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Hypersexualization and the Dark Body: Race and Inequality among Black and Latina Women in the Exotic Dance Industry

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Abstract During the 1980s in the USA, two sides of the pornography debate emerged: (a) sex work is oppressive to women based on sexism and women's low economic positioning and (b) sex work is empowering to female sexuality and agency. However, a void remains in theoretical analyses of racial and sexual hierarchies within sex industries that create challenges for women of color that go beyond the pornography debates. Using a case study analysis of three exotic dance clubs, the author examines how hypersexualization structures stratification. The author explores the hypersexualization of Black and Latina women within the clubs regarding racial passing among dancers of color, pay differences, and club safety to examine how these factors produce inequalities between Black and Latina women in the exotic dance industry. Avenues for further social policy research focused on improving the sex industry work environment for Black and Latina exotic dancers are discussed.

Keywords Strip clubs · Stratification · Racism · Violence · Pornography

During the feminists sex wars of the 1980s, two sides of the pornography debate emerged as a result of feminist movements within the USA (Chapkis 1997). The first position concerning women within the sex industry taken up by radical feminists was that all sex work, and to a lesser degree, heterosexual sex, was inherently exploitative toward women within a patriarchal society (Barry 1984; Dines 1998; Dworkin 1991; MacKinnon 1989).

On the other side of the sex wars debate regarding sex work, contemporary US feminists have focused on sexual agency and the expansion of women's control of their bodies and sexuality (Chapkis 1997; Nagle 1997; Queen 1997; Rubin 1984). However, in recent times, feminist theory has argued for a more complicated position on women in the sex industry that is not just good or bad and focuses on (national and international) sex worker's rights, with elements of both agency and oppressive circumstances (Alexander and Delacoste 1987; Barton 2006; Bernstein and Schaffner 2004; Bradley-Engen 2009; Chancer 1998; Frank 2002; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Nagle 1997).

However, a void remains in a theoretical analysis of racial and sexual hierarchies within sex industries and how they affect dancers of color (Brooks 2001; Collins 1990; Hunter 2002; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Miller-Young In Press). No study to date has examined how race and gender stratification are produced in the exotic dance industry, and how this stratification influences material and social exchanges between women in strip clubs. In this article, I seek to answer the question of how racial stratification is produced in strip clubs among Black and Latina women by using a case study analysis of three exotic dance clubs in Manhattan, Bronx, and Oakland. I will be exploring how notions of hypersexuality functions within the clubs with attention to racial passing among dancers of color, pay differences, and club safety to examine how they work to produce inequalities between Black and Latina women in the exotic dance industry.

This article focuses the following research questions: How are Black and Latina women stratified in the exotic dance industry? What are the consequences of this stratification for dancers of color? How do dancers of color

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manage racism? To answer these questions, I use ethnographic field research to examine how racial stratification affects economic exchanges among Black and Latina women in strip clubs. I argue that social constructs of Black and Latina women as hypersexual makes them receive less monetary value for their sexual services, thus situating them in potentially violent work environments. I expand on Patricia Hill Collins' (2004) theory of controlling images and *hypersexualization*[1] of Black bodies. I aim to locate my study of racial stratification of US Black and Latina exotic dancers within the discourse of the sex wars and conclude with possible public policies to improve the situation of Black and Latina exotic dancers.

Literature on Women in the Sex Industry

Debates about whether sex work is exploitative or empowering for women have been a focal point in feminist discourse regarding women who work in the sex industry. According to Wendy Chapkis (1997), the debates can be categorized into three positions: (a) radical feminists, (b) sex radical feminists, and (c) feminists who are arguing for a more complicated position on women in the sex industry that takes the debate beyond the feminist sex wars.

Radical feminists argue that within a patriarchal society, women working in the sex industry are always exploited. In this view, women cannot assert agency within sexual economies; the belief is that women are victimized or controlled by heterosexual male desire against their own interest (Barry 1984; Dworkin 1991; MacKinnon 1989). According to Catherine MacKinnon, pornography constitutes

> [a] form of forced sex, a practice of sexual politics, an institution of gender inequality. In this perspective, pornography, with the rape and prostitution in which it participates, institutionalizes the sexuality of male supremacy, which fuses the erotization of dominance and submission with the social construction of male and female (p. 197).

On the other side of the debate are feminists who have emphasized empowerment and have focused on sexual agency and the empowerment of women within sexual economies as an expansion of women's control of their bodies. They have argued that contrary to the view that sex work is inconsistent with feminist ideals, women in the sex industry are taking control of their sexuality (Chapkis 1997; Queen 1997; Rubin 1984). The third position attempts to get beyond the sex wars and underscores sex workers' rights nationally and internationally along with the reality of both analyses of empowerment and oppression functioning simultaneously (Alexander and Delacoste 1987; Barton 2006; Frank 2002; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Nagle 1997).

Yet, these debates largely overlook structural racism within the sex industry that makes it difficult for women of color to maximize the benefit of the empowering aspects of sex work sex radical feminists underscore and produces problems not addressed by radical feminists, because sex work in and of itself is often not viewed as a problem by women of color but rather lack of decent shifts, safety, and better monetary gain. Feminists who argue for a more complicated view of women working in the sex industry sometime fail to see how racism is a major constraint for women of color choosing to do sex work; however, there are some exceptions to this oversight.

Kamala Kempadoo's (1999) *Sun, Sex, and Gold: Tourism and Sex Work in the Caribbean* examined the global conditions of the result of the outsourcing of jobs and migration among female and male sex workers in the Caribbean, and the racialized nature of sex work, emphasizing that the relationship of women and men engaging in sex work is a product of colonialism with Westerners often being the customers for sexual services. Kempadoo's work also has explored the racism inherit in which types of women are viewed as sexually desirable, and how this racism affects working conditions of women working as prostitutions, with lighter-skinned women receiving the desirable shifts and clientele. For example, in *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition,* edited by Kempadoo and Doezema (1998), Kempadoo stated that in the Caribbean, racialized hierarchies structure the conditions women work in when doing sex work: "Migrant sex workers from Columbia and the Dominican Republic are predominantly 'light-skinned,' mulatto (mixed African-European) women, while 'local' prostitutes who invariably work the streets and ill-paid sectors, are far more likely to be of Afro-Caribbean descent" (p. 131).

On a local US level, Katherine Frank (2002) has examined in her book, *G-Strings and Sympathy: Strip Club Regulars and Male Desire*, racial hierarchies within the geographic location of strip clubs in her research site of Laurelton. Frank observed during her participant-observation in her fieldwork in the South that strip clubs are classified in terms of race regarding customer taste, geography, and club reputation—highly ranked clubs were rarely described as Black, whereas Black clubs were referred to as out of the way or lower tier, and often women would perform illegal acts to make money. According to Frank, Black dancers

[1] Joane Nagel (2003) has used this term (after Patricia Hill Collins 1990) to describe an all-encompassing social position of sexuality extending Judith Halberstam (1998) argument about masculinity being a legitimate sphere of men. I use the term to describe the social construction of people of color as possessing a more active sexuality than Whites.

working in upper-tier clubs were encouraged to identify not as Black but instead as mixed-race: "In Diamond Dolls, the Crystal Palace, and the Panther…the Black dancers were more concerned with looking as Caucasian as possible to make the customers 'comfortable'" (p. 219).

My research contributes to these local and global findings of systemic racism against Black women in the sex industry and the sex wars debate by arguing that for many women of color working in the sex industry, racism and constructions of hypersexualization, not sex work itself, remain an oppressive factor in their work environment. Similar to the findings of Kempadoo (1999) and Frank (2002), I found strip clubs to be categorized by geographic space associated with race and class, and that Black and Latina women who were light skinned received better treatment from customers and club management. However, my work differs from that of Kempadoo and Frank on two fronts: I studied sex workers of color in the US context and explored racial stratification among dancers of color, not among customers or White women.

Theoretical Approaches

Patricia Hill Collins' (1990, 2004) work on controlling images of Black women is the departure point for my theoretical approach to the structural positioning of Black and Latina women working in the exotic dance industry. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Collins listed four types of controlling images affecting Black women's position within US society: the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare mother, and the Jezebel. According to Collins, the images of the mammy and the Jezebel originated in the institution of slavery to justify Black women's oppression within the home and sexualized violence for the purposes of breeding slaves; the images of the matriarch and the welfare mother emerged during the post-World War II period to justify economic exploitation of Black women on welfare and the ideology that low-income Black women on welfare were the cause of poverty among Black families. In *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, Collins revisited these controlling images of Black people and hypersexuality in contemporary forms of racist practices. She argued:

> The new racism also relies more heavily on mass media to reproduce and disseminate the ideologies need to justify racism. There are two themes here—the substance of racial ideologies under the new racism and the form in which ideologies are created, circulated, and resisted. Ideas about Black sexuality certainly appear in contemporary racial ideologies. (2004, p. 34)

For Collins (1990, 2004), the intersection between the new racism and Black sexuality is evident in constructions of Black women on welfare and as possessing an aggressive sexuality, resulting in forced birth control and welfare cuts for low-income Black women along with mass incarceration among low-income Black men socially constructed as rapists and criminals. In this article, I would like to extend Collins's theory of hypersexuality and the aforementioned stereotypes of Black women as sexually aggressive and as welfare queens and applied it to Black and Latina women working in the exotic dance industry and economic marginalization. According to Collins (and also antiporn activist Gail Dines), women of color are positioned within pornography differently than White women, with controlling images of them as hypersexualized resulting in their being presented as animalistic vis-à-vis White women, and thus more sexually available, which also has economic consequences for women of color in the porn industry (Dines 1998). Collins (1990) has argued that the subjection of Black women's bodies on the auction block during the nineteenth century is the basis for White women's positioning in pornography underscored by the exhibition of Sarah Bartmann. Hence, Black women are starting from an animal status, not a human one, unlike the status of White women at this time, who were portrayed as an ideal archetype of womanhood.

This analysis is useful to my investigation into racial stratification among women of color in the occupation of exotic dancing, in which race complicates the experiences of women of color exotic dancers who are not objectified in the same manner as White women (i.e., it is not a guarantee that a Black women will be hired at a high-end club just because she takes her clothes off). In other words, women are not objectified equally in the sex industry and do not have access to work in anywhere they desire in this industry but are instead stratified by race and class, much as they are in other service-sector jobs (Chang 2000).

Method

I used ethnographic methods, fieldwork, and participant-observation for my study. I conducted a total of 12 interviews with Black and Latina women ranging from ages 19 to 45 in New York City and Oakland, California. My study passed institutional review board requirements, and I used pseudonyms for dancer names and clubs to protect the identity of the women in their professional and personal lives. I interviewed six US Black (non-Latina) women, two Black Latinas, and four non-Black Latinas—all were dancers except for two (one waitress and one manager). Many of the dancers I interviewed were students at colleges within the City University of New York or

working in other service industry jobs. My sample is from two clubs that cater to a male audience (New York) and one that caters to a lesbian audience (Oakland). I chose two gentlemen's clubs (one Black/Latino/a, one mostly White) and a Black lesbian club to get a range of experiences from dancers regarding racial stratification and to explore whether dancing for women was different than performing for men. My sample size is small because these data were taken from a larger project that did not solely focus on the experiences of dancers, so my data is not meant to generalize but rather add to a discourse on women of color in the sex industry in the USA, a topic that begs for more research.

My goal was to determine the connections between dancer employment, desirability, monetary earnings, and racial positioning of the women who worked at these clubs. I met my interviewees and conducted participant-observation in two strip clubs in New York City, Conquest in Manhattan and Temptations in the South Bronx,[2] as well as Girlielicious in Oakland, California. At all three clubs, I entered as a customer, often alone, and paid for my own drinks. Conquest charged a cover fee of $30; Temptations was free before 7:00 p.m., after that, the cover fee was $20. At Girlielicious in Oakland, the cover was $10 after 7:00 p.m. At all of the clubs, I interviewed dancers while they sat at the bar waiting for their turn to perform their stage show. I would often buy myself a drink and strike up conservations with dancers asking them how long they worked at the club, what they liked about it, if they feel their race is an asset, if they felt safe, and how much money they earned on a shift. I usually bought dancers drinks so they could talk for longer and carried a notebook to write down my fieldnotes. I was not allowed to record any interviews at my sites (also, the music would have made it hard to hear interviewees), so I went into the bathroom to write my fieldnotes. Sometimes I shared with the women that I used to work as an exotic dancer to gain their trust, and I found that this trust helped the dancers open up to me. My conversations with dancers lasted about 10 to 15 min, with the exception of four women who felt comfortable giving me their phone number for follow-up questions.

Temptations employed mostly Black and Latina dancers, with few Asian or White dancers; it catered to a working-class crowd, and the women tended to be creative with their costumes and had voluptuous figures. Conquest hired mainly White dancers, with few Black, Asian, or Latinas; however, the waitresses, bartenders, and janitors were racially diverse. This club catered largely to White businessmen, who considered Conquest high class compared with Temptations, which customers classified as low class or ghetto. A Black lesbian in downtown Oakland named Silky, who had a history of club promoting in the lesbian community, started Girlielicious in 2003. Girlielicious is described as being one of few queer clubs for Black women and is known for lip-syncing events every Thursday among performers and occasional violence among female customers (usually couples) at the club.

[2] In this article, I use pseudonyms to protect the identity of clubs, dancers, and interviewees.

Description of Settings

Temptations is located in the South Bronx in New York City and surrounded by the following institutions: Hostos Community College, a Medicare health rehabilitation service center, the Triborough Bridge, a diner, a public auto auction, a car wash, a muffler repair shop, and a Kentucky Fried Chicken. There are no banks anywhere in sight but many check cashing places. South of Temptations is the Mott Haven neighborhood, with housing projects and local business, though many buildings and businesses had been abandoned and were boarded up. According to the 2005 US Census, the median family income for the Bronx was $33,460. The racial demographics of the Bronx are 23.6% White, 32.1% Black, 0.4% American Indian, 3.2% Asian, 0.1% Native Hawaiian, and 52.3% Latino/a. Temptations promotes fine wine, gourmet food, champagne, and beautiful women for the customers.

In contrast, Conquest gentlemen's club in Manhattan is one of the most famous strip clubs in the country among middle and upper class, mostly White men. Conquest is located in Chelsea. Chelsea is located on the west side of Manhattan and has a large queer population. According to the 2005 US Census Bureau, the median family income is $43,434. The racial makeup of Manhattan is 56.8% White, 16.7% Black, 0.8% Native, 11.3% Asian, and 25.1%% Latino/a. Conquest is known for its restaurant business in addition to its bar and stage shows. The hours are 8:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m., Monday through Saturday, and 8:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. on Sundays. Both clubs are located within 500 ft of a school, church, other sex venues, or residential area, and thus have survived former mayor Rudolph Giuliani's 1995 zoning laws (Delany 1999). Most of the bartenders, security personnel, waitresses, and bathroom attendants are people of color (Black, Latino/a, and Indian), whereas the dancers and customers are predominantly White.

Oakland, California, has a diverse population. According to the 2005 US Census Bureau, the population is 31% African American, 25% Latino/a, 20% White, 16% Asian American, and less than 1% Native American. In addition to racial diversity, Oakland, like San Francisco, has a large concentration of same-sex couples, and according to the Urban Institute of US Census 2000, such couples are almost three times as likely to live in Oakland vis-à-vis

other cities within the USA. Girlielicious is located at a popular queer bar in downtown Oakland, close to the Bay Area Rapid Transit train and some Chinese food restaurants. Most of the dancers, workers, and customers are Black queer women, with the exception of a male bouncer.

Performance and the Management of Racism

For dancers at all three clubs, erotic performance is marketed in four ways: (a) the DJ announcing the dance set, (b) stage lighting, (c) striptease, and (d) dancers soliciting lap dances before or after their performance. The role of the DJ is to play songs that will complement the dancer's body and movement on stage. The dancer usually selects 3- to 5-min songs for the DJ to play during her set, and the skill of dancing is learned on their own; most dancers have not had professional dance lessons, although others have had some formalized dance training. The stage lighting consists of dim, sultry lights ranging in greens, purples, and reds to make the dancers appear sexy and create a sensual mood between them and the audience.

Dancers market their bodies by performing a strip tease dance down usually to a thong and walking around before or after their set to see if customers want to buy lap dances from them. The stage provides a dancer with the most exposure to customers with the help of the DJ playing music and promoting her prior and during her set, and the lighting covering up blemishes that would be more obvious in bright lights (Frank 2002).

Dancers of color in addition to marketing themselves to customers as desirable must manage racism among customers as a result of being racialized and hypersexualized with some dancers being in more advantageous positions than others. For example, Alicia, a 22-year-old Canadian Black dancer from Toronto working at Conquest, stated that it was harder to make money being Black:

> You have to try harder to talk to the customers and ease them into buying a lap dance from you; smile at them, engage them more, because many White men are scared of Black women and sometimes Black men don't want to see a Black woman either, whereas the White women have an easier time talking to customers. Some nights I make anywhere from $150 to $300 a night, whereas White women make around $500 a night or more.

Mona, a 26-year-old dancer who worked at Temptations, could pass for a dark-skinned Latina, but she is Italian, Irish, and US Black. When asked how she markets herself racially, she replied:

> At Temptations, it didn't matter since most women at the club are Latinas, but when I work in Manhattan, I never say I am Black because the customers don't like Black girls, I always say I am Italian and play up my Italian accent.

Diana worked at Conquest, was 19 at the time of the interview, and of German and Puerto Rican ancestry. She was going to college to be a medical technician and is dancing as a way to earn extra money. When asked if she viewed her race as an advantage to working at Conquest, she replied: "Yes, because I'm Latina, I'm blond…I could be a lot of thing.…People don't really know what I am. I can play on that.…I can be whatever they want me to be."

Diane's response says a lot about how race and class function in the exotic dance business. She feels her race is an asset in dancing primarily because she is mixed and can therefore perform various ethnicities for customers. In other words, customers can imagine her to be the race of their choice and can even ignore the fact that she is Latina and just see her as a White blond woman.

Spice was 28 years old at the time of the interview and had danced at Girlielicious for 3 years and, before that, had danced at male-managed clubs she identified as biracial. When I asked her about racial marketing when dancing, she stated that when she danced for men, she marketed herself as whatever the customers wanted her to be, thus underscoring the fluidity of racial categories, especially for mixed-race individuals:

> I learned to be whatever they want me to be because they are there for a fantasy. I remember I used to actually tell them what I am [Black, Native American, and Scottish] and they would get turned off when I would really tell them because that's not what they saw me as—they saw me as Latina or Black. If I were dancing for them at a table, they would not spend a lot of time with me. So, I learned to ask them what I looked like to them, and based on what they said, I would tell them that is my racial identity.

Spice's response mirrors Diane's at Conquest regarding the passing between racial identities, although for Spice, passing was not as easy as for Diane, because Spice clearly has African features.

In the aforementioned examples, all the dancers except Alicia used racial passing as a strategy in managing customer racism by morphing into racial identities comfortable for the customer, who was often non-Black. Unlike the other dancers, Alicia had to perform higher standards of emotional labor (Hochschild and Machung 2003) as a strategy to manage racism to make White customers (and sometimes Black ones) feel comfortable enough to tip and buy lap dances from her. For Alicia, marketing her sexuality did not translate into a smooth transaction with consumers, because some men appear scared of Black

women, so her erotic value was lower than that of her White counterparts at Conquest.

In my research, many dark-skinned Black women talked about losing opportunities to make money dealing with White customer racism, whereas White women had an easier time making money. Tammy, a Black 20-year-old dancer who was studying psychology at Merger Evers College, stated:

> Many White men are scared of Black women, so it takes longer to have a customer warm up to you for a lap dance, which means you lose time and money on this step. In the amount of time it takes for a Black dancer to get a lap dance from a customer, a White dancer would be getting two or three lap dances.

This quote underscores the intersectional challenges of race, class, and gender involved in Black dancers trying to make money in a predominantly White club: her position as a Black woman, to his position as a White man, her position as a dancer, to his position as a customer. It also confirms the stereotype of the overly aggressive Black women ambulant in popular media, which customers internalize, thus making it harder for Black exotic dancers to obtain dances and the wages they deserve for their erotic labor.

The concept of Black women being viewed as hyper-sexual by customers within the exotic dance industry often results in them being seen as the controlling image Collins (1990) has referred to as the welfare queen or, in the case of Black dancers, *gold diggers*.[3] Black women I interviewed discussed the idea of Black dancers being seen as gold diggers, which they say does not help them in the exotic dance industry to make money. Natasha, a 24-year-old Black waitress at Conquest, said she believes that White women get what they want out of sexual relationships with men regarding material items, whereas when Black women do the same, they are labeled gold diggers, expressing the low exchange value of Black women's bodies and the stereotype of working-class Black women taking advantage of government programs, such as welfare (Collins 2004; Quadagno 1994; Roberts 1997).

I asked Natasha more about how she perceived the image of Black women as gold diggers affecting them as workers in the exotic dance industry. She stated:

> White dancers can be a bit more direct in asking customers for money, whereas Black dancers will be seen as gold diggers and pushy. I hear customers say that about some Black dancers at Flash Dancers [Manhattan] and at Sugar Hill [in Harlem] there was that image of the pushy Black woman asking for money. Men come in the clubs and think they will get a rap video with Black women all over them.

The view of Black women as gold diggers also results in customers wanting to bargain down the prices of lap dances given by Black women and sometimes Black women perform illegal acts in attempts to make more money and break even at the end of the night, because they often have to tip out a certain dollar amount at the end of shift to management. This situation puts them at risk for being arrested on charges of prostitution if there is ever a police raid at a club.

For example, at Girlielicious, one thing I noticed during my fieldwork, there was the explicit nature of many of the performances. One woman let someone suck on her breast during a lap dance for a dollar, another woman pulled pearls out of her vagina on stage, providing the audience lots of shock value as people stood up in their chairs to see her performance. When I asked Silky about these performances, she stated:

> I give everyone a chance to perform. Many dancers are working mothers who work 9 to 5. I give everyone an opportunity to perform and make some money; single mothers often need additional money. I think the dancers are really into giving the audience a good show and getting the attention of the audience. I like when dancers are into their performance and use props with their shows

Spice critiqued what she felt were women giving away too much for too little money:

> I don't like it, and I don't think the audience does, either. Women who do that may have shock value, but if you watch closely, they don't get any money for it. It just brings down the standard for the rest of us. It is also the result of the newer dancers not having proper mentoring into the industry and not knowing what prices they should charge for services—that should be a private show, not public. Also, when they do that, they put the venue at risk for losing their liquor licenses.

Sandy, a 24-year-old dancer and single mother, also disapproved of the sex acts that some dancers perform; she felt that most people would rather see artsy performances involving talent and skill. As she put it:

> Many women who do those tricks are used to dancing for men where they want us to stick things in ourselves, but women often think "Isn't she going to get a yeast infection?" whereas many men don't care.

[3] The term *gold digger* has been popularized in hip-hop culture, which constructs Black women as materialistic and money hungry, out to get money from the men they date. Many Black feminists have critiqued this term as sexist, arguing that it ignores the low wages many working-class Black women earn on the job or on public assistance.

> Also, because women dancers perform at the same venues for the same audience, that trick becomes boring because everyone saw the dancer pull pearls out of her pussy, but for the men they like it because they haven't seen the trick before.

It is noteworthy that the undervaluing of Black women's erotic services does not just exist in clubs managed my men, but in Black lesbian clubs also, suggesting that Black women are not except from internalizing popular images of Black women as hypersexual, especially if they have worked in male clubs where these kinds of performances are encouraged.

However, some non-Black Latina dancers at Conquest were able to maintain White customers as regular clients and ask for a high value for their erotic services. Cristina, a 24-year-old Puerto Rican with olive complexion and dark hair, was studying political science at one of the city colleges in New York. When asked if race is an asset to her, she replied:

> Yes, because White men think I am exotic I can use that to my advantage. There is this older Jewish man who is really nice and he helps me with my rent. I live on the Upper West Side where my rent is $1,550. He sometimes helps me out with part of it, but a couple of times he has paid my full rent for me. He also helps me with my English, which is great. Like, if I mis-pronounce a word he will correct my English. He speaks perfect Standard English, so I feel like when he corrects me that helps me to speak better in school.

For Cristina, her erotic capital helps her to attract customers who not only financially help her but also aid her in her educational career. At Conquest, erotic gains are highest for White women and higher for non-Black Latinas, especially mixed-race Latinas, than for dark-skinned Black dancers who are more at a disadvantage for being hyper-sexualized—leaving Black women at all three clubs having to work harder for wages (which means often engaging in explicit sex acts for little money), whereas non-Black Latinas and White dancers either make more money doing less or are able to accrue various others forms of capital (e.g., social networks and cultural capital) via their erotic services.

Symbolic Violence and Black Clubs

A consistent theme among Black dancers in my research was their negative experiences in all-Black male–female strip clubs regarding low-level security and customer harassment; most said they would not work in an all-Black club if they didn't have to. For example, Alicia remembered her experiences working at a Black working-class strip club in Atlanta, Georgia:

> I would never work at a Black strip club again. I worked once at a club in Atlanta, and the customers acted like they were just entitled to have you. They were rude touched you even after you told them certain areas were off limits. Also, I remember I was charging $25 for a lap dance, and come to find out the actual price was $5, so I had other dancers getting mad at me because I was overcharging. I quit after a few months there.

Though Alicia was racially marginalized at Conquest because she made less money than her White counterparts, she actually enjoyed working at Conquest because of the security, and the caliber of the customers was better. This level of customer harassment against Black dancers by some Black male customers emphasizes the internalization of stereotypes of hypersexualized Black women some Black men hold, which in turn makes them view Black women in a negative light, similar to their non-Black counterparts. This devaluing of Black women's bodies happens not only at the individual level of customers but also institutionally regarding the types of shifts Black and Latina dancers have at predominantly Black and Latino/a clubs, which puts them at risk for customer violence.

Sonya, a 25-year-old Black graduate of Penn State, worked at Crunch gym during the week and danced at Temptations for extra money on weekends. She felt that there was a form of racial stratification among dancers and that Black dancers, especially heavier dancers, were scheduled more on the night shift when the customers are younger, rowdier, and mostly Black and Latino, than in the afternoon when customers tend to be older and racially mixed and often include White businessmen:

> During the day you usually find Asian and Latina dancers, a few Black dancers, and most are thin. Also, when you work during the day the stage fee[4] is lower, it's $60 as oppose to $100. I feel it's hard for Black women to make money because you compete with the lighter-skinned women and thinner women. At night you get a rowdier crowd, so Black women have to put up with that more, because that's when most of us are scheduled. I am skinny, so I work in the daytime. I worked at night once, but stopped because I didn't feel safe.

[4] A stage fee is what many dancers, who are legally classified as independent contractors, pay to work nationally. The stage fee has been a source of activism for many involved in the sex worker rights movement who are fighting for exotic dancers to be recognized as employees verses independent contractors.

In this case, stratification highlights divisions based on skin color among women of color within the same status of being dancers. Non-Black Latinas and mixed-race women of color have higher erotic value than dark-skinned Black women; as a result, they are tipped more, work more desirable shifts (which lessens their experiences with customer harassment), and pay less of a stage fee based on the time they work.

Stratification based on skin color at Temptations was further underscored by a comment made by Casey, a 22-year-old light-skinned US Black and Puerto Rican dancer at Temptations, who stated that although the club hired Black and Latina women, dark-skinned Black women were often discouraged from working there:

> Often when dark-skinned Black women audition they are not hired the way light-skinned Latina and Black women are. Once around six dark-skinned Black women auditioned and none were hired. When I asked the management why, they said too many dark-skinned women would make the club lose money.

Hence, ideas of hypersexualization affect women differently at Conquest and Temptations. At Temptations, lighter-skinned Black women and mixed-raced women work less for tips, are touched less, and are desired more, not just by White customers but also by Black customers, whereas at Conquest, darker-skinned women work more for tips but were not exposed to unwanted touching and low security as were the women at Temptations.

In addition to skin color discrimination, many Black women complained of being inappropriately touched by customers while walking across the club or having customers haggle down their prices for dances. If a dancer said a lap dance cost $20, a customer might try to get it for $10. This situation of unwanted touching, haggling down of prices, and of dark-skinned Black women being placed on latter shifts means that their erotic labor is being devalued and they not being paid what they are worth. So economically and symbolically, they are less valued at Temptations.[5]

Ideas of hypersexualization play an important role in the way customers interact with Black dancers. Spice has worked at a number of clubs, known for their ill treatment of dancers via the payment of stage fees and low-level security and has experienced violence at these clubs:

> The managers didn't deal with violence towards the dancer. You don't just wait for security if you want to survive; you've got to handle it yourself. I used to hit the customers with this big metal purse I would carry on stage that had my makeup in it, but I would carry it to hit the customers if they tried to hit me or touch me in the wrong way. Once this White frat boy type came in and thought he was going to get a free dance. I told him a dance was $20, and he kept trying to bargain me down. I was on stage getting ready to walk over to another customer, and he grabbed my arm. I told him to stop, but he wouldn't let go, so I hit him over the head with my purse. The manager was angry that I was hitting customers, but I told him, "You can't expect me to put up with that shit if you're not doing anything about it." They [managers] also hired short, nonthreatening men as security. If you want to have customers behaving appropriately, you have to have the idea of intimidation to make people fear doing something wrong in the club.

Once while doing fieldwork at Temptations, I witnessed a customer who appeared to be drunk behaving in an inappropriate manner. He came up to a Latina dancer, with an olive complexion, and she offered him a lap dance, but within 5 min of the performance, she stopped and walked away from him. He continued approaching dancers on stage and offering the waitresses money, without buying a drink. I could tell this behavior made them uncomfortable by the way they smiled and told him, "No, thanks," but he kept invading their personal space. Meanwhile, one of the bouncers was near the stage, watching, but not intervening.

Some dancers at Temptations felt the inner-city environment and low reputation of the club as seedy contributed to the lack of respect dancers received there. Sheila, a 23-year-old US Black dancer, gave her account on why she felt Temptations was different than other clubs in the Bronx but cautioned against stating that Temptations did not share any elements of seedy behavior with the other surrounding clubs:

> At Temptations the girls do audition, whereas at the other clubs often there is no audition, and you can almost just come in from off the street. So, in that case it has more class than other clubs. But on the other hand, it is still ghetto.…For example, after midnight the crowd goes from businessmen to younger, rowdier guys. So, you get some yelling, people are frisked for guns—though there are fewer fights here than at other clubs, but occasionally there are police raids.

[5] While doing fieldwork, I remember once being at Conquest when a middle-aged White man yelled at the bouncer on duty and actually took swings at him. He had to be escorted out of the club. I then heard an ambulance siren. It turned out he was drunk and had a heart attack while swinging at the bouncer. The police did not have to come, because the bouncer successfully took care of the situation—also, the club's image was not stained because of the incident, as it would be at Temptations.

Sheila's quote indicates that although Temptations may be considered a classy gentlemen's club by South Bronx standards, it still carries elements of behavior associated with lower-tier clubs, such as rowdy customers, low-level security, and thus lower value on Black dancers bodies vis-à-vis customer behavior and lower expectations of having to pay Black (and Latina dancers) what they are worth for lap dances.

Whereas dancers of color reported feeling unsafe at Temptations, dancers at Girlielicious felt safer dancing for a Black lesbian crowd than men, even though fights would occasionally break out among the female customers, often over couple disputes. Spice noted that she felt "safe with the audience. I think most of the drama is between the people dating each other, not the performers." Sandy also felt that dancing for men was more dangerous than performing for women:

> Men want to touch you and are often aggressive and don't want to pay the price you want. They also act out in front of their friends and may refer to you as a bitch or a ho, you just never know what can happen, especially at a bachelor's party where you don't even know if security will be there. Men often don't respect you when you dance, and they want you to work harder, like by putting objects in your vagina. I don't like that.

Sandy's comment highlights the danger many Black women exotic dancers face when performing at bachelor parties for men, again as a result of their bodies being perceived as more available than those of White women, and therefore of less value. As noted earlier at Girlielicious, some Black dancers perform by putting objects into their vagina for little money, a practiced carried over from performing for men, but telling in the kinds of erotic work, Black women do to remain desirable and hopefully profitable to a male clientele. In other words, they must work harder than their non-Black counterparts to remain in the exotic dance industry and risk their health, as well as sometimes being arrested, to try and make a decent amount of money in the industry, all while managing images of themselves as hypersexual.

Summary and Conclusions

In my research, I found that the Black and dark-skinned Latina women gained less returns for their erotic services, were affected by negative racial stereotypes of them as hypersexual or aggressive, and thus were racially marginalized in their employment at White clubs. Yet, Black women would rather work at predominantly White clubs such as Conquest than at a predominantly Black club, where they were likely to be subject to rowdy customer behavior and low-level security measures. The Black women who worked at Temptations were in the majority of dancers but complained of being devalued by internal stratification within the club concerning skin color divisions among women of color and being placed on undesirable shifts.

Dancers of color managed racism in two ways: racial passing or performing large amounts of emotional labor to appear nonthreatening. Non-Black Latinas at Conquest had greater opportunity to benefit from their erotic labor in customer interactions than Black dancers, especially if they performed racial representations of Whiteness and, therefore, had the ability to move between racial categories. At Temptations, non-Black Latinas and Asian women also could get betters shifts and have more options of working at different clubs, especially if they were mixed race. In Temptations, inequality was produced by Black dancers being placed on shifts deemed unsafe, where stage fees are higher, customers wanting lower prices for lap dances, and skin color differences among the women.

At Girlielicious, Black women felt safer performing than at male-managed clubs, and their race was more of an asset than it would have been at Conquest or Temptations. Yet, issues of the Black female body as hypersexualized prevailed in this space because the Black dancers sometimes performed explicit shows for little money, illustrating that they feel they must do these kinds of performance to remain attractive to paying customers, often what they have internalized from dancing at male clubs, because the female customers do not pay more for these acts.

In this article, I have illustrated how Black and Latina women are hypersexualized within the exotic dance industry, expanding on Patricia Hill Collins' (2004) theory of controlling images and hypersexualization. My aim was to add to the sex wars debate the idea that the hypersexualizatoin of women of color, along with individual and institutional racism, provides unique challenges for women of color in the sex industry. I provided an examination of the ways that hypersexuality functions for dancers of color using a case study analysis of three exotic dance clubs in Manhattan, Bronx, and a lesbian club in Oakland interviewing Black and Latina dancers using ethnographic field methods.

I argued that the hypersexualization of women of color does not help them advance in the exotic dance industry but, on the contrary, forces them to work harder at achieving monetary and social capital vis-à-vis White women sometimes within the same club. For Black women, this hypersexualization is even more pronounced, because among non-Black Latinas and mixed-race Black women, racial passing is more of an option than for darker-skinned Black women, who in turn gain less from selling their erotic

labor and are valued less in both White and Black clubs. For example, in predominantly Black clubs, they are touched more without being tipped by customers, work in clubs with lower levels of security than predominantly White clubs, thus exposing them to violence and are perceived by male customers, both White and Black, as worth less sexually, thus being more sexually available than White women. This image of Black women as hypersexual has dire consequences for Black exotic dancers who cannot rely on Black male-managed clubs to be a haven from the racism in mostly White clubs, such as Conquest, because many Black male customers and management have internalize these negative stereotypes of Black women, so the range of options for them to work in the exotic dance industry is limited. Even in Black lesbian clubs, where the work environment is better regarding safety, the hypersexualization of Black women is present in some dancer performances.

The image of Black dancers as greedy or as gold diggers when they are asking for money for lap dances implies they are not worth the price they are charging.

In a larger context, it supports the attacks by neoliberal conservatives on welfare, such as former president Bill Clinton's 1996 welfare reform, and on affirmative action based on views that Black and Latina women are sexually promiscuous, lazy, and socially irresponsible, and thus undeserving of social services afforded to White women.

The hypersexualization of Black and Latina women who work in exotic dance industries has consequences for Black women not only in the sex industry but also in the legal system. A recent example of Black women's low erotic value within the legal system is in the May 24, 2009, edition of *The Post-Crescent* (Appleton-Fox Cities, Wisconsin) newspaper, which printed an article concerning the unsolved case of the murders of five Black women in Milwaukee, who police claimed were prostitutes, between 1986 and 2007. It was not until the week the article was released that police reveled recent DNA test to link the murders of these women. According to the article, many people in the community felt that the race of the women and the stigma of them being prostitutes kept police from pursuing these crimes aggressively and that some officers referred to prostitutes as crack whores. All of the women who were killed were Black, except for one White woman, who police believe someone else may have murdered, though the suspect's DNA was found on her body. This case says a lot about how racism and classism function to devalue the lives of people from marginalized groups, such as sex workers.

The devaluing of Black women in the exotic dance industry also has implications for constructions of race within the post-Civil Rights era. In "White Americans, the New Minority? Non-Blacks and the Ever-Expanding Boundaries of Whiteness," Warren and Twine (1997) argued that Whiteness has historically expanded to include groups that were not considered White, such as the Irish, with Blacks serving as the measuring stick toward assimilation. They have asserted that non-Black people often distance themselves from Blackness to create a middle space for them to be viewed as closer to a White racial category, especially in the state of California. They have stated that "Blacks, at least at the national level, serve as the anchor for Whiteness…in other words, precisely because Blacks represent the 'other' against which Whiteness is constructed, the backdoor to Whiteness is open to non-Blacks" (p. 208).

This so-called back door to Whiteness allows some mixed-race dancers to play on the social construction of their race and, therefore, can have it be an asset, because light skin is often valued over darker skin, especially in marketing techniques used by club owners in advertising.

My research has shown among the women I interviewed that working in the exotic dance industry is in and of itself not a problem, contrary to the position of the antiporn feminists, but rather lack of decent wages, customer harassment, and overall safety are the issues most important to exotic dancers of color. Although some of these problems are indeed challenging to eradicate, such as symbolic racism against Black dancers by customers, there are ways feminists interested in social policy geared at helping women in the sex industry can work toward eliminating some of these hardships. One way is for feminists interested in sex workers' rights to work with city planners to make sure street corners where some inner-city clubs are located on well-lighted streets or create a fund that gives dancers cab fare to go home on late night shifts. Another suggestion that the Exotic Dancer's Alliance has taken on in San Francisco is to have club management get rid of the payment of stage fees, so dancers could keep more of the their tips. Policymakers can also work to ensure that efficient safety measures are implemented at clubs where Black dancers work.

As I stated at the beginning of this article, this area begs for more research, and it is my hope that this article will alert feminists concerned about sex workers' rights to some of the unique challenges of racism and classism affecting dancers of color and that those on both sides of the pornography debate may find solutions for a group whose needs are not yet properly addressed by either position.

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