Northumbria Research Link

Managing spoiled identities: dirty workers' struggles for a favourable sense of self

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore how a group of dirty workers, that is, exotic dancers employed in a gentlemen's club, engage in identity construction amidst various macro, meso and micro considerations.

Design/methodology/approach – This study adopts a social constructivist approach in exploring the stories of a group of 21 dancers employed at a chain of exotic dancing clubs in the UK, For Your Eyes Only.

Findings – Identity construction is a complex process whereby dancers struggle to secure a positive sense of self among the various resources they encounter. The findings focus upon the processes of distancing through projecting disgust upon clients, other dancers and other clubs. Dancers do this to minimize the stigma associated with their own identities and position themselves in a more favourable light to others. In doing this, dancers construct a variety of identity roles for themselves and "others." This process of distancing also results in the construction of a hierarchy of stigmatization whereby dancers categorize motivations for dancing, type of dancing and type of clubs to rationalize the work they perform and manage their spoiled identities.

Practical implications – The stories of these dancers illustrate the messy nature of identity construction for dirty workers. In turn, it also illuminates how a better understanding of the complexity of identity construction for exotic dancers can offer insights transferable to other dirty work occupations and organizations in general.

Originality/value – The paper provides an indepth look at an occupational site that is relatively unexplored in organization studies and thus makes a unique empirical contribution. It also offers a more comprehensive theoretical lens for understanding identity construction and dirty workers.

Introduction

Albert *et al.* (2000, p. 14) contend that the dynamics of identity need to be better understood because identity is so "crucial to how and what one values, thinks, feels and does in all social domains, including organizations." As organizations expect more from paid workers to satisfy the consumption demands of consumers (Du Gay, 1996), understanding the processes through which individuals manage these, and other considerations, while securing a positive sense of self has become a growing concern for researchers in organization studies. In "dirty work" (Hughes, 1958) occupations, the construction and maintenance of positive identities become even more problematic. Individuals must manage the stigma associated with the work, and in turn the stigma associated with them as the "dirty workers" who perform the work (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). Dirty work (Hughes, 1958) refers to occupations or tasks that are viewed as physically, socially or morally tainted. Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) draw attention to the diverse range of occupations that
can be considered dirty work (e.g. garbage collector, funeral directors, prison guards, exotic dancers, bill collectors). They contend that these occupations are often overlooked or neglected in mainstream organization studies, yet these jobs do exist and the stigma experienced by these workers is "real." This research sets out to explore how a group of dirty workers, that is, exotic dancers employed in a "gentlemen's club," engage in identity construction amidst various macro, meso and micro considerations.
As a form of dirty work, exotic dancing can be seen to be physically tainted (e.g. in contact with bodily fluids through unprotected client/customer interactions or dancers using the same stage and poles to do tricks without cleaning between sets), socially tainted (e.g. associated with "sleazy" men, working in dangerous parts of the city) or morally tainted (e.g. commercialization of sex, public sex, sex outside of marriage). The position of exotic dancing, as both sex work and dirty work, in a paid work hierarchy is the ongoing result of various historical, social, cultural and political considerations. These

considerations are likely to play a role in how an individual comes to understand and define herself (and others) as an exotic dancer. These considerations are referred to here as broad macro resources of identity construction. In response to these broad macro considerations, the organizations that offer exotic dancing services are also likely to struggle with positioning themselves in a positive way. In turn, the organization may also serve as a macro resource for the individual in her identity making. Furthermore, it has long been argued by social identity theorists that individuals define themselves in relation to others. This can be understood to be another resource of identity construction, that is, meso resources of identity construction. Finally, the individual is also seen to play a role in her identity making, choosing or struggling with various macro and meso resources that she encounters as she comes to understand herself as an exotic dancer. These struggles are viewed as micro resources of identity construction for this research.

Exotic dancing[1] clubs have a long history in the USA, however, it was not until the mid-1990s that topless dancing clubs began to emerge in the UK (Bindel, 2004). Gentlemen's clubs are seen to be unique in comparison to other organizations providing exotic dancing services. These clubs occupy a position of exclusivity and attempt to present exotic dancing establishments as professional, legitimate, law-abiding businesses, as do the dancers who work in these clubs (Forsyth and Deshotels, 1997). This research focuses upon dancers employed in a chain of clubs, For Your Eyes Only (FYEO) in the UK. FYEO is one of the first exotic dancing clubs established in the UK and markets itself as a gentlemen's club with upscale entertainment and surroundings, "classic entertainment for the modern gentleman" (FYEO, 2005). Dancers are self-employed, however, FYEO has various formal rules (e.g. hours of work, dress code, drinking policies), as well as informal rules (e.g. rigid physical criteria) to which dancers must conform. These efforts of FYEO can be viewed as an attempt to manage the stigma associated with the industry and thus it serves as a fruitful site from which to explore how dancers who work in these clubs also manage their "spoiled identities" (Goffman, 1963).

It is important to note that this research was exploratory in nature and that the adoption of a dirty work lens to understand the findings of this research emerged through a to-ing and fro-ing between the extant literature, data collection and analysis. In the end, the contribution of this research is two-fold in that it makes a theoretical, as well as an empirical contribution. First, building upon the work of Dick (2005) and Tracy and Scott (2006) this research draws attention to the complexity of identity construction for dirty workers as they struggle to manage the various forces, that is, macro, meso and micro, that play a role in this process. Second, Brewis and Linstead (2002) draw attention to sex work as a fruitful, yet relatively unexplored site for management research. As such, this research on identity in exotic dancing serves as an instrumental case study (Stake, 2000) that allows us to better understand the nature of work in an overlooked site in mainstream management studies. In doing this, it also serves as an opportunity to surface the sameness and differences between sex work, dirty work and other types of work.

Identity construction

More and more organization studies researchers are challenging the notion of identity as fixed, stable and directly observable to propose a view that depicts identity as dynamic, multiple, contradictory (Kohonen, 2005; Thomas and Davies, 2005; Thomas and Linstead, 2002). It has also been argued that we need to focus more upon the processes of identity construction and the "how" of identity, rather that the "what" of identity (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004; Watson, 1998; Watson and Harris, 1999). From this view, identity can be seen to be an ongoing achievement, that is, an emergent, messy process of knowing oneself and others, retrospectively (Thomas and Davies, 2005; Watson and Harris, 1999). Identity is not a matter of what one becomes, but the ongoing process of becoming (Braidotti, 1994; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Jenkins, 1996; Watson and Harris, 1999). This process involves the individual's struggles of balancing the desire for coherence in her sense of self, with the complexities of the various resources available for her to draw upon (Brewis, 2004; Denzin, 1989, in Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). Responding to the call for more studies on how identity happens, this research builds upon the work of the social constructionists to explore identity as a process of becoming, underpinned by coherence, multiplicity and complexity.

Identity for the purposes of this research is defined as who we, and others, think we are in particular contexts. Identity encompasses self and social aspects including bodily attributes, reflexivity, distinctiveness, and group membership (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Harré, 1998). Identity work or identity construction refers to the processes through which meanings about how we understand ourselves and others are constructed, negotiated and managed by the individual in relation to various external and internal experiences and pressures (Hall, 2000; Jenkins, 1996).

Identity construction, dirty work and exotic dancing
Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) draw upon occupational prestige as a composite of status, power, quality of work, education, and income to depict the wide scope and variety of dirty work occupations. They note that the commonality is not in the job design or context of these occupations, rather it is in the reaction that such tasks evoke in individuals, "How can you do this?" (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999, p. 415). The stigma of dirty work is transferred to those who perform dirty work so that they in turn are seen and treated as "dirty" (workers). Drawing upon the work of Cusack *et al.* (2003), Goffman (1963) and Jones *et al.* (1984), stigma is understood here as an emergent property or product of definitional purposes (e.g. physical mark, attribute, characteristic) that through social interaction is regarded as flawed, deviant or inferior. These discrediting and undesirable associations mean that the individual defined by these attributes is "reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). In turn, constructing and maintaining favourable occupational identities is likely to be difficult. I argue here that macro, meso and micro considerations play a role in the identity work of dirty workers, thus making the process of securing a positive identity complex to manage.

Macro resources
Heinsler *et al.* (1990) and Tracy and Scott (2006) both conducted comparative studies of dirty workers to better understand how dirty workers struggle to frame their work, and in turn their occupational identities, in a favourable light. They reveal that some groups are more successful than others in managing the stigma. Heinsler *et al.* (1990) explore how detectives and campus police strive to refocus the tarnished image that goes along with the dirty work they perform. The
detectives are successful in creating a valued core identity to transform their dirty work into meaningful work. The campus police, however, are unable to do this and are left feeling that all aspects of their work are dirty. Tracy and Scott (2006) draw attention to the role of macro-level discourses in how fire fighters and correctional officers struggle to construct favourable identities. Fire fighters, for example, engage in "infusing" tactics (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999) and highlight the danger involved in their work so as to transform the dirty parts of their work into a badge of honour. The media coverage post 9/11 facilitates the fire fighters' efforts to do this. Correctional officers also emphasize the dangerous parts of the job as most desirable as a means through which to manage the stigma associated with their work and occupational identities. Tracy and Scott (2006, p. 25) note, however, that this technique is not as easy for correctional officers as the dirtiness of their work is often "associated with low-status, servile body work, always and already coded with feminine meaning through discourses that transcend the occupational context."
In the sex work literature, Brewis and Linstead (2000), Hollway (1989) and Rubin (1993) all draw attention to broader macro forces and the role they play in positioning sex work in certain ways. Brewis and Linstead (2000) are particularly interested in how these macro forces affect sex workers' struggles with securing positive occupational identities. The work of Brewis and Linstead (2000), Heinsler *et al.* (1990), Hollway (1989), Rubin (1993) and Tracy and Scott (2006) serves as a starting point for this research study. It sets the groundwork for a better understanding as to how broad macro resources may play a role in the identity construction of exotic dancers, as both sex workers and dirty workers. My research will fuse these insights with various other streams of literature that follow.
There is little research that uncovers how dirty work organizations interfere in the identity construction of its workers. Enck and Preston (1988) draw attention to the role of the organization in how exotic dancers re-present themselves to others in the organization, however, Enck and Preston are not driven by an interest in identity construction. Enck and Preston (1988) draw upon Goffman's (1959, p. 18) "cynical performance" to emphasize the instrumental and deliberate nature of the techniques employed by waitress-dancers employed at a topless club in order to secure sales of alcohol and table dances. They explore how dancers enhance the believability of their counterfeit intimacy, the cues of a successful performance as illustrated through customers' reactions, and how the organization intervenes in the construction of appropriate feeling rules. Moreover, Bruckert (2002) and Wood (2000) highlight how individuals working in exotic dancing establishments respond to organizational expectations in re-presenting themselves to others. They both discuss how club owners and managers of exotic dance clubs use "impression management" (Goffman, 1959) techniques in their own dress code (e.g. suits), as well as via house rules for dancers (e.g. no tattoos). There is still, however, much to be learned about how the organization serves as a resource in the identity construction of exotic dancers and dirty workers more generally. This research study moves us toward filling this lacuna.

Meso resources

Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) focus upon social identity theory to demonstrate how dirty workers' identities are informed by the perception of others. They note that the development of strong subcultures may provide the social resources needed to counteract broader discursive forces in which the occupation is embedded. Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) propose that dirty workers manage their spoiled identities through negotiating the meanings attributed to the dirty work. This negotiation can be seen in attempts to reframe, recalibrate and refocus the work they perform. This work will prove useful in this research study in exploring how dancers interact with each other as a part of their identity construction processes.

Micro resources

Enck and Preston (1988) (noted earlier), as well as Sanders (2005) and Thompson and Harred (1992) all contribute to our understanding of how the individual plays an active role in her identity construction. While none of this research directly employs a dirty work lens, the findings reveal how dancers (and prostitutes in the case of Sanders) do not passively accept the stigmatized position of the work they perform. The workers struggle with the various macro (both broad and organizational) and meso resources they encounter in their processes of identity construction. Thompson and Harred (1992) explore how topless dancers engage in various techniques to manage the stigmatized position of the work they perform and their sense of self. They do not focus upon identity *per se*, nor do they adopt a dirty work lens, however, their work highlights the agency (although they do not call it "agency") that is involved in how dancers come to understand themselves given the dirty work they perform. Sanders (2005) does focus upon identity management in her ethnographic study of a group of individuals working as prostitutes in the UK. She is interested in the agency involved in the emotional labour performed by these individuals. She does not, however, "name" it "agency," rather she focuses upon how sex workers construct "manufactured identities" (Sanders, 2005, p. 319) to manipulate male sexuality and sexual desire to their own advantage. She contends these workers manufacture identities as a resistance strategy to "control" their workplace.

The techniques employed by sex workers (Enck and Preston, 1988; Sanders, 2005; Thompson and Harred, 1992) begin to surface the active role that the individual might play in her identity construction as a dirty worker. Overall, the research to date, however, does not explicitly link the active role of the individual with the various other resources, nor does it look to the dirty work literature to help explain the complex and problematic nature of identity construction for exotic dancers as sex workers and dirty workers. This research study aims to bridge these considerations.

The research process

Social constructivism and identity construction

This research adopts a social constructivist approach and it is understood to be a perspective that views individuals as continually constructing and negotiating meanings, models and concepts to make sense of experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Schwandt, 2000). Those around us, as well as specific historical, cultural, social and political contexts inform these constructions. As described by Burrell and Morgan (1979) and Denzin and Lincoln (2000), social constructivism adopts a relativist ontology through which local and specific, multiple, constructed realities emerge. At the same time, by acknowledging the specific historical, cultural and political contexts through which these realities are constructed, I adopt a position that also takes into account the material effects produced by these specificities (e.g. stigma). Who we are is not just ideological, there are also material conditions which envelop our sense of selves (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). In particular, my exploration of sex work/dirty work makes me sensitive to the experiences or outcomes of such work for the participants involved in this study (e.g. job insecurity, withdrawal, violence).

The conceptualization of identity employed in this research, that is, identity as processual, multiple, contradictory and coupled to our broader lived experiences, is aligned with the relativism, realism and fluidity described above in social constructivism. In understanding agency as the struggles in which an individual engages, consciously or otherwise, in choosing to live a particular way (Brewis, 2004), I draw out the subjective individual[2] in identity construction. Furthermore, in exploring exotic dancers experiences through a dirty work lens and linking it to various macro considerations at play (broad and organizational), I also illuminate the historical and institutional forces that play a role in the co-construction of identity at work for the participants with whom I interacted.

A social constructivism perspective also allows me to embrace my own subjectivity and view myself as a subjective individual in this process (Thomas and Davies, 2005; Thomas and Linstead, 2002). Through, my conversations and engagement with participants I co-construct and re-present their identity at work stories as partial, retrospective accounts of their experiences, intertwined with my own

lived experiences (gender, culture, age, education) (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Watson, 1998). For example, my comfort (and at times discomfort) with the fluid and contradictory nature of my own occupational identity construction partially explains how I interpreted the stories of participants in the way I did. Their struggles and the multiple, contradictory nature of their identity work were particularly salient to me because of my own lived experiences.

The case study

This research serves as both an intrinsic and instrumental case study (Stake, 2000). It is intrinsic in that the contradictory nature of the sex industry (e.g. growth versus rejection by various stakeholders) triggered my interest to "know" more about how individuals who work in the industry manage the various considerations they confront and how they come to define themselves given this complexity. The research is also instrumental in that there is still much to be learned about the messiness of identity construction and the role of various intervening factors in this process across all occupational settings, in particular for dirty workers. Initially I did not set out to explore the experiences of exotic dancers through a dirty work lens, however, I felt that the struggles of a group of dirty workers would more vividly surface the complexities of securing a positive sense of self than looking to a group of individuals employed in a more mainstream occupation. In turn, the insights of this research contribute to our understanding of identity work for exotic dancers, dirty workers in general and perhaps even more broadly to other occupational sites.

My decision to focus primarily upon dancers working at FYEO was partially determined by how the organization positioned itself as a gentlemen's club. The decision was also influenced by one of my first contacts with a Club Manager, Terry. The constant willingness Terry displayed in allowing me to visit the club, introduce me to the dancers and place me on the guest list influenced my decision to use FYEO as a continued site. Moreover, my connection with Terry also influenced when I collected data. The other managers at the FYEO club where I first collected data were less cooperative and, in some cases, unfriendly. As a result, most of my data collection occurred during Terry's shifts. In addition, the rapport developed with some participants also enabled me in certain incidents to have recurring conversations with them and thus richer accounts. For example, both Lesley and Ivy (dancers) approached me on several occasions after their formal interviews to converse with me when I was visiting the club for observation. Undoubtedly, the stories of these dancers were richer and more vivid to me in the data analysis process.

I also engaged in my own "impression management" (Goffman, 1959) techniques, taking great care in how I presented myself to participants. For example, I considered how my clothing and interpersonal skills might be interpreted in this context. In addition, in gaining access and during the process of contact with many participants, I was cognizant of my tendency to emphasize my role as the student researcher. Accurately or not, I perceived the identity of a student as someone less threatening to participants and that this would make securing participation easier. Dancers did not explicitly reveal that this influenced their decision to participate or not, however, the power relations inherent in the process (between researcher and dancer) inform the realities we co- constructed.

Although, the larger study drew upon a variety of material (e.g. primary and secondary), this paper focuses upon semi-structured formal and informal interviews with dancers. Similar to the approach adopted by Coupland (2001), I asked individuals to talk about work to explore how identity making emerged through the discussions, rather than imposing identity-specific questions upon participants. Broad or grand tour (Spradley, 1979) questions were asked initially to allow participants the flexibility to tell their story. (e.g. Tell me how you first became a dancer, what did that involve?; On a typical night how does it start, progress, end?; How would you describe a typical dancer?) The semi- structured interview guide drew upon broad themes of work experiences (McCracken, 1988), many of which were areas covered by researchers exploring sex workers and more specifically exotic dancers (e.g. motivations, strategies employed in securing dances) (Boles and Garbin, 1974; Bruckert, 2002; Forsyth and Deshotels, 1997; Frenken and Sifaneck, 1998; Skipper and McCaghy, 1970). The questions were open-ended to encourage participants to describe their own experiences. As advocated by McCracken (1988) and Mason (2002), "data" collection and analysis were an iterative process. Two initial interviews were conducted (two groups of three individuals each) to determine the appropriateness of the interview guide and uncover emerging themes. During these initial interviews dancers discussed house rules and the role of the housemother; two ideas not in my interview guide or considered initially. Subsequently, I modified the interview guide to reflect this. I also added several questions to the semi-structured interview guide to prompt dancers to discuss their emotion work, relations with others, type of work performed, and how and if the organization intervened in their public and private lives. (e.g. How do you feel about work?; Does your job affect your life outside of work?; Does your job affect your relationships with your partners?)

In total 21 dancers were "formally" interviewed with a diverse range of experiences. All names used here are pseudonyms. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 31, ranged in exotic dancing experience

from two months to six years of experiences in the industry, and ranged in employment history in exotic dancing from topless only, fully nude, employment only at FYEO, employment with various clubs in the UK, to employment in various clubs in the UK and across Europe. Although sampling was not systematic I did try to interview a diverse range of participants based upon experience, age, and background to create space for different experiences (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). Snowballing has been used by other researchers investigating sex work sites (Babbie, 1995; Forsyth and Deshotels, 1997; Wesley, 2002) and this was employed to broaden the range of participants with whom I interacted. For example, I often asked dancers if they knew of other dancers that would be willing to be interviewed.

All formal interviews with the dancers, except one, were conducted in groups of two-four. This provided an opportunity to gauge interaction among participants. As noted by Madriz (2000), group interviews also provide a more relaxed context for participants thereby increasing the chance of spontaneous responses from members of the group. Indeed, the settings under which the interviews were conducted (e.g. dressing rooms) proved challenging due to interruptions and distractions from loud music, other conversations and others interjecting comments in the interviews. At the same time, however, it did provide a more naturalistic setting. It is important to note that although the structure of the interviews was relaxed and flexible (i.e. semi-structured and in groups), the close proximity of the managers while the interviews were being conducted on many occasions may have imposed pressure for discretion or restricted the dancers' ability to be open when responding to particular questions (e.g. What kind of relationship do you have with management?).

Data analysis

characterized the research. As each interview was transcribed I began a "rummaging" (McCracken, 1988) process that entailed reading and re-reading of the transcript to categorize content. Each interview transcript was first examined individually. First, a process of initial coding and focused coding was performed. Text was sorted into broad themes (e.g. socialization/recruitment/selection, motivations, nature of job) that were reflective of the discussion, prior to drawing any conclusions about the relationships among themes in each text or between texts. Following this, a process of focused coding involved reviewing the material for more meaningful concepts. Second, a process of re-interpretation with a focus upon how individuals defined their work and themselves in particular ways followed. Finally, I began a process of constant comparison (Charmaz, 2000; Corbin and Strauss, 1990) across themes and across interview transcripts. Table I provides a sample of the data analysis process involved in analyzing the interview transcript with dancer Michelle. Several processes emerged from the readings of the data and this paper focuses upon the process of distancing through projecting disgust and the development of a hierarchy of stigmatization resulting from the distancing. These two processes clearly draw attention to the management of stigma as a part of constructing positive identities. A part of these processes is the construction of different roles by the dancers, referred to as identity roles.

Findings

Constructing psychological barriers: distancing by projecting disgust
In their stories about work, dancers construct psychological barriers to separate themselves from clients, other dancers, other clubs or the work itself. To do this, they project disgust onto various "others" and distance themselves from some element of the work they perform. This helps them to rationalize their place in the industry or to position themselves in a more favourable light in comparison to the "disgusting others." In constructing these psychological barriers, individuals align themselves on the side of the barrier that they, or others, view more favourably. This also allows them to minimize the stigma associated with the work they perform and their identities.

Most dancers highlight the empowering nature of their jobs and emphasize that there is nothing wrong with what they do. Paradoxically, however, dancers hold a lot of resentment toward individuals willing to pay for the services they provide. Some dancers group all men together. Alex, who describes herself as a "professionally trained" dancer, refers to all men as "very fickle, very shallow." Other dancers make a distinction between men who frequent the clubs and men who do not. Tian has been dancing at FYEO for six months and refers to customers as "sleazy men." Similar to Tian, Angie, a dancer at FYEO for three months, notes that the men who frequent the clubs are not reflective of all men, "I just think the ones that come in here are dickheads." This disgust directed towards customers illustrates the competing feelings dancers experience. They desire the freedom, control and empowerment afforded through the job, yet dancers create ways to detach themselves from other constituents associated with their jobs. Dancers attempt to neutralize the stigma attached to their identities by transferring the stigma to their clients.

In projecting disgust to clients, dancers construct two competing identity roles, the exploited and the empowered. The exploited is one who faces unfair and unjust treatment by others in, and out of, employment arrangements. Dancers' stories of clients who are rude, whether that is manifested through language (e.g. negative comments about dancers' appearance) or behaviour (e.g. inappropriate touching, demanding services that go beyond the operating licenses of the clubs), highlight that the exploited is a role that dancers construct and can draw upon from time to time. In comparison, the empowered is one who is confident about herself, makes her own choices and is in control over her own destiny. Dancing serves as an outlet for individuals to develop and express confidence in who they are, physically, emotionally, sexually and financially (e.g. I am better than them – the clients). The income they earn allows them to live where they want and buy what they want without being dependent upon someone else or worrying about balancing bill payments. It also provides an outlet through which many dancers explore their sexuality and become comfortable with their bodies, inside and outside work boundaries. In this way, they become empowered sexually, as well as financially.

Distancing is also achieved through transferring disgust to fellow dancers. Dancers express real contempt for "dirty" dancers and draw a clear distinction between appropriate dancing (e.g. no contact) and inappropriate dancing (e.g. contact, extra services). Ronnie is a part-time dancer at FYEO who has been dancing for two months. She really struggles with finding her place in the industry and shaping her identities given the work she performs. She expresses frustration with herself about working in the industry and that she is unable to find work related to her formal education. She struggles with her decision to not tell her partner where she is working. She also expresses disgust for everything about the industry, including herself, however, she directs this disgust towards her colleagues more so than anything or anyone else. She notes most of her colleagues are "competitive and bitches." She describes an incident where she noticed another dancer masturbating for a client while she, herself, was dancing nude for a client. Ronnie's client noticed she was distracted so she apologized to him by saying "sorry but I think that is disgusting and it bothers me." While, she notes that such incidents are not common at FYEO, it was a critical incident for Ronnie in managing her emotions through comparisons and positioning herself in a unique position to her colleagues. Ronnie indicates that the dancer must have worked in a "dirty" club where such acts are condoned or expected before coming to FYEO. As a result, Ronnie only associates with one other dancer, Lisa, another part-time dancer at FYEO.

In struggling with the competing feelings about her work, Ronnie attempts to construct herself as the Good Girl in comparison to the other, that is, the Dirty Dancer or the competitor. The Good Girl role is aligned with societal expectations about morality, fidelity, and loyalty, while at the same time constructing space for certain types of acceptable commercial "sexual" displays. Stories of nondisclosure of their work, as noted by Ronnie, to certain family members or partners serve to protect more positive identity roles from the more stigmatized ones associated with the work. Overall, the Good Girl is one who is guided by strong morals and values based upon respect for others and herself, fidelity, loyalty and professionalism. Conversely, dancers construct the Dirty Dancer as an other who engages in inappropriate conduct at work (e.g. touching, extra services), is affiliated with clubs condoning such behaviour, and is affiliated with other forms of sex work. Dancers acknowledge the existence of the marginalized position of the work they perform, and construct or draw upon the Dirty Dancer to differentiate themselves from the negative stereotypes of the work they perform. Moreover, Ronnie also constructs the competitor as an other against whom to compare herself. The pay per dance (or per sit down) working arrangements mean in some cases dancers are competing for finite customer resources. If a customer prefers the performance of one dancer over another, it means less opportunity for other dancers working on that shift. In this way, co-workers are seen as competitors and often referred to as "bitches" when talking about them. As a result, workplace relations are often superficial, whereby dancers sometimes feel that they cannot trust their colleagues.

In response to what Anna indicates are unfair stereotypes about dancers, she rejects the notion that dancers are unintelligent and abnormal, feelings often expressed by clients. She defends herself and her colleagues, describing herself as goal oriented with career aspirations. Anna places herself in a superior position to other dancers that do not have other employment opportunities or plans. Furthermore, in an attempt to make her argument more persuasive she adds comments that imply dualisms of intelligent-unintelligent and normal-abnormal dancers from which to compare herself and the dancers she thinks are similar to her. The boundaries of what can be considered legitimate reasons for dancing, however, are not clearly defined. Anna is dancing to pay her way around the world and save for future investments. Individuals not dancing as a means to an end are the ones that should be stigmatized:

Most guys come in and they think you're just dumb. And as soon as you've had a dance for them, they go "why do you do this, you're better than this?" It is just not true; the girls that do this and that actually have a goal and do it for a reason [...] are normal, are intelligent and are going somewhere. But people

who just do this as a dead end job tend to live up to what people think.

Anna constructs two identity roles in talking about her experiences, namely, the opportunist and the lifer (an other). In a similar way as the empowered, the opportunist focuses upon the opportunities afforded through exotic dancing. For the empowered, the experiences and extrinsic benefits of the work satisfy intrinsic needs (e.g. a sense of freedom and autonomy). The opportunist is guided more by the extrinsic benefits afforded through the work, rather than emotive consequences. The opportunist sees dancing as a means through which she can save for a new business, finance travel plans, and pay for tuition or other debts. A sense of empowerment or the thrill of the work is secondary to the pragmatic drive for financial security or future aspirations that require significant finances. The competitor and opportunist are similar in their non-emotive way of approaching the work, that is, work is first and foremost about generating income. The difference between the two roles, however, is that the opportunist does not necessarily see her success threatened by the success of other dancers. The opportunist sees the job as an opportunity to achieve other financial objectives and the competitor adopts a "win at all cost" attitude to do this. The lifer is also an other that allows dancers to position themselves differently and justify their work as acceptable when it is short-term in nature to fulfill a particular objective or aspiration. The lifer is one who works full-time or with a long-term commitment to dancing and with no definite plans to leave the industry. For the lifer, dancing is seen to be a potential career, not simply as a means to an end. Those who view exotic dancing as a long-term life decision are positioned as inferior to those that see the work simply as youthful fun, easy money, a way to pay for tuition, or a way to save for future investments. The construction of the lifer offers dancers a means through which to elevate their position in an industry fraught with negative stereotypes about the type of individuals who work in it.

Interestingly, there is not much disgust or resentment directed towards FYEO and its management. In this regard FYEO, with its no contact and other strict policies, serves as a benchmark that dancers use to construct comparisons within exotic dancing and across the sex work industry. Clubs known for dirty dancing (e.g. contact dancing, sexual acts beyond what is permitted in licenses), however, are drawn upon in dancers' identity work. In defining other clubs, dancers or sex workers as inferior, dancers associated with FYEO are automatically placed in a position of superiority. Francis has been dancing at FYEO topless only venues for the past two-and-a-half years. She presently dances in one club and teaches FYEOs pole dancing courses in another. Francis' comments illustrate the dichotomy of nice versus dirty clubs and how FYEO is placed in the former position, thereby allowing dancers to draw on the other, dirty clubs, when attempting to manage their own feelings:

Well there's is always incidents especially working in [city]. With such a variety of clubs in [city], a lot of them are really dirty clubs, a lot of them are nice. So this [FYEO] is a really nice club. But obviously you might audition a girl that comes from a particular bad club, she might come in and feel that she can get more money by doing things when other people aren't looking. But, this club's really good 'cos we'll will keep an eye on it and if the girl's caught doing anything like that she will be sacked.

In drawing a comparison between FYEO and other inferior clubs, Francis is able to construct herself as a Good Girl associated with a good club compared to other Dirty Dancers associated with dirty clubs. Overall, dancers distance themselves from the work they perform, their co-workers, other clubs and other types of sex work in an attempt to minimize the taint associated with the work they perform and how they make sense of who they are. The distancing serves as a psychological barrier to rationalize their place in the industry and in some cases separate their identities in and around work from other identities associated with their "private" lives. In constructing a more positive identity, dancers emphasize their position relative to other "dirty" dancers, "dirty" clubs, unintelligent coworkers, competitive co-workers and "sleazy" clients. In this way, dancers can construct a superior place for themselves compared to the inferior "other."

Constructing and struggling with a hierarchy of stigmatization

The construction of certain clubs (or parts of the industry) and dancers as "others" serves to rationalize the work or manage the stigma associated with the work, and in turn, dancers' identities. This, in effect, also results in the construction of a hierarchy of stigmatization, surrounding the motivations for dancing, type of dancing and type of clubs (Figure 1).

Dancers who are studying at higher education institutions make great efforts in their retrospective identity construction to distinguish themselves from dancers who are working for other, "less legitimate" reasons. It is important to note that the construction of the hierarchy is a "front region" (Goffman, 1959) performance whereby the dancers constructed a reality for me that aligned with what they felt was appropriate for an outside audience. Given my status as both an employee and student of a university this may have served as a cue for the dancers to indicate that university education is important and that it symbolizes legitimacy and professionalism.

Dancing to fund education is positioned as a trade-off, but a legitimate one that justifies the individual's choice to perform the work. In one way, the focus upon providing an opportunity to fund higher

education infuses the work with positive value, thus minimizing the stigma attached to the work. In another way, by expressing a desire to justify the work and the individual's role in the industry, it sustains a sense of stigma about the work. Furthermore, some of these student-dancers give an impression that their motivations are more legitimate than other motivations, for example, dancing for the sake of dancing and considering it a "real" job. Even dancers who are not presently studying make reference to leaving in the near future to go back to school, thus constructing a view that dancing to pursue higher education is indeed an acceptable reason for doing so. Overall, if dancing is a means to an end, then it is viewed as a reasonable thing to do. Some ends are positioned more favourably than others, thus attributing more stigma to the different types of motivations driving dancers' choices. For example, Maggie constructs herself as the empowered in her stories about how the job allows her to be confident about who she is physically, even though she emphasizes her role as a university student paying her way through her studies. The opportunist identity role noted earlier also aligns with the notion of dancing as a means to an end.

Similarly, Alex constructs her identity as both the professional and the Artist/e as she pays her outstanding bills, while waiting for her break as a professional dancer. The Artist/e emerges through dancers' discussion of the creative, physical and interpersonal skills required to "perform" as an exotic dancer. Dancers need to be physically fit and possess a certain amount of physical agility and gymnastic capabilities in order to engage in high-quality pole tricks and stage shows. Integral to this is dancers' physical appearance, that is, the Artist/e is expected to dress and look a certain way. Weight maintenance, hair styling, make-up and skincare are critical to the Artist/e. Coupled with this, dancers also need to possess or develop a keen ability to assess and address the service requirements (e.g. attentive listener, conversationalist, entertainer) of a diverse clientele. The dancer's ability to perform in a consistent and "genuine" manner interpersonally, goes a long way in FYEO creating its organizational identity centred upon "high quality" service. In this way, FYEOs formal and informal house rules play a role in this identity construction process. The professional draws upon aspects of the Artist/e and the Good Girl in highlighting the sameness of exotic dancing and other forms of work. Attention is drawn to the specific training and competencies required for the work, just like any other skilled profession. Work is viewed as a rational activity where private and public boundaries are not meant to overlap. The construction of self imposed rules on drinking at work (e.g. abstinence) and maintaining impersonal, but civil relations with co-workers underpin the professional. The construction of these identity roles and the hierarchy of motivations allow dancers to justify the work they do and their position in the industry. In doing this, these dancers also acknowledge, and in some regards sustain, the stigma associated with the occupation and their spoiled identities. Through, the processes of constructing psychological barriers dancers also draw attention to the type of dancing performed. Different types of dancing are posited as more acceptable, or less stigmatized, than other forms of dancing. Furthermore, dancers negotiate a hierarchy of organizations and type of sex work. Dancers associate themselves with the type of sex work and organization that they, and others, view more favourably, that is, gentlemen's clubs. They disassociate themselves from those they view less favourably, that is, clubs that encourage or allow contact between clients and dancers and those clubs that allow other unlicensed sexual services. The Good Girl and the professional are constructed to align with the no contact type of dancing, and thus the more legitimate organizations and type of sex work. The lifers, Competitors and the Dirty Dancers are constructed as the others to epitomize the more stigmatized levels of the hierarchy.

Discussion. Dirty work and managing spoiled identities
Dancers express disgust as a means through which to manage their own feelings and shape their identities. They reframe (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999) their position as dirty workers by redirecting the stigma to clients, other dancers and the industry as a whole. The moral taint is transferred by condemning those (e.g. sleazy men) that often condemn dancers (e.g. as promiscuous, cheap, brainless). Social comparisons are also drawn between Dirty Dancers versus professionals and between lifers versus professionals and opportunists. The opportunist and professional are constructed to rationalize the individual's occupation and thus present dancing as a legitimate occupation. The opportunist and professional are more likely to be interpreted as nonstigmatized or less stigmatized when there is an other from which to compare it. In this case the other is the Dirty Dancer or the lifer. Dancers also recalibrate (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999) the weighting of different job components so that the less stigmatized, more positive features of the work are prioritized over the more stigmatized features. The thrill of the performance, the exciting lifestyle and the monies earned are all placed higher in a hierarchy of job components than the monotony of the job, competitive nature of the work and the rude behaviour of clients. Dancers acknowledge the less positive features of the work, but place lower value on these elements when evaluating the total value of the job. They modify meanings by directing attention to the more positive features of the job. Similarly, dancers also refocus (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999) upon the positive features of the work, while ignoring or minimizing the stigmatized

elements. Self-employment offers a viable, reasonable alternative for students to pay tuition fees without sacrificing studying time or increasing debt. Other dancers focus upon the opportunity to travel the world, discover themselves or start up their own business. If it were not for this work, these possibilities may otherwise not be available to the opportunist.

The construction of the hierarchy of stigmatization occurs as a mutually constitutive process among macro, meso and micro resources that the individual draws upon in her identity construction. Currently, in the UK, exotic dancing clubs operate under a public entertainment license, yet in Glasgow, council representations and other anti-sex work advocates argue for clubs to be categorized and regulated as sex work to recognize the "real" nature of the work performed. Jones *et al.* (2003) conclude that there is little agreement on what constitutes sex work or exotic dancing. Bruckert (2002) also argues that exotic dancing is not work that can be easily categorized and it exists on the margins of the economy, morality and legality. In this research dancers sometimes refer to exotic dancing as a part of the sex industry, yet they are quick to emphasize a distinction between sex work and exotic dancing based mainly upon the fantasy and entertainment aspects of exotic dancing.

Furthermore, organizational rules about acceptable levels of nudity vary from club to club. This plays a role in identity construction as well (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Some clubs are fully nude, while others are topless only. Moreover, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) argue that individuals do not enter organizations with clean slates, rather they enter organizations with socialization experiences from a variety of different aspects of their lives. Newcomers to the exotic dancing occupation may already have formed stereotypes about the industry, clubs and dancers before they start working. This means individuals not only have to construct positive occupational identities drawing upon various macro and meso resources they face, they also have to sort through their own past experiences about how they view the work and those performing it. Overall, this creates a sense of confusion and ambiguity around what type of work exotic dancing is and how it is viewed by various constituents. This lack of clarity, on the one hand, may limit the chance of challenging exotic dancing, and sex work in general, as dirty work. On the other hand, however, without clearly understood definitions it may open space for meanings to be more easily negotiated and changed.

Conclusions

Similar to Coupland (2001), Dick and Cassell (2004), Thomas and Davies (2005), Watson (1998), and Watson and Harris (1999), I have adopted an approach whereby reader, writer and participants "work together on a story" (Watson, 1998, p. 139) about identity. These stories illustrate the messy nature of identity construction for dirty workers amidst various macro, meso and micro considerations. This serves as a critical contribution of this research. The dirty nature of the work, that is, the economically marginal and culturally stigmatized nature of the work, does not mean dancers are not agents in their own identity work (Bruckert, 2002). The individual may strive for a sense of coherence among the chaos that envelops her process of becoming. A part of this process entails "othering" whereby individuals draw upon others viewed less favourably to create a more positive self-view for themselves and their identified groups. "Agency," however, may not necessarily result in freedom from structural constraints, nor might it mean coherence whereby there is complete and absolute, favourable understandings of one's self and others. This we can see in the dancers' construction of a hierarchy of stigmatization. On the one hand, it serves as a resource to construct more favourable identities and on the other hand, it serves to sustain the stigma associated with the work.

Undoubtedly, there is a wealth of research that explores the nature of sex work, in particular the emotional labour and the "doing gender" of the work (Boles and Garbin, 1974; Chapkis, 1997; Enck and Preston, 1988; Foote, 1954; Ronai and Ellis, 1989; Wood, 2000). There has also been some research that explores how sex workers manage their spoiled identities (Sanders, 2005; Thompson and Harred, 1992). As a site of study relatively overlooked in mainstream organization studies, however, there is still much to be learned about sex work as an empirical site and the identity construction of these workers. This research moves us forward in filling this lacuna and this is the second critical contribution of this work. Moreover, this research brings us closer in understanding the sameness and difference between dirty work and other types of work. The othering experienced by the dancers discussed here is likely to occur in various other occupational settings, not just those

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