to this point later in the chapter when discussing experiences of working in 'proper jobs'.

The perceived reactions from real and imagined/generalised others plays an important part in constituting the self which is at the same time social, contextual and relational (Jackson, 2010:132). The generalised other represents wider social norms and expectations which have become internalised and are inherently classed and gendered. Victoria (waitress) refers to ‘people’ that *will* look down on her for not having a ‘proper’ job and this feeling of potential shame shapes her decision-making processes. By the second interview, Victoria had already quit her waitressing job, however her former employer had recently made contact and offered her a job at their sister restaurant.

“It gives me literal anxiety thinking about going back [to waitressing]. I think I’m a different person as pure cheesy as that sounds. I just feel like I’d be going back on me life and I don’t want to go back to putting that uniform on. Like, it makes me feel uncomfortable even thinking about it... even me Dad was like don’t go back but me boyfriend said I should but he doesn’t know what it’s like, he didn’t know me when I was working there, so I’ve never talked about some of the stuff like the stressful times when I worked there, when I was crying in the bathrooms probably cos something [manager] said to me, the arsehole. Or just sometimes I really hated working there so I would get stressed and upset. I probably could do with the money but (sighs), no! I couldn’t do it to meself! Like if somebody came in and they’d be like ‘Oh my God, Vicky *still* works here. I’m sure she worked here when she was 17 she’s 24 now’. I’d rather be on the dole than be a waitress. It’s no longer an option for me. I’ve been there, done that. I feel like I’d literally be wasting my life if I went back doing waitressing. I don’t want to do it” (Victoria, waitress).

The quote above is not merely Victoria retelling a story based on memories, thoughts and reflections. Our conversation generated affect and evoked a corporeal response in the form of ‘literal anxiety’ as she imagined the embodied practice of putting on her uniform. Victoria recalls the emotionality of the job - crying in the bathroom, feeling stressed, upset - and experiences of bullying by her male manager regarding her weight/body. Victoria’s quote also demonstrates the temporal nature of narratives relating to the self as she is able to construct who she is now (present) in relation to who she was (past) and who she images herself to become (or not) in the future. This challenges the notion of an isolated individual self – often found in theories of individualisation – which is replaced with a reflexive, social self (Burkitt, 2008). Smart (2016) argues that people make decisions in relation to others and not simply in terms of their own specific or separate needs and desires. Again, Victoria refers to her father

and partner in her decision-making as well as generalised others who she assumes would judge her for wasting her life by *still* working as a waitress. Furthermore, despite stating that she ‘could do with the money’, to emphasise her point and to express just how much she did not want to go back to waitressing, Victoria stated that she would prefer to receive benefits which is used as an example of the ‘lowest’ and most shameful position to be in (see Tyler, 2008).

Certain aspects of both jobs that were considered to be advantageous while at university - for example, the perks of working in the NTE and the flexible but also unpredictable/unsocial working hours - were no longer deemed appropriate or fitting with their (present and future) imagined lives/selves as graduates. ‘Student-jobs’ served a specific short-term purpose while respondents were at university and their lives were in - what they assumed would be – a *temporary* state of flux.

“I mean, waitressing is a great job to do but you can only do it for so long. It’s not like, a job you can do for a career. I guess like with all the late nights, early mornings, you’ve never actually got a proper sleeping pattern and with all the drinking as well, you’re never sober” (Lucy, waitress).

Similarly, Amy (waitress) sought employment which had the potential to fit around and support her future children/family. Indeed, marriage and kids were taken-for-granted for most women and participants frequently engaged in ‘we’ talk when discussing plans/decisions. By imagining their future in gendered ways, it appeared that respondents were already taking responsibility for and shaping their plans around their future commitments as wives and as mothers. This precluded certain kinds of jobs (e.g. waitressing) which were not considered to be suitable for ageing women/mothers.

“I wanted a job that you know, I could do when I’m old like I found that waitressing I could never have done it as I got older like you know as a 30-year-old, 40-year-old, 50-year-old I wouldn’t wanna be a waitress at that kind of age. So, I wanted a job that provided me with stability as I got older when I wanted children and things like that” (Amy, waitress).

Although Amy (working-class) considered parenthood to inevitable, she was clear that she wanted to find a career first. While Skeggs (1997) found that young working-class women conceive motherhood to be the most viable route to achieve respectable adulthood, Amy sought to achieve this through a more traditionally middle-class route of education, ‘proper’ job/career and deferred parenthood. Thus, motherhood was not seen as a route to autonomy or respect but shaped the form such autonomy and respect might take (c.f. Evans, 2010:65).

### ‘Career strippers’

What was essentially ‘wrong’ with waitressing and stripping for many respondents was that they were not considered to be ‘real’ jobs and certainly not careers. Indeed, existing literature also suggests that stripping is rarely a long-term occupation for women (Forsyth and Deshotels, 1998; Colosi, 2012). However, six of 20 waitresses had worked in hospitality for over six years and two women had worked as waitresses between 10 and 14 years. Similarly, nine of 21 dancers had worked in the industry for over five years and five of those 10 women had worked in the industry for between 10 and 15 years. Both jobs had therefore intentionally or unintentionally become part of their long(er)-term plans. Rachel (dancer, age 38) and Sarah (dancer, age 34) considered stripping to be a career in ways that waitresses did not. Their stories shared a number of similarities as their decisions to leave and re-enter stripping and their working patterns, practices and identities were both highly relational and impacted by their age, children, current and ex-partners. Like entry-routes into stripping, experiences of leaving and returning were also complex and multifaceted, rather than purely economic (Colosi, 2012:143).

Sarah started dancing at the age of 19 and officially ‘quit’ her role at the age of 30 when she met her partner and they left the UK to go travelling. The couple were later engaged and have since had a child together. According to Barton (2017:186), it is common for women to leave stripping and to marry a wealthy male customer who is able to take care of them financially. Sarah stated that she had never intended to return to stripping, however four years

later, she was in the process of re-entering the industry as her partner had encountered unforeseen financial problems.

“I didn’t think I’d be going back to it [stripping] but then I didn’t think my fiancé would lose all his money and fuck us over. I’m going back for the money and the experience. He’s [partner] not done too well at work recently so I have to go back to work and the baby is like a year and a half now. He [partner] loves the fact that I’ve lost all this weight and like toned up you know like he’s really supportive of me going back as well. I came home from my first shift in this underground club the other day and there’s a mac and cheese already in the oven for me and like a little side salad prepared and a glass of wine and you know, he made me dinner and wanted to talk about it [work] and you know, seeing if everything was alright and stuff” (Sarah, dancer).

Sarah returned to work in order to regain financial security, however this decision was also made in direct relation to her partner’s financial precarity and thus, to support her family. Existing research (see Colosi, 2012:149-52) suggests that intimate partners are usually a catalyst for women *leaving* the industry as partners are disapproving/jealous (this was the case for Danielle discussed in Chapter One) rather than for women remaining in/re-entering stripping. Barton (2017:97, c.f. Bradley, 2007) argues that partners who ‘support’ women working as strippers tend to be ‘guys that don’t treat them right’ or who are really ‘pimping’ or ‘mooching’ off women as they do not have jobs or money of their own. The latter argument is problematic as this implies that male partners will be jealous or should have a problem with their female partner stripping – and thus violating heterosexual gendered norms - and that if they do not have an issue and are supportive, that this is because they do not care or are exploiting women financially.

Since returning to stripping, Rachel and Sarah stated that they had changed their working patterns and practices by only working if/when they were meeting regular customers and/or when working at underground events which were organised by dancers as a way to avoid high levels of financial exploitation within strip clubs/pubs.

“It’s like I’ve been pushed into these underground, illegal places because of the legislations in the clubs. Basically, it’s very difficult to work in a mainstream club. I don’t make any money anymore so I’ve got like a little band of customers that I can take to these places that are like not known about and yeah I can sort of phone them and say you know, ‘I’m working here

tonight, come in' and it's run by other girls but because it's like that, there's not as many rules. So, a lot of girls do what they want and so they [customers] do expect a little bit of touching and this and that... I think a lot of girls do that when they get older, otherwise you're in there [stripping venue] with like 20 something year olds and you can't work, you don't have as much energy when you're older" (Rachel, dancer).

As discussed in Chapter Two, the supply of dancers has outweighed the demand and with fewer places to work, 'older' dancers such as Rachel and Sarah are more likely to be 'pushed underground' and thus, become invisible. Existing research suggests that women in a range of occupations become 'invisible' as they age which limits career opportunities and trajectories (see Riach et al., 2015). However, for a stripper, this has the potential to carry real, physical dangers as unregulated stripping scenes lack security, safety regulations and women face potentially poorer working conditions.

Despite being considered 'low-skilled', transitioning back into stripping was not straightforward and involved re-skilling, re-gaining self-confidence and on-going bodily labour for both women to 'feel ready' to fully return to work.

"I really needed to lose loads of weight which I've done, I've lost like a couple of kilograms and toning up. I needed to re-learn some pole tricks 'cos I haven't danced for like three years and then obviously having the baby and stuff like that means your body changes a lot. I've got to tone up!" (Sarah, dancer).

"When I went back [to stripping], I had a tummy tuck, and lipo[suction]. Yeah. Because I had an emergency C-section, and I'm 38. So, it's, my muscles just didn't, my abdominal wall was kind of pulled apart, and it wasn't going back naturally. So, I got some surgery done. Just to get rid of it. And then I have got a couple of faithful clients that didn't care, they just let me dance and cover that bit up. But I think, yeah, to go up to strangers and get a dance, I looked like a big rectangle, I didn't look good. So, I got that done, and I can keep dancing now" (Rachel, dancer).

During the interview, both women discussed how their bodies had changed in ways beyond their control through pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum and they frequently compared themselves to (real and imagined) dancers who are childless and almost 20 years younger. Efforts or pressures to lose weight after having children are of course, not limited to dancers. However, to recreate the 'stripper look' - as a hyper-sexualised ideal/fantasy - required both



women to engage in a range of bodily technologies and to continually manipulate their appearance to conform. The (re)creation of this ideal in many ways reinforces limiting and potentially harmful conceptions of the feminine body. Yet, Wesley (2003) argues that we must try to look beyond one-dimensional understandings of body technologies to explore the complex and multiple meanings behind why women engage in such technologies and what bodily change means in relation to their gendered, embodied identities. Indeed, Barker et al. (2018) maintain that expressions of female sexuality can be in one sense scarred by power and inequality and at the same time sites of pleasure.

When working at underground events, Rachel and Sarah were not constrained by management in the same way as other women working in clubs/pubs. While the rules on appearance and behaviour were more ‘relaxed’, customers still expected women to look like strippers. Indeed, both women sought to alter their bodies based on ‘industry standards’ (outlined in Chapter Five) and in ways they considered would be financially rewarded. Participants spoke about a desire to regain their former ‘stripper-self’ which they considered to be an important part of their identity and something they felt that they had lost since becoming mothers. Nevertheless, their embodied identities as strippers and mothers were not considered separate. For example, Sarah referred to her body/self/identity as ‘sexy (because it is) MILF-y’. This use of this acronym - ‘Mother I’d Like to Fuck’<sup>62</sup> – demonstrates a merging of the whore/Madonna binary which is potentially disruptive. Rather than perpetuating restrictive notions of heterosexual female sexuality, Sarah and Rachel considered themselves to be ‘hybrid’ which counters ideas of motherhood and sexiness as mutually exclusive.

“I’m like a mum most of the time so I want to kind of get, I want to be like thrown deep into the action and be really sexy, you know. I love that kind of stuff, like I love that high. I mean after over 10 years of working in clubs I’ve still got loads of energy for them, I need interaction,

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<sup>62</sup> Media imagery of the sexually attractive mother was exemplified through the character, Mrs Robinson in the 1967 movie *The Graduate* and the acronym was later popularised by the 1999 film, *American Pie*. The MILF is not too dissimilar from the middle-class ‘yummy-mummy’ who is typically depicted as a white, thirtysomething women in a position of privilege. Celebrity examples provided by Littler (2013:228) include Claudia Schiffer, Jools Oliver, Mylene Class and Melanie Sykes.

I need busy places, I actually need that in my life *especially* after moving to bores-ville around here, you know (laughs)” (Sarah, dancer).

“To be honest, dancing, it’s helped because it gives me a little break from childcare. Now [child] is older, I don’t really need so much of a break from him but before I really did because he was difficult. So that kind of gave me a bit of freedom to get back to myself and have my bit of fun it was like going out, I see so many faces I can feel like someone who is not *just* a mum but like an attractive woman, for a few hours” (Rachel, dancer).

Rachel and Sarah wanted to be seen and understood as multi-dimensional and not *just* strippers or *just* mothers. Wesley (2003) argues that how we interact with our bodies is complex and while respondents capitalised on a relatively restrictive version of heterosexual female sexuality, the meanings that they attributed to the stripper look were not singular, static and therefore, the ‘stripper look’ was not the same embodied experience for all women. While both women sought economic security through dancing, the quotes above also support Colosi’s (2012:70) argument that women enter – and return – to stripping for emotional reasons and for thrill seeking purposes. Sarah stated that she *could* have found ‘mainstream’ employment, however re-entering stripping was conceptualised as a break or escape from other – more mundane, less exciting - aspects of her life (as discussed in Chapter Five). Both Sarah and Rachel were able to regain access to a ‘risky’ lifestyle (Colosi, 2012:70) and to a sense of independence away from their partners and children who represented responsibility. Thus, Smart (2016:23) argues that the lives of individuals should not be seen in isolation from the other lives which run in parallel, cross, or interfere with those of the main protagonists in the study.

### Leaving waitressing/stripping

The majority of women working in both industries stated that they had worked in their respective roles longer than they had originally planned. Eugenia (dancer) and other women described becoming ‘comfortable’, losing track of time and eventually feeling stuck.

“To be honest, I didn’t think I would be there [strip club] for six years because that’s actually quite a long time (laughs). I had the idea, probably around when I would be studying, but stayed longer. So, that’s why I was like, ‘If I don’t get out now, when would I?’ Time goes so fast

especially when you're there and you get into your comfort zone. I've done it for six years and I just wanted to move on. I didn't want to stay in the trap because it's easy to just stay and do it forever, so I wanted to get out" (Eugenia, dancer).

Dancers frequently stated that they worried about being/becoming trapped which appears to reflect broader discourses around the sex industry as an "...ominous, exponentially expanding entity that ensnares vulnerable women into risky labour" (Ham and Gilmore, 2017:752). To be/become 'trapped' in anything implies danger, risk or that one has been duped/tricked. Such discourses overtly suggest<sup>63</sup> that stripping is something women *should* leave which evidently shaped the ways that women were able to reflect on and narrate their past, present and future engagement in stripping.

Soon after acquiring a new, 'proper' job, Eugenia and Helen both quit their jobs as dancers as they feared being outed and that this could negatively affect their future careers. This fear was also considered to be the biggest 'deterrent' which prevented women from returning to stripping. Both respondents described the same imagined scenario of a potential colleague/employer frequenting the strip club, outing them as dancers and that they would lose their jobs as a result. As discussed in Chapter Four, based on Phillipa's (dancer) case, this fear was unfortunately not unfounded.

Temporality was important in regard to whore stigma. For example, Eugenia and Helen (dancers) were careful to protect their future selves/opportunities and to negotiate the lingering effects of sex work stigma. Eugenia stated that she kept secrets and told lies to her family to avoid conflict and feelings of shame (her own and her job affecting her family) (c.f. Sanders, 2005b).

"I've always been confidential about what I did because I knew one day, I would be out of there and I didn't want it to kind of follow me forever in that sense" (Eugenia, dancer).

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<sup>63</sup> By researching women's experiences of 'exiting' stripping (or not), I found myself walking a tightrope as I carefully attempted to avoid insinuating to respondents that they should leave.

Helen (dancer) on the other hand wanted to challenge stigma and negative stereotypes of strippers by coming out as a former dancer in her new ‘professional’ workplace but at the same time felt that this was too risky this early in her career when she was yet to achieve a sense of status or authority.

“I love the fact that actually I can work and live in both worlds. People kind of distance themselves from strippers. They group them and think that they don’t know anybody who is one, or that they would spot one. They think, oh you know, they’re stupid or they look a certain way. I just love the element of like, I’m so different from that, from what people think. So, yeah, that makes me laugh. I really wanna go to people and tell them, just to see what they’d say now they’ve met me in a professional environment. I’d love to say, ‘Actually, this [stripping] is what I *really* did’ and see their reaction. But, I’m hesitant, *obviously*, because I don’t wanna ruin my career at this stage (laughs)” (Helen, dancer).

Barton (2017:108-9) argues that our culture is more forgiving of women who have had a ‘stripper phase’ than ‘career dancers’ (such as Rachel and Sarah outlined above) whose stigma becomes a more permanent aspect of their lives. As a middle-class woman who has quit dancing and then turned ‘professional’ (read: respectable), Helen’s narrative has the potential to be more acceptable as Barton (2017) argues that short-term engagement with stripping becomes titillating rather than ruinous. Indeed, as Helen’s quote suggests, her former engagement in stripping was evidence of her ability to occupy and perform both good girl (professional) and bad girl (stripper). By doing so, she is able to walk the gendered tightrope where women are expected to appear both “...‘natural’ and ‘professional’ and ‘sexy’ and ‘nonchalant’ and ‘available’ and ‘desirable’ and ‘cute’ and ‘fun’ and ‘capable’ and ‘healthy’, all at the same time” (Orbach, 2017:ix). Helen wanted to be able to express her exceptionality, however, by stating that she enjoyed stripping, or that it is still a part of her identity in the present is not an acceptable exiting story in comparison to those who ‘got out’/‘escaped’ the trap and survived (Barton, 2017:108-9).

#### *Waitressing/stripping: a stepping-stone?*

For many women, their engagement in stripping was not as simple as ‘in or out’ (c.f. Bowen, 2015).

“I don’t feel like I’m leaving completely because it’s something you always go back to. Years ago, when I was a stripper, the older strippers would always tell me there’s that there’s no end to this job and that you always go back to it sooner or later which I kind of now understand what they meant by it. Even if you go back, it’s not necessarily that you go to a strip club. You can go to a stag do or something and it will be a private event” (Laura, dancer).

Laura (dancer) stated that she had not worked in a strip club for two years but that stripping remained a part of her working life as she performed at private events and worked as a pole instructor. Existing literature points to the use of stripping in a financial sense to create future trajectories outside of the industry (Hardy and Sanders, 2015). However, participants also used the skills they developed from stripping (i.e. pole dance) to generate further work opportunities. Ashley (dancer) was also able to diversify her stripping skills and at the time of interview was in the process of becoming a qualified pole instructor. She was able to capitalise on her job as a stripper which she used as a marketing strategy. Indeed, being a stripper boosted her client base by attracting women who sought an ‘authentic’ experience and to be taught by a ‘*real stripper*’. Furthermore, this also gave her credibility when teaching new/other dancers who trusted her because she worked in the industry.

Similarly, some women were able to use waitressing strategically to advance within the hospitality industry. This supports existing research which highlights how working while studying is not wholly negative and can increase ‘employability’ (Robotham, 2013:438). For example, business and hospitality students Katherine and Chloe (waitresses) specifically chose waitressing to gain experience, skills and insight into their potential future careers in hotel and hospitality management. Chloe (waitress) worked as a waitress for the same company over the course of her degree and upon graduation was promoted to a management position. Within two years of graduating, she had been promoted three times and at the time of our interview, Chloe was the Deputy General Manager of a large multimillion-pound hospitality company. While she undertook the same process as external candidates<sup>64</sup>, she considers her work as a waitress

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<sup>64</sup> Sending a cover letter, CV, completing an application form and attending an interview.

and the relationships she built to be the key reason why she was promoted. Waitressing acted as a stepping-stone in a similar way to an internship.

“I’m happy cos I think that if I went anywhere else, I wouldn’t have got to where I am now. I think like, overall, I would have just as much experience going to any other company, but they don’t know me, they don’t know how I work, and they wouldn’t be as trusting to give me a position. Since I worked there [current place of employment] so long [three years] they know that I would actually be able to do it [new job]” (Chloe, waitress).

As discussed in Chapter Four, Chloe (working-class) was a ‘living at home’, first-generation, foundation-degree student. Finn and Holton (2019) argue that local students such as Chloe are presented in existing scholarship as problematic and immobile. This implies that they are trapped and constrained in comparison to students who move away from home to study or for work. Although her transition into HE was not straightforward, on the contrary, Chloe appeared to have one of the ‘smoothest’ transitions into her preferred career in comparison to other graduates. She was able to draw on local networks and has become socially mobile as a result.

Grace (dancer) conducted an ethnographic study in the strip club where she worked as a dancer for her PhD research (similar to Colosi, 2012; Lister, 2015). For this reason, Grace stated that stripping was ‘always’ going to be temporary.

“The reason I became a stripper was first and foremost because I needed money and I needed money fast, as in, I needed money *instantly*. The second very, very close reason was I needed participants and I figured the only way of doing this would be to actually, you know, become a deviant essentially myself and get to know the lasses and win their trust that way” (Grace, dancer).

While the financial element was important in helping to advance Grace’s degree, becoming a stripper also (in)directly boosted her future career prospects within academia by providing her with access to respondents and thus, data (in a similar way to this research). Given her strategic involvement, Grace stated that she found it relatively easy to leave stripping and to not return.

“I went away from stripping and I was just glad to never have to go back again. Some people stay in it for years and years and years. I was always going to be in it for a relatively short period of time overall anyways because you know, my *modus operandi* was not to work as a lap-dancer for the rest of my life. I wanted to get a job with stability and a regular wage which eventually, I got. But until then, it suited my purpose” (Grace, dancer).

Grace considered herself to have some leverage in the labour market due to her credentials which made it easier for her to leave stripping. Like most aspiring academics, she was offered a number of short(er)-term contracts before she was offered a full-time lectureship. Similar to Eugenia and Helen (dancers), Grace worked hard to keep her involvement in the stripping industry as hidden as possible as she did not want her family to find out about her work. While it was clear from her PhD research that she had worked in the industry, she feared that this could/would negatively impact on her future job prospects in academia due to the prevailing and intense stigma around sex work.

Similar to Phillipa's (dancer) experience outlined in Chapter Four, Grace's fear almost became a reality as a colleague collected photographic 'evidence' of Grace to report to senior management following her entry to a new academic post within a university.

"None of this [previous engagement in stripping] was a secret by the time I came to this job, everybody knew what I did, it was why I got the job. Yet, somebody Googled me, saw these pictures and reported me to the HoD, so that was behind my back, and the HoD pulled me in and I said, 'Well you can look at the pictures you knew my background none of it is pornographic', and the HoD looked and just said, 'Well, quite frankly, I don't give a shit'... but it was the fact that the person went behind my back and it's the whole kind of underlying thing of Googling somebody and saying, 'Oh that person's got a picture of themselves with hardly any clothes on'... so when I found out who it was 'cos I took this to the Union and everything because it was all happening behind my back, the person actually came to me and identified themselves I said, 'Well why did you do that?' and she said, 'Oh I thought maybe you would get a hard time from the male students' and I said, 'Well firstly, if you cared, you would have said this to me directly and secondly, all the male students know about it anyways'" (Grace, dancer).

As a permanent member of staff and part of a trade union, Grace had more 'power' than student, Phillipa (dancer) in defending her position. Nevertheless, given the lack of specific policies in universities on the whole regarding student *and* staff active or former engagement in sex work (see Cusick et al., 2009), staff are not immune from potential dismissal or other negative repercussions including bullying, discrimination and harassment. Grace's example demonstrates how sticky and difficult shedding a 'deviant' identity can be. Becoming a former-

sex worker does not necessarily remove the effects of stigma completely, even when becoming ‘professional’.

*Planning: What next?*

Becoming a graduate produced mixed emotions amongst respondents who described feelings of relief in finishing their degree, pride in their accomplishments and excitement in relation to their potential unknown/uncertain futures. However, this was also met with feelings of worry and dread or even experiences of ‘an existential crisis’ (Nikki, dancer). For many women, even before they had started university, their degree provided a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. Making new plans/goals was described as daunting which is not surprising given the mix of contemporary, consumerist discourses of self-actualisation and transformation, meritocracy and the supposed endless choice and equal opportunities young women are said to have (despite typically having less, rather than more choice in their lives (Segal and Littler, 2018)).

“Uni was over and that was my goal ever since I finished my A-levels. All I wanted to do was hold that scroll and I held the scroll and it was like, ‘What do I do now?’ So, yeah it was really confusing having to be like, ‘Okay, well, what’s the point of my life now?’” (Nikki, dancer).

Transitions out of university should not be understood in isolation. For many women, this transition was accompanied by geographical mobility and returning to live with parents, transitioning out of stripping and waitressing and leaving (at least in a geographical sense) the relationships they had built with co-workers, moving away from shared accommodation and from roommates, leaving and entering romantic relationships. As their lives were undergoing substantial change, several women stated that they felt unable to make concrete plans about their futures and instead assumed that fate, a higher power, or ‘life’ would guide them; particularly in relation to finding employment.

“I think you’ve got to be in the right place at the right time and talking to the right people and get lucky. It’s not always based on you know, you’ve got this degree and you can do that” (Rebecca, waitress).



“I let things come to me. Like if I see something, if it comes up, it’s for a reason” (Lucy, waitress).

“I’ve always been one of them that’s like, something will always happen for like when you’re wanting a job or you don’t know what you’re gonna do at uni, something will always pop up and it’s probably, I don’t wanna say fate but yeah, that kind of thing” (Stephanie, waitress).

Given the prevalence of neoliberal rhetoric of individualism and risk, it is understandable that respondents may want to try to alleviate themselves from total responsibility in deciding their futures and in potentially making the ‘wrong’ choices. At the same time, the quotes are reminiscent of the Protestant ethic whereby one’s ‘fate’ is regarded as predetermined. Weeks (2011:45) argues that this helps to assuage anxiety produced by uncertainty while at the same time masking the effects of structural inequalities. For example, an individual is offered their dream job because of luck/fate and not because of class/gender/racial privilege.

Ellie (waitress) took solace in the thought that she was not alone as she assumed that (generalised) other graduates also feel the same and that this sense of not knowing is part of the process of becoming an adult.

“It’s kind of good [not knowing what is next] because it means like, you know, even if you have no idea it’s kind of *the thing* isn’t it. You muddle along. I think very few people, unless you’re working in a graduate scheme or you are like a doctor or something really obvious who actually know what they want to do. How do you know what you’re interested in? A lot of people are interested in lots of things” (Ellie, waitress).

A number of women sourced what they considered to be professional support and guidance from university careers advice services. While the importance of graduate transitions and employability has become a pressing concern for universities (as HEI’s are now financially affected by how well they fare within this metric), those who graduated prior to 2016 felt particularly abandoned by their university upon graduation. Despite attending careers advice sessions, Sophia (dancer) felt that she was not given any concrete information, “...it’s like, you’ve graduated, bye!” Amy and Kate (waitresses) also described leaving careers advisers feeling ‘defeatist’ when they were informed that their chances of obtaining employment within

highly competitive professions (child psychologist and police force) were low. Both women stated that based on such advice, they opted for employment routes they considered to be more obtainable. For example, Amy stated that she chose the (feminised) path of social work as there was (and still is) a high demand for social workers. However, (most likely due to public sector cuts), Amy also stated that her pay is less than she anticipated and that her workload is substantially more than she expected often leading to burnout.

Rather than seeking ‘social mobility’ per se, many working-class women in particular sought financial security and to feel ‘settled’. For Olivia (dancer) financial stability was also intimately linked to feelings of psychological stability. Finding a stable source of income was her main priority following over 10 years in stripping which can be financially precarious.

“I was just following the kind of direction of the way life was taking me at the time... I’m not really much of a planner. Plans historically in my life haven’t worked out which has been demoralising and to some extent, I’ve become afraid of making plans because it would you know, inevitably not kind of work out. I’ve always wanted to have money really. I think coming from no money, I just always wanted to you know have some financial stability. All the times in my life when I’ve been at my most stable [mental health] have also been when I’ve had my most financial stability. So yeah, I think I just erm, didn’t really have plans, didn’t really know what I was doing (laughs)” (Olivia, dancer).

Olivia’s quote encapsulates the hidden injuries of neoliberalism and demonstrates the link between neoliberal and economic conditions of precarity with psychological feelings of instability. Indeed, Tyler and Slater (2018) argue that the existing neoliberal political economy has created an epidemic of fear and anxiety which was expressed within all women’s accounts. At the same time that more people require mental health services and support, the government has continued draconian cuts to the NHS and to health provisions.

When money and finding stability becomes an individual’s main priority, the actual job or career and what it entails becomes less of a concern. For example, a number of women stated that they would apply for jobs purely based on the salary. On the one hand, this points to clear inequality as working-class women did not feel able to apply for or fully focus on finding meaningful/fulfilling employment or jobs/careers that they were interested in/wanted to do

because their main concern was instead, finding financial stability in *any* role. Yet, at the same time, why should we work for anything other than money? Indeed, Weeks (2018) problematises the pervasive overvalue of work and the romanticising discourses which encourage us to ‘do what we love’ and to ‘fall in love with our work’ insisting that work is and should be the most important and purposeful thing in our lives (c.f. Sandoval, 2018). I will come back to this point later in the chapter.

#### *Plans not going to plan*

Even when participants made plans, events happened in their lives which were out of their control and either derailed or deferred imagined futures. For example, Rebecca’s (waitress) priorities changed from the first to second interview as she initially planned to join the police but due to an unknown heart condition, she failed her medical test and was unable to continue with her application. Rebecca referred to the year following university as a ‘pause’ year as she had put plans on hold to focus on her health.

Like many women during the first interview, Nikki (dancer) planned to take a gap year and to continue working as a stripper, save money and to go travelling. When discussing intentions to leave or continue stripping, during the first interview she stated that she could not envisage her life without stripping as she described her job as ‘addictive’ and something that women *never* stop doing.

“I don’t think I’ll ever leave [stripping]. I’m not going to stop until I have to. Some of the dancers I’ve seen, I don’t ever have to stop (laughs). It’s addictive, you can’t like, stop and never go back. It’s not only the money, it’s kind of, I think a lot of the girls like to perform and have a bit of fun as well. I’ve had like a month off when I first came to uni I had like four months off I was really craving it at that point I was like, ‘I really need to work!’” (Nikki, dancer).

During the 12 months between the two interviews, Nikki’s plans had changed, and she had found herself in a large amount of unexpected debt. Rather than this financial pressure ‘trapping’ Nikki in stripping - as suggested by scholars such as Barton (2017) - instead she felt compelled to leave stripping in search of a higher and more stable income.

“Oh no! I hate this. All the plans that you make and then you don’t do anything! I didn’t do anything that I wanted to do, sadly” (Nikki, dancer).

One key advantage of longitudinal research is the ability to return to respondents who are then able to reflect back on their intentions, plans and imagined future selves. However, it was not always easy for respondents to look back on what was said/planned during the first interview. Many women had made what they considered to be exciting/adventurous plans that did not always work out for various reasons (usually financial). Some women felt that they had ‘failed’ to achieve goals such as graduating or travelling, and this made the second round of interviews particularly emotional for respondents, and also for myself as the interviewer.

Indeed, during the first round of interviews, Charlotte (dancer) stated that she had reached a turning point in her life and planned to leave stripping mainly due to her age but also because she wanted change. Discussing her future plans was highly emotional for Charlotte as she described how the shame associated with her work had affected her family and her mother in particular. Charlotte was affected by the emotions of others and also by the emotional ‘consequences’ of her continued engagement with stripping. She sought to counter previous feelings of shame associated with her job by finding employment which would make her parents proud.

“I really do wanna try and get out [of stripping], because, I’m getting all emotional now, I want to make my parents proud and I’ve actually told my mum that I was stripping and I did see her heart break in front of me, so that’s been a big thing for me. ‘Cos, I love dancing, I’d like to keep dancing, obviously I want to do the dance teaching so that’s my main aim, I want to keep performing. I do want to leave the club in the next year because, as well, I’m not getting any younger, I’m going to be 31” (Charlotte, dancer).

I was unable to contact Charlotte during the second round of interviews. Therefore, I can only speculate, however based on the emotionality of the first interview when discussing her decisions to leave stripping, it is possible that Charlotte may have continued working as a dancer and felt uncomfortable taking part in the second interview. The first time we spoke I explained that the second interview would involve reflecting back on the time passed and

discussing her experiences and decisions. As outlined in Chapter Three, transitions research can imply and (re)produce narratives of ‘progress’ and ‘development’ (Finn, 2015) which can be daunting and emotional for participants who may individualise their plans not going to plan as a personal ‘failure’.

Despite having the opposite intentions to the majority of respondents and planning on remaining in stripping long-term, as mentioned Nikki (dancer) quit stripping sooner than most respondents (aged 21) and felt that in many ways she had no choice but to find a full-time job outside of the sex industry. Although stripping and sex work are one of the most lucrative options for many women, as Nikki had a degree and no gaps in her employment history (as she had also worked as a front of house member of staff at a local restaurant), she was able to find and secure a well-paid ‘graduate’ job with relative ease.

Nikki stated that she missed stripping and there was a notable shift in her narrative and in the way that she constructed her sense of self from the first to the second interview. For example, she initially described herself as ‘crazy’ and ‘wild’, however during the second interview she described herself as ‘vanilla’. I asked Nikki if she had any plans to return to stripping. She stated that, since moving away from the strip club environment and facing increased constraints in regard to time-management, job responsibility etc. that she did not consider juggling two jobs or returning to stripping to be an option at that point in time.

“My new job is 9am until 6pm and then by the time I get home it’s about quarter to seven and you don’t want to do anything with your weekend. You don’t want to go into work or shave your arsehole [as preparation for work in the strip club], you just want to stay at home and do nothing. I just want to watch *Come Dine with Me* and drink decaf coffee” (Nikki, dancer).

Similarly, Anna (waitress) also planned to go travelling and to continue working as a waitress abroad for around six months to one year before returning to the UK and entering her career as a nurse.

“It didn’t go as planned. Nothing went as planned. I applied for jobs out of peer pressure because everyone was like ‘Are you applying for jobs? Are you applying for jobs?’ And I was just thinking God I haven’t even finished [university]! Because at that point I still had the three

months placement and then I was just like, okay I'll go for some practice ones, interviews, like you do, and the job was what I wanted and I got it" (Anna, waitress).

Although her trajectory into work appears relatively straightforward, Anna was older than the majority of respondents and found her first 'proper job' aged 27. As previously mentioned, Anna felt pressured by her parents to leave waitressing and 'do something' with her life. Parental expectations were then compounded by comparisons made with her peers which generated fear of falling behind. Given that she had completed a very specific degree – nursing – Anna was aware of the career that she wanted to pursue unlike other participants. She referred to her initial job interviews as 'practice' as she assumed that she would not be successful. Stating in the first interview that she planned to continue waitressing may have been what Holloway and Jefferson (2008:299) refer to as 'a defended response'. When individuals are faced with anxiety-provoking situations/questions, in order to protect the 'self', by stating that she planned to remain in waitressing – rather than find a job as a nurse – this may have been seen as the 'safe' option to avoid feeling like/being perceived as a failure during the second interview.

### The 'proper' job

#### *It's hard work finding work*

To 'boost' their employability, skills and career prospects, some respondents competed for unpaid internships which appeared highly exploitative and rarely resulted in employment. Phoebe (waitress) continued working as a waitress to fund her unpaid internships which meant that she was (over)working almost *double* the legal weekly working limit. Her typical working week included 40 hours as an unpaid intern (9am-5pm Monday to Friday) and 51 hours per week as a waitress (6pm-1am Monday to Friday and 10am-2am Saturday).

"I thought okay, if I work *really* hard, I'll get a job and like they [company] kind of made it out that I would but never actually said it. As time went on, I found out about the internships and stuff and they were like 'Yeah, we just can't afford to keep you on, but we wanted to give you experience for your CV'. If you have an internship it shows dedication, like most people in London have done an internship and it just looks good. But it's hard. I was working 90-hour weeks, I was knackered!" (Phoebe, waitress).

Eugenia (dancer) stated that despite acquiring a degree, gaining industry experience through unpaid internships and providing potential employers with ‘good’ references, she was *still* unable to find employment for almost 10 months after she had finished university.

“I dunno why, in my head it was always, ‘Oh, I will send one application out and then I will get this job straight away’. But it really didn’t work out like that, it’s not like that. Far from it. Even though you have a degree, good internship, good references, it’s not enough...what matters in the end? Nothing, a piece of paper” (Eugenia, dancer).

The high amount of unpaid labour involved in finding a ‘proper job’ was repeatedly cited by almost all respondents as one of the biggest challenges they had encountered since leaving university. This included job searching, crafting and continually adapting CVs and cover letters, finding references, long, detailed application forms, interviews (including preparation) and rejection. When applying for a social worker role, Amy (waitress) described the process as ‘extremely long and difficult’ so much so, that this almost prevented her from applying. Amy was expected to complete a written application, a number of online tests, an assessment day, a group interview, a two-hour written exercise, an individual interview and a separate situational role play. The process appeared to be even more challenging for those who had never written a CV, who had limited experience applying for jobs and who did not have much previous work experience to draw upon other than waitressing and/or stripping.

“I find the whole process of writing a CV and applications quite demoralising because it’s constantly having to be talking about the skills that you don’t have and looking through lists of things that you don’t do. It can be quite depressing when you’re really inexperienced and you’re having to pretend and no one’s buying it anyway, no one’s buying the pretence” (Hannah, waitress).

Sophia (dancer) and Lilly (waitress) both felt that the amount of work required in the application process and employer’s expectations of candidates was not an equal trade-off for the expected salary in return.

“I mean for every job application there’s like 10,000 people and it’s a lot of really skilled people with a lot of studies and so I feel like maybe having a degree helps somehow but I feel like these days, it seems like you need a lot more than just one friggin degree. Like, people are asking for *so* much and offering very little in return. You know, they have like a personal assistant position, but you need to speak German, you also need to be proficient in this and that

and you need to do this and that and we're paying £20,000 a year and you're like, 'How?' I see these job descriptions and they're *so* boring, I'm looking, and I just want to yawn you know, I'm like 'Oh God! Do I really want to do that?'" (Sophia, dancer).

Participants described a creeping sensation of fear and worry that 'It (finding a career) was never going to happen' (Phoebe, waitress). As mentioned, several women stated that they had accepted jobs that they did not necessarily want due to financial necessity or because the job was vaguely related to the industries that they wanted to work in. For younger respondents, omitting stripping and having limited work experience on their CV may not have hindered their chances of finding employment; given their age and the justification that they had been studying during that time. However, Sophia (dancer) stated that she struggled to account for large gaps in her CV when questioned by potential employers.

"The problem I've got is after so many years dancing, even though you know, I have gained so many skills as a dancer, you learn selling skills, you learn interpersonal skills, you learn how to self-manage. How do you explain that on a CV, do you know what I mean? Like, I found that it's quite hard to put everything that you have learnt in stripping on a CV because you feel like peoples going to judge you if you say, 'Oh, give me an example of customer satisfaction' and you're like, 'Oh I can think of one for you!' (laughs) but you can't fricking say that (laughs), and that's the struggle I'm having right now" (Sophia, dancer)

Sophia, Laura and Rachel (dancers) had worked in stripping for a similar amount of time (10-15 years) and appeared to be the most averse to the formal application process as they had previously relied on informal, local networks to find work as dancers. Similarly, Anna (waitress) had worked as a waitress for over 10 years and also struggled with the application process. She had little experience outside of the hospitality industry and had also previously relied on more informal methods of finding work.

"Apart from this job [waitressing] I got off *Gumtree*, all the other jobs were just like, oh I'll drop my CV in, so you know how you walk into the restaurant and be like 'Hey, you looking for people? I saw the sign; this is my CV'. Then they call you and your hired. This is completely different... it's hard to just be like, 'Hi, I've been a waitress for 10 years, but I want to be a nurse now' (laughs)" (Anna, waitress).

Although Nikki (dancer) was able to find 'graduate employment' she also stated that she struggled in the first few interviews that she attended as she was unsure how to answer



competency-based interview questions without any prior experience of formally applying or interviewing for jobs.

“I told them that I burned my house down in first year and that was probably the hardest thing I’d ever had to overcome. Idiot! Obviously, I didn’t get that job, I really wanted it as well. What an idiot! I can’t believe I said that I’m really embarrassed by it still. It was a competency-based question and I blew it” (Nikki, dancer).

There is an assumption within the existing literature that student/graduate sex workers would not disclose their work experience on their CV/applications which would then disadvantage such individuals in comparison to students working in mainstream employment; as the latter are able to demonstrate the development of skills outside of the classroom, the ability to juggle different responsibilities, experience in the workplace etc. (see Robotham, 2013). However, only four waitresses stated that they currently included waitressing on their CV. Several waitresses stated that they assumed potential employers would not take her work experience seriously and that they would consider waitressing to be irrelevant.

When respondents were asked what ‘skills’ they thought they had developed in waitressing and stripping, participants made similar jokes. For example, waitresses made reference to their new-found ability to carry more than one plate at a time and dancers light-heartedly referred to walking in extremely high-heels or being able to ‘...twerk<sup>65</sup> one butt cheek at a time’ (Holly, dancer). Some women acknowledged that both jobs required ‘skills’ but felt unable to translate the transferability of such skills in a formal sense i.e. on CVs/application forms. Gemma (dancer/waitress) appeared to draw on neoliberal ideas of ‘resilience’ as a valued capacity (see Phipps, 2019) which she felt she had gained from stripping as she stated that dancing had helped her to develop a thick skin and confidence which she considered to be invaluable in the current job market.

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<sup>65</sup> Dancing involving quick, repeated hip thrusts and shaking of the buttocks in a squat stance.

“I think I’ve developed less so skills, more confidence. Learning how to sell yourself, like I found that even the way I wrote CVs and stuff after working there had completely changed” (Gemma, dancer/waitress).

Dancers faced rejection from customers on a regular basis based on their appearance which is not necessarily unique to stripping - for example, Entwistle and Wissinger’s (2006) research demonstrates how this type and level of rejection is also experienced by models - this gendered/racialised/classed reaction to women it is not simply ‘unproblematic’. Participants were required to manage emotions and several women took pride in their ability to ‘shake off’ negative feelings induced through rejection. For example, Helen (dancer) stated that stripping had not only taught her how to talk/convince/sell to different types of people, but also to not take rejection personally. Helen stated that if she is turned down for a job outside the stripping industry, she now tells herself that the company is not right for her, that they are not compatible and moves on to the next job vacancy. In doing so, she stated that she was able to reframe rejection as an inevitable part of the hiring process. Although this may appear like an individual ‘solution’ to a structural problem (Gill and Orgad, 2017) - where women are expected to simply ‘deal with’ being rejected - unlike most women in this research, Helen stated that she no longer considers herself to be a failure/the problem.

Amy and Lucy (waitresses) on the other hand stated that they struggled to ‘sell themselves’ on their CV, in interviews and that rejection negatively impacted their confidence and self-esteem. Many graduates assumed that they would find work relatively quickly and easily and that they had not taken into account high levels of rejection and disappointment. A vicious cycle emerged as Amy started to experience rejection, she also started to avoid applying for jobs or going to interviews as she became too nervous at the thought of being rejected, again. As a result, Amy worked as a waitress for longer than she had initially anticipated and around 12 months after she had finished university.

While Lucy (waitress) initially found employment relatively quickly (within one month), she was made redundant after six months in her new role. She stated that she already suffered with severe anxiety and depression and that her redundancy negatively impacted her mental health as well as her confidence when interviewing for new positions.

“The interview was absolutely horrible ‘cos I was suffering so bad with this like self-doubt all the time. I was like, I just couldn’t feel it and I thought to myself, ‘Oh, I’ve definitely failed this one’ ‘cos I was shaking, and I was sweating... the area manager who interviewed me said, ‘It’s okay, just chill!’ I still couldn’t really chill and I didn’t think I’d got the job but he called me afterwards and he said, ‘Look, darling, I can see straight through you, I can tell you’re not normally like this and I wanna give you the job’... he’s been the person that’s sort of put like worth into me, he’s given me a reason to continue ‘cos he believed in me and do you know, I love it [the job], I really do” (Lucy, waitress).

Lucy and Amy – like many people – seemed to tie their feelings of self-worth and purpose to their employment which has potentially damaging emotional effects when or if they are rejected. Similar to the employability and skills discourse, Gill and Orgad (2017:26) argue that women are increasingly told to ‘be confident’ in the workplace (and in other areas of life) and that it is their ‘lack’ of confidence (or skills) which is holding them back. The authors argue that this implies that the source and solution of the ‘problem’ of women not being able to obtain certain roles is simply because of their low confidence/*self*-esteem. Thus, to be ‘successful’ women must work on themselves, conveniently leaving the patriarchal, capitalist culture, which may have produced self-doubting women, both unquestioned and undisturbed.

Chloe (waitress) provided a more insidious example of gender inequality in the workplace as she stated that one of her male managers directly warned her not to apply for a role that she wanted stating that she was ‘...unlikely to get the job as a young, good looking female’ who would ‘lack authority’. Her manager made such comments to deter Chloe from applying for the role and given his position of authority/power, it would be understandable if Chloe took this ‘advice’.

“I wasn’t going to apply, I didn’t feel like I had enough experience but when he said that I just thought, ‘Well fuck you! I’m gonna go for it’, then I got it (laughs)” (Chloe, waitress).

Although such comments had the opposite effect than intended in this instance, it is not guaranteed that all women would feel able to challenge both sexism and management in the same way. The example does, however support the argument that the ‘problem’ of gender inequality in the workplace does not lie with individual women who are too young/good looking/lacking authority, particularly as Chloe was hired.

### *Experiences of having a proper job: Expectations versus realities*

Six of the 13 women re-interviewed had found what they considered to be a ‘proper’ job/career by the second interview. While graduate destinations data records women’s outcomes six months after university, based on retrospective interviews, it appeared to take much longer for most women to obtain employment. For example, as mentioned Eugenia (dancer) was unable to find employment outside of the strip club for almost 10 months after university. However, she stated that in contrast to stripping (associated with shame), she felt proud and professional (read: respectable) in her new role. Contrary to the affective response to stripping described by Rachel (dancer) earlier in the chapter of an interviewer psychically recoiling, Eugenia stated that people physically reacted to her and her job differently than when she worked as a stripper.

“I can say that I’m a professional now, I have like a *proper* job and people react to me differently now like, ‘Oh wow! That’s great!’” (Eugenia, dancer).

Other ‘positive’ aspects of having a ‘proper job’ cited by respondents included working in roles which provided meaning to their lives, finding jobs which were socially valuable and that had a ‘real’ purpose (unlike hospitality/stripping). When reflecting back on their jobs as students, respondents stated that they missed the ‘fun’ elements of hospitality/stripping with fewer responsibilities in comparison to their ‘proper jobs’ which *felt* like and were experienced as ‘work’. Most women were working less hours in their new full-time jobs than they had when they were students. Having ‘normal’ working hours and schedules meant respondents no longer

felt that they *had* to miss out on social events, weekends, bank holidays etc. as a result there was more of a clear distinction rather than active blurring of ‘work’ and ‘life’ for some women. However, for most strippers, transitioning into more structured work schedules was one of the biggest challenges.

“I didn’t like the amount of hours I had to go to work every single day. I felt like I had no life because by the time you get home, it was 7:30pm, you have to cook some meals for the next day, have a shower and that’s it. Go to sleep for the next day to go to work again, its soul-draining” (Sophia, dancer).

Expectations differed from reality for many women especially in regard to income. Lilly (waitress) assumed that she would experience less financial precarity when securing ‘graduate employment’, however as a freelancer with a somewhat unstable income, money was still one of her main concerns.

“Money is the main challenge. It still is even though I’ve got so many things on, it’s still very much a hand-to-mouth situation at the very end of the month. It’s never comfortable and always a bit of a question of whether or not I’m going to make the rent, or if I’m going to have to borrow money from friends” (Lilly, waitress).

On the whole, it appeared that waitresses were more accustomed to living on a lower income than strippers. Indeed, becoming a graduate *and* leaving stripping meant no longer receiving a student loan and no longer earning a potentially limitless amount each month in the strip club. Adjusting to a low, fixed income was, therefore, also challenging for many participants.

“It was a shock. I couldn’t even afford my morning Starbucks. Even though it’s £2 a day I was like ‘Wow! Okay so even £2 a day will make a difference’ in that sense in a month it will be £40 so I really had to look where I put my money for the first time” (Eugenia, dancer).

Eugenia (dancer) did not enjoy having a stable income as much as she had imagined. Rather than good or bad months at the strip club, she felt that her current income was demotivating. Regardless of how hard she worked, she stated that she would receive the same amount each month. While Nikki (dancer) was able to earn a bonus, Helen (dancer) was in the same position as Eugenia. Lister (2015:51) argues that the Russian Roulette nature of a dancer’s income is what encourages women back to work and as long as the possibility to walk away with large

sums of money remains, women will continue to turn up for work. Indeed, despite initially assuming that leaving stripping would be straightforward, Helen found the process much more difficult and drawn-out than she imagined. Helen stated that she contemplated returning to stripping for several months after she quit and that it took around 12 months for her to fully adjust to her working hours, having less money and less autonomy at work.

“I went up and down, I was like, ‘I’m going back [to stripping], I’m going to quit my office job and go back cos I need money!’ It was *really* hard. It took me a long time to adjust. I would say, a good year actually ‘cos also, I missed the freedom. I missed, like being able to just say, ‘I’m not going to work tonight ‘cos I don’t have to’. I *have* to go to work now, like it kind of dawned on me (laughs). I was like, ‘Oh no! I have to go to work tomorrow. I can’t just not turn up, what is this?!’ (Laughs) it was really, really, weird. Things you don’t even realise that you start taking for granted you know being able to go on holiday, being able to take time off, all these things. I kept thinking, I get four weeks holiday a year, what is this?! I could take six months if I wanted to [when stripping], so it was really quite a shock and I didn’t anticipate it to be as hard as it was” (Helen, dancer).

Due to the precarious conditions created by the neoliberal political economy - producing an epidemic of anxiety (Tyler and Slater, 2018) - participants devised a number of strategies to overcome feelings of instability in regard to their future. For example, obtaining a degree as a contingency/backup or Plan B, ‘just in case’ their chosen careers ‘fail’ or alternatively, continuing to accrue more credentials as one degree was no longer considered to be enough. Although Olivia had stopped stripping at the time of the research interview and did not plan to return or want to necessarily go back to stripping, she also stated that she could not state with certainty that she would never return. The phrase ‘never say never’ was used by a number of women in regard to their engagement in stripping and waitressing which was also framed as a ‘last resort’. Many women lived their lives and thought about their futures not in regard to potential opportunities but rather, worst-case scenarios.

“I keep saying to myself, ‘Never say never’ because you know, I might need another outrageous dental bill paid, or if something else goes wrong in my life and I might, you know, need that kind of high income again. I hope it doesn’t, it’s a really intense challenging time but...” (Olivia, dancer).

The point of stripping providing Olivia peace of mind in an uncertain climate is different to stripping actually providing women financial security. As Helen's (dancer) quote suggests ideas and expectations did not always match 'realities' and this was also the case for stripping. For example, six weeks after she had quit her job, Helen stated that she returned for one night mainly for financial purposes.

"When I went back, I was like, 'Oh! It's not really what I thought it was', if that makes sense. 'Cos, I think when you remember things, you remember the good nights, nights where you made £3,000 and it was like *so* easy. You forgot the nights where you stay there and made no money for like six hours and you were bored out your head (laughs). So, it kind of hit me, like actually, it's not as glamorous as I thought it was" (Helen, dancer).

Having a combination of respondents who had quit, remained and returned to stripping at different points in their lives and over longer and shorter periods of time with (dis)similar experiences, memories and thus, outlooks on the industry has been beneficial in providing a more nuanced overview of the work. Those who are still working in the industry may have a very different perspective to women who have quit and look back somewhat nostalgically. With(out) distance and time away from a place and/or way of being, this (dis)allowed respondents to re-construct their past lives/selves differently.

Another challenge which dancers appeared to struggle with more so than waitresses was in 'adapting' to new occupational cultures. Although women working in strip clubs engage in high levels of emotional labour, many women also felt that they could act/be their authentic selves when working as a stripper rather than having to engage in constant, classed impression management to appear 'professional' (read: respectable).

"[Stripping], it's just a bit of fun isn't it. Music, naked, dancing girls, being yourself. Oh, my goodness, being yourself at work is almost impossible in an office job. I couldn't be my old, crazy and loud and inappropriate self! Sometimes I come up with mean things to say, I don't mean like mean, but they're pretty savage and it would be okay to say in the strip club but it's almost impossible to be my full self at work" (Nikki, dancer).

"In the strip club, if you want to smile to someone you smile, if you don't then you don't. But then when I started working in the office, I wasn't sure like how to be. I'm always like erm, you know well-mannered and I know how to talk to people. But in that sense if you go to the office environment after six years working in a strip club suddenly, I was a bit like, 'Oh, I'm

not sure if that's correct to say to them' or, if my joke was too much or too less. It took like half a year to get into it I would say, and then you know my boss telling me off, not telling me off but telling me what to do or how I can do it better, that was new" (Eugenia, dancer).

As discussed in Chapter Five, the spirit of carnivalesque within the NTE and strip clubs in particular produced an affective environment where normal rules were flouted. Similar to Summers' (1980 cited in Tyler, 2011:1482) description of Soho, strip clubs were experienced by many women as "...places of work and a place to forget it...a place characterised by tolerance offering the unconventional, the eccentric, the rebellious and the merely different a chance to be themselves." Several women describe feeling that they fit or belonged in the strip club in ways they did not in (traditionally middle-class) spaces such as the university or certain 'mainstream' workplace environments.

#### *Sticking it out or getting stuck?*

Despite not wanting to remain in their respective 'proper jobs' for a long period of time, there was a shared assumption among women that leaving a new job before a certain (unspecified/arbitrary) amount of time was not acceptable, that this did not create the 'right' impression to potential future employers and that this would hinder their future employment prospects. This meant that some women continued working for companies longer than they wanted to/planned in order to essentially 'save face' and to appear committed.

"Once you get a job, you have to stick it out, I guess. Once you're in a role you can't keep bouncing out of jobs otherwise no one will employ you because you'll never stay in one place long enough. So that's why I've given myself a year in this job and then see how I feel" (Nikki, dancer).

"When I was younger, I used to quit jobs if I didn't like my manager or if I thought something was wrong, I would just be like (sigh) I'll go and find something else, and I would. Whereas now, I'm like, 'No, okay you can't keep doing that you need to learn how to kind of grin and bear it'. I think that's a really hard thing for me personally that I've had to learn. I've always done really well, you know I'm hard working, so I've always found it easy to get jobs but keeping jobs, I think that is another thing. Young people really don't get it sometimes. They don't get that actually, you're very replaceable and if you want to go somewhere you need to do something above and beyond. So yeah, that's been a bit of a shock, it's stressful at the same time" (Helen, dancer).



Helen's (dancer) narrative demonstrates identity work as she frames her former, student/younger self as irresponsible. Whereas her new/current graduate self is positioned in oppositional terms and as hard-working, dedicated and able to 'persevere' in the face of adversity. The spectre of precarity and of being replaceable was ever-present within participants' narratives. Regardless of class position, women appeared to have attitudes of 'endurance rather than entitlement' to work (Skeggs, 2011:504).

Those who considered their 'proper' jobs to be transient had similar experiences to women who had continued working in waitressing/stripping. For example, Kate (waitress) stated that she 'lost track of time' and three years later was working in the same job she planned to stay in for only six months. Feelings of being/becoming 'trapped' in a job are not limited to sex work, nevertheless, the rationale behind why women feel that they *should* leave their jobs differed. During the interviews I was able to discuss how and why women chose, remained or quit certain jobs (and not others) and this revealed more about how women (de)valued certain forms of (women's) work.

Like many women in this research, Kate returned to live with her parents after university. She found work through a local contact as a care coordinator which was walking distance from her home. As mentioned, she initially planned to work there for six months and until she passed her driving test, allowing her to travel further for work. Soon after university, Kate also entered a new relationship and at the time of interview, she had been with her partner/lived as a graduate for three years.

"I only thought I'd stay there until I passed me driving test 'cos then I could drive to other places. So, I intended to apply for more jobs as soon as I could drive but I think I just got comfy and it's like, why jump out the frying pan into the fire sort of thing? That saying, whatever it is, the grass isn't always greener, sometimes (laughs). I do enjoy working with the service users like I think they're all ace and probably that is it, like job satisfaction. I don't know how I'd get that anywhere else now, do you know what I mean, sitting behind a computer or something like that. Because I can actually see them reaching targets and things like that so, that's a positive of the job for me... I hate people asking, 'Well what are you doing now?' And then I think, like I'm *just* doing this [care coordinator] do you know what I mean? I'm not a psychologist or anything like that. So, I think people expect me to have this amazing career" (Kate, waitress).

There are a number of points to unpack here starting with Kate's (waitress) attempt to justify her job and decision to remain *just* a care coordinator. As a graduate and based on her job and salary, in many ways Kate (working-class) had 'achieved social mobility' in comparison to her parent's education/occupations. If crudely compared to graduates more generally, Kate may not be seen to fare so well. For example, Kate worked in a traditionally working-class and feminised role and within a sector and geographical area which has been hit by austerity<sup>66</sup>. Her job did not require a degree and despite describing her role as a 'proper' job/career, she worried that other people (real and imagined) would not consider it to be 'proper' (respectable) enough. Kate stated that she felt pressure to leave her job and 'become someone' and to 'do something' with her life/degree, which Evans (2010) found is common among first-generation female students. Kate gained a real sense of job satisfaction and felt that her job provided meaning/was socially valuable as she made a difference to people's lives. Importantly, she worried that she would lose this sense of purpose if she obtained a 'desk job' (read: middle-class employment).

Kate's and other people's (real and imagined) ideas of what is considered to be an 'amazing career' (or not) appeared to be defined in middle-class terms. This disregards different value systems which run parallel but are not recognised/misrecognised within the dominant system. For example, Kate described traditionally feminine/working-class values of care and sociality which are incompatible with masculine/middle-class values of independence and mobility. When describing her future prospects and what it would mean to 'become someone' and find this 'amazing career', her ambivalence was related to (middle-class) expectations of what her life/job *should* look like in comparison to her lived reality. Given the lack of opportunities in her local area, achieving this expectation would involve geographical mobility and thus, leaving her family and partner 'behind'. However, Kate felt comfortable in

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<sup>66</sup> As a result, Kate (waitress) described being 'constantly' asked to carry out tasks which were not part of her job description (i.e. cleaning vomit) and that – similar to waitresses (see Chapter Five) – she was made to feel guilty for letting the team down when she tried to refuse.

her job and settled which is also antithetical to privileged notions of ‘progression’ and renders localism and embeddedness as static and inferior by default. Crude comparisons and the measuring of graduates after university based solely on metrics and destinations can be unhelpful. As I will discuss in the following chapter, a politics of redistribution is important and necessary to ensure that women do have access to employment within their geographical vicinity. Yet, at the same time, without recognising value in things/people/places which lie outside of the current dominant system, regardless of their ‘outcomes’ post-HE, working-class women will always be seen as lacking and will consequentially *feel* ‘not good enough’ by comparison.

### Conclusion

There has been a growing interest in graduate destinations from governments, scholars and universities. The term destination implies the end of a journey which did not seem appropriate when discussing the lives of participants in this research. Becoming a graduate marked the start of an ongoing journey towards adulthood which many women believed would come to fruition at the age of 30. Particularly for those who had completed their degree by the age of 21, the first six months post-university was far from the ‘end point’. Given that the concept of a job for life is becoming increasingly outdated, this research sheds light on how women experience entering/leaving/re-entering jobs which is likely to become a common feature of their working lives.

The majority of scholarship on graduate transitions takes a quantitative approach focusing on metrics and career outcomes. However, women in this research rarely fit neatly into one ‘outcome’ category. Limiting the scope to employment can produce a one-dimensional narrative which ignores the complex, layered and ever-changing nature of graduate experiences. Throughout this chapter, I have sought to uncover what *else* can be said/known about female graduates than is currently given space. For example, other people – partners, family, friends, co-workers and managers – were central to, rather than peripheral in shaping

women's decisions and subsequent actions. Graduate experiences were highly gendered as instances of sexual assault, whore stigma and different forms of care work also 'derailed' plans or excluded women from particular paths.

Qualitative longitudinal studies allow researchers to capture the fluid – rather than static – ways that individuals (re)make plans and (re)imagine futures over time and in response to personal/circumstantial and social change. For example, there was a disparity between expectation and realities as the 'adventurous' plans that respondents made as students during the first interview (e.g. to travel) did not always go to plan by the second interview – usually because of money, or a lack thereof. Participants expected their degree to provide them access to the labour market and to 'proper jobs', however they often felt that their degree was not enough. This pushed some women into undertaking further qualifications and to 'accrue more value', and others to work extreme hours engaging in a mix of exploitative, unpaid internships and waitressing/stripping leading to more instances of burnout. Importantly, overworking was considered by most women to be part of a short-term struggle while at university, however this became a more concrete facet of their lives as graduates; alongside low, precarious pay. Thus, contrary to stereotypes of 'snowflake millennials' as workshy and less resilient than previous generations, respondents in this research expressed attitudes of endurance rather than entitlement in regard to employment.

The data was filled with examples of hidden (and more obvious) injuries of neoliberalism, most notably the 'epidemic of anxiety' (Tyler and Slater, 2018). Most women struggled to make concrete plans and rarely spoke of opportunities or hopeful futures and instead prepared for failure and worst-case scenarios. Waitressing/stripping was not always the first/preferred choice but was part of a contingency plan which helped to provide 'peace of mind' and to mitigate feelings of anxiety linked to the ever-present threat of financial insecurity. While it is assumed in the literature, and more broadly, that working-class graduates

seek social mobility, the majority of women in this research actually sought stability. For example, women described present-located rather than future-oriented plans as they were happy, settled and wanted more of the same (for now) rather than change. Based on existing scholarship, such graduates are typically analysed and understood through the lens of underemployment/overeducation, however this assumes that all graduates *should* strive to achieve a similar goal and to become neoliberal subjects of value. Those who do not are misrecognised as lacking – the ‘correct’ – aspiration/motivation. In a similar vein, there appeared to be an expectation within women’s narratives that they *should* leave certain jobs and that being *just* a waitress/stripper – or working in other feminised roles - is also not ‘enough’. For strippers specifically, even when women ‘exited’ the industry, the spectre of – classed and gendered - judgement did not disappear and respondents struggled to shed their former ‘improper’ identity long after they had found ‘proper’ jobs. Thus, while some women considered waitressing beyond 30 to be ‘shameful’, becoming a former waitress was not comparable to the whore stigma that followed dancers.

# Chapter Seven: Conclusion

## Introduction

In this chapter, I synthesise the key findings into overarching themes which tie the thesis together. Throughout, I discuss the contributions made to current academic knowledge in the field of education, work and employment and to the theorising of gender and class. While I do not claim to have ‘new’ answers or solutions to the problems I have identified, the study is timely in that the current socio-political context in which I am making policy recommendations poses an opportunity for change. The issues which will be discussed in this chapter, for example, HE fees and funding, sexual harassment in the workplace and SEV licensing – at the time of writing – are being (re)addressed by governments. Further to this, the thesis attends to notable gaps in existing literature by looking at what happens after university for women working in the sex industry and extends the scope to include students/graduates in ‘mainstream’ labour. The thesis also responds to calls by Sanders et al. (2018) and Finn (2015) by taking a more holistic approach to the study of sex workers and students/graduates by bringing attention to the interdependency of their roles/identities. In an effort to redress the quantitative focus in existing graduate transitions research, I have applied a qualitative, longitudinal comparative method to capture the complexity and multidimensionality of participants’ lives and experiences; demonstrating how they are much more than metrics or ‘outcomes’ after university. Indeed, by exploring what *else* matters to women *beyond* university or work, I was able to highlight a much broader range of issues faced by graduates than are currently given space i.e. sexual assault, health, pregnancy, caring responsibilities, intimate relationships, bullying and mental health. Similar to Chapter Three, this chapter starts by taking a slight detour and with a discussion of the limitations of this thesis, as they also became key contributions.

## Limitations of the study and further areas research

HEIs across the UK actively blocked and delayed this research by restricting access to potential respondents. This not only hindered my ability to carry out the initial research design, but also shaped the knowledge that I was able to produce. Feminist researchers continue to show how the research process is far from an equal encounter, however focus tends to remain on the relationship between the researcher and the researched which can leave the power wielded by patriarchal institutions such as universities - and research ethics committees specifically - overlooked (exceptions include Holmwood, 2010; Stanley and Wise, 2010; Hedgecoe, 2008, 2016).

As an individual researcher, it is difficult to argue against ‘ethics’ which are essentially principles designed to protect and prevent harm. Yet, given that there is little consensus among social scientists regarding what is/is not ethical, this means that individual ethical bodies are able to determine what constitutes (in)appropriate research. There appears to be a (mis)understanding of ethics and the role of ethics committees as upholding clear, objective and highly scripted sets of rules and procedures which masks the subjective nature of ethical (dis)approval and the operation of power (Boden et al., 2009). The subjective nature of such decision-making was evident as universities referred to ‘*our*’ research ethics, separating their ethical code from that of my own institution, and to individual Professors who had declined my request.

Hedgecoe (2016) argues that we should expect more, and harsher restrictions on research which will threaten academic freedom and thus, the future of social research. Blocking certain types of research has clear implications for social scientists if/when researchers limit themselves to projects which will ‘get through’ ethics committees rather than producing research that is ethically justifiable and important (Hammersley, 2009). This can heavily shape

disciplines and uphold certain – already dominant and therefore classed, gendered and racialised - views of the world.

The literature suggests that the trend towards increased formalistic and bureaucratic ethical regulation is driven by efforts to obviate potential causes of litigation against the institution rather than by a genuine concern with ‘ethics’ (Glucksmann, 2010:206). As universities become large corporations, risk management becomes reputation management and protection of the institution’s prestige (and funding) becomes the main concern. Universities specifically referred to ‘manag[ing] responses’ to my recruitment posters which might ‘give offence to some students/staff’. The justification to deny my request on the grounds that the university in question would have no way to explain why the research is important implies that certain student experiences and perspectives are unimportant. Equally, the advice to ‘find more hidden forms of recruitment’ suggests that student sex workers should also remain hidden.

As powerful gatekeepers, HEIs are able to exploit ethical regulatory processes to evade becoming the ‘subjects’ of research themselves. In the context of this thesis, it is clear that students and universities have conflicting needs and interests and by blocking access to student sex workers, universities have also further silenced the unheard voices of marginalised women. While I was able to recruit a number of dancers via a sex work collective, they were politically motivated to improve the working conditions within the industry and so their commitment to stripping may not reflect the perspectives of students more broadly who may be less invested and consider the work to be more transient. Nevertheless, as the majority of respondents were recruited via referrals, the sample became more varied and ‘random’ in that some women were students/graduates/stripping/no-longer stripping and of a wider age range.

The response that this research has received from universities combined with the ongoing silence regarding student sex work suggests a ‘wilful ignorance’ (Skeggs, 2019:28). HEIs are stubbornly resisting what they do not want to hear or see while simultaneously



blocking attempts to generate knowledge in this area which may ‘implicate’ them in some way. This silence does not free institutions from liability but instead sheds light on deeply embedded inequalities. Issues can only be ignored by those with enough privilege to ignore them. Findings from this thesis show how some institutions have either taken a paternalistic approach with the aim of rescuing students from sex work (Gemma), or have punitively excluded women for engaging in legal, stigmatised work to (ironically) pay their way through university (Philippa). I join Cusick et al. (2009), Sagar et al. (2015, 2016), Roberts (2018) and Lister (2019) in calling upon universities to break their overwhelming silence and to acknowledge and respond accordingly to the unique forms of discrimination faced by student sex workers. Furthermore, for professional bodies such as the RCN to address and clarify their stance on ‘fitness for practice’ to avoid sexist interpretations which render sex workers as ‘bad women’. There is a real need for universities to develop clear policies and guidance to ensure that students *and* staff (Grace) are not punished and will not face disciplinary action, discrimination or bullying for their current or previous engagement in sex work. Universities have a duty of care to ensure that they create safe, non-judgemental and supportive spaces for *everyone*.

Without research on ‘politically sensitive’ topics we are unable to fully understand or solve social problems. While I do not advocate for the removal of ethical processes in their entirety, to protect academic freedom we must collectively, rather than on an individual, ad hoc basis:

1. Scrutinise the role and function of ethics committees which are taken-for-granted.

Rather than having the power to block/shape research/disciplines, taking an advisory role may be sufficient. Indeed, being able to block research projects on the basis of the topic alone denies the researcher’s ability to carry out ethically justifiable, rigorous and important research and so the two should remain separate.

2. Challenge the supposed ‘objectivity’ and ‘expertise’ of ethics committees which masks the operation of subjective power. As mentioned, universities did not explicate what it was about this research which rendered it **‘extremely sensitive’** (own emphasis). More transparent processes are required to justify decision-making.
3. I am in agreement with Hedgecoe (2016) that we must restrict membership of such committees to non-managerial staff and those whose key concern is reputation management. This can hopefully limit the misuse of ‘ethics’ to protect institutions rather than protecting research participants or academic freedom.

I do not claim to have uncovered, examined and compared all aspects of waitressing/stripping or student/graduate experiences. However, by taking an inductive approach, I have focused on bringing attention to the elements of the work that participants considered to be important in response to the interview questions. There is great variability in agency waitressing, restaurants, strip clubs and strip pubs in the way they are organised and experienced by workers. Experiences are also dependent on a range of gendered, interpersonal factors for example, relationships with management and co-workers. The way that stripping is regulated in England is different to other countries and as discussed in Chapter Five, experiences of stripping had changed over time. For those who were relatively new to stripping, the current system was all they had known. Those who had worked in stripping for a longer period of time tended to have a different, more negative outlook on what they considered to be the decline of stripping in regard to working conditions and a shift to more intense hustling. Respondents found it difficult to earn a living as they aged, and this also shaped their perspectives on their job. I initially considered choosing two venues – one strip club and one restaurant – and carrying out an ethnographic study to compare the two workplaces more directly and to supplement interview data. However, by looking at women’s experiences across

England and in a range of different restaurants and strip clubs, I was able to draw commonalities within and across the two industries.

If I were to carry out this research again, I would focus on a smaller sample and aim to gather more detailed accounts. I was initially concerned that participants may drop out of the study and given the difficulty in finding participants, I wanted to ensure that I had ‘enough’ data to be able to make claims about women’s experiences. In reality, I ended up with an overwhelming amount of data and struggled to achieve analytical closure. With less data, this could have enabled me to draw out the different concepts which emerged (relationality, emotionality, temporality etc.) in more detail. Despite the wealth of data gathered, this thesis is not generalisable and is limited (primarily but not exclusively) to white, female students in the UK. There is a need for research with a more ‘diverse’ sample of students, and with students working in other areas of the sex industry/mainstream employment sectors to uncover if ‘degrees on the side’ has become the new normal.

### Escapism, blurring of boundaries and precariously (over)working

The majority of research on students and part-time work is quantitative which limits our understanding of student employment pressures. By taking a qualitative approach and comparing different types of student jobs, findings from this thesis go beyond economic and practical motivations for working while studying, highlighting the importance of relationality/sociality and emotion which are commonly overlooked. This was a key finding as it demonstrated not only why students worked, but also why they chose waitressing/stripping specifically. For example, in Chapter Five, I apply the lens of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984) to strip clubs/pubs and for the first time to restaurants. This framework helped me to find a common thread across both industries and to explain how students were drawn to the affective atmosphere of the NTE. The spirit was (re)produced through the bodies of workers engaging in a complex mix of aesthetic, emotional and affective labour creating defined, yet dynamic

strip club/restaurant experiences. Customers ‘rubbed off’ on participants (Chapman and Light, 2017:185) who were able to engage in behaviours mirroring their lives outside of work and during times of leisure. Stripping *and* waitressing provided participants with the opportunity to get pissed, have a laugh and still get paid, which I argue is a ‘perk’ for workers across the NTE with a close proximity to alcohol, rather than being exclusive to stripping; as argued by Colosi (2012)<sup>67</sup>. For many students, waitressing/stripping also became a form of escapism from university and other responsibilities. While this was usually described in positive ways, this romanticisation and blurring of work/leisure also normalised overworking and the seepage of work into all aspects of life.

The aforementioned example tells us more about how students are currently navigating living in financial hardship - often with precarious incomes - managing high workloads – at university and work - and under severe time constraints; while at the same time still trying to live a stereotypical student lifestyle. This thesis challenges existing literature which suggests that working-class students miss out on the fun/social elements of university in comparison to their middle-class peers; perpetuating the bleak narrative of lack for non-traditional students. For most women in this research, university was experienced as *at the same time* enjoyable and transformative as well as constraining and challenging. Binary understandings of working-class experiences as wholly negative and middle-class experiences as straightforward and unproblematic are overly simplistic and miss the nuance of both experiences which can be ‘good’ *and* ‘bad’.

Contrary to scholarship which suggests that students engage in strict boundary maintenance to ‘fit everything in’ (Brennan and Patel, 2008), women in this research adopted the opposite approach. For example, by bringing university work to the restaurant/strip club.

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<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, due to a combination of reduced custom, increased labour supply and management strategies to increase profit i.e. more dancers working at one time, it appeared that dancers’ priority within certain ‘hustle’ clubs may have shifted away from having fun and toward trying to earn money.

This time-space compression and need to remain constantly productive is one clear effect of neoliberalism and the ever-increasing intensification of work. Yet, efforts to remain productive at all times had real consequences including stress/anxiety and burnout. Like many forms of unpaid labour, the work students engage in at university was not always framed as ‘work’. However, when taking into account the hours participants were studying and working in other capacities, the total number of hours usually surpassed the legal weekly limit of 48-hours. Most women were working over three times the recommended 10-hour limit which suggests that governments and universities are far removed from the lived realities of students and appear to be ignorant of just how long and how hard (some) students are having to work in order to study.

The pressure to overwork was not shared equally by all women which challenges the individualistic assumption made by Evans et al. (2014) that students freely choose when to work and prioritise work over university. This not only ignores structural inequalities but also disregards how women with no contract or precarious contracts are not always able to ‘ignore’ managers requests/demands. As mentioned in Chapter Five, failure to comply carried repercussions i.e. no/less work/less favourable shifts. Given that 47% more female students work while studying than male students, such employment pressures are clearly both gendered and classed (ONS, 2019c). This has important implications for universities who continue to impose the same rigid standards/expectations on all students regardless of circumstance, and to governments who continue to deny women proper financial support and access to resources so that they are able to participate as equals within the system. To reduce reliance on overworking for students, simple but effective changes such as increasing the National Living Wage for under 25s to ensure parity regardless of age can make a difference in alleviating feelings of financial precarity.

## Degrees on the side

Universities are aware that many students have multiple roles/responsibilities, however it is still widely assumed that full-time students *should* prioritise their education and that those who do not are ‘at risk’/problematic. Based on existing scholarship, ideas around what it means to be a student have seldom changed which disregards the ‘new’ ways that students are engaging with university in response to the neoliberalisation of HE and the labour market. Existing research on students and part-time work takes a binary approach i.e. working/non-working, yet, findings from this thesis highlight a range of varied student experiences. For explanatory purposes, I have grouped students into six categories<sup>68</sup> starting from students with side jobs to those with degrees on the side.

1. Full-time students with part-time jobs who are able to dip in and out of work as/when they need extra income/to maintain a certain lifestyle. I would argue that the government/universities assume most working students are in this category, however such students tended to be middle-class. Some working-class strippers were also part of this category as they had a higher earning potential and were able to save money/take time off when university work increased/for holidays etc.
2. Full-time students with part-time jobs who do not have the ability to choose if/when they work as they do so for financial necessity. Students in this category were able to maintain some ‘balance’ between work/university. As a result, they were able/wanted to keep university as their main priority and waitressing/stripping as a part-time job on the side.

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<sup>68</sup> The categories are not mutually exclusive and as this research focuses on full-time students only, this list is not exhaustive.

3. Rather than university being their ‘main thing’, some women considered their degree to be one of their many jobs/hustles/gigs. Students in this category did not want to be *just* students. Due to the deregulation and flexibilisation of labour markets, having multiple jobs has become the new normal for many people (Hughes, 2013). However, now that 50.2% of young people go to university (Department for Education, 2019b), the status of being a student and having a degree has also become devalued. Individuals may feel increased pressure to diversify their CV and to find more ‘creative’ ways to ‘stand out’ to potential employers amidst the growing pool of graduates.
4. Contrary to Evans et al’s (2014) assertion that *some* students lack motivation to fully engage with their studies, prioritising part-time work for immediate financial gains, some participants were full-time students with full-time jobs who wanted university to remain their ‘main thing’ but instead their degree was pushed to the side because of their need to earn money to survive. It is important to stress the difference here between part-time students working full-time and respondents in this thesis who were working *and* studying full-time. The pressures and expectations differ substantially making the latter more difficult to manage.
5. Full-time workers with (full-time) degrees on the side. Respondents in this category were already in or trying to pursue careers which did not require a degree and as such, they considered having qualifications to be their Plan B *if* their desired career ‘failed’.
6. Full-time workers with (full-time) degrees on the side who considered student loans to be a source of income and so undertaking a degree became a side-hustle. Student loans helped to maintain careers in the creative industries which are notoriously difficult for working-class people to penetrate as they rely on unpaid labour and precarious/short-term contracts.

There is an expectation that university should be an individual's priority and that paid labour should be carried out 'on the side'. However, the data revealed that working students range from those who have side-jobs to those who have degrees on the side. Some students are no longer working to fund university and are instead studying in order to fund their work. If young people are choosing to go to university not for educational purposes and not to find graduate employment but instead as a back-up plan or form of income generation, this brings the role of universities and student finance into serious question. While signing up to potentially 30-years of loan repayments (which has in many ways become an acceptable debt) was seen as the 'best' option, respondents did not foresee that in doing so, they also became dependent on the continuation of said loans and thus, on passing each term<sup>69</sup> which resulted in high levels of stress/anxiety and extreme overworking. As more sectors - including HE – are able to exploit workers through unpaid labour and precarious/casualised contracts, this precludes many employment options for those who do not have access to 'the Bank of Mum and Dad' or other sources of financial support. To restore a sense of agency in this context, and in reference to students in categories five and six specifically, by providing all workers with decent living wages in all industries and banning exploitative unpaid labour and internships, this could provide access to careers/industries which are at the moment considered risky or even impenetrable for working-class women in particular.

It is clear that we must rethink HE and how it is delivered as there is overwhelming evidence<sup>70</sup> that our current system is both unequal and outmoded. Generating cultural and attitudinal change to address structural inequalities are clearly long-term strategies and not quick fixes. I agree with Reay (2018) that to create a fair system, we must first acknowledge that education (and workplaces) are sexist, classist, racist places where transformation in terms

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<sup>69</sup> Reducing their degree to part-time was not an option as this does not provide as much financial support.

<sup>70</sup> Including data from this thesis and existing research discussed in Chapter Two.



of policies and practices – while vital – are not enough. Scholars such as Rustin (2016) have already provided alternatives to the neoliberal HE system which could help to address some of the issues which this thesis has identified. For example, university is ‘sold’ on the pretext of ‘graduate premiums’, however statistics from the GLMS suggest that it is the intersection of gender and education which remains the key factor influencing income, rather than education alone (Department of Education, 2019c). The current loan repayment system requires all graduates to repay (roughly) the same, specific monetary debt regardless of where they studied or their ‘destination’ after university. I am in agreement with Rustin (2016) that graduates could instead make a contribution to the cost of their education rather than being obligated to pay back the full amount *with interest*. This ‘graduate tax’ (Rustin (2016: 161) recommends 1%) would be proportionate to income and less burdensome serving as a form of recognition of the benefits of being a graduate which may encourage entry into HE.

The overemphasis - by governments/universities - on metrics and outcomes truly narrows the focus of what university can offer people and disregards other important features of HE which everyone can benefit from. For example, findings show evidence of consciousness raising, reflexive and critical thought outlined in Chapter Five. This was also another example of the interdependency of women’s student/worker roles. By reflecting on what they had learnt at university, this knowledge informed their work as waitresses/dancers and vice-versa creating a knowledge-practice feedback loop or an example of praxis (Rodriguez et al., 2016:214). Respondents critically reflected on their work which has transformative potential in regard to challenging poor working conditions and stigmatisation.

The idea that individuals should stop their education at the age of 21 and that university will have prepared students for the world of work is also unrealistic given the ever-changing nature of work and the advancement of the digital revolution in particular. As new jobs emerge, we must adopt a lifelong learning approach which allows everyone to dip into education

frequently throughout their lives as the nature of work evolves. By adopting a lifelong learning approach, this recognises education is both a public and private ‘good’ and something that all citizens should be entitled to. Thus, HE must be funded by the democratic state to avoid further social/economic polarisation if/when paid, routine jobs (such as waitressing) disappear (Rustin, 2016). Moreover, as the idea of a ‘job for life’ also becomes increasingly outdated, research like this thesis will become more important in understanding how women experience entering/leaving/remaining in different roles – outlined in Chapter Six – as this is likely to become a common feature of their working lives.

### ‘Real’ students and ‘proper’ jobs

Although respondents considered themselves to be students and adopted a student identity, they did not see themselves as ‘real’ students or as having ‘proper’ jobs as waitresses/strippers. In other words, they felt improper, inappropriate, incorrect, ‘wrong’, unseemly, unaccepted/able and objectionable. At present middle-class students are still the defining group and non-traditional students remain Other. It is important that all students are recognised as existing in their own right and that we alter the language used to focus on what students can and do offer; rather than on everything they are not/lack. Universities should aim to build a sensibility within students to respect difference and to dissolve categories which exacerbate such cultural injustices.

Admittedly, HEIs have begun to acknowledge that Widening Participation and providing ‘equal opportunities’ to access university is not enough and that the recognition and representation of under-represented groups through initiatives such as ‘Inclusive Curriculum Frameworks’ are essential in providing a sense of social justice and value to all students and staff. However, this institutional inclusivity could be extended more explicitly to student sex workers. While it is a step in the right direction, we must ensure that such efforts remain student-centred and not simply metrics-focused or reduced to a TEF tick-box exercise (i.e. to improve student

attainment/retention rates). Sufficient funding and time must be allocated to such initiatives to avoid increasing workloads for certain members of staff who consider this to be important; and who are also likely to be from under-represented groups themselves.

Stripping and waitressing are traditionally working-class forms of labour and like working-class people, they were also seen to ‘lack’ **respectability**. Respondents reported facing similar classed devaluation regardless of their own class background. For example, customers assumed they were uneducated/unintelligent and trapped in dead-end jobs with no (middle-class) future prospects. To counter this misrecognition, women in both industries actively told customers that they were students and by drawing on their alternative identity, this allowed participants to claim respectability and to neutralise feelings of stigma. Playing the student card in the strip club had a number of positive effects. For example, the ‘sexy student act’ worked as a marketing strategy and allowed women to position themselves as educated and on par with customers rather than as inferior (intellectually or otherwise). While this disrupts negative stereotypes of strippers as ‘stupid bimbos’, on a broader scale the production of an ‘ideal’ or ‘proper’ waitress/stripper can also reproduce unhelpful binaries which further stigmatises *Other* women who are not students<sup>71</sup>.

Attempts to ‘pass’ or claim respectability do not challenge class inequality (Skeggs, 1997) and that being a ‘respectable student stripper’ did not translate into other (middle-class) domains such as the university demonstrates this point. Indeed, when respondents’ sex worker identities blurred with their student identities, this resulted in discrimination, bullying, stigma and paternalism. At the same time, middle-class student strippers – likely due to their stronger social standing in terms of their race and class – felt able to come out and campaigned within university spaces for the recognition of student sex workers. Although this remains limited at present, the interdependent student/worker roles/identities appear to have some transformative

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<sup>71</sup> Further research could investigate what impact the influx of students has had on sex workers and in hospitality on ‘non-student/graduate’ workers.

potential which could lead to change not only in the workplace but also in the context of the university.

### Implications for the stripping and hospitality industries

This research supports Skeggs' (2011) argument that what really matters to us most is other people. Throughout this research, women expressed a relational value of time/energy with other people and how they enjoyed the sociality and the giving/receiving of attention which characterised both jobs; rather than using their time/energy purely for the self which challenges theories of individualisation. Relationships established at work and university were described as meaningful, not based on what people could offer them in terms of capital, but rather, as reciprocal emotional support. Findings counter scholarship in the US which suggests that students disassociated from co-workers/the stripper lifestyle (Trautner and Collett, 2010). Indeed, relationships with colleagues/managers were described as one of the best but also 'stickier' elements of both jobs which made leaving stripping/waitressing (and other jobs) more emotionally difficult for participants. This could have implications in regard to graduate transitions if women feel guilt/embedded/obliged to stay in jobs. As argued by Colosi (2012), the reasons behind why women stay/leave jobs are multifaceted, complex and not simply based on economic/practical factors.

The data supports recommendations made by Sanders et al. (2015) to include hourly pay, banning of fines, limits to the number of dancers working at one time, more security, introduction of panic buttons, policies to ensure dancers' safety when leaving the clubs among others. While Sanders and Campbell (2013) were successful in influencing 25 local authorities' SEV policies, creating a missing platform for dancers' voices to be heard in England and Wales, this research demonstrates that there is further scope needed to ensure decent working

conditions for all women. Changes to Scottish legislation poses both a potential risk and opportunity to the future of stripping in the UK. Similar to England and Wales (outlined in Chapter Two) in April 2019, Scotland granted their local authorities new powers to decide whether or not to licence SEVs and to determine individual licence applications. At the time of writing, Glasgow and Edinburgh councils had launched a public consultation to determine whether they should take up this newly acquired power. Dancers in Scotland, alongside GMB Scotland trade union launched the #Askthe700<sup>72</sup> public awareness campaign urging the public and local authorities to listen to the voices of workers over the future licencing regulations. Sanders and Hardy (2014) argue that if workers voices had been heard during the consultation process in England and Wales that the state of the stripping industry could have looked very different. Indeed, if Scottish dancers' concerns are prioritised and if Scottish local authorities learn from the 'empty shell' licensing introduced in England and Wales (Sanders and Hardy, 2014), this could be an opportunity for England and Wales to learn from the Scottish Councils' example.

To gain actionable labour rights and demand decent living wages – as well as equal pay for those under 25 – in hospitality and stripping, there needs to be collective, cross group action and solidarity. While trade union participation for hospitality remains low at only 2.9% (ONS, 2019d), there has been an increase in dancers joining trade unions across the country. A potential growth in presence of trade unions within both industries may encourage women to join and fight for better conditions. For example, in 2019, the GMB signed the first two trade union recognition agreements in Scotland with strip clubs to ensure staff can bargain collectively over the terms and conditions of their employment<sup>73</sup>. However, women are unable to fight for the improvement of their working conditions and against employers when they have

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<sup>72</sup> 700 is the estimated number of dancers across Scotland who will be affected by SEV licencing.

<sup>73</sup> The timing of certain clubs now engaging with unions may be rather suspicious and in fact a public relations campaign for clubs rather than a sign of the recognition or engagement with trade unions.

to first fight on the side of their employers against a bigger battle of losing their workplace altogether. Dancers across England also started to join the United Voices of the World and there is a continued presence of stripper collective such as the East London's Strippers Collective. There has also been some progress in terms of solidarity with sex workers as the UK Women's Strike movement on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2018 called for a sex/work strike placing sex workers at the centre of the day of action (see Hardy, 2019). Although this shows signs of hope, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, feminist groups across the UK (e.g. Not Buying it!) continue to ignore and fight against their sex working sisters.

Based on findings from this thesis, I challenge the current political stance toward sex work and the banning of strip clubs by providing empirical evidence – rather than abstract claims – that many of the 'problems' associated with stripping are not inherent nor unique to the industry. Efforts to eradicate stripping do not tackle broader socio-economic issues which have drawn women into stripping in the first place. For instance, women in this research entered due to increases in tuition fees and a reduction in government support as well as the rising cost of (student) living. Women continued working as strippers and waitresses due to public sector wage stagnation and changes in the nature of contemporary work which has become increasingly precarious (Hardy, 2019; Phipps, 2017b). Carrying out a comparative analysis highlights how calls to ban strip clubs are morally charged and focused on what some people consider to be 'the ickiness' (Wolkowitz, 2006:11) of stripping rather than on tackling gender inequality. Findings from this research support arguments made elsewhere that strip clubs are not unique sites of sexism or SH. Waitresses and dancers in this research routinely experienced abuse, hostility and harassment by customers, managers and other workers. So much so, women stated that SH was an expected 'part of the[ir] job'. There are, however, no calls to ban the hospitality industry and the abuse of waitresses has not been used against them as

‘investment capital’ (Phipps, 2017b) by lobby groups as a justification for putting an end to their work.

At the time of writing the government had launched a public consultation to explore how to tackle SH in the workplace. The EHRC (2018) acknowledge that the onus should not be placed on the individual and recommend that employers are liable for preventing SH from happening in the first place. However, the UK government has also stated that they need ‘compelling evidence’ that changes in the law - i.e. making employers liable for preventing the SH of their employees by customers - would be ‘effective’. This implies, that legislative change must remain ‘capitalist friendly’ rather than disruptive which questions the impact and potential of tackling this systemic issue. How SH legislation will be enforced and what constitutes ‘all reasonable efforts’ to prevent SH from happening in the workplace are not yet clear/decided. Based on findings from this thesis, there is a concern that if laws, policies and recommendations are not clear that managers may consider the cause of SH to lie with their female workers whose sexuality is seen as the threat in this instance.

The data shows how the devaluation of stripping and waitressing was based on customer beliefs, attitudes and judgements about both industries, including the myth of customer sovereignty, the conflation of service with servitude and that stripping is immoral. Participants described feeling fear, shame, embarrassment and degradation of this kind is embodied, affective and emotional. Respondents’ ‘low-status’ at work was compounded by their gender and age and was also affected by the strong hierarchy within both industries positioning waitresses/strippers at the bottom, or as children in ‘the family’. While there were clear similarities across the two industries, what marked sex work as different was the far-reaching and long-lasting effects of whore stigma. Indeed, becoming a former stripper did not remove the effects and continued to shape women’s behaviour and job opportunities in ways that being a former waitress did not.

As previous research has shown, legislative/legal efforts to ‘rid’ society of strip clubs/the sex industry have the effect of generating a discourse of disposability which is then perpetuated by media and results in hostility towards sex workers who are represented as ‘disposable people’ (Lowman, 2000). The hostility and violence disclosed by dancers was far more frequent and far more serious. Furthermore, respondents were not always supported by management or other authorities (i.e. police, council) and so women were not granted full-citizenship and protection. Laws criminalising such gender violence then become, as Arruzza et al. (2019:15) argue, a ‘cruel hoax’ if we turn a blind eye to the structural sexism (and racism) of the criminal justice system leaving in-tact harassment and abuse in the workplace.

Respondents in both industries emphasised the social value of their jobs and referred to the attentive and caring nature of their role. However, as O’Connell Davidson (2002:93) argues,

“...a person’s human, civil and labour rights, and their rights to respect and social value as a human being are not contingent on whether or not they perform labour that is socially valued”.

Whether sex work or waitressing are considered to be ‘real’ jobs, women deserve to work in safe conditions free from harassment. Drawing on the work of Gill and Orgad (2018), to tackle sexism and whore stigma, which affects all women, albeit differently, we must start by taking a political not moral stance towards sex and focus on issues of power, consent and justice; not simply exposure of the flesh. Indeed, gender equality and respect for women cannot be conditional. Regardless of the clothes women wear or the jobs that they do, until ‘bad girls’ are respected, there is no gender equality.

### Graduate Transitions: (Neoliberal) expectations and (unequal) realities

It was assumed by most women that overworking and the physical ramifications of doing so i.e. sleep deprivation and physical exhaustion were part of a short-term struggle while at university. However, the data suggests that overworking, low income and precarity became a regular facet of many women’s lives as graduates. Despite obtaining an UG qualification (some had PG degrees), enduring exploitative internships, working long hours and juggling



multiple responsibilities/roles, many women struggled to find a 'proper job'. Even when participants were able to enter their preferred careers, because they were working in traditionally feminised - and arguably devalued industries - i.e. fashion, social care, dance, teaching, they also continued waitressing/stripping to help counter low wages. Thus, it was not stripping or waitressing per se which kept/trapped women in such roles as graduates but rather, broader economic trends which made it difficult for some women to leave. This finding reiterates the need for decent, living wages for all workers in all industries. At the same time, despite intentions to continue stripping, some women were compelled to leave in search of higher, more stable incomes. While existing research suggests that women become 'trapped' in stripping because it is financially lucrative, some graduates were in a 'unique' position as they were able to leave stripping with relative ease and to find better paid employment outside of the industry because of their credentials.

Hardy and Sanders (2015) argue that student/graduate dancers usually have five-year plans and that most women considered stripping to be short-term. However, findings from this thesis demonstrate the importance of taking a longitudinal approach to graduate transitions research as what respondents say they are going to do and what they actually are able to do are not always the same; leading to very different findings/analysis. For example, women in this research stated that they were 'always planning on leaving' their respective jobs but that they never actually quit. As mentioned, many women's expectations as students did not match their lived realities as graduates. Most women wanted to travel/take a gap year but were pushed into finding employment sooner than they had planned. While the aim of qualitative research is not to uncover whether participants are telling the 'truth' (or not), taking a longitudinal approach emphasises the fluidity of decision-making and how plans are not static. Indeed, imagined selves/futures were continually (re)adapted to fit changing circumstances. Plans were derailed due to unexpected health problems or due to gendered experiences/incidents such as sexual

assault, pregnancy and care responsibilities. Such factors and the broader context are often overlooked but should be accounted for when discussing women's 'outcomes' after university.

The majority of research on student/graduate transitions into/out of HE takes a Bourdieusian approach and typically foregrounds issues of overeducation, underemployment and working-class graduates as 'failing' to acquire the 'correct' skills/attributes. I found that this accumulative model positioned many of my respondents as lacking. As I discuss in Chapter Two, this approach can also leave unchallenged the assumption that middle-class dispositions and tastes are by definition, the right ones (Lawler, 2005). It is widely assumed that graduates have similar aspirations perpetuating a limited, classed standard of 'success'. Adopting a processual approach allowed me to explore what graduates themselves defined as 'success', as well as finding gaps, contradictions and overlaps to uncover how meaning can be found *alongside* dominant circuits of value. As Skeggs (2011:509) argues,

"If we only focus our theoretical gaze on abstractions from the bourgeois model... we will never be able to imagine or understand how value is produced and lived beyond the dominant symbolic and will repeatedly misrecognise, wilfully ignore and degrade other forms of value practices, person-value and personhood, by default performatively relegating them to the void and valueless".

I do not claim that arguments for redistribution and recognition should be either/or, particularly as I also call for major redistribution of resources throughout this thesis and in this chapter specifically. For example, it was evident that given the spatial inequality in the UK, many individuals in this research were forced to move away from families/support networks. The continued London-centric imbalance and lack of attention/investment directed at any region outside of the capital must be addressed by governments. Living and working in London may be considered 'desirable' for some but for others it was the only option to find employment and for others still, the costs of living rendered overworking the only viable way to survive or precluded this as an option entirely. Importantly, the redistribution of funding for infrastructure and opportunities in other parts of the UK is also a form of recognition that other people/places are of value and require equal access to resources.

My focus on restoring the dignity and value of my participants is not meant to overlook the importance of the politics of redistribution and representation but to instead redress what I consider to be an imbalance in emphasis. In Chapter Six, I used Kate (waitress) as one example, however in a more general sense, working-class respondents were left to negotiate the expectation, or their ‘moral duty’, to become neoliberal subjects of value combined with their more traditional working-class, feminised values. Kate felt pressure from real and imagined others to ‘be someone and do something’ with her life and to not waste her degree. At the same time, she felt ambivalent about leaving her care-coordinator job for a ‘desk-job’ (read: middle-class) which she assumed would not provide her with the same meaning and satisfaction. Rather than working with and caring for service users, Kate imagined the job that she ‘should’ have to involve isolation and being self-oriented rather than sociality and being other-oriented.

Despite achieving ‘social mobility’ - as the only person in her family with a degree and in regard to her employment status and income - Kate still described her current career as not good or ‘proper’ *enough* and this feeling was shared by respondents. When analysing/judging/valuing women’s lives through a neoliberal or middle-class lens and measuring their experiences or ‘*objective*’ outcomes within the dominant circuit of value - which many women did not have full access to - it is not surprising that respondents considered themselves/their lives as lacking or not ‘good enough’.

Similarly, while stripping and waitressing were used strategically by women as part of a future-focused strategy (rather than being a dead-end job (c.f. Hardy and Sanders, 2015)), some respondents were content stripping/waitressing ‘for now’ as they described present-located value in both jobs. I am wary of reproducing binaries of future-oriented value/mobility (social and otherwise) and present-located value/stasis which renders the latter as problematic. Indeed, the association of mobility with progress is developed in discourses of civilisation and

points to those who *should* leave something (class/waitressing/stripping) behind to signal distance and thus, ‘bettering’ of oneself (Skeggs, 2019).

Given that capitalism is inherently unequal, prioritising profit over people and relying on the unpaid labour of women and the working-classes, I find it difficult to fully advocate for ‘equal opportunities’ for women as this individualist, meritocratic approach asks, as Arruzza et al. (2019) argue, that in the name of feminism, we are grateful that men and women have equal opportunity to dominate and exploit others in the workplace and in society as whole; rather than fighting for real change which would involve wealth and natural resources to be shared by all. We already know – based on existing research outlined in Chapter Two– that working-class graduates do not fare as well as their middle-class counterparts when they are crudely compared to their peers. However, providing students/graduates with access to certain ‘privileges’ will, by definition, continue to disadvantage others. Instead, if everyone is entitled to an ongoing education throughout their lives and the benefits that this can offer both publicly and privately, this will allow more people to participate as equals in society.

Despite stereotypes of snowflake millennials as workshy and less resilient than previous generations, respondents in this thesis had a relationship of endurance rather than entitlement to employment. Women continued working in ‘graduate jobs’ as they feared that quitting would negatively impact their chances of finding future employment if they were to appear unreliable. While emerging adulthood is already considered a time of uncertainty and exploration (Arnett, 2000), combined with living in uncertain, precarious times, it is not surprising that women sought stability rather than social mobility. The data was filled with examples of hidden (and more obvious) injuries of neoliberalism, most notably the ‘epidemic of anxiety’ (Tyler and Slater, 2018). Many women struggled to make concrete plans and rarely spoke of opportunities or hopeful futures and instead prepared for failure and worst-case scenarios. This highlights the psychosocial effects of neoliberalism and the relationship between culture and subjectivity as

what goes on ‘out there’ gets ‘in here’ and reconstructs our sense of self (Gill, 2011:66). Anxiety and feelings of precarity have seeped in and transformed our understanding of social life becoming a common state of mind/being. Universities and workplaces have begun to acknowledge the important issue of student/employee mental health/well-being, however having allocated ‘mental health days’ or even weeks does not go far enough. As a society we must start to prioritise our physical well-being over our productivity while at the same time fighting to regain a sense of security through actionable labour rights/protections and living wages.

Graduates described the high levels of work involved in trying to find employment. Based on women’s experiences, it appears that as more graduates apply for jobs, employers impose higher expectations, make the process more difficult and at the same time lower the rewards in return<sup>74</sup>. Rather than exploiting graduate precarity, employers should be responsibilised and pushed to re-evaluate their hiring processes. This could work in tandem with the implementation of new and specific Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP) devised to help graduates to enter their preferred careers both financially and practically; rather than having to rely on extreme overworking in order to survive. Due to austerity and cuts to public spending this has also had a negative effect on ALMP which have become increasingly sanctions-based rather than supportive (the most prominent example being universal credit (Orton and Green, 2019)). I would like to end this thesis by urging governments to properly invest in education and employment to pre-emptively protect graduates from a wide range of labour market problems discussed throughout this thesis. Graduate destinations are far from static and do not end or no longer matter six months after university. Indeed, at the end of each interview, participants discussed their future plans and expectations and given our limited long-

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<sup>74</sup> Any rejection that women experienced was individualised and understood as a personal failing. It is important when offering training and support to graduates that we move away from the meritocratic skills and attributes approach which disregards structures of inequality and perpetuates the notion of lack.

term understanding of graduates in the UK, I hope to return to the women who have taken part in this research and to re-create a similar study which explores past/present/future lives/selves when respondents have reached the age of 30; and when they assumed that their 'real' adult life would begin.

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## Appendix 1: The practicalities of stripping and waitressing

Based on the data gathered from the interviews, the following sections outline the ‘practicalities’ of strip club/pub and restaurant/agency work described by participants. However, it is important to take into account the variation of experiences between clubs and restaurants.

### *Strip clubs and pubs*

Dancers were expected to pay a house fee (discussed in Chapter Five) and in return they were provided with a number of services from the strip club/pub. In both strip pubs and clubs, each dancer was expected to dance on stage (or up/around customers in strip pubs without a stage), usually for the duration of one song and on rotation with other dancers. In some clubs, women remain clothed, however in others, dancers were required to become topless at some point during the show. Dancers in clubs were not paid for stage shows, whereas strip pubs employ a ‘jug system’ where women collect a minimum of £1 from each customer before their performance. Once the stage show is complete, dancers then approach customers and attempt to sell private dances and time in a VIP area or booth which is where they were able to make the most money. In some clubs, dancers are also expected to encourage customers to buy drinks to help boost the venue’s profit.

### *Restaurant, strip club and agency waitressing*

Despite differences in the type of restaurant, there are similarities in the expected tasks. Prior to the opening of the restaurant and during the shift, waitresses are expected to clean, polish, (re)set tables, replenish condiments, (re)stock the bar. In larger restaurants, waiting staff are often briefed on what was expected during the shift and debriefed on how their service could be improved. When customers arrive, waiting staff ‘greet and seat’, provide menus, take orders and serve food and drinks. Waitresses are expected to memorise certain food and drinks which are stocked as well as daily/weekly specials. Once an order has been taken, waiting staff

are then expected to communicate with the kitchen staff regarding dietary requirements and when customers were ready for different courses. In most restaurants, waitresses are assigned their own section with an average of seven to 10 tables. At the end of each customer's dining experience, respondents provided the bill, took payment, cleared, cleaned and reset the table (Dowling, 2015).

Agency waitresses on the other hand are not expected to carry out the same number of tasks as they typically served set menus at events for corporate dinners, sports clubs, music arenas etc. Their role involved setting tables, folding napkins, serving food and drink as well as handing out canapés. Waitresses in strip clubs are also expected to 'greet and seat' customers. This is sometimes strict due to policies preventing customers from walking around the club or going to the bar (hence the need for waitresses). Waitresses take drinks orders to bar staff, serve drinks and take payment. A limited number of strip clubs offer food to customers, but most do not. The role also involves practical duties similar to restaurants including (re)stocking, cleaning and workers are also expected to sell dance vouchers.

## Appendix 2: Waitress flyer



# Are you a student? Working as a Waitress?

I'm looking for **final year university students** working in the **hospitality industry** to take part in a Sociology PhD study.

This is an opportunity to share **your experiences** of both work and university. You can choose either a **face to face**, **telephone** or **Skype** interview which will be confidential, anonymised and will last around 1 hour

**To thank you for your time and your insight, I would like to offer you a £10 gift voucher of your choosing.**

If you would like to take part or for further information, please do get in touch via email: [REDACTED]

This study has been reviewed by and received ethical clearance through the Department of Sociology Ethics Committee at City, University of London. If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the University's Senate Research Ethics Committee or [REDACTED] or via email: [REDACTED]



**CITY**  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON  
EST 1894

This study has been reviewed by and received ethical clearance through the Department of Sociology Ethics Committee at City, University of London. If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the University's Senate Research Ethics Committee on [REDACTED] or via email: [REDACTED]



## Appendix 4: Ethical approval

09<sup>th</sup> March 2016

Principle Investigator: Jessica Simpson

Project Title: What Happens Next? A Comparative, Longitudinal Study of Female University Students Working in the UK Sex Industry and 'Mainstream' Employment

Supervisors: [REDACTED]

Degree: PhD

Start Date: 01/10/2015 End Date: 01/10/2018 To

whom it may concern:

This is to confirm that the research proposal detailed above has been granted formal approval by the Sociology Research Ethics Committee. Please note the following:

Project amendments: You will need to submit an Amendments Form to the Chair/Secretary if you wish to make any of the following changes to your research:

1. (a) recruit a new category of participants;
2. (b) change, or add to, the research method employed;
3. (c) collect additional types of data;
4. (d) change the researchers involved in the project.

Adverse events: You will need to submit an Adverse Events Form to the Chair of the Committee, copied to the Secretary of Senate Research Ethics Committee [REDACTED] in the event of any of the following:

- (a) adverse events;
- (b) breaches of confidentiality;
- (c) safeguarding issues relating to children and vulnerable adults;
- (d) incidents that affect the personal safety of a participant or researcher.

Issues (a) and (b) should be reported as soon as possible and no later than 5 days after the event. Issues (c) and (d) should be reported immediately. Where appropriate, the researcher should also report adverse events to other relevant institutions, such as the police or social services.

Should you have any further queries relating to this matter, then please do not hesitate to contact me. On behalf of the Sociology Research Ethics Committee, I hope that the project meets with success.

Kind regards

[REDACTED] Reader in Sociology

Chair of the Sociology Research Ethics Committee Department of Sociology  
Rhind Building  
City University London

Whiskin Street  
London, EC1R 0JD  
[REDACTED]

## Appendix 5: Consent Form

|     | QUESTION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | YES | NO |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| 1.a | I agree to take part in the above City University London research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the participant information sheet, which I may keep for my records.                                                                                                                                                                                  |     |    |
| 1.b | <p>I understand that my participation will involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• being interviewed by the researcher</li> <li>• allowing the interview to be recorded</li> <li>• being contacted later (around 11 months following the initial interview) to arrange and take part in a second interview • possibly being contacted with follow-up questions</li> </ul> |     |    |
| 2.a | I understand that I have given approval for direct quotes to be used in the final report of the project, and future publications. I understand that findings from the research will be reported in a PhD thesis, as well as other scholarly publications which may arise from this project and other possible future projects.                                                          |     |    |
| 2.b | I wish to be anonymised in any publication based on the study                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |     |    |
| 2.c | I <i>do not</i> wish to be anonymised in any publication based on the study                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |     |    |
| 3   | I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.                                                                                                                                                                          |     |    |

|   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |  |  |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| 4 | I agree to City University London recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998. |  |  |
| 5 | I agree to take part in the above study.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |  |  |

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant

Jessica Simpson

Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## Appendix 6: Participant information sheet

### *What Happens Next for Female Students?*

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

There is a gender-gap between female and male UK graduates:

- Female graduates are *less* likely to secure graduate-level employment than male graduates
- Female graduates are more likely to work in lower skill jobs than male graduates.
- Female graduates are more likely to work part-time than male graduates
- Female graduates earn *less* than male graduates (ONS, 2013)

This research seeks to understand *why* this is the case by exploring what happens to female students as they make the transition from student to graduate. To this end, the researcher is looking for female students in their final year of university education to take part in two interviews. However, you can take part in the first interview, second interview or both interviews **What will it involve?**

The first interview will take place in your final year of university. The discussion will centre on experiences of being a working student and plans for the future. The second round of interviews will take place approximately 12 months later. The focus will then be on your experiences of transitioning from student to graduate and your current circumstances and employment.

#### **Why have I been invited?**

You have been invited to take part in this research because you are:

- In your final year of a full-time or part-time undergraduate degree
- Living, studying and working in London
- Employed as a waitress/erotic dancer
- Identify as female

Including yourself, there will be around 40 people involved in the study.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you have the right to withdraw from the project at any point without giving a reason. This includes after the first or second interview has taken

place. You can request the data be destroyed without explanation or consequence. Please note, you can refuse to answer any questions you feel are too personal or intrusive again without explanation or consequence. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. Your name will not be used and any key identifying features will be removed in any publications based on the study.

### **What will happen next if I take part?**

All interviewees will be asked to take part in two interviews taking place over a 12-month period. You can take part in the first interview, second interview or both interviews. You have the right to withdraw at any point. Each interview should last approximately one hour (maximum 90 minutes). Prior to the interview, the researcher will contact you in order to arrange a date, time and public place that is most suitable/convenient to you. All interviews will be recorded, transcribed and analysed. Direct quotes may be used in publications; as noted, however, your name will be anonymised. If you decide to take part in the second round of interviews, the researcher will contact you around one month before the second interview will take place to discuss a time and place most suitable. After each interview the researcher may contact you with follow-up questions.

### **What do I have to do?**

As noted, you are not obliged to say or do anything. If you agree to take part in the study this will involve talking with the researcher about your experiences as a student, as a working student and as a graduate. You have the right not to answer any questions you feel are too intrusive or personal without giving a reason. You have the right to withdraw at any point.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

As noted, the first interview will centre on experiences of being a working student. This may involve issues that you find stressful. If you feel uncomfortable at any point you can take a break, stop the interview, reschedule or withdraw completely. The researcher can also provide details and contact information for professional organizations offering support to women and advice for students on their rights at work.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

You will receive a £10 gift voucher of your choosing as a thank you for your time and insight. Interviewees may also indirectly benefit from the study as the aim is to:

- Raise awareness about the issues faced by female students/graduates in the UK
- Assist student support services in providing better support for students and graduates
- Potentially influence policy change helping to create equality between women and men in terms of graduate employment and wages
- Contribute to knowledge production

**What will happen when the research study stops?**

Following each interview any information regarding your identity will be replaced with a code and a record of this process will be kept in a locked computer file on a password protected computer. All audio recordings (and message logs in the case of instant messaging interviews) will be permanently deleted on completion of the project. Data will be kept in a locked computer file for the required minimum of 10 years then permanently deleted. If you withdraw from the study you can request your data be destroyed permanently.

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

The discussions that take place prior to, during and following both rounds of interviews will remain confidential. Only the principle investigator will have access to the audio recordings (or written interviews/conversations in the case of email/instant messaging) and transcripts both before and after the interviews have been anonymised. With your consent, the personal information you provide will be used only to make contact and discuss the second round of interviews. Your information will not be shared with any third party.

Please note, there are limits on confidentiality if you disclose (verbally or written) that you may hurt yourself or another person. If you disclose such information the researcher will encourage you to seek professional support. The researcher will offer you information you can use to contact professional organisations offering support and guidance. The researcher may also discuss further action with the primary and secondary supervisors.

**What will happen to results of the research study?**

The research will be reported in a PhD thesis, as well as other academic publications which may arise from this project and other possible future projects. Your interview and the transcripts are stored on a password protected computer and kept for up to 10 years before they are permanently deleted. Any information regarding your identity will be anonymised when the researcher transcribes the interviews. Your identity will remain anonymised in all publications based on this study. The findings may be shared with organisations such as the National Union of Students in order to help to improve support for students and graduates.

Please contact the principle investigator if you would like a copy of your interview transcript(s) and/or a summary of the findings when the study is finished.

**What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?**

If you do not want to carry on with the study you can withdraw at any point without any explanation or consequence.

**What if there is a problem?**

If you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain

formally, you can do this through the University complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you need to phone [REDACTED] You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform

them that the name of the project is: *What Happens Next?: A Comparative, Longitudinal Study of Female University Students Working in the UK Sex Industry and 'Mainstream' Employment* You

could also write to the Secretary at:

[REDACTED]

Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee

Research Office, E214

City University London

Northampton Square

London

EC1V 0HB

[REDACTED]

City University London holds insurance policies which apply to this study. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

#### **Who has reviewed the study?**

This study has been approved by City University London, Department of Sociology, School of Arts and Social Science Research Ethics Committee **Further**

#### **information and contact details:**

##### **Principle investigator:**

Jessica Simpson

[REDACTED]

##### **Primary Supervisor:**

[REDACTED]

Senior Lecturer in Sociology

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Supervisor:**

[REDACTED], Professor of Criminology

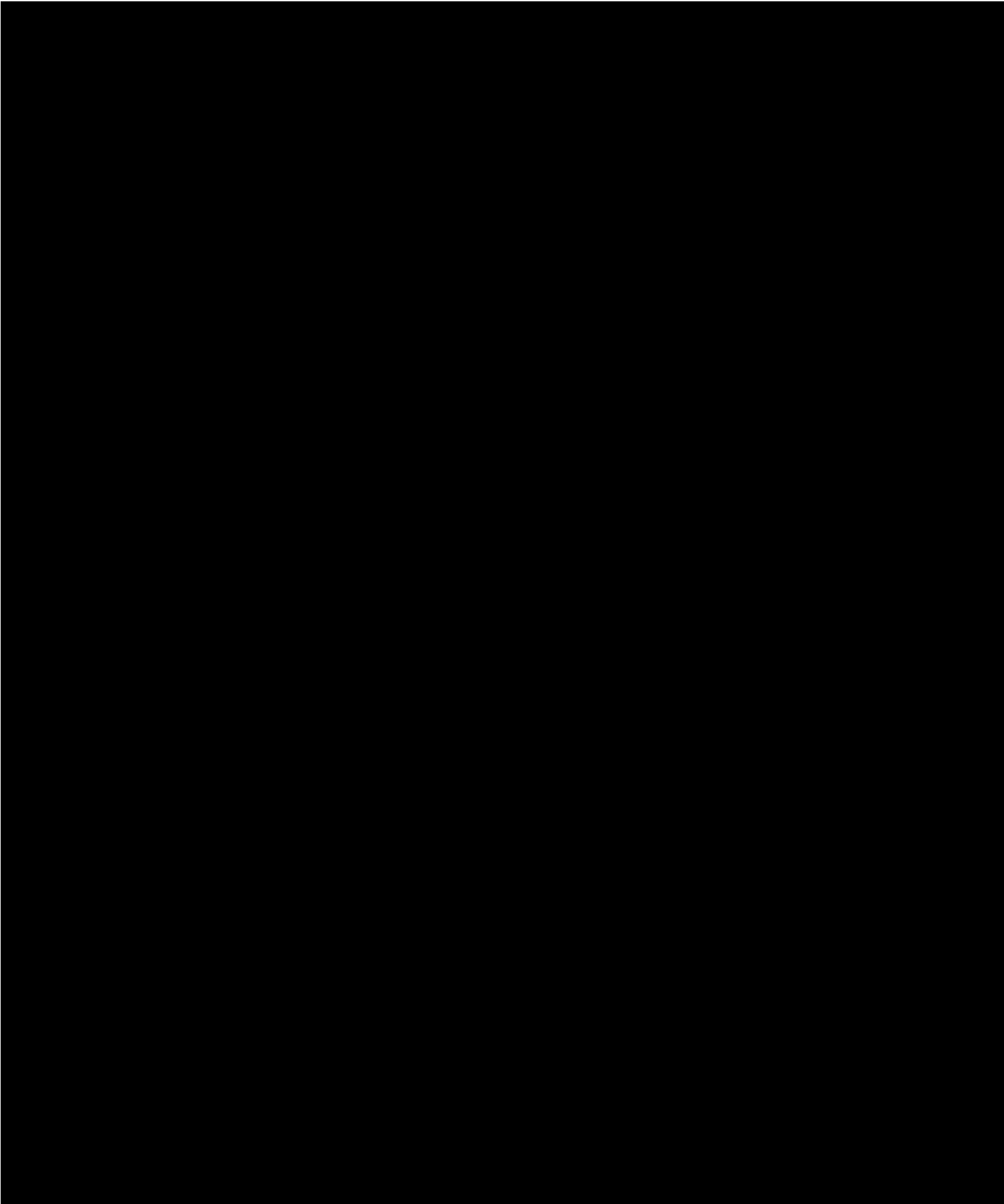
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.**

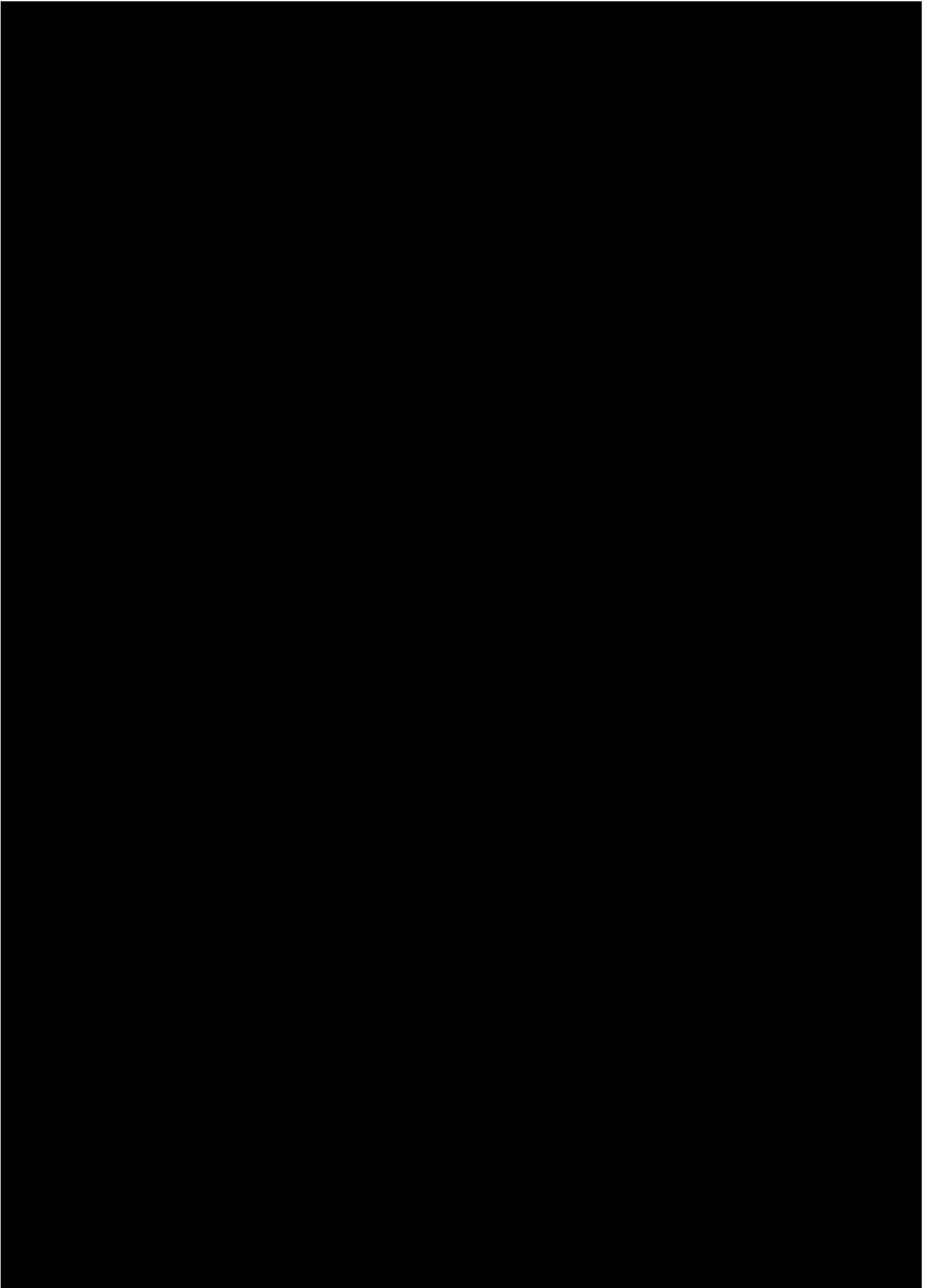


Appendix 7: Table 3 - Demographic Information of Dancers





Appendix 8: Table 4 - Demographic Information of Waitresses





## Appendix 8: Timeline example

