

83 | pole position: migrant British women producing 'selves' through lap dancing work

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abstract

This paper explores the motivations and experiences of British women working as lap dancers in the tourist resorts of southern Tenerife, with a particular focus on the subjective choices and processes undertaken by working-class women in the embodiment of positively evaluated identities. It uses Skeggs' theoretical framework of 'becoming respectable' (1997) alongside other debates on 'identity management' in order to begin mapping the ways in which migrant British lap dancers produce themselves, negotiate gender and class, and seek forms of respectability, reputability and honour through their work. Drawing on empirical data, it will discuss how strong disassociations with the Other are formed, and how and why important binaries, particularly distinctions between lap dancing and prostitution and lap dancing and other 'degraded' forms of work and lifestyle are drawn in the dancers' own stories of themselves. It will look at notions and processes of gaining 'respectability' through part of a wider migrant discourse, exploring how being a migrant lap dancer can serve as a vehicle for reproducing a 'respectable' and otherwise positively evaluated self on several levels.

keywords

lap dancing; identity management; distinction; British migration; embodiment; sex work boundaries

introduction

In her highly influential and important *Formations of Class and Gender* (1997), Beverly Skeggs generated questions about the theoretical frameworks used to understand how women's subjectivities are constructed, identifying weaknesses in the class/gender linkages within analyses of gender construction and reproduction. Skeggs explored how women negotiate and understand their classed and gendered 'selves' through social and cultural relations. More specifically, the study exposed how white working-class women can access notions of respectability through occupational, social and cultural identification. Skeggs reminds us that respectability is primarily the concern of those to whom it is not automatically granted, and that those in pursuit of it do so in order to cast off the dirt and danger historically associated with the working classes. Her longitudinal ethnographic study, which traces the life courses of women over a 12-year period, begins at the point of their enrolment on a Social Care course at a Further Education college, and follows their journey through the labour market and into family life.

In mapping the significance of respectability to subjective class categorization, Skeggs' research explored the notion of class *disidentification*. She discovered that the women experienced class not through explicit identification with class positioning but rather by a deliberation to *not* be working-class: '[T]hey made enormous efforts to distance themselves from the working-class' (1997: 74). But processes of class *disidentification* did not manifest directly either. Instead, they happened in what Skeggs calls a 'dialogic manner' of comparison: 'in every judgement of themselves a measurement was made against others' (1997: 74). Skeggs discusses processes of 'valorization' as occurring by disassociation with an unvalorized social identity, that is, working-class woman, and the accessing of new, positively evaluated identities as always being set in opposition to the Other.

It is my aim in this paper to discuss similar processes of disidentification with a disreputable Other and the idea of comparative subjectivities in another context. My own work on British migration to Tenerife involved ethnographic research into lap dancing, a sector of the tourism industry in Tenerife and other destinations which is undergoing growth and rising popularity among young British women migrants.

A limited literature on 'exotic dancers' in the USA has been exploring the interactions and relationships between dancers and customers (Enck and Preston, 1988; Frank, 1998; Wood, 2000). It has also begun mapping and theorizing entry into exotic dancing (Lewis, 1998; Forsyth and Deshotels, 1997), and has examined the ritualization of demand from regular customers (Frank, 2002). However, very little attention has been dedicated to understanding the social positioning and subjectivities of the dancers, or the meanings of lap dancing as a form of work,

or the discursive and/or definitional distinctions between exotic/lap dancing and prostitution. The growing popularity of lap dance and other 'exotic' dance venues in a British context also remains under-researched, as does the rising phenomenon of this particular sex industry sector in holiday and migration destinations popular with the British. This paper aims to capture the British migrant lap dancing scene in Tenerife, and to use Skeggs' theoretical framework of 'becoming respectable' alongside other debates on 'identity management' in order to begin mapping the ways in which migrant British lap dancers produce themselves, negotiate gender and class, and seek forms of respectability and reputability through their work and consumption. It will discuss how important distinctions between lap dancing and prostitution and lap dancing and other 'degraded' forms of work are drawn in the dancers' own stories of themselves. It will look at notions and processes of gaining 'respectability' through part of a wider migrant discourse, exploring how being a migrant lap dancer can serve as a vehicle for reproducing a 'respectable' and otherwise positively evaluated self on several levels.

methods

The paper draws on wider data gathered in the course of ongoing ESRC-funded research focusing primarily on the markets for migrant domestic and sex workers in Spain and the UK, but which also involves ethnographic research on the informal tourism economy (and its intersections with the domestic and sex work markets) in Tenerife. The data stem from 16 semi-structured interviews with British dancers from three different lap dance venues, as well as additional interview and survey data from a wider sample of third parties (club owners, club DJs) and clients. All informants were British people living in Tenerife.

The methodological and ethical concerns of the study (including gaining access, negotiating researcher/researched relations and power dynamics, sensitivity and reflexivity in the field, consent and confidentiality, researcher safety and so on) are important and complex, and a serious discussion of them is beyond the capacities and focus of this paper. Here I have room to mention only some key points: three lap dance clubs in close proximity to each other were selected as they were reputed to employ mainly British women and were located in the main tourist 'strip' popular with British tourists. Gaining access to the dancers presented difficulties and usually required me to negotiate with a gatekeeper (club manager or sometimes doorman or DJ). Once I had obtained gatekeepers' permission to approach the women, persuading them to talk to me was often tricky, especially at first. They tended to be wary of me for a number of reasons that I could identify. Some suspected that I was a tabloid journalist working undercover; others were concerned that I might be there to make moral judgements ('so what do you want to know – about how *bad* we all are?'). Some

were simply irritated by my presence and I often felt awkward and interfering. On further visits, after the first couple of interviews had taken place, however, the women became less inclined to ignore me and several even approached me to give an interview.

Some interviews were carried out inside clubs, usually seated at the bar, between 9pm and approximately 10.30pm, after which time the dancers generally became too busy to talk. I was able to arrange several follow-up interviews, which were conducted during the day and in a neutral location. These follow-up interviews proved to be more revealing, partly because I was able to record them but also perhaps because the interviewees felt more relaxed being fully clothed, away from the demands and restrictions of work and in a quieter environment. Of all the women I asked for an interview, only one refused but then later agreed to meet me elsewhere at a later date. One woman who gave me a brief, interrupted interview in a club agreed to do a follow-up interview for which she did not turn up.

This study, which is above all interested in the (re)production of 'selves' is not without limitations. Unlike Skeggs' extensive, long-term study on processes of 'becoming respectable', this research offers merely a snapshot of a particular time in these women's lives. The study does not lend itself to a longitudinal repeat and cannot make claims about the longer-term trajectories of its subjects. While providing an important insight into the current subjective experiences of some women in an under-researched area, it should be acknowledged that the 'selves' being produced have potentially only a short shelf-life (women rarely continue lap dancing much beyond their early thirties) and it would be nearly impossible to study the interviewees at a later stage in their lives in order to explore whether the capitals and self-identities they developed through lap dancing are enduring or transferable through time or into other working environments.

migration to Tenerife

Similar limitations may also apply to understandings built upon analyses of the often very short-term migration of British people to Tenerife. Elsewhere (Bott, 2004) I have discussed British migration to Tenerife as being illustrative of some of the new, unorthodox migration motives concerning contemporary writers on migration (Cohen, 1995; King, 2002; Castles and Miller, 2003). King discusses 'changing views of consumption and self-realization' as 'important implications for defining and studying migration' (2002: 90). Young British migrants to Tenerife can be discussed within a discourse of such incentives, with ideas around escape, self-improvement and status seeking – in other words, ideas connected

to identity reproduction/management, often generated through 'valorized' forms of work – being key identifiable migration motives (Bott, 2004).

Among the employment options open to young British women who have, in some form or another, migrated to Tenerife, lap dancing is one of the better paid. Of all 16 lap dancers whom I interviewed, only one had had lap dancing work in mind when she migrated to Tenerife from the UK. The others had drifted into it from other forms of service work, usually serving drinks or touting on behalf of bars or lap dance clubs. Lap dancing brings significantly higher earning potential than do bar work and touting. Bar work is the most reliable source of income but is poorly paid – usually around €12–20 per shift plus a drinks allowance. PR/touting is paid by commission on customers brought in, or by a combination of a low basic wage plus commission, usually €1 per head for diners or 50 Eurocents for those just wanting drinks. A small number of women work in holiday timeshare sales, which though potentially well paid, can also be extremely hazardous and competitive, and is very male dominated.

lap dancing

Lap dancing is a form of 'exotic dance'. An exotic dancer has been defined as 'one who removes all or most of her clothing in a sexually suggestive fashion to a paying audience in a performance environment' (Bernard *et al.*, 2003: 2). Other forms of exotic dance include 'striptease', 'table dancing' and 'pole dancing'. Lap dancing specifically involves a form of one-to-one interaction between dancer and a paying customer in his or her 'lap' area, although many clubs operate strict 'no touch' rules. The lap dance itself is a 'personal' performance in very close proximity to the paying customer but which may be viewed by other members of the audience. Some clubs offer private booths, where this interaction can take place in relative isolation from the rest of the club, although there is often a gap of half a meter or so between the booth door and the floor, through which the feet and legs of the dancer and her client are visible, creating a peep-show type environment. Several clubs in Tenerife encourage or demand their dancers to perform 'extras' (sex or sexual services involving physical contact for extra money) in such booths. Lap dance venues often have free entry (although drinks sell at inflated prices) and club owners take a cut from dances sold. In Tenerife, dances cost between €12 and €20 and last the length of one song (approximately 3–6 minutes). Club owners receive roughly 25% from the price of each dance.

In the clubs visited during these studies (which I will call clubs 'X', 'Y' and 'Z') between five and 12 women were working every night. Each dancer works six nights per week from 10pm until between 3am and 5am, depending on how busy the club is. The majority of dancers were British women, although there were

Hungarian, Bulgarian, Czech, Russian and South American dancers also. The dancers arrive at work for 9pm and then spend about an hour getting ready to perform, applying make-up, rehearsing, chatting, and drinking soft drinks from the bar. At around 10pm, customers begin to arrive at the club and the DJ turns up the volume. In one particular venue at around this time each night, the manager filled a paper bag with slips of paper displaying a different number (1–20) and each dancer picked a number at random from the bag. The number denotes the order in which the girls must perform a striptease (to naked) and a pole dance, again for the duration of one record. The women continue taking to the stage in the same order throughout the night.

Members of the audience are thus able to decide which dancer(s) they would like to buy a lap dance from. They normally have to negotiate and pay for dances at the bar. Dances can be paid for singularly or in multiples, with cash or by credit card. Usually, and especially during quiet times or when venues are overstaffed with dancers and competition is high, the dancers must engage in lengthy, flirtatious conversations with potential customers in order to sell dances.

The dancers ranged from age 17 to 32 years, the majority being in their late teens or early 20s. Several of the women interviewed said they had been working as lap dancers since they were 16 years old and had lied about their age to employers. All of the women were white and described their backgrounds as 'working-class'.¹ Like many of the young British migrants interviewed and surveyed in the wider study of British migration to Tenerife, almost all the dancers said that they had arrived in Tenerife with very little money, no employment and no accommodation. Many travel to Tenerife on cheap package tours and deliberately miss the return flight home.

With regard to demand, interviewees held that their clients include many male British regulars, especially timeshare salesmen and other tourism sector workers, who are often 'coked-up' but 'bearable'. Lap dance clubs in Tenerife also attract tourists from Britain, Germany, Scandinavia and Italy as well as Latin American regulars who reside in Tenerife. They also appeal to a small number of women tourists, mainly from Britain, German and Scandinavia.

British dystopia

Boredom, mundanity, poor living standards and lack of opportunity in the UK emerged as central, explicitly stated reasons for young British lap dancers (and indeed young British migrants in general) wanting to leave the UK (Bott, 2004). Living and doing lap dancing in Tenerife can serve as vehicles for renouncing a negatively evaluated British working-class background on several levels. First, and most obviously, is that they constitute a geographical departure from one's place of birth. This in itself is a statement of mobility, of independence, of

1 I acknowledge the definitional and political difficulties surrounding the terminology of class. The wider study into British migration to Tenerife, to which this research on lap dancing contributes, was concerned with identity and 'mobility' narratives. Interview schedules therefore included the question 'How would you describe your class background in the UK?'. All 16 women interviewed here answered 'working-class' or a variation thereof, for example, 'ordinary working-class people'.

freedom (albeit politically structured), of bravery, of doing something, which, I was told by an interviewee, her parents wish they had done years ago. Elsewhere (Bott, 2004) I have discussed in detail the emergent motives behind British migration to Tenerife, and a central theme is that Tenerife offers an opportunity for salvation. Britain is widely perceived as being a place where 'ordinary people' become trapped in a life of misery. A clear manifestation of this idea emerged in more than half of the total number of interviews conducted, where interviewees held onto a secondary subjectivity – their unmigrated self – and described to me the alternative story of their lives, the one they would be living had they not had the resourcefulness to escape to Tenerife.

For example, Karen had worked in clubs X and Z alternately for 9 months. She had just turned 18 when I interviewed her and was from a large town in the north of England. She had left school with 3 GCSEs and had worked in retail for several months, earning below the minimum wage and living at home with her parents. Her father's continued unemployment and the breakdown of her parents' marriage caused her relationship with them to deteriorate. Just before her 17th birthday, Karen ran away to Tenerife with a friend. They had purchased a two-week package holiday with self-catering accommodation included and had planned to skip the flight home and rent an apartment together in Playa de las Americas. At the end of the two-week period, however, the friend changed her mind and went home to the UK. Karen felt that she could not return home and had very little money left. She explained what she did next:

I slept on the beach for a few nights, probably about a week, on the sun beds, which is where all the shaggers go so it was fairly horrible. Then I met some girls and they let me sleep on their settee till I found a job. I did some PRing for a bit, but the money was so crap, I couldn't afford my own place on that money. Then one of the girls I was staying with said why don't you try lap dancing, 'cause the money's good. I thought 'no way' but I tried it and I thought I was really crap at it and I felt really ashamed. The first night I went home and cried. I was so nervous and I thought there was no way I could do it. But I stuck at it and got better. Now I don't mind it, I'm quite good and I earn enough money to rent a flat with my boyfriend. I usually make about a hundred [Euros] a night doing a few hours exercise. Can't be bad can it?

I asked Karen if she anticipated returning home to the UK at any point. She replied:

No way. I mean, if I had a degree like you, I'd be fine wouldn't I? There's absolutely nothing for me to go back to. I've got no qualifications so all I'd end up doing is working in Dorothy Perkins for five quid an hour being told what to do all day long, making money for someone else. I can't even stand to think about that. When I think about going back all I see is this person who is pale and skint and hanging about with a load of single-mothers. I'd end up killing myself.

Karen had a very clear picture of her 'alter' self. This kind of 'alterity' narrative appears to serve as an important prompt or incentive to persevere with what can

be very demanding and demoralizing work. Karen compares herself favourably with an alternative, 'pale and skint' self who has no choice but to work in 'mundane' retail jobs and become enormously depressed. But there is a second Other in Karen's narrative; the working-class women she left behind in her hometown whose inevitable fate involves getting pregnant and becoming single-mothers. Karen sees this as the only real alternative for women of her background, and part of being *her* is about not being *them*. Skeggs (1997) discusses this as a process of disidentification with the limited and negative connotations of being a working-class woman. Karen's own negative reference to such a pathologizing representation of working-class women (as all being single-parents) demonstrates her own disassociation with that particular version of working-class femininity, and exemplifies the generation of what Skeggs (1997: 76), as well as Steedman (1986), Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) and Walkerdine (1990), have noted as a longing to be in a *different place*.

Part of realizing such a longing comes from migrating out of an unfavourable, undesirable situation to a warm, sunny, 'exotic' location; from turning away from one's history and by not being that pale, failed, Britain-bounded self. But what part does becoming a lap dancer contribute to arriving at a 'different place'?

A good starting point is to consider that lap dancing can be extremely physically, emotionally and psychologically demanding work. Overcoming these difficulties can in itself bring, perhaps not respectability, but certainly a sense of honour. Pitching herself against the difficulties and dangers associated with her work mobilizes a sense of pride and feelings of achievement for Laura, an 18-year-old from the East Midlands. The adversities of lap dancing and the subsequent honour she experiences in overcoming them are compounded and intensified by the migration context of her work:

[I]t's hard and you need balls to do it, which I didn't think I had and it makes me proud that I can stand up there and strip and get on the pole. I'm actually good at it and that makes me proud. It's not easy, you know, coming to a foreign country where you don't know many people and getting up there on the stage and stripping off. I've never been good at anything in my life before.

Managing to be a migrant and a lap dancer, and, moreover, a *good* lap dancer is important to Laura's positively valued subjectivity. Lap dancing in Tenerife is viewed as something that takes foresight and considerable tenacity to achieve, and it represents a world far removed from the drabness and tedium of council estate life and single-parenthood. Lap dancing, despite its difficulties, remains glamorous:

I was a bit ashamed at first to strip naked but I soon got used to it. Now I just really love the feeling I get from dancing. It's about the only time I feel strong and sexy; I don't think it's degrading at all. It gives me a massive buzz. I even get on the pole in clubs when I'm out on my night off. It's given me loads and loads of confidence. There's something about being up there on that stage all dressed up

with your hair done and everybody's looking at you. You have to keep yourself looking good, your nails, your skin, and you always have to have nice underwear and dresses. I love all that. And I love how slim and fit my body is – I've even got a six-pack!

This was Rachel's response to a question about what she likes and dislikes about lap dancing. Rachel is 19 years old and comes from Yorkshire. She had never done lap dancing before she came to Tenerife one year ago. She had previously worked in a factory in the UK, which she hated and described to me as 'really heavy, boring work' and the factory as being 'full of really bitchy old hags'. Rachel experiences lap dancing as a positive means for being glamorous and for expressing a glamorized femininity, which is projected against the backdrop of the factory. Like Karen, Rachel sets her self against a negative, pathologizing representation of working-class women, her ex-colleagues at the factory, whom she describes as old and 'bitchy'. Their haggishness contrasts sharply with her glamour, vigour, beauty and youth (see Table 1(1)).

The women of Skeggs' study were claiming a caring, responsible respectability through their disidentification with a dirty, dangerous, valueless Other. A caring, responsible respectability can be chased institutionally, through marriage and the family, and gratification can be deferred, through college courses and training which lead to respectable caring jobs. Skeggs notes that the women she researched consolidated themselves as valued and caring by performing caringly and altruistically, and that this moral superiority enabled a location with respectability. The nurturing, caring representation of femininity could be embodied and the dirty, dangerous Other disembodied. In tilted reflection of this process, the women of this study can be said to be finding access to a reputable, recognizable and, in and through their own value placements and disidentifications, *respectable* femininity through their dissimulation with ordinariness, sexlessness and failure to escape. The young British lap dancers can embody another version of idealized femininity, that of the long-haired, made-up, slim and attractive, recently waxed and bronzed beauty.

Lap dancing has become more popular, more professionalized and less underground in the UK in recent years. The 'high class' image of lap dance club chains such as *Spearmint Rhino*, the appearance of supermodel Kate Moss performing a semi-naked pole dance in a recent *White Stripes* video and news stories about middle-class university students supplementing their incomes with lap dancing work have done a lot for the image of lap dancing. The embodiment of the glamorous and corporeally 'ideal' lap dancer can mobilize the rejection of her opposite number – pale, haggish, trapped – in the UK.

If, as Skeggs did, we look to Bourdieu to frame an analysis of the relationship between becoming respectable and embodiment, we can discuss the body as a site for improvement, and as a vehicle for carrying cultural capital to the outside

Table 1 Opposite subjectivities

Other (working-class woman)	Self
(1)	
Old (or old-acting)	Young
Trapped	Free
Haggish	Glamorous
Ugly	Attractive
Fat	Slim/fit
Weak	Brave
Cog in machine	Autonomous
(2)	
Other (Alter-self)	
Trapped	Free
Pale	Tanned
Poor	Rich
Failure	Success
Depressed	Happy
Ordinary	Special
(3)	
Other (Eastern-European)	
Trafficked	Freely moved
Controlled	Independent
Desperate	Coping
Prostitute	Non-prostitute
Dangerous	Innocent
Oppressed	Liberated
Victim	Agent
Amateur	Professional

world. A way of accruing cultural capital is by improving the body, and 'distinction' (by way of comparison with unimproved bodies) reproduces improvement. For the lap dancer, the body is improved upon by regulation, not only by club rules (which dictate what she wears, how much bodily hair she can retain and so on) but also by herself as she adheres to the demands of an idealized femininity. The self-regulation is what holds her femininity together and what distinguishes it from other, degraded femininities. Despite her rigorous nightly workouts in the club, Rachel told me she still has to watch what she eats, because 'nobody likes a pot-belly'. As Skeggs notes, fatness signifies immobility, and 'the working-class body which is signalled through fat is the one that has

given up the hope of ever improving' (1997: 83). What Rachel, a keen fan of Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) suppers after work, actually meant by watching what she eats is skipping meals when she feels she is gaining weight. Food in itself is not an important marker of taste, and is not regulated in the sense of it being a 'space of lifestyle' governed by approved or appropriate forms of food (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu constructed a binary opposition between tastes of necessity and tastes of luxury (or freedom), the former being the tastes of the working-classes, the latter belonging to the bourgeoisie, for whom the tastes of necessity can be escaped by virtue of economic freedom. He also argued that when 'tastes of necessity' are maintained even when incomes are high enough to allow for freedom from them, this may constitute a form of 'cultural resistance', whereby tastes of necessity become liberating in themselves as ways of resisting refinement (Bourdieu, 1984). Rachel could easily afford to eat more luxuriously after work, yet she chooses not to. Bourdieu might have called this an act of 'congenital coarseness' (1984: 178); a process of spontaneous gratification and a show of solidarity to Rachel's cultural community. I think it indicates at least that investments are not being made towards emulating or become part of the 'middle-classes' by way of learning the signifying 'grammar' of food consumption (Barthes, 1979), and that this has wider relevance in terms of class (dis)association in this context. It is not about class aspiration *per se*, not least because all of the women without exception identified themselves to me, often with pride, as 'working-class'. Rather, as the data show, aspirations manifest as disassociation with very specific, unimproved (female) figures *within* the working classes.

So care of bodies is not undertaken by eating lightly, nutritiously, that is, fashionably, or by any process that is culturally representative. Rather, under-eating or meal skipping is done as a means to an end – a slim body shape. Bourdieu discusses the proportionality of interest in self-presentation and attention to the appearance of the (female) body to the material or symbolic value in it. Women, of different classes, he argues:

[D]epend on the existence of a labour market in which physical appearance may be valorised in the performance of the job itself or in professional relations; and on the differential chances of access to this market in which beauty and deportment most strongly contribute to occupational value.

(Bourdieu 1984: 202)

Lap dancing is certainly a form of work where physical appearance is particularly valorized in the 'performance' and has a direct relationship with the (symbolic and material) value and profitability of the body. Bourdieu discussed a logic whereby working-class women, whom he argues are less likely to work in jobs which 'most strictly demand conformity to the dominant norms of beauty' (e.g. professional/executive jobs), are also unlikely to be aware of the 'market value' of beauty and are therefore less inclined to 'invest time and effort, sacrifices and

money in cultivating their bodies' (1984: 206). If it is a similar logic to this which informs the particularly pathologized representations of working-class femininity reproduced by Rachel, Karen and others, we can see that conforming to beauty norms allows the body to serve as an indicator of awareness of the value of their bodies. This awareness contradicts Bourdieu's assertion, and in subjective terms, enables the dancers to distance themselves from the lack of awareness of bodily value demonstrated by the working-class women back home. The care and attention bestowed upon bodies serves a professional purpose, because 'better' and better-kept bodies earn more lap dances and tips. However, it is also the *recognition* of this profitability that is important to subjectivity, because it reinforces hierarchies in (corporeal, cultural and economic) capital. The well-maintained body can thus become a vessel for distinction and respectability, social and symbolic profit as well as gaining control and making money.

spend, spend, spend

What the women do with the money they make with their bodies is also important to understanding their strategies for distinction. I asked the women about their consumption habits and a common theme to emerge was their reckless spending:

I earn really decent money. I can have everything I want and I can eat out in a different restaurant every day. Some nights I get about €400. That's more than I could earn in a week, no, probably two weeks at home. Well, if I was doing just a crappy job anyway. People I went to school with think eating out is getting some fish and chips on a Friday night. Mind you, I should slow down 'cause it doesn't matter how much I earn, I always manage to spend every last penny.

(Gemma)

Gemma's answer again sets up the contrast between herself and her past and the people she left there whom she views as having very limited aspirations and resources with regard to eating out. Dining in restaurants is beyond the limits of 'tastes of necessity', and to Gemma indulging in 'tastes of luxury' is connected to her new freedoms, especially in comparison to the Other, whose apparent lack of 'cultural capital' she mocks. Again though, not unlike Rachel with her inclination towards KFC, Gemma is either not fluent in, or chooses to reject the grammars of significance in food consumption:

Me and my boyfriend go out in the daytime. Usually we have a full-English at about midday when we get up, then we'll probably spend some time together on the beach or in the flat. Sometimes I'll go to the club to practice on the pole. Then we go to the *Steakhouse* or for a Chinese buffet at about six o'clock. I eat so much 'cause of the dancing – you need it. My boyfriend's a bodybuilder so he eats a lot.

Natalie's money is also spent quickly and in ways that are instantly gratifying:

I don't manage to save anything... it's not that easy to save out here 'cause there's so much you can spend your money on. Usually we leave work with a wad of notes but by the time you've bought some cocktails and some drugs, what you've got left doesn't go very far. You always need money for dresses and shoes as well. Anyway, it's nice to blow it when you've earned it.

Although dresses, shoes, cosmetics, perfume and other beauty products are necessary purchases for the dancers, there is an emphasis here on the act of spending for spending's sake. Katie echoed Natalie's attitude towards money:

At first I couldn't believe the money I was making. I was going home with about €150 a night, and I had all these ideas about saving up and buying a car or getting a really posh apartment by the beach. But, I don't know... you just get used to earning a certain amount and it doesn't seem to go very far. Things are a bit quiet at the moment but I'm still earning easily enough to save up for something nice. It just doesn't seem to happen; I just seem to spend it as soon as I've got it. You get used to a certain lifestyle.

Eating in restaurants and drinking cocktails signal a surplus of wealth and this underscores the distinction between the women and their various Others. The idea that money can be wasted on 'conspicuous consumption' (Veblen, 1994/1899) is important to processes of dissimulation because it exemplifies another key difference between past and present. But wastefulness in this context may have another dimension.

This paper has so far been discussing how working as a lap dancer in Tenerife can facilitate the search for respectability, honour and extraordinariness. It has considered how these women produce themselves in comparison to other working-class British women (their former selves included) through a narrative of self-improvement, through the body and through lifestyle. Yet, unlike the group of women studied by Skeggs, who sought respectability in thoroughly 'respectable' institutions, that is, education, marriage, social care employment and (hetero)-sexual propriety, this group inhabits a rather different social and moral landscape.

Lap dancing, despite becoming an increasingly 'sanitized' and socially accepted form of striptease, still remains a relatively deviant career choice. Indeed the clubs visited during this study were a world apart from the luxuriously decorated and fiercely regulated *Spearmint Rhino* and other show-biz haunts featured in men's lifestyle magazine, which legitimize and glamorize demand as well as supply. Clubs X and Z were both raided and temporarily closed by the authorities on a number of health and safety breaches, and Club Z changed its policy from 'no extras' to 'extras supplied' when trade was slow.

Lap dancing's proximity to, and periodic crossover with, prostitution places it within some definitional, moral and legal contention. For example, is the performance of a lap dance to be included in the list of 'sexual services'

exchanged for 'cash and/or other material benefit' typically understood as characterizing prostitution (O'Connell Davidson, 1998: 9)? How do lap dancing and other forms of 'exotic' dance further problematize the limitations of such definitions as identified by Phoenix (1995)? Can we regard lap dancing as belonging to 'the institution which allows certain powers of command over one person's body to be exercised by another... in order that he may command the prostitute to make body orifices available to him, to smile... to whip, spank, massage or masturbate him...' (O'Connell Davidson, 1998: 9–10)?

In clubs that operate strict and consistent 'no touch' and 'no extras' rules, the level of power exercised over lap dancers by customers to do such things is limited. The dancer has a degree of choreographic freedom, but she begins each shift knowing what is expected of her in terms of how far to strip, how close to get, how explicit the moves should be and so on. These standards are set 'in house'. Therefore, if a client requests anything further, for example, if he tries to touch the dancer, or make her touch him or herself, she can simply refuse and so his powers of command are overruled by those of the dancer's employer. Only in clubs where extras are provided are these terms negotiated between dancer (and in such cases prostitute) and client and therefore subject to his powers of command. Lap dancing, although it takes the body as the immediate site of labour, does not normally involve the 'intimate, messy contact with the (frequently supine or naked) body, its orifices or products through touch or close proximity' discussed by Wolkowitz [in her analysis of the social relations of 'body work' (2002: 497)].

That said, as mentioned above, club policies on touching and extras can sometimes be swayed by market forces. As well as Club Z reneging on its promise to dancers that they would not be asked to perform extras, Club X also rethought its rules when business was slack. During the course of less than four weeks in summer 2004, this club went from strictly enforcing a 'two-foot' rule (a distance of at least two feet must be kept between dancer and client at all times) to requiring its dancers to do 'enticement performances' including 'lesbian' shows (intimate dancing with touching and kissing) and a routine which involved a dancer covering her breasts and stomach in 'squirty cream' and allowing clients to lick it off. Dancers are not paid extra for these routines; they are simply intended to generate demand for lap dances.

Lap dancing, therefore, is not a homogeneous or clearly definable work form. It belongs to the sex industry and sometimes meets head on with prostitution. Yet, this chapter is arguing that lap dancing can also be the site for the accrual of capital and respectability. Although it is clearly a different kind of respectability being pursued by the dancers to that sought by the women studied by Skeggs, markedly so in relation to marriage, deferred gratification and occupation, respectability is still a significant feature of their narratives of self. So how might they begin to reconcile the contradiction between performing morally and sexually 'deviant' work with becoming respectable?

dirty money

First, in connection with wastefulness, the women become caught in a cycle of earning and spending, without ever saving money or investing in permanent material goods. For example, none of them owned an apartment or a car, or even their own furniture. In the main, everything earned in a night's work would be spent before work commenced the following evening, mainly on food, cocktails and drugs (usually cocaine). Several dancers said they often had difficulty paying their rent because they had failed to put it by. Natalie's propensity for 'blowing it once you've earned it' was more or less representative of the group.

It is conceivable to read these spending habits not only as conspicuous consumption for the benefit of status reproduction but also as a way of disposing of 'dirty money'. Hoigard and Finstead (1992: 49) identified a 'divided economy' among prostitute women in Oslo, wherein money earned legally was carefully budgeted and money earned from prostitution which 'burns a hole in your pocket and has to be used quickly' was spent on going out. Alcohol and drug use certainly serve other social purposes and can become habitual, but there is something in this type of compulsive spending that is reminiscent of Patricia Adler's (1993) ethnography of upper-level drug dealing in the USA, in which she writes about dealers feeling unable to spend their high earnings quickly enough. The dealers talked about wasting and burning money, and laughing when hundred dollar bills were found in laundered shirt pockets, and I want to argue that perhaps it is not simply its abundance that devalues money earned on 'deviant' markets. 'Marking' this money as dirty (see Zelizer, 1997) and shedding it as quickly as possible might also help to unpick the social meanings of how the money was made.

all good, clean fun

A second way to redress the contradiction between working in the sex industry and becoming respectable has to do with the discursive emphasis on drawing, redrawing and maintaining boundaries between different types of sex work. Again in the spirit of disassociation, integral to being a respectable lap dancer is *not* being a disreputable prostitute. The following three interview excerpts illustrate the importance of this distinction to the dancers themselves:

I used to think lap dancing was pretty cheap, you know, slaggy... But now I know what it's about and it's not cheap. It's not like being a prostitute; I could never be a prostitute. ...No, we leave that to the Eastern Europeans.
(Samantha)

I know at [Club name] they've started making the girls do extras 'cause it's changed hands. [Colleague's name] used to work there but she came here when

they told her she had to do extras... like giving blow-jobs and hand-jobs. I wouldn't do extras, never. I'm not a prostitute.

(Natalie)

Sometimes you have a bad night, like sometimes you get called a slag or a dirty whore by some dick-head in the crowd. You just ignore them. Mostly people are more respectful. ...I know I'm not a whore. I've never had sex for money and never would. It's not really the English girls who do that out here... mostly it's the Russian girls or the Eastern Europeans. We've had them here, and they'll do anything, they're so desperate...they're too desperate. It gives the rest of us a bad name.

(Mel)

The lap dancers construct what they do for a living as a skilled, legitimate profession, entirely unrelated to prostitution and the sex industry. They experience their work as distinct from selling actual sex, which they consider cheap, desperate and non-respectable. Thus, they disconnect themselves from the dirt associated with prostitution and the universally constructed figure of the prostitute as a moral and sexual outsider (O'Connell Davidson, 1998: 129). National/racial distinctions are drawn within what constitutes prostitution (and therefore respectability), with 'Eastern European' and Russian women falling on the wrong side of the divide and British women remaining strictly on the lap dancing-only/respectable side. Rather than forming a politicized defence of the sex industry as a legitimate labour institution in which they participate, the women hold that lap dancing is not a part of the sex industry and that lap dancing/striptease have nothing to do with selling sexual services. The dancers themselves partake in the universal discourse which marks out prostitutes from their 'good sisters' in the Madonna/whore dichotomy (O'Connell Davidson, 1998: 131). Prostitution, like poverty, is a source of pollution associated with Other women, against whom the lap dancers contrast themselves. The contrast is further underpinned by its connection to the mechanics of racist self/other distinction. The Other woman is embodied by the racialized (and gendered and classed) identity of 'Eastern European' figure, who is at once feared, pitied and resented – feared for her abjection and ruthless drug-dealer boyfriend, pitied for her victimhood (having being trafficked against her will and beaten by her pimp), and resented for her desperation and willingness to sell sex and 'do extras', thus degrading the work of lap dancers. My wider research in Tenerife revealed that 'Eastern Europeans' have become demonized (and 'alienized' in Anglocentric disassociations with 'immigrants' and indeed with the act of migration itself – see Bott, 2004) by the British migrant community, and are blamed for a range of 'social problems', including human and arms trafficking, racketeering, drug dealing, theft and murder. Among lap dancers and other British migrants, they get the blame for prostitution too.

The Eastern European sex worker represents and embodies the polar opposite to the British lap dancer on many levels (see Table 1(3)). The key site for comparison and distinction is the way sex and sexuality are performed. Eastern European women sell sex and sexual services because they are in such 'desperate' situations that they have no choice. They are accused of degrading and de-professionalizing lap dancing. They represent a racialized sexuality which is coded by the British lap dancers as being unrespectable and which they quote in oppositional reference to their own sexualities. They transfer the dirt and immorality historically associated with their own classed, gendered and ethnicized social identities onto a new figure of sexual victimhood/transgression. By attaching her to, and blaming her for, whoring, they can detach themselves from such and claim some moral high ground.

conclusions

The young, working-class British women of this study share common experiences through being in Tenerife and working in the lap dance industry. They imagine, discuss and experience this new form of migrant labour in (largely) positive social-psychological terms, and engage self-consciously with it as physical, economic and social mobility. They discuss it as a means of escape and self-realization and encounter it as a way of disassociating themselves from that which degrades, disappoints and disgusts them.

Moving to Tenerife and working in lap dancing can be discussed as a process in which young British women negotiate themselves subjectively and seek respectability. They do this by engaging in what Skeggs (1997) called 'disidentification' and dissimulation with pathologizing versions of white working-class femininity. They disassociate with (but never forget) their 'alter' self – the woman they envisage they would have become had they not migrated, as well as with other working-class women living ordinary lives in Britain. They become valorized by *not* being these women. They work in very close proximity to prostitution, yet they are not prostitutes. The dancers stand out from the dirt and degradation of working-class femininity, not by following institutionally or traditionally respectable trajectories (marriage, occupation, family), but by claiming respectability in morally ambiguous ones.

While these analyses have limitations in terms of predicting the longevity of the embodied capital cultivated by the women which, because of the nature of the work has a potentially limited shelf-life, they can, however, contribute to understandings about negotiations of identity, especially in terms of how games of distinction are played out by those who cannot demand a great deal of recognition in the 'legitimate' status order. Different self-defined status groups distinguish themselves from, and disavow the attributes of, each other. Oerton

and Phoenix's (2001: 389) analysis of the distinctions drawn between two often elided forms of body-work – sex work and therapeutic massage – argues that (because of the elisions) 'imputations of disreputability and immorality [are] made manifest'. It is the 'symbolic violence' of distancing oneself from others (Bourdieu, 1984) which unravels these imputations, in a kind of cultural pass-the-parcel, where groups repudiate the respectability of those who have taken a different trajectory to their own within the narrow range of possibilities facing young working-class women with similar holdings of social and cultural capital.

Lap dancing is a form of work in which a glamorized deviation from ordinariness and dirt can be discursively experienced and through which new sexualities and subjectivities may be imagined by dancers in their *own stories* of themselves and comparisons with others. In the migrant context in Tenerife at least, it is a location where certain pathologized femininities can become especially separate and other. It can be discussed as an institution wherein working-class women have some power to attach their own value to symbolic capital and claim legitimacy, or what Skeggs has termed a 'right to be' (1997: 11).

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