

Strip Clubs

As we delve into the world of strippers, we sought to better understand what their job entails and the cultural differences with the general population. Trips to various strip clubs on Oahu led us to interviews with different strippers and former strippers. We will provide here a short, but in-depth peek into the behaviors, practices, and beliefs of strippers and views from their customers.

Three different strip clubs were visited. Two were standing room only at the peak hours of 10:00pm – 12:00pm; the other one was never busy. Our key informant, “Steve,” escorted us to these unfamiliar places and introduced us to some of the strippers. Due to the time constraint, the easiest and fastest way to gather information from the women was to depend on Steve’s established rapport and trust with them. Each club has similar characteristics. There’s a bouncer at the door, before the customer pays a cover charge, which is typically \$7.00 and up. The customer gets one free drink with the receipt. The loud music can be heard when entering the dark, badly lit club. Strippers are everywhere, walking around, on the tables, stages and sitting down, each waiting for her turn to perform. The customers are plenty, including some women.

About 3 of the women were reluctant to speak to anyone concerning stripping for fear of identity’s being revealed. After some convincing from Steve, a couple agreed just to answer questions. Entry into the subculture is not easy without connections. The most informative person was a former stripper, Cici.

Strippers have an unspoken language and set of social rules while on the stage with the customers and also the workers in the club. For example, customers can purchase mileage. Mileage is how much contact the customers can have with the strippers. Most clubs here allow only light contact. For example, the customer is not allowed to touch the strippers, yet the strippers can touch the customers. It is not acceptable for the customer to grope them in any way, shape or form. The dancer has to remain in control of the touching. It does not always happen that way, but it should. Customers sitting at the stage should expect to pay for their dances. Those are the best seats in the house and customers shouldn’t waste their time and the strippers by sitting there expecting a free show. This is the stripper’s job and tips are a big part of their pay. Most women dance and sometimes give a little conversation to try to get a tip, if no tip is given, the women politely move on. The stripper will let the other women know, at least the ones that they like, about the customer’s non-tipping ways. Our observation of non-tipping customers at one of the clubs showed that some women will not tolerate this. One stripper started to dance for about four men, squatted down, and held the garter belt open so the men could put their tip in it. The men just looked at the dancer, and laughed to each other. The stripper let the garter belt go and got up while the waiter passed by. The stripper loudly asked the waiter to have the men removed from the stage. Other customers

around groaned and scolded the stripper, but she woman ignored them. The waiter took no action, just nodded his head in acknowledgement and moved on. Unfortunately, we did too, so the outcome of that incident is unknown.

The garter belt is used in all three clubs. It is common knowledge between the dancers that holding it open invites tips. It says, I danced enough, now it's time for a tip. The stripper does this continuously throughout a song. Each stripper sets a goal of how much she wants to make per song. The women stop moving and makes eye contact until the customer puts money in the garter belt. Some regular customers just do it when the women are dancing close to them. Regular customers tend to go to the stage when a favorite stripper is working. Sometimes the customer will ask the stripper what table to be on for that stripper's set. If this is a regular customer, the stripper already has a good idea of how much money can possibly be made and what to expect.

The club usually has its own rules for each stripper to abide by. That means that sometimes the women have to put up with difficulties from some of the customers. In strip clubs, the dancers are paid to dance and sell drinks. Strippers are advertising for clubs and are the way the clubs make money. If a customer is shelling out the dough, even if the stripper doesn't like the customer's behavior (to a certain extent), the stripper is expected to tolerate it. Most women don't have a problem with this, they just grumble afterwards to the other women. According to the key informant, one club turns it head to prostitution. The customer has to know, usually by word of mouth, which women are available for this service. Some women don't like competition in this area. This sometimes causes bad feelings between some of the strippers. They do not all get along. There are grudges over customers, songs, sets, and shifts.

Strippers are selling the customers a fantasy. The women must be able to perform well. There's no professional training; some women learn with time. The better the stripper's performance, the more money can be made. Strippers sometimes share and teach each other how to do new moves and will practice at home in front of mirrors. In one of the clubs, Kitty is always in demand. For example, Kitty told Steve that she couldn't talk now because she wanted to work the customers at her table. Her stage was almost full and the other 2 stages with the other women just had a couple of customers sitting at it. She does handstands, walks on her hands, and works the pole. Kitty can hang upside down hanging onto the pole with her two legs or uses just one leg and arm. Our observation of Kitty working the customers also included wrapping her legs around the customer's neck, rubbing her breast past the customer's face, lying on her back gyrating while she hung onto the customer's neck.

For the most part, even regulars with favorite dancers are just viewed as paying customers. "While I am myself (to a certain extent) at the club, it is an exaggeration of certain aspects of my personality so you are not really meeting me." (GCG) Most strippers don't have personal relationships

with customers, but they don't mind the customers coming back. This is what the strippers imply but when interviewed several customers, three actually had relationships with women that were met when these men went to the strip clubs.

Kitty and Dena are not ashamed of getting naked for customers that are willing to pay. At first it seemed awkward, but once they got over it, it's all good. Especially with all the money that can be made. Some women never get over it so don't last too long. It's not something for everyone. If you are comfortable with your body, then you shouldn't have a problem. It's all about the money. One stripper, Candy, has worked as a stripper for over 10 years in various places. She owns 3 houses that she purchased from this job only. It's like having an addiction to money. You get so spoiled that it's hard to do anything else that you know is not going to pay as much. Her furthest education is high school, makes more money than some of her college graduate friends and is proud of what she has accomplished. One day she will retire, when her body forces her to.

Cici on the other hand only stripped for about 3 years. When she first started it was fun and glamorous, you could play dress up according to your moods. The other women knew she was new on her first night because of her clothes, shoes, walk and dance moves. After she got over the initial shock of showing her body for money, the dancing got better along with the money. It's not the same as dancing in a night club, the moves are more suggestive. Taking off your clothes in front of everyone becomes an art. She became so good that she was the 2nd best in the club, which means she was one that made the most money. While dancing she would set a goal of \$100.00 per dance. Once she had a customer lay his hand on her when her back was turned, she slowly turned around and then returned his money and left. She said that you still have to value yourself. Not all the women were like that. They would let a customer get away with that behavior as long as they paid. Cici first did it to get her and her husband out of debt, but instead of lasting a few months; she ended up doing it for 3 years. The women didn't always get along yet they would come together to celebrate other women's birthday's in the locker room. She tried cocaine once and started drinking frequently before going on stage. Her husband accompanied her when she danced away from home. This is when she was in the mainland. When she started going to church on Sundays and then dancing on Sunday nights the question of what she was doing kept on bothering her. She said if she has to drink to perform then she needs to quit. Granted the money is good, but the novelty of dressing up had run its course. Cici is now going to school to become a teacher.

Some customers have similar views on strippers. The customers were males between the ages of 26 – 46 yrs old, both single and married. When interviewing male customers, the most common answer to why they go was to hang out with the boys and look at T & A. One customer commended the girls saying he could never do that if he was a girl no matter how much money. Their advice to new customers was not to spend their paycheck on some dancer that they think will see them out of the club. Also, do not

touch the women. There was conflicting information with the customers as 3 of them that were interviewed actually had relationships with strippers that stems from their visits to strip clubs.

Simple (34yrs old) who frequents strip clubs ended up having a relationship with one of the strippers for over two years. Simple asked her to meet him outside of the strip club and that's how the relationship started. Simple said she continued stripping while they dated. The stripping job only bothered him once in awhile. Simple went less often once the dating started. He thinks stripping really screwed up her head and that it is not a good job to have. The influences of drugs and alcohol go hand in hand with that job. They seldom fought, but when they did it always came down to her job. Unfortunately, she met another customer from her job that was able to shower her with expensive gifts. The other customer bought her a really expensive surfboard, jewelry and other material items that he is unaware of. This is what ended the relationship. Simple owns a business, travels the world, and is known in his field.

Another example is Mot (40yrs old). Mot frequents strip clubs knowing sooner or later he will get lucky. Mot has dated many strippers, even ones that are married with kids. Mot's last stripper girlfriend lasted longer than usual. The stripper was married with kids. Mot spent a few hundred dollars when going to the strip club, bought her clothing, jewelry and even gave her cash outside of the strip club. Mot owns a construction company, divorced, has 3 kids of his own (lives with their mother), and this is how he likes to spend his free time. He does not intend to marry again, especially a stripper. They're fun to be with and he doesn't have to worry about commitment.

Last example of a customer is Kevin. Kevin dated an under age stripper (17yrs old). The stripper wasn't working that long, maybe about 6 months. Kevin was attracted by her good looks and asked her for a date out of fun. That's how the relationship started. Kevin said she's psycho and that when he realized that, it was too late. The stripper was pregnant. They almost got married, but instead mutually broke off their relationship. He now pays child support for his daughter. Kevin is now married and has no desire to go to strip clubs anymore. He says that part of his life is over.

Strippers are everyday people with an unusual profession. They have kids, some are married, and some stay single like Candy. In fact, some women bring their husbands or boyfriends to work, like Cici. It's the get in, make your money and then get out situation. Their priorities in life are different yet they all strive for the common goal of making lots of money. Some need the money for drugs, to pay bills, to raise a family, or to get ahead like Candy. Even with a high turn over rate, there are still many women that have been stripping for over 10+ years. We went to 3 different strip clubs and observed both young and old strippers. After observing these women and learning a little more about their profession, our views of strippers have changed and will not hesitate to tip them if we ever go to a strip club again.

