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Directed by Professor Steve Kroll-Smith.

This thesis focuses on the role of the male revue as a liminal setting. Adult play is an opportunity to examine those spaces and times where conventional, work-a-day behaviors are suspended and what is 'normal' often becomes oddly different, at times even a parody of itself. The male revue is one such space and time. The male revue is a unique form of adult play in which conventional norms are simultaneously suspended and reinforced.

The traditional view that male revues are liberating to women is challenged. This study suggests that the show is created to feel liberating while working to reinforce current gender norms. Turner's theory of liminality is paired with Goffman's theory of action and Simmel's ideas about flirtation as social form to investigate the simultaneity of the customary and its opposite in adult play.

Observations were made at six male revues, four of which were in the Triad region of North Carolina. The remaining observations were located in a well-known tourist destination in Nevada. The results indicate that the male revue is a liminal setting in which gender norms are rigidly upheld and abandoned to create the feeling of liberation among the women. There is no evidence to substantiate that this liberation is more than a feeling.

BITTEN AND SPANKED: THE MALE REVUE

AS A LIMINAL SETTING

by

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## CHAPTER I

### LET'S GET READY TO PARTY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MALE REVUE

The male revue emerged onto the social scene in the late 1970's (Dressel & Petersen, 1982). Bars or nightclubs occasionally brought in male entertainers for "ladies' night" events. In 1979, the first full-time, touring male exotic dance troupe was formed and remains one of the few full-time dance troupes today (<http://www.chippendales.com/>). The male revue has increased in popularity since the 1980's, but remains difficult to find.

Clubs dedicated to the sole purpose of women stripping are plentiful and easy to locate. Such clubs do not exist for men stripping. Male revue performances usually take place within dance clubs or bars. These facilities host most of the male revues on a weekly or monthly basis. The few venues that feature nightly male revues frequently refer to themselves as "theatres". They are not a widespread phenomenon and exist predominately in a Western city known for tourist attractions. Patrons of male revues outside of these "theatres" usually discover the venues by word of mouth.

The male revue is more similar to a burlesque show than the typical female strip show. Certainly there are likenesses between the all shows because they both involve stripping and fantasy play, but the stylistic and gender variances create a very different atmosphere at the shows. The male revue begins at a set time and progresses through a

number of acts. There is far more emphasis on themed costuming and the creation of “song and dance” acts than at female strip shows. The male dancers’ performance lip syncing, dancing and stripping down to a thong. Unlike the traditional female exotic dance performance, there are no poles on which men dance (Ryan & Martin, 2001). The show is more like a traditional burlesque show that relies on elements of comedy, dance and striptease (Minsky & Machlin, 1986; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Striptease>). Male revues usually incorporate silliness into the shows. Modern strip clubs forego the folly to focus on the “bump and grind” striptease. They have a tone of seriousness that male revues lack. They are more or less bars in which women strip. The tonal contrasts may impact the audience reactions. The audiences’ response to shows is dissimilar. The patrons of a male revue react with unbridled enthusiasm often screaming madly and groping male dancers. The female strip club audience seems tame compared to that level of exuberance. The current research seems to ignore the differences and examines the settings as if they were the same (Clark, 1985; Dressel & Petersen, 1982a, 1982b; Montemurro, 2001; Montemurro, Bloom & Madell, 2002; Prehn, 1983).

The research on the male revue follows the same format as much of the work on female strip clubs. The focus is on objectification of women and the blatant encouragement of heterosexuality. Women continue to be objectified, but as sources of revenue rather than sexual objects. Research on the male revue suggests that the show is carefully structured to create a setting conducive to feelings of sexual liberation for a price (Clark, 1985; Dressel & Petersen, 1982a, 1982b; Montemurro, 2001; Montemurro, et al., 2002; Prehn, 1983).

This study focuses on the male revue as a type of adult play by virtue of being a liminal setting. The revue is not simply a female strip show with the gender of the dancers and patrons reversed; there is more to the phenomenon. While gender is a difference, there are stylistic variances in the shows and audience that should not be ignored. The crowd at a male revue gets rowdy in a way that would get male patrons expelled from the female strip club. This type of adult play is an outlet in which traditional norms are simultaneously reinforced and suspended. Traditional rules for social status no longer apply once one is engrossed in adult play. A new set of behavioral guidelines emerges within the male revue. Conventional gender norms such as dress are rigidly enforced while the importance of female sexual attractiveness is abandoned. Liminality forms an opportunity for flexibility within the social structure. It is a way of challenging, if only fleeting, social convention. This research explores how and why transcendence occurs from everyday life into a liminal setting in which new behavioral guidelines emerge. These transformations are meant to be brief; therefore the setting is not creating sexually liberated women. It is a type of adult play that promises what it cannot deliver: the transformation of gender roles. The male revue is not a vehicle of social change, but a structured way to release tension.

## CHAPTER II

### FROM PLAYTIME TO PAPER: A LITERATURE REVIEW

The female striptease celebrates a long history. The Sumerian tablets recant the tale of the first known striptease. A consumer following of female strip shows occurred as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The shows gained popularity in the United States during the depression era through the 1950's. The striptease lost esteem during the 60's and 70's, but faced a resurgence in the 1980's that continues today (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Striptease>). Many assume exotic dancing to be a female craft. The term stripper conjures images of women pole dancing on a stage rather than the vibrant, machismo performances of the male revue. Most add male as a descriptor when referencing men that strip. They are male strippers, not just strippers. The literature reflects the longevity of the female strip shows. Research and general knowledge on such clubs is comparatively plentiful. Information on the recent phenomenon of male revues is less common and more difficult to obtain than knowledge of female strip shows.

The research published on female strip clubs covers a variety of theoretical approaches. The articles range from the liberal to radical feminist viewpoints. The radical feminist articles focus on the plight of the female stripper while the liberal feminist perspective heralds the strippers as active members of the social system that use sexuality to their advantage (Murphy, 2003; Wood, 2000). The consensus is that female strippers

are selling fantasy, yet their status as subject or object seems debatable (Clark, 1985; Dressel & Petersen, 1982; Prehn, 1983).

The article by Ryan and Martin (2001) is of particular interest to this research, it is a participant observational study proposing that the female strip show is liminal. The research took place in a club frequented by tourists. It suggests that the female strip show is in some ways similar to sex tourism and therefore a liminal theater. The researchers indicate that these tourists are already displaced from their everyday lives and go in search of activities that further remove them from normative behaviors. While at the club, the patrons abandon the norm of male dominance while upholding femininity as sacred. The authors investigated the reasoning behind the women's decision to strip and the patrons' choice to attend. The dancer's primary motive for stripping was economic while the patrons came in search of action. By action, the authors are referring to Goffman's theoretical explanation of those seeking thrills. The research concludes that female strip clubs are part of the social and tourist world. They exist because of men and their desire to momentarily challenge male- female power relationships. The women are in control at the club by establishing boundaries, but they are still catering to male fantasy. The authors note that the setting is more of a true liminal space for the patrons than dancers. The patrons attend the show for entertainment and return to "normal" life once they leave the club. It is not so easy for the strippers. They continue to dance daily for long periods of time and the work frequently creates negative feelings toward men. It is fantasy for the patron and reality for the women (Ryan & Martin, 2001).

Unlike the highly debated research of female strip clubs, the research on male revues lacks the contention. The relative newness of the male strip show may play a role in this deficit. The studies have been participant observation studies and seek to explain the scene. Dressel and Petersen (1982) enlist the help of gender theory. Prehn (1983) examined a club that regularly featured female strippers and began to bring in male strippers once a week. He found female patrons to be more expressive than male patrons and that the presence of male strippers elevated the level of gender equality among patrons. Clark (1985) offers an exploration of the scene and acknowledges that it is not a means of creating gender equality. Montemurro (2001) studied social control at the male revue. Montemurro et al. (2002) developed a typology of the patrons.

Much of the research focuses on identifying an objectified party. It is reported that both parties are objectified, but in different ways. Some of the articles adopt the perspective that the male revue is liberating for women and argue that the experience creates small advances in gender equality. On the other hand, the research indicates gender discrimination is still present because the gender role reversal is only temporary (Clark, 1985; Dressel & Petersen, 1982a, 1982b; Prehn, 1983). Overall, the topic seems to lack the emotional fervor of female strip club research. It reflects the lighthearted attitude of the male revue patrons. The women are out for a good time and to lose their inhibitions.

Dressel and Petersen (1982a, 1982b) were among the first to research the male revue. They have published two articles on the venue. Both articles focus on the transcendence of typical gender roles at the male revue. In fact, the articles are very much

alike. They aim to debunk the assumption that women are sexually passive while examining the club's egalitarian and heterosexually focused theme. The authors argue that the egalitarian aspects of the show are constructed rather than naturally occurring facets. The creation and encouragement of this motif is an effort to make a profit. The female patrons enjoy the idea of equal rights. Dressel and Petersen (1982a) claim that this is to divert attention from the club's primary objective to earn money. The women visiting the club seem to be interested in equality and the male revue as a liberating experience. The emcee and club employees actively encourage heterosexuality. This is the most beneficial for the dancers that make money by creating intensely masculine characters and interacting with female patrons. The women become sexually assertive and exploitive of the dancers. They even go as far as propositioning or abusing the dancers.

Despite the chaotic appearance of the audience, male revues are structured, patterned behaviors. The carefully constructed show allows women to violate norms within limits, creating the feeling of liberation. The scene is orchestrated through choreography, costumes, music and audience participation. It relies heavily on a female dominated audience. A gender homogeneous environment is the most important factor in the production of women's outrageous behavior. Women feel reticent to act in a sexually aggressive manner in the presence men who are not exotic dancers (Dressel & Petersen, 1982a). Patrons perceive the male revue as a place free of judgment. They abandon normative sexual behaviors. Women become sexually aggressive, verbally demanding and sometimes abusive. There is a sense of vengeance among the women at the club. The

mistreatment of male strippers is a pay back for years of oppression. This sexual aggression generates the illusion of power (Dressel & Petersen, 1982b).

There is a perception of power and status linked to gender roles and sexuality. They act out sexually and men become the sexual objects. This emancipation of female sexuality creates a feeling of elevated social status and power. Men experience the same feelings of vulnerability and degradation that women face because of objectification. The few hours during the show are a glimpse into a dramatic role reversal (Dressel & Petersen, 1982a, 1982b). At the male revue, gender inequality goes unrecognized. Hidden beneath the fabricated world of female sexual liberation is a commercialized endorsement of heterosexuality (Dressel & Petersen, 1982a, 1982b). Men have had an outlet for commercialized heterosexuality and the male revue is the women's chance. The heterosexual interaction is the main attraction at the male revue. The show is a bonding experience for women revolving around men (Dressel & Petersen, 1982a). The creators and performers of the show are not the only perpetrators of gender bias.

Prehn (1983) argues that this role reversal lead to social change. His research took place in a small town club that offered male exotic dancers as featured performers for a time. After the club ceased to have male strippers, it appeared more integrated. There were more women and they occupied seats in a once male dominated area of the club. Gender equality requires more than integrated seating at a small town club. The show is an alternate reality in which both parties are objectified. The women view the men as sexual objects while the men view the women as sources of income. As long as men

retain the social and economic power outside of the show, there is not an actual reversal of roles (Clark, 1985). The male revue is not void of gender discrimination.

Many nightclubs featuring strippers or traditional strip clubs encourage gender discrimination. Some clubs charge a higher cover charge on male strip nights than on female strip nights. The club believes it to be legitimate because the male dancers are featured entertainers. The status of featured dancer brings a higher pay for the male stripper. Featured dancers only need to perform a portion of the time a regular shift dancer must work to earn the same income. He brings home more money for less work in better conditions than a female dancer (Clark, 1985; Prehn, 1983). In addition to higher pay, the male dancer experiences a more fluid boundary between the dancer and himself.

Dancers and patrons frequently touch each other in a sexual manner, but the male revue is not a free for all. Montemurro found that there are limitations on behaviors. The dancers and patrons each have their own set of boundaries. The patrons set the restrictions for the dancers while the dancers set the limits for the patrons. They establish these rules through verbal cues or by simply moving hands. As a whole, both parties respect the boundaries once they are determined. If a patron does violate the limitations, the most frequent sanction is a negative reaction from the dancer and the most severe is expulsion from the club. Very few patrons receive sanctions because the boundaries are loose (Montemurro, 2001). Some women are more likely to act aggressively while others cower on the sidelines.

Montemurro et al. (2002) investigated these different behavior patterns and developed a typology. They model their categorization after Erickson and Tewksbury's

typology of patrons at female strip clubs. The division of female patrons is Ringleaders, Girlfriends, Insiders, Outsiders and Sideliners. They range from the outlandish to the timid. The Ringleader is obviously out for a wild time. She makes every effort to be a one-woman party. She yells the loudest, dances the hardest and tries to stand out. She emphasizes her flamboyant attitude with a distinctive outfit or hairstyle. Luckily, this type of patron is the least common. There are only a few in every audience. The majority of the audience falls into the category of Girlfriends. These women attend the show in groups. The Girlfriends see the male revue as a venue for festivity. They attend the male revue to celebrate a birthday, a bachelorette party or a ladies' night out. They get rowdy and participate, but not at the same level as the Ringleader. They blend as a cohesive group rather than a one-woman party.

The Girlfriends remain among their group of friends. They mingle with other patrons, the dancers and workers, but only briefly. The Insiders interact primarily with club employees or dancers. They know the dancers, bartenders or club managers on a personal level. They have access to areas of the club from which others are restricted, such as backstage or a VIP section. They blend into the crowd when they are not exercising their special status. The last two types of patron fail to integrate with the others. Outsiders, as the name suggests, did not fit into the typical patron stereotype. They were either substantially older than the other women were or male. The Outsiders sit on the edges of the audience. They have a low level of participation and lack interaction with the other patrons. The Outsiders are more active than the Sideliners. The Sideliners seem embarrassed by the scene. They attempt to fade into the edges of the club

and remain timid around the dancers. They lack the exuberant participation of the other groups. Each type of patron is distinctive. (Montemurro et al., 2002). The typology is merely the beginning of research on the male revue. There is more to the scene than the research suggests.

The lack of research on the male strip show leaves the story untold. Many facets of male revue remain unexplored. The author is unaware of any comparative studies of various types of strip shows. Every article offers a vivid description of the dancers, patrons and scene. Overall, the current research purposes to explain and categorize behaviors at the male revue. The show provides feelings of gender equality and the patrons seem to enjoy this even if it is only temporary. Most argue that this role reversal only lasts as long as the show. All of the researchers agree that it appears that the women have tremendous amounts of fun at the revue. The purpose of this paper is to explore the social function that lingers beneath the façade of female liberation. By investigating the male revue as a liminal setting, the researcher hopes to shed some light on its cultural significance.

## CHAPTER III

### MAKING IT MORE THAN JUST A GOOD TIME: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The male revue is a more than just a good time. It is a far more serious, multi-functional element of society than most believe. This form of play becomes a structural outlet for the reversal of normative behaviors. It can provide a sense of power, liberation and, simultaneously, a confirmation of gender norms by developing into a liminal setting. Victor Turner, Erving Goffman, Georg Simmel and literature from gender theory guide the theoretical argument for the cultural importance of the male revue.

Turner's theory of liminality operates on the structural level. It explains how the environment is created and sustained. It rationalizes why a period in time such as this is necessary. The male revue provides a time and place to fulfill a social need that is not being satisfied by other aspects of social structure. The structure influences behavioral norms and social status. Liminality is an outlet from other structural entities. A culture might incorporate these betwixt and between periods to create temporary or permanent transitions in social status. Liminal periods allow transitions to occur without social upheaval. Behaviors within these settings are both ritual and out of the ordinary. Setting aside time for these shifts in behavior helps maintain order (Turner, 1969).

If liminality helps explain the larger structural picture, Goffman makes sense of the micro level. Action is a social process that connects the individual to the social

structure. His theory of action and the character contests justifies women's desire to seek out the male revue (Goffman, 1967). The women attend the show in search of feelings of sexual liberation and gender equality. The revue challenges them to prove that they are comfortable with asking for a sexually charged encounter. It verifies that these women can act like men and object others for sexual gratification.

One of the ways that the risk occurs in the action is flirtation. Women trade their means of power to experiment with financial power. The male dancers adopt the role of the flirt. This reversal of power types is possible because, according to Simmel (1984), flirtation is a social form. The particulars of the interaction are not important; rather it is the form of these interactions that is of value. It grants a sense of familiarity within the liminal setting. Flirtation at the male revue is crucial to liminality. It is a normative behavior that is maintained, but also altered. The social forms and norms remain the same only the actor of the social forms changes (Simmel, 1984).

Turner's idea of liminality is a familiar concept in anthropology. The liminal period is a state of ambiguity. It is a unique moment in time in which norms are simultaneously reinforced and suspended. There is a possibility that participants can reemerge with a new social status. Anthropology uses the term to describe events such as rites of passage (Turner, 1969). In the age of modernity, rites of passage are becoming less common.

In the absence of rites of passage, modern society has play. Changes in social status are not guaranteed through play as they were with traditional rites of passage. In a segmented world, it is difficult to alter social categorizations. One group may recognize

the transition while others remain unaware or choose to ignore it. Globalization makes the world appear smaller and cultures blend. Social groups are fluid and semi-permanent. The technological developments of modern society create freedom and social change. Geographical and cultural boundaries are more lax than ever. People are not tied to a geographic location anymore. Extended families are spread across the world. There is more focus on the individual. Social groups are less important. Technology allows people to interact without face to face contact. There was far less diversity within a small area prior to modernity. There can be several families with different cultural and religious beliefs within one neighborhood (Giddens, 1991).

Play offers an opportunity to unite by abandoning the usual differences in social status. Play does not involve specific religious beliefs and generally operates within the boundaries of general culturally accepted ideas. Cultures that remain distant from technological advances maintain rites of passage. There is still ritual tied to entering adulthood, child birth or marriage. In cultures affected by modernity, the age at which one becomes an adult varies by opinion; while marriage and child birth may never occur for some. Play is not dependent on social status or specific cultural values.

The male revue is an example of this form of liminal play. Ultimately, it provides a time and place for women to stray from typical gender norms outside of mainstream culture. It is acceptable to experiment, but only in a limited setting. The patrons use the male revue to explore options that are not available to them in the outside world (Turner, 1969). After playing with new social roles, the patrons reenter society feeling as if they have been liberated from the constraints of everyday gender. This freedom is only

temporary because the rest of society does not recognize the transcendence of stereotypical gender roles.

Just as the transformation of gender roles is ignored outside of the club, social categories that matter outside of the venue become inconsequential. The change is achieved by separating the participants from their original social group. Once larger social groups are abandoned, norms are simultaneously reinforced and suspended. Members of the liminal period reincorporate into society and feel as if they are liberated, sexually assertive women (Turner, 1969). Only the women themselves and those that attended the show with them acknowledge the new found freedom. It's more of quite smugness than an actual transformation.

Women do not attend the male revue with the intention of participating in liminality. They go to the show for individual reasons. They are looking to gain something from the experience for themselves. The male revue is exactly the type of place that Goffman (1967) describes as "where the action is". It is a heightened period of excitement that challenges the participants' character. The action draws the women to the male revue. They feel like they are engaging in risky behavior. The action is what gratifies them (Goffman, 1967). The attention from the dancers leaves the women feeling sexually desirable after the male revue. The dancers attend to patrons because of their money. The women seem to interpret the interest as confirmation of their physical attractiveness. These feelings of desirability rejuvenate their femininity and make the women feel powerful. They walk away feeling assured that they are in fact liberated, assertive women.

In the everyday social world, women use flirtation to gain power according to Simmel (1984). The act of flirting itself does not end in refusal or acceptance of sexual advances. The power behind the flirt lies in this lack of decisiveness (Simmel, 1984). The male revue is the perfect environment for the flirt. Stripping is the art of the tease. In this setting, flirtation is a fluctuation in power. The men and women both flirt, but at different times throughout the night. They take turns being the object of the flirtation. For most of the evening, the male dancer maintains the role.

The male exotic dance club offers a glimpse of the role reversal of the object. The club forces women to ask for a sexually charged encounter. It allows women to move in a space without being the object of a sexual gaze. Encroachments in personal space usually only happen when they are invited. In mainstream society, female personal space is often synonymous with available space, whereas male personal space has strict boundaries (Richardson, 1977; Salifilios-Rothschild, 1977). In the male exotic dance club, there is an inversion of personal space boundaries. Women openly violate the dancers' boundaries by grabbing and touching them. The dancers' rarely approach women that have not cued them (Montemurro, 2001). Although women cease to be the object of the gaze, some social norms stay intact.

Clothing is the most obvious example. The patrons dress as if they were attending a dance club or party. They are wearing makeup, jewelry, and feminine, often sexy clothing. The male dancers' costumes have an heir of masculine bravado. They dress as cowboys, police officers, gangsters and other highly masculine characters. This play between the patrons and dancers has an interesting balance between suspending norms

and reinforcing them. Many of the negotiated norms at the male revue are gender norms. The opposite sex adopts traditionally masculine or feminine ways of acting.

Society has prescribed gender appropriate ways of acting. These norms are an integral part of liminality. The reversal of norms produces a liminal setting (Turner, 1969). The male revue as a liminal setting transposes predominately gender norms. The literature argues that women lack the aggressive qualities of men. This passivity carries through into all areas of a woman's life thus impacting norms from speech patterns to sexuality. It becomes a behavioral expectation or norm. Most norms require that women occupy space as a passive object. A woman is meant to field the demands of others rather than make them. The social rules require women to present themselves in an attractive, behaviorally subdued manner. As a result of these obligations, women are less likely to make direct statements or demands of others. When women speak, they tend to use qualifiers and make less direct vocalizations giving the impression of uncertainty (Newman, 2004; Richardson & Walum 1977; Safilios-Rothschild, 1977). A demand or direct statement is certainly not of a sexual nature if made. There are significant differences in verbal space as well. Not surprisingly, men dominate verbally. They use more verbal space and speak louder (Newman, 2004). This submissive approach to speech holds women back and affects other areas of their lives.

Sexuality is one such area. It traps women in a strange dichotomy. She must balance between being sexually appealing, but not promiscuous. Women are not to be sexually aggressive or even sexually assertive. Her role is the sexual gatekeeper. She

must ward off the sexually aggressive male. Women are to resist the ever-persistent man and become objects for procurement (Safilios-Rothschild, 1977).

This objectified status creates an environment in which women are frequently touched without permission. People are more willing to extend into a woman's space than a man's space. Because of this violation of space, women often keep their limbs close to their bodies and occupy a small amount of personal space. For example, women sit with their legs crossed whereas men sit with their knees far apart. Women are not likely to extend their legs or arms far from their bodies. Any touch that a woman administers should be tender and gentle, whereas rough housing and fighting are allowable within the bounds of masculinity (Newman, 2004; Richardson & Walum, 1977; Safilios-Rothschild, 1977). This objectification and fear of using the space around them causes women to rely heavily on physical appearance and sexual attractiveness for social status. Men are not objects. They do not need to depend on physical attractiveness to lure a mate. They are valued for their ability to achieve power and wealth. Men entice female affection through financial means (Safilios-Rothschild, 1977). Patrons and dancers negotiate typical gender norms at the male revue.

The male revue draws women and men willing to participate in a scene that challenges social norms. They temporarily abandon their usual social status to engage in a liminal period. In the midst of the betwixt and between period, the patrons experience action, which is sought in an effort to confirm character and provide feelings of excitement. The dancers and patrons use flirtation as the primary way to engage in risky behavior because it feels exhilarating, yet lacks real danger. The purpose of the study is

to investigate the ways in which the male revue is a liminal setting, how it becomes that way and why we have created such an environment.

## CHAPTER IV

### MORE THAN JUST FUN AND THONGS: THE METHOD TO THE MADNESS

Most people assume that the approach to gathering the data involves hanging out at a male strip club. This assumption is partially correct. Indeed, the methodology is ethnomethodological participant observation (Babbie, 1986). This is the only viable mode for gathering information. The male revue is a relatively new scene and it is still considered scandalous by many. Those two factors alone rule out the possibility of informed observation, interviews and data sets. There is so little research on male revues that researchers must see the scene for themselves. Interviewing patrons or dancers without observations of the shows may paint an incomplete picture because the male revue is risqué, participants may hesitate to divulge their experience.

The male revue is taboo and it is important to gain access without disrupting the patrons' normal behavior in the club. The dancers and patrons may act differently toward someone viewed as an observer rather than a patron. The setting is sensitive to "outsiders" and blatant observation of the patron would create a feeling of self-consciousness in the crowd. The dancers and patrons do not want to be caught doing something "naughty", such as participating in a male revue. Participant observation allows the researcher to observe the setting without disrupting the process. The inclusion provides an opportunity for the researcher to gain a better understanding of the male

revue (Babbie,1986). By choosing this method, I feel the escalation of energy of the group and grasp the relationship between the patron and dancer. It equips me with the emotive experience of the male revue. The emotive experience is limited because I must hold back to maintain the ability to observe. This causes me to miss the pinnacle of the affect, which is both positive and negative. I preserve her ability to observe, but may miss an experience created by full immersion.

The setting for the observations varies due to limited research opportunities. There are six observations in four locations. Observations were made predominately in a Southeastern state in two settings and a large Western tourist town (Tables 1 and 2). This is largely due to the limited availability of research opportunities. Local bars and clubs periodically host male revues. Male revues are found via internet, word of month, radio and news publications.

One club in which observations were made on a Wednesday is a Country-Western themed place frequented by college students. My confederates and I purchased tickets at the door. There are two sections of the club. One section contains the bar, a mechanical bull, a dance floor and a few couches. This section overlooks the other. The other section has a stage and a variety of seating. There were three seating options. The couch section was the most expensive and was located directly in front of the stage. “Barrel seats” (stools placed around a large barrel) were in a semi-circle behind the couches. Long tables mixed among the “barrel seats” were to accommodate large parties. The least expensive seating option was the “floor”. Patrons with these tickets were only permitted to stand in the bar section of the club and look over a half wall at the male revue.

Other observations took place in a club that offers a regular male revue. The club advertises itself as “3 clubs in one”. It presents female dancers in one area, a dance club in the center and male dancers in another area. The entire club was dimly lit. The room in which the male dancers performed was small with rows of chairs, an aisle off to the side and a tiny stage. The deejay worked from the stage and some dancers utilized the remaining stage space while others danced in the aisle. The back wall was mirrored and there were strobe lights in every corner creating a dizzying effect.

The other two observations took place in a famous, large Western tourist destination. There are theaters within casinos that offer nightly shows. One theater is very dark and has a stage surrounded by long tables with chairs. There is a semi-circle half wall that divides that room. Behind the wall are more long tables and a bar in the back corner. The stage was lit and a slideshow of the dancers was shown as the patrons took their seats.

The other theatre could be described as the quintessential male revue. Every patron is ushered into the holding area with small tables, a bar and scantily clad waiters. Patrons chat and drink somewhere between 30 and 45 minutes. The crowd is then ushered into the actual theater. It looked remarkably like a normal theater except the ceiling is lower than normal. The seating is what one would find in a playhouse or movie theatre and two large aisles divide the seating into three sections. There was a small bar in the back and waiters take orders and serve drinks to the audience. This theater was softly lit too. All of the male revues have a similar ambiance. They are dark rooms with a stage and a bar. The music is always loud and heavy with bass and the audience rowdy.

Male revues appear to be easy places to access because they are public and anyone with a ticket is allowed to enter. Each observation happens under the guise of a “Girls Night Out”. Most women do not attend male revues alone; with the exception of one observation, every outing involves attending the show with at least one other woman. This is the most difficult aspect of the participant observation. Women often volunteer and back out at the last minute. Attending male strip clubs does not seem to be a priority for most women available to me. Some women think the show seems fun until they are presented with going as a reality. They feel too scared and intimidated to attend the show. The discovery of some male revues relies on word of mouth and that can create short notice for acquiring confederates. The women are friends of mine that volunteer to attend. I offer my services as the designated driver for the evening and occasionally buy the confederate’s ticket as incentive. The women are between the ages of 21 and 40. These are the only women aware that research is taking place. Confidentiality is guaranteed to each woman and none of them are mentioned in this research. The confederates and I arrive as a group between 15 and 30 minutes before the show time. The early arrival assures my choice of seating. Ideal seating allows for a view of the stage and the majority of the patrons. The middle of the room usually provides the best view.

Observations occur during seating, the performance and the exit. I am looking for suspended and reinforced gender norms by both the patron and dancer. Specifically, I’m looking for everyday gendered behaviors like use of physical space, clothing choices, use of verbal space and financial means. I watch for norms that are maintained and altered. I will need to be aware that suspended norms will be easier to spot than reinforced norms. I

must appear to be a patron while observing behaviors of other patrons and the dancers.

Participation and limited patron conversation are necessities for normal appearances.

My accomplices and I participate in the show just as the other patrons participate. The confederates consume alcoholic beverages. I drink soda with a lemon to give the appearance of a mixed drink or I place a beer in front of me. Most patrons dress as if they were going to a dance club. We wear dressy, feminine clothing. An example of a typical outfit is a low cut shirt made of a thin fabric, nice looking, fitted jeans and heels. Most handbags are small, compact and filled with bills.

The most important item the women bring is the one-dollar bills. Every patron seems to have a large supply of ones. My confederates and I fully engage ourselves in the participation of the show. Everyone screams, waves their ones and receives dances. I work to maintain a careful balance between participation and observation. There is a signal between the confederates and myself to help police the balance. My confederates have agreed to poke me if I am in danger of appearing creepy by staring at other patrons. We stay until we are among the last to leave. This provides an opportunity for eavesdropping and views of the patrons in more light. It is normal for women to mull around the area after the show. We easily blend into the group.

Conversation with other patrons is limited to small talk to avoid the possibility of patron discomfort. Any conversation with patrons is casual, such as, "Have you been to one of these before?", "Congratulations on your upcoming wedding!", "He's cute!" etc. Conversations with the dancers will take the form of informal chatting with questions such as, "How long have you been a dancer?" There will be no probing questions asked

to either party to avoid suspension. Casual conversation among patrons and dancers is common at the male revue.

There are six observations in this study. Each observation lasts approximately 3 hours. The observation can vary between 2.5 hours up to 4 hours. After the show, the confederates and I excitedly tell stories to each other from the show. This is normal patron behavior and it helps refresh my memory. Field notes were written after the show because there was not an opportunity to jot notes inconspicuously at the venue.

The design of the study is imposed, in part, by the particular nature of the research setting. It is, arguably, the only way to access the environment without alerting patrons and dancers to the presence of a researcher. It allows observation of normal behaviors at a male revue. The participation in patron behaviors provides a better understanding of the norms in this setting. While this method is the best possible means of observation in this setting, it does have limitations. Due to the length of the observation time, I may forget things between leaving the show and writing my field notes. It requires a lot of concentration on my part to remember as much about the setting as possible. I am also unable to view the entire audience and dancers all at once so there must be some things I missed. The confederates are both a strength and limitation to the study. They provide me with a means of blending with other patrons, but they also can be difficult. Patrons back out at the last minute causing the observation to be cancelled. Overall, the study strengths outweigh the limitations.

## CHAPTER V

### FROM AVERAGE WOMAN TO BEING BITTEN AND SPANKED: A DESCRIPTIVE JOURNEY INTO THE MALE REVUE

The data for this study is a descriptive overview of my observations of various male revues. Each performance differs from the last; as a result the following depiction focuses on the general aspects of the male revue. The variations are minimal, such as costumes, dance moves and song choices. The inconsistencies are minor and therefore inconsequential to this study.

#### **Before the Show**

The mood before the show is the same at every venue. The air is full of energy. I waited in line prior to five of my observations. The location was different, but the patrons acted the same. We funnel into a single file line giggling like school girls. The line is predominately white women dressed in night club attire. Each patron tries her best to look sexy. I have spent over an hour getting ready to go to the male revue. I have even purchased new tops to wear. A quick view of the line leads me to believe that others have done the same.

Glancing down the line reveals an array of trendy low cut shirts and tight pants. Most of the pants are black or denim. It is uncommon to see a woman in a skirt and even more rare to see a woman in a dress. A dress is too formal for the occasion. It appears that cleavage is the favorite accessory followed closely by high heels. The future patrons wear makeup and many opt for perfume. Most patrons wear their hair down and styled.

Some women do last minute primping in the line. They apply lipstick, powder or fix a friend's hair. We slowly make our way to the ticket podium.

Half of the women purchase their tickets at the door and others call ahead to reserve their space. A general seating ticket at local shows cost ten dollars and professional shows charge up to fifty dollars per ticket. VIP tickets cost more and are only provided if the patron asks about them. The employee taking tickets and money in five observations is a woman. She smiles and says things like, "You're in for a good time," as she checks identification. It is as if she is welcoming and reassuring us that it will be fun.

The entrance of every venue was similar. We enter the club through a narrow hallway and the lights get progressively dimmer until we reach the room with a bar. Lights swirl around the darkened room and loud music blares. The music is heavy with bass, the kind one can feel in her chest. Even the country-western venue manages to play music that makes the floors thud with bass. The air is thick with anticipation and the smell of smoke and stale alcohol. The venues that claim to be theatres are supposed to be non-smoking, but somehow they still have the faint smell of smoke. It may waft off patrons or it may be left over from sneaked cigarettes. The scene is almost disorienting. The sensory overload seems to draw us away from the outside world and into a place where nothing else exists. It is similar to waiting for a concert to begin, but there is more nervous energy in the crowd.

Some women chug drinks while others chain smoke or laugh uneasily with friends. Social groups that once mattered begin to fall away as we take our positions for

the show to begin. There is a sense of solidarity forming, but we are still wary of other patrons. We make small talk with each other asking whether other patrons have been to this type of show before. We mentally size each other up in terms of fear. I could hear women whisper about others looking too scared or too excited. Most women are trying to play it cool, like they've seen mostly naked men before, but not too many. I find myself doing the same thing. During my first trip, a woman at the table next to mine asks if I had been to a male revue before. I try very hard to hide my nervousness and sound overly confident. She quit talking to me. By the third visit, I am comfortable and make sure to project a relaxed attitude. I know what to expect and how to behave. My novice wears off by my fourth observation. I discover that I feel guarded about how frequently I visit a male revue. I am anxious about seeming like one of "those girls".

The audience is divided into two major groups. There are the "normal" girls and "those girls". "Those girls" appear too eager and too comfortable at the beginning. They are the first to cheer and touch the dancers. Some refer to the as "desperate". The uneasy and the confident patrons look upon "those girls" with shame. "Those girls" remain unapologetic for their actions. On my final observation, I went alone guaranteeing myself a position as one of "those girls". I worried about facing the impending shame. I finally realized why "those girls" were unabashed. They knew what I had missed among the safety of my group. The two social groups eventually blend into one because we all become "those girls" eventually.

### **It's Showtime!**

The lights dim further and the music lowers. Smoke billows from the stage of the shows that take place in their own theater. It takes a minute for the audience to start screaming. The show begins. The emcee takes the stage. This attractive male becomes the master of ceremonies. He quiets the crowd and begins his speech that dictates the rules and pumps up the audience. The talk is laden with sexual innuendos, guarantees that the dancers are here simply to please the patrons and promises that our presence makes us liberated women. The emcee encourages the audience to objectify the dancers by referring to them as “meat”, “man meat”, etc. Every venue promises that “these men are her for YOU!” We are encouraged to gently touch the men with sayings like, “Remember ladies, stroke it, but don't choke it!” The monologue usually promotes economic independence for women.

At local shows, the emcee orders the audience to scream if they attend college, work or do both. At Cowboy Bob's, he usually follows with a comment about the worthlessness of the men at home. The speeches all vary, but they carry the same message. The emcee lauds the women for being independent, for freeing themselves from the constraints of everyday life and men. He is persuading the women to adjust to the new norms. The speech always ends with a comment like, “Remember Ladies, what happens here, stays here!” It gives the women permission to objectify the dancers and freely express their sexuality. We patrons are slow to warm to the idea. We sit or stand with their arms close to our bodies. There is screaming and clapping, but it is only a fraction of what is to come. The emcee is still in control and instructs the crowd's

behavior. He reminds the crowd that they have to scream for the dancers and feed one dollar bills into their thongs. The patrons do not need bills at Lords of the Night or the Boom Boom men. There are far too many women to dance for and only those selected from the crowd get lap dances.

The emcee disappears after he introduces the first dancer. He reemerges only to introduce subsequent dancers or ask men to leave. Local shows ban men and professional shows allow them. Only three men attended the professional shows during my observation. Two of the men came with a group of women and did nothing to indicate that they were partnered with any of the women. The other man seemed to be partnered with his female companion because he kept touching her.

### **The Stage Dance**

There is a standard look for male dancers. As a whole, the men are very good-looking. The men must invest a great deal of time and energy to maintain their look. They are well groomed. Many have short hair that is styled with gel and a few have long hair that is left loose. Those with long hair toss their hair back repeatedly during their acts. Some of them dye their hair or have tattoos. Men at the local level are more likely to have several tattoos on their arms, back or chest. Some professionals have one or two arm tattoos, but only a small fraction of the troupe is tattooed. The professional companies maintain a higher level of attractiveness than local shows. All of their bodies are chiseled, tanned and hairless, but the local revues allow dancers to fall short of chiseled. Some have less defined muscles and compensate for their shortcomings by flexing. They oil themselves before performing, so the men glisten and smell like baby oil.

Every dancer has an attractive face to match his well defined body. In general, the men are not good-looking enough to model. They are commonly handsome rather than striking. This may be due to their stature. Many of them are short to medium height and some have small muscular frames. As a 5'7" woman of average build, many dancers are not much bigger than me. I was shocked once during a lap dance at Cowboy Bob's when I discovered that one dancer's knees are smaller than mine. Most dancers stand a few inches taller than me. The men appear exceptionally confident which boosts their level of attractiveness.

For most patrons, an unattractive exotic dancer is a joke. Women dare each other to put a dollar in the thong of the dancer with a little paunchiness and stubbly patches of body hair. Cowboy Bob's and Slick Rick's featured dancers that did not fit the chiseled image of the typical male dancer. At Cowboy Bob's, a new dancer neglected to shave his buttocks and had pale creases underneath the buttocks that escaped the artificial light of the tanning bed. He had a slight belly and a baby face. Most of the women in the audience seemed to find the combination of his novice and less than impeccable grooming unappealing. He was ignored by quite a few women. The atypical dancer at Slick Rick's seemed to have a fan base despite his obese frame. Some women gave him money as a joke, but others appeared to actually like him.

The costumes add to the level of attractiveness for the dancer. Professional shows spend substantially more money on costuming and props than the local shows. It makes him seem less like a real person and more like a fantasy. The dancers step on to the stage oozing masculinity in their campy costumes. Each one seems to be more ridiculously

manly than the last. The first acts are Terminators, businessmen, men in button front shirts, wizards, monks, gangsters or men in spandex costumes. The spandex outfits are seen only during group numbers at the professional shows. The costumes at the beginning are more of a restrained masculinity than the costumes later in the show. They are not as over the top as the rest of the costumes. The costumes use street clothes, like jeans or a suit. The dancers in suits portray a business man coming home from work to romance his lady usually. The monk and wizard have on a cloak, but wear black pants underneath. There are only a few of these more subtle costumes in each performance. After the array of fairly mannish costumes, the dancers bring out the heavy hitters, the men in uniform. These are the manliest of men; they are the policemen, firemen, military men, construction workers, the men in leather and the cowboy. The cowboy and military man in dress whites are the favorites. The audience explodes at the sight of them.

The dancers wear exceptionally manly looking costumes only to peel them off to reveal their hairless, muscular bodies in a thong. They stuff their thongs much the same way that women wear padded bras. The dancers wear big black lace up boots as part of their costumes. At local clubs, the dancers with the best costumes keep part of their costume on as they circulate the room for lap dances. The cowboy keeps his hat and chaps on, the leather man carries his whip and the others wear their hats. The men sport thongs, black boots and hat for most of the night.

This costuming is usual for a male revue with mostly white dancers and patrons. My last observation took place in a male revue with predominately African-American patrons and dancers. The costumes are less stereotypically masculine. They are more like

bondage than the uniform type costumes of the white male revue. The costumes are made of brightly colored vinyl, spandex and panne velvet. They are tightly fit and unlike street clothes. Some pants have one short and one full-length leg. The shirts have one sleeve or holes in the side. The dancers are fully clothed, but manage to show quite a bit of skin. Many wear knee- high vinyl boot covers or panne velvet booties. Some carry props such as a whip or a stick. Once they strip, they are not wearing a thong. They sport a penis sock instead. The sock is tight and clings to their erection. It is obvious that first time patrons are uncomfortable with the erections. We lean away from the dancer or put our hands up to shield ourselves from his penis. The presence of the erection is treated as commonplace by more experienced patrons. I was shocked because I was only familiar with predominately white male revues in which erections are a faux pas.

On my first observation at Cowboy Bob's, a first time dancer achieved an erection and the crowd was horrified. They pointed, shrieked and laughed. The dancer was embarrassed and danced with his back toward the audience until his erection had subsided. He finished his dance and patrons were reluctant to buy a lap dance from him. The performances at both revues follow the same format despite the differences in costuming.

The performance is more like a burlesque show than a female strip tease. The dancer is announced by the emcee and the crowd roars as he takes the stage. The act is a combination of dancing, acrobatics and lip syncing. The style of dance most resembles hip hop and jazz. There are dance moves unique to the male revue. The quintessential moves are the pelvic thrust, crotch grab and chest rub. Every dancer utilizes these moves

through out the course of the show. The local dancers choreograph their own routines and choose their own music. The professional groups look like they hire choreographers to plan the performance. The continuity, costumes and props of the professional shows are better, but the actual dancing is comparable to the local shows. It appears that male exotic dancers are good dancers, but have a fairly limited repertoire.

The music matches the costume style. The cowboy routine is done to a country song like “Save a Horse, Ride a Cowboy”. Blue collar costumes, such as the construction worker, are accompanied by rock. The businessman dances to R&B because he is portrayed as the romantic. The others use well-known hip hop or pop music that works well with their theme.

The music plays and the dancer begins his routine. The first part of the dance usually reminds me of a good high school talent show act. The dancer is fully costumed as he dances and lip syncs to his song of choice. The first acts of the night struggle to get us to cheer. The youngest and least experienced dancers are first. They face the daunting task of warming up the audience. It is always slow to get excited. The dancers give it everything they have to pump up the crowd. They stop dancing occasionally and beg for louder cheers. The dancer continues his act despite the minimal applause. He knows we will eventually scream wildly, but for another dancer.

Each dancer follows the same routine arrangement despite his position in the line up. He takes the stage and begins dancing. We laugh, shout and clap during the clothed performance. We laugh from uneasiness and the sheer absurdity of a grown man lip syncing in a costume. Some acts are corny and the audience fills with giggles. Some of

the goofy acts seem endearing and others are just plain funny. One silly routine had a performer dance in front of an old metal fan. It looked like a low budget Michael Jackson video. Another dancer rode a plastic toy tractor on stage dressed as a cowboy. The Michael Jackson act was ridiculous, but there was something charming about the cowboy on his plastic tractor. The cowboy meant to be funny and gave us a “boys will be boys” shrug. The Michael Jackson dancer performed his routine with a straight face. The dancer seemed unaffected by the laughter and continues to perform. Both of these routines occurred on my second observation at Cowboy Bob’s.

After about a minute, the dancer acts like he is going to take his shirt off. The audience cheers with delight. The first few acts make us scream louder before he removes his shirt. This happened during every observation. Once we are sufficiently frenzied, he proceeds to strip. The dancers that perform later in the night have no need to encourage the patrons to scream. It is impossible to increase the volume. Most audience members can not scream any louder. The dancer tears his t-shirt off, lifts the costume over his head as he flexes his abs or drops a button up shirt to the floor. If a dancer tears his t-shirt, he whips it around his head and tosses it into the audience. The women near the t-shirt jump for it and yank from each other. The victorious patron waves the torn shirt above her head to show the others that she has it. It looks like a bridal bouquet toss without the flowers and bridesmaids. The performer continues to dance shirtless throughout the squabble. He breaks out his best moves to regain attention. Flips, spins and fancy footwork are the crowd’s favorite moves. We enthusiastically squeal at flips, splits between chairs or any other movement demonstrating athletic prowess. The lip syncing fades in and out of the

performance once the shirt is gone and the harder dance steps begin. He teases the crowd by pretending to take off his pants. We scream, clap, stomp and beg for him to take it all off. We yell lewd comments and bark orders like “Take it off!” The dancer responds by taunting us some more. He smirks as he grabs the front of his pants mid thigh and rips them off. The crowd erupts as he tosses his pants to the side. He thrusts his pelvis, shakes his hips and extends his arms into the air as if he is celebrating his partial nudity. He turns his back toward the audience and shakes his buttocks. We continue to scream and wave our arms in the air.

The most entertaining performer dances at the peak of the evening. He strips in the same manner as the other dancers, but his act is amplified. He dances harder, flips longer and does splits in the air. This dancer at the Boom Boom Men show jumps onto a table in the audience and grabs someone’s beer. He takes a swig of beer, pours some on his chest and whips the bottle around his head spraying beer on the nearby patrons. Women shoot from their seats and scream at the top of their lungs. They stomp their feet and clap their hands above their heads. The explosion of screams almost drowns out the music. The women at the table grope the dancer’s legs and buttocks. We maintain the heightened level of excitement for the rest of the night. The dancers that follow contend with the peak performance by sliding their thongs off and covering themselves with a strategically placed prop right before slipping back stage. The Lords of the Night have perfected this move. Many of the dancers get completely naked without showing genitalia. This move happened at most of the shows, but the previously naked dancer

reemerged wearing his thong again. At Cowboy Bob's he heads into the audience to give lap dances for a dollar.

### **Being a Part of the Show**

It takes awhile for the patrons to adjust to the new rules at the male revue. The audience warms up after the first performance. The excitement level is still minimal. We raise our arms in the air to clap and shout safely from our seats. Some women wave their bills. Everyone is self-conscious of their behavior. The male revue remedies this timid behavior by using audience volunteer in the act. Between the second and fourth dance, the first audience participant is brought onto the stage. The participant is usually a volunteer and occasionally chosen by the dancer. There are typically two or three performances with volunteers per show. The selected woman becomes a prop for the dancer. He incorporates her into his routine in a way that simulates some aspect of love making that is pleasing to a woman. He takes her hands and rubs them down his chest and stomach or buttocks. Her response to this is a mixture of embarrassment, nervousness and possibly excitement.

This first participant rarely touches the dancer with her fingers. Her touch is more like a forced palming. She is visibly uncomfortable on the stage. The audience watches and awkwardly cheers. There is an initial sense of confusion. The look on other patrons' faces indicates that they feel a mixture of outrage, compassion and obligation as I do. The anger is a reaction to the dancer forcing his volunteer to touch him. She is noticeably tense with her rigid frame and discomforted smile. It is a scene too reminiscent of unwanted sexual encounters with which women in the crowd are familiar. We feel

empathetic toward her and want to save her. We clap and whistle anyway. No one wants to interrupt the show. We tell ourselves it is not real and that the show must go on. The crowd goes wild. The “normal girls” cheer in an attempt to quell her fear and offer support. “Those girls” scream excitedly and look upon her with envy. “Those girls” seem to miss the degrading nature of this first volunteer performance. Both parties seem to agree that the chosen woman has gained status in the eyes of the audience. She is commended for her bravery. She achieved something many of us would not. She was able to be on stage, touch the dancer and not run in fear. She sacrificed her pride and let the show progress. Watching the woman on stage palm the dancer makes it more acceptable for us in the crowd to touch the dancers.

The second participant is still nervous, but clearly more comfortable being in the routine than the first woman. She allows her fingers to flutter over the dancer’s skin as he guides her hands over his body. During one observation at Cowboy Bob’s, I was chosen as the second participant. I did not volunteer. I believe that I was selected because I made eye contact with the dancer. He was dressed as a police officer and marched over to me to make his “arrest”. He took my hand and asked me to stand. I got to my feet only to find myself spun around, hand cuffed and bent over my stool. I was surprised and a little frightened. The dancer leaned over and whispered, “Just play along. You’ll be fine,” between spans with his night stick. He steered me to the stage by my handcuffed wrists and sat me in a chair facing stage right.

The lights were bright and hot on my face. I was nervous and attempted to spot my confederates. The audience was screaming wildly, but I was unable to see anyone

past the first row. The dancer once again bent to my ear. This time he whispered, “Don’t get out of the chair,” in a stern voice. He crossed to the other side of the stage, leaving me alone in the middle of the stage. I stared at him with uneasy eyes and an anxious smile plastered on my face. All of the sudden, he flipped toward me. He came to a stop with his head between my legs.

I was beginning to process what had just taken place when I was hoisted from my chair. He was picking me up by my outer thighs. I was simultaneously being jostled and straddling a stranger while handcuffed. He must have seen the fear in my eyes and said, “Don’t worry. I got you,” before he power lifted me over his head. He began to spin and dance while holding me in the air by my thighs. I estimate that my head was at least fifteen feet above the floor (including the stage and dancer). I was terrified of being so held in the air by a stranger, but I was more afraid of this public display of my sexuality. I felt embarrassed and worried what the other women would think of me. Then, I glanced down and realized that I could see the audience from this height. I saw my friends beaming up at me with pride. The other patrons looked at me with envy and sheer enjoyment. Suddenly, I no longer felt scared, but special. I was placed back on the stage. My handcuffs were removed and I was led off the stage. I was congratulated and admired as I walked to my seat. My friends and women near by said things like, “You’re so brave!” or “Way to go!” They interpreted the situation differently from me. They had seen a woman openly expressing her sexuality and it allowed them to do the same.

## **The Lap Dance**

Lap Dances are only for sale at the local clubs. The professional shows such as the Lords of the Night and the Boom Boom Men provide lap dances for a select few patrons free of charge. At Cowboy Bob's and Slicks Rick's, the dancers give lap dances to the women who are not too afraid. A small percentage of the crowd is brave enough to solicit dances from the first few dancers. Some women wave the dancer over and pretend they did not ask for him. The average lap dance lasts 30 to 60 seconds and costs one dollar. Some women tip with fives or tens, but most use one dollar bills. The men encourage others to buy lap dances by approaching women that are not waving bills. They dance for the women without being asked and the women feel obligation to tip.

The first lap dance is visibly uncomfortable for most women. The dancer saunters toward a woman and gyrates in front of her. The first time she is approached by a dancer she reverts back to the coy girl role. She acts scared to touch the dancer; if she does touch him she only uses her palms. She avoids eye contact and keeps her head down staring at his chest. He touches her and pulls her knees apart as he wriggles around. She smiles hesitantly or pretends to be shocked. The dancer goads the woman during her first lap dance. He grabs her breasts, rubs her legs, simulates penetration or thrusts his pelvis at her face. Some women accept the groping and others establish boundaries.

During the patron's first lap dance, she manages to say, "You can have me, no you can't" without speaking. The dancer fires back with the same unspoken language. He engages in the chase. He dances despite her hesitation and puts her hands on his body. He moves his head to encourage eye contact. Once the woman feels brave enough to

touch him on her own and give him the bill, he leaves. Every one of the women forced into a lap dance clumsily stuffs a dollar into the dancer's thong. It seems rude to tell a dancer to go away. Most of the women give the dancer money to make him leave during the first lap dance. When the dancer moves on, they giggle and talk about what just occurred. One woman squeals to another, "I just gave him money so he would go away!"

After my first lap dance, I feel another muddle of anger and obligation like I did after the first volunteer dance. I feel violated by the dancer and afraid of seeming prudish. The peer pressure is comparable to junior high levels. I feel like I want to retaliate for being made into a sexual object. I decide to treat the dancers the way I had been treated and the other women seem to agree. We catcall the men, spank them and look at them as objects for our entertainment. The crowd loosens up and women move from their personal space into the space of others.

Second lap dance is more comfortable and less awkward. The patron makes it clear that she wants him and he restrains eye contact. His touch hovers over her body as he dances for her. She pays him and he leaves. Once the audience begins to feel comfortable in the setting, they get wild. We scream at the top of our lungs, dance in our chairs, and wave our arms rowdily. We are unreserved in our movement. Women bump into strangers and grab at the dancers. Some women abuse the men by spanking them as hard as physically possible or scratching their backs. The men are treated as sexual objects. Some women hide their bills in their shirts or between their legs for the dancers to retrieve. Others expect the men to dance several minutes for a dollar while being ordered to work for the money. A few women steal money from a dancer's thong only to

have him dance to earn it back. Most of the patrons madly grope the dancers without harming them and give dancer one dollar for dance that is around a minute.

Many women are at ease with the dancers touching their legs, breasts, buttocks and various other parts. This behavior is assumed to be acceptable. The women who get touched most frequently are physically or financially attractive to the men. The men become sexual gatekeepers. They pull away when women grab too eagerly or move her hands when she attempts to reach into his thong. If a woman gets too aggressive, she is ignored. On occasion, some women remain the sexual gatekeeper. The dancers and other women do not appreciate the preservation of this role. I ask dancers to abstain from touching me sexually. I told one dancer to refrain from touching my genitals to which he retaliated by biting my inner thigh hard enough to bruise it. Women at the male revue are expected to be assertive, but only in a specific way.

Most of the women fully accept the role of the pursuant. Some struggle with the switch in power type. Attractive young women (approximately 18 to 22 years of age) have the most difficulty with the transition. In a culture that values youth as beauty, these women are accustomed to being chased, but they lack financial experience. Young women tend to be in college or have low paying jobs. These women refuse to relinquish the role of flirt. They resort to activities that increase their attractiveness and power outside of this setting. They engage in homoerotic play. They dance together, touch each other and make out. These tactics are useless at the male revue. One dancer was at my table during my third visit to Cowboy Bob's when two young women started making out and looking around to see who was watching them. The dancer looked at me and said, "I hate

it when girls like that try to steal the show.” The women were ignored by all of the dancers.

Women who become too rowdy and interfere with the delicate balance of the tease are removed from the interaction. This forces the women to look to their money for power. This is uncomfortable for women with a great deal of capital when their value is based on sexual attractiveness, but very little financial capital. The status of older women is reversed. Their worth is fading as age strips away their beauty outside of the revue, but within the walls of the male revue these women become more attractive with their higher incomes.

The dancer’s actions and dress are molded according to what women believe is attractive. It is through his physical appearance that he gains worth at the male revue. This value system is a complete reversal of gender norms. A woman’s attractiveness carries little weight at the show. The pretty women get slightly more attention, but feminine beauty is always trumped by wealth.

A woman’s value is tied to her ability to provide financially at the male revue. She must pay for a sexually charged encounter. Outside of this setting, it is incredibly taboo for women to pay for sexually related services. The financial upper hand instills a sense of power and entitlement to which most women are not accustomed. Some women flaunt their money by wildly waving it in the air with both hands. They stuff bill after bill into the dancer’s thong. The men hover around these women and fawn over them. It is a sense of power new to most women. It gives the illusion of being more stable than relying on sexual attractiveness and flirtation for power. At the height of the show, the

moment is the only thing that matters. The new power feels good, but we know despite our wishful thinking that it will not last forever.

### **The Show Ends and the Crowd Leaves**

The last performance has ended and bill supplies are dwindling. The show must end. We are still an energetic crowd, but we realize the night is coming to an end. Some women pull out credit cards and pretend to offer them to the dancers. The emcee takes the stage again. He thanks us for being a great audience and we applaud for the performers. He invites women to take pictures with the performers. About half stick around and hope to imprint the night's memories on film.

The lights come up, the music dies off and the women head for the door. The room is filled with an odd mixture of excitement and haziness. Chatter fills the abrupt void in noise. The night is verbally replayed as if we are reluctant to surrender our moment. The patrons appear groggy, but energized much like weary concert goers. The booze is not the only catalyst for this mood because I feel it too. Things seem back to normal. Gender norms are reestablished immediately. Women that shoved bills into dancers' thongs and made lewd comments all night now shy away from the men. They quickly shuffle out in a pack and some seem afraid to touch the dancers while posing for a picture.

After several hours of play, we must reenter mainstream society. The transition feels quick and abrupt. The change in the women is subtle and personal, but palpable. An outsider could easily fail to notice the pride on our faces. We know how it feels to sexually liberated and financially powerful even if it is for just a few hours. We feel a

little more confident because this experience does make us appear more sexually liberated to those that know we have attended a male revue. Other women see us as more courageous. It is hard to tell if the experience actually inspires women to be more sexually liberated or if it is simply a temporary way to gain status in the eyes of other women.

## CHAPTER VI

### WHAT HAPPENED AT THE REVUE DIDN'T STAY AT THE REVUE: MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

I explore the serious side of the male revue in this study. What is this form of adult play providing for these women that mainstream society can not and how does this social supplement to take place? The male revue offers women an outlet to act outside of normative gendered behaviors by creating a liminal period. It is constructed in a specific way that is meant to separate patrons from the outside world both physically and symbolically. The scene intends to be an escape for female patrons. Normal ways of acting and thinking cease to apply here. The patrons and dancers forge new behavioral expectations. Social phenomena such as gender role negotiation, flirtation and action occur within this unique time and space.

This study offers a new perspective to the current research on male revues. The literature indicates that previous research focused predominately on objectification at the show and descriptions of the setting. It states the scene is a well-constructed atmosphere in which the traditional objectification of female patrons ceases. Many articles are highly descriptive and sing praises for the male revue as a liberating force (Clark, 1985; Dressel & Petersen, 1982a, 1982b; Montemurro, 2001; Montemurro, et al., 2002; Prehn, 1983). Some seem almost redundant due to their similarity to other articles and research on female and male strip clubs. The literature offers insight into the male revue scene, but the time for further investigation is here. This research explores the male revue in a way

that complements and adds to the literature while challenging the opinion that the show is liberating.

Like the literature on female strip clubs, the principal focus of male revue research is objectification. The articles establish that traditional female objectification drastically declines at the male revue. The male dancers become the brunt of the sexual objectification. They seem to agree that the lack of female sexual objectification inspires feelings of liberation among the patrons. Some articles allude that the temporary freedom from sexual objectification at the male revue may lead toward gender equality (Clark, 1985; Dressel & Petersen, 1982a, 1982b; Montemurro, 2001; Montemurro, et al., 2002; Prehn, 1983). Unfortunately, they neglect a complete explanation as to why or how this liberation occurs.

Much of the literature portrays the male revue as a positive experience for women because of this lack of objectification. Dressel and Petersen (1982a) adopt a slightly different approach to the subject. They argue that the women continue to be objectified, but in a different way. They state that dancers see the women as a source of revenue rather than sexual opportunity. There is a reversal of traditional objectification. The men gain importance through physical appearance and the women achieve status through wealth. This study supports the idea that objectification continues at the male revue. It takes on a different form, but persists in this setting. This is not to say that the male revue is a negative experience, but not as wonderful as other research suggests. It could be of value to women to feel another type of objectification, but the presence of any objectification contradicts the ideas of liberation.

It may be too soon to herald the male revue as a liberating force. There is no evidence to support the idea that male revues promote actual liberation outside of the setting. Research has yet to track the women after the show. The data suggests that women do feel more liberated while at the male revue. This work challenges the current literature by adding a theoretical explanation for the happenings at the show and the social purpose for the male revue.

### **Separating from the Mainstream and Transitioning into Liminality**

Liminality begins with a physical and mental separation from the outside world. The structure of the male revue is such that it creates a period of disconnection from everyday life for the patron. Entering the scene is a striking sensory experience. It simultaneously becomes darker, louder, different smelling, and periodically the lights become blinding. Every patron knows she is there to gawk at undressed men. The whole situation seems bizarre and disorienting. It feels so foreign that it is difficult to translate normal social rules. In a place and time so unique, it is necessary to craft new rules.

Liminality is not instantaneous. The time between the entrance to the venue and approximately the second audience participant performance is the evolution into the liminal setting. The transition is a gradual process that typically takes between 30 and 45 minutes. Preparation for the liminal period begins at the door of the venue. The scene is carefully staged to seclude the patrons from the outside world. The drastic difference in atmosphere shocks the senses. The transition from outside into the venue is the first step in the conversion. The women enter a location that is substantially different from the external world. The change in scenery creates the feeling that the women are somehow

separate from the rest of the world. The bright, swirling lights and reverberating music make it difficult to concentrate on anything other than the moment. The drastic shift in atmosphere is the first hint that this scene operates with a new set of rules. The environment remains recognizable. It is an intensified mixture of familiar things. Music, lights, drinks and smoke are found in everyday life, but not at this magnitude. The audience realizes that something sensational and different is about to take place.

Norms remain in tact. They are dressed in their finest club attire. Most women are fashionable and sexy with jeans, heels, a skimpy top and glamorous makeup. They are gathered in groups of two or more to chat and giggle nervously. No one speaks too loudly and most women stay seated with their legs crossed. They wait anxiously until the emcee emerges to instruct their behavior. Their highly feminine dress and passive use of physical and verbal space are characteristic of women following conventional gendered behaviors. Yet, the mere presence of these women at the male revue suggests that they are more inclined toward negotiating tradition gender roles. They purchase tickets with the intention of viewing a show featuring mostly naked men. These women are not ashamed of the desire to be sexual, which is atypical in a society that values sexually passive women. They are purposely engaging in an activity that strays from normative behaviors. The inclination is there and the performance encourages deviation.

The show begins as the lights dim and the emcee takes the stage. His duty as master of ceremonies is to guide women into the liminal setting. Traditional rites of passage commonly use a community or religious leader to direct rituals. A modern society fractured in belief systems relies on a charismatic stranger for this role. He leads

the group into their new roles just as the religious leader coaches his participants into adulthood. The emcee's speech informs the crowd of the expectations and rules for patrons at the male revue. His words work to reverse the social status from mainstream society. He objectifies the dancers by telling the audience that the only purpose of these men is to serve the female patrons. He degrades the men in the patrons' eyes by calling them "meat" and various other inanimate objects. It is apparent by the end of the speech that a man's only purpose in this setting is as a sexual object. He heralds the women for having jobs or college educations. He congratulates the crowd for being "independent women" and makes derogatory statements about the men they have left at home. The monologue suggests that women are superior to men. The patrons cheer in agreement with his statements. He appears to understand the difficulty of being a woman. This acknowledgment of worthiness gains him immediate acceptance. His sexual innuendoes lose their ability to threaten and he is trusted to lead the ceremony. The audience likes this idea, but remains hesitant to adopt the new standards. It overturns the rules that direct everyday life.

The first performances force the women to go through the motions of objectifying the men. They are still nervous about touching the dancers or yelling at them. They mostly applaud and squeal. They touch the dancers as if they were hot plates. They test the new rules and experiment with what is acceptable. They begin to negotiate social boundaries. The dancers manipulate the role adaptation with a combination of encouragement and provocation. The dancers compel the women to touch them by placing a woman's hand on their bodies while giving lap dances. They smile and act as if

they enjoy the touch. They goad the women by touching them and take participants to the stage. The dancers force the participant to touch him and he touches her. He objectifies her. This provocation coerces the women to retaliate the objectification. The dancers teach the women how to act. It operates in a similar way to the “treat others the way you want to be treated” principle. The patrons gradually start to cat call, grope the men and wave money to appear attractive. No one is sanctioning the women for these new behaviors. They men are clearly the sexual objects and the women morph into the providers. They adopt the norms of the venue. The crowd acclimates to the new setting.

### **In the Midst of the Liminal Setting**

Sometime during the second participant performance the audience fully embraces the altered state. Traditional norms no longer regulate behavior. A new set of behavioral guidelines has emerged. It is a blend of conventional rules and their opposites. Within the confines of this unique space and time, a grown man dancing in a costume is not weird or creepy. Women are normal for enjoying the spectacle. Conventional norms for flirtation and gender no longer apply as liminality provides the setting for action.

### **Gender Roles**

Social norms and statuses from mainstream society are placed aside to adopt the temporary norms of this unique moment in space and time. The patrons ease over the boundaries of typical gender norms until the complete immersion into liminality. Gender roles within the male revue are a distinctive combination of normative and oppositional behaviors. The men adopt feminine roles, but must be careful to not be too womanly. The same is true for the women. They want to appear in control and sexually liberated without

seeming masculine. The parties must preserve their gender while exploring the other. Both sexes negotiate a careful line of gender norm reversal through clothing and actions. Physical gendered appearances are rigidly upheld while normative actions reverse.

The dancers adhere to the physical appearance of traditional masculinity, but act in contradictory ways. The muscular bodies and overly macho costumes suggest the manliest of men. Upon closer inspection, these men groom in a traditionally feminine way. Their bodies are completely free of hair and tanned. It is obvious that these men are exfoliated and moisturized. Their skin is beautiful. Their hair and eyebrows receive an ample amount of attention. Their hair is styled and their eyebrows plucked. Oddly enough, the grooming regiment makes them seem more attractive rather than girly. The hair removal and tanning emphasize muscles. The rest of the grooming makes them appear less threatening. It gives the impression that they want to be attractive to the patrons. The male performers gain their value from physical attractiveness rather than money. They attempt to please the women by being sexually appealing much the same way that women do for men.

The most blatant contradiction to the masculine appearance is the routine itself. These very masculine looking grown men are participating in a conventionally feminine act. The dance moves are masculine, but the act itself is not. Manly men do not dance. A man learning to dance is a scarcity in mainstream culture. Young boys in dance classes are ridiculed while thousands of dollars and hours are spent teaching girls to dance without giving it a second thought. The dancing is not the only aspect of this performance that is questionably mannish. They lip sync too. These men memorize the lyrics to the

song in order to pretend to sing it later. The male exotic dancers must spend hours perfecting his solo routines as well as the choreographed group numbers. It is absurd to think of grown men doing this outside of this setting. The only other people for which it is acceptable to develop a choreographed lip sync performance are drag queens and young girls. In these boundaries, it becomes the only suitable behavior for men.

The male revue creates a scene in which it is mandatory for men to don the most stereotypically feminine of underwear, the thong. Thongs are not widely available for men to purchase. A man has to know where to shop to buy one. Somehow the masculine costumes overshadow the feminine aspects of the thong and the dancer seems closer to nude. Most patrons are oblivious to the fact that they have undergarments in common with the dancers.

The women are not turned off by the similarities in grooming and undergarment selection. They merge gender roles too. It is important for women to appear outwardly feminine. Most wear makeup, jewelry, low cut shirts, tight pants and heels. The women rarely wear skirts or dresses. They are too feminine and impractical for lap dances. Lap dances and audience participation require women to sit with their legs spread. Leg crossing rarely happens after women grow accustomed to the scene. They move in a more masculine way. They readily occupy the space of others. They scream loudly and dance freely. The self conscious use of space that typically guides a woman's actions is gone. Her physical attractiveness no longer carries the weight it does in the outside world. A woman's ability to provide financially for the dancers measures her worth. A strikingly beautiful woman is useless if she is broke, but an ugly woman with money is a treasured

gem. It is a complete reversal of the social rules that govern life outside of the male revue. Patrons and dancers view this blend of traditional gender roles as “normal”.

### **Flirtation**

Flirting is a peculiar thing at the male revue. The entire performance is an extended period of flirtation, but it varies from normal flirtation. The form remains the same and the role of the flirt shifts. Both the dancer and patron occupy the role of the flirt at different times throughout the night. The male dancer tends to assume the role the majority of the evening. Flirtation is about fantasy and power. It is about creating a moment in which there are no expectations of an outcome, but the participants play with the idea that an encounter is possible. Flirtation is a vehicle for the imagination of improbable sexual activity. Initiating and sustaining this coquettish type of play is a position of power.

In mainstream society, a woman derives much of her sense of worth and power from her physical attractiveness. Flirting is a way for her to sustain her power. She fuels the attraction without ever having to consent or deny the pursuer. She has an opportunity to feel attractive and powerful with very little risk. During their first trip to the male revue, many women believe that their role in flirtation should remain the same. They are unaware of the extent to which normal social rules are abandoned. These women enter the club expecting to be the flirt. The role slowly slips away from the women as liminality progresses. When the women begin to objectify the dancers, they forfeit their role as sexual gatekeeper. They pursue the men and ask for the sexually charged encounter. The dancers assume the role of the flirt at this point. The men dictate for

which patron they dance. At the revue, the rules for gaining social power are reversed. Women must derive power from monetary resources rather than physical attractiveness. It is a situation dissimilar from everyday life.

The male revue is a night in which the women feel they can play with their sexuality. The fantasy aspect of the male revue attracts most of the patrons to the show. It is an opportunity to act sexually assertive and experiment with fantasy. The lightheartedness of the show creates a sense of play and safety. Most aspects of the male revue are exaggerated or amplified. It has the playfulness of an upbeat Broadway musical. The level of hyperbole stokes feelings of security in the patrons. It seems so unreal that it is hard to view as entirely dangerous. It becomes a safe environment to flirt with a cowboy or imagine a sexual encounter with a rugged construction worker. A woman can play and fantasize openly without ruining her reputation or endangering herself. The act of flirtation is integral to the male revue. It adds a facet of realism to a show that seems ludicrous outside of the environment. Flirtation is the undercurrent of reality while the interaction is in the fantasy realm. The male revue is grounded in reality by maintaining the familiar social form of flirtation. The act itself keeps its original form. This dalliance solidifies the male revue as strictly fantasy. There are no expectations for the interaction to continue outside of the revue. This allows the relationship between the patron and dancer to only exist while at the revue in most cases.

The idea of experimenting with fantasy and flirtation is one of the main draws to the male revue. Most attend the show without the intention of an actual sexual encounter. They intend to have a sexually charged interaction with an attractive man. In that

interaction, some assume that they will maintain the role of the flirt. This assumption adds to the awkward moments of the first lap dances and performances. Some women are unsure of the new behavioral expectations and attempt to hang on to their traditional role. They act in typical flirtatious ways. They attempt to be coy or challenging. Some act frightened of the dancer or pretend they did not beckon for him. Others wave a bill around trying to make him beg. They struggle to play hard to get, but the dancers have no patience for this. The hard to get act may work outside of the male revue, but the dancers are after money instead of a chase. The men ignore women that make them work too hard for a dollar. They refuse to allow the women to use flirtation as a source of power. The only thing the dancers have to offer in this environment is their sexuality. Many young attractive women struggle with this transition the most. They switch from having the most power when it is based on physical attractiveness to very little power at the male revue where their power relies on financial resources. Some young women pull out all of the stops in an attempt to regain their sexual power. They engage in homoerotic play. This is proves to be very alluring in the outside world. Men find it sexually appealing, yet the women never have to consent or deny a sexual encounter with a man. By engaging in the homoerotic play, they are sexually attractive and seemingly unavailable. At the male revue, this tactic is futile. The dancers refuse to acknowledge the women. Some dancers seem slightly jealous and annoyed at those women for trying to steal the spotlight.

Flirtation is the dancer's means for power in the male revue. The fantasy part of the show relies heavily on flirtation. Therefore, the male dancer's ability to flirt is essential to the creation of fantasy. He becomes a driving force behind the fantasy. The

male dancer flirts in a number of ways. The show is orchestrated in a way that places the male dancer in the position of sexual object and flirt. He maintains a sense of power and control in this choreographed relationship of mutual objectification.

The good male dancer begins to work the room the second he walks on stage. His performance is based on perceived female fantasy. Although the dancer may portray a tough guy, the dancer is careful to never appear threatening. He must continue to be as attractive as possible to the patrons. He uses flirtation to fuel his desirability and create fantasy. Much of flirtation relies on the tease. The stage dance is all about the tease. He pretends to begin to remove his clothing and waits. Women must beg the dancer to strip. He remains clothed as long as possible to sustain his power while continuing to entertain. After stripping to his thong, the dancer relies on individual lap dances to perpetuate the fantasy. Women solicit him for lap dances. He answers each request by seductively approaching the woman. He focuses all of his attention on one woman. He adds to the fantasy by seeming genuinely interested in each woman. He rubs her body, gazes into her eyes and makes her feel desired. He makes himself momentarily available, but still maintains boundaries. This makes the dancer seem more attractive. She gives him the money. He thanks her and moves on. She is left wanting more than the brief encounter because he is unobtainable. The dancer always leaves before the interaction becomes intense enough to warrant an actual solicitation for sex. The male exotic dancer is a master flirt within this environment. The setting works in his favor. The intent for most women's attendance is not a sexual conquest, but a fun night out with the girls. They are looking for a wild time with a mischief and the male revue offers just that.

## **Action**

The sense of action lures women to the male revue. The event is staged to appear risky and adventurous despite the presence of real danger. This is why the male revue is fun. The patron's purpose of attending a male revue is to engage in this risky seeming behavior. The liminality creates a scene in which things are familiar yet unusual. Norm reversal in gender and flirtation adds to the chanciness and character trying aspects of the revue. Our society dictates that women are to remain chaste. They are supposed to repel sexual advances rather than seek out sexually charged experiences. The male revues provide a place for women to experience action and test their character. This is the opportunity to prove that one is a sexually liberated and assertive woman.

The male revue as a whole feels dicey. Simply by attending the woman is engaging in risk taking behavior. She is openly admitting she is interested in sexually charged situations, therefore risking her reputation. Others outside of the male revue may view her as promiscuous or wild. This chance only exists outside the walls of the male revue. The real action within the male revue is the lap dance. There is no reason for receiving a lap dance other than the act itself. The lap dance is a game of chance. It is a calculated risk because it feels potentially dangerous when no real danger is involved. It is at this point that there is one on one interaction and a more realistic potential for harm.

In mainstream society, this type of interaction damages a woman's character. It is perfectly normal and acceptable within the show, but feels risky because these behaviors are taboo in everyday life. A naked man in a face to face interaction is frightening because women are taught to associate naked men with the fear. There is the fear of rape

or a tarnished reputation. A lap dance at the male revue feels like a risk, but has no chance of negative outcomes. The result is positive. Women interpret the lap dance as a chance to prove themselves sexually liberated. This chance is orchestrated in a series of steps.

Once the dancer has finished his performance and descended upon the audience. Women begin waving their dollar bills wildly in the air. They are offering the dancer an opportunity to partake in the game of chance. When the man approaches the patron, he is accepting the terms. This is the squaring off phase. The determination phase begins when the man starts to dance for the patron. During the dance, the women will decide if she is willing to pay the dancer more to stay and the dancer will decide how long he will dance for her dollar. The patron will then place the bill on her body or move it toward the dancer's thong creating the disclosive phase. Once the money reaches the dancer it becomes the settlement face during which he accepts the money, hugs the patron and moves on. By engaging in the lap dance, the woman feels that she has proven herself to be sexually liberated.

### **Reintegrating into the Mainstream**

The last performer finishes his round of lap dances and the emcee emerges. He announces the end of the show and thanks the patrons. The dancers go backstage. The lights come up and the music dies. It is an anticlimactic end. Almost immediately, norms revert back to their conventional status. The crowd is excited and groggy. It is sudden return to normal life. It is like waking up to an alarm clock after having a really great dream. The women leave the revue to return to their everyday lives. The change that they

experience within the liminal setting becomes a memory. There is an inner confidence that comes from knowing that she has participated in a sexually liberating ritual. This confidence is obvious the next time she goes to a male revue. She gains status in her own eyes and the eyes of those that share a similar experience, but this transition is not recognized by the outside world.

## CHAPTER VII

### LAST CALL: THE CONCLUSION

The male revue is a unique moment in time and space that allows for experimentation with traditional norms. It provides a break from the limitations of every day social rules. In the past, communities relied more heavily on religious or cultural rituals for an escape. This form of play replaces traditional rituals by creating another liminal setting. The liminal period releases the structural tension without forcing immediate change.

The male revue is a compartmentalized play ritual that allows contained, gradual change without altering the social structure. These patrons of the revue feel as if they have changed, but it is debatable whether this actually alters their social status. They are viewed as sexually free women within the male revue and by other women that have attended them. It is not common to hear women brag in public about watching male strip shows. It is usually something that comes up after a few cocktails, if at all. It is possible that women that are already more sexually liberated are the ones attracted to these shows as an outlet.

The male revue permits women to feel sexually liberated without granting tangible changes in the social world. This can be viewed as a hindrance for women's equality. On one hand, it provides an instrument for women to practice and better understand liberation. This may enable them to take this experience into mainstream

society and make small steps in their lives toward personal liberation. Once again, there is no evidence that this personal liberation exists outside of the male revue.

If the feelings of freedom only exist at the male revue, it can be seen as a method with which to appease women. It lulls them into believing that they are in fact liberated without making actual changes. Liminality absolutely grants a degree of liberation within the show, but there is no evidence that this translates to the outside world. Male revues have been around for over twenty years and there is no link establishing the shows lead to liberation. In order to determine the male revue as a vehicle for social change, one would need to study the isolated long term effects of such shows.

What is the purpose of the male revue? It provides the benefit of relief from social constraints, even if it is only temporary. It is a safe environment in which the patrons and dancers can play with social norms in way that is unacceptable in the outside social world. Most importantly, the male revue provides an opportunity to play and participate in a ritual that connects one with others. The rites of passage that used to create these liminal periods are becoming less common. Venues for ritualized play replace the rites of passage that are falling by the wayside.

This study only begins to scratch the surface of the social phenomenon of the male revue. The scarcity of male revues creates limitations for the study. The sample size is small and varying in location. More observations in one environment provide a better understanding of the intricacies in the relationship among patrons and dancers. The data gathering approach in this study offers a wider range of venues and grants access to a more generalized view of the shows. I conducted data collection in an unobtrusive way

that allowed patrons and dancers to remain unaffected by the observation. The lack of interviews with dancers or patrons provides observations as seen through my perspective, which may view things differently than other patrons or dancers. As a lone researcher I was unable to watch the stage performance, crowd and lap dances all at once. There is the possibility that information was overlooked. Despite the limitations, the research method is sound.

There is great potential for future research projects on the male revue. It is a virtually unexplored setting. There is an opportunity for many comparison studies between male and female strip clubs, predominately black and white male revues, predominately heterosexual and homosexual male revues. The male exotic dancer's perspective of the audience and the scene could be fascinating. Patron demographics need to be investigated as well as a historical exploration of the male revue. Research on male revues offers an opportunity to better understand the function of adult play in modernity.

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