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The Effects and Experiences of Stigma in the Minneapolis Strip Club Industry

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By

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This Master's Thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

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Abstract

Utilizing participatory action research with dancers in the Minneapolis strip club industry, the present study examined current dancers' experiences with stigma, its effects on their quality of life, and stigma management techniques. The present multi-methods study involved an initial survey and follow-up interviews with approximately 60 current dancers within Minneapolis strip clubs. Participants reported experiencing stigma in personal relationships and in the workplace, discrimination by landlords and future employers. Through thematic analysis, seven key themes were identified: dancer identity, assumptions made, loss of social support, profession weaponized against them, housing discrimination, lack of employment mobility, and identity concealment as stigma management. Applying the minority stress theory to dancers in the strip club industry, it appears the stress experienced by dancers is caused by the discriminatory social structures and stigma built against the population. Therefore, educating lawmakers about the needs and rights of dancers and the impact of stigma might inform legislation and eliminate the power of employers and landlords to discriminate against dancers.

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Introduction

Dancers[1] in the strip club industry[2] are a stigmatized and marginalized group who, historically, have been studied by academia through the lens of deviancy. The tone of previous research infers that dancers are either victims of poverty, drug abuse, and/or trafficking, or are victimized by their own poor life choices (Sherman et al., 2017). Other research focuses on the motivations (Hardy & Sanders, 2015; Sanders & Hardy, 2015) and self-perceptions of dancers (Pederson, Champion, Hesse, & Lewis, 2015), and how they manage stigma (Ham & Gerard, 2014; Miller & Major, 2000; Thompson, Harred, & Burks, 2003; Wong, Holroyd, & Bingham, 2011). Unfortunately, much of the previous research has neglected to view dancers as decision makers, and further perpetuates the stigma surrounding the profession.

This paper will conceptualize the experiences of dancers within the strip club industry through a lens of minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003). Previous literature has posited that marginalized individuals experience negative consequences as a result of social stigma surrounding their stigmatized attributes. In the case of dancers in the strip club industry, negative consequences from minority stress are a result of the social stigma surrounding working in the strip club industry, and not inherently from the work **(**Koken, Bimbi, Parsons, & Halkitis, 2004; Krusi, Kerr, Taylor, Rhodes & Shannon, 2016; Lazarus et. al., 2012; Scrambler, 2007). While

[1] For the purpose of this paper, *dancer* will be used to define workers who self-identify as having danced in a strip club within the past two months and whose primary income from the strip club is through customer tips.
[2] The *strip club industry* is defined as adult entertainment venues where dancers provide lap dances, pole dances, and other erotic entertainment to fulfill the fantasies of customers. The strip club industry does not include the provision of direct genital stimulation or full-service sex work to customers. Strip clubs may be topless or fully-nude with differing regulations between each type of venue and geographical locations.

previous research regarding stigma has typically been conducted with sex workers[3], a review of the literature revealed the minority stress theory has not yet been applied to sex workers or dancers.

Minority Stress

The *Minority Stress Model* (Meyer, 2003) posits that excess stress for stigmatized minorities is caused primarily by oppressive social structures (e.g., discriminatory legislation and regulation) rather than by their stigmatized attributes (e.g., self-identification as or perception of a dancer). These oppressive social structures built against the stigmatized group include discriminatory laws, prejudice, and religious traditions that act as core stressors by perpetuating stigma, prejudice, and discrimination (Meyer, 2003). The minority stress model has, historically, conceptualized the stress of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) population, but has also been applied to other marginalized populations including transgender individuals (Bockting, Miner, Swinburne-Romine, Hamilton, & Coleman, 2013; Katz-Wise, Mereish, & Woulfe, 2017), people of color (Chen & Tryon, 2012; Cyrus, 2017; Wei et al., 2010) and immigrants (Negi, 2013).

As a result of the unique, socially-based stressors (Meyer, 2003) affecting individuals within the strip club industry, minority stress has a strong impact in the lives of the stigmatized individuals and may lead to adverse physical and mental health outcomes (Hatzenbuehler, Phelan, & Link, 2013; Link & Phelan, 2006; Meyer, 2003). The minority stress model describes experienced stressors as *distal* or *proximal* (Meyer, 2003). Distal stressors are external sources of stress which are independent of personal identification with the stigmatized attribute. Therefore,

[3] Traditionally, *sex work* is considered an umbrella term that includes stripping. However, for the purpose of this paper, a distinction has been made between the two terms in order to specify the population for comparison. For the purpose of this paper, *sex work* is defined as the sale of a sexual service for money or material goods including escorting, cam-working, pornography, professional domination/submission, street-based work, erotic massage and providing "extras" within strip clubs.

even if the individual does not self-identify with the stigmatized attribute, he/she may still experience discrimination, prejudice, or violence as a result of others' perceptions of the stigmatized attribute. Proximal stressors, on the other hand, are internal sources of stress that are related to self-identity with the stigmatized attribute. Proximal stressors might include anticipating rejection, internalized stigma, and techniques to manage stigma such as identity concealment (Meyer, 2003).

Dancers experiencing proximal stressors manage their stigma using a variety of stress management strategies. Previous studies (Forsyth & Deshotels 1998; Thompson, Harred, & Burks, 2003; Wong, Holroyd, & Bingham, 2011) have found that dancers and sex workers are concerned about how others will react or perceive them and engage in identity concealment to avoid negative consequences associated with the stigma surrounding their profession (Miller & Major, 2000). Sex workers often lose access to social support due to stigma (Koken, 2012), or socially isolate themselves from others to avoid the experienced stigma and stress when concealing their work (Ham & Gerard, 2014). Other studies have found that dancers may create alternate positive identities about themselves and distance themselves from other dancers to differentiate themselves from, or disconfirm, the stereotypes associated with the profession (e.g., engaging in prostitution, being "loose," or being drug addicted) (Miller & Major, 2000; Trautner & Collett, 2010). As another technique of stigma management, they may choose to affiliate themselves with similarly stigmatized persons, such as other dancers, as a self-protective measure to avoid negative consequences as a result of self-disclosure to others (Crocker & Major, 1989, Postmes & Branscombe 2002; Miller & Major, 2000).

Aims of Current Study

This study was part of a larger needs assessment that utilized participatory action research with dancers within the Minneapolis strip club industry to examine the various workplace, health, legal and social needs of current dancers. The major objective and research questions of the present study were: (1) "What are the Minneapolis dancers' experiences with stigma relating to their profession, and its effects on their quality of life?", and (2) "How do Minneapolis dancers in the strip club industry manage stigma as a result of their profession?". A mixed methods approach to gather quantitative and qualitative data was utilized.

Methods

Participatory Action Research

Utilizing participatory action research, as described by McIntyre (2008), this study was designed to produce a more representative picture of the needs of dancers within the Minneapolis strip club industry and to correct problems of previous studies which have not been worker-centered. Specifically, dancers were included not just as participants and consultants, but as coresearchers, emphasizing collaborative research at all levels of the research process. This level of inclusion throughout the research process is essential when working with marginalized populations, particularly within sex work (van der Meulen, 2011). Through mutual discussion and collaborative effort, the structure of the present study was developed with members of the Sex Workers Outreach Project of Minneapolis (SWOP-MPLS).

Sampling

Researchers. Members of SWOP-MPLS were approached by the PI to conduct a needs assessment that would best serve their community. SWOP-MPLS members elected to focus on

strip club dancers due to impending regulations in the strip club industry that were not worker-focused, and potentially harmful. SWOP-MPLS members who identified as current dancers within the Minneapolis strip club industry were approached and provided with information on the purpose and processes of participatory action research. Traditionally, PAR seeks to include as many stakeholders in the research team as possible. However, given the consequences related to stigma, such as being outed as a dancer, and the hidden nature of the population, the research team was limited in stakeholder involvement. Based on interest and availability, three members of SWOP-MPLS, who were already public with their profession and could represent the interests of the community, volunteered to become co-researchers, and one member volunteered to serve as a consultant. In total, the research team consisted of six co-researchers (three academic researchers from Minnesota State University, Mankato, and three community researchers from SWOP-MPLS), and one community consultant (from SWOP-MPLS).

Participants. Purposive sampling was used to approach participants who identified as current dancers[4] within the Minneapolis strip club industry. For complete demographic information, please see Table 1 in Appendix A. Approximately 80 individuals initiated the online survey, and of these, 62 participants completed enough of the survey to be included in analysis (criteria was completion of 90% or more of the quantitative questions). Of the 62 survey participants (aged 20-47, M=27.26, SD=4.875) included in the analysis, the majority of participants identified as white and were aged 20-25 or 26-30 (43.55% and 35.48%, respectively). More specifically, 56.45% identified as white (n = 35), followed by black (17.74%, n = 11), mixed race (16.13%, n = 10), Hispanic (6.45%, n = 4), middle eastern

[4] For the purposes of this study, *current dancer* has been defined as having worked as a dancer in a strip club in Minneapolis within the past two months.

(1.61%, *n* = 1), and other race (1.61%, *n* = 1). 91.2% of participants identified their gender identity as female (*n* = 57), 6.4% identified themselves as non-binary (*n* = 4), and 1.6% as gender fluid (*n* = 1). 55.74% of participants identified their sexual orientation as heterosexual/straight (*n* = 34), 14.75% as bisexual (*n* = 9), 11.47% as queer (*n* = 7), 8.2% as pansexual (*n* = 5), 4.92% as homosexual/gay (*n* = 3), 3.28% as open (*n* = 2), and 1.64% as fluid (*n* =1). For a complete glossary of gender identity and sexual orientation terms, see Appendix B. When asked about current relationship status, 16.1% of participants (*n* = 10) reported they were single and not dating, 25.8% were casually dating with no committed partner (*n* = 16), 53.2% were partnered (*n* = 33), and 4.8% were legally partnered (*n* = 3).

67.8% of participants (*n* = 40) indicated that the majority (76-100%) of their income is earned through dancing. Most frequently, participants identified Downtown Cabaret or Spearmint Rhino as their primary club (26.67% and 16.67%, respectively). For complete club affiliation information, please see Table 2 in Appendix A. Following the online survey, participants were able to voluntarily participate in follow-up interviews. From the 62 survey participants, 33 elected to participate in the follow-up interviews used for analysis.

Inclusion criteria for the study was having worked in a Minneapolis strip club within the past two months. Inclusion was also restricted to dancers, as opposed to other workers inside strip clubs such as bartenders and management, and those who are at least 18 years of age. To control for these criteria, participants were required to answer a screening question regarding specific Minneapolis clubs that they have recently worked at.

Procedure

Participants were directly recruited by members of SWOP-MPLS and identified as a current dancer within the Minneapolis strip club industry. Through personal contacts, recruiters asked potential participants if they were interested in completing the survey. If a potential participant was interested, the recruiter emailed them a direct link to the online survey. Additional recruitment was conducted on social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) from the PI's and recruiters' accounts with the following post: "If you have worked in a Minneapolis strip club within the past two months and would like to participate in research asking your opinions on workplace conditions, please DM [Direct Message] for the survey link." Potential participants direct messaged the research team declaring their interest and were subsequently emailed the direct link to the survey. For a complete recruitment script, please see Appendix C.

Upon opening the survey link, participants were presented with a consent form. Participants indicated their informed consent to participate and their assurance that they were 18 years of age by clicking the link at the bottom of the page which continued to the survey. For a complete survey consent form, please see Appendix D. The survey took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. After completion of the survey, participants were directed to a separate survey to enter an email address for a $20.00 Amazon gift card as compensation, as well as inquiring whether they would like to participate in an optional interview.

Participants who expressed interest in participating in an interview were sent an email from which informed consent was obtained. For a complete interview consent form, please see Appendix F. Interviews were conducted via ZOOM meeting platform (a video conferencing program similar to Skype, but that meets HIPAA compliance for privacy), or in-person recording on the interviewer's iPhone. All participants who expressed interest in interviewing were

interviewed by the SWOP-MPLS co-researchers. Interviews lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. Upon completion of the interview, SWOP-MPLS co-researchers ensured the recorded file was saved using the participant's pseudonym as the file name. SWOP-MPLS co-researchers sent the files via email to the academic co-researchers who compensated the participant with a $100 e-gift card to Amazon. Interviews were conducted via ZOOM meeting platform during a pre-scheduled meeting time. Upon entering the meeting and before recording, the assigned SWOP-MPLS co-researcher explained the nature of the interview (i.e., duration, purpose, confidentiality, and compensation) and held for questions. The SWOP-MPLS co-researcher asked each participant whether they would like to use an alias or pseudonym to further protect their identity, and asked permission to begin recording. SWOP-MPLS co-researchers were instructed to ask specific questions related to needs assessment topics during the interview, allowing for expansion and clarification as needed.

Measures

The present study utilized an online survey and follow-up interviews to gain information on dancers' experiences of stigma and quality of life.

Online survey. The quantitative survey was part of a larger needs assessment which was designed to ask participants about numerous experiences and perspectives on workplace conditions and stigma. Question topics such as demographics, places of employment, safety, pay structure, contract details, cleanliness, stigma, police presence, as well as others were included (for a complete survey questionnaire, please see Appendix E). Quantitative scaling questions utilized a five-point Likert scale with a variety of anchors to match the question. Question examples included, "Are your friends supportive of you working in a strip club?", or "Are you treated differently when someone knows you work in a strip club?". Free response and open-

ended questions were included at the end of each section allowing participants to share any additional insights they may have. For example, “Do you have any other comments relating to stigma about your job or how stigma has affected you?”

The first draft of the online survey created by the academic co-researchers and was sent to SWOP-MPLS co-researchers for review. This led to changes in ambiguous wording and refocusing content to worker-centered questions. After SWOP-MPLS approved the content, the survey was released and conducted over a 3-month period (February 13, 2018- May 18, 2017). The survey was hosted by the Qualtrics website with details about the study and contact details for support. The only questions that were required affirmed the inclusion criteria mentioned above. The survey was anonymous. However, emails were voluntarily provided in a separate and unattached survey in order to receive compensation and indicate whether they would like to be contacted for the in-depth interview.

Interview. A short, semi-structured interview script was developed for the larger needs assessment. The present study focused on aspects of stigma, which included the following questions: (a) “Do you have any other comments relating to stigma about your job or how stigma has affected you?” (b) “Is there anything else you would like to share with me and the other researchers?”. The interviews followed a conversational style, and all participants agreed to interviews being recorded. For complete interview instructions and script, please see Appendix G.

Analysis and Coding

The survey questionnaire was analyzed using a mixed methods approach. All survey material was organized utilizing SPSS software.

Quantitative analysis. Quantitative data was analyzed by reporting simple means and descriptive statistics from the various questions and distinguishing responses between clubs. The only questions that were required were those confirming the individual met inclusion criteria. Therefore, while there were 62 participants included in quantitative analysis, the number of respondents *(n)* vary by item.

Qualitative analysis. All interview material was sent to an independent firm, VerbalInk, for transcription. Interviews and qualitative responses from surveys were organized and analyzed utilizing a qualitative research software program (MAXQDA), which allowed participants' statements concerning their feelings about sex work, stigma and quality of life to be identified and captured within each narrative. Using an iterative thematic analysis, two academic researchers, first on their own and then collaboratively, analyzed and categorized statements, codes, and themes. The process of thematic analysis involved: reading participants' statements for familiarity, clustering statements of meaning into codes, clustering codes into themes, reviewing codes and themes, and sharing analyzed statements, codes, and themes with other researchers.

Results

Online Survey

62 online surveys were completed to inclusion criterion. Participants were asked whether they are treated differently when someone knows they work in a strip club. 77.2% of participants indicated that people treat them differently due to knowledge of their profession (n = 44). For example, "Many people have a preconceived idea about what it means when a woman is a stripper. This translates into how people view and treat you inside and outside the club."

Participants were asked whether people make assumptions about their personal lives based on their job. 89.5% of participants (*n* = 51) answered "yes," of which were assumed to engage in prostitution or full-service sex work (19.2%), to have multiple sexual partners (17.6%), and to engage in drug use and parties (11.2%). Other, lesser reported assumptions were being unintelligent (3.6%), having "daddy issues" (3.6%), having sexually-transmitted diseases (3.2%), lacking morals (1.6%), being a victim (1.6%), or being unable to consent (1.6%). 53.6% of participants (*n* = 30) felt that other people do not respect their job as a dancer or do not see their profession as a legitimate profession. In contrast, 91.2% of participants (*n* = 52) respect their job and see it as a legitimate profession.

Participants were asked to report on their experiences with disclosure of their profession to important others. 74.1% of participants (*n* = 43) indicated their family was aware of their profession. Of those participants, 18.6% (*n* = 8) were non-consensually outed to their family. For example, "My mom and sister know because someone they know found me at a club" or, "Was outed by someone I was dating." Many participants indicated they told their family members outright and aimed to reduce the stigma and stereotypes by explaining the profession. Of the 25.9% of participants (*n* = 15) whose family was not aware of their profession, dancers reported they did not disclose due to fear of embarrassment (*n =2)*, fear of disapproval or stigma (*n = 5)*, or the belief that it is no one's business (*n* = 3). 91.4% of participants felt their friends were aware of their profession, and some participants indicated their friends were also dancers (*n* = 6). 69.2% of participants (*n* = 36) reported they felt their friends were supportive of their profession working in a strip club.

Participants were asked at what point they disclose their profession in a new intimate relationship. 47.4% (*n* = 27) indicated they would disclose immediately, 29.8% (*n* = 17) after a

couple dates, 15.8% (*n* = 9) after a few months, and 7% (*n* = 4) reported they would never disclose their profession to a partner. Of the 83.8% (*n* = 52) participants who indicated they were currently in a relationship, 100% (*n* = 38) of respondents indicated their partner is aware of their profession. 59.6% (*n* = 34) of all participants reported their profession has been weaponized against them (i.e. used against them in an argument) by a current or former partner. For example, "I have been threatened and blackmailed by an ex-partner. This person threatened to spread untrue lies about my work in the sex industries that would endanger my safety. I was afraid for my well-being after this threat."

Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with 33 participants who self-identified as having worked as a dancer in a Minneapolis strip club within the past two months. Through thematic analysis, seven main themes were identified from participant interview responses: dancer identity, assumptions, loss of social supports, profession weaponized against them, housing discrimination, lack of employment mobility, and identity concealment.

Dancer identity. When dancers disclose their profession to others, their profession becomes their identity to others even if they do not identify with it themselves. Many dancers reported when they disclose their profession to important others, they are then seen as "the stripper." With the identity of "stripper" comes the stigma and assumptions associated with the profession. Therefore, dancers easily lose respect and are immediately treated differently by those who are aware of their profession. As soon as they disclose their profession, people's perceptions are "warped instantly."

"Everyone's like, 'You're only a stripper. You're only a sex worker.'"

"*Yeah, that becomes your identity. Then it's like, 'Oh, yeah, I'm going to invite my friend to this party. She's a stripper.'"*

"That and the judgment I receive from people when it is disclosed that I was a dancer. I'm not treated as if I had any kind of brain which I mean I went to college, I have a degree, yeah, I'm smart. But I'm not treated that way because – just because of that label of being a stripper."

Assumptions made. Dancers were asked to identify whether assumptions were made about them based on their profession. Some dancers reported people making assumptions about their work ethic, budgeting skills, and intelligence. Others reported assumptions about their lifestyle, drug use and sexual partners. These assumptions were typically based on stereotypes and stigma associated with the profession and were used to discriminate against the dancers in several facets of life.

"However, you're also making assumptions – you're then making assumptions – about my ability to budget and my credit score, my savings, I mean, you're making a bunch of other assumptions that aren't okay."

"You're making assumptions about my work ethic and that's shitty."

Loss of social supports. As a result of disclosing their profession, dancers often lose social supports (i.e., family members, friends, intimate relationships) due to the stigma associated with the industry. Many participants reported their family members disapprove of their profession, and many reported their families "disowning" them. This loss of social support can occur with any important other who disapproves of the profession (e.g., parents, siblings,

extended family, friends, and significant others). As a result, dancers are often selective about who they disclose their profession to.

> ”*So, I started doing this. I was very, very excited. Told my family about it, and immediately my step-mother disowned me, shut me down, did not speak to me for two months. I did not go to Christmas with my family and my extended family because my aunts and my cousins were all very disappointed in me.”*

> “*Like my family didn’t disown me but, like, is it difficult every time I see them? Yes."*

Profession weaponized against them. Many dancers indicated their profession has been weaponized against them by a current or former partner. Partners may use the dancer’s profession against them during an argument to get their way, to obtain custody of children, or to scare dancers into staying in the relationship. Many dancers reported meeting partners in strip clubs, thinking he or she would be accepting and supportive of the profession. However, many partners would eventually use the profession against the dancer, even if they indicated previously that they never would.

> “*He literally made me cry all the time. Like he would be like, ‘Go sit on some dicks or something.’ Like, Go to the club and – He’d be like, ‘You’re for everybody. You’re not for me. You’re not loyal to me. You can’t be loyal to me, because everybody is – wants you.’”*

> *"Every time I fight with my baby dad, like, having to worry at someplace in the back of my mind, like, he’s gonna use me being a drug-addicted stripper to, like, take my baby away from me, which, like, totally fucking happens.”*

Housing discrimination. As a result of the stigma and stereotypes surrounding the dancer identity landlords often make assumptions about dancers and discriminate against them when dancers are trying to obtain appropriate housing. Participants reported being faced with the dilemma of disclosing their profession to landlords and having their application passed over due to stigma, or not disclosing their profession and having to lie about their income. Some dancers reported landlords requesting pay stubs or 1099s, which independent contractors (especially in an all-cash profession) would not have, in order to avoid renting to the dancer.

> "*Yes. It has honestly affected a lot of things, like renting, for instance. I've had a couple times when I was looking for an apartment, like even though I make over $100,000 a year and I claim that, they still won't give me apartments because they're like, 'You don't have paycheck stubs.' Just because of that they're like, 'Oh, no paycheck stubs? Red flag. Sorry, that's it.' Either that, or they just don't say anything and they're like, 'Oh, sorry. This isn't enough,'"*

> *"Getting my apartment was difficult, but that was just because all my income is mostly cash, so I had to prove my income three different times. I had to send them three different bank statements and then deposit slips."*

Lack of employment mobility. As dancers attempt to leave the strip club industry and enter a new field or profession, the stigma associated with previously or currently being a dancer can affect their chances of being hired. Future employers may discriminate against dancers based on stereotypes and assumptions associated with the stigma of the dancer identity. Many dancers report fear of disclosing their profession to future employers and are faced with the dilemma of disclosing their current or past profession as a dancer and being passed over for the position or explaining several years of unemployment to the potential employer. Many dancers experience

this fear and stigma even if they have the skills for the position or have attended higher education.

> *"I've known plenty of girls that gave it up and then they can't find jobs and then they end up going back. But then often because they get discriminated against in the regular employment business"*

> *"But if we don't write that we worked there and we try to cover it up, they're gonna find out because they're still documenting us. We're still out there documented under [club] and all this other shit so we can't get a job. But yet there's no safe way for us to […] Or we just don't pay taxes and we just act like we haven't been working for five years."*

Identity concealment as stigma management. The stigma management technique that was primarily reported by dancers was identity concealment. Dancers reported hiding their profession from important others, landlords, and potential employers. Often, dancers are selective of who they disclose their profession to in order to avoid the negative consequences associated with being a dancer, such as the previously described themes. While this is an effective strategy for managing stigma much of the time, it adds an extra source of stress to many dancers.

> *"I don't tell people. Because I've even had friends - in the beginning, I did tell people, my friends and stuff. It would turn into like, 'Oh, yeah, my friend, she's a stripper.'"*

> *"I'm from a really small town. So, I don't tell anybody and it's kind of just like I keep it on the hush-hush."*

> *"I mean, it's hard and it's like gotten harder, because – because I'm like in the closet with the door open kind of."*

Discussion

The focus of this study was to examine dancers' experiences with stigma and minority stress, and its effects on their quality of life. As predicted, dancers reported experiencing stigma in a variety of situations and by a variety of individuals. The majority of dancers (74.1%) indicated their parents were aware of their job, but many of these instances involved being outed to their family. Of the 25.9% of dancers who did not disclose to their family, it was commonly reported that their family would not approve due to the stigma attached to the profession. Furthermore, it was common for dancers' significant others to be aware of their profession, but many dancers (45.6%) reported delayed disclosure of their profession. In addition, it was common within these intimate relationships for their profession to be used against dancers in arguments.

Dancers also discussed how others make assumptions about them based on their occupation. Dancers commonly reported being labeled a "whore" or "prostitute" because of their profession of working in a strip club. As a result, workers frequently reported discrimination by landlords and future employers.

The present study provides support for extending the minority stress theory to the strip club industry and sex work community in order to better understand the impact of stigma and minority stress. The stigma and minority stress associated with being a dancer is not a result of the job per se. While dancers may experience some stress as a result of financial distress, safety, and cleanliness, the bulk of the stress experienced by dancers is the result of minority stress. The social structures and social stigma regarding the profession result in discrimination of dancers in all facets of life. As a result of their profession, dancers have lost social support, and respect. They are often assumed to be drug addicts, promiscuous, and unintelligent. Dancers experience

difficulty obtaining housing and jobs within other industries due to the preconceived notions and assumptions made by landlords and potential employers.

This study also examined dancers' stigma management techniques. As predicted, dancers reported engaging in various strategies of stigma management. However, the primary source of stigma management reported was identity concealment. Many dancers reported hiding their profession from important others, people they just met, future employers, and landlords to reduce their experienced stigma. Dancers often reported being selective in the individuals they disclosed their profession to, and often delaying disclosure until they were certain the important other could be trusted with the information. Other stigma management techniques included affiliating themselves with other stigmatized individuals, such as being friends with other dancers, and socially isolating themselves from others.

Limitations and Future Research

While making important contributions to existing literature, the present study had several limitations related to sampling and research design. This study only included current dancers within the Minneapolis strip club industry. As such, many dancers from Minnesota outside the metro area were excluded from the sample, so the results are not necessarily representative of dancers across the state or country. The sample size was also relatively small considering the large population of strip clubs and dancers nationwide, which is difficult to quantify since dancers are typically independent contractors rather than documented employees. Future research should explore the strip club industry of other geographical areas. In particular, future research should include rural area strip clubs to compare cultural and environmental differences in stigma experiences.

This study also had limited representation of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity. The majority of the sample was White (56.45%), and heterosexual/straight (55.74%). The sample also only included female dancers from the Minneapolis strip club industry. Thus, the generalizability of these findings to dancers of other and multiple minority status is limited. Future research should explore the experiences of male dancers, as well as those with multiple minority status which could further impact the extent and experience of minority stress.

The use of participatory action research in this study created some limitations as well. While using SWOP-MPLS co-researchers for recruitment and interviewing allowed for increased rapport with participants, it also reduced the amount of control that the academic research team had over these aspects of the study. All co-researchers discussed and developed procedures, and the PI created a template of the procedures for each co-researcher. However, the SWOP-MPLS co-researchers could have been trained more thoroughly to prevent bias being introduced into the interviews, and to prevent leading questions from being asked. It is also difficult to know if SWOP-MPLS co-researchers' bias was introduced to participants during recruitment. It is possible that SWOP-MPLS co-researchers explained to participants what types of information to share in the survey and interview, beyond the procedural recruitment script. Future research utilizing participatory action research and community members as active co-researchers might consider training non-academic co-researchers in the procedures of academic research design to increase fidelity of research procedures.

Future research should examine the experiences of stigma and minority stress, and its effect on quality of life in a population of dancers in other geographical areas, or of other diverse backgrounds. It might also consider making comparisons of experiences in different cultural and environmental factors related to the various geographical areas. Future research should further

assess how stigma impacts the dancer's families (i.e., discrimination of dancers' children by others), and the experiences of stigma in the healthcare system after disclosing their profession, as these were two areas of stigma that were reported to a lesser extent and were not specifically examined in the present study. Finally, future research should continue to further the knowledge and understanding of dancers' management of stigma and minority stress, and consider making geographical comparisons in this area as well.

Conclusion

Dancer-specific minority stress was associated with the social structures built against the profession, such as discriminatory regulation and prejudice. A variety of themes in stigma emerged from the data: dancer identity, housing discrimination, lack of employment mobility, loss of social supports, profession being weaponized against them, assumptions being made about them, and engaging in identity concealment. Once dancers disclose their profession, others' views of them are immediately warped, discriminatory assumptions are made about them, their profession is weaponized against them, and sources of social support are lost. As a result, dancers experience difficulty transitioning into other industries, and obtaining housing. Therefore, dancers often engage in identity concealment by being selective of who they disclose their profession to in order to reduce their experienced stigma.

Phelan, Link, and Dovidio (2008) identified three reasons people stigmatize other groups or individuals: (1) exploitation and domination, (2) social norm enforcement, and (3) disease avoidance. In terms of the strip club industry, exploitation and domination is often assumed to be an inherent part of the work, and, therefore, may be considered a justifiable reason for stigmatization. Dancers also deviate from the social norms in several ways (e.g., acceptable profession, sexuality, promiscuity). As a result, dancers may be stigmatized for the purposes of

reintegrative shaming, or to clarify to other members of society what is considered acceptable. Finally, dancers are often assumed to be dirty, or at risk for HIV/STI risk (Sherman et al., 2017). Therefore, society may stigmatize the population as a means of avoiding disease infecting the social majority. In order to reduce stigma within the population, then, interventions need to be tailored to changing the opinions and attitudes of those in power, or reducing the ability to use that power to discriminate against dancers.

Link and Phelan (2001) suggest using multifaceted and multilevel interventions to change the attitudes and beliefs of societal groups that lead to labeling, stereotyping and stigma. More specifically, it is suggested to choose interventions that "produce fundamental changes in attitudes and beliefs or change the power relations that underlie the ability of dominant groups to act on their attitudes and beliefs (p. 381)." Some studies have indicated that changes in the power to discriminate against the group diminish the health disparities and inequalities of the stigmatized group (Hatzenbuhler, Phelan, & Link, 2013). Including dancers in research and social policy to develop better relevant and effective programs and policies may increase the benefit of the chosen interventions (Koken, 2012). Other research indicates that policy and societal shifts in views of dancing as a legitimate occupation may decrease the stigmatization (Lazarus et al., 2012). Education to the public and legislatures about the meaning of being a dancer, and the job description may reduce the stigma associated with the profession. Addressing this distinct type of prejudice is necessary to improve the well-being and quality of life of dancers within the strip club industry.

Areas for potential intervention might include educating lawmakers and government officials about the needs and rights of dancers, and the impact of stigma associated with the profession. Specifically, this education might inform legislation toward treating dancers as a

protected class which may decrease discrimination and increase fairer treatment in employment and housing. By creating legislation that eliminates the power to discriminate against dancers, the minority stress on quality of life may be reduced. It may also influence social attitudes toward the profession over time to eventually diminish the stigma associated with being a dancer.

A dancer specific area of intervention may include education and training on the effects of minority stress and stigma. Interventions might include education on filing taxes as an independent contractor, resume writing, and interviewing skills to better conceal their professional identity to landlords and future employers. In addition, mental health counseling and therapy with a competent and supportive therapist may improve healthy coping mechanisms and better allow dancers to manage the stigma. Therefore, during interventions dancers should be provided with a list of dancer-friendly organizations in the area to seek help and support if needed.

Dancers experience a myriad of stigma and stressors as a result of the social structures built against them. While dancers engage in various coping mechanisms to manage that stress, such as identity concealment, stigma reduction should not be the sole responsibility of the dancer. Societal attitude and power shifts, through education and worker-centered legislation, are needed in order to reduce stigma's effect on dancers' quality of life.

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Appendix A

Table 1

Survey Participant Demographics

Demographic	*N*	*%*
Age*		
20-22	7	11.2
23-25	20	32.3
26-30	22	35.5
30+	16	25.8
Race/Ethnicity		
White	35	56.45
Black/African American	11	17.74
Multiracial	10	16.13
Hispanic/Latino	4	6.45
Middle Eastern	1	1.61
Other	1	1.61
Gender Identity		
Female	57	91.9
Non-binary	4	6.45
Gender Fluid	1	1.61
Sexual Orientation		
Straight/Heterosexual	34	54.8
Bisexual	9	14.5
Queer	7	11.3
Pansexual	5	8.06
Gay/Homosexual	3	4.84
Open	2	3.2
Fluid	1	1.6
Not reported	1	1.6
Relationship Structure		
Single and not dating	10	16.1
Casually dating (no committed partner)	16	25.8
Partnered (boyfriend, girlfriend, significant other, fiancé)	33	53.2
Legal Partnership (married)	3	4.8

* M = 27.26, *SD* = 4.875

Table 2

Survey Participant Primary Club

Club	*n*	%
Augie's	8	12.9
BJ's	2	3.2
Choice	2	3.2
Deja Vu	1	1.6
Downtown Cabaret	16	25.8
Dreamgirls	7	11.3
PYRMD	2	3.2
Rick's	5	8.1
Seville	7	11.3
Spearmint Rhino	10	16.1
Did not answer	2	3.2

Appendix B

Definitions of Gender Identities and Sexual Orientation

***It is important to note that this list is not exhaustive, and definitions may not meet an individual's personal definition of their self-identified gender or sexual orientation. However, this list may provide readers a brief background on the nuanced continuum of experiences.*

Bisexuality – "An individuals who is attracted to both males and females" (Dentato, 2017, pp. 33)

Fluid – "Describes a [sexual orientation] identity that may change or shift over time between or within the mix of the options available" (Killermann, 2019).

Gay/Homosexual – "A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender" (Human Rights Campaign, 2019)

Gender Fluid – "A changing or "fluid" gender identity" (Trans Student Educational Resources, n.d.).

Gender identity – "One's internal sense of being male, female, neither of these, both, or other gender(s)" (Trans Student Educational Resources, n.d.).

Non-binary – "Preferred umbrella term for all genders other than female/male or woman/man, used as an adjective" (Trans Student Educational Resources, n.d.).

Pansexual – "Can be attracted to individuals of all gender identities and expressions" (Dentato, 2017, pp. 34)

Queer – "General term for gender and sexual minorities who are not cisgender and/or heterosexual. There is a lot of overlap between queer and trans identities, but not all queer people are trans and not all trans people are queer. The word queer is still sometimes used as a hateful slur, so although it has mostly been reclaimed, be careful with its use" (Trans Student Educational Resources, n.d.).

Sexual orientation – "A person's physical, romantic, emotional, aesthetic, and/or other form of attraction to others. In Western cultures, gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Trans people can be straight, bisexual, lesbian, gay, asexual, pansexual, queer, etc." (Trans Student Educational Resources, n.d.).

Straight/Heterosexual – "Experiencing attraction solely (or primarily) to some members of a different gender" (Killermann, 2019).

Appendix C

Recruitment Scripts

Step 1: Social Media Recruitment

If you have worked in a Minneapolis strip club within the past two months and would like to participate in research asking your opinions on workplace conditions, please DM for the survey link.

MSU IRBNet ID# 1178138

Step 2: Email for Survey Recruitment

**Once the person direct messages the researchers, they will be sent the following email:*

You are invited to participate in a survey-based research study conducted by the Sex Workers Outreach Project of Minneapolis and Minnesota State University, Mankato. The purpose of the study is to facilitate participatory action research with workers in the strip club industry in Minneapolis, and to examine the various workplace, health, legal, and social needs of current workers employed in Minneapolis strip clubs. Participation is voluntary, and lasts approximately 15-20 minutes.

If you are interested, please click on the following link to be taken to the survey and its informed consent form: https://mnsu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5jobCGoJLyMR2hD

If you have any questions or concerns about participating, please contact the study's principal investigator, Dr. Eric Sprankle at 507-389-5825 or eric.sprankle@mnsu.edu

If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board at (507) 389-1242 and reference the project number: MSU IRBNet ID# 1178138

Thanks!

Step 3: Email for Survey Compensation

**After completing the survey, all participants will be sent this email:*

Thank you for completing the survey! Here is the link to claim your $20 Amazon gift card: [insert link here].

If you also indicated you are interested in being interviewed for this project, a member of the research team may contact you toward the end of February or early March to schedule a time for the interview.

If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board at (507) 389-1242 and reference the project number: MSU IRBNet ID# 1178138

Again, thank you for your participation!

Step 4: Email for Interview Recruitment, Part 1

**If a participant is randomly selected to be interviewed, they will receive the following email:*

Thank you for completing the needs assessment survey, and for your expressed interest in being interviewed for the project. The interview is an opportunity to expand upon your answers you provided in the survey about the working conditions in Minneapolis strip clubs.

Participation is voluntary, and the interview will last approximately 30-60 minutes (or longer if desired). The interview will take place on Zoom, which is a web conferencing and video chat platform similar to Skype, but is HIPAA-compliant for confidentiality. The interview will be audio and video recorded, but you will have the option to not have the video portion recorded by telling your interviewer of your preference. The audio needs to be recorded for your responses to be transcribed. You can also use a pseudonym or alias instead of a legal or stage name. Your interviewer will ask you for your preferred name before beginning the recording of the interview.

Please select from the following dates and times that you would be available for an interview. If none of these times works well for your schedule, please let me know and provide me your general availability:

[insert list of dates/times the interviewer is available]

If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board at (507) 389-1242 and reference the project number: MSU IRBNet ID# 1178138

Again, thank you for your participation in the survey and for your interest in being interviewed!

Step 5: Email for Interview Recruitment, Part 2

**Once the participant selects a date/time, they will receive the following email. If no date/time works for the participant, the interviewer will send alternative dates/times until one works for the participant:*

Thank you for selecting a time to be interviewed. Before being interviewed, please see the attached informed consent document. Please print the form, read it, initial on the first page, sign on the second page, and email it back to me (either by scanning it or taking a photo of each page on your phone).

Here is the link to the Zoom meeting space [insert Zoom link]. Please click on the link on [insert date/time of interview].

If you need to reschedule or cancel the meeting, please email me.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating, please contact the study's principal investigator, Dr. Eric Sprankle at 507-389-5825 or eric.sprankle@mnsu.edu

If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board at (507) 389-1242 and reference the project number: MSU IRBNet ID# 1178138

Thanks again, and I look forward to our interview!

Step 6: Email for Interview Compensation

**After completing the interview, all participants will be sent this email:*

Thank you for completing the interview! Here is the link to claim your $100 Amazon gift card: [insert link here].

Again, if you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact the project's principal investigator, Dr. Eric Sprankle at 507-389-5825 or eric.sprankle@mnsu.edu

If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board at (507) 389-1242 and reference the project number: MSU IRBNet ID# 1178138

Thanks again!

Appendix D

Survey Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a survey-based research study conducted by members of the Sex Workers Outreach Project of Minneapolis (Andi "Betty" Seymour, Jayne Swift, and Katie Bloomquist), two graduate students from Minnesota State University, Mankato (Alexander Twohy and Machensey Shelgren), and supervised by the principal investigator, Dr. Eric Sprankle from Minnesota State University, Mankato. The purpose of the study is to facilitate participatory action research with workers in the strip club industry in Minneapolis, and to examine the various workplace, health, legal, and social needs of current workers employed in Minneapolis strip clubs.

Procedures

If you consent to participate, you will complete an online survey. Participation should last approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

Voluntary Nature of Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relationships with Minnesota State University, Mankato. If you decide to participate, you are free to skip questions, and you are free to stop at any time without penalty. You may stop the survey at any time by exiting the page.

Confidentiality

This study involves an online survey, and your name will not be associated with the survey. You may choose to provide your email address as contact information if you are interested in being compensated for your participation and/or if you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview. Your email address will not be exported with your survey responses when the responses are analyzed.

Only the aforementioned research team will be able to see the survey responses. Responses to your survey may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

Although responses will only be viewed by the research team, whenever one works with online technology there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online interviews, please contact the information security manager at 507-389-6654, ITSecurity@MNSU.edu.

The survey responses will be stored on a password-protected computer, and will be erased after 3 years by the researchers.

Risks and Benefits

The risks of participating are no more than those experienced in daily life. There are no direct benefits for participating.

Compensation

You will be compensated a $20 Amazon gift card for participating in the survey. The gift card will be emailed by one of the researchers to the email address you provide.

Contacts and Questions

If you have any questions about this research, you are encouraged to contact Dr. Eric Sprankle (the principal investigator) at 507-389-5825 or eric.sprankle@mnsu.edu.

If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Instituional Review Board at 507-389-1242.

Consent

Clicking on the link provided to begin the survey will indicate your informed consent to participate and indicate your assurance that you are at least 18 years of age.

You are welcome to print a copy of this page for your personal records.

MSU IRBNet ID# 1178138

Appendix E

Survey Questions

Do any family members know about your job?

- ○ If yes, how did you disclose? _____
- ○ If no, why have you not disclosed? _____

Do any friends know about your job?

- ○ If yes, how did you disclose? _____
- ○ If no, why have you not disclosed? _____

Are your friends supportive of you working in a strip club?

- ○ Definitely yes
- ○ Probably yes
- ○ Might or might not
- ○ Probably not
- ○ Definitely not

Does your significant other know about your job?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Not applicable

Has your job ever been weaponized against you by a current or former partner (i.e. used against you in argument)?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

When dating someone new, when do you tell them about your job?

- ○ Immediately
- ○ After a couple dates
- ○ After a few months of dating
- ○ Never

Do you avoid talking about your job with people you just met?

- ○ If yes, please explain why: _____
- ○ No

Do people make assumptions about your personal life based on your job?

- ○ If yes, please explain how: _____
- ○ No

Are you treated differently when someone knows you work in a strip club?

- ○ Definitely yes
- ○ Probably yes
- ○ Might or might not
- ○ Probably not
- ○ Definitely not

Do you feel other people respect your job?

- ○ Definitely yes
- ○ Probably yes
- ○ Might or might not
- ○ Probably not
- ○ Definitely not

Do you respect your job?

- ○ Definitely yes
- ○ Probably yes
- ○ Might or might not
- ○ Probably not
- ○ Definitely not

Do you feel your most frequented club is stigmatized in Minneapolis?

- ○ Definitely yes
- ○ Probably yes
- ○ Might or might not
- ○ Probably not
- ○ Definitely not

Do you have any other comments relating to stigma about your job or how stigma has affected you? _____

Appendix F

Interview Consent Form

You are invited to participate in an interview-based research study conducted by members of the Sex Workers Outreach Project of Minneapolis (Andi "Betty" Seymour, Jayne Swift, Ramona Falls, and Katie Bloomquist), two graduate students from Minnesota State University, Mankato (Alexander Twohy and Machensey Shelgren), and supervised by the principal investigator, Dr. Eric Sprankle from Minnesota State University, Mankato. The purpose of the study is to facilitate participatory action research with workers in the strip club industry in Minneapolis, and to examine the various workplace, health, legal, and social needs of Minneapolis strip club workers.

Procedures

If you consent to participate, you will be interviewed by a member of the Sex Workers Outreach Project of Minneapolis. The interview will take place in-person or on Zoom, which is a web-conferencing platform similar to Skype or G-Chat, but is more secure and is HIPAA-compliant. The interview will be audio recorded via Zoom. Participation should last approximately 30-60 minutes, but may go longer if desired.

Voluntary Nature of Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relationships with Minnesota State University, Mankato. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without penalty. You may stop the interview at any time by verbalizing your desire to discontinue.

Confidentiality

Before the interview begins, you will be asked by the researcher for a preferred name to be used in order to protect your legal and stage names. Additionally, this study involves the audio recording of your interview with the researcher. Only the aforementioned research team will be able to listen to the recordings. The recording will be transcribed and destroyed once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice or picture) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

Although responses will only be listened to by the research team, whenever one works with online technology there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online interviews, please contact the information security manager at 507-389-6654, ITSecurity@MNSU.edu.

The recording and transcripts will be stored on a password-protected computer. Once the recording is transcribed, the recording will be destroyed (approximate date of destroying the recording is early to mid-summer 2018). The transcripts will be destroyed after 3 years by the researchers.

Please initial here that you understand and consent to the information on this page _____

Risks and Benefits

While precautions are being taken to de-identify all information (use of pseudonyms, destroying the recordings after transcription, not having email addresses attached to your responses, etc), there are potential risks if identifying information were obtained, including but not limited to involuntary outing as a strip club worker, and lost wages and employment opportunities from being banned by specific clubs.

There are no direct benefits for participating.

Compensation

You will be compensated a $100 Amazon gift card for participating in the interview. The gift card will be emailed by one of the researchers to the email address you provide.

Contacts and Questions

If you have any questions, you are encouraged to contact Dr. Eric Sprankle (the principal investigator) at Minnesota State University, Armstrong Hall 103, 507-389-5825 or by email at eric.sprankle@mnsu.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, or if you have questions/concerns about the treatment of human subjects, you are encouraged to contact the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato, Dr. Barry Ries at 507-389-1424 via phone or at barry.ries@mnsu.edu via email.

Consent
If interested in being interviewed, initialing and signing this document will indicate your consent.

By signing this document, you are consenting to participate and indicate your assurance that you are at least 18 years of age.

Please keep a copy of this page for your future reference.

_____ _____
Please Print Your Name Date

_____
Please Sign Your Name

MSU IRBNet ID# 1178138

Appendix G

Interview Instructions

All questions are from the survey. The interviewer will repeat the participant's written response from the survey and ask the participant if they would like to talk more about that topic. The interviewer will have the option of asking clarifying questions if anything from the written response is not understood.

Before the interview begins, the interviewer will go over the procedures, risks, and rights written in the consent form. The participant will be asked their preferred name to be used during the interview. The participant will be asked if they have any questions or concerns before proceeding. The participant will be reminded of the recording and will ask for their permission to begin recording. If permission is denied, the interview will not take place.

1. What do you think would be a fair pay structure?
2. What do you think would be a fair tipping policy?
3. What do you think should be included or not included in a fair contract?
4. What do you think would be fair treatment by management?
5. What do you think would be fair policies regarding cleanliness?
6. What do you think would be fair policies regarding safety?
7. What do you think would be fair policies regarding working in other sectors of the sex industry?
8. Do you have any other comments relating to stigma about your job or how stigma has affected you?
9. What do you think would be fair policies regarding coworker relationships?
10. How does police presence at your most frequented club affect your work?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share with me and the other researchers?