

Surviving a Dying Industry:
The Compounded Effect of Precarity and Stigma
on Strippers in Britain

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Abstract

Like most forms of sex work and adult entertainment, stripping is and has always been a form of stigmatised and precarious work and in many ways resembles the gig economy. Over the last decade, the British stripping industry has furthermore been on a downward trend due to the closure of clubs, restrictive licensing conditions, and a decrease in demand for live nude entertainment. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated some of the trends towards casualisation and exploitation in stripping, and intensified digitalisation and platformisation of adult entertainment more generally. However, despite a decline in income potential, strippers do not seem to leave the industry completely. Instead, many have started to work in multiple sectors of the wider sex and adult entertainment industries alongside stripping, a trend that resembles wider transitions of work towards increasingly precarious and flexible labour markets. Strippers who work at the intersections with other sectors face specific issues due to legal frameworks that seek to prevent crossover between sectors and different levels of stigmatisation based on the whorearchy, which ranks different sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries according to level of criminalisation and proximity to clients.

This study applies a mixed methods approach involving a literature review, a self-administered online survey of 141 strippers, in-depth interviews with 16 of the survey respondents, and triangulation of the data in three sector-specific focus groups and engages with the key mechanisms that drive further precarisation and stigmatisation in the stripping industry as well as with the strategies of strippers to subsist within a dying industry. It uncovers a cycle of precarity and stigma which strippers are caught up in. While the Covid-19 pandemic intensified and accelerated precarisation in the industry overall, newly formed networks of solidarity and mutual aid temporarily disrupted this cycle.

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This thesis is dedicated to my combabes.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

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Abbreviations and Glossary

BDSM	Bondage/Discipline, Dominance/Submission, Sadism/Masochism
ECP	English Collective of Prostitutes
ELSC	East London Strippers Collective
GMB	General, Municipal, and Boilermaker, Workers Union
IUSW	International Union of Sex Workers
LDA	Lap Dance Association
SEV	Sexual Entertainment Venue
SWARM	Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement
UK	United Kingdom
USW	United Sex Workers
UVW	United Voices of the World

1. Introduction: The Contemporary Stripping Industry in Britain

Strippers occupy a unique position inside the sex and adult entertainment industries, both in terms of stigmatisation, as stripping is often more socially accepted than other forms of sex work (Clare, 2022), and the legal framework, as strip clubs are legalised in Britain while brothels or escorting agencies are not (Barbagallo and Cruz, 2021). While many strippers consider their work to be a form of sex work, others aim to distance themselves from those who offer other, more stigmatised sexual services, which can lead to frictions within the wider sex working community. At the same time, stripping – alongside many other parts of the sex and adult entertainment industries – exemplifies precarity due to the setup of strip clubs which transfers economic risk directly to strippers by introducing fees and fines (Hardy and Sanders, 2014), as well as high levels of income uncertainty due to decreasing demand (Lister, 2015) and a licensing regime that puts clubs at risk of being shut down overnight (Clare, 2022). Precarious working conditions and the continuous decrease of profitability in the stripping industry result in many strippers working in multiple sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries at the same time in order to make sufficient income. However, they are prevented from doing so in an effective and safe way due to the unique position of stripping with regards to criminalisation and stigma. This thesis engages with the strategies that strippers employ to subsist within an industry that has been under constant attack from anti-sex worker campaigns, suffered from increasing digitalisation of adult entertainment, and has been damaged by the Covid-19 pandemic and corresponding political decisions that excluded strippers – and sex workers more generally – from access to support structures.

This study applies a mixed methods approach involving a literature review, a self-administered online survey of 141 strippers, in-depth interviews with 16 of the survey respondents, and triangulation of the data in three sector-specific focus groups of strippers and full-service sex workers. It investigates the mechanisms that drive precarity and stigma in the industry and the strategies of strippers to survive in it. A particular focus lies on strippers who utilise multiple income streams by working at the intersection with adjacent sectors, namely forms of full-service sex work, such as independent or agency-mediated escorting, and online adult entertainment, including webcamming and erotic or sexual content creation on digital platforms. Overall, this thesis argues that the stripping industry as we know it today is dying and income uncertainty is exacerbated. However, instead of resigning, strippers continue to work in strip clubs but are pushed to also pick up work at the intersections with the aforementioned, adjacent sectors. There, strippers are criminalised, stigmatised, and made even more precarious because of different legal systems and sector-dependent levels of societal stigmatisation.

This chapter is structured into four parts and provides an overview of the context in which I developed my research; the focus and aims of this study; an outline of the motivation and rationale for the terminology and definitions used throughout this thesis; and finally an overview of the contents of the eight chapters of this thesis.

1.1. The Context of this Research

Existing research on the British stripping industry has identified significant changes in the last decade. While it has in the past been referred to as ‘one of the fastest growing leisure industries’ (Colosi, 2008: 2), its profitability for both workers and club owners in recent years has significantly decreased (Clare, 2022; Lister, 2012) and likely peaked in the 2010s (Hardy and Sanders, 2014). Nevertheless, many strippers remain in the industry at least part time, due to the potential for high spending clients (Lister, 2012) and lack of alternative jobs that provide the same degree of freedom and flexibility (Hardy and Sanders, 2014). With the introduction of a new licensing regime in 2010, councils were given the powers to decide on strip club licences locally, resulting in clubs facing greater challenges and higher costs to remain open which were directly transferred to strippers through higher house fees¹ (Colosi and Hubbard, 2012a). Crucially, councils are now able to determine an appropriate number of strip clubs in a certain area, providing the opportunity to set so-called ‘nil-caps’ and effectively outlaw the stripping industry entirely. Over time, this has led to a decrease in the number of strip clubs in Britain, particularly outside of big cities and traditional stag-do destinations, and therefore to greater competition between strippers for jobs in the remaining clubs, and ultimately for customers (Hardy and Sanders, 2014). This downward trend has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic which shut down the industry overnight with many strippers having little access to governmental support structures due to being misclassified as independent contractors (Clare, 2022), the effects of which will be explored in 3.1.3. There are no nationally compiled statistics and numbers of clubs have been disputed by various lobbying and campaigning groups (Colosi, 2011) but Clare (2022: xxiv) estimates that the number of strip clubs in Britain has ‘dwindled from 350 clubs a decade ago to 150 at present’ and it is likely that some clubs did not survive the pandemic financially, further limiting the overall number of clubs.

Alongside higher levels of competition between strippers for shifts in the remaining clubs, the income potential in the industry has significantly decreased with a recent study of the United Sex Workers (USW) trade union indicating that two thirds of strippers at least

¹ House fees are paid to the strip club by strippers in order to be allowed to work their shift in the club, usually upfront. The fee is set by management and therefore varies between clubs and days of the week. Most clubs also take commission from the money earned on top of the house fee (see 3.1.2).

occasionally leave work having lost money and nearly 90% have gone home from work with earnings that are less than minimum wage (USW, 2022). Crucially, nearly ten years prior, Hardy and Sanders (2014) found similar figures with regards to strippers having left work without breaking even, indicating that the stripping industry has always been subject to high income uncertainty. Nevertheless, as this thesis will illustrate, working in strip clubs has become even more precarious and uncertain in recent years. Recent research has identified sex work and adult entertainment as prime examples of precarious work and the gig economy. Levitt (2021: 59) argues that ‘sex work operates according to the logics of the gig economy, demanding multiple sources of income, independent contractor status, low wages, flexibility, and a premium on creativity’ and Barbagallo and Hardy (2021) outline how gig economy aspects materialise on AdultWork, the most popular advertising platform for full-service sex workers in Britain. By providing an up-to-date picture of working conditions in the stripping industry immediately before the first lockdown as well as insights into the situation of strippers during and after the pandemic, this thesis also contributes to this new way of thinking about sex work. It furthermore advances general understandings of increasing precarity in the sex and adult entertainment industries as stripping is closely interlinked with other sectors of these industries.

1.1.1. Different Levels of Stigma and Criminalisation

The legal frameworks in which different sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries operate, police and restrict workers in similar ways but to different degrees. Hence, in Britain, some forms of sex work or adult entertainment are recognised as a legitimate occupation while others are not (Cruz, 2013). The aforementioned licensing regime defines strip clubs as Sexual Entertainment Venues (SEV) and grants local councils the powers to regulate them by setting licensing conditions and an appropriate number of SEVs. As a result, the number of clubs allowed in an area as well as freedoms of strippers to perform vary significantly. Hence, stripping falls somewhere in the middle of this spectrum of legitimacy. The introduction of the SEV licensing regime needs to be viewed in the context of increasing criminalisation and policing of all sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries (Colosi, 2013). Furthermore, the hierarchy of legitimacy between sectors results in significant differences in access to labour protections and trade union representation for strippers and other sex workers or adult entertainers (Barbagallo and Cruz, 2021).

There are different levels of stigma attached to different sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries. In Britain, strip club operators have been successful at normalising the stripping industry as part of the wider leisure industry and night-time economy by creating a narrative that distances strip clubs from the full-service sex industry (Colosi,

2013). Clare (2022) argues that the detachment from more stigmatised forms of sex work and adult entertainment has ultimately compromised the position of strippers and that, particularly with regards to political organising, strippers need to stand in solidarity with other sex workers and adult entertainers. However, it is evident that many strippers benefit from the glamourisation of the stripping industry in comparison to the full-service sex industry (ibid.). Toubiana and Ruebottom (2022: 517) suggest a ‘stigma hierarchy’ of different sectors which significantly affects the relationships within the wider sex working community. This concept is also often described as the whorearchy and although the term is widely known and has been used inside the wider sex working community for many years (Sumner, 2020; Witt, 2020; Vixxx, 2019; Knox, 2014; McNeill, 2012), the term has only recently been picked up in academic circles (Easterbrook-Smith, 2022; Fuentes, 2022; Levitt, 2021; Bowen, 2021). It roughly refers to a set of informal, social hierarchies based on the physical proximity to clients and police (Knox, 2014) as well as a number of other factors, such as rates and services provided, depending on the context in which the whorearchy is discussed (Witt, 2020; Vixxx, 2019). Because a comprehensive understanding of community-internal stigma is crucial for any investigation into the experiences of strippers who work at the intersection with other sectors, this thesis conceptualises the whorearchy as a tool to analyse interactions between strippers with each other as well as with other members of the wider sex working community. By drawing on the experiences of strippers in Britain, many of which have also worked in other sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries, this thesis therefore takes forward conceptualisations of the whorearchy and the ways in which it is built and maintained in the context of British strip clubs.

1.1.2. Overlapping Sectors and Conflict

More recently published literature shows that, against popular opinion, not only are the sex and adult entertainment industries very diverse and involve a range of different forms of work (Pitcher, 2015), but many sex workers and adult entertainers also work in several sectors of these industries at the same time in order to make ends meet (Fuentes, 2022; Toubiana and Ruebottom, 2022; Levitt, 2021; Hester et al., 2019; Sanders et al., 2018). Even before the closure of strip clubs due to the pandemic, many strippers had entered different sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries, either alongside stripping or at a different time. Amongst this study’s participants, there were no clear patterns with regards to how or when people worked in those different sectors, with some switching between online and in-person work depending on their health or capacity, others starting stripping or online work to leave the full-service sex industry and others who described stripping as a ‘gateway drug’ to other forms of sex work or adult entertainment. The crossover to other sectors was

naturally exacerbated by the pandemic during which large numbers of in-person sex workers and adult entertainers, including strippers, started creating content or livestreaming online (Hackett and Murphy, 2020). The increasing digitalisation and platformisation of adult entertainment and the rise of apps such as OnlyFans have been a lifeline for many sex workers and adult entertainers during the lockdowns (Sanchez, 2022) but have also created new challenges which resemble the issues that many platform workers in other industries face (Easterbrook-Smith, 2022). The prosperity of independent adult content creation through subscription apps drove the digital adult entertainment industry towards more individualised and personalised content where performers build more intimate relationships with some of their fans who can pay for direct messaging or custom content (Laurin, 2019), a service that traditionally used to be provided in person in strip clubs. Yet little is known about the role that strippers play in this shift to digital spaces and how they responded to the increasing digitalisation. This thesis not only acknowledges but specifically engages with the intersections of stripping with full-service sex work and with online adult entertainment and the strategies that strippers have found to utilise multiple income streams most efficiently.

The high levels of labour mobility (Alberti, 2014) between different sectors which are, in part, a consequence of the declining earning potential in the individual sectors, are exemplary of wider trends in other precarious industries, such as food delivery, transportation, and large parts of care work, that have been subject to increased demand for flexibility and casualisation (Jones, 2021). However, in the case of strippers, labour mobility is restricted by the aforementioned varying legal frameworks which aim to keep the sectors neatly separate. This thesis provides an insight into the strategies that many strippers found to link their work in multiple sectors regardless, and shows that working precariously in a number of different forms of sex work and adult entertainment at the same time in order to make ends meet has become increasingly common.

1.1.3. Organising in the Stripping Industry

Because of the aforementioned unique position with regards to its legal status, the stripping industry acts as a trailblazer for trade union organising of the wider sex and adult entertainment industries (Barbagallo and Cruz, 2021). Due to the fact that, in Britain, all third parties in full-service sex work are criminalised, it is impossible to formally unionise brothels, saunas, or massage parlours (Brouwers, 2022) while, in contrast, licensed strip clubs are legal and exploitative practices can therefore be challenged in court. At the same time, many strip clubs have to fight anti-sex worker lobbying groups aiming to close them down and implementing local strip club bans (Clare, 2022). The transfer of the power to license strip clubs to local councils also resulted in campaigns of strip club owners and, more

recently, strippers themselves to keep clubs open being organised locally. Throughout the course of this PhD, the USW union, which represents strippers as well as other members of the wider sex working community, organised two major worker-led campaigns to lobby councillors to vote against a strip club ban in their city. In Bristol, a strip club ban could be avoided (De La Mare, 2022) while, in Edinburgh, the union had to enter a judicial review to challenge the council's decision to outlaw the stripping industry there (Guy, 2022). Because of the constant risk of criminalisation that strip clubs find themselves in as well as due to increasingly precarious working conditions, activism both inside trade unions and with other stripper-led organisations is a crucial aspect of the lives of many strippers.

Both stripping and the sex and adult entertainment industries more generally are contentious within feminist as well as leftist spaces and are often attacked by groups which are commonly referred to as abolitionists² and oppose sexual or sexualised labour on moralistic principles. These anti-sex worker activists have created a narrative that divides sex workers into two groups: victims of exploitation, who in their view make up the vast majority of the industries, and so-called 'happy hookers' who are typically very privileged and therefore not representative of the sex working community and find pleasure in their work (Phipps, 2017). While sex workers' rights activists are assigned the latter label in order to discredit them, the voices of people who have left sex work and refer to themselves as sex industry survivors have become central to the anti-sex worker argument. In this way, 'prostitution is positioned as sex rather than work, and sex workers become either helpless victims or privileged promoters of the industry' (ibid.: 314), resulting in sex workers and adult entertainers who fight for the decriminalisation of their jobs and do not plan on moving into a different line of work being deterred from speaking up about exploitative practices within the sex and adult entertainment industries (Mac and Smith, 2019). Phipps (2017) argues that this narrative was derived from the binary of the two fronts during the sex wars of the 1970s and 80s: sex-positive and radical feminist perspectives. In adopting a Marxist-Feminist perspective which identifies all labour, including stripping and other forms of sex work and adult entertainment, as a form of capitalist exploitation of workers who have to sell their labour power in order to survive (Cruz, 2018), this thesis opposes and actively counteracts this binary narrative.

² As Nagel (2015) points out, however, the use of the term which suggests parallels to the movement to abolish slavery in the US during the 19th century is problematic as it is fundamentally based on penal and carceral principles rather than on liberation.

1.2. Scope and Research Focus

This research centres on the mechanisms that drive precarity and stigma in the stripping industry as well as strategies that strippers have adopted to survive in this environment, which crucially includes working at the intersections between stripping and full-service sex work as well as stripping and online adult entertainment. While theories of societal stigma of marginalised communities as well as at work are well developed, stigma from *inside* the sex working community and hierarchies of stigma, usually referred to as the whorearchy, are undertheorised. Because a comprehensive understanding of the whorearchy and how it is built and maintained within the context of British strip clubs is crucial to engage with the place that strippers occupy within the wider sex working community, this thesis aims to conceptualise the whorearchy as an analytical tool. In order to do so, I first investigate the relationship between strippers and the wider sex working community as well as with the sex workers' rights movement. I then look at how strippers are impacted by the licensing regime and restrictions of full-service sex workers through criminal law and the ways in which strippers are working around or resisting these restrictions, including their role in the political organisation of sex workers and adult entertainers in trade unions and other peer-led organisations. The developments during the pandemic act as an exemplary case of the compounded effect of precarity and stigma on strippers due to the accelerated digitalisation of adult entertainment and downward spiral of stripping. As it has been a decade since the last large-scale study of the British stripping industry (Hardy and Sanders, 2014), one of the key aims of this thesis is to provide a comprehensive picture of the dynamics and working conditions immediately before the first lockdown, as well as the situation of strippers during and shortly after the pandemic.

The overarching research question of this thesis is:

- What are the key developments of the last decade in the British stripping industry?

Subsequently, this research engages with the following sub-research questions;

- How useful and accurate is it to view stripping as a form of sex work?
- What mechanisms drive precarisation and stigmatisation in the stripping industry and what are the strategies of strippers to respond to these mechanisms?
- How does stripping intersect with other forms of sex work and adult entertainment at a time of increasing precarisation and legal restriction?
- What impacts did the Covid-19 pandemic have on stripping and its intersections with other forms of sex work and adult entertainment?

The research aims are:

- to provide an up-to-date picture of the dynamics and working conditions in the stripping industry immediately before, as well as the situation of strippers during and shortly after the Covid-19 pandemic;
- to develop a conceptualisation of the whorearchy in Britain and an understanding of how it is built and maintained within the context of British strip clubs; and
- to map the impact that the expansion of the digital adult entertainment industry due to the Covid-19 pandemic had on the sex working community and particularly strippers

Due to the significant impact of the licensing regime on the relationships of strippers with the wider sex working community, this thesis focuses on people who work in *licensed* strip clubs in Britain³. However, at times, I will allude to other settings, such as clubs that operate without a licence and are therefore de facto criminalised, or stripper agencies through which private parties, most commonly stag dos or birthday parties, can hire a stripper who works freelance (Colosi, 2010). Although the licensing regime gives councils the power to adopt a policy that decides on an appropriate number of strip clubs in a certain area and imposes conditions to those licences, councils are not required to produce such a policy. Instead, they can continue to licence strip clubs under the 2003 Licensing Act, which gives authorities similar powers with regards to business-specific licensing conditions, such as partial nudity only or additional CCTV (Hardy and Sanders, 2014). Nevertheless, the vast majority of councils adopted the 2009 Policing and Crime Act and have since published a SEV licensing policy, resulting in a large range of different policies, including varying licensing conditions and differences with regards to a cap on the number of clubs in a certain area (Colosi and Hubbard, 2012a). The focus of this thesis lies on all licensed strip clubs, regardless of the level of policing through local authorities.

1.2.1. Motivation and Starting Point

My original motivation for this research project evolved from personal conversations with strippers and other members of the sex working community about the interconnectedness of the different sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries. The academic work I was aware of, which engaged with one particular sector at a time and arranged different forms of sex work and adult entertainment into neatly separate studies, clashed with my own lived experience and accounts from colleagues at work and in activist spaces about their work

³ The licensing regime was introduced in England and Wales in 2010 and in 2019 in Scotland. In Northern Ireland, the legislation surrounding full-service sex work which criminalises clients as well as all third parties could include the licensing of strip clubs but since there has not been a request for a licence since the introduction of client criminalisation in 2015, it is unclear if this would hold up in court. Either way, there are currently no licensed strip clubs in Northern Ireland and the focus of this thesis therefore lies on England, Scotland, and Wales.

experiences. In most academic accounts of the stripping industry, the high levels of crossover between stripping and other forms of sex work and adult entertainment which, to me, constituted a crucial aspect of the working lives of many of the people that I met in strip clubs and other sex worker spaces, was described as a marginal occurrence or overlooked altogether. My involvement in trade union activism sparked a strong interest in the changing forms of labour and increasing precarity in the wider labour markets, a trend which I had also witnessed inside strip clubs. Because of the aforementioned unique position of the stripping industry with regards to level of stigmatisation and criminalisation as well as its continuously decreasing profitability which drives strippers to diversify their income streams, strip clubs seemed a particularly interesting field in which to investigate this interconnectedness of the different sectors.

Throughout writing this thesis, I was involved in trade union organising of sex workers and adult entertainers which included campaigns against locally imposed strip club bans. The fact that strippers are being targeted by supposedly feminist groups, Labour MPs, and councillors and therefore put at constant risk of being criminalised means that any research about strippers is automatically more politicised than most social research. Hence, the immediate benefit to the researched community is of utmost importance (Phipps, 2015) and this project was embedded into my trade union activism and particularly the support and representation of strippers in licensing battles in Bristol and Edinburgh. Not only am I seeking to give back to the stripper community by engaging in activism and taking on administrative, often labour-intensive tasks, such as keeping membership databases up to date, coordinating tasks, organising regular meetings, facilitating, and taking minutes, but, roughly following Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly (2021), my work as a researcher also stands in service to the wider sex workers' rights movement. The focus and scope of this research have therefore been significantly influenced by my engagement with sex workers' rights activism and especially the unionisation of British strip clubs.

1.2.2. The Use of Non-Academic References

Due to technical advances and the rise of social media, there is less need for researchers to act as an intermediary between sex workers or adult entertainers and the wider public (Mulvihill, 2022). Notwithstanding the increased reach that many sex workers and adult entertainers have to share more comprehensive narratives of their diverse realities, there continues to be a tendency in academia to dismiss publications from community insiders that do not have academic credentials. Although there have been more instances of sex workers and adult entertainers being able to publish their experiences in academic journals or

collections (e.g. Adams, 2020; Stardust, 2019; Brooks, 2005), voices outside of these academic spaces are often ignored (Berg et al., 2022).

Especially considering that concepts such as the whorearchy, which has been known and discussed within sex worker spaces for many years (McNeill, 2012) but for which academic engagement has been limited so far, are at the centre of this thesis, I identified the need to include non-traditional references. In order to contribute to a comprehensive conceptualisation of the whorearchy, it is crucial that sex workers' voices beyond those who participated in this research are included and centred. Building on the principles of the Sex Worker Syllabus (Berg et al., 2022), I therefore frequently reference work that is typically not included in academic bibliographies, such as blog posts, medium.com contributions, and newspaper articles. Because many sex workers and adult entertainers blog under an alias in order to remain anonymous and keep their legal names hidden from clients or third parties, some author names are furthermore clearly chosen pseudonyms.

1.3. Strippers, Sex Workers, and Adult Entertainers - The Terminology and Definitions Used in this Thesis

Due to the highly politicised nature of the lives of sex workers and adult entertainers, the language used and definitions vary between different pieces of literature and therefore clarification on terminology and rationales is necessary in order to prevent misunderstandings. This thesis presumes that sex work and commercial adult entertainment are legitimate forms of work (Mac and Smith, 2018; Pitcher, 2015; O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1998) and specifically of precarious work (Easterbrook-Smith, 2022; Barbagallo and Hardy, 2021; Stardust, 2019; Hardy and Sanders, 2014). It acknowledges that sex workers are a diverse group of people who work in a range of different settings, under varying working conditions, and for a variety of reasons (Pitcher, 2015) and therefore rejects narratives that obscure agency from sex workers and adult entertainers and frames them as victims of sexual exploitation by default (Weitzer, 2010).

The terminology that is used to describe jobs and workers in the sex and adult entertainment industries vary, depending on time, location, and the writer's positionality. As terminology and self-identification with certain terminology plays a crucial role in this research, inclusivity of language stood at the centre of my reflections on the use of language throughout this thesis. Due to the diversity of the settings in which sex workers and adult entertainers work (Pitcher, 2015), Hardy and Sanders (2014) stress that it is most accurate to speak of sex industries in plural rather than assuming homogeneity. Crucially for this research, there are furthermore strong disagreements within the wider sex working

community about the scope of the terms ‘sex work’ and ‘sex industry’ and whether strippers as well as other performers such as online content creators, webcammers, or peep show dancers should be labelled sex workers or adult entertainers, which will be discussed here. In order to ensure that all participants find themselves represented in the language used in this thesis, regardless of their own affiliation with the term ‘sex worker’, I will refer to the workplaces and settings that are the subject of this research as sex and adult entertainment industries, which alongside full-services sex work also includes stripping and all other forms of in-person or online adult entertainment.

1.3.1. The Boundaries of Sex Work

The term ‘sex work’ was invented by the sex worker, writer, and activist Carol Leigh, also known as Scarlot Harlot, at a conference ‘in 1979 or 1980’ (Leigh, 1997: 229) in order to create new terminology that focused on the women who performed the work and described their involvement in the sex industry rather than branding them with a status. The term was then picked up by the global sex workers’ rights movement as well as public health organisations. Leigh (1997) stresses that ‘the concept of sex work unites women in the industry - prostitutes, porn actresses, and dancers - who are enjoined by both legal and social needs to disavow common ground with women in other facets of the business’ (1997: 230), indicating that the original term was meant to include all workers in the wider sex and adult entertainment industries. The boundaries of the term have since been subject to significant controversy.

The definition of ‘sex work’ is sometimes widened to include various forms of opportunistic transactional sex that the people involved in that transaction might not term as ‘sex work’ themselves. Agustín (2005) emphasises the value of a theoretical framework that considers ‘all commercial goods and services of an erotic and sexual kind’ (2005: 618) and, in a later essay, suggests that ‘scholars of sexual cultures won’t get far if they follow dogma that considers marriage to be separate and outside the realm of investigations of commercial sex’ (2012: 272). With regards to the type of sexual or intimate service that is exchanged, some burlesque dancers⁴ or erotica writers identify as sex workers which others view as an appropriation of the term from people who are not affected by the same stigma (Simon, n.d.).

⁴ Burlesque shows are occasionally talked about as ‘stripping’ but generally not included in the debates surrounding the industry. While there are many similarities between the two forms of dance, burlesque dancers are often keen on pointing out that their performance is based on different values than those of contemporary strippers. Instead, “‘new burlesque’ involves a nostalgic reworking of the striptease performances of the late 19th and early to mid 20th century’ (Ferreday, 2008: 48). Modern burlesque can thus be described as a hobby or art form with a mostly female and feminist audience, which aims to challenge beauty ideals and celebrate hyper-femininity, rather than a commercialised performance which constitutes the main income for the entertainer.

Some full-service sex workers have pointed out that an overly broad definition of sex work which includes digital and in-person forms of adult entertainment can shift the focus away from the needs of full-service sex workers and conceal the specific issues of criminalised workers. For practicality, some make a distinction between direct and indirect forms of sex work or prostitution, with indirect sex work referring to sexual services or adult entertainment that does not include sexual intercourse (e.g. Sanders et al., 2009), including both in-person services that do not involve sex, such as stripping, and digitally mediated sex work, including live webcamming and pornography. Harcourt and Donovan (2005) use the term ‘indirect prostitution’ to describe the work of people who only substitute their income from other industries with occasional instances of prostitution and are therefore less likely to identify as sex workers or prostitutes. Importantly, the law does not distinguish between sex workers who identify as such and those who do not (Clare, 2022).

1.3.2. The Boundaries of Stripping

The terms ‘stripping’ or ‘striptease’ act as an umbrella term for live pole dance⁵ or sex shows with varying degrees of nudity, table dances, erotic dancing, and lap dances, both with or without physical contact depending on the licence of the club and personal boundaries of the dancer (Hardy and Sanders, 2014). A commercial setting is presumed in the term. In Britain, most stripping establishments are lap dancing clubs, hence working in them involves a one-on-one strip show in the lap of the customer who is usually taken to a private room or booth for this. While in other parts of the world, such as the US, Australia, and Switzerland, both contact and non-contact clubs exist, the British legal framework prohibits touching between strippers and their customers (Colosi, 2010).

Terminology used in previous studies varies, with most academic work referring to performers in strip clubs as ‘lap dancers’ (Hardy and Sanders, 2014; Lister, 2012; Colosi, 2010), ‘erotic dancers’ (Pilcher, 2012), or simply ‘dancers’ (USW, 2022). However, during initial data collection for this study through a self-administered survey, for which I reached out to ‘anyone who had ever worked in a British strip club’, it quickly became clear that the

⁵ In recent years, pole dancing has also become a popular fitness activity for many people who have never worked in the sex industry, most of them women. Although elements of contemporary pole dancing can be found in various cultures and practices, such as Indian aerial yoga called Mallakhamba, European traditions of maypole dance, and Chinese martial arts (Wilkerling, 2012), pole fitness originated in North American strip clubs (Lagler, 2017). Holland (2010) explores the experiences of pole fitness class instructors and students and finds that while there are some specific ‘strippery’ classes offered, which tie to their roots in lap dancing, the majority of ‘exercise polers’ emphasise the distinctness of striptease and the athletic discipline. In order to get pole fitness recognised as an Olympic sport, some pole dancers make an effort to distance themselves from lap dancers, which becomes most apparent in a 2015 online campaign with the hashtag #notastripper, which was heavily criticised for stigmatising strippers while appropriating an art form that had been invented in the strip club (Wheaving, 2020).

vast majority of performers identified with the term ‘stripper’ more than with other descriptions, which was reinforced in qualitative interviews where participants added that they would speak of ‘dancers’ with their colleagues and peers but of ‘strippers’ in conversations with the wider public. Throughout this thesis, I am therefore using the terms ‘dancer’ and ‘stripper’ synonymously and interchangeably to describe all performers that work in strip clubs. Wherever other terms such as ‘lap dancing’ or ‘gogo dancing’ are used, I am referring to that particular type of stripping.

There are contrasting views about the relationship of stripping with other kinds of sex work. While most anti-sex worker advocates tend to simply equate all forms of sexual, sexualised, and adult entertainment work (see Bindel, 2004; MacKinnon, 1993), Hardy and Sanders (2014), who conducted the biggest and most comprehensive study of strippers in Britain to this day, stress that the services that are sold in strip clubs are sexualised which leads to the conclusion that stripping can, and should, according to Hardy and Sanders, be located inside the wider sex industries. However, they also point out the reluctance of many strippers to identify as sex workers themselves and emphasise the differences between stripping and full-service sex work instead. Colosi (2010), a former stripper herself who also firmly places stripping within the sex industry, adds that some club owners have attempted to re-brand their establishments as part of the leisure industry despite the fact that both the law and wider society treat stripping as a sexual service.

Large parts of the sex workers’ rights movement firmly include strippers in the sex work umbrella and aim for solidarity beyond industry sectors. In Britain, strippers organise within a number of regional and national organisations that fight for the rights of sex workers more broadly. Furthermore, the East London Strippers Collective (ELSC) was founded in 2014 in order to advocate for the rights of strippers in particular and present an industry voice that is not controlled or influenced by strip club management or industry outsiders (Clare, 2022). The ELSC stresses their solidarity with the wider sex workers’ right movement but emphasises their special focus on the issues that strippers in Britain face. When sex workers came together in 2018 in order to develop an industrial strategy to unionise the wider sex and adult industries, strip clubs were identified as an appropriate workplace to start the unionisation process as they were able to operate within the legal framework, while premises on which full-service sex workers work collectively remain criminalised (Barbagallo and Cruz, 2021). The USW trade union, which grew out of that industrial strategy, continues to unionise and support strippers as well as other people who work in the sex or adult industries and has kept their focus on legal workplaces while their sister organisation Decrim Now

campaigns for the full decriminalisation of all sex workers⁶ so that they have access to labour protections and full trade union representation. However, some of the smaller, more ad-hoc campaigns of strippers to fight strip club bans in their cities, such as the #AskThe700 campaign organised in Glasgow in 2019, were keen to point out their distance to full-service sex work, and emphasising the differences between stripping and full-service sex work was one of their main arguments with one organiser stressing that the industries should be kept separate in order to protect strippers from sexual exploitation and coercion (Rodger, 2019).

Ultimately, Clare (2022) stresses that the question as to whether strippers are considered sex workers is politically loaded because the levels of stigma and criminalisation that strippers are subjected to are lower than those that full-service sex workers experience. For many strippers, identifying as sex workers constitutes an act of solidarity with the wider sex working community while others are wary of speaking over full-service sex workers and putting their own needs above theirs. As mentioned above, many strippers follow the narratives of strip club owners and managers and avoid the sex worker terminology because they do not want to be associated with an even more stigmatised occupation. Clare (2022) reminds her readers that because passing on stigma to other sectors does not resolve it, strippers and other sex workers need to assume a shared identity and focus on the unity in their movement in order to build a platform that centres their voices. She hopes that in doing so, everyone who works in the sex or adult entertainment industries can ‘discuss their differences *and* their shared experiences without fear of being stigmatised for either conversation, regardless of what label they prefer to use’ (2022: 162). Until then, however, the identification of strippers with the wider sex working community will be overshadowed by the different levels of stigma. Due to the evident complexity of the question whether strippers should be labelled sex workers, it was the focus of one of my research questions and will be discussed in more detail in 5.1.

In the context of this thesis, ‘full-service sex work’ refers to the in-person exchange of sexual intercourse for money or goods (Mulvihill, 2022). In the term ‘online adult entertainment’, I include all forms of work in which a sexual or sexualised product or service is provided online, either through live broadcasting or through the sale of previously recorded or created material. Notably, this does not include full-service sex workers who advertise their in-person services on an online platform (Easterbrook-Smith, 2022). With regards to referring to the people paying for the services of sex workers and adult entertainers, I follow this study’s participants, most of which referred to strip club visitors either as customers or strip club clients, which will be used synonymously, and to people who buy sexual services

⁶ ‘A legal model that decriminalises the sex worker, the client, and third parties such as managers, drivers, and landlords and regulates the sex industry through labour law’ (Mac and Smith, 2018: 190)

from full-service sex workers as clients. Although there are instances of live adult entertainment being consumed by audiences that do not consist primarily of straight men (Pilcher, 2012), the vast majority of the customers of the strip clubs that are the subject of this research are cis male. Hence, if direct quotes from participants make mentions of ‘men’, those are likely in reference to clients. Because of strong affiliation of strippers with the wider community which will be discussed in more detail in section 5.2.2 as well as for practicality, I define the term ‘sex working community’ as inclusive of strippers although I also acknowledge competing perspectives of this.

1.4. Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured into eight chapters. After this introductory chapter, I will outline the theoretical framework that has informed this research from the beginning, including its focus, research questions, data collection, and analysis. I will engage with various theories of stigma, including stigma as a tool of oppression and control (Tyler, 2020), occupational stigma (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999), and particularly the conceptualisation of the whore stigma (Pheterson, 1988) while also embedding the research into wider theories of precarious and flexible labour in contemporary capitalism (Alberti et al., 2018; Kalleberg, 2018; Caraher and Reuter, 2017), gig work in particular (Tassinari and Maccarone, 2021; Prassl, 2018), as well as the transition of work more generally (Jones, 2021). In doing so, I aim to provide a picture of the contemporary stripping industry that locates it within increasingly flexible and precarious labour markets without ignoring the specific issues that strippers and other sex workers or adult entertainers face due to stigma and criminalisation or, in the case of stripping, high levels of policing alongside a lack of effective labour market regulation. The theoretical framework furthermore provides insights into the conceptualisation of the aforementioned whorearchy and gives an overview of the accounts of various sex workers (Sumner, 2020; Witt, 2020; Vixx, 2019; Knox, 2014) as well as previous academic literature (Fuentes, 2022; Toubiana and Ruebottom, 2022; Bowen, 2021) on its functionality.

Chapter three reviews existing literature around stripping in Britain with a particular focus on the aforementioned SEV licensing legislation, how it came into effect originally (Hubbard, 2014), the impact that it has been found to have on the working conditions and profitability in clubs since (Hardy and Sanders, 2014; Colosi and Hubbard, 2012a, 2012b), and the resistance campaigns that have evolved to challenge locally imposed strip club bans (Barbagallo and Cruz, 2021). I will also outline the situation of strippers as well as precarious and stigmatised workers more generally during the pandemic. Alongside accounts of strippers and other sex workers or adult entertainers who either shifted their work online or were forced to break content restrictions to work in person (Platt et al., 2020), I will

engage with descriptions of the treatment of some key workers who had to continue working in person and whose working conditions deteriorated (May et al., 2021), particularly with regards to health and safety (Cai et al., 2022), despite a growing public perception that their contribution was invaluable for the survival of society (Meija et al., 2020).

Following the literature review, I will outline my methodology and research design which is grounded in feminist standpoint methodology (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Harding, 2004; Haraway, 1988) and employs a mixed method approach (Hesse-Biber, 2010) with an online, self-administered survey, in-depth interviews with former and current strippers on the video conferencing platform Zoom, and focus groups with both strippers and full-service sex workers, also conducted on Zoom, to triangulate the data collected in survey and interviews (Hesse-Biber, 2012). This chapter furthermore extends thoughts and reflections on the aforementioned dual role of researcher and organiser (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, 2021) as my involvement in unionisation efforts of British strip clubs as well as campaigns to keep them open in the first place not only assisted my research through strong networks that facilitated rapid recruitment and an awareness of the developments in SEV licensing legislation but also ended up constituting a crucial aspect of my overall methodology and shaped my research significantly. On top of reflections on insiderness due to lived experience (Van der Meulen, 2011; Colosi, 2010; Dobson, 2009) and my involvement in activism, I will present other ethical considerations that went into the planning and completion of this research due to the sensitivity and inherent politicisation of the topic (Liamputtong, 2007; Shaver, 2005).

Findings chapters of this research are structured into three parts: Firstly, I preface my research by considering the questions whether strippers are part of the wider sex working community and whether they should be labelled sex workers. I then conceptualise a theory of the whorearchy with a particular focus on how it is built and maintained in British strip clubs. Despite clear differences between the nature of stripping and full-service sex work, I argue that stripping should indeed be viewed as a form of sex work due to the strong affiliation of most strippers with the wider sex working community and shared political culture. However, the prevalence of conflict and stigmatisation from within the community illustrate the whorearchy, which I conceptualise as an analytical tool to highlight the intra-occupational hierarchies which are reproduced in spaces where sex workers and adult entertainers meet. I define the whorearchy as based on a worker's proximity to clients and grade of criminalisation. It arranges the workers in different sectors within the sex and adult entertainment industries accordingly. Discussing and determining the exact definitions of sex work, stripping, and the whorearchy is crucial for the understanding of any dynamics in the contemporary stripping industry and therefore this research project.

Secondly, I engage with the working conditions and practices inside strip clubs as I concentrate specifically on the crossover between the full-service sex industry and stripping, and strategies about how to link them or keep them separate. This research reports high levels of crossover, expanding further because the stripping industry is dying, with precarity and income uncertainty in the sector intensifying. However, it has become impossible to provide full-service sex work within the walls of a licensed strip club and strippers who find other ways to work at the intersection are forced to hide this from their peers, resulting in severe safety issues. This chapter also investigates the role of the legislative frameworks and finds that the whorearchy is particularly visible within British strip clubs because of the high levels of competition that result from the setup of clubs, as well as criminalisation of full-service sex work and the tight policing of strip clubs through the SEV licensing regime. It argues that the increasingly strict enforcement of licensing conditions in recent years has led to more restriction of strippers' performances which prevents them from providing the services that they are comfortable with, resulting in further decreases in earning potential and driving the move towards more precarious working conditions.

Lastly, I present the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the digitalisation and platformisation of adult entertainment via apps such as OnlyFans on the stripping industry. It shows that the pandemic led to an overall increase in solidarity and understanding between sectors while also intensifying the shift towards even more precarious working conditions and income uncertainty in the sex and adult entertainment industries. Although contact restrictions created an additional layer of stigma and criminalisation for those who were working in person, there was a shared experience of financial desperation after a sudden and immediate closure of clubs, which increased solidarity. Strippers who switched to online adult entertainment had mixed experiences and while some discovered the advantages of working online, others faced new challenges such as policing of online spaces, the necessity to work long hours for little reward, and even higher income insecurity. In addition to the expansion of the digital market, the increase in online activism was used to spread information about the hardships that different sex workers and adult entertainers faced and social media provided new spaces for members of the sex working community to connect and educate each other.

In the subsequent concluding chapter, I summarise my key arguments and contributions and take a solution-oriented approach in outlining potential opportunities to improve policy and suggestions for future organising efforts. Lastly, I engage with the limitations of this research project and propose corresponding areas of future research. Due to the timing of the fieldwork, this thesis is able to provide a unique snapshot of the stripping industry in and around the Covid-19 pandemic and can give insights into the dynamics of relationships

within the stripping and wider sex working community throughout this particularly uncertain and changing time. However, due to the fact that strip clubs remain in a time of transition, consecutive research is needed to make more accurate predictions about the future of stripping in Britain as well as the sectors of sex and adult entertainment industries that are adjacent to it.

Following this brief introduction to the thesis which provided relevant context, the next chapter will outline the theoretical framework that I developed for this research.

2. Theoretical Perspective: The Compounded Effects of Stigma and Precarity

For the purpose of this study, looking at stripping and its intersections with other forms of sex work or adult entertainment through a theoretical lens that combines ideas about stigma with theories on precarious work was most useful. Occupational stigma in general (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999) as well as the whore stigma more specifically (Pheterson, 1996) and their impact on community internal interactions is crucial to understand the dynamics inside strip clubs and in spaces where strippers meet with other sex workers or adult entertainers. The stripping industry is then analysed as a prime example of the gig economy, outlining the issues that many workers in other precarious industries face and highlighting the combined effects of stigma and precarity on strippers. By looking at the transition of work and the rise of the platform economy more generally, some of the trends in the stripping industry can be explained as part of a wider move to less secure employment and precarious working arrangements (Alberti et al., 2018) while also highlighting the precarity that has always been inherent in sex work and adult entertainment (Barbagallo and Hardy, 2021).

The following chapter outlines the theoretical framework that forms the basis of the orientation of this study and has determined the focus of this thesis in terms of research questions, design of the study, data collection and analysis of the data, and is therefore crucial in order to contextualise and comprehend the findings of this study. It shows that sex workers and adult entertainers generally and strippers in particular exemplify the extreme end of precarity while also suffering from stigmatisation because of their work. Restrictive policy and (partial) criminalisation exacerbate precarity and stigma while concurrently being justified by moralistic values and therefore a direct result as well as a reinforcer of stigma. Hence, this thesis engages with the compounded effects of stigma and precarity on the stripping industry and its intersection with other forms of sex work or adult entertainment.

2.1. Stigmatisation of Strippers

The first part of this chapter will provide an overview of the range of connotations of the concept of stigma and highlight its significance in social, political and identity research in relation to stripping and the wider sex and adult entertainment industries. In this section, I will summarise literature on the concept of stigma, both with regards to effects on the individual by outlining the work of Erving Goffman (1963) which was paramount for the initial conceptualisation of stigma, as well as the political impact of stigma described by Imogen Tyler (2020) that goes beyond individual experiences and examines stigma as a form of political control. In order to consider the stigma that strippers and the wider sex working

community experience, I will then focus on occupational stigma, which according to Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) is based on the perceived social, moral or physical dirtiness of an occupation, and the consequential stream of literature concerned with ‘dirty work’ (Hughes, 1951). While theories of occupational stigma provide a useful framework for understanding the strategies that sex workers and adult entertainers use to mitigate stigma, it is crucial to include the role of patriarchal mechanisms that seek to control women’s bodies – and have done so throughout history (Federici, 2004) – in any theoretical understanding of the stigma that sex workers experience. This is illustrated in theories of the whore stigma, a term coined by Gail Pheterson (1988, 1996), which I will explore in more detail.

2.1.1. General Theories of ‘Stigma’ and ‘Othering’

There has been significant academic interest in the concept of stigma, which refers to a social mark or taint that is attached to people in order to devalue or discredit them, as well as stigmatisation, which is the process of this devaluation (Pescosolido and Martin, 2015). Theories of stigma, stigmatisation and strategies to mitigate stigma have been developed in a number of different disciplines, including Social Policy, in order to make sense of the treatment of marginalised or disadvantaged communities (Lloyd, 2013; Patrick, 2016); Sociology with a focus on identity and identity management (Goffman, 1963; Pescosolido and Martin, 2015); and Management to describe dynamics in work relations and stigma inside organisations in order to improve wellbeing at work (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Zhang et al., 2021). Due to this heightened interest in stigma, the scope of the term has widened and now comprises a number of different meanings. Zhang et al. (2021) identify four levels of stigma research, the most dominant of which is the individual level that is concerned with the stigma that a person experiences and how they might mitigate it. Particularly in Management studies, however, the focus is increasingly shifted towards stigma research on the occupational, organisational, and industry levels in order to gain a more comprehensive picture of the structural impacts of stigma, at work or elsewhere. A similar trend can be observed in Sociology and Politics, where scholars such as Tyler (2020) have become more concerned with stigma as a social force that is used to discredit communities and individuals on a more structural level.

Although the term originally referred to physical branding or tattooing of slaves and criminals (Lloyd, 2013), our usual contemporary understanding of stigma is highly influenced by Goffman’s work which defines stigma as ‘an attribute that is deeply discrediting’ (1963: 2) and results in a person being ‘reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one’ (1963: 12). Importantly, it is not a fixed or static condition of a person but dependent on social settings, such as location, time and culture. He

thus conceptualises stigma as something that is created in direct social interactions between stigmatised individuals and non-stigmatised individuals who have been socially conditioned to discredit them. Goffman's focus lies on how individual interactions are shaped by the fact that both individuals are aware that one of them is different from the predominant groups in society (Lloyd, 2013).

Tyler (2020) points out that while this view can be useful to explain the consequences of social norms, it does not take into account inherent structural power relations. Crucially, she states, stigma cannot be explained without considering histories of oppression as well as those of resistance that have shaped all of our contemporary social relations. Thus, it is impossible to fully understand stigma and stigmatisation from a neutral perspective without centering the knowledge of stigmatised communities in their struggle against the social structures that devalue them. Instead, she proposes to reconceptualise stigma as a 'governmental technology of division and dehumanisation' (2020: 7) and a practice that is 'always enmeshed with wider capitalist structures of expropriation, domination, discipline and social control' (2020: 17). Through a genealogical narrative, she argues that stigma is a political tool to oppress, control, and govern populations which is produced 'from above' (2020: 269) and 'enables the capitalist enclosure of land, resources and social life' (2020: 270). One example of a political control mechanism that is dependent on stigma is the border regime which brands migrants as undeserving in order to justify maltreatment and abuse. Furthermore, Tyler points out that stigmatisation intensifies in times of political turmoil or uncertainty in order to stabilise capitalist hegemony. In doing so, she sets a precedent to view stigma as a social force on a structural level rather than solely as a result of individual social interactions. This will be particularly important for the conceptualisation of the whole stigma later in this chapter. The obvious strategy to mitigate stigma power on a structural level is resistance and struggles for liberation of all stigmatised communities through 'the building of solidarity movements' (2020: 271) which ultimately means the abolition of the stigma machine.

Turning away from the structural and political meaning of stigma and towards an individual, occupational, organisational, or industry level, the core strategies to mitigate stigma that scholars have identified include the management of boundaries to non-stigmatised groups, dilution through changing appearance or leaving a stigmatised occupation, concealing the stigmatised identity through information management, reconstruction of the stigma through normalisation, cooptation by finding a community that will respond positively to the stigma, or emotional work by shifting the emotions of both stigmatised and non-stigmatised people from negative (shame) to positive (pride) (Zhang et al., 2021).

Another crucial strategy to mitigate stigma is othering, a term originally coined by Spivak (1985) who explains the process of a dominant group, in an example of European colonisers in India who produce an ‘other’ which they distinguish from themselves. Othering is most frequently discussed focussing on ethnic and racial issues as the construction of ‘the other’ is exceptionally visible and momentous in colonial frameworks but the concept can also be applied to minorities more generally (Coupland, 2010) and the term has also been used in stigma research. Patrick (2016), for example, shows that out-of-work benefits claimants most frequently distanced themselves from those who they viewed as less deserving to assert their own entitlement, a process she describes as othering. In the process, they distance themselves from this less deserving group and attempt to transfer the stigma to them. This is particularly interesting as Patrick’s (2016) framing of othering as a stigma mitigation tactic recognises the relative power that some benefits claimants have over other people in this larger stigmatised group. In Spivak’s (1985) example, colonial governments other native Indian states by assuming practices and dynamics that they imported from Europe. Spivak explains that the emergence of ‘The Third World’ as a new field for researchers is based on Europe’s place as the unquestioned subject and its colonies as objects that are thought of as ‘distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted, and curricularized in English translation’ (1985: 247). Coupland (2010: 247) formulates a more psychological perspective on othering through a linguistic lens and argues that ‘[o]ur representations of *ourselves*, even *to ourselves*, require a form of social comparison’, showing that it is necessary for human identity formation to explore the identity of others and adopting as well as rejecting personality traits and values of them. In the case of a stigmatised group this can become a strategy to manage stigma by othering those who are viewed as even more devalued and assuming power over them.

To summarise, stigma is a multifaceted term referring to a range of different phenomena as the term has proven useful to describe social dynamics on different levels as well as social forces. This section has shown that stigma is not only a form of devaluation of individuals in social interactions but is also used to control and govern communities more structurally, which is important when considering how stigma impacts stripper and sex worker communities. In order to gain a better understanding of the stigma that strippers experience, this chapter will now focus on the occupational level while keeping in mind the structural role that stigma plays in the construction and maintenance of contemporary hegemony.

2.1.2. Occupational Stigma and ‘Dirty Work’

The stream of literature concerned with stigma on the occupational level generally uses the terminology of ‘dirty work’, a framework developed by Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) who

connected the work of Goffman (1963) with that of Douglas (1966) who described societal perceptions of cleanliness being good and dirtiness being bad, as well as with that of Hughes (1951) who originally coined the term 'dirty work' to frame occupations that are generally viewed as degrading or disgusting. In a later publication, Hughes (1958) clarifies that there are three dimensions of dirt or taint that can be attached to occupations: physical, social and moral taint, categories which have since been used by contemporary dirty work researchers. Hence, 'dirty work' does not only refer to sex workers or adult entertainers but also to a wide range of people who work in other physically, morally, or socially tainted occupations such as cleaners, coroners, midwives, and butchers.

Building on Goffman's (1963) conceptualisation of stigma, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) extend Hughes' work into management studies by developing an analysis of the ways in which physical, social, and moral taint impact on the identity of those working in these tainted occupations and how they manage the assigned stigma. They firstly emphasise the importance of occupational prestige which significantly impacts the levels of stigma that dirty workers experience. Hence, a funeral director and a butcher are both occupations that are physically tainted, but will experience occupational stigma differently. With regards to identity construction, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) argue that although occupational identity is central to self-definition and identity building and dirty workers have to deal with the stigma associated with their occupation in every part of their lives, many dirty workers do not seem to suffer from low self esteem or shame because they have created strong workgroup cultures and tend to present their work in more positive terms. For the latter, Ashforth and Kreiner identify three strategies: reframing the values of the occupation and turning it into a 'badge of honour' (1999: 421), recalibrating the standards through which the occupation is valued or devalued, or refocusing by emphasising the positive components of the job such as flexibility or high pay. By condemning industry outsiders, particularly those who are critical of the stigmatised occupation, and carefully selecting who they associate with outside of their own occupational group, dirty workers control the impact that external stigma has on their self-identification. Finally, they propose that a stronger occupational culture tends to lead to increased use of these strategies, resulting in greater identification with work identity.

Dirty work researchers more generally are concerned with a large number of occupations that experience various forms and levels of stigma and therefore include examples from butchers, cleaners, social workers, prison guards, and numerous other jobs including the wider sex and adult entertainment industries. When analysing the practice of reframing, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999: 421) mention that full-service sex workers as well as strippers might stress that they provide a 'therapeutic and educational service'. They also mention sex workers as

an example of a community that is wary of critical outsiders. Furthermore, there is a growing body of dirty work literature that focuses specifically on stripping (Grandy, 2008; Mavin and Grandy, 2013) and sex work more broadly (Blithe and Wolfe, 2016; Selmi, 2012) as the stigma that sex workers face has been identified to be particularly prevailing and strong due to controlling regulation and, in some cases, criminalisation (Blithe and Wolfe, 2016) and because *morally* tainted occupations, including sex work and adult entertainment, tend to be viewed as more evil than they are necessary (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2014). Toubiana and Ruebottom (2022: 520) even state that sex work ‘provides an ideal setting in which to examine the internal dynamics of stigmatization’ through a dirty work lens. Ashforth and Kreiner (2014) also point out that full-service sex work is considered an occupation that is stigmatised in all three dimensions - physically, socially, and morally - which stands in contrast to the majority of dirty work occupations, the other exceptions identified being bouncers, executioners, and bounty hunters.

The dirty work framework has been used to make sense of identity management of various sex workers and adult entertainers, including strippers⁷ (Grandy, 2008; Mavin and Grandy, 2012), brothel-based sex workers in Nevada (Blithe and Wolfe, 2016), and Italian phone sex workers (Selmi, 2012). It has proven useful to identify some of the strategies that sex workers and adult entertainers use to deal with stigma and how they relate to other workers in stigmatised occupations. Scholars have described othering of other people working in the wider sex and adult industries who experience higher levels of stigma (Grandy, 2008), refocusing conversations around the non-sexual, caring aspects of the job (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Selmi, 2012), and setting strong boundaries between their work and private identities (Blithe and Wolfe, 2016; Selmi, 2012) which are all strategies that can be compared with those of other dirty workers. However, as many dirty work researchers specialising in sex work point out (Ashforth and Kreiner, 2014; Blithe and Wolfe, 2016; Toubiana and Ruebottom, 2022), there are some characteristics specific to the stigma that sex workers experience, including criminalisation and restrictive regulation, the gendered nature of the industries, and the added stigma of non-normative sexuality more generally. While occupational stigma and the dirty work framework is useful to make sense of coping mechanisms of sex workers, it is not sufficient to describe the structural dimensions of sex worker stigma and how it influences the treatment and attitudes of non-sex workers who deviate from gender norms.

⁷ Grandy (2008) uses the terminology ‘exotic dancers’ which has more recently been pointed out by dancers with a minority ethnic background as problematic and harmful, resulting in the vast majority of the stripping community ceasing to use the term altogether (Clare, 2022). I will hence avoid it here and refer to Grandy’s participants as strippers.

2.1.3. The Whore Stigma

Similarly to the argument of Tyler (2020) who points out the importance of embedding analyses of stigma in inherent structural power relations, Pheterson (1996), 25 years earlier, conceptualises the stigma that sex workers experience as a structural mechanism to control women. She refers to it as the ‘whore stigma’ because although it explicitly targets sex working women, it effectively impacts the social restraint of all women by putting them at risk of being labelled as whores as it is fundamentally based on the ‘social criteria of female chastity’ (1996: 89) which prevails in all cultures and results in unchastity being punished and stigmatised. While sex workers are the prototypes of stigmatised women, all women who are classified as defiled due to their (consensual or unconsensual) sexual history, or as impure due to being perceived as dirty, unclean or non-white. This links the whore stigma to racism, anti-Semitism and classism (Pheterson, 1988). So while accusations of unchastity cannot stigmatise and delegitimise men *as whores*, the prevalence of the whore stigma and social precondition of female chastity also indirectly stigmatises some men who deviate from white, heterosexual masculinity on the basis of their race, ethnicity, class or sexuality.

While some women, both sex workers and non-sex workers, attempt to distance themselves from the whore stigma by insisting that they are not whores or emphasising the more virtuous aspects of their work or private lives – strategies also identified in dirty work literature outlined above – Pheterson argues that this is ultimately ineffective because the whore stigma can always be used against any woman who challenges male entitlement in any way. This is likely to intensify in ‘times of disorder or panic’ (1996: 67), creating a further link to Tyler (2020). Pheterson (1996: 12) refers to the whore stigma as ‘a ready instrument of sexist attack against women deemed too autonomous, be it in self-defense or simply in self-expression’ and therefore a crucial tool to uphold patriarchal structures. The liberation of women is dependent on the liberation of sex workers as ‘the menace of the whore stigma acts as a whip holding female humanity in a state of *pure subordination*’ (1996: 89). The whore stigma is used to justify criminalisation of sex work and other forms of control over women’s bodies by the state in the same way that Tyler’s (2020) conceptualisation of stigma is used as a tool to oppress, govern, and control marginalised populations.

The whore stigma is a crucial tool of the patriarchy to control women and its elimination therefore needs to be a central part of wider feminist struggles. This idea lay the groundwork for different alliances between the sex workers’ rights movement and other women’s rights activists, particularly with two factions: sex-positive feminists and women organising around reproductive labour. While the American sex workers’ rights movement has in the past

tended to work closely with representatives of sex-positive feminism or sex radicalism (Chateauvert, 2014), sex worker-led organisations in the UK have formed alliances with the Wages for Housework campaign which is grounded in materialist feminism and centres a labour angle on sex work (Toupin, 2018). Although this thesis views sex work as a form of labour and hence, following Mac and Smith (2018), focuses on the ‘work’ aspect rather than on ‘sex’, it is useful to keep in mind the historic link that some parts of the sex workers’ rights movement have had with sex-positivist feminism. Queen (1997), a sex worker, scholar and sex-positive feminist, points out that commercial sex is stigmatised in the same way that any sexual encounter that sits outside of what is culturally viewed as acceptable; resulting in a need to challenge ‘our culture’s demonization of non-procreative, non-monogamous sex’ (1997: 180). She therefore locates the fight against the whore stigma within the wider struggle to destigmatise sex and particularly female desire, which, according to sex-positive feminists, should constitute a fundamental feminist goal (Willis, 1982). In the past, sex-positivist feminists such as Willis (1982) have supported and defended sex workers against other members of the wider feminist movement, particularly anti-pornography activists. However, the dominant narrative in the British sex workers’ rights movement has shifted towards a more labour-centric analysis which focuses on the *work* aspect of sex work rather than on sex. Thus, a materialist perspective on the lives of sex workers has mostly replaced the concentration on pleasure and empowerment of the sex-positive movement, that evolved primarily from non-sex working communities (Mac and Smith, 2018). Phipps (2017) points out the potential danger of alliances with the sex-positive feminist movement as anti-sex worker activists have successfully created a narrative that divides sex workers into two groups: victims of exploitation, who make up the vast majority of the sex industry, and so-called ‘happy hookers’ who are typically very privileged and therefore not representative of the sex working community and find pleasure in their work. All sex workers’ rights activists are assigned the latter label by this narrative in order to discredit them and even describe them as part of the ‘pimp lobby’ (ibid.). Sex workers who have left sex work and frequently refer to themselves as sex industry survivors, on the other hand, are welcomed to the movement and their reports have become central to the anti-sex worker argument. In this way, ‘prostitution is positioned as sex rather than work, and sex workers become either helpless victims or privileged promoters of the industry’ (ibid.: 314). Particularly in the UK, large parts of the sex workers’ rights movement have therefore formed feminist alliances on the basis of organising against the devaluation of women’s reproductive labour instead (Barbagallo and Federici, 2012). While it is crucial to keep in mind the potential disadvantages and vulnerabilities of an overly sex-positivist analysis of the stigma that sex workers experience (Mac and Smith, 2018), it is a useful perspective to keep in mind in order to connect the whore stigma to the stigmatisation of other forms of

non-normative sex and particularly female sexuality. It furthermore links in with Pheterson's (1988, 1996) work on (un)chastity, which is strongly influenced by, and influential to, the first wave of the global sex workers' rights movement.

Theories of occupational stigma in general and the whore stigma more specifically are crucial to consider in any research on sex workers or adult entertainers, as the inherent structural stigma shapes every part of a sex workers' life. It furthermore acts as a tool to justify criminalisation or restrictive policing of sex workers, their clients, or third parties. In turn, criminalisation further contributes to sex worker stigma, illustrating a cyclical relationship (Armstrong and Fraser, 2020). Both the materialisation of stigma on an individual level and the structural social forces that impact on the lives of sex workers and women more generally fundamentally impact on the relationships that sex workers and adult entertainers have with industry outsiders and with each other. For the purpose of this study which focuses on relationships *within* the wider sex working community rather than with community outsiders, it is furthermore necessary to look specifically at the materialisation of stigma inside occupational groups or otherwise marginalised communities. The following section will therefore build on the stigma conceptualisations of Goffman (1963), Tyler (2020), Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), and Pheterson (1988, 1996) and outline the theoretical work on intra-occupational stigma and the whorearchy in order to make sense of the dynamics between different sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries.

2.2. Community Internal Stigma Hierarchies

Regardless of the level on which stigmatisation occurs, the majority of the literature outlined so far focuses on stigmatising behaviour from non-stigmatised individuals, organisations, groups, or states towards a stigmatised individual or group. However, as briefly touched on by Patrick's (2016) study of out-of-work benefit claimants who used othering of those who they deemed less deserving as a coping strategy, members of stigmatised groups are not immune to reproducing stigmatising behaviour towards their peers. Scholars have identified similar patterns as Patrick (2016) in other marginalised communities, including drug users (Harviainen et al, 2020; Lloyd, 2013), disabled people (Deal, 2003), and the LGBTQ+ community (Faye, 2021; Formby, 2017; Duggan, 2002). Recently, there has been growing academic interest in more generalisable theories of dynamics of stigma within stigmatised communities and the materialisation of social hierarchies in-between members of those communities. On the occupational level, Toubiana and Ruebottom (2022) speak about intra-occupational stigma in order to challenge the dominant assumption in the dirty work literature that members of stigmatised occupations will develop a strong sense of belonging to a certain (in this case, occupational) group, which will automatically lead to 'stigma-free

safe havens' (2022: 516). Instead, they refer to the heterogeneity of the wider sex working community in order to illustrate how stigma hierarchies can be reproduced within occupational groups.

Depending on the definition used, the sex work umbrella can cover a particularly diverse range of people and occupations (see 1.3.1 and 1.3.2) who experience different levels of stigma which has resulted in a community internal stigma hierarchy, often referred to as the whorearchy (Knox, 2014). Due to the relatively low levels of stigma in comparison to full-service sex workers, strippers are a particularly interesting group in which to analyse the materialisation of the whorearchy. After outlining the work on hierarchies within marginalised communities in general as well as intra-occupational stigma theory, the following section will describe what sex workers have written about the functioning and effects of the whorearchy.

2.2.1. Social Hierarchies in Marginalised Communities

Social hierarchies, including informal ones, are essential to the psychological, sociological, and anthropological understanding of organisations and other groups (Magee and Galinsky, 2008). The social order and coordination that hierarchies provide is 'appealing psychologically because it helps resolve individual needs for stability, and organizationally because it is effective for the coordination of activity' (2008: 256). It is therefore no surprise that most, if not all, marginalised communities create internal hierarchies that are based on the different levels of societal stigma that members of the community experience. Work exploring other marginalised groups that many sex workers are also part of, specifically queer people, disabled people, and drug users, is useful for highlighting the development and functioning of social hierarchies in general.

Notwithstanding the shared identity of many queer people, the importance of community organising that many describe is often overshadowed by hidden hierarchies and exclusionary behaviour, leading to separation from the most stigmatised individuals. Intra-group stigma in LGBTQ+ communities has been a topic of interest for decades and inspired Duggan's (2002) conceptualisation of homonormativity. She describes homonormativity as a form of assimilation of homo- and bisexual people to a neoliberal narrative, leading to an exclusion of queer people who refuse to or are not able to live by heteronormative standards. She argues that the gay movement of the 1970s had worked more closely with other radical social movements but has since focused on liberal goals such as marriage equality and the right to join the military while dissociating from the wider queer liberation struggle and, in some cases, even actively fighting it. This distancing from radical queer politics, which go beyond

normalisation and towards liberation of oppressed groups, arguably leaves behind more vulnerable sections of the movement such as lesbians of colour or gay men living with HIV. More recently, a similar view has been emphasised by Faye (2021) who stresses that trans liberation is linked to class struggle because transphobia directly results in trans people being denied access to wealth, secure and well-paid jobs, and, often, labour protections to the same degree as their cis colleagues. While the majority of trans people, like the rest of society, are working class, a minority of particularly wealthy trans people are able to escape many aspects of societal and structural transphobia, which illustrates the ways in which class fundamentally shapes experiences of transphobia. Hence, a corporate or liberal approach to fighting transphobia is ineffective because it gives wealthy corporations and media outlets – i.e. the organisations that already hold power under the current system – the power to decide on which political demands are appropriate. Instead, Faye points towards more structural political struggles that centre the voices of the most marginalised within the community, intersect with other oppressed communities and ultimately resist capitalist hegemony. Formby (2012) finds hierarchies in queer communities which put gay cis men at the top and trans people at the bottom, resulting in some people leaving queer spaces because they no longer feel safe, welcome, or represented there. Again, these hierarchies are strongly influenced by societal norms and by whose identities are more tolerated and accepted by community outsiders. Hines (2010) describes how queer communities often exclude transgender people, especially those who do not fit the homonormative binary of female/lesbian and male/gay. In addition, she finds a hierarchy inside the trans community which is organised by passing, expecting transgender people to surgically transition and reproduce gender ideals. For example, she describes that inside some trans communities, transgender people who decide against gender affirming surgery are denied entry because their gendered authenticity is questioned by some other trans people who chose to go through surgical reconstruction.

Similar trends have been shown in communities of disabled people where a hierarchy of impairment results in some disabled people avoiding association with others in order to appear more ‘normal’ (Deal, 2003). This hierarchy places the most visible disabilities at the bottom and impairments like Asperger’s or dyslexia at the top. While those hierarchies are prevalent in society as a whole and reproduced by community outsiders, including children and health care workers, Deal (2003) found that disabled people do not want to be associated with some of their peers and actively reproduce stigma as well. At the same time, some disabled people stress that those with ‘new disabilities’, i.e. impairments that have only recently been classified as disabilities, are not truly members of the disabled community as

they do not face the same social oppression which links in with some of the trends that LGBTQ+ researchers have found.

A third stigmatised group that exhibits particular social hierarchies is drug users, where they are commonly constructed around the degree of control over drug use which manifests itself in maintaining everyday obligations, physical appearance, and mental state (Copes et al., 2016). Hierarchies have been identified between various drugs, placing cannabis users into a significantly less stigmatised group than methamphetamine users, and between different kinds of drug administration, with injection at the bottom and smoking or snorting at the top. Copes et al. argue that ‘drug users of all types seek to distinguish themselves, as functional users, from stereotypical dysfunctional users (i.e. junkies)’ (2016: 135) in order to minimise the stigma. One subcategory of methamphetamine users which was frowned upon in particular by other users was women who sold sex to fund their drug use.

What these examples show is that stigma hierarchies within marginalised communities are common and, according to Duggan (2002), Faye (2021) and others, can be overcome by an explicitly political, radical liberation movement that challenges capitalist and societal norms at their roots rather than fighting for normalisation of the lives of some members of the community. This links in with notions of Tyler (2020) and Pheterson (1996) who both conceptualise stigma as something fundamentally rooted in capitalism and the patriarchy. However, members of stigmatised groups who are located relatively close to the top of the internal stigma hierarchy often tend to press for assimilation or normalisation of their identity in order to overcome the stigma that they face, resulting in some of their peers being left behind or pushed out of community spaces. While the previous examples all focus on stigma as a structural social force, similar trends become visible on the occupational level.

2.2.2. Intra-Occupational Stigma

By applying the occupational stigma theory of Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) to sex work, Toubiana and Ruebottom (2022) develop the idea of intra-occupational stigma which occurs when members of a heterogenous stigmatised occupation reproduce the stigma that they experience internally. This can be particularly distressing for the recipients because industry insiders tend to have a better understanding of the occupation and can therefore make distinctions that outsiders are unaware of. In doing so, Toubiana and Ruebottom (2022) challenge two dominant assumptions in the dirty work literature: that members of a stigmatised occupation develop a strong sense of belonging automatically once they enter the stigmatised industry through strong occupational cultures and ideologies based on the shared experience of stigma; and that stigmatisers can be found exclusively outside of the

occupational group while industry insiders show support towards each other. Instead, they propose that in order to better understand the dynamics of stigma within dirty work occupations, it is necessary to ‘attend to their boundaries’ (2022: 519) and accept that these boundaries are unlikely to be static rather than assuming an outsider perspective of who is considered a member of the stigmatised occupational group.

Toubiana and Ruebottom (2022) point out the existence of a number of occupational groups with internal boundaries, including ‘green chemists’ who separate their work from those of traditional chemists (Howard-Grenville et al., 2017), physicians who specialise in pain management and keep a distance from other medical staff (Baszanger, 1990), and gynaecological pelvic surgeons who are excluded from the obstetrics and gynaecology community (Zetka, 2011). They focus on sex work as an example of a particularly heterogeneous occupational group. Their definition of ‘sex work’, and therefore their sample, comprises people from a wide range of sexual, sexualised, and adult entertainment jobs, including burlesque dancers who are rarely included in sex work (see 1.3.1). Importantly, the inter-occupational boundaries that Toubiana and Ruebottom (2022) describe are based on the level of stigmatisation and hence create a hierarchy within sex work, often referred to as the whorearchy by their study’s participants, which distinguishes them from boundaries within other occupational groups such as the examples listed above.

The intra-occupational sex worker stigma hierarchy is reproduced through two mechanisms: ordering, which refers to the ranking of peers based on perceptions of stigma, and detaching, which refers to sex workers removing some people from the occupation altogether, particularly those who are either perceived to be coerced or forced into the industry and burlesque dancers, who are not considered sex workers by the majority of the wider sex working community as they are not seen as stigmatised enough to have earned the sex worker label. With regards to ordering, Toubiana and Ruebottom (2022: 527) stress that ‘evaluations of relative stigma are made based on the degree of nudity and the extent to which the sex worker’s body is involved in the sexual act, as well as the proximity of the sex worker’s body to the client’, illustrating that perceptions of stigma are strongly tied to corporeality. Grandy (2008) discovers a similar hierarchy inside strip clubs based on the proximity between the stripper and their customer during a private dance. She notes that some strippers voice disgust of their colleagues who were known to dance closer or ‘dirtier’ than themselves. Although not as impactful as physical intimacy, Toubiana and Ruebottom (2022) find that demographic and moral stigma, i.e. socioeconomic status and the reason why somebody was working in the sex industries, also impact the stigma hierarchy. Particularly looks, race, and education level influence the prices that sex workers are able to charge and as a result their place in the stigma hierarchy. The impact of moral stigma was

illustrated by comments about the superiority of sex workers who were in the industry for empowerment, enjoyment or to produce art or education rather than solely to make ends meet. This is also a mechanism that Grandy (2008) discovers inside strip clubs with some strippers distinguishing between ‘opportunists’ (2008: 189) who are only stripping as part of a wider strategy for a different, less stigmatised career, and ‘lifers’ (ibid.) who view stripping as vocational and do not have any plans to leave the industry.

The most common response to the stigma hierarchy was what Toubiana and Ruebottom (2022) call stealth organising, a practice where sex workers split up into small occupational groups in order to provide support to each other rather than developing a sense of community and belonging throughout the entire occupation. However, this form of organising can lead to fragmentation of the community and prevent effective organising⁸ against criminalisation and stigmatisation and ultimately prevent some sex workers from accessing the support that they need.

2.2.3. The Whorearchy

The dynamics of intra-occupational stigma within the sex working community are often referred to by sex workers’ rights activists as the whorearchy, a term that has been used within the sex working community since at least the early 2010s (McNeill, 2012). While academic work on the concept has been limited, with the majority of research either focusing solely on one specific sector of the wider sex and adult industries or omitting power dynamics and conflicts within the community, a number of sex workers have written or spoken about their experiences with the whorearchy. This section will therefore initially centre the voices of sex workers in order to outline what is commonly understood as the whorearchy in community-internal spaces.

Belle Knox (2014), who worked simultaneously as an adult film performer and an erotic dancer, describes her discomfort when she was confronted with derogatory comments from her colleagues at the strip club about her involvement in pornography. In accordance with Pheterson’s (1996) conceptualisation of the whore stigma, Knox (2014) claims that sex workers are influenced by a culture that assesses the value of women by their promiscuity in the same way that non-sex working women are. Stigma causes strippers and other workers that are ranked higher in the whorearchy to call attention to their differences to sex workers

⁸ Toubiana and Ruebottom (2022) collected their data in Canada during a time of political and legislative battles around sex work legislation after the Canadian Supreme Court had ruled out the old legislative framework and given the government one year to implement a new one. Canada has since introduced the Nordic Model which sex workers had campaigned against but due to the high levels of campaigns and public activism, the dynamics within the sex workers’ rights movement were particularly visible.

that offer other services, rather than showing solidarity. Knox (2014) emphasises that this distancing behaviour contributes to the overall stigma of the industries and she appeals to other sex workers and adult entertainers to tear down the whorearchy. Importantly, she adds that the denigration from her colleagues at the strip club hurt her more than criticism voiced by outsiders to the sex working community, which ties in with the notion that intra-occupational stigma can be more distressing because insiders often have a better understanding of the occupation (Toubiana and Ruebottom, 2022). With a background in stripping herself, Clare (2022) stresses that the whorearchy does not solve or diminish the problem of the whore stigma but simply passes it on to others.

The exact order of the whorearchy is contested although there is a general consensus that street-based sex workers are at the bottom (Sumner, 2020). Knox (2014) defines the whorearchy as ‘arranged according to intimacy of contact with clients and police’ (2014, n.p.) with those ranking lowest being closest to both. Vixxx (2019) adds that, particularly within the full-service sex industry, workers rank each other according to their limits and boundaries, hourly rate and minimum session length. This means that those who offer the least explicit services, charge the most, and demand the longest booking length, rank higher in the whorearchy than those who offer more services for less money and in a shorter period of time. Additionally, Vixxx (2019) identifies the venue or place that a sex worker works from as an important factor in the whorearchy with expensive hotels or flats rented specifically for business at the top and outdoor areas and cars at the bottom. Particularly so-called car meets, which are a frequent form of booking for most street-based sex workers, are subject to much debate between escorts as they are often looked down upon and commented on in a judgemental way. Witt (2020) stresses that with the exception of the lowest ranks, the order is undefined because most sex workers aim to present themselves as the top of the hierarchy and stigmatise others accordingly.

The whorearchy can have devastating effects on members of the sex working community. Grace Sumner, a street-based sex worker, writes: ‘The whorearchy is the worst thing about the sex work community. I hate it so much because it is one of the very reasons it silences street sex workers and makes us feel ashamed’ (2020, n.p.), showing the significance that judgement from inside the movement can have on those who are placed at the bottom. She also describes how the whorearchy prevents street-based sex workers from accessing peer support and joining the sex workers’ rights movement. Taking a more political perspective, Mac and Smith (2018) show that judgemental or patronising statements of community insiders about their colleagues who are ranked lower in the whorearchy are often nearly identical to the arguments of anti-sex work activists, and that these comments are also frequently used to prove the harms of the sex industry. This leads to a simplification of the

sex working community with “Happy Hookers” (who enjoy sex work and thus support decriminalisation) versus “Exited Women” (who experienced harm in the sex industry and therefore support criminalisation)’ (Mac and Smith, 2018: 35; see 2.1.3).

The earliest mention of the term whorearchy can be found in George Templeton Strong’s diaries written in the 1830s to describe the rapid advancement of sex work in Five Points, New York (Nickols, 2018). Academic work on the concept has since remained scarce and attempts to develop a comprehensive theory of the whorearchy as it is known in the sex working community today only evolved recently, although the term has been mentioned on occasion in older publications (see Gilfoyle, 1992; Wood Hill, 1993; McClintock, 1992). The conceptualisation of intra-occupational stigma within the sex and adult industries outlined above (Toubiana and Ruebottom, 2022) engages with the consequences of the whorearchy and briefly mentions the term, although it is referred to as stigma hierarchy throughout the article. Few scholars have discussed the whorearchy as defined by sex workers themselves as outlined in previous paragraphs, but the term has been used to describe and analyse the hierarchies within the sex working community that are based on ‘characteristics that are preferred among clients in their respective marketplace’ (Bowen, 2021: 101), particularly ethnicity and Britishness. Bowen (2021) uses the concept to investigate the impact of Brexit on both British and non-British sex workers. She reviews the accounts of sex workers about the whorearchy and states that ‘there is a level of in-group oppression that occurs because one group of workers will stigmatise other workers due to the level of intimate contact they have with clients’ (2021: 102) but she later conceptualises the ‘UK whorearchy’ (2011: 104) as based on ‘colourism or a hierarchy of whiteness that emerged during the EU referendum’ (ibid.). Hence, she identifies demographic characteristics as the factors impacting the order of the hierarchy. Callander et al. (2022: 8) also explain the whorearchy as a ‘hierarchy of power among sex workers (...) that reproduced and reinforced classicism and racism’. Fuentes (2022), whose research is concentrated on the United States where all forms of full-service sex work are criminalised, puts an emphasis on the impact of criminalisation on the whorearchy. She argues that fear of criminalisation hinders solidarity between sex workers by ‘promoting intergroup policing’ (2022: 4) even though mutual aid networks are crucial for the survival of those who are refused access to formal services due to racialised and carceral policies that exclude people due to their engagement in sex work, trans or queer identity, or undocumented status. Hence, the whorearchy, according to Fuentes, indicates the levels to which criminalisation affects sex workers disproportionately, which is further impacted by other intersectional factors such as ‘age, race, class, gender, disability, type of sex work, and visibility through having a public presence as a sex worker’ (2022: 4-5). Finally, Sawicki et al. (2019) build on the work of Knox (2014) and link both intimacy of

contact with clients and the intersection with other forms of marginalising characteristics in their definition of the whorearchy.

The reproduction of the whore stigma *inside* the sex working community needs to be acknowledged as a complex and messy system of hierarchies that is subject to changes dependent on transitions in the wider sex industry, including ongoing digitalisation (Jones, 2010) and increasing participation of the middle-class in the sex industries (Bernstein, 2007). Although a detachment from full-service sex workers and adult film performers whose work includes penetrative sex has also been observed in studies of cam girls (Mathews, 2017) and dominatrices (Lindemann, 2010), judgemental behaviour from strippers towards full-service sex workers is often mentioned as a prime example of the whorearchy.

So far, this chapter has outlined theories of stigma in the context of the British stripping industry and focused on its materialisation both from industry outsiders and within the wider sex working community. Although some of the earliest conceptualisations focus on interactions between individuals (Goffman, 1963), stigma has since been understood as a mechanism to control deviant women (Pheterson, 1996) and as a tool for oppression of marginalised communities more generally (Tyler, 2020). Hence, stigma is used to justify the delegitimation and corresponding criminalisation or restrictive policing of many forms of sex work and adult entertainment, including stripping to some degree. It furthermore drives the wider sex working community apart due to intra-occupational stigma (Toubiana and Ruebottom, 2022), resulting in a stigma hierarchy, often referred to as the whorearchy (Knox, 2014), which ranks different sectors according to the whore stigma (Pheterson, 1996). Similar trends are visible inside other marginalised communities and several people have pointed out the need for an explicitly political, radical liberation movement that fundamentally challenges capitalist and societal norms at their roots rather than fighting for normalisation of the lives of some members of the community (Faye, 2021; Duggan, 2002).

2.3. Precarity in Stripping

Following an exploration of the stigma that strippers experience, I will engage with recent academic work on the gig economy in contemporary capitalism and how it relates to the stripping industry. To do this, I will firstly examine the transition of work more broadly and explore the dominant view in recent academic literature that large parts of the labour market have been subject to increasing precarity due to automation and deindustrialisation, particularly in the global north (Jones, 2021). Following Kalleberg, I define precarious work as ‘work that is *uncertain, unstable, and insecure* and in which *employees bear the risks of the work* (as opposed to businesses or the government) and *receive limited social benefits*

and statutory entitlements' (2018: 14). Secondly, I will outline recent conceptualisations of the gig economy and the potential benefits as well as challenges that its rapid growth has had on the labour market with a particular focus on the changes that result in vulnerabilities of workers (Caraher and Reuter, 2017). Lastly, this chapter will connect stripping and the sex and adult entertainment industries more broadly to these developments in the wider labour market and show that sex workers have always been a prime example of precarious gig economy workers.

2.3.1. The Transition of Work

With the advance of information technology and its impact on the setup of the labour market, the nature of work has changed which has been met with overwhelming academic interest (Alberti et al., 2018). Early critics of an overly positive analysis of the emergence of the digital economy within a capitalist system predicted that the internet would accelerate trends of increased flexibility, deskilling, and growing reliance on freelanced work (Terranova, 2000). More recently, Jones (2021) states that contemporary capitalism has reached a 'crisis of employment' (2021: 21) following increasing precarity since the early 2010s, with many workers depending on informal work with stagnant wages, high unemployment and a workers' movement that is ineffective in challenging these dynamics. Others have pointed out the overall shift to more precarity in jobs beyond traditional class boundaries and decreasing job security due to higher flexibility within the labour market (Alberti et al., 2018; Caraher and Reuter, 2017). While the desire for straightforward and direct explanations for this crisis has led to a number of people ascribing this situation to a single development – most commonly the idea that 'robots are stealing our jobs', – the reasons are, in fact, more complex and multi-faceted. Automation theorists tend to claim that the general applicability of computers resulted in less labour demand, but Jones (2021) stresses that the decline of profitability of manufacturing industries, over-accumulation of capital, and overall less economic growth resulted in a crisis that is more terminal than the cyclical crises that are to be expected in capitalism. Alongside higher unemployment levels overall, this crisis involves a transfer from manufacturing jobs to the service sector, which cannot be automated through technology in the same way that productive industry can, particularly in countries that were deindustrialised quickly such as the UK and the US. Because the service sector does not grow at the same rate as manufacturing industries, service jobs tend to be low-paid and precarious. Increased competition due to the higher labour supply caused by globalisation allows employers to lower standards. They furthermore bypass labour protections through new forms of bogus self-employment contracts. The emergence of digital platforms has made it possible for employers to hire subcontractors for ten minute

tasks, pay them a small fee for the service and avoid having to provide any labour protections (Prassl, 2018). Even without the digital platforms, this means that the increasing flexibilisation of labour markets has led to a shift of financial risk and responsibility from the employer to the worker. As a result, the boundaries between work and private life become blurred and wage-labour takes up an increasingly significant role in the lives of most workers (Caraher and Reuter, 2017). Additionally, this leads to some people who would otherwise be left behind being forced to invent ‘a seemingly never-ending range of new and esoteric services’ (Jones, 2021: 24) that illustrate the absurdity of the state of the service sector. As concrete examples, Jones mentions ‘hired friends and pet babysitters’ (ibid.) but another, more prominent example might be Graeber (2013: 6) who extends this notion to include jobs whose absence would be unlikely to affect humanity negatively, including ‘private equity CEOs, lobbyists, PR researchers, actuaries, telemarketers, bailiffs or legal consultants’.

The effect of this crisis on the nature of work is a move towards increasing reliance on ‘work that is highly temporary, casual and contingent, work that involves large amounts of unpaid labour, significant underemployment or high levels of in-work-poverty, or work that, more often than not, no longer guarantees a life any better than the most abject forms of unemployment’ (Jones, 2021: 25). This precarisation process is visible globally, goes beyond class boundaries and is driven not only by explicit efforts of employers to bypass labour protections but also by political decisions of states and governments to provide a legal framework that facilitates a shift of risk to workers and mitigates the cost for employers (Alberti et al., 2018; Caraher and Reuter, 2017; Prassl, 2018). Hence, the rise of non-standard forms of employment, which in the UK typically includes zero-hour-contracts, agency work, and bogus self-employment, has ultimately led to a removal of many of the labour protections that trade unions fought for throughout the 20th century and has resulted in many workers having to constantly chase for new gigs in order to make ends meet. The intensity and speed of these developments are relatively new in certain sectors (Alberti et al., 2018) while this form of precarity has always existed in the sex and adult entertainment industries (Hardy and Barbagallo, 2021).

While the crisis of employment that Jones, Prassl, Alberti et al. and others describe has become a dominant narrative in the literature, critics point out that many workers have always been subject to high levels of precarity and contest the notion of a transformation of the labour market that has only emerged recently. Choonara (2020) stresses that although the presence of highly precarious job markets, which are shaped by income uncertainty and a lack of labour protections, is uncontested, it is not constructive to view them as all-encompassing. He shows that, in reality, employment stability remains high in the UK and that high turnover is, at least in part, a result of workers choosing to move companies

more often rather than the prevalence of insecure jobs. Following Social Reproduction Theory and Radical Political Economy, he points out that the interests of capital, which shape labour markets, are inherently contradictory (see Vogel, 2013) in that they both include immediate profit making and the longer term reproduction of the workforce. Hence, a transition of the labour market toward a completely precarious, ad-hoc system that absorbs all labour protections and forces the majority of people to work multiple jobs to make ends meet, clashes with the interest of capital to keep a healthy and functioning workforce. Instead, Choonara suggests analysing specific labour markets while keeping in mind these contradictory imperatives that shape them.

2.3.2. The Platform Economy

Regardless of whether precarity is on the rise in all job markets or not, recent developments in information technology have led to the rise of the gig economy, and particularly the digitally mediated platform economy. Although the term gig economy is controversial and has changed over time, many contemporary scholars in the UK now tend to use it to refer to mostly app- or platform-mediated work (Taylor et al., 2017). This includes work that is arranged digitally and performed in person, such as food delivery or taxi rides, and work that is mediated and delivered remotely, such as software programming and data entry (Wood et al., 2018). Notably, platforms are used as intermediaries for both skilled and unskilled work with one of the largest websites for remote gig workers, Upwork, connecting qualified programmers, designers, or translators with potential employers as well as offering a range of ‘microwork’ tasks which refers to ‘the most fragmented, deskilled and commodified work’ (2018: 60). While ‘microwork’ often includes miniscule and invisible tasks that pay close to nothing and are performed by some of the people with the least access to formal labour markets, including those living in slums, camps, and prisons (Jones, 2021), these ‘microwork’ platforms only make up a small fraction of the wider gig economy and the working conditions and pay on them are not representative of gig work more broadly (Wood et al., 2018). Particularly in the UK and mainland Europe, the most popular gig work platforms alongside Upwork are Deliveroo and Uber which have both been subject to significant academic interest (see Gregory, 2020; Tassinari and Maccarone, 2020; Wiener et al., 2020) but there is also a large number of highly skilled professionals who use platforms to find freelance work (Sutherland et al., 2019). In addition, the gig economy attracts both people who are employed in more traditional forms of work alongside their engagement in the gig economy and people who rely on gig work exclusively (Taylor et al., 2017). Due to the fragmentation of the labour market and the need of many people to take up multiple jobs rather than being employed in one full-time occupation (Jones, 2021), it is estimated that

only about one quarter of gig workers generate the majority of their income from platform work (Forde et al., 2017a). It is clear, nevertheless, that the rise of the gig economy significantly influences the nature of work in general and impacts workers in various different parts of society, including industries that do not rely on digital platforms to mediate the work but still function under similar conditions, such as hospitality and large parts of the caring sector.

Scholars have both pointed out the high potentials of platform-mediated gig work with regards to efficiency of matching workers with suitable tasks as well as the risks of an overly digitally mediated labour market in terms of labour protections and lack of a regulatory framework (Prassl, 2018). Two of the main issues that gig workers on various different platforms report are high levels of control through either algorithms or platform rules and high competition between workers. While there are some accounts of monitoring practices such as keyboard presses or regular screenshots on platforms that mediate remote work, algorithmic control mechanisms like rating and ranking systems play a more important role for most gig workers as they determine whether a worker is authorised to accept high-paying gigs (Wood et al., 2018). This is particularly true for food delivery and taxi services (Forde et al., 2017a) where algorithms even frequently determine prices and pay (Prassl, 2018) but there are also instances of workers on Upwork accepting lower or no pay for some of the work that they had done in order to avoid bad ratings (Sutherland et al., 2019). Building direct relationships with clients which is crucial for a successful career in many freelance jobs is made more difficult on platforms where workers have only limited possibilities to advertise their work beyond ratings and reviews from clients. Although these rating systems promise high flexibility and agency on how and when a task is completed, in reality the oversupply of labour on many platforms forces many workers to accept any task that they are offered and work long and often unsocial hours (Wood et al., 2018). However, Bessa et al. (2022) found that the majority of platform protests evolved due to concerns of pay, indicating that an overly strong focus on algorithmic control might not describe the experiences of platform workers fully.

2.3.3. The Gig Economy More Broadly and Legal Misclassifications

While most of the gig work literature of the last five years has focused nearly exclusively on the platform-mediated labour market, essentially equating the gig economy with the platform economy, many of the trends of increasing precarity are equally as visible in industries without digital intermediaries. In later studies as well as in less euro- or US-centric scholarship, a broader definition of the gig economy is more prevalent, which also includes non-digitally mediated markets that rely heavily on flexible, precarious, and temporary jobs

(Pant and Majumder, 2022), generating an analytical framework that is inclusive of gig workers who are not working through an app. Watson et al. (2021) warn of the tendency of recent research to overlook the parts of the gig economy that have existed before the rise of platforms but show similar symptoms in terms of job insecurity, precarity, and exploitation and have also grown in recent years. Personal trainers and fitness centre workers, for example, face the same hyper flexibility and precarity with no guarantee of income while concurrently dealing with high levels of control from gym managers despite a lack of platform interference (Harvey et al., 2016). There is furthermore a large body of literature outlining the increase in flexible and precarious jobs without appropriate contracts in other parts of the service sector (Glerum, 2021; Lloyd, 2019; Barbagallo and Federici, 2019). Hence, the rise of platforms has to be viewed as part of a more general move towards non-standard forms of employment that are often more precarious and shift economic risk and responsibility to the worker and therefore saving costs associated with more traditional employment for the employer (Prassl, 2018).

Because gig workers are usually considered independent contractors, they have limited access to trade union representation and collective action to challenge exploitative practices from managers or platforms and the corresponding lack of holiday or sick pay makes it impossible for many to take time off. Hence, Prassl (2018) stresses that the potential to create better job opportunities and improve products and services that the gig economy evidently has can only be realised if it is embedded in a regulatory framework that prevents platforms and managers from bypassing existing labour protections. While both digital platforms and managers in precarious in-person workplaces tend to present themselves as intermediaries or market places, in reality they often act as employers who set out the terms and conditions of engagement and have significant control over the workers selling their labour on them (Prassl, 2018; Wood et al., 2018, Harvey et al., 2016). Forde et al. (2017a: 19) stress the importance of viewing ‘platforms as active shapers of the online economy, rather than as passive facilitators’ in order to illustrate that under the current regulatory framework, platforms are the only regulators of the digital gig economy. In the in-person gig economy, the owners and managers of workplaces, such as strip clubs, fitness centres, pubs, and hair salons, have the power to regulate their businesses.

In the UK, employees, independent contractors, and workers are distinct legal categories that determine the access that someone has to labour protections and workers’ rights, including minimum wage, sick pay, protection from unfair dismissal and discrimination, and paid annual leave (Forde et al., 2017b) but there are concerns that these categories are not sufficiently able to protect gig workers from exploitation, particularly considering the challenges of collective labour organising on platforms (Forde et al., 2017a) and in

unregulated workplaces (Barbagallo and Cruz, 2021). A number of workers, scholars, and trade union representatives have therefore called for more rigid regulation of gig work as it is often viewed as an explicit driver of overall precarisation as it offers new forms of mischaracterising workers as independent contractors or ‘entrepreneurs’. Instead of banning platforms entirely, Prassl (2018) suggests a focus on British employment law and particularly the question of who has to act as the responsible employer within the platform economy and therefore provide access to basic workers’ rights. While platform work creates a new complexity to current employment law, Prassl maintains that flexible work and employment protections are not mutually exclusive, provided that regulators reform existing legal standards to tackle challenges of these new forms of precarious work. Furthermore, Bessa et al. (2022: 32) have identified an ‘increasing prevalence of protests by platform workers’, which often go beyond traditional forms of worker protest, indicating that there are developments of collective action even within these highly informal labour markets. The same can be said about non-platform mediated gig work. Hope that the increasing precarisation of employment might not be as terminal as Jones (2021) describes it can therefore be found within collective worker struggles and the relative power of regulators with regards to employment law. Nevertheless, the rise of the platform economy as well as exacerbation of precarity and flexibility in other parts of the gig economy has evidently shaped the nature of work in general and needs to be taken into account particularly in studies of informal sectors, including stripping and the sex industry more broadly.

2.3.3. Stripping as a Prime Example of Precarious Work

Similarly to most parts of the service sector, there has been a shift to digital platforms within the sex and adult entertainment industries, both with regards to platform-mediated sexual services that are delivered in person, particularly escort services, and digital sex work that is performed entirely remotely, such as webcamming and adult content creation (Sanders et al., 2018). While overall the internet has provided sex workers with safer working conditions, less police interactions and more autonomy, there are also some new challenges and risks that sex workers face online that come with increased visibility (Jones, 2015). Barbagallo and Hardy (2021) stress that despite being overlooked in debates on work and employment frequently, sex workers face many of the issues described above that other platform workers also deal with, including their exclusion from regulatory frameworks, barriers to collective action, and isolation from other workers while standing in competition with them, resulting in a downwards spiral of pay and working conditions. The authors add that ‘sex work is – and has always been – an archetypal form of insecure, unprotected, informal labor’ (2021: 535) on top of also being subjected to various degrees of criminalisation and stigma. Recently, there have been more calls to view sex work as a prime example of the gig

economy (Easterbrook-Smith, 2022; Levitt, 2021; Berg, 2021). Levitt (2021: 59) argues that '[s]ex work operates according to the logics of the gig economy, demanding multiple sources of income, independent contractor status, low wages, flexibility, and a premium on creativity.'

The advertising platform AdultWork is the most dominant website in the full-service sex industry in the UK and it has been argued that, similarly to many other platforms, it has significantly shaped the wider sex industry and the working practices of independent sex workers although it is not legally considered an employer (Barbagallo and Hardy, 2021). In fact, the overall silence of sex work platforms such as AdultWork during the Covid-19 pandemic illustrates that these platforms are not made responsible to provide social protections or support to their workers during crises (Brouwers and Herrmann, 2020). The platform's practices resemble those described in the previous section to a certain degree with high levels of control over the content that sex workers post to attract clients, a reviewing system that prevents sex workers from speaking up about inappropriate behaviour from clients, and an oversupply of labour on the platform, leading to high competition between sex workers. Furthermore, AdultWork, alongside other adult websites, is known for its rigid verification process and need for sex workers to constantly add new content in order to stay visible (Barbagallo and Hardy, 2021). Overall, this contributes to a downwards spiral of the income and working conditions of sex workers, particularly with regards to safety with unprotected sexual services, such as sex without a condom, becoming normalised on platforms (Caradonna, 2019).

Platforms that facilitate online adult entertainment, which includes both live webcamming and various forms of content creation, either through subscription-based websites such as OnlyFans or AdmireMe, or Pay-to-watch sites where customers can buy photo sets or clips individually, are also known to employ various practices that platforms in other industries have used to extract more value from workers and exert control. In webcamming, ranking algorithms are known to significantly affect the income of performers who do not fit into the platform's patterns, which usually means all performers who are not white cisgender women (Caminhas, 2022; Jones, 2015). The prosperity of OnlyFans has replaced large parts of the studio-based porn industry, resulting in many performers having to take up a number of jobs in the wider adult industry to make ends meet and agree to low-paid or free shoots to advertise themselves (Berg, 2016). Overall, the platformisation of porn work has given many porn performers more agency over their content but also increased precarity in the industry (Easterbrook-Smith, 2022). Similarly to Barbagallo and Hardy (2021), Berg and Penley (2016) suggest that the need to diversify income streams to get by and precarious working

conditions more generally are not new for porn workers. Instead, platforms have simply added new ways of casualisation and precarisation.

Although most definitions of the gig economy focus solely on platform-mediated work, which clearly does not include stripping, there are some evident parallels between the sectors and some of the work that has been written on gig economies is useful to analyse the working conditions inside strip clubs, as illustrated in the title ‘Flexible Workers’ of the largest study of strippers in Britain to date (Hardy and Sanders, 2014). Due to the setup of strip clubs, managers and club owners have found ways to profit off dancers directly through house fees, fines for breaking house rules, and alcohol consumption. Any financial risk that emerges from the gradual decrease of profit in the stripping industry is therefore transferred to strippers. The fines are also used to police the appearance and behaviour of strippers by implementing dress codes or rules about the interactions with customers beyond private dancers, resembling some of the control mechanisms that can be seen on platforms. Hence, although platforms have not directly impacted the work inside strip clubs, stripping has been subjected to the wider transition of work towards more precarious and casualised settings, preventing labour organising and access to labour protections. Looking at the industry from a gig economy perspective and centering issues surrounding work and employment relations in informal settings is particularly useful for this study.

2.4. Conclusion: Combining Stigma and Precarity

Strippers, and sex workers more broadly, are located at the extreme end of precarity while also experiencing stigma for their occupation. In some cases, both stigma and precarity are exacerbated by (partial) criminalisation or overly restrictive regulation that is based on moralistic values rather than the wellbeing of the workers, and hence a direct result of the whore stigma (Pheterson, 1996). The orientation of this thesis focuses on the relationship within and between industries that are hyper precarious and stigmatised with both precarity and stigma exacerbating each other in an iterative process. I have therefore decided to approach this research through integrating these theoretical perspectives.

There are a number of other industries mentioned in this chapter in which stigma and precarity intersect, including nurses, carers, and cleaners. However, as this chapter has argued, the sex and adult entertainment industries are located at extreme ends of both for two particular reasons; the distinctiveness of the whore stigma and the prevalence of (partial) criminalisation. Crucially, the wider sex working community is contemporaneously both a group of workers, affected by the wider transition of work towards increased precarity and less income security as well as occupational stigma, and a marginalised community

oppressed by patriarchal control mechanisms in the form of social stigma. Pheterson's (1988, 1996) conceptualisation of the whore stigma and its role as a tool to oppress and control women contextualises the formation of the whorearchy which resembles other hierarchies within social groups and is based on societal stigmatisation, but also incorporates factors based on occupational differences, such as income and working practices, into its ranking order. The positioning of the sex workers' rights movement, which has evidently shaped this thesis significantly and is outlined in section 2.1.3, further sheds light on the intersection of job precarity and stigma.

When assessing relationships within the sex and adult entertainment industries, I have therefore found it crucial to consider both the hyper precarious and (partially) criminalised environment in which these relationships form, as well as the stigma that produces and justifies social hierarchies within this community. Consequently, in the case of sex and adult entertainment industries in Britain, and particularly the stripping industry, precarity and stigma are interwoven and mutually aggravating.

3. Contextualising Stripping in Britain: An Outline of the Existing Literature

The stripping industry occupies a unique place within the British sex and adult entertainment industries as well as the labour market more broadly. While it is not restricted by criminal offence law like many parts of the full-service sex industry are, it is highly regulated through Sexual Entertainment Venue (SEV) licences which differentiates stripping from work in other parts of the night-time economy. However, with regard to working practices and employment relations, strip clubs operate in similar ways to other parts of the hospitality sector as well as with other precarious and flexible industries, resulting in comparable grievances of strippers, hospitality workers, and gig workers. This became particularly visible throughout the Covid-19 pandemic when strippers, alongside other sex workers, were overlooked in the governmental response to lockdown poverty.

Likewise, the stigma that strippers experience puts them in a special position both within the wider sex working community and society in general as they tend to experience lower levels of stigma than full-service sex workers but are still affected by the whore stigma (Pheterson, 1996) and occupational stigma (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999) in general. It is again the Covid-19 pandemic that most recently illustrated some of the patterns of stigmatisation and the ways in which stigma fluctuates during crises.

The following chapter will outline the literature on the British stripping industry and the role that both the sex workers' rights movement and anti-sex worker activists play in shaping the working conditions within it. This includes a description of the legal framework that has facilitated strip club bans in some parts of the country while leaving them unregulated in others. I will then examine how various stigmatised and precarious communities beyond stripping were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and outline responses to it. The aim is to provide an understanding of the functioning of British strip clubs and the social, political and economic trends that have affected the industry in recent years. Due to vastly different legislation with regard to licensing, regulation of performances, migration policies, and pay between different countries globally, I will focus on research conducted in Britain and indicate whenever I refer to studies carried out elsewhere.

In Britain, studies that focus specifically on the operation and working conditions inside strip clubs have only recently emerged and are still rare although the topic has received more academic interest in North America (Brooks, 2010; Egan 2003; Frank 2002; Kay 1999). Nevertheless, British scholars have analysed the business model of clubs which is based on a highly competitive system in which strippers pay for the opportunity to offer their services in

an unregulated market space while also being subjected to high levels of control with regard to their appearance and performance. In order to describe the setup of the industry, some key studies are centred in this chapter and outlined below.

3.1. Existing Research of the Stripping Industry

The earliest British investigation of the working lives of strippers was led by journalist and lobbyist Julie Bindel (2004) and has since been criticised for its lack of academic scrutiny and unethical research methodology such as unnecessary covert observation, lack of informed consent, and disregard of strippers' wellbeing (see Colosi, 2008; Hardy and Sanders, 2014). Despite her lack of academic scrutiny, Bindel's (2004) findings have significantly shaped the public narrative of the industry. More recently, Hardy and Sanders (2014) conducted the largest study on strip clubs in England and Wales to date which reflects the comments of 197 strippers, who either participated in an in-person administered survey or in qualitative interviews, as well as twenty club owners and fifteen state authority representatives. Although the fieldwork was carried out between 2010 and 2013 and the stripping industry has arguably since been subjected to substantial change, the study provides important insights into regulations and working conditions of strip clubs, especially from the point of view of strippers. Still the most significant study of the British stripping industry to date, this has therefore been an invaluable resource for the design and realisation of this study and will be featured significantly in this thesis. In addition, Lister (2012) provides an overview of the specifics of the stripping industry in Scotland through a case study of one Glasgow-based club, and Colosi's (2010) ethnographic study of a club in England investigates the experiences and motivations of strippers in more detail. Both researchers worked in the clubs that stood in the centre of their research during their data collection and their lived experience constitutes a crucial component of their research design.

3.1.1. The Overall Decline in Earning Potential

Although there used to be a number of pubs where strippers would perform stage shows throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the stripping industry as it is known today, with lap dances in private booths or rooms alongside suggestive stage shows in view of all customers, came to Britain in the late 1990s with the opening of two new clubs, Stringfellows and Spearmint Rhino, who both remain crucial actors in the stripping industry today (Clare, 2022). Throughout the 2000s and early 2010s, the stripping industry expanded significantly due to a growing number of dancers entering the occupation with its profitability likely having peaked just before the recession after the 2008 financial crash (Hardy and Sanders, 2014). At present, however, Clare (2022: xxiv) estimates that the number of strip clubs in Britain has

‘dwindled from 350 clubs a decade ago to 150’ and it is likely that some of the remaining clubs did not survive the pandemic. There is furthermore a wide consensus that there is a tendency of declining income potential due to a shortage of high-spending clients and simultaneously an oversupply of dancers (Hardy and Sanders, 2014; Lister, 2012). Considering the ongoing recession and cost of living crisis in Britain, it is unlikely that these downward trends are going to change in the near future. Lister (2012) points out that although most men seem to have become less interested in sexualised, nude dancing as a form of live entertainment than they used to be, many strippers remain in the dying industry despite acknowledging the decline in their earnings due to the remaining potential of meeting an exceptionally high spender. Hardy and Sanders (2014: 80) add that on top of the overly high numbers of strippers being offered shifts, ‘all the women are in direct competition with each other for each customer that comes through the door’, resulting in conflicts, declining earning potential, and many strippers standing under constant stress to earn enough money. Furthermore, the decline in wages has led to a ‘race to the bottom’ (2014: 81) with some strippers offering additional services or undercutting their colleagues’ prices in order to persuade customers to buy a lap dance off them. In some cases, this incentivised strippers to compromise their own boundaries or safety, or work more shifts than they were comfortable with.

Most frequently, the declining income potential and corresponding job precarity is ascribed to the economic recession since the financial crash in 2008. Upon closer inspection, however, the reasons for this downward spiral are more complex and multi-faceted. On the supply side, scholars have argued that cultural and economic shifts have led to more women choosing to work in the stripping industry which led to an oversupply as well as deskilling of the work (Lister, 2012). Due to strip club management opening up their clubs to more people without professional pole or dance skills, many strippers who had originally viewed their work as a vocation or art form had to compete with higher numbers of strippers and were forced to lower their standards with regards to pay and quality of their performances (Hardy and Sanders, 2012). Similar developments have been described in previous decades, particularly in North American strip clubs (Kay, 1999) and burlesque establishments (Johnson, 1987). At the same time, Lister (2012) argues that demand for live adult entertainment declined due to cultural shifts towards more liberal attitudes about sexuality and casual sex in general as well as the growth of the porn industry. This has led to a shift in bargaining power from dancers to customers as they can point towards the oversupply of dancers and the fact that sexualised content is widely available to them outside of strip clubs (Lister, 2012). In addition, the relative oversupply of strippers in comparison to customers has transferred power inside clubs to management who are now able to impose more

precarious working conditions due to the seemingly infinite labour supply, giving strippers the impression that they are disposable and resulting in a business model that directly profits off the workers rather than customers (Hardy and Sanders, 2014).

3.1.2. House Fees, Commission, and Fines vs. High Levels of Control

Hardy and Sanders (2014) emphasise the power inequality between management and strippers and state that club owners have found several ways of profiting off dancers directly through set house fees, fines for breaking house rules, and alcohol consumption. House fees, which usually have to be paid at the beginning of the shift, range between £10 and £200 (USW, 2022) and depend heavily on the club as well as the day of the week, resulting in a stressful working environment and income insecurity. Any financial risk that emerges from the gradual decrease of profit in the industry is therefore transferred to the strippers. Despite the clubs making money from strippers directly, there is a troubling shortage of health and safety standards and problems with infrastructure in some clubs, such as lack of heating or air conditioning, unsuitable restrooms, and unsafe pole dance stages. Clare (2022: 84) goes as far as to state that ‘the current business model of the strip club industry is built on wage theft’, illustrating the extreme income precarity that strippers find themselves in.

At the same time however, club management exerts high levels of control over strippers. The fines are used to police their appearance and behaviour by implementing dress codes or rules about their interactions with customers both within and beyond the lap dance. In some places, strippers are required to buy their work clothes from a specific vendor and are not reimbursed for the additional costs (Hardy and Sanders, 2014). Additionally, the authors find that the majority of dancers were not sufficiently informed about the content of their contracts, lack of insurance, and the specifics of their club’s licence which vary significantly between regions and even individual clubs. The same can be said about their employment status which is the focus of the following section.

3.1.3. Independent Contractors, Workers, and Employees in Strip Clubs

In Britain, strippers are legally classified as independent contractors and thus have no access to labour protections in their workplace although clubs tend to enforce high levels of control on them, which would de facto make them employees (Cruz et al., 2017). As described earlier in this chapter, the lack of an appropriate employment contract allows club owners to shift the responsibility for licence breaches, work insurance, tax, and National Insurance to strippers and to terminate their working relationship without notice. Concurrently, club owners are able to police the physical appearance and behaviour through a fining system and house rules which strippers must sign on their first shift. In addition, they can demand house

fees on top of the commission taken from the strippers' income. These dynamics can be described as atypical for independent contractors and it has been argued that strippers could claim employee or worker status if they took their clubs to court (Cruz et al., 2017). Indeed, at the time of writing, there are several completed cases in which a stripper has taken their grievance to court and challenged their independent contractor status, two of which will be outlined in more detail below.

In 2012, Nadine Quashie, a London-based stripper, claimed unfair dismissal from two clubs operated by the company Stringfellows. While the original ruling in the Employment Tribunal decided that she was not considered an employee of the club since she was taking a personal economic risk and was paid for her services by her customers and not the club directly, her appeal in the Employment Appeal Tribunal was accepted on the basis that the club worked with a voucher system and that Quashie was in fact not paid directly by her customers (Albin, 2013). Both tribunals agreed that there were high levels of control by the club including the fact that she was not able to turn down the customers that the club had directed her to (Cruz, 2013). Although the ruling was reversed again in the Court of Appeal and Quashie ultimately lost her claim for unfair dismissal in the last instance, the case constitutes an important milestone for the wider struggle of strippers for more adequate workplaces and laid the basis for further legal challenges that followed *Stringfellow Restaurants Ltd v Quashie*.

Cruz (2013) outlines a variety of reasons why the majority of strippers are unlikely to claim employee status. Fully transforming the employment relationships in strip clubs by classifying all performers as employees would give club owners the right to enforce free dances and control over the rota, and house rules as well as dress codes and fine systems would have legal backing. This stands in stark contrast to the desire to be unmanaged that many strippers feel very strongly about. In the case of Nadine Quashie, the employee status label was needed for her unfair dismissal claim but she did not plan on continuing her work at Stringfellows as an employee after the hearing. Hardy and Sanders (2014) also discovered a strong identification of strippers with the label 'self-employed' as they value their independence and autonomy for a variety of reasons, preventing them from demanding employee status and corresponding labour rights, although they also argue that what strippers actually value is true self-employment which is not currently provided in British strip clubs. So while strippers do not fit the description of independent contractors, it becomes clear that they are unlikely to use employee status as a tool to secure labour protections. Instead, Cruz (2013) proposes that strippers should claim worker status, a legal category that sits in-between self-employment and employment.

Article 230 of the 1996 Employment Rights Act introduced an intermediary status called 'limb (b) worker' which includes any self-employed person who works under an expressed or implied contract to 'do or perform personally any work or services for another party to the contract whose status is not by virtue of the contract that of a client or customer of any profession or business undertaking carried out by the individual' (Article 230, Schedule 3B). This applies even if the worker does not directly receive a wage from the employer which means that anyone claiming worker status only needs to be able to prove in court that their work cannot be substituted by another worker and that it is exclusively provided for the employer (Davidov, 2005). In February 2021, it was confirmed by the Supreme Court that uber drivers were considered limb (b) workers, not only granting them basic workers rights but also providing clarity over the category and hence making it easier for many other atypical workers to claim it (Atkinson and Dhorajiwala, 2021).

In the stripping industry, the limb (b) worker category was utilised for the first time in 2020 when Sonia Nowak, another London-based stripper who was supported by the United SEx Workers (USW) trade union, took her strip club Browns, owned by Chandler Bars, to court for various claims. In the first instance, it was ruled that Nowak was indeed a worker, mainly due to the high level of control that was enforced on the strippers, and at the time of writing there has not been any appeal hearings to challenge that decision. *Nowak v Chandler Bars* illustrates the usefulness of worker status for strippers for reducing exploitation without being deprived of the label of self-employment, which can be important for the identity construction of many strippers (Barbagallo and Cruz, 2021). An Edinburgh-based stripper and USW member, who asked to remain anonymous in the court proceedings, was also successful at proving worker status in her club in November 2022 (Worden, 2022). With worker status, strippers are entitled to holiday pay and minimum wage as well as protection from things such as whistleblowing, trade union victimisation, and discrimination in the work place. Despite the fact that both cases were successful at proving that strippers are indeed workers, they still tend to be treated as independent contractors by strip club management and every stripper who takes grievances against their club to court has to re-argue their case for worker status separately as each strip club constitutes a different employer and an individual's employment status is a personal concept in employment law. The case further illustrates the parallels of stripping with other forms of precarious and atypical work, particularly the gig economy where unionised workers at companies such as uber (Atkinson and Dhorajiwala, 2021) proved worker status in order to be granted some basic labour protections. For strippers to force the implementation of proven worker status in all strip clubs in the same way that uber drivers did, they would have to organise behind the claim and create pressure by threatening club owners with infinite claims.

3.2. Sexual Entertainment Venue Licensing

This chapter will now explore the change in British licensing legislation for strip clubs with the introduction of Article 27 of the Policing and Crime Act in 2010 which has had a significant impact on the working conditions and wellbeing of strippers and the operation of their clubs more generally. Arguably, this change and the corresponding restriction of freedoms of strip clubs is socially justifiable only due to the societal stigma that is attached to the stripping industry. It is important to acknowledge that the majority of studies that look into the licensing of the stripping industry have been conducted either in large cities with a dense population, or in smaller cities that offer a tourism industry that particularly advertises to stag and hen dos as well as other party tourists and have thus become relatively well-known for their distinctive sex industry. While the focus on these places is understandable in terms of data collection and significance of the studies, it does not address the question how smaller strip clubs and strip pubs, which are often found in rural areas (Clare, 2022) have been impacted by the changes in licensing legislation.

3.2.1. Introduction and Impact of Article 27 of the 2009 Policing and Crime Act

In April of 2010, Article 27 of the 2009 Policing and Crime Act came into effect in England and Wales, which defines strip clubs as ‘Sexual Entertainment Venues’ (SEV) and in doing so, provided local authorities with new powers to issue new licences, renewals, and licensing conditions that clubs previously did not require. An SEV, as defined in Article 27, Paragraph 2A of Schedule 3, is defined as any venue which provides relevant entertainment, i.e. ‘any live performance or any display of nudity with such nature that, ignoring financial gain, it must reasonably be assumed to be provided solely or principally for the purpose of sexually stimulating any member of the audience (whether by verbal or other means)’. An exception are venues that offer relevant entertainment not more than eleven times in twelve months. The government guidance on SEVs includes lap dancing, pole dancing, table dancing, strip shows, peep shows and live sex shows but explicitly excludes nude performances that are not ‘provided solely or principally for the purpose of sexually stimulating any member of the audience’, as outlined in Paragraph 2A of Schedule 3, such as in theatre plays (Home Office, 2010). Hence, nude performances that are not stigmatised in the same way as stripping are not affected. This change in legislation was prompted when Roberta Blackman-Woods, Labour MP for Durham, voiced her support for a residential campaign against a local strip club due to its proximity to the city’s cathedral and subsequently introduced a Ten Minute Bill in 2008, called the Sex Encounter Establishments (Licensing) Bill, which ultimately led to the introduction of Article 27 (Hardy and Sanders, 2014; Hubbard 2014).

In Scotland, the licensing of SEVs remained under national government control for the most part until April 2019, when Article 76 of the 2015 Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Act came into effect. The legislation transfers the power over SEV licensing decisions to local authorities in virtually the same way that Article 27 of the 2009 Policing and Crime Act does in England and Wales. One notable variation is that while venues in England and Wales do not require a licence when there have been less than twelve occasions within twelve months in which sexual entertainment was provided, venues in Scotland can only provide sexual entertainment up to four times in twelve months without requiring a SEV licence. As the majority of research reviewed in this chapter was conducted before April 2019, it mostly refers to England and Wales. However, similar conclusions can be drawn for Scotland, provided the time lag of nearly ten years is kept in mind (Clare, 2022; Lister, 2012).

SEVs do not fall into the category of obscenities, such as for example (gay) cruising areas or street-based sex work which are also regulated by municipal laws, so instead they are mostly controlled by zoning ordinances, development control and premise licensing (Colosi and Hubbard, 2012a). This means that local authorities can limit the number of SEVs in their constituency as well as refuse their opening on the basis of the venue's location in areas in which a strip club would not be deemed suitable, such as in proximity to places like schools, places of worship, shopping centres, or tourist attractions. Colosi and Hubbard (2012a) refer to this as 'moral geography' (2012a: 69) and identify a public desire for 'distancing between sex premises and spaces where children might routinely be present (irrespective of the fact that they would not normally be in the vicinity during the opening hours imposed on the clubs)' (2012a: 76). Zoning ordinances remove strip clubs, alongside other spaces where a particular sexual lifestyle can take place, such as lesbian and gay venues, from certain neighbourhoods, ultimately exacerbating the gentrification of these areas by removing businesses that are 'regarded as an obstacle to the attraction of family-friendly corporations and investment in specific urban neighbourhoods' (Hubbard, 2014: 6). In other words, moral geography is directly based on stigma against stripping and those working in the industry, hence the whore stigma. Similar observations have been made in other contexts in which places of the wider sex industries, such as dedicated red-light districts or locations where street-based sex work is tolerated, were moved into less attractive, and thus often less safe, areas in order to for them not to disturb the overall image of the city (see Caradonna and Hardy, 2021; Tigchelaar, 2019; Mac and Smith, 2018).

In addition, many councils have decided that there simply are no appropriate spaces for SEVs as they are not suitable in any areas that are close to residential, commercial, and industrial zones (Hubbard, 2014), ultimately banning strippers' from working in that area legally. Local councils also have the power to decide on the suitability of the licence holder,

usually the club owner, and enforce conditions on the licensed premises, which can include opening hours, public advertising, or clear recognition of strip clubs to passers-by (Home Office, 2010). Hardy and Sanders (2014) note that these conditions have the potential to write workers' rights for strippers into policy. They report that after significant lobbying and advocacy work, twenty-five constituencies have included health and safety conditions into their SEV licensing policy, including, in some regions, limits on the number of dancers working per night, bans on fines, fees, or commission, and adequate changing and kitchen facilities. In this way, the introduction of Article 27 theoretically offers possibilities for the improvement of working conditions. Imposing these conditions, however, also leads to significant differences in what strippers and customers are allowed to do, with some councils implementing a one-metre distance between performers and customers or even limitations to the degree of nudity (Colosi and Hubbard, 2012a).

Another major part of the licensing process introduced in Article 27 is the involvement of objection letters from the public into the council's decision making process. The Home Office clarifies that 'any person can object to an application' (2010: 18), irrespective of their location or if they have any affiliation with the affected area, as long as their objection is not solely based on moral grounds or values. Although Colosi and Hubbard (2012b) have shown that there is no direct correlation between the number of these objection letters and the decision of the council, the arguments brought forward in them have been successful in preventing new licences or the renewal of the licences of already established clubs in various locations. This has evidently had a significant impact on the lives and wellbeing of strippers who lost their jobs in the process (Colosi and Hubbard, 2012b). As a result of the transfer of licensing power to local authorities, municipal law has become as essential to controlling sexual conduct as criminal law and although strip clubs are not illegal in Britain, local authorities now de facto have the power to eliminate their existence in their area by introducing 'nil' policies, i.e. limiting the number of SEVs to a total of zero (Colosi and Hubbard; 2012a).

3.2.2. 'Nil' Caps

'Nil' policies have been adopted by several councils, especially in rural areas where no strip clubs had been operating. However, one of the earliest and most controversial cases is the Hackney borough council which intended to pass a 'nil' policy but, due to effective campaigning of strippers and an overwhelming majority of residents voting for the preservation of Hackney's clubs, was ultimately pressured to renew the licences of already established clubs by granting them so-called 'grandfather rights' and only put a restriction on new SEV licences. It is argued that in Hackney, a predominantly working class borough with

a large African-Caribbean and other migrant population, the clubs were embedded into the working class culture and their removal was perceived as yet another result of gentrification, to the point where even the local vicar argued against the closure of all clubs (Hardy and Sanders, 2014). In other parts of Britain, however, the introduction of ‘nil’ policies forced many clubs to shut down. Hence, Colosi and Hubbard (2012a) conclude that the new legislation has created a much more challenging system for club owners and managers and will, in combination with the introduction of relatively high licensing fees, likely lead to a significant decrease of strip clubs in Britain. Colosi (2013) adds that as a consequence, the entire sex industry is being homogenised through policy as strip clubs are recognised as part of the wider sex industry, which has been exposed to increasing criminalisation in recent years. She argues that this is the direct result of stigmatising moral narratives that were pushed by anti-sex worker campaigns, demonstrating an increase in stigma towards strippers.

While Hardy and Sanders (2014) point out the evident potential that SEV licensing has to improve the working conditions of strippers by writing minimum wage, appropriate breaks and infrastructure, and labour protections into the conditions for SEV licence applications, they conclude that ‘in practice, the licensing has at best done nothing to improve the conditions of dancers and at worst has precluded dancers’ attempts at self-determination’ (2014: 180). Similarly, Clare (2022) stresses that Article 27 has done little to improve working conditions and failed to protect strippers from exploitation because licensing policies lack ‘long-term welfare packages, living wages, and employment rights’ (2022: 79). Instead, the high licensing fees and restrictions of advertising opportunities have prompted club owners to transfer costs to strippers by imposing higher house fees and commission. It has therefore been suggested that, in reality, the wellbeing of strippers may not have been the central reason for the introduction of Article 27 but that anti-SEV campaigners were more keen on eliminating the industry as a whole (Hardy and Sanders, 2014).

3.2.3. Anti-SEV Campaigns

The legislative change that impacted strip club licensing was the direct result of debates between feminists about the sex and adult entertainment industries in general. Roberta Blackman-Woods MP who first tabled a bill to licence strip clubs and was ultimately responsible for the introduction of Article 27 was highly influenced by a residential campaign against a strip club in Durham. Object (2011) commemorated the passing of Article 27 in their Annual Report as their biggest success of the year and commented positively on the adoption of ‘nil’ caps and implementation of limits on the number of clubs in general. The new legislation was a direct result of the exhaustive campaigning against the stripping industry by a small number of organisations that claim to end violence against

women and girls, in particular the ‘Stripping the Illusion’ campaign run collectively by Object and the Fawcett Society between 2008 and 2010, which specifically called for a change in licensing regulations⁹ (Colosi and Hubbard, 2012a). It included a detailed report of 31 case studies of constituencies in Britain in which the licensing of strip clubs had either been raised as an issue by council members or had produced issues in the past and recommends a re-classification of strip clubs as ‘Sex Encounter Venues’ as well as an increase in powers for local authorities (Object, 2008). It has generally been argued that strip clubs have increasingly become the focus of many organisations that are prominent in the British anti-sex worker and anti-pornography movement (Long, 2012), notably the anti-SEV group Not Buying It! which was founded by the former CEO of Object, and the Women’s Equality Party. This is significant because it illustrates the high visibility of the stripping industry to wider society, including people who have no interest in consuming adult entertainment or buying sexual services. The focus of many anti-sex worker organisations on the stripping industry as well as their success in changing the legislative framework show that strippers remain a stigmatised group in Britain.

After the legislative change, these anti-sex worker campaigning groups turned to residents by providing tool kits in order to facilitate writing appropriate objection letters. Colosi and Hubbard (2012b) outline the three main arguments that they have identified in those letters of opposition, namely harm coming to the performers, to non-sex working women that live in the area, and to non-sex working women in general.

Firstly, objection letters often point out the harms to performers, claiming that by taking off their clothes for money they are ‘reducing their sense of self-worth’ (2012b: 598) and are often coerced into offering further sexual services. Although there are studies that have shown the illegal provision of sexual services inside strip clubs in the past (Bindel, 2004), little evidence for coercion on strippers to offer more than a non-contact lap dance was found (Hardy and Sanders, 2014). Although concerns about the wellbeing of strippers are a prominent rationale for the overall objection to SEVs, scholars have also pointed out that the refusal of licences are likely to result in unlicensed or illegal venues in which working conditions are completely outside of the control of regulators. The second argument evolves around the discomfort of non-sex working local women passing by SEVs, often pointing out the vulnerability of women in the night-time economy and claiming that strip clubs pose an

⁹ The campaign slowly died out in 2010/11 since its goal to change the licensing legislation had been reached and the slogan was taken over and reclaimed by a collective of strippers and supporters, including clients, academics, and artists, who launched a blog with the same name. Its main purpose was to comment on the anti-SEV campaigns and ensure that the voices of industry insiders are included into the debate. Especially in early 2012, when Hackney as well as several other councils debated introducing ‘nil’ policies, the blog was very active and kept its readers up to date on licensing hearings, rulings, and renewals (strippingtheillusion.blogspot.com).

additional risk to women who live, work, or go out in the area around it. One study that is often quoted in this regard is the Lilith Report which compares Camden, a relatively SEV-heavy area, to two other inner London boroughs with a less visible presence of sex work. It claims, amongst other things, that the number of reported rapes increased by 50% after the opening of strip clubs (Eden, 2003). The study has been statistically debunked, and criticised for its methodology and lack of causality by several scholars (Hardy and Sanders, 2014; Colosi and Hubbard, 2012a; Magnanti, 2012) and the Lilith report is no longer publicly available. However, although the authors have admitted methodological issues, the report continues to form the basis of many statements of opposition to SEVs. Other, less measurable impacts on local women include a general discomfort when passing by strip clubs (Patiniotis and Standing, 2012). While the participants of Patiniotis and Standing's (2012) study were all organised in feminist groups opposing the stripping and wider sex industry already, a survey-based investigation by Colosi and Hubbard (2015) including a diverse range of residents, found that only a small minority of about 10% of their participants showed distress about SEVs, which mostly manifested in disgust, further illustrating the impact of stigma. There was, however, a clear trend of women being more affected by the visibility of the wider sex and adult entertainment industries than men. In addition to the survey, the study also analysed the formal objections that were sent to the council and involved guided walks through the city centre where participants could explain how safe and comfortable they felt in various areas. There, people who had ranked adult entertainment as harmless fun in their survey response, spoke up less. It appears that on top of the stigma that strippers experience, publicly admitting to enjoying and consuming sexual services also continues to be highly stigmatised which can be read as 'an attempt to police the boundaries of middle-class respectability' (Colosi and Hubbard, 2015: 797). As a final grounds for objection, the authors mention harms against non-sex working women and society more generally as a result of more strip clubs. Many objection letters link the objectification of all women to the stripping industry and claim that strip clubs promote the reduction of women to their physical attributes and sexuality. A related concern is the amplification of beauty ideals because it is generally white, slim, young, cis-female bodies that are favoured in strip clubs. The safeguarding of children is also often brought up, implying that children are entirely unable to understand sexual activity and that sexuality needs to be distanced from them altogether. Colosi and Hubbard (2012b) show that the harmful impacts on girls and boys are described differently: 'while the former are described as vulnerable to the clientele of clubs, the latter are seen as potentially seduced by the presence of clubs' (2012b: 602). It is also argued that strip clubs contribute to the glass ceiling since some women refuse to socialise and network in them while male executives increasingly use places where adult entertainment or sexual services take place as opportunities to close deals with high-paying

customers or to launch new products (Jeffreys, 2010). However, this narrative suggests a prioritisation of the careers of middle class women over the means of income and safety of strippers (Hardy and Sanders, 2014).

Some anti-SEV campaigns are furthermore known to apply particularly ruthless methods in order to get strip clubs pushed into illegality. The project Not Buying It! made headlines in 2019 when they paid men to covertly film dancers at work in Sheffield and Manchester (Barbagallo and Cruz, 2021). Clare (2022) describes how strippers were left fearing that recordings of them at work could become public, potentially resulting in their personal identity being revealed and them having to deal with the stigma outside of their work context on top of anxiety over their income source being taken away if their club had to close down suddenly. A photo that seems to have been taken in secret during a lap dance remains on the website of Not Buying It!

Evidently, those working in the stripping industry responded to those attacks. Alongside the founding of the Lap Dancing Association (LDA), which consists of strip club owners and managers and aimed to represent clubs in licencing battles but was often unsuccessful due to their refusal to centre the voices of dancers (Clare, 2022), strippers started organising against the closure of their clubs themselves while also remaining critical of inadequate working conditions and the high control through their employers.

3.3. Unionisation and Activism

The sex workers' rights movement has been fighting for the full decriminalisation and destigmatisation of all forms of sex work and adult entertainment, including stripping, for several decades and strippers have been part of this movement in various ways since the emergence of the stripping industry. The following section takes a closer look at the beginnings of the sex workers' rights movement, both globally and in Britain specifically. This includes advocacy and lobbying campaigns, community organising, peer support and mutual aid networks, and trade union participation of sex workers and adult entertainers. Subsequently, the role of strippers, both within more traditional forms of trade union organising in the sex and adult industries and the sex workers' rights movement more generally will be the focus of the last subsection.

3.3.1. The Beginnings of Sex Worker Organising

Although the emergence the sex workers' rights movement is typically placed in the 1970s and 80s, it is important to give credit to some of the earliest forms of sex worker organising, including striking brothel workers in medieval Europe, Bavarian sex workers protesting city

councils in the fifteenth century, and a march of 200 sex workers in 1917 San Francisco opposing brothel closures. Furthermore, mutual aid networks of sex workers evolved in nineteenth century Britain and colonial Nairobi and sex workers participated in wider liberation struggles such as the 1950s Mau Mau uprising in Kenya and the Stonewall Inn protests in the 1960s and 70s that formed the beginning of the queer liberation movement (Mac and Smith, 2018). While the term ‘sex worker’ was not coined until 1979/80 (see 1.3.1), sex workers started self-organising for the decriminalisation of their industries globally and forging alliances with non-sex working women, especially with groups of housewives and lesbians, throughout the 1970s, often in opposition to mainstream feminist opinions which increasingly leaned towards campaigns that aimed to ban the sex industry rather than supporting sex workers in their fight against repression, prohibition and regulation (Pheterson, 1988). In addition to oppression from the state, which in some cases included violent prevention of self-organisation, the sex workers’ rights movement was forced to engage with feminist groups that sought to ‘rescue’ women in the sex industry and abolish the sex trade entirely. While some of these campaigns were well intended, they failed to include the voices of sex workers themselves and subsequently did more harm than good. Many sex workers’ rights activists have accused the anti-sex worker movement of intentionally confusing forced prostitution, child prostitution or trafficking with sex work and thus revoking their agency, making it impossible for sex workers to be taken seriously in the public debate concerning their own lives and safety (Pheterson, 1988).

Because many sex workers and adult entertainers are not able to speak out due to fearing the stigma and repercussions of being outed as a sex worker publicly, the movement relies heavily on collective publications and proceedings from the Whores’ Congresses that were held in 1985 and 1986 in the Netherlands and brought together representatives of sex worker-led organisations from various countries in order to put together statements about the situation of sex workers worldwide. The resulting publications criticise the divide between non-sex working feminists and feminists who sell sex, and urges women’s rights groups to include sex workers and adult entertainers into their leadership. In addition to their exclusion from the global feminist movement, the safety of sex workers and adult entertainers is a major issue highlighted throughout the proceedings of the Whores’ Congresses (Pheterson, 1988). Margo St. James (1987), one of the few activists who decided to publicly identify herself as a sex worker, stresses that one of the reasons that people working in the wider sex industries are at a higher risk of experiencing violence is the public’s indifference to their safety, which she illustrates by pointing out the lack of legal consequences of harming or even murdering a sex worker. Violent deaths, which constitute the extreme end of the whore stigma, are frequently only reported by the media and investigated by the police if a non-sex

working woman was hurt and in some cases, women involved in the sex trade are even made responsible for their own rape or murder (St. James, 1999). The US-based activist therefore invited other sex workers to join support peer networks in order to protect themselves from both violent clients or third parties and the state itself.

In Europe, the birth of the sex workers' rights movement is most commonly attributed to a group of French sex workers who occupied six churches in 1975 to protest repressive laws surrounding full-service sex work and criminalisation of the industry in general (Aroney, 2018). Multiple sex worker-led groups in other European countries, including the ECP in the UK, have since referred to the French church occupations as one of their main inspirations (Filar, 2020a).

3.3.2. The Sex Workers' Rights Movement in Britain

In Britain, the sex workers' rights movement is rooted within the Wages for Housework (W4H) campaign which aims to politicise and uncover the unpaid domestic labour that women are expected to perform and to bring together waged and unwaged women (Toupin, 2018) and welcomed the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP) into their movement, indicating that they viewed sex work as reproductive labour¹⁰ (Filar, 2020a). Selma James, a non-sex working activist and theorist of W4H, became the first spokeswoman for the ECP so that organised sex workers were able to remain anonymous. Because the ECP, which remains a crucial component of the sex workers' rights movement in Britain until today, was ideologically inspired by W4H and the French church occupations (Filar, 2020b), most sex worker organising here is based on a 'Marxist-feminist, labour-centred analysis' (Mac and Smith, 2018: 13) rather than focusing mostly on bodily autonomy and sex positivism. This is not necessarily the case in the contemporary sex workers' rights movements in other countries (see Swift, 2021; Gloss, 2020).

While sex worker uprising throughout the 1970s, 80s and 90s, including pickets in front of High Court, a church occupation in London, protests against the violent murders committed by Peter Sutcliffe, and campaigning against soliciting, kerb crawling, and brothel keeping, was mostly led by the ECP, other organisations and collectives have since evolved throughout Britain and collectively set up a radically leftist movement that lobbies for the full decriminalisation of sex work, builds community organising networks, and pursues cultural advocacy (Filar, 2020b). While some organisations, such as the ECP and the Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement (SWARM) focus on community organising,

¹⁰ Following Marxist-feminist theory, reproductive labour contributes to the capitalist mode of production by reproducing the labour-power that produces surplus value (Dalla Costa and James, 1975).

mutual aid and direct peer support and therefore consist of people with lived experience, other groups, such as Decrim Now and Labour4Decrim concentrate on public education, advocacy and lobbying to change the legal framework in which sex work happens and welcome non-sex working allies into their campaigns. Because the issues that sex workers and adult entertainers are facing intersect with those of many other oppressed, marginalised, or stigmatised groups, many sex worker-led organisations have joined wider movements resisting poverty, homelessness, precarity, addiction, gendered and racial violence as well as anti-capitalist movements more generally (Barbagallo and Hardy, 2021; Clare, 2022; Filar, 2020b; Mac and Smith, 2018). These intersections of oppression that often put Black, queer, and working class women at the centre of many social liberation movements furthermore prompted Margo St. James to claim that ‘it takes about two minutes to politicise a hooker’ (1975, cited in Mac and Smith, 2018: 7).

More recently, sex workers have also started to join trade unions in order to collectively organise against their bosses (Gall, 2014) in Britain as well as various other countries, including Canada (Couto, 2006), Argentina (Cruz and Hardy, 2019; Hardy, 2010), and Germany (Müller and Mitrović, 2009). In Britain, the International Union of Sex Workers (IUSW) joined the GMB union in 2002, resulting in the momentary unionisation of seven lap dancing clubs and one brothel (Gall, 2010). In addition to legal representation and advice for their members, the union also offered services such as a lap dancing workshop and self-defense classes in order to cater to sex workers and adult entertainers who work more independently (Gall, 2012). However, many members were uncomfortable in the GMB arrangement because their bosses and managers were allowed to join the union alongside them (Barbagallo and Cruz, 2021). Instead, a group of sex workers and adult entertainers began organising with the Women’s Strike in 2018 and joined the United Voices of the World (UVW) union and founding the USW branch which is widely acknowledged as the largest sex worker union in Britain today. The industrial strategy of USW involved focusing on the unionisation of strippers at first as they work in the most legal and regulated sector of the sex industry and have clearly defined employers (Barbagallo and Cruz, 2021), further illustrating the special position of strippers as a trailblazer for unionisation within the wider movement.

3.3.3. Strippers’ Rights Activism and the United Sex Workers Trade Union

From the beginning, strippers were involved in the sex workers’ rights movement. Since the fight for full decriminalisation of all forms of sex work is the core of most sex worker-led groups, their focus often lies on full-service sex workers whose work is usually much more heavily policed than that of strippers. Nevertheless, solidarity between different sectors of the wider sex and adult industries is continuously shown within the movement due to the sense

that further criminalisation of one sector tends to also have negative effects on other sectors (Cruz, 2021). Many sex worker-led organisations therefore welcome strippers to organise within them and collectives of full-service sex workers, such as the ECP, often support the fight for strippers' rights. However, there are instances in which strippers – and especially strip club managers – have been critical of the solidarity that organised full-service sex workers have shown strippers. During protests against strip club closures in Hackney in 2010, in which strip club owners and managers were involved, support from burlesque and pole dancers was welcomed while strippers were forbidden by management to join picket lines alongside the ECP due to a fear of being seen organising alongside full-service sex workers (Clare, 2022). Clare (2022) attributes examples like this to the whorearchy (see section 2.2.5) and stresses that strippers and strip club managers were pushed towards stigmatising and separating behaviour because they feared criminalisation if they were seen in company with people who already were criminalised.

Strippers in England and Wales, and more recently in Scotland, have been campaigning against 'nil' caps in their cities since the introduction of the SEV licensing regime. While at first, these campaigns were led by strip clubs owners and managers who founded the London-based Lap Dance Association (LDA) in 2008, they were often unsuccessful because they pushed a narrative that separated them from anything sexual rather than embracing their place within the wider sex and adult entertainment industries. Furthermore, the LDA failed to include the voices of strippers in their strategy which led policy makers to believe that they were unable to speak up independently of their bosses due to high levels of control (Clare, 2022). Like all sex workers and adult entertainers, strippers are well aware of the stigmatising narratives and politics within anti-SEV campaigning and are able to counter them with arguments focused on bodily autonomy, freedom of sexual expression, and the material reality of many working class women. However, those who do speak up are frequently met with patronising suggestions that they lack agency or are choosing stripping due to experiences of abuse in their private lives (Hardy and Sanders, 2014). After the inappropriate representation of the industry through the LDA, strippers started campaigning against strip club closures themselves by joining trade unions and launching their own collectives. By raising their own voices and giving their campaigns a face, strippers not only organised against the shutdown of their clubs but also against stigmatising narratives from industry outsiders. The licensing decision of Hackney Council who had originally planned on introducing a 'nil' cap and closing down all clubs in 2010 was disrupted by an aggressive campaign by strippers who had joined the GMB union and forged alliances with groups of local business owners, residents, and community representatives, including well-known performers, politicians, and the local vicar (Clare, 2022). The campaign was successful

insofar as existing clubs were allowed to remain open¹¹ despite the introduction of a ‘nil’ cap.

The push for strippers to join trade unions and organise together kickstarted the process of unionising clubs and standing up against exploitative practices imposed by managers rather than through legislation. Because trade unions that welcome sex workers and have been most successful in legalised areas of the sex and adult entertainment industries such as stripping (Sanders et al., 2018), there are several examples of US-based strippers unionising as early as the 1990s (see Kempadoo and Doezema, 1998; Fischer, 1996). In Britain, collective organisation in the GMB and UVW led to various legal claims against strip club owners for unfair dismissal, withholding of pay, discrimination in the work place, and trade union victimisation (Barbagallo and Cruz, 2021). Furthermore, the USW branch represents their members in licensing hearings and has become an important player in the ongoing local licensing battles, most recently in Edinburgh and Bristol (Smythe, 2022).

3.4. The Covid-19 Pandemic

Due to a lack of financial support from state or employers despite the closure of the in-person sex and adult entertainment industries, the lockdown which was imposed in March 2020 affected sex workers and adult entertainers disproportionately (Fedorkó et al., 2021; Lam, 2020; Platt et al., 2020). A large number of in-person sex workers attempted to move their business online and picked up webcamming and phone services or produced adult content to sell online (Hackett and Murphy, 2020). However, particularly for the most marginalised sex workers and adult entertainers, there are many barriers to accessing the online market, including a lack of access to a private workspace with a reliable and high speed internet connection and difficulty with the language requirements of online work.

More broadly, the Covid-19 pandemic has led to a decay of standards in precarious work and increased job insecurity (Cai et al., 2022) as well as additional occupational stigmatisation of those continuing to work in person, such as nurses, cleaners, and transportation workers (Glerum, 2021). The following section will explore the situation of precarious and stigmatised workers throughout the lockdowns as well as longer term effects of the pandemic on these groups of workers before turning to sex workers and strippers specifically and outlining the issues they faced and solutions they found. I will furthermore focus on the value and necessity of mutual aid networks and peer support.

¹¹ For a more detailed explanation of ‘grandfather rights’, see section 3.2.2.

3.4.1. Precarious Workers in the Pandemic

Societal and economic crises are commonly known to expose systematic failures of social relations and the corresponding vulnerabilities and privileges (Dobusch and Kreissl, 2020), resulting in increased social, racial, and gendered inequalities. In this way, the spikes in unemployment, income reduction, and unsafe working conditions throughout the Covid-19 pandemic uncovered the negative consequences of the transition to more precarious work (see section 2.3.1.) although the underlying causes for this transition are more systemic and have little to do with public health emergencies (Kalleberg, 2021). Nevertheless, the pandemic illustrated the failure of the British welfare system as well as the inadequacy of occupational health and safety measures due to deregulation of the workplace alongside governmental policies that enabled a supply of migrant workers who were unable to challenge unsafe working conditions that exposed them to the virus due to their dependency on their employers for their visa (Cai et al., 2022). Furthermore, already established gendered inequalities were exacerbated during lockdown with many women spending more time on childcare and housework which, particularly in the case of self-employed women, led to a reduction in paid working hours (Daniel et al., 2021).

While the pandemic dramatically affected all workers across different industries and employment types, self-employed people and those in precarious, atypical employment were affected disproportionately due to the setup of the British welfare system that relies heavily on traditional employment. Early findings of an in-depth analysis of the Understanding Society COVID-19 Study suggest that particularly in the industries that were restricted by social distancing measures most, such as the arts, entertainment, accommodation, and food services, self-employed people were hit harder than employees in terms of income losses, resulting in a number of people leaving self-employment and seeking other, often temporary employment within the first few months of the national lockdown (Reuschke et al., 2020).

Dobusch and Kreissl (2020) argue that the novelty of the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of the necessity of physical distancing for safety uncovered the interdependence of all members of society, with many people realising that their wellbeing was directly reliant on that of others. Hence, people's lives were not only impacted by contact restrictions for themselves but also by the fact that other members of society were unable to work, particularly in key industries such as health care and public transport. This differentiates the personal feelings that people have had about the pandemic from situations such as refugees being held at EU borders which are easier to externalise and separate from crises within Europe. However, while the dependence on a functioning system of social relations affects all members of society, it is mostly maintained by 'underpaid, undervalued and largely power-distant groups of people'

(2020: 714), putting them at further risk of infection. Many frontline workers reported fears of Covid-19 exposure due to insufficient PPE and protection at work alongside other challenges such as increased workload or lack of recognition of their work (May et al., 2021) and the lack of adequate sick pay forced some to be present in their workplace despite being infected (Cai et al., 2022). The option to work from home was offered only to some people and highly depended on class and education level (Dobusch and Kreissl, 2020). Furthermore, various industries that did allow working from home for some workers, including academia, were subjected to casualisation and an increase in insecure and short-term contracts after March 2020, affecting particularly those who had already been in precarious employment before the lockdowns (Hadjisolomou et al., 2021).

Overall, the Covid-19 pandemic has so far illustrated the negative consequences of the ongoing transition to more precarious work and the corresponding lack of labour protections and increase in social inequalities. Cai et al. (2022: 405) conclude that years of deregulation of work alongside decreasing trade union activity ‘has left UK workplaces without adequate infrastructures to address current and future pandemics, raising questions as to their resilience in the face of climate emergency.’

3.4.2. Dirty Work in the Pandemic

While the traditional occupational stigma logic (see section 2.1.2) suggests that frontline workers, including healthcare workers and nursery home staff, who deal with dirty and off-putting tasks and work in proximity to tainted individuals, including those infected with Covid-19, are affected by occupational stigma, this seems to have changed during the pandemic with many frontline workers being celebrated as heroes (Ashforth, 2020). At the same time, the pandemic created new forms of occupational taint due to fear of contamination. While the hero narrative prevailed in the media and political discourse, many frontline workers in tainted occupations reported experiencing stigmatising behaviour from members of the public, including verbal and physical attacks, and lacking support from their organisations (Glerum, 2021). In many cases, the abuse that frontline workers experienced during the pandemic exceeded their previous experiences of occupational stigma, resulting in a sudden need for coping strategies while also dealing with a lack of support from managers and leaders with regard to new experiences of stigma and novel health risks (Glerum, 2021).

Similarly to Dobusch and Kreissl (2020) but coming from an occupational stigma perspective, Debus et al. (2021) argue that the negative consequences of the pandemic were mostly carried by marginalised workers in dirty occupations which are already prone to lacking health and safety provisions. Hence, the pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing

health and socioeconomic inequalities despite the changes in narrative that brands some frontline workers as heroes. Nevertheless, Debus et al. (2021) claim that the status increase of workers who are considered essential to the survival of the population constitutes a silver lining for all workers in tainted occupations and gives hope that the public gratitude that politicians, media and members of the public have shown for frontline workers constitutes a first step towards abolishing occupational stigma. Importantly, this valuation of previously tainted occupation needs to go hand in hand with adequate support of the marginalised groups that are currently most likely to be employed in dangerous, dirty, and stigmatised jobs.

3.4.3. Sex Workers and Strippers in the Pandemic

As both precarious and stigmatised workers, all in-person sex workers and adult entertainers, including strippers, were particularly strongly affected by the national lockdowns due to a variety of reasons. The nature of the work made it impossible to continue working in person without breaking social distancing measures, causing many sex workers and adult entertainers to refrain from working directly (NUM, 2020). However, due to economic necessity, some were forced to continue in-person sex work and were thus faced with even more unsafe working conditions. While the demand for sexual services and live adult entertainment naturally decreased significantly, brothels and massage parlours that had been tolerated by state authorities before the pandemic were closed down and street-based sex workers reported an increase in fines and surveillance. As a result, there appeared to be a rapid decline in prices and more dangerous clients exploiting the economic desperation of some sex workers (Hackett and Murphy, 2020).

Governmental support schemes in Britain did not cater to full-service sex workers. Because even those working in a venue or with other third parties are not legally employed, sex workers were not able to apply for the Job Retention Scheme, which would have guaranteed them 80% of their wage (Nicola et al, 2020). Hence, employers of sex workers and adult entertainers were not required to provide any support. The Scottish government announced public funding intended specifically for sex workers but the money was distributed through the Encompass Network which works under the principle that all sex work is violence and only provided funds to those who agreed and identified with the victim status (Clare, 2022). Platforms on which sex workers advertise their services overwhelmingly abdicated their responsibility and did not offer support or safety advice with one platform's entire response to the pandemic consisting of removing a crucial safety feature for full-service sex workers that prevented them from receiving or giving feedback about clients (Brouwers and

Herrmann, 2020). This corresponds with the lack of support from platforms in other sectors of the digitally mediated gig economy such as food delivery (Gregory, 2020).

Although strippers were in a slightly more fortunate position with regard to the legality of their workplaces, many did not receive any support throughout the lockdowns. SEVs were shut down with the closure of the rest of the night-time economy but were not permitted to re-open at the same time as pubs or bars ‘despite the fact that licensing conditions have required strippers to socially distance for years’ (Clare, 2022: 375). While strip club managers, bar and security staff qualified for furlough, strippers were unable to join the scheme because they were treated as self-employed, illustrating that the misclassification of strippers’ employment status has direct negative consequences in crises (Clare, 2022). The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS), that the government introduced in March 2020, required three years of tax documentation of self-employed work (HMRC, 2020) which many were unable to produce because stripping is very transient and often a short-term form of work (Sanders et al., 2009). Particularly migrant workers, who had not lived in Britain for three years or more, were evidently unable to produce the required documentation. In addition, many are not officially registered as self-employed because they feared stigmatisation when disclosing that they worked in strip clubs (NUM, 2020). For those who were eligible for the SEISS, the payment was not distributed until June 2020, meaning that for at least three months even the workers who qualified for an official government scheme did not receive support (Barbagallo and Cruz, 2021).

Due to the lack of support from state and employers, sex worker-led organisations immediately set up novel and radical support structures. Within days of the first lockdown announcement, the SWARM collective (2020) released a hardship fund and granted payments of £200 to 1,255 in-person sex workers by the end of June 2020. Based on principles of honesty in order to avoid ‘replicating the violent logics of state welfare systems’ (2020: 7), Britain-based sex workers and adult entertainers in need could apply online by proving that they had been selling sexual services in person at the start of the pandemic, were in immediate financial need, and had no savings to resort to. The majority of grant recipients reported having heard about the hardship fund through word of mouth, indicating that the project quickly became well-known within the sex working community. In Scotland, the sex worker-led organisation Umbrella Lane ran a mutual aid fund which distributed over £10,000 directly to sex workers (Clare, 2022). In addition, sex workers formed collectives to help each other to earn more money in the online adult entertainment industry, such as the worker-led, virtual strip club Cybertease which was founded by members of the USW trade union (Clare, 2022).

Despite the successes in radical community organising and the rapid formation of peer support structures, many strippers – alongside other in-person sex workers and adult entertainers – struggled to make ends meet and shifted their business online by signing up to either a live webcamming or phone service, or producing content to be sold individually or on a subscription basis. However, the online market is not accessible to all as many online adult platforms require identification papers that some cannot provide and some platforms are even known to have implemented xenophobic and racist verification processes which are often justified by assumptions of coercion, exploitation, and trafficking, especially of migrant workers (Sanders et al., 2018). Others simply do not wish to compromise their anonymity or risk being outed by having their online content leaked but prefer the anonymity of a strip club. Nevertheless, there has been a stark increase in the number of creators on online platforms such as OnlyFans since the beginning of the pandemic (Jones, 2020) and it can be assumed that a large number of strippers who previously only worked in person have entered the digital adult entertainment market instead. While some are likely to return to their previous ways of working, some might continue online services alongside their work in the club (Barbagallo and Cruz, 2021).

3.4.4. Overlapping Sectors in Sex Work and Adult Entertainment

Even before the pandemic, the different sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries were interlinked and there is evidence for a significant personal crossover. This refers to both full-service sex workers who offer their services in various different settings concurrently, including the street, managed premises, and on online advertising platforms (Abel and Fitzgerald, 2011; O’Doherty, 2015), and workers who provide different sexual services or adult entertainment (Levitt, 2022; Hester et al., 2019). In Brouwers’ (2022: 190) sample, which consisted of full-service sex workers, nearly a third of participants indicated that they had also worked in other sectors, including ‘pornography, camming, selling pictures and videos, selling items, phone sex, stripping, non-full service BDSM work, modelling, financial domination, and selling content via Snapchat/Skype or other direct or app mediated media’. Especially when including digital adult entertainment platforms, only a minority of sex workers and adult entertainers work exclusively in one sector of the industries. Many workers who primarily work in the in-person full-service sex industry tend to substitute their income with online services or use them to direct more traffic to their escort advert (Sanders et al., 2018). This illustrates the high labour mobility (Alberti, 2014) of sex workers (Brouwers, 2022) which is further encouraged by the business model of some ‘multi-service adult entertainment platforms’ (Sanders et al., 2018: 24) which require independent

full-service sex workers to upload photos or videos regularly in order to stay visible to clients (Hardy and Barbagallo, 2021).

This trend has been exacerbated by the pandemic due to the necessity of many in-person sex workers whose workplaces were shut down, such as strippers, to replace their lost income during the lockdown. For strippers who were unable or uncomfortable to shift their business online, this could mean entering the in-person full-service sex industry despite the added risk of infection (Clare, 2022). Furthermore, online subscription sites such as OnlyFans have grown significantly during the pandemic with many sex workers signing up out of financial desperation. Crucially, creating online adult content creates new risks associated with the lack of anonymity in the digital market such as ‘doxxing’ which refers to the non-consensual publication of private information that can lead to being outed, and ‘capping’ which occurs when content is stolen from behind a paywall and shared with non-paying clients. Furthermore, many sex workers who had previously only worked in person were starting their business from scratch in a highly competitive environment and were unable to earn enough money to make ends meet (Sanchez, 2022).

However, despite the challenges that some people face in the digital adult entertainment industry, it is likely that the pandemic has contributed to the already existing personal crossover between the different sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries.

3.5. Conclusion: The British Stripping Industry

The literature outlined in this chapter has shown that the business model of strip clubs relies heavily on house fees and commission, paid by strippers who are simultaneously subjected to high levels of control with regard to their performances, appearances, and working hours. This leads to a stigma-driven, precarious, and insecure work environment in which strippers stand in direct competition with each other. The stripping industry is furthermore on a downward spiral which is exacerbated by a restrictive licensing system which is based on stigmatising principles and has resulted in a high number of strip clubs being forced to shut down due to costs or a loss of their licence on the basis of locally imposed strip club bans.

Resistance against restrictive and prohibitive legal frameworks and against societal stigma constitutes an important component of the lives of many sex workers and adult entertainers, including strippers, and the global sex workers’ rights movement has been fighting for justice in alliance with other oppressed groups of women, particularly housewives and lesbians, despite backlash from mainstream feminist groups. In Britain, strippers have started to join unions in order to collectively challenge strip club bans as well as exploitative practices of strip club owners.

Lastly, this literature review engaged with changes during the Covid-19 pandemic throughout which social inequalities and precarious working conditions for sex workers and precarious and/or stigmatised workers in other industries were mostly exacerbated. Due to a lack of support from the state or employers, many strippers, alongside other sex workers and adult entertainers, were struggling to earn enough money and some entered the digital adult entertainment industry which posed new risks associated with the lack of anonymity in the online market. Overall, the personal crossover between different sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries, which was already apparent before the pandemic, was exacerbated significantly, illustrating the high levels of labour mobility that sex workers and adult entertainers have.

The downward spiral of the stripping industry combined with the increasing shift towards digitalised forms of sex work and adult entertainment poses questions about the future of the stripping industry as well as the future plans of many strippers. While it is likely that many strippers have started to work in other sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries in recent years, little is known about their strategies to survive at these intersections and struggle against the stigma and policy frameworks which aim to keep the sectors apart. The following chapter will outline the methodological approaches that were chosen to approach these questions.

4. Methodology

This research project is grounded in feminist standpoint theory and employs a mixed method approach. In addition to a literature review, outlining the context in which strippers operate and in which this study takes place, original data was collected in the form of a self-administered online survey, in-depth interviews with sixteen strippers, and focus groups to triangulate the findings from survey and interviews in three separate groups; strippers, full-service sex workers, and people who had done both. While the main purpose of the survey was to reach out to a large number of strippers all over the country and gain an overview of opinions held in the community, the interviews aimed to explore feelings of affiliation with the wider sex working community as well as detailed accounts of interviewees' responses to increasing precarity in their industry. Finally, in the focus groups, participants discussed the findings from previous data collection in three different groups in order to understand if and how they interpreted these findings differently. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, all stages of data collection were conducted online through the digital survey tool Google Forms and via the video conferencing platform Zoom. One particular principle of this project was the direct and concerted usefulness of this research for the sex workers' rights movement by adopting an approach to scholar-activism that links academic inquiry to contemporaneous involvement in organisations of resistance (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, 2021). In the following chapter, I will outline my research design and positionality, describe the details of the methods and recruitment process, including decisions made on sampling, and give special attention to the ethical considerations of this research. Because sex work is highly stigmatised and often subject to restrictive regulation or criminalisation, research on the lives of sex workers is particularly sensitive and requires extra care. My research design and methodology therefore rely heavily on Liamputtong's (2007) guide for research with vulnerable populations as well as previous studies of the wider sex and adult entertainment industries, particularly on Hardy and Sanders (2014) and Brouwers (2022).

The central question of this thesis is about the compounded effect of precarity and stigma on strippers on the one hand and the responses to these effects on the other. The exact research questions are:

- What are the key developments of the last decade in the British stripping industry?
- How useful and accurate is it to view stripping as a form of sex work?
- What mechanisms drive precarisation and stigmatisation in the stripping industry and what are the strategies of strippers to respond to these mechanisms?

- How does stripping intersect with other forms of sex work and adult entertainment at a time of increasing precarisation and legal restriction?
- What impacts did the Covid-19 pandemic have on stripping and its intersections with other forms of sex work and adult entertainment?

The research aims are:

- to provide an up-to-date picture of the dynamics and working conditions in the stripping industry immediately before, as well as the situation of strippers during and shortly after the Covid-19 pandemic;
- to develop a conceptualisation of the whorearchy in Britain and an understanding of how it is built and maintained within the context of British strip clubs; and
- to map the impact that the expansion of the digital adult entertainment industry due to the Covid-19 pandemic had on the sex working community and particularly strippers

As described in the preceding chapter, there is relatively little academic literature on the development and operation of the whorearchy and hence a lack of clarity about what determines the order of the hierarchy. As the few publications that do mention the whorearchy adopt contrasting definitions, it was therefore beneficial for the purposes of this research to adopt a working definition (see Brown, 2013), for which I used the descriptions of Belle Knox (2014, n.p.):

‘Since filming my first porn scene, I’ve discovered that sex work segregates itself along perceived social and legal lines ranging from phone-sex operation to stripping and porn to prostitution. The whorearchy is arranged according to intimacy of contact with clients and police. The closer to both you are, the closer you are to the bottom.’

Following Knox’ understanding and approach to the whorearchy, this study focuses on stigma hierarchies *between* sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries rather than within them, particularly between stripping, full-service sex work, and online adult entertainment. However, there are also accounts of hierarchies *within* those sectors, for example between street-based sex workers and indoor escorts (Sumner, 2020) or between full-contact lap dancers and topless dancers (Grandy, 2008), and the boundaries of the sectors cannot be easily defined and tend to be fluid (Toubiana and Ruebottom, 2022). For practicality, the lived experience of participants of this study was categorised into stripping, full-service sex work, and online adult entertainment, with many participants having worked in more than one of these areas.

4.1. Feminist Standpoint Epistemology

This PhD project is informed by feminist principles and one of its premises is to serve the researched community rather than simply adding to the stockpile of academic knowledge. Feminist research promises to conduct studies on behalf of marginalised groups and to actively push for social change (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Building on the Frankfurt school and Critical Theory scholars who critiqued the positivist paradigm, which presumes a value-free, neutral, and uninvolved approach to science and therefore results in one normative truth, feminist discourses of the 1970s and 80s criticised the dominance of positivism by introducing conversations on the value of academic research as a tool for women's liberation (Mies, 1983). Consequently, feminist standpoint theory, which constitutes the main philosophical basis for this study, challenged the notion that political positions are antagonistic to academic research and became a methodology for feminist research rather than just an explanatory theory (Harding, 2004). Mies (1983) argues that in order to meaningfully understand the lives of women and other oppressed groups in the context of an androcentric environment, their subjective experiences must be integrated into the research process. In practice, this means transparency and acknowledgement of these subjective experiences of both researcher and research participants. Instead of claiming social neutrality, feminist standpoint epistemology therefore makes a point of starting research from the perspective of oppressed groups and embraces the positionality of the researcher as well as the research participants (Harding, 2004).

Some feminist standpoint theorists, alongside many other critical scholars, eventually rejected the claim for objectivity in research entirely, resulting in a devaluation of feminist research by more mainstream social scientists. Haraway's (1988) concept of 'situated knowledges', however, proposes that objectivity should not be abandoned and replaced with relativism but that feminist scholarship recognises the impact that the social conditions of both researcher and participants have on the creation of knowledge¹². According to Haraway, knowledge can only be objective for a certain set of conditions. In this way, the knowledge of every member of society, including that of the researcher and research participants, is situated in their lived experience which is crucial to contextualise and make sense of it. Harding (1992) goes even further and argues that research that starts with the experiences of oppressed groups, in this case women, can actually achieve more objectivity than research that automatically begins with the reality of the dominant group, in this case men. She

¹² Haraway describes this feminist struggle with objectivity through a metaphor of a 'greased pole' (1988: 580) which scholars are attempting to climb while holding on to both ends, radical constructivism and feminist critical empiricism. She claims that it is 'hard to climb when you are holding on to both ends of a pole' (ibid.) which I am sure the participants of this research would be happy to confirm from experience.

stresses that communities that are affected by oppression or discrimination are better qualified to produce more comprehensive knowledge due to their lived experience. Supposedly objective academic work is frequently based on ‘androcentric, economically advantaged, racist, Eurocentric, and heterosexist conceptual frameworks’ (Harding, 2004: 5) and has therefore covered up the realities of oppressed communities. Feminist standpoint epistemology, on the other hand, centres the experiences of these oppressed communities as a starting point and, in doing so, even has the potential to act as a tool for empowerment.

With growing awareness of the importance of an intersectional perspective on research, various feminist standpoint theorists pointed out that not all women have the same experiences and that generalising all women into one standpoint can be just as harmful as traditionally positivist approaches. Feminist standpoint epistemology today therefore includes diverse voices of not only women but other marginalised and oppressed groups, which all depict different, often intersecting experiences (Brooks, 2007). Standpoint theory views the diversity of experiences as a valuable asset of research as it can illustrate complex realities more comprehensively (Brooks, 2007). In addition, various social movements that counter racist, imperial, or queer-phobic hegemonies have organically produced standpoint theory without employing the terminology used by original feminist standpoint theorists (Harding, 2004). While the aims and methods of contemporary feminist standpoint epistemologies are therefore multi-faceted and controversial (Harding, 2004), the core principle to produce situated knowledges through counter-hegemonic research remains. It is therefore not the aim of this study to produce the one and only true account of the situation of the British stripping industry but present insights into some of the conversations that strippers and other members of the wider sex working community have. This is reflected in the choice of methods for data collection and has guided my analysis significantly.

The positionality of both researcher and research participants was crucial in the development of this study’s methodology. This research is inspired by publications and anecdotal evidence from sex workers about dynamics in their own communities (Sumner, 2020; Witt, 2020; Vixxx, 2019; Knox, 2014) and seeks to understand these dynamics through the eyes of study participants, i.e. members of the sex working community. Furthermore, my own positionality as an insider to the researched community as well as a longstanding member of the sex workers’ rights movement stood at the centre of this research. As someone with lived experience working in the sex and adult industries as well as an active sex worker organiser, I am not making any claims to impartiality. I have been involved in sex workers’ rights activism for over half a decade and understand the full decriminalisation of all forms of sex work to be the only legal model in which sex workers can work safely and are given agency over their own lives. There is no doubt that my insider status has affected my relationship to

study participants and their experiences and feelings. My strong links to the British sex workers' rights movement, particularly the United Sex Workers (USW) trade union, have led me to embed my research into the wider struggle for improving working and living conditions for sex workers and linking my scholarship to activism. Following feminist standpoint epistemology, I am not seeking social neutrality but want to be transparent about my own positionality. The following two sections will therefore lay out the risks and benefits of my lived experience and role in sex worker organising respectively.

4.1.1. Reflections on Being a Researcher with Lived Experience

Due to the stigma and politicisation of the lives of sex workers and adult entertainers, many are wary of research feeding into further stigmatising narratives. Hence, there is often a general distrust towards researchers who are not considered insiders to the community (Van der Meulen, 2011). By examining practices such as offering sexual services in strip clubs or soliciting there as well as community-internal conflicts and hierarchies, this research project investigates particularly sensitive topics and there was potential for some of the findings to be taken out of context and used to argue for further criminalisation or policing of the sex and adult entertainment industries. Several sex work researchers have pointed out that being an insider to the community can help with accessing knowledge as well as with contextualising findings (Colosi, 2008; Gloss, 2020). The value of lived experience for research on strippers even prompted Lister (2012) to pick up shifts at the strip club that stood in the centre of her research despite not having been a stripper prior to commencing her research. Having lived experience working in different parts of the sex and adult entertainment industries myself was therefore an important asset for conducting this research and I openly communicated this with all study participants and in recruitment material. This helped to create a trusting environment in the interviews and focus groups in which some participants mentioned that they felt safer to disclose both positive and negative experiences that they had made working in strip clubs. For example, one participant commented 'Oh, so you get it then, oh, that's amazing. That's great. I didn't know whether I could say anything', indicating that she felt comfortable speaking to me about her experiences openly which she may not have done in an interview situation with a researcher who did not disclose any lived experience. My insider status furthermore provided me with special insights into the industries (Dobson, 2009) such as specific terminology used in strip clubs.

However, insider status also creates a number of challenges which researchers in similar situations have reflected on, particularly the fear of exploiting one's own community and the risk to assume the context of participants' responses due to their own experiences. Colosi (2008) who conducted her PhD research inside the strip club that she also worked in

simultaneously, was worried that she would exploit the trusting relationships she had built with her colleagues by asking them to participate in her research: 'I was concerned that not only could I damage my relationships by presenting the dancers' stories in a way that caused their disapproval, but more significantly, that I was somehow exposing people with whom I had built trust' (2008: 60). Due to the fact that I knew two of the interviewees, three focus group participants, and a significant number of survey respondents personally and had mutual acquaintances with many study participants, I asked myself similar questions. Despite being able to compensate interview participants with a £20 shopping voucher which many postgraduate researchers are not, I was aware that my own academic career would benefit from this research above all (Phipps, 2015) and felt uneasy about extracting information from my own community. This feeling was exacerbated by the fact that some participants pointed out that they would not have been willing to contribute to this research if I had not had lived experience. In all emails and messages, I therefore emphasised that there was no obligation to participate and that this would not impact our relationship going forward. In the thesis, I ensured anonymity and aimed to present accounts as accurate and sincere as possible. Whenever I spoke about my research findings with friends or colleagues, I made sure to not give any identifying information about participants.

Another concern of many researchers who are also considered insiders is the temptation to 'fill in gaps' (Dobson, 2009: 185) in the responses of participants or to assume the meaning and context of these responses because of personal experiences and views. The fact that I am a white, middle-class, cis woman with a European passport and an academic education has evidently shaped my experiences in the sex and adult entertainment industries immensely and it is crucial to be reflective of how my socio-economic and demographic background impacts on the relationships with research participants. Particularly in the interviews, I made a point of asking participants to explain their answers and asked a lot of follow up questions to ensure that I had understood them correctly and not simply read my own experiences into their responses. Extra effort was made to ensure that sampling reached outside my own personal networks by employing snowball sampling and asking people to spread the survey outside of the groups and organisations I was already a member of. Because it is impossible to completely separate personal experiences and views from accounts of research participants (Harding, 2004) it was another important aspect of this research design to regularly consult with other insiders to the wider sex working community whose experiences differed from mine. The research instruments, namely the survey and topic guides, as well as preliminary findings were discussed informally with other sex workers and adult entertainers, including strippers. This also involved detailed conversations about the terminology used in this thesis, particularly with regards to the choice of words to describe

various members of the wider sex working community or job descriptions, such as the scope of the term ‘digital adult entertainment’. Importantly, I mostly spoke with sex workers and adult entertainers who were based in Britain as terminology can differ across countries (Bowen, 2021). These consultations were held in order to increase reflexivity and furthermore aimed to ensure that the research benefits the researched community, which includes not only strippers but also full-service and online sex workers, and contributes to the struggle for justice for all sex workers and adult entertainers to the greatest extent possible (Shaver, 2005). Hence, my contemporaneous involvement in sex workers’ rights activism and the strong links between activism and scholarship throughout this PhD constitute another crucial principle of this research and will be outlined in the next section.

4.1.2. Involvement in Sex Workers’ Rights Activism

In addition to my lived experience, I am involved in different forms of sex workers’ rights activism, particularly in the unionisation efforts of the USW trade union which has a large focus on the stripping industry as a first step of its industrial strategy since it is the sector with the most traditional employment relations (Barbagallo and Cruz, 2021). I joined the USW committee in June 2020 and became co-chair between June 2021-September 2022. Alongside some administrative tasks, coordination, and casework to ensure the day-to-day operations of the trade union for members working in all sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries, I mostly supported strippers’ campaigns against ‘nil’ caps in Bristol and Edinburgh, and, after Edinburgh City Council decided to introduce one regardless, I helped organise a Judicial Review to challenge it. In 2021, I was also involved in campaigning against the introduction of the Nordic Model in England and Wales which would harm full-service sex worker first and foremost (Vuolajärvi, 2019) as part of the group Decrim Now. This involvement provided me with invaluable insights into the most pressing issues that sex workers and adult entertainers in Britain were facing while I was conducting my research and therefore fundamentally impacted the direction and focus of my research. Concurrently, conclusions from my literature review, reflections on my methodology, and preliminary findings strengthened my political views, helped me contextualise certain developments, and in doing so strongly influenced my activism. In this way, my activism and research became increasingly interwoven throughout the duration of my PhD. While strong links between activism and research are often frowned upon by scholars who come from a more traditional or positivist research perspective, modern approaches to activist-scholarship that point out the usefulness of the activist-researcher duality have more recently evolved and proven useful for me to recognise and manage my own roles. Following feminist standpoint theory, I want to clarify my positionality as a member of the sex workers’ rights

movement and be transparent about the ways in which my activism and research influenced each other (Harding, 2004).

Originally, my involvement in activism throughout my doctoral research was intended as a form of indirect community compensation. Like other researchers who engage in activism and research contemporaneously (Gloss, 2020; Huschke, 2014), I viewed my time spent on sex workers' rights activism as a way to give back to the community that I was researching. Importantly, this included using my time to do the less exciting, admin-heavy, coordination tasks that Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly refer to as 'donkey work' (2021: 76). While I am aware that there is no direct or automatic link between trade union activism and the extraction of knowledge about the materialisation of dynamics and labour relations within strip clubs, I aimed to give back to the wider community in this way. Over the course of my PhD, however, my research became increasingly intertwined with my activism as I gained a better understanding of my role as a researcher and activist and discovered the ways in which embedding my research into the sex workers' rights movement helped me contextualise my findings and ensure benefit to the researched community which is crucial in studies of any marginalised groups (Phipps, 2015).

Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, whose work has influenced my approach to my activism significantly, engage with scholar-activism in the context of anti-racism and present an approach to research that centres praxis-informed theorisation 'from below' (2021: 14) and is shaped by 'long-standing, genuine embeddedness' (2021: 57) in the communities of resistance that it claims to serve. The authors are critical of the interpretations of 'Impact' or 'Accountability' provided by the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) and other academic ranking systems as they are limited to certain forms of impact and accountability which can be encouraged within the context of the 'neoliberal-imperial-institutionally-racist university' (2021: 1) but ultimately feed into the marketisation of research and fail to support counter-hegemonic resistance movements effectively. Instead, Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly (2021) propose that those who consider themselves to be doing scholar-activism, which I would include myself in¹³, actively engage in activism beyond their research project rather than solely talking about it or supporting it with research reports or training. For research practice, this means being directly accountable to the counter-hegemonic movement through genuine and long-standing involvement and close relationships with other activists which are often difficult to quantify and therefore useless to the REF framework but all the more important for achieving genuine accountability (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, 2021).

¹³ Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly (2021) include critique of both 'scholar' and 'activist' into their analysis and while I would agree with much of it and would likely not use the term 'scholar-activist' to describe myself outside of academia, it is useful to characterise my approach to concurrent research and activism in the context of this methodology chapter.

Having been active in the wider sex workers' rights movement for several years before commencing my doctoral research, I had already built close relationships with other activists which only intensified during my PhD when I was able to extend the energy spent on activist work. Many of my colleagues and friends at USW and Decrim Now, some of which are or used to be engaged in research projects themselves, have given me valuable criticism and feedback about my research and approach to academia which led me to constantly scrutinise and challenge the usefulness and benefit of my research for the movement. Rather than focusing on gaps in the literature, Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly (2021) propose deriving the research focus from the needs of the movement and the direct usefulness of the research outputs for non-academic purposes. Although I did not reach out to sex worker-led organisations formally as a first step of my research (see Brouwers, 2022), my original decision to engage in doctoral research was highly influenced by an interest to produce useful research in service of the movement and several decisions throughout my PhD, surrounding topics like research questions, design, and theoretical framework, were highly influenced by my conversations with other activists.

Naturally, there are specific challenges and risks when engaging in activism and research contemporaneously which, in many ways, resemble those posed by insider status through lived experience. Following Dobson (2009), I therefore took extra care to ensure that participants remained anonymous throughout informal conversations with other activists and preliminary findings were not shared in activist circles prematurely. Furthermore, I was aware of the power that my long-standing involvement in various sex worker-led organisations provided me with and made an effort not to use it to convince colleagues to participate in the research if they would not do so otherwise (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, 2021). Finally, I spend a lot of time reflecting on my position on the fine line between conducting research in service of and collaboration with a resistance movement and letting activist principles cloud my view on the research findings.

4.2. Three Stages of Data Collection: Mixed Methods

As part of their rejection of positivism, feminists have traditionally avoided quantitative research methods altogether as they were assumed to be 'bound up with male values of control' (Jenkins, 2010: 93). More recently, however, feminist standpoint researchers have discovered the advantages of mixed methods to approach marginalised communities which are typically difficult to reach and represent their standpoint better (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Herman & Egri (2002: 180) stress that mixing methods can 'enhance the validity, reliability, and usefulness of research data', especially when looking into multifaceted realities. Considering the relative scarcity of recent studies on strippers in Britain, I decided that

conducting either quantitative or qualitative research alone would run the risk of failing to maximise the knowledge created with data of the experiences of this study's participants. Empathising the continuing rejection of positivism, Hesse-Biber (2010) points out that feminist researchers do not assume that findings from one method are true or more true than results from the other. Rather, findings complement each other and provide different forms of knowledge. She further points out the importance of a process-centred approach, allowing for flexibility and creativity throughout the research (Hesse-Biber, 2018). Here, topic guides for both interviews and focus groups were developed dynamically and included questions that had come up in preliminary analysis of survey responses. Regular informal consultations with other members of the sex working community and sex workers' rights movement also had a significant impact on the development of research tools.

In order to ensure that findings from quantitative and qualitative methods are not simply presented next to each other, this research project employs a form of data triangulation (Bryman, 2008). Hesse-Biber (2012) proposes a feminist approach to the concept of triangulation to prevent qualitative methods simply ending up validating the findings from quantitative data collection, resulting in a positivist framework which elevates quantitative data. Thus, findings from the quantitative survey of this project were used in the subsequent qualitative interviews as prompts rather than as evidence that seeks to be validated. The goal of this was to inspire interview participants to share their views and experiences and invoke discussion. This form of triangulation also seeks to encourage the consideration of multiple perspectives. The findings from both the survey and the interviews were then discussed in focus groups in order to gain insight into the conversations had in the wider sex working community. Here, the aim was to develop theories and ideas from early analysis further by adding collective feelings to the data on individual experiences. All three methods are intertwined and placed 'in conversation with one another' (Hesse-Biber, 2012: 144) rather than trying to validate or enhance one method's findings over the others.

4.2.1. Online Self-Administered Survey

In order to gain an overview of the opinions held in the stripper population and to reach out to a wide range of strippers, data collection for this study began with an online self-administered survey. As described above, feminist scholars have started to discover the benefits and opportunities that quantitative data collection can add to research projects. Miner-Rubino and Epstein Jayaratne (2011) identify three major advantages for feminist researchers of the access to larger numbers of participants that quantitative methods can provide: the opportunity to take feminist issues to mainstream discussions, the simplicity of statistics which make it easier to understand and remember the research, and the potential

identification of trends and patterns that smaller sample sizes are not able to provide. The authors argue that conducting surveys is appropriate 'if the goal of the research is to apply the findings beyond the research participants, to influence policymakers and the public opinion, or to test hypotheses or complex theoretical models' (2011: 11). Especially due to the extensive diversity in the experiences of strippers in Britain, depending on their location, race, gender, class, and a multitude of other factors (Hardy and Sanders, 2014), it was crucial for this study to reach out to a large sample which would not have been possible with only more in-depth, qualitative data collection methods. In her study on bisexual women's visual identities, Hayfield (2011) felt that particularly due to the sensitivity of the topic, participants would be most comfortable with a self-administered survey as it provided full anonymity and allowed them to contribute their views without spending significant time and effort on it. This is also an important notion for this study as it similarly deals with sensitive topics and anonymity is particularly important for sex workers and adult entertainers, including many strippers.

The survey consisted of up to 28 multiple choice questions and was centered around participants' identification with the sex working community and their experiences of judgement at work. The central aim of the survey was to identify trends and patterns in the attitudes of strippers towards other sex workers and adult entertainers, particularly full-service sex workers. Firstly, general questions were asked about affiliation with the sex worker terminology, the community, and the movement; as well as the ways in which they worked. There was a focus on the forms of sex work and adult entertainment that participants had engaged in; whether, for example they had ever offered 'extras' in a club or after their shift; in order to be able to separately analyse attitudes towards other sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries based on the sectors that participants had worked in themselves. Consequently, questions were asked about how participants felt about their colleagues engaging in different forms of sex work or adult entertainment, either in the club or in general; and what their reasons were for this. In order to address the Covid-19 pandemic, there was furthermore a section in the survey that asked about their experiences of judgement during the lockdown as well as their future plans and if and how the pandemic had affected their relationship to the wider sex working community. The survey in its entirety can be found in Appendix 1.

Keeping in mind the sensitivity of the research, there were several considerations with regards to an appropriate and considerate survey design. Miner-Rubino and Epstein Jayaratne (2011) point out the usefulness of conferring with community insiders during the development of the survey in terms of vocabulary and phrasing in order to ensure that participants fully understand the questions and are not disturbed by inappropriate or

inaccessible terminology. Regular consultations with other members of the sex working community about the survey were held to achieve this. In addition, the survey was piloted with two strippers, as suggested by O’Connell Davidson and Layder (1994), which provided feedback on coherence, flow, sensitivity of the questions, and the time they had spent on responding as the survey was designed to take around ten minutes to respond to in order to easily fit into the busy schedule that many strippers have. Another important feature of the survey was that participants were able to add qualitative explanations to their responses to the majority of questions in the form of an open ‘Other, please specify’ option (De Vaus, 2013). This ensured that participants could add their own experiences if they did not feel represented in any of the multiple choice options. While some added completely new categories, others used this space to explain their response or add background information. In total, there were eighteen survey questions and two questions on demographics which allowed for qualitative responses in the form of an ‘Other, please specify’ questions but most of these comments could either be assigned to already existing multiple choice options or differed from all other responses too much to group them with others. However, the options outlined in Table 4.1. below were added during analysis. While standardising the data set, all qualitative comments were kept in a separate sheet and taken into account for qualitative analysis. Some comments which did not fit into any of the multiple choice options or were clearly added jokingly (notably ‘Pro-nude scallywag LOL’) were deleted from the standardised data set but retained in the comments sheet.

Question	Option(s) added
Which of the following terms do you identify with?	Escort, (Pro) Domme, (Pro) Slut, Ho/Hoe
Would you consider yourself part of the sex working community?	Not currently/Not anymore
What do you consider ‘extras’ in a strip club?	Other
During the pandemic, what were / was your income stream(s)?	I left the stripping and sex industry before the pandemic already
Racial Background	Hispanic, Arab/Middle Eastern

Table 4.1: Options added to multiple choice questions for analysis

Although the benefit for the researched community stands at the centre of this research project, it cannot be ensured that the publication of this thesis has a direct and immediate positive result for participants. In addition to the impact that was achieved through my contemporaneous involvement in activism, it was therefore crucial to identify a way to compensate the community financially (Phipps, 2015) despite the remoteness and anonymity of survey respondents. Inspired by Brouwers’ (2022) concept of community-transferred

financial compensation (CTFC), I decided to arrange a donation to a sex worker-led organisation on behalf of every respondent. Participants could choose between three different groups, namely United Sex Workers (USW), the Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement (SWARM), and the East London Stripper Collective (ELSC), where a donation of £2.50 for their response was sent. The following amounts were donated.

United Sex Workers	38 respondents	£95.00
Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement	70 respondents	£175.00
East London Stripper Collective	33 respondents	£82.50
Total	141 respondents	£352.50

Table 4.2: Donations for community-transferred financial compensation

A number of strategies were used to gather responses as recommended by Liamputtong (2007) in order to reach out to a diverse sample of strippers. The survey was distributed online through private groups for strippers; social media, particularly Instagram as it is popular amongst pole dancers, many of which also work or used to work in the stripping industry; public forums, namely the SAAFE forum and stripperweb, which are both online platforms where strippers and other sex workers or adult entertainers exchange information about safety at work; and my personal contacts. A significant spike in responses was seen after USW shared the survey on their social media sites. WhatsApp and Facebook groups where sex workers and adult entertainers exchange information were also particularly effective for the distribution. Another crucial aspect of the recruitment strategy was snowball sampling. I asked strippers from all over Britain who I had met in activist circles or at work to share the survey with their colleagues and friends in order to reach out to people beyond my personal networks and activist groups.

The survey was addressed to anybody who had ever danced in a strip club in England, Scotland, or Wales, including strippers who had not worked in the industry for years. Northern Ireland was excluded as there are no licensed strip clubs anymore after the last one closed down in 2003 (Maginn and Ellison, 2016). While there might still be strippers who work for agencies through which performers can be hired for individual gigs such as stag parties in Northern Ireland, this study focuses on the dynamics inside clubs rather than stripping agencies as the legal framework in which agencies operate differs from those of clubs significantly. The survey was open for five months, between March and July 2021 and had reached 141 strippers by the end of this time. Three responses had to be removed from the data set entirely because respondents were not eligible to take part.

In terms of demographics, the sample reached reflected similar trends to previous studies (USW, 2022; Hardy and Sanders, 2014): Most respondents were in their twenties (63.9%) and cis female (90.1%). Over half (54.6%) had been performing in strip clubs up until they closed down because of the Covid-19 pandemic and most had been working in the industry for 5 years or less (65.3%). However, 12.1% indicated that they had worked as a stripper for 10 years or more, indicating that the survey was able to reach out to a wide range of people with varying experiences. In order to ensure anonymity, the survey did not inquire about what clubs respondents had worked in so it is impossible to make predictions about the range of experience in terms of size of the club or area that people worked in. In comparison to other studies, British nationals were slightly overrepresented with 83.6% in this study compared to 66.1% (Hardy and Sanders, 2014) and 61.5% (USW, 2022). This may in part be due to the Covid-19 pandemic which prompted many migrants in precarious employment to leave Britain and stay with relatives during lockdown. Even though the survey was distributed online, there is reason to believe that some migrant workers were not as closely connected to the British stripper community online as they usually would be. Additionally, the survey was launched only four months after Britain officially left the European Union, further impacting how many EU migrants chose to live and work here. It is, however, surprising that only 2.9% of survey respondents indicated that they had migrated to Britain from a non-EU country and this raises questions about representation. The vast majority of respondents (88.7%) were white, which, with the exception of central London, coincides with Hardy and Sanders' (2014) findings although they do not state exact percentages. There is furthermore anecdotal evidence from discussions in online stripper groups that particularly in small clubs and rural areas, white strippers are significantly more likely to be hired because managers will only employ one person of colour at a time. Brooks (2010) talks in length about the hypersexualisation of Black and Latina dancers in the US context, and concludes that white dancers are hired more easily in gentlemen's clubs that are not explicitly Black clubs. It is, however, still likely that non-white and particularly Black strippers are slightly underrepresented in my final sample which was taken into account in further qualitative data collection.

Only one third of respondents reported being or ever having been actively involved in sex workers' rights activism and less than 20% were part of a trade union representing sex workers, which indicates that the snowball sampling approach was successful in reaching dancers beyond my personal network. The demographics of survey respondents are summarised in Table 4.3. below.

	N	%		N	%
Gender			Migration Status		
Cis Women	127	90.1%	British	117	83.6%
Non Binary	12	8.5%	EU Migrant	19	13.6%
Not sure	2	1.4%	Non-EU Migrant	4	2.9%
Race			Age		
Arab/Middle Eastern	1	0.7%	under 20	0	0.0%
Asian/Asian British	4	2.8%	20-24	37	30.3%
Black/Black British	3	2.1%	25-29	41	33.6%
Hispanic	1	0.7%	30-34	26	21.3%
Multiple Ethnic groups	10	7.1%	35-39	12	9.8%
White	125	88.7%	40+	6	4.9%
Length of experience			Time of experience		
Less than 1 year	16	11.4%	Up until clubs closed	77	54.6%
1-2 years	33	23.4%	Until less than a year before	21	14.9%
2-5 years	43	30.5%	2-5 years ago	25	17.7%
5-10 years	32	22.7%	5-10 years ago	11	7.8%
More than 10 years	17	12.1%	More than 10 years ago	7	5.0%

Table 4.3: Demographics of survey respondents.

4.2.2. In-Depth Interviews with Strippers

In the second stage of data collection, sixteen of the survey respondents were interviewed. In-depth interviews are often considered particularly suitable for qualitative research into sensitive topics due to the level of intimacy that they can provide in comparison to other forms of data collection (Liamputtong, 2007). The aim of the interviews was to explore feelings of affiliation with the wider sex working community as well as detailed accounts of interviewees' responses to increasing precarity in their industry during and immediately before the Covid-19 pandemic. Depending on the experience of the participants, more or less time was spent on the individual circumstances as some people had been involved in activism, some had worked in the online adult entertainment industry, and some had experience in the full-service sex industry. It was therefore particularly important to be flexible and spontaneous during the interview rather than insist on a predetermined set of

questions (O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1994). Due to this semi-structured nature of the interviews, I developed a topic guide (see Appendix 2) to ensure that all main topics were covered but to also leave space for participants to decide what they wanted to focus on. After a brief introduction and check in about the participant's situation with regards to Covid-19 and the resulting challenges for many strippers, the interview guide covered questions on their experiences and strategies at work in the club and their understanding of the whorearchy as a concept. Depending on a participant's experience, it then moved on to experiences in activist circles and during the pandemic and concluded with giving participants space to add anything else that they would like to say and that had not been covered by the questions so far. While some interviewees spent a lot of time going into detail about their experiences at the club, others were more interested to speak about the functions of the whorearchy more generally, proving the importance of being flexible with time and depth of certain topics (O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1994). While the topic guide was designed to last around one hour, the actual time spent in the interviews ranged between 43 and 74 minutes. All interviews were transcribed verbatim as soon as possible, usually not more than two weeks after the interview.

In the same way as with the survey, I found it helpful to conduct two pilot interviews with personal contacts in order to test the topic guide and get familiar with the questions as suggested by Bryman (2008). This gave me the chance to assess the usefulness of the questions as well as their order. Furthermore, it became apparent that in order to answer my research questions, interviewing full-service sex workers who had never worked in a strip club alongside strippers, which had been the plan originally, was unsuitable as the focus of this study lies heavily on the dynamics inside strip clubs. While it was initially my intention to involve voices from all parts of the sex working community, particularly including full-service sex workers, it became clear in one of the pilot interviews that this was more appropriate for the focus groups following the interviews.

The interviews were conducted between the 22nd of April and 7th of July 2021 and, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, held on Zoom as required by governmental as well as university policy which banned all face-to-face fieldwork. In addition to the mitigation of public health risks, remote interviewing presents numerous advantages such as time flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and efficiency (Archibald et al., 2019). It was therefore possible to include the voices of people from various parts of the country, including remote places, in a relatively short period of time, which would have been more costly and time-consuming if I had had to organise travel and potentially accommodation. It was also possible to arrange a time for the interview spontaneously and dependent on the availability of participants which would have been more complex if I had travelled to their locations. Although unintended, the

intimate nature of interviews held in participants' homes, often in their bedrooms, created a comfortable atmosphere to speak about sensitive topics. While it is difficult to compare this particular research project with similar data that was collected in person, it has been suggested that the perceived anonymity that the online space provided made it easier for some participants to speak about their experiences freely (Reñosa et al., 2021). Reñosa et al. (2021) point out potential challenges with capturing non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions and body language, which are an integral part of qualitative research. This was indeed noticeable as one person asked to be interviewed via phone, one preferred to keep her camera switched off and two asked for their video recordings to be deleted immediately after the interview. However, the accentuation and tone of voice of participants as well as laughter, pauses, and other verbal cues gave additional context for the statements. The desire to keep their cameras off or be interviewed via phone furthermore suggests that those respondents would likely not have participated in the study if data had been collected in person.

As stated above, it is good practice to reimburse participants for their time and efforts in order to ensure an immediate and direct benefit for the researched community (Phipps, 2015). Interviewees were therefore given £20 shopping vouchers which were not intended to be an incentive to participate but rather as compensation for the time spent talking to me about their experiences.

The sixteen interviewees were all contacted after they had filled out the survey, which asked if they were interested in being contacted about participating in this study further in the future. Of the 141 people who filled out the survey, 109 (77.3%) indicated that they would like to be interviewed or take part in focus groups. In total, 39 recruitment emails were sent out in eight rounds of four to five emails each. The response rate was 57.9% but four people decided to decline the interview request in the end, two stopped responding, and one person provided a wrong email. The people contacted were mainly chosen automatically with the help of the `RANDBETWEEN` function in Google Sheets, with some purposive sampling focus in terms of including people of colour and migrants. Since the respondents from the initial five recruitment rounds were all white and British, I exclusively contacted people who had not (only) ticked 'white' as their ethnicity in the sixth round and only people with a migration background in the eighth round. This resulted in two interviews with Black strippers, two with strippers of multiple ethnic origins and two with EU migrants. In terms of experience, the sample automatically turned out to be a very diverse group with ages ranging from 21 to 40 and the length of their experience in the stripping industry ranging from seven months to 21 years. Furthermore, the experience of interview participants covered different parts of Britain, including nearly all major cities as well as some rural areas in England and

Scotland. While there were no participants that were based in Wales throughout the year, two participants mentioned that they had worked in Cardiff several times.

Name	Region	Length of stripping	Ethnicity	Migrant Status	Age
Rosie	Yorkshire/Humber	6 years	white	British	27
April	Scotland	7 years	white	British	32
Lana	Yorkshire/Humber	18 years	white	British	35
Georgina	London	8 years	white	British	27
Casey	South East	7 months	white	British	22
Evie	Midlands	Several years	white	British	36
Jet	Midlands/South West	5 years	white	British	31
Kleo	North West	4 years	white	British	25
Iris	North West	16 years	white	British	38
Mildred	London	1.5 years	Black/Black British, Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	British	25
Bella	South East	6 years	Black/Black British	British	25
Violet	North East	3 years	white	British	26
Elise	London	21 years	Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	British	40
Nelly	North West	5 years	Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	British	25
Marie	South West	1 year	white	EU Migrant	24
Valerie	Scotland	2 years	white	EU Migrant	21

Table 4.4: Demographics of interview participants

Importantly, nearly half of the interview participants had not only experience in stripping but had also worked in other sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries, including full-service work through agencies, in brothels and independently, online work, either through Pay-TV channels, cam sites or content sharing platforms, and a mixture of all three sectors. This meant that rich discussions of the materialisation of the whorearchy in different parts of the sex and adult entertainment industries were possible. Many participants had also dipped their toes into other sectors once but found that they were not comfortable working in them. Furthermore, some mentioned either a professional career or a part-time job outside of sex work and one reported that she was running her own business but these income avenues

were not explored in more detail. However, it does confirm that some strippers are only using their work in the strip club as part-time income while concurrently working on other career paths (Hardy and Sanders, 2014) which is particularly relevant in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.2.3. Focus Groups

In the last stage of data collection for this study, the findings from the survey and interviews were discussed in three focus groups; firstly with strippers, secondly with people who had worked in both the stripping and the full-service sex industry, and thirdly with full-service workers only. In preliminary survey analysis and during the interviews, some clear trends with regards to the attitudes of strippers emerged depending on their experience in the full-service industry, prompting the separation into two distinct focus groups. While the focus of this study was on the strategies of strippers, I added another focus group of full-service workers who had never worked in a strip club in order to gain insights from the wider sex working community about their views of the stripping industry and particularly the whorearchy.

Despite the high organisational effort, focus groups have many advantages, particularly when researching sensitive topics (Antloft and Peterson, 2014). Kitzinger (1995) stresses that they can be particularly useful to understand how topics are discussed inside a community rather than by individual members of this community as focus groups are able to ‘highlight (sub) cultural values or group norms’ (1995: 300), including insider jokes and specific terminology. They were therefore especially suitable for investigating the whorearchy as an institution that exists inside the wider sex working community. In contrast to group interviews, the aim of focus groups is to spark discussion and conversation between participants rather than solely with the researcher (Bryman, 2008). Furthermore, this division contributed to focus groups being used as a space in which participants feel safe to discuss sensitive topics because they are surrounded by peers (Antloft and Peterson, 2014).

A key aim of the focus groups was to triangulate findings from previous data collection which were controversial among interview and survey participants in three different groups in order to understand if and how they interpreted these findings differently. Crucially, focus group triangulation was not used to simply ‘prove’ that the interview and survey findings are ‘the truth’ (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Instead, I sought to get informed views from diverse groups of sex workers and adult entertainers on these preliminary findings and particularly on the topics that were most controversial among interview participants. Therefore, the focus groups were split into four sections: after a brief introduction, participants were asked about terminology which included discussions about what terms participants identified themselves

with and how they would label other sex workers or adult entertainers, particularly strippers. Secondly, the practices within strip clubs were discussed where participants spoke about their feelings with regards to ‘extras’ being provided in clubs, what the potential consequences of that would be for other strippers and for themselves, and how separate the sectors are and should be. In the focus group consisting of full-service sex workers, this section was used to discuss their relationships with strippers and what they thought about strip clubs more generally. Thirdly, the focus groups turned to theories about the whorearchy which dealt with ideas that participants had about the whorearchy as a phenomenon and in what ways the concept might be useful or harmful. Finally, the discussion focused on pandemic-related changes to relationships between different kinds of sex workers during lockdowns and particularly due to the rise of the online platform OnlyFans. The focus group consisting of full-service sex workers ran out of time to discuss the last section effectively. The full topic guide can be found in Appendix 3.

Like the interviews, the focus groups took place online. While Zoom facilitated participation from strippers and full-service sex workers from all over the country without the need for expensive and time consuming travel (Archibald et al., 2019), there are also certain disadvantages to conducting focus groups online that have been reflected on by various scholars. While in the past, online focus groups were usually conducted in chat rooms and often asynchronously with participants commenting on each others’ posts over a longer period of time, the prosperity of Zoom made it possible for focus groups to be conducted via video, resembling in-person discussions (Lobe and Morgan, 2020). However, Archibald et al. (2019) point out issues with connection and call quality that can arise on online platforms like Zoom. In the focus group consisting of full-service sex workers, one participant’s internet connection was interrupted, resulting in her being kicked out of the Zoom meeting. Although she was able to rejoin the conversation later, the focus group had moved on to another topic and her statement got lost. There were also several situations where participants spoke over each other due to delayed audio. Furthermore, online focus groups can create issues with confidentiality (Marhefka et al., 2020) which is particularly relevant for research with sex workers and adult entertainers. As suggested by Marhefka et al. (2020), participants were expected to participate from a private space in order to ensure that no community outsiders would become indirectly involved in the focus group. However, in one instance, a flatmate overheard parts of the conversation and commented on it and there were occasional disruptions of postal workers, colleagues, or pets. Overall, the benefits of being able to organise focus groups that included participation from various parts of the country with relatively low levels of organisational effort and cost outweighed the challenges posed by technical difficulties. Although focus groups took place between October and November

2021 when governmental policy would have allowed meeting in person, I decided to conduct them online due to the flexibility and accessibility of Zoom. Like interviewees, focus group participants were compensated for their time with a £20 shopping voucher.

Participants for the first two focus groups were recruited in the same way as interview participants by randomly selecting survey participants who had indicated that they were interested in joining further qualitative data collection. For the focus group including only full-service sex workers, I shared a call for participants on twitter and received a number of messages from interested participants. After some people cancelled with short notice, all focus group participants ended up being British citizens and only one was not white, resulting in a demographically unrepresentative sample. Since it had proved particularly difficult to find enough participants who were able to commit to a certain date in advance, however, I decided not to regulate this by employing the purposive sampling approach that I had used for the interviews in order to ensure representation of people of colour and migrants but instead to go ahead with the focus groups as planned. With focus groups consisting of between two and four participants each, it is furthermore impossible to ensure genuine demographic representation of the sex working community which is particularly diverse and difficult to quantify (Shaver, 2005). The demographics of focus group participants are summarised in Table 4.4 below.

Focus group	Region	Length of sex work	Ethnicity	Migrant Status	Age
Strippers	London	16 years	Asian/Asian British	British	35
Strippers	Midlands	5 years	white	British	26
Strippers	Yorkshire/Humber	Several years	white	British	23
Both	North East	4 years	white	British	28
Both	North East	Several years	white	British	33
Full-service	South East	12 years	white	British	32
Full-service	Scotland	10 years	white	British	30s
Full-service	South East	9 years	white	British	44
Full-service	London	3 years	white	British	49

Table 4.4. Demographics of focus group participants

The threefold approach which was furthermore complemented with findings from reviewing existing literature resulted in a wide range of data through which it was possible to paint a

comprehensive picture of challenges in the contemporary stripping industry and explore the responses of strippers to them. Applying mixed methods meant that I was able to capture both wider trends in the stripper community and more detailed, in-depth experiences at work and beyond. While the initial literature review was conducted prior to the data collection and its findings determined the exact research focus as well as questions for data collection, I continued scoping the literature throughout my PhD in order to refocus my research where appropriate and contextualise the experiences and views of participants.

4.3. Data Analysis

The timelines of qualitative and quantitative analysis overlapped and the overall analysis was an iterative process. The initial survey analysis was conducted with the help of Google Sheets, where responses were collected and then standardised by converting the qualitative comments into the quantitative multiple choice options where possible in order to facilitate statistical analysis as described in section 4.2.1. All qualitative comments were kept in a separate sheet and included in the qualitative analysis. Survey analysis began with basic descriptive statistics as well as illustration in graphs in order to gain an overview of the data set. I focused specifically on how responses differed depending on participants' lived experience in different sectors alongside their involvement in the stripping industry, e.g. if strippers who had also provided sexual services responded to questions about judgement in strip clubs differently than those who had not. Although the majority of the graphs are not used in the final version of this thesis, they were an important tool for my understanding of the data and guided my further analysis significantly. They were also used in conference presentations and when discussing preliminary findings with consulting sex workers and adult entertainers.

For the analysis of qualitative data, I chose thematic analysis which is known as 'the most common approach to analysis of data in the social sciences' (Roulston, 2001: 280). The coding software NVIVO was used in order to handle the large data set alongside handwritten notes which were taken throughout the analysing process to ensure no details about coding decisions were lost and particularly interesting aspects or trends in the data were emphasised. I roughly followed the guidelines of Nowell et al. (2017) who propose six phases of thematic analysis, starting with the researcher familiarising themselves with the data set, in this case the recordings and transcripts of the interviews and focus groups. Following this, initial codes were created and the data set was sorted into these codes. I identified the codes on the basis of which subjects seemed to be important to participants in the interviews and what directly addressed the research questions. A total of 26 initial codes were created which I organised into six overarching topics. The topic 'Solidarity', for example, consisted of the

codes ‘Friendships and Solidarity from other SW’, ‘Strategies to mitigate effects of the whorearchy’, ‘Abolishing the whorearchy’, and ‘Activism’. A full list of the exact codes can be found in Appendix 4. In addition, I identified some key messages from each participant. For each topic, the statements of interview participants were then summed up and particularly controversial topics were identified in order to further discuss them in the focus groups that followed. The focus group transcripts were coded in a similar way to the interviews (Kitzinger, 1995) but separately, resulting in another set of codes.

Following Nowell et al. (2017), the next phase of data analysis involved fleshing out overarching themes in both sets of codes and sorting the coded data extracts into them. The themes that were identified, which also informed the structure of this thesis, were ‘Sex worker community and whorearchy’, ‘Regulation and policy in a precarious industry’, and ‘Stripping during and post-pandemic’. These themes were decided upon in a deductive manner and named after several rounds of coding the data into the initial codes and identifying patterns and controversies (Nowell et al., 2017). In this way, the qualitative data of all three data collection methods were combined and put in conversation with each other. During the write up of the findings, I put an emphasis on direct quotes in order to illustrate the statements in their original form rather than translating them into academic language (King, 2004).

4.4. Ethical Research with Sex Workers

Social researchers who investigate sensitive topics or work with vulnerable populations have a responsibility to ensure that their research meets ethical criteria, particularly with regards to informed consent, confidentiality, and the safety of study participants (Liamputtong, 2007). While not all sex workers and adult entertainers can automatically be classified as vulnerable, the partial criminalisation and stigmatisation of the sex and adult entertainment industries creates challenges that would not arise in research with other populations. One direct consequence of the whore stigma for researchers is that sex workers and adult entertainers are often automatically deemed vulnerable research participants by ethics committees, colleagues, and wider society (Simpson, 2022). There are some particular challenges in sex work research that researchers who work with other, less stigmatised populations do not have to consider to the same degree. Shaver (2005) points out three main challenges with sex work research: the politicised nature of the narratives and discourses surrounding sex work and adult entertainment, issues with confidentiality and privacy, and difficulties obtaining a representative sample. The following section will engage with each of these challenges and outline how I addressed them.

Ethical approval for this research project was granted by the Social Policy and Social Work Ethics Committee of the University of York on the 22 February 2021 after providing detailed information about the risks and benefits of the project, an outline of the safety measures put in place to ensure the wellbeing of participants to the greatest extent possible, and a data management plan, explaining how the data collected would be kept confidential.

4.4.1. Political Narratives in Sex Work Research

Shaver (2005) calls attention to the prevalent dichotomies that shape the narratives surrounding sex work and adult entertainment. There are various societal prejudices and assumptions attached to sex workers, particularly the dichotomy between the victim of exploitation or human trafficking and the so-called 'happy hooker', a usually high income sex worker who enjoys the sexual encounters with clients and feels empowered by their engagement in the sex industry (Mac and Smith, 2018). Furthermore, sex work is often seen as not a job but rather as a social identity. As mentioned at various points throughout this thesis, sex workers and adult entertainers are perceived to be one homogenous group, neglecting the diversity both between and within different sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries (Shaver, 2005). Social research often contributes to this perception. By and of itself, this research aims to tackle these issues. By zooming in on the crossover between stripping and other sectors as well as the simultaneous separation of workers in different sectors, this research seeks to portray the wider sex working community as the diverse, heterogenous, and complex group that it is.

There are, however, institutions and political actors that hinder sex work researchers. Dewey and Zheng (2013) point out that researchers acknowledging sex work to be a form of work can lead to attacks from sex work prohibitionists, leading to public denunciations and conflicts that have affected the careers of especially younger researchers. Particularly the disclosure of my own insiderness to the community and involvement in the sex workers' rights movement creates a risk of this research being attacked for supposed lack of objectivity about the topic which, as outlined above, is a myth in social research (Harding, 2004). Furthermore, universities are known to interfere with the work of sex work researchers, particularly postgraduate or early career researchers. Because institutions within academia, such as Ethics Committees, hold significant power over the ways in which academics are able to conduct research, their bias can result in restriction of access to participants, communities, and ultimately knowledge (Simpson, 2022). In this study's application for ethical approval, the wellbeing and agency of participants was central and measures to prevent distress and misrepresentation were put in place, including taking breaks where needed, emphasising participants' right to withdraw at any point during or after data

collection, and providing the option to get in touch after the interviews and focus groups had ended to add or withdraw statements. Following Liamputtong (2007), I put additional effort into making sure that informed consent was obtained by providing information sheets and talking about the research and what participation entailed at the beginning of the interviews.

4.4.2. Confidentiality and Data Management

Another focus point for ethical approval was the management of sensitive data. Shaver (2005) stresses that the confidentiality of sex working participants has to be treated with particular caution as many sex workers and adult entertainers choose not to disclose their occupation to the wider public out of justified fear of repercussions. The survey of this study could be filled out completely anonymously, interview participants were given a pseudonym to hide their identities, and focus group participants remain anonymous throughout this thesis. Interviewees could either pick a pseudonym themselves or let me pick one at random. If they chose to use the name of their work identity, I explained the risks of colleagues, friends, management or clients finding out about their participation in this study. All other identifiable information was anonymised and recordings as well as transcripts of the interviews and focus groups. There are contrasting views about how to deal with the disclosure of criminal activity (Liamputtong, 2007). While I was careful not to neglect any safeguarding responsibilities, I ensured participants that I would not get third parties involved if they disclosed breaking the law, provided that no child or vulnerable adult was at risk of harm. Due to the prohibitive legislation of the sex and adult entertainment industries, it is important to keep criminal activity associated with this work confidential in order not to break the trust of participants (Dewey and Zheng, 2013). In the context of this study, there are examples such as soliciting clients in a strip club, an important and common aspect of the working practice of many strippers, that would fall under criminal activity but are also crucial for the development of an understanding of the whorearchy and therefore the findings about these practices make up a central component of this research. Passing on potentially incriminating information about participants of this study would not only impair any trusting relationship but also directly harm the people that provide insights about their working lives for this study.

In terms of data management, the email addresses that the majority of survey participants had provided, in order to be contacted for interviews or focus groups or to be informed about publications of this study, were blacked out in the responses sheet immediately and stored in another separate sheet in order to assure anonymity but still be able to filter addresses by demographic information in order to reach out specifically to marginalised communities. Following the University of York's Data Management Policy, recordings and transcripts of

the interviews and focus groups were stored on the University's Google Drive which is regularly and automatically backed up. All identifiable information was omitted from the transcripts and recordings of the Zoom calls were deleted after the analysis. None of the recordings or transcripts were shared with anyone in their entirety and I kept in mind the risks of participants being outed to anyone but myself throughout my PhD.

4.4.3. Representativeness of Sample

Lastly, Shaver (2005) argues that traditional sampling methods are unsuitable for sex work research because not enough is known about the population and sex workers tend to be very heterogeneous and diverse. Instead, she recommends building on relationships with sex worker-led organisations in order to reach out to a wide range of potential research participants. While there were no formal consultations with sex worker-led groups about this particular research, my personal involvement and relationship to a number of organisations which is outlined in 4.1.2, including USW, SWARM, and Decrim Now, allowed me to make use of their internal networks and social media reach for recruitment. Hence, embedding my research into sex workers' rights activism facilitated recruitment significantly and made it possible for me to interest enough people in filling out my survey in a relatively short amount of time. In addition, the aforementioned focus on snowball sampling ensured that participants outside of activist networks were reached as well.

Section 4.2.1 outlines the representativeness of survey participants in comparison to other studies of the stripping community in Britain (Hardy and Sanders, 2014). It is likely that migrants as well as strippers of colour are slightly underrepresented in the overall survey sample. As described in 4.2.2, I employed some purposive sampling for interviews after the original sample was unrepresentative in terms of race and migration status. However, as outlined in 4.2.3, the sample of focus groups remained overly white and entirely British. Furthermore, there are wider questions surrounding the inclusion of the most marginalised voices as well as those who have a fundamentally different view of the sex and adult entertainment industries than I do. Due to my outspoken support of the sex workers' rights movement, and particularly industrial efforts by USW to unionise the sex and adult entertainment industries, it would make sense that some strippers, for example those who have particularly close and positive relationships with managers who disapprove of trade union activism, were opposed to participating in this study.

4.5. Research Validity: A Snapshot of a Changing Industry

Like most doctoral studies that commenced between 2019 and 2021, this research was heavily disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic which made any form of in-person data collection impossible for the majority of my PhD. The closure of all strip clubs in March 2020 removed the option of recruiting participants by sharing the survey link at work and asking other strippers to do the same which would have otherwise constituted a crucial part of the recruitment process in order to also reach out to those who are not connected to the online stripper community. Furthermore, it became clear during data collection that some migrant strippers who had decided to stay with their families outside of Britain during the pandemic were no longer in touch with their Britain-based community as much and were therefore less likely to be made aware of the survey.

Because many strippers had not worked in the industry by the time data collection began, some participants felt disconnected from the wider community which likely impacted the findings of this research significantly. This was confirmed by some interview participants who explained that they had indicated in the survey that they did not feel like a part of the sex working community because of the pandemic, rather than because they had never worked in the full-service sex industry. It is possible that the long break that many strippers took during Covid-19 had an impact on other responses as well. Since the interviews were held between April and July 2021, during a time in which lockdown measures in Britain eased significantly, responses on future plans were likely also impacted by the date of the interview. While in some of the later interviews, participants had detailed ideas of when and how they wanted to return to working in strip clubs or had already started to do so under specific restrictions, this was impossible to foresee for participants who were interviewed in April or May already. Most focus group participants had gone back to work by the time that they were discussing findings from interviews that had taken place during lockdown. While this was taken into account during analysis, it is likely that these different circumstances had an impact on the findings.

Equally, the time at which data collection for this research was conducted means that this research provides a unique insight into the issues that many strippers faced during the pandemic and how they responded to it. Since the interviews engaged with opinions and feelings of strippers who, at the time of the interview, were unable to work in strip clubs and had therefore not been in touch with many of their colleagues for a significant amount of time, their responses may have been different if this research project had been conducted a year prior. While this has implications for the generalisability of this study and was not

originally intended, it gives an unprecedented insight into feelings about judgement and hierarchies whenever strippers are isolated from each other.

As a frame for this research, it is therefore important to remember that the experiences of participants differ significantly, depending on when and where they stripped and the degree to which their income streams were disrupted by the pandemic. While some participants had left the industry years before the first lockdown was announced, most had worked in strip clubs up until the closure of clubs. The stripping industry has changed considerably over the last decade due to economic recession, regressive licensing policies, and if nothing else the Covid-19 pandemic. Those are likely to lead to even more changes in the industry in the near future, potentially resulting in a completely different approach to stripping culture in Britain. It would be particularly interesting to repeat this research project again in the future in order to compare the results and gather more robust information about the materialisation of the whorearchy, the working conditions in the British stripping industry, and the effects that the pandemic had on it. It is therefore crucial to view this research as a snapshot of the state of the industry during and shortly after the closure of strip clubs due to the pandemic which gives valuable insight into the lives of some sex workers and strippers during and right after the pandemic, but the nature of the wider lens of the investigation focussed on the whorearchy provided insights with utility beyond a particular moment in time.

5. The Relationship between Strippers and the Wider Sex Working Community

Chapter one and two described the complexities of the question whether strippers are considered sex workers and established the existence of a set of social hierarchies inside the sex and adult entertainment industries, which is commonly referred to as the whorearchy. Chapter three outlined the collaboration of strippers and other sex workers or adult entertainers in activism as well as the need for many strippers to also work in other sectors in order to make ends meet. Before turning to the specific responses of strippers to deteriorating working conditions and income potential in their industry, it is therefore crucial to make sense of the relationship between strippers and the wider sex working community and how it is viewed by different members of that community.

This is the first of three chapters which report on the findings of the self-administered survey, the sixteen in-depth interviews, and the three focus groups with regards to the relationship between strippers and the wider sex working community. Firstly, it engages with the research question on how useful and accurate it is to view stripping as a form of sex work by focusing on the nature of the work, on the ways in which strippers associate and dissociate with the wider sex working community, and on the political usefulness of unity under one umbrella. Secondly, this chapter will zoom in on the sex workers' rights movement in order to extend findings from the literature review about collaboration and solidarity of strippers as part of a wider resistance movement. Finally, I extend the working definition of the whorearchy adopted for fieldwork (Knox, 2014, see chapter 4) and concentrate particularly on the intersection between stripping and other sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries. Although the existence of a hierarchy between different forms of sex work and adult entertainment is uncontested (Fuentes, 2022; Toubiana and Ruebottom, 2022; Bowen, 2021; Vixxx, 2019; Knox, 2014), there are many differing opinions on its exact functioning which this chapter will outline.

In this chapter, I argue that although there is no consensus on whether strippers should be labelled sex workers, I found evidence for a strong cross-sectoral community of sex workers and adult entertainers in which hierarchies are prevalent and reproduced internally. Because many strippers also work in other sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6, some members of the stripper community experience forms of stigmatisation from their peers. However, there is also growing frustration inside the wider sex working community and resistance movement about a lack of acknowledgement of different levels of stigmatisation between strippers and other sex workers or adult entertainers.

5.1. Are Strippers Sex Workers?

Because the label ‘sex worker’ has significant political meaning, it is helpful to discuss whether strippers can be considered sex workers and to what degree they identify as sex workers themselves before turning to the relationships between strippers and the wider sex working community. The origin and boundaries of the term have been discussed in more detail in the introductory chapter. Both in the literature and in the data collected for this project, many strippers felt quite strongly about the term ‘sex worker’ and how it was used by peers, clients, managers, and wider society. As outlined in previous chapters, the majority of academic researchers place stripping inside the sex industries (see Hardy and Sanders, 2014; Lister, 2012) and in many studies, the affiliation of the two is not even questioned but strippers are simply considered part of the sex worker community (see Toubiana and Ruebottom, 2022; Colosi, 2010). This is also very common in anti-sex worker literature (see Bindel, 2004; MacKinnon, 1993) although they rarely use the ‘sex work’ terminology as they do not consider any sexual or sexualised services to be work. Other scholars, such as Sanders et al. (2009) or Harcourt and Donovan (2005), define stripping as a subcategory of sex work but distinguish between direct, i.e. full-service sex work, and indirect sex work, including webcamming, pornography and stripping. The term ‘adult entertainment’ is furthermore used to refer to some forms of indirect sex work, including the business in sex shops, peep shows, live sex theatres, sex cinemas, and, in some cases, also strip clubs (Hubbard et al., 2009).

Hardy and Sanders (2014) stress that most of the strippers that informed their study did not identify with the term ‘sex worker’ and firmly distanced themselves from sex work as they argued that they did not provide actual sexual services but rather an illusion or fantasy of sex. Similar comments from strippers were described by Grandy (2008) and Bott (2006), prompting me to start this investigation with questions about the extent to which study participants associated with the sex worker identity. During conversations with participants of this study, however, it quickly became clear that the question whether strippers are considered sex workers goes beyond individual association and consists of four segments that I will address separately at first in order to then derive an overall conclusion. Firstly, there are questions surrounding the nature of work, related to whether stripping in and of itself can be considered sex work or if sex work necessarily includes the act of sex. However, due to the social and political marginalisation of all sex workers and adult entertainers, the question whether strippers are sex workers cannot be fully answered by determining solely the physical proximity to clients’ genitals. Secondly, one may therefore ask if strippers identify with the ‘sex worker’ terminology themselves and if the term is commonly used to describe strippers by other members of the community, particularly by full-service sex

workers. Terminology can be crucial for identity formation in marginalised communities (Limatius, 2018) and the feelings that both strippers and full-service sex workers have about the use of the word can give insights into wider questions of association. Thirdly, there is a separate question as to what degree strippers associate or disassociate with the wider sex working community, i.e. if they consider themselves to be a part of one group with full-service sex workers and potentially other workers in the sex and adult entertainment industries. This includes notions on empathy and solidarity with workers in other sectors. Finally, and adjacent to community affiliation, questions arise about the political strategy of the sex workers' rights movement and whether strippers are organising with other sex workers and adult entertainers or separately. This includes both the overall theoretical usefulness of joint organising and experiences of activists in practice.

While those are four different approaches to the question whether strippers are sex workers, in practice, each of these segments are most often collapsed in discussions about the industries and reduced to one. This highlights the complexities of the question of affiliation. In what follows, I want to firstly focus on the characteristics of stripping in comparison with other forms of sex work or adult entertainment, then on terminology and community affiliation, and lastly on debates about politically strategic association of strippers with the term sex worker as part of sex workers' rights activism in order to come to an informed resolution about whether strippers are indeed sex workers.

5.1.1. The Characteristics of Stripping and Sex Work

With regard to the nature of the work, neither the existing literature nor this study's participants find a clear consensus on whether stripping constitutes sex work. Hardy and Sanders (2014: 18) come to the conclusion that "the labour characteristics, along with the marginal and stigmatised nature of stripping despite its legal status in Britain, definitely place stripping within the broader range of sex markets". Their focus lies on the fact that lap dances as well as other interactions with strip club clients are arguably of sexual or erotic nature and strippers present themselves in a very sexualised way. The authors furthermore mention that strippers are affected by sex worker stigma, although the stigma that strippers experience is significantly lower than that associated with full-service sex work, a notion that was confirmed by all participants of this study. Some participants of this study agreed with this conclusion and argued that any work that was sexual should be considered sex work. Marie (South West, stripper), for example, who placed stripping firmly within the sex industry, pointed out that strip clubs in Britain are labelled *Sexual* Entertainment Venue, indicating that stripping is sexual by its very nature. To Marie, this meant that defining stripping as anything else but sex work was nonsensical, a notion that Clare (2022) agrees

with. Barbagallo and Cruz (2021) argue that the fact that strip clubs are labelled as a form of ‘sex establishment’ is a direct result of British law regulating the wider sex industry ‘via sexual offences rather than labour framework’ (2021: 360). With the introduction of the 2009 Policing and Crime Act (see section 3.2.1), the ‘sexual exploitation’ narrative that is used to justify tight regulation or even criminalisation of the full-service sex industry was also attached to the stripping industry.

However, British licensing laws prohibit any form of physical contact between dancers and customers, with many clubs being forced to work with so-called ‘three foot rules’ that dictate that strippers are obliged to keep three feet distance between themselves and their customers during private dances for the club to keep its licence (Colosi, 2013). This has two implications for the affiliation of stripping with sex work. On the one hand, following Hardy and Sanders (2014), stripping is heavily policed by the state in similar ways that full-service sex work is. On the other hand, the physical distance between strippers and their clients results in a less sexualised nature of the work, as Violet points out:

Occasionally I meet a girl who doesn’t [consider herself a sex worker] and I can understand why. Mentally, they might think it’s not because there’s no touching, it’s distance.

Violet (North East, stripper and full-service, previously online)

While participants reported that in most other countries they had worked in, no no-touching rules are written into law, this strict licensing regime impacts how many strippers in Britain view their work. Not allowing any physical touch has widened the gap between stripping and more physically intimate forms of sex work with regard to what the work actually entails. Bella (South East, stripper and online), for example, talked about her experience of dancing in Australia where she found full-contact lap dances to be the norm and reported that her colleagues there made fewer stigmatising comments towards the full-service sex industry than she had seen in British strip clubs. These variations between countries with different legislation illustrate the complexities of defining clear boundaries of sex work. Following occupational stigma theory, Toubiana and Ruebottom (2022: 9) stress that ‘the boundaries of occupations are formed through ongoing negotiations between those within the occupation, as well as with those outside the occupation who have a vested interest in it, such as regulatory bodies and stakeholders’, illustrating the impact of different legislation in both the stripping and the full-service sex industry. The ambiguity of these boundaries also became apparent in interview and focus group conversations about burlesque dancing and life modelling. While there are occasionally people who would define burlesque as a form of sex work, it is usually described as a hobby or art form (see Ferreday, 2008). Whenever

burlesque came up in conversations, most participants came to the conclusion that it was not a part of the sex industry although some reported having had doubts or heated debates with colleagues about this. Life modelling was described by one focus group participant as an activity that has many parallels to stripping but is never considered sex work:

I do a bit of life modelling and it's so funny because obviously I get naked and I'm often quite uncomfortable but I'd certainly never call it sex work and I'm sure life models aren't considering this sex work. But they're taking off their clothes and I'm sure there's an element of titillation going on and it's, again, one of those things that I'd think of as being adjacent.

Focus group participant, full-service

This underlines the social construction of sex work and the importance that the commercial aspect of stripping and other forms of sex work or adult entertainment has for the conceptualisation of identity. By detaching burlesque dancers and life models from sex workers, participants illustrate that sex work goes beyond the sole sexualisation of bodies.

Interestingly, the only participant who strongly argued for strippers to not be labelled sex workers was a full-service sex worker who had only worked in a strip club for a few months over ten years ago. To her, it was clear that people who did not have sexual intercourse for money were not considered sex workers, meaning that only full-service sex workers and porn performers who had sex on camera were. Her focus evidently lay on the nature of work rather than community affiliation or politically strategic unification. She pointed out that although she was aware of the need for unity inside the sex workers' rights movement in order to fight stigma, she considered the act of stripping to be closer to burlesque or other forms of adult entertainment as well as fashion modelling than to full-service sex work:

I still don't think that stripping is sex work. I think you're a dancer. You're a hard working dancer, you're a gig economy dancer, you're a hyper sexualised dancer, but you're a dancer. You're not a sex worker. You don't have sex with your clients, you're not a sex worker.

Why would I compare myself to a stripper if they're a dancer and I'm a sex worker? Doesn't make any sense. I might as well compare myself to a fashion model because they also take their clothes off for money and don't have sex with their clients.

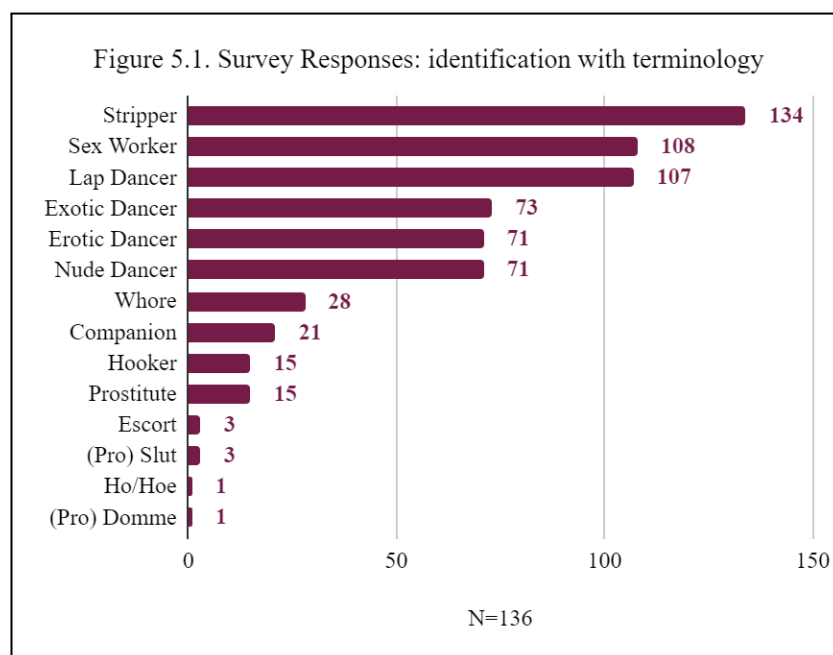
Focus group participant, full-service

This narrow definition of sex work is potentially quite radical in that it detaches moralistic or political meaning from the term 'sex worker' and focuses solely on the act of sex versus the act of dancing. Speaking from her experience in a wide range of different sectors of the sex

and adult entertainment industries, this focus group participant looks at sex work not as an identity which is shaped by politics and stigma but solely as a job, in which case the nature of stripping resembles fashion modelling more than that of full-service sex work. However, notwithstanding the differences in the work of stripping and full-service sex work, the question whether strippers are sex workers needs to be embedded into a wider context of a stigmatised community with a strong occupational culture (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999) which includes shared terminology and politics.

5.1.2. Terminology and Community Affiliation

Terminology surrounding the sex and adult entertainment industries is contentious and often emotionally charged because it acts as a proxy for larger questions of affiliation and self-identification. Hence, one of the first survey questions asked participants about the terms that they would describe themselves as. The answers, summarised in Figure 5.1, show a high identification with the term sex worker alongside a number of descriptive terms for strippers. However, in analysing only the responses of people who had never worked in any sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries apart from stripping, identification with the term ‘sex worker’ drops to just over 50% in comparison to 76.6% overall and over 90% of those who had also provided full-service sex work. This indicates that many strippers who do not engage in other forms of sex work or adult entertainment do not consider their work to be in line with the sex work terminology today despite the original invention of the term clearly including sexualised services such as stripping (Leigh, 1997; see 1.3.1).



Crucially, Figure 5.1 shows that nearly all respondents identified with the term ‘stripper’ in comparison to only 78% identifying with the word ‘lap dancer’ which is used in most of the literature to date (Hardy and Sanders, 2014; Lister, 2012; Colosi, 2010). This is despite the fact that during recruitment and in the information sheet displayed before the survey, I chose the term ‘lap dancer’ and only began to use ‘stripper’ instead after it had become clear that the majority of survey respondents identified with ‘stripper’ more than with any other terms. Some interview participants mentioned wanting to reclaim the word ‘stripper’ rather than following strip club owners’ use of the term ‘lap dancer’. However, in all interviews and focus groups, participants also simply used the word ‘dancer’ which is consistent with the literature (Hardy and Sanders, 2014; Colosi, 2010). One focus group participant explained that she referred to herself as a stripper in public but would use the term dancer whenever she spoke with other industry insiders. Furthermore, Figure 5.1 shows that, with the exception of ‘stripper’, fewer people identify with terms that describe only stripping, such as ‘erotic dancer’, ‘exotic dancer’, or ‘nude dancer’ than with the word ‘sex worker’. As mentioned in 2.1.2, a group of strippers and pole dancers pointed out the problematic history of the term ‘exotic dancer’ in 2019, leading to many people, particularly white dancers, ceasing to use the term altogether (Clare, 2022). This was pointed out by multiple interview and focus group participants.

I’m happy to be a stripper or lap dancer – I didn’t mind ‘exotic dancer’ but I know people have raised issues with the use of the word exotic. And so I try and be more considerate of that now.

Focus group participant, stripper and full-service

The term ‘sex worker’ sparked more discussion. All interview and focus group participants who were also doing full-service sex work at the time¹⁴ identified with the term sex worker, and the majority of the people that had never offered full-service sex work said that they did not mind being labelled a sex worker but would usually not use the term themselves. This stands in contrast to findings from Hardy and Sanders (2014) who state that most of their study’s participants made it clear that they were not sex workers and did not want to be referred to as such. This was not confirmed by participants of this research, nearly all of whom agreed that stripping constituted a subcategory of the wider sex work umbrella, at least to a certain degree, and were therefore not offended if they were called a sex worker.¹⁵

¹⁴ Some of the people who had previously offered full-service sex work but had moved out of it and into other sectors of the wider industry (either stripping or online sex work) or had left the sex industry completely were careful to clarify that they had retired from full-service sex work as they felt that active sex workers should lead the public conversation about the sex industry.

¹⁵ One person was uncomfortable about the word sex work because she did not enjoy the sound of it. To her, it made her sound like a ‘labourer of sex’ which was an incorrect description of what she was

However, some people who had been working in the stripping industry for a long period of time reported that this had not always been the case and that the narrative had changed in recent years due to increased visibility of strippers who were vocal about their involvement in the wider sex workers' rights movement (see 5.1.3). This might explain why the results here differ from Hardy and Sanders (2014) who conducted their fieldwork ten years prior to this study.

Notwithstanding the general agreement that stripping belongs under the sex work umbrella to some extent, some participants avoided the sex worker terminology to refer to themselves. Several people pointed out that they did not want to overstep and be seen as a representative of the entire sex working community as they were aware that they did not experience the same degree of stigmatisation as full-service sex workers do.

I would have always referred to myself as a stripper, rather than anything else. But I'm not offended by people saying sex worker [...] I think there are other struggles that go with full service sex work that I don't have. And so it's a bit of a privilege thing really to be a stripper and not necessarily have to do any other or choose to do any other kind of sex work.

Evie (Midlands, stripper)

I wouldn't want to act on anyone's toes and say, you know, if full service workers don't want strippers to call themselves that, then I would respect that.

Kleo (North West, stripper)

Others pointed out that they were uncomfortable with being called a sex worker because they did not want people to assume that they were involved in full-service sex work or wanted to avoid the stigma associated with it.

I use the term stripper usually if people ask me because I feel like that's almost more widely accepted.

Casey (South East, stripper and online)

But I think 'sex worker' is a lot more linked to doing other things, or the term 'sex worker' includes the whole umbrella, so it includes people who are doing extras, so I would make clear to people that I was a stripper, not a sex worker 'cause it sounds, like, worse I think. If you say 'sex worker', it sounds like you would be involved in

doing. However, she did consider stripping part of the sex industry and simply did not like the wording.

prostitution – and not that I’m against it but I wouldn’t want people to think that I did it automatically.

April (Scotland, stripper and online)

These comments illustrate that the structural dynamics of stigma drive some strippers to use terminology as a strategy to appear distant from full-service sex workers who experience higher levels of stigma. Pheterson (1996) argues that this intensifies the whole stigma which ultimately oppresses all women, including strippers. Both Casey and April stressed that they supported full-service sex workers and stood in solidarity with them but that they did not find it politically useful to label themselves sex workers. April went on to describe how systems of stigma influenced her:

I’m even sitting here saying I wouldn’t want someone to think I did it but then I mean that’s just implanted into your head from a young age, isn’t it? You’ve got to be modest, you don’t go about showing guys your tits, don’t do this, don’t do that, if you sleep with too many guys, you’re a whore.

April (Scotland, stripper and online)

There were, however, also strippers who strongly identified with the term ‘sex worker’ because they either considered their work to be part of the sex industry, as discussed in 5.1.1, or used the term in order to show solidarity with the wider sex working community. Marie (South West, stripper) and Mildred (London, stripper, full-service and online), who both viewed their work in the strip club as sex work, identified with both ‘stripper’ and ‘sex worker’ at the same time and used both terms interchangeably. Others identified as sex workers as a sign of solidarity with people who experienced higher levels of stigma.

But then, in some spaces, using the term sex worker, particularly having done other forms of sex work is kind of, it really also brings a lot of solidarity across different industries while being a stripper just does not have the same stigma.

Jet (South West, stripper, previously full-service and online)

I would mostly identify as a sex worker, because I just saw a lot of stigma by strippers to sex workers that a lot of dancers are like “Oh, I wouldn’t do it” or something like “We’re better than them” or something like that, just like classism between them. And it’s really shitty because we’re all sex workers.

Valerie (Scotland, stripper and online)

What Valerie is saying explains how some strippers are using the term sex worker to counter stigmatising behaviour that they witnessed within their circle of friends or colleagues in

contrast to some of the comments that seek to use terminology as a means of separation. This further illustrates the importance that terminology plays in questions of affiliation.

	Only stripping	Stripping and full-service	Stripping and online	Stripping, full-service and online	Total
Identify with the term 'sex worker'	51.7%	89.0%	73.7%	91.7%	76.6%
Consider themselves part of the sex working community	72.4%	98.6%	89.5%	100.0%	90.8%
Believe that strippers are sex workers	75.9%	97.3%	86.8%	98.3%	89.3%

Table 5.1: Survey responses with regards to affiliation of strippers with sex workers

Because of the complexity of community affiliation, the survey included multiple questions on identification with both the terminology and the community, the most significant of which are summarised in Table 5.1, grouped by the sector(s) that survey respondents worked in. In general, association with the sex working community was higher than identification with the term 'sex worker'. This can be explained by a general understanding that the whore stigma (Pheterson, 1988, 1996) does have an impact on strippers, which creates a certain level of empathy and belonging which does not seem to necessarily translate to self-descriptions. For example, one focus group participant who had never provided full-service sex work explained that she would usually avoid referring to herself as a sex worker but that whenever she heard about the issues of sex workers in the media, she did identify with it. She later described an instance in which she met two street-based sex workers at a drug recovery facility and one of the social workers suggested that they worked in the same industry.

It hit me like a ton of bricks. I was like wow, these are my women, this is my community. [...] I first thought – I'm gonna be completely honest – I was like 'what the fuck, no they're not' and I rejected them because of the stigma, so I even have that within myself.

Focus group participant, stripper

The fact that she was initially shocked by the suggestion of a social worker, i.e. an industry outsider, that they worked the same jobs illustrates that she had firmly distanced herself from full-service sex workers, particularly those working on the streets, but once confronted with the whore stigma, she promptly identified with the sex working community.

Maybe unsurprisingly, the survey showed that the more forms of sex work or adult entertainment respondents had done, the more they identified with both the term and the

community, with 100% of those who had stripped, provided full-service sex work, and worked in the online adult industry identifying with the sex working community while only 72.4% of those who had only ever stripped did. These results indicate that for many, stripping alone is not considered in line with the sex work terminology, although there seems to be a trend of increased use of the term with newer generations of strippers. Nevertheless, lack of personal identification with the sex work terminology does not prevent the majority of strippers to consider themselves a part of the wider sex working community.

5.1.3. Political Strategy and Unity in the Sex Workers' Rights Movement

As part of forming strong occupational cultures to combat occupational stigma, stigmatised groups of workers often develop a shared set of values and political beliefs that is crucial for their identity formation (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). It is therefore unsurprising that developments within the sex workers' rights movement are significant to the lives of many sex workers and adult entertainers, regardless of their personal involvement in activist organisations. The majority of interview and focus group participants who argued that stripping constitutes sex work tended to focus their attention on uniting all workers in the sex and adult entertainment industries in order to jointly resist the whore stigma rather than spending a lot of time discussing the nature of the work or the meaning of the term. Hence, the political strategy of the sex workers' rights movement with regards to unity and affiliation with the sex worker label might be the most significant aspect of the question whether strippers are sex workers.

As outlined in 1.3.2, most British sex worker-led organisations and collectives highlight the shared struggle of all sex workers and adult entertainers, including strippers. All interview and focus group participants who were involved in some form of activism stressed that strippers were part of the wider sex workers' rights movement and effectively organised together and alongside other sex workers and adult entertainers. Despite some evident instances of strippers distancing themselves from full-service sex workers within the wider stripper community, activists pointed out that all sex worker-led organisations in Britain had a firm stance on strippers being part of 'the red umbrella' (Focus group participant, full-service), i.e. the sex workers' rights movement.

However, due to instances of strippers feeding into stigmatising behaviour towards full-service sex workers, some of the coordinators and leaders of activist and support groups identified the need to counter these narratives and show solidarity with the most oppressed within the sex working community. During recruitment for this project, for example, the admins of a Facebook networking group for strippers refused to approve a post advertising

the online survey as its wording was intentionally vague with regards to the question if strippers are sex workers. The post was only approved when I changed the wording from ‘strippers and sex workers’ to ‘strippers and other sex workers’. The admins got in touch with me to explain that they had a policy to delete all posts that viewed the sectors as separate because there had been many cases of whorephobia, i.e. hostile comments about full-service sex workers, in the group before and they wanted to make sure that full-service sex workers in the group were protected from this form of harassment. This example shows why questions of terminology and community affiliation are often combined in practice. It becomes clear that particularly in political settings, association with the sex worker terminology is used to highlight association with the community.

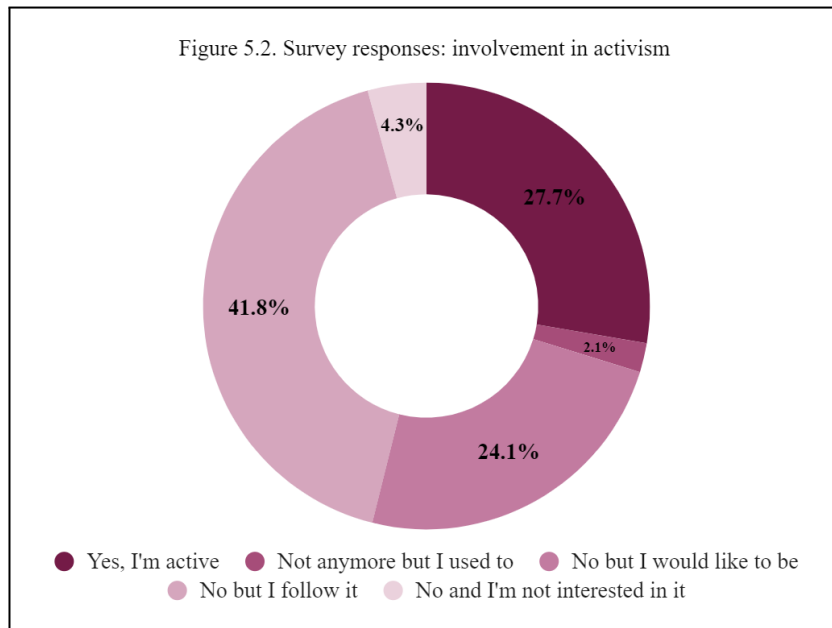
To conclude the question whether strippers are sex workers, I put emphasis on the political usefulness of a united sex workers’ rights movement and community that is inclusive of strippers and other adult entertainers, regardless of differences in the nature of the work. Although it is challenging to objectively determine the exact boundaries of sex work, the experiences and views of participants outlined in this section illustrate the strong affiliation of most strippers with the wider sex working community as well as a shared political culture. Due to the evident significance of political organising in the lives of many sex workers and adult entertainers, the following section will engage further with dynamics within the activist movement.

5.2. Sex Workers’ Rights Activism

The sex workers’ rights movement plays an important role in the lives of many participants, regardless of their own involvement in any organisations or groups, and many relate to activist groups even if they are not actively organising within them. In the survey, 88.9% indicated that they were part of the sex workers’ rights movement although, in a later question on participation in an organisation that fights for the rights of sex workers, illustrated in Figure 5.2, only 27.7% reported being active with an additional 2.1% having been actively involved in the past. The exceptionally high share of strippers identifying as a part of the movement despite not being actively involved in it therefore shows the importance of resistance movements in stripper culture¹⁶. Furthermore, 41.8% said that they followed the work of activist groups and only 4.3% indicated that they were not interested in the sex workers’ rights movement at all, illustrating the important role that political resistance plays in the lives of people who experience stigma, a notion that chimes with

¹⁶ As briefly outlined in 4.4.3, my own positionality and vocal support of the sex workers’ rights movement may have influenced the circles in which this study’s survey was circulated and who agreed to participate. Furthermore, some participants may have felt compelled to overstate their interest in activism as they knew that I was involved in it.

existing stigma literature. Strong political cultures and involvement in resistance movements has been identified as a crucial mitigation strategy for the whole stigma (Pheterson, 1996) and occupational stigma more generally (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999).



Survey respondents indicated that they were involved in a wide range of activities, including advocacy for the decriminalisation of sex work (82.1%), online or in-person community organising (69.2%), community education (51.3%), trade union activism (46.2%), financial support for other sex workers (28.2%), volunteering for a sex worker support charity (17.9%), and legal support for sex workers facing criminalisation or immigration charges (2.6%). Several interview and focus group participants also referred to their organising experience and reported that it had helped them deal with stigma in various ways. Valerie (Scotland, stripper and online) had been involved in a writing project with a peer-led organisation in the country that she had lived in before coming to Britain and said that this had helped her recognise internalised stigma and work through it in therapy. Mildred (London, stripper, full-service and online) explained that she had entered sex work when she was ‘already fully radicalised’ and a member of various groups that fought for the rights of sex workers which she acknowledged was an unusual progression. She considered herself lucky that she had been aware of the politics behind stripping, and sex work more generally, and not entered the industry without that support network and added that the majority of her colleagues were also organised politically which created a closer bond between them. Being an activist had furthermore provided her with work opportunities such as a collectively run virtual strip club that was started by unionised strippers during the pandemic. Bella (South West, stripper and online) reported the positive effects that unionisation had on the

atmosphere in her strip club by exposing unfair practices from management and limiting competition between dancers.

A lot of girls in my club, they ended up having to unionise because of those women who pay men to go into a stripclub with a camera.¹⁷ We had to unionise because of that. And then we all got put in the group chat and stuff. And it's like, then you're part of that network so you don't judge each other.

Bella (South West, stripper and online)

Jet (South West, stripper, previously full-service and online) mentioned that she had made close friends in sex worker organising which was particularly important for her when she was working in the full-service sex industry, which can often be isolating, rather than in strip clubs, where she was working with colleagues. Others described that they were part of group chats or social media groups where they connected with other sex workers and adult entertainers about work but also other topics that were important to them. Georgina (London, stripper and full-service) was a member of a sex worker group chat where members shared their poetry and art projects with each other which had become an important support network for her during the pandemic. Overall, participants emphasised the positive impact that political organising and community building had on their lives.

5.2.1. Activism Beyond Sector Boundaries

Following the aforementioned controversies surrounding questions whether strippers are considered sex workers, it is maybe unsurprising that activism that goes beyond sectoral boundaries can pose challenges whenever strippers distance themselves from full-service sex workers or make stigmatising comments. Nevertheless, all participants ultimately agreed that with regard to political activism, it made sense to work together or at least to support each others' fights. Historically, strippers have been involved in sex workers' rights activism from the dawn of the international movement and many full-service sex workers and porn performers have supported strippers in their fight to unionise their workplaces, such as the *Lusty Lady* in the late 1990s (Brooks, 2005). More recently, Barbagallo and Cruz (2021) stress that strippers are a vital part of the sex workers' rights movement in Britain. As the most legalised and regulated sector, the stripping industry is a suitable starting point for labour unionisation of all sex work and adult entertainment. The United Sex Workers (USW) union therefore makes an effort to unionise strippers alongside full-service sex workers as well as porn performers, online content creators and any other adult entertainers. The survey results, which show an exceptionally high affiliation with the sex workers' rights movement,

¹⁷ See 3.2.3 for a detailed description of anti-strip club campaigners organising undercover filming

as well as comments from interview and focus group participants, illustrate a general agreement that unity between sectors within the movement is crucial for successful resistance.

And I think it's your responsibility as a sex worker to stand for other sex workers. Regardless of what sex work they do. I mean, yeah, there's a whorearchy¹⁸, whatever you want to call it, but we're all in it together. And we should be fighting. The real enemy is not us, it's the system, the outside.

Georgina (London, stripper and full-service)

We all need to be there for each other because no one else is going to be there for us. So it really bothers me when people aren't.

Mildred (London, stripper, full-service and online)

One of the reasons why the need for joint organising was emphasised by many participants was that anti-sex worker campaigners were known to show animosity against all sectors of the wider sex and adult industries.

I guess as far as abolitionists are concerned, we all need to go to hell and I get that. And I need to be very clear that when it comes to activism and unionising, I think we do all need to band together.

Focus group participant, full-service

I think we should all be here for each other and support each other because anyone who's anti sex work isn't gonna see you as any different from me, just because you're on a screen and I'm shaking my ass in someone's face. You know, all of us are whores and that's all they're gonna think.

Mildred (London, stripper, full-service and online)

Some participants furthermore mentioned how anti-sex worker legislation also affected strippers. At the time of the interviews, a Labour MP was seeking to introduce the Nordic Model in parliament which triggered a strong response from the campaigning group Decrim Now, a collective of sex workers, trade unionists and activists who lobbied in and around the Labour party by publishing an open letter (Miren, 2021). Marie (South West, stripper), who supported the campaign and knew people who were directly involved in writing the open letter, stressed that 'strippers should be a lot more worried than they are' about the potential change in legislation as the wording would likely affect Sexual Entertainment Venues (SEVs) as well. This indicates that although anti-sex worker activists often target various

¹⁸ This quote was taken from a conversation about the materialisation of the whorearchy which will be outlined in more detail in section 5.3

sectors concurrently, some strippers seem to be unaware of the impact that further criminalisation of full-service sex work could have on their jobs while others are conscious of the parallels and aim to connect with other sex workers' rights activists. In the US context, Cruz (2021) describes how the criminalisation of full-service sex work leads to indirect criminalisation of strippers as it exacerbates the antagonistic position of all sex workers and adult entertainers to the police who are more likely to view strip clubs as a space for criminal activity if providing full-service sex work is indeed a crime. Similarly to Marie, she calls on other strippers to support the full decriminalisation of all sex work, not only out of ideological solidarity but also to improve working conditions in strip clubs.

Furthermore, the potential of labour organising with other precarious workers, a strategy that the USW union has been following since its foundation in 2018 (Barbagallo and Cruz, 2021), was discussed. In the focus group of full-service sex workers, a conversation about the affiliation and potential for collaboration with workers in other industries evolved. While one participant suggested calling all sex workers and adult entertainers gig workers and focusing on the similarities to uber or delivery drivers with regards to working conditions, two other participants pointed out that the fact that they were self-employed and did not work with any managers was crucial for them and their understanding of their work. However, despite differences in the employment relations of participants, the parallels between strippers, other sex workers or adult entertainers, and non-erotic atypical workers with regards to income insecurity, lack of labour protections, and responsibility for economic risks is evident. In the focus group, the original suggestion made a wider point of unionising together with other precarious workers and focusing on the work aspect of sex work rather than discussing the scope of 'sex' in detail.

5.2.2. Challenges in Activism Beyond Sector Boundaries

In addition to the benefits of joint activism, some participants voiced frustrations about the sex workers' rights movement. A number of people wondered about the inclusivity of street-based sex workers and frequent drug users into the movement. In the focus group of strippers, participants talked about their perception that survival sex workers who were struggling with drug addiction would get left behind by the movement because they often left the industry and never looked back once they had become sober. Participants wondered to what degree the wider movement tried to distance itself from street-based survival sex workers to strengthen the narrative that sex workers were choosing to work in the industry freely. Other participants, on the other hand, argued that the known sex worker-led organisations in Britain were pushing a different narrative that emphasised that all sex workers and adult entertainers deserved workers' rights regardless of their circumstances or

drug use. Mac and Smith (2018: 93) acknowledge that ‘the demographic within sex work politics most often given a substantial mainstream platform to speak publicly dovetails with the group that lives in metropolitan cities, commands higher rates, has access to more resources, and suffers the least criminalisation’ but also point out the structural barriers that silence and prevent many street-based or drug using sex workers from speaking up and joining organising efforts, particularly criminalisation of prostitution-related offences as well as immigration laws and stigma.

Furthermore, concerns were raised about the accessibility of activist spaces for those who were not working in the full-service industry. Some strippers were unsure if they were welcome in the sex workers’ rights movement if they had never worked in the full-service sex industry. One survey respondent commented that she would like to join an organising or advocacy group but felt judgement from some activists because she did not identify as a sex worker herself.

I want to support the sex workers rights movement more but feel a bit judged by those in the movement because I didn’t feel as a stripper, that I was a sex worker. I think strippers would be more inclined to help if it was okay not to identify as a sex worker themselves.

Survey comment

Marie (South West, stripper) pointed out that once she got more involved in activism, she realised that ‘everyone has done so much’ in terms of forms of sex work or adult entertainment that her peers had been involved in, and she occasionally felt like she had very little experience which would sometimes make her uncomfortable although she stressed that she had never received any negative comments about it. Her slight discomfort as well as the survey comment above illustrate that the conflicts surrounding terminology and community affiliation outlined in 5.1 are prevalent within activist spaces too. Most participants felt welcome in the wider sex workers’ rights movement and firmly considered strippers to be a central part of it.

Importantly, Marie did not feel excluded from any organisations due to her lack of experience in full-service or online sex work but pointed out that she was particularly aware of the fact that most of her colleagues had worked in multiple sectors. She did, however, point out that she had experienced a lot of solidarity from full-service sex workers in her fight against an SEV ban in her city. It was therefore surprising to her that she could not mobilise OnlyFans creators or other online adult entertainers to support her campaign.

I feel frustrated with all these OnlyFans girls and cammers because they feel so unaffected by everything going on, they just don't get involved. And it is so frustrating because if it was the other way around, I know that the full-service community and the strippers, we'd get involved and we'd help out, and we don't get the reciprocity.

Marie (South West, stripper)

This comment illustrates the frustrations of many activist sex workers and adult entertainers whenever other members of the community who experience lower levels of stigma do not support their colleagues. Particularly people who create content on OnlyFans, which constitutes a relatively new income stream within the sex and adult entertainment industries, do not seem to be integrated into the sex workers' rights movement, and potentially also the wider sex working community which I will investigate in more detail in section 7.2.

5.2.3. The Sex Workers' Rights Movement as a Space for Collective Organising

Overall, the sex workers' rights movement was seen as a space where people who worked in different sectors could connect and form networks of solidarity and there were several accounts of participants educating themselves and each other more about other forms of sex work or adult entertainment when they joined an organising group. Valerie (Scotland, stripper and online) reported getting to know more full-service sex workers when she got involved in a writing project and understanding that 'all of us are equal' despite having worked in an environment that was particularly judgemental towards full-service sex work prior to her involvement in activism. Bella (South East, stripper and online) talked about how unionisation of her club actually led to a decrease in judgemental behaviour. She explained that because her colleagues and herself joined the union when they needed professional support, a stronger bond between them was created.

It's like, then you're part of that network so you don't judge each other.

Bella (South East, stripper and online)

So I learned about that a lot in [sex worker-led organisation], that like, all of us are equal. And you can actually be friends with whoever and like, it doesn't matter that someone is doing escort or something because they're just normal people.

Valerie (Scotland, stripper and online)

Jet (South West, stripper, previously full-service and online) agreed that, in her experience, organising and campaigning with people who worked in other sectors prevents stigma from

within the community to a certain degree because it creates more understanding about the issues that workers in adjacent sectors face and therefore results in more solidarity.

I think all of the groups are doing a lot to try and break it down and bring different sex workers together to work together. Because at the end of the day, we're all in industries that are kind of repressed in some way. And we all have similar demands of good work conditions and reasonable behaviour towards us. And those conditions might look different in different places, because our workplaces look different, but they're basically the same thing. And that's also the same with the union [which is] connecting with these other worker groups, because there are lots of similarities with other gig workers. Obviously, the risk for them is different. And the stigma is different. But the work condition demands are really similar. And also the skills around declaring your income and stuff are really similar, building solidarity across lots of different workers in different industries is really important, and breaking down stigma.

Jet (South West, stripper, previously full-service and online)

All participants who were active in the sex workers' rights movement stressed the potential that activist spaces had to unite the wider sex working community. Particularly the cases of Valerie and Bella, who reported having worked in particularly judgemental environments which changed when they got involved with the trade union or other sex worker-led organisations, illustrate the power of inclusive organising. There is a clear link with notions from Duggan (2002) and Faye (2021) in the context of queer communities. They call for radical, counter-hegemonic queer movements that tackle heteronormativity at its root by building an inclusive resistance movement rather than fighting for reforms that ultimately only benefit some members of the community.

5.3. The Whorearchy in the Context of British Strip Clubs

One concept that has already come up in this chapter and requires further clarification from the view of participants in order to conceptualise the position that strippers are taking inside the wider sex working community is the whorearchy. While existing theories of the whorearchy were discussed in 2.2.3, it also became clear that it is highly context-dependent and has not been investigated in the context of British strip clubs. Considering that the term has been used within sex worker spaces for at least a decade (McNeill, 2012), academic work has only evolved recently (Fuentes, 2022; Toubiana and Ruebottom, 2022; Bowen, 2021) although previous research has described hierarchies within the sex and adult entertainment industries without using the term (Brewis and Linstead, 2000; O'Connell

Davidson, 1998). However, multiple sex workers have written about it in depth (Sumner, 2020; Witt, 2020; Vixxx, 2019; Knox, 2014, see 2.2.3) stressing that the whorearchy is a hierarchy between different kinds of sex workers and adult entertainers with street-based sex workers at the bottom and the least sexual and stigmatised workers at the top which, depending on the definition, can mean digital content creators, phone sex operators, or suggestive cosplayers.

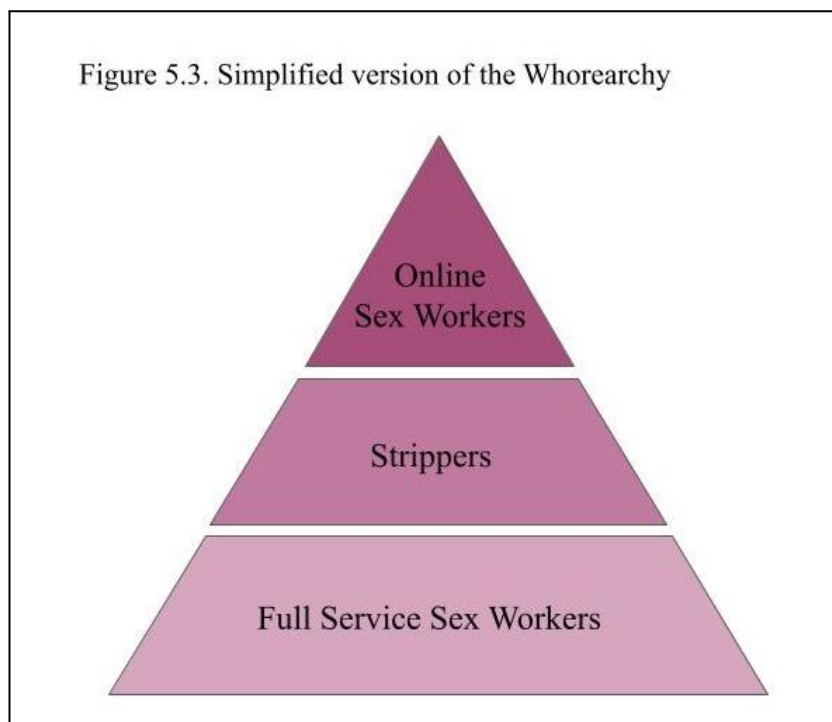
The majority of this study's participants had heard about the term whorearchy but had different understandings of its exact definition and what factors impacted on its order. There was a consensus among all participants, including those that had not heard the term before, that there was an informal stigma hierarchy between the different sectors of the wider sex and adult entertainment industries. One focus group participant stressed that the whorearchy was 'self defined, not written down and just kind of implied' in everyday interactions between different sex workers and adult entertainers. Importantly, the whorearchy is not solely reproduced by industry outsiders but specifically materialises in sex worker spaces and in interactions between different sex workers and adult entertainers. Participants therefore viewed it as a direct result of internalised whorephobia and misogyny. It was furthermore important to some participants to point out that similar hierarchical systems were also prevalent in other marginalised groups, a notion that has also been described by Deal (2003) for the disabled community, Copes et al. (2016) for drug-using populations, and Hines (2010) inside the queer community. All three of these examples were also picked up by sex workers who took part in this study and were or had been members of these marginalised communities as well.

5.3.1. The Order of the Whorearchy

All participants agreed that street-based full-service sex workers were most affected by stigma and placed lowest in the hierarchy. It is important to mention here that none of the people that took part in this research had ever worked outdoors and this research therefore relies on the publications of others, such as Sumner (2020) who writes about the impact of the whorearchy on street-based sex workers. There was little agreement of participants over the remaining order as well as the factors that determine it.

I started the investigation with a simplified version of the whorearchy (see Figure 5.3) based on Knox's (2014) definition which put online sex workers at the top, strippers in the middle, and full-service sex workers at the bottom. Judging from academic literature, written accounts of experiences, and anecdotal evidence from informal conversations with sex workers, this mirrored the level of societal stigmatisation that sex workers of different

sectors experienced. However, the whorearchy seems to be more than a ‘stigma hierarchy’ (Toubiana and Ruebottom, 2022: 517) due to the particularity of the whore stigma. During



the interviews, this was mostly confirmed but some participants pointed out that the BDSM market was not covered by any of the mentioned sectors although professional dominatrices were known to perpetuate the whorearchy by insisting that their services required more professional skills and were therefore a more serious job than full-service sex work (Lindemann, 2010). The lack of voices of dominatrices in this project is due to the focus on the intersections between stripping, full-service and online sex work. The specific conditions and dynamics in BDSM work therefore go beyond the scope of this research. One group that is part of this simplified version and sparked a lot of discussion were sugar babies, a job description that is controversial in and of itself. While some strippers mentioned that they considered receiving gifts or going shopping with their strip club clients without providing sexual services a part of sugaring, the majority of participants agreed that this line of work involved full-service sex work alongside a lot of emotional labour as it was essentially a disingenuous romantic relationship. The intensity of the emotional connection and the high level of deception prompted some participants to speak about sugar babies in a negative way.

It's so fucking dishonest, sugaring. Because essentially what you're doing is tricking someone into thinking that if they just chug enough money at you, buy enough pairs of shoes and do enough fancy dinners and just throw the fucking kitchen sink at it, you'll eventually gonna fuck them. And then at the last minute, you split, right, with

the money, you block them. And it's so fucking dishonest. So that's why, in my head, I see it as a sort of lower form of sex work.

Focus group participant, stripper

And sugar babies, they're basically getting the worst deal of the lot, you know. Because of all the emotional labour and not as much reward as they possibly think.

Focus group participant, full-service

However, it was also pointed out that sugaring is often painted in a very positive light by the media and wider society. Nelly (North West, stripper) furthermore reported that women who came to the strip club with their sugar daddies would look down on strippers. Mildred (London, stripper, online and full service) said that she was engaging in what she would now consider sugaring before she started other forms of sex work but did not consider herself a sex worker back then, indicating that sugar babies sit on the boundaries of sex work that were described earlier in the chapter.

The other group whose exact place in the whorearchy was heavily debated were OnlyFans content creators. Hamilton et al. (2022) argue that the platform received a lot of public acceptance due to celebrity participation and endorsement and high visibility in media and wider society as performers have to utilise other social media platforms to advertise their profiles due to the set up of OnlyFans. While all interviewees agreed that online content creators experienced less stigma and took less risk than in-person sex workers by keeping a physical barrier between themselves and their clients, and should therefore generally sit higher in the whorearchy, the discussions in all focus groups concluded that OnlyFans had become one of the most looked down upon sectors of the wider sex and adult entertainment industries. One of the reasons for this was that the subscription model led to a perception that OnlyFans creators were cheap because the price for a subscription was low in comparison to the hourly rate of most escorts or strippers. Although people were aware in theory that this was simply the business model, it was pointed out that clients and other members of the wider society viewed the work as less valuable. One focus group participant mentioned song lyrics that spoke in a derogatory way about OnlyFans creators for charging 'even less than an escort'. One possible explanation for the contrasting views is that the focus groups were conducted months after the interviews. There is a potential for a change in attitudes towards OnlyFans after the lockdowns had ended in Britain. Existing literature, however, tends to identify online work, including content creation on OnlyFans, as one of the least stigmatised forms of sex work or adult entertainment (Easterbrook-Smith, 2022; Hamilton et al., 2022; Berg, 2021). Either way, these discussions give indications that sex workers have identified a range of factors that impact on the order of the whorearchy.

5.3.2. Factors That Impact on the Whorearchy

Building on the working definition provided by Knox (2014, n.p.) which determines ‘intimacy of contact with clients and police’ as the two factors that the whorearchy is built upon, I asked participants if they agreed with this definition and whether they had anything to add to it. Everyone confirmed that the closeness of physical contact with clients had a significant, if not the largest, impact on where people sat in the hierarchy. Many participants discussed in depth the impact of physical proximity to clients on the wider perception of a certain form of sex work or adult entertainment to the wider public as well as to other members of the sex working community. With regards to police, most participants mentioned that the lower ranks of the whorearchy were often more criminalised through prostitution-related offences such as brothel-keeping and public soliciting. Some strippers shared experiences of raids and other forms of unwanted police contact in strip clubs that would not happen in the online market but were known to be prevalent in the full-service sex industry, particularly on criminalised premises. However, it was also pointed out that those who were not criminalised and sat higher in the hierarchy were able to report crimes committed against them to the police. Here, it is important to remember that Knox (2014) wrote about her experiences in the United States where all forms of full-service sex work are criminalised. What impacts on the order of the whorearchy is therefore the level of criminalisation and policing and does not include literally every interaction with police officers.

A number of other factors were mentioned that can help to develop a more comprehensive theory of what the whorearchy is built on. Participants’ ideas about components of the whorearchy were highly dependent on personal boundaries and individual experiences but three factors that are closely connected and were brought up frequently were income level, perceived desperation or happiness in sex work, and the level of risk of physical harm. Particularly within the full-service sex industry, the rates that sex workers charged had an impact on where they were placed within the whorearchy. Various participants, including those who had never worked in the full-service sex industry, reported having witnessed judgement towards those who charged ‘too little’ or engaged in survival sex work. As outlined in previous chapters, many full-service sex workers have written about this phenomenon in more detail (Sumner, 2020; Witt, 2020; Vixxx, 2019). With regards to strip clubs, Nelly (North West, stripper) added that once someone’s income was beyond a certain level, they were no longer judged over how they worked or how intimate they were with their clients. The income level of strippers was also known to impact heavily on club-internal hierarchies which will be discussed in 6.3.1. in more detail. Another factor that came up in discussion frequently was how ‘happy’ people were working inside the sex and adult

entertainment industries. Many participants pointed out that those who were perceived as desperate for money were looked down upon by both industry insiders and outsiders. People were aware that a large part of these perceptions came from advertising as clients were known to perpetuate this by only wanting to see sex workers who they thought loved their job and did not simply do it to pay bills. Nevertheless, the narratives created by adverts and clients created real hierarchies inside the community with those who were viewed as 'needing' sex work at the bottom. Importantly, income level and perceived happiness were only described to rank people *within* sectors, not beyond them. Strongly related to this was the level of risk of physical harm that people took doing sex work. Online sex work was perceived as safe due to the physical barrier and working in licensed strip clubs was also seen as relatively safe because of the managed environment that provided bouncers, CCTV and rooms for strippers to retire to.

As you have more contact with clients in more private settings, you're going to be exposed to more risk. Because at the end of the day, men are inherently risky. So the more of them you expose yourself to on an individual basis, you are exposing yourself to more risk.

Jet (South West, stripper, previously online and full-service)

Interestingly, one full-service sex worker said that she considered the visibility of putting uncensored photos of oneself on the internet and working in strip clubs an added risk that she did not take by deciding to work for an escort agency where she could ensure that only her actual paying clients knew about her involvement in the industries rather than anyone who entered a strip club or webcamming stream. In this way, she viewed her choice to work as an escort as the most controlled way of working in the sex or adult entertainment industries. However, most participants concluded that full-service sex work, particularly independent forms, were more risky due to the higher exposure to potential physical harm. As Jet's comment that 'men are inherently risky' illustrates, riskiness is directly related to physical proximity to clients.

Several comments were made about people taking risks that some participants viewed as unnecessary. Lana (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper), for example, wondered why street-based sex workers would not prefer working in a strip club or for an agency instead as she thought of it as much safer and potentially more profitable. One focus group participant commented on the risks of providing full-service sex work to clients from the strip club:

I think it is an extremely dangerous way of being a full service sex worker because girls who work outside of clubs, most of them have their safety procedures, their ID checks, they run their things through these apps where you check their details, you

know, there's a lot of safety measures while as in the club, a girl three vodkas deep just wandering off with some guy she's met. It's fucking dangerous as fuck. I don't know what the statistics are on what happens to those girls but I should imagine they run into a lot of problems. I mean I don't know but it's a very, very risky thing to do with your life.

Focus group participant, stripper

Because there is little research on strippers going home with clients, it is impossible to 'know what the statistics are' and whether the risk of physical assault is higher than it is for independent escorts. However, participants who had actually provided sexual services to strip club clients confirmed that they had put safety measures in place. Some added that they had been able to work more safely in this way than when they were working independently.

Other participants voiced their discomfort about commenting on what might be perceived as an unnecessary risk. In the focus group of people who had done both stripping and full-service work, participants did not view risk as a factor that impacted the whorearchy.

It just seems like a very harsh way to kick someone while they're down almost. Being like "I judge you for your work and the reason I judge you for your work is you put yourself at greater risk as I perceive it" - like, that's cold.

Focus group participant, stripper and full-service

They added that it was impossible to judge how risky someone's working practices actually were from the outside as many safety measures were hidden or happened in secret on purpose. Everyone was aware that many full-service sex workers had developed strategies to keep as safe as possible. Georgina (London, stripper and full service) pointed out that, ironically, judgemental behaviour based on the whorearchy had prevented her from taking certain safety measures because she wanted to hide her engagement in the full-service sex industry from her colleagues in the strip club. The ways in which stigma directly contributes to harm by adding the risk of having to keep full-service work a secret will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6. To conclude, the perceived level of risk that a sex worker or adult entertainer is taking also seems to contribute to sector-internal whorearchies.

5.3.3. The Whorearchy as an Analytical Tool

The impact that perceptions of desperation, riskiness and income have on participants' views and opinions of the work in other sectors shows that class hierarchies are also reproduced within the sex working community. Mechanisms of oppression, including racism (Fuentes, 2022; Jones, 2015; Brooks, 2010) and xenophobia (Bowen, 2021; Connelly and ECP, 2021;

Mai, 2018), shape the interactions between members of the sex working community and result in various formal and informal social hierarchies. Furthermore, factors such as socioeconomic status, race, nationality and migration status, age, (dis)ability, education level, and body type impact which sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries are accessible for people. Hence, hierarchies within the sex working community are also shaped by forms of oppression that have not been centred in this chapter so far. While several scholars have incorporated these wider social hierarchies into their definition of the whorearchy (Callander et al., 2022; Bowen, 2021), I argue that it is more useful to view the whorearchy as an analytical tool that describes one specific hierarchy that is based on the factors outlined in this chapter: I conclude that the primary factors which determine the order of sectors within the whorearchy are physical proximity to clients and grade of criminalisation, while hourly income, level of physical safety, and perceived desperation as secondary factors establish hierarchies *within* sectors. By using the term to describe one hierarchy that is a direct result of the whore stigma (Pheterson, 1996) and unique to the sex working community, its intersections with other forms of oppression can be analysed more effectively.

Crucially, both scholars (Fuentes, 2022; Toubiana and Ruebottom, 2022; Bowen, 2021) and sex workers (Sumner, 2020; Witt, 2020; Vixxx, 2019; Knox, 2014) as well as all participants of this study agreed that overall, the whorearchy prevents sex workers and adult entertainers from showing solidarity towards one another, fight stigmatisation, and access peer support. Despite the minutiae of its exact order remaining controversial, the existence of the whorearchy and its contribution to the whore stigma are uncontested.

5.3.4. Exploiting the Whorearchy

So far this chapter has shown that stripping is generally less stigmatised than full-service sex work. This prompted Mildred (London, stripper, online and full-service) to come out to her parents about working in a strip club but she did not want them to know that she provided sexual services as well because she feared that they would not understand why she would do so and react negatively. One focus group participant even mentioned a friend who only worked in the full-service industry but still decided to tell her parents that she was a stripper instead. This was a convenient solution for her to explain why she had large amounts of cash and was able to afford living in central London without having to deal with her parents' reaction to her engagement in the full-service sex industry. Marie (South West, stripper) who had worked on numerous public campaigns with significant media attention to prevent strip clubs from closing reported that she would not dare to publicly show her face and be open about being a stripper as part of her activism if she had to deal with the level of stigma that

full-service sex workers experience. She indicated that many of the interviews and statements she had given to journalists in order to raise awareness for the difficult situations that licensing laws put her and her colleagues in, would not have been possible if she was a full-service sex worker. In this way, she used the privileges that sitting higher in the whorearchy gave her to advocate for strippers' rights. Furthermore, a number of participants pointed out that they could exploit the different levels of stigmatisation for their benefit.

I don't think it's a positive thing but I can appreciate people using it to their advantage in the same way that we use the patriarchy and exploit that to our advantage.

Violet (North East, stripper and full-service, previously online)

Mildred (London, stripper, online and full-service) added that when speaking to police, she would make sure to present as a stripper or sugar baby because she expected a more positive reaction about those forms of sex work from them. Similar strategies were mentioned with regards to mortgages and taxes. This shows that some strippers, including those who also worked in the full-service industry, used the whorearchy to reduce the impact of the whore stigma from state authorities or banks. Hence, there is a perception of some immediate advantages of the whorearchy for some sex workers and adult entertainers, particularly those who are located towards the top or can pass as someone who does, in the same way that Pheterson (1996) describes the perception of many non-sex working women that distancing themselves from sex workers is beneficial. However, because ultimately the whore stigma affects all sex workers and all women, the existence of the whorearchy negatively impacts on all members of the sex working community. Nevertheless, some sex workers and adult entertainers have found ways to successfully exploit its existence in the short run.

5.3.5. The Hipsterfication of Sex Work

One phenomenon that was described particularly by those who were involved in some form of sex workers' rights activism was that, at least in certain social circles, identifying as a sex worker presents social capital and was considered 'cool'. This meant that many people were using the term to describe themselves without an acknowledgement of the different levels of stigmatisation. Furthermore, some participants talked about their experience of people wanting to seem more marginalised than they were and increasing their identification with the sex worker community for that reason. One focus group participant who had been active in the movement for over a decade even stressed that she knew people who were only doing sex work to have access to a community that they otherwise would not have access to.

P1: I also think that it's really important to say that the label of sex worker has been quite hipsterfied over the last few years and I know for a fact that there are people that sex work who do it purely because they want access to a community they would not have access to otherwise [...] and it's really hard to conceptualise [the whorearchy] when even in the very small bracket of what I would consider actual sex work, there's people that I don't like calling sex workers because I'm like 'I don't like that I have to share my space with you when I know you've got a well paying job in the city and you're only doing this because you wanna tell people you're marginalised'

P2: Do you feel like that is something they wanna tap into because they're desperate to identify with something?

P1: Yeah definitely.

P2: Is it about being part of a community?

P1: I mean I don't know what their intentions are, I just don't know. But I know that there's people that see sex work as a particularly oppressed community and they want in

Focus group, full-service

While these were extreme cases, another focus group participant confirmed that she knew people who stayed in sex work part-time in order not to lose their access to sex worker spaces. This can create tensions inside the community as active, full-service sex workers have more reason to protect their spaces from outsiders and to make sure that the conversation is led by those who are most affected by sex worker stigma. This topic was particularly important to the focus group that included only full-service sex workers. The increased interest of industry outsiders to enter these spaces was referred to as hipsterfication by one focus group participant who pointed out that particularly when speaking about unity inside the wider community, these trends needed to be taken into account. She explained that therefore it was difficult for her to accept strippers and online sex workers into her spaces because she had grown to be wary of whom she welcomed. Some participants mentioned that they were aware of people who had never worked in the industry joining meetings that were only for sex workers. On social media, they were referred to as 'fakes', indicating that this is a common issue for organisers of sex worker only spaces. Due to the interest of industry outsiders such as journalists and parts of the leftist movement, there have always been strict vetting procedures in place to ensure that non-sex workers are unable to access information that is crucial for sex workers' survival and should not be shared publicly, such as reports about dangerous clients or third parties.

While everyone completely understood the need for active, full-service sex workers to have spaces that are closed to everyone else, some participants indicated how this complicated the conceptualisation of the whorearchy as well as definitions around which jobs can and should be described as sex work. Marie (South West, stripper) mentioned that she occasionally felt like she should have more experiences in other sectors of the wider sex industry like many of the people she organised with. In various interviews as well as two focus groups, participants described that they were reverse-perpetuating the whorearchy. Casey (South East, stripper and online), for example, admitted that she had judged some OnlyFans creators who referred to themselves as sex workers as they had not experienced the hardships that she had as a stripper.

I think for a while I did sort of look down on people that weren't proper sex workers [before the pandemic] or what I had in my head as "proper sex work". I was like "we're not the same" even though I had an OnlyFans on the side, that wasn't my job, I was a stripper. I was a proper sex worker. And I would definitely look down ironically on people that were above technically in this hierarchy system.

Casey (South East, stripper and online)

At the same time, some participants identified a lack of solidarity with lower ranks of the whorearchy. As mentioned above, Marie (South West, stripper) tried in vain to get members of a group of OnlyFans creators to support campaigns to save strip clubs. In contrast, she also reported that few of her colleagues from the strip club were interested in stopping propositions for the Nordic Model that went through parliament at the time of the interview. Other people also talked about their frustration if members of the wider community did not join the sex workers' rights movement or supported other sex workers individually but still demanded access to the resources and, in some cases, social capital that being part of the community provided them with. With regards to sex worker meetings and groups, some people called out people who worked in relatively destigmatised sectors, such as stripping and online work, and dominated the spaces that were designed for full-service sex workers. One focus group participant reported that one of her friends who was a sugar baby attending a meet-up for full-service sex workers and feeling uncomfortable with taking up space that she thought should be reserved for the street-based sex workers she met there.

One possible way of interpreting these experiences and views is that due to the hipsterfication of sex work, sex workers have had to develop mechanisms to gatekeep their community spaces which, in some situations, leads to further separation of the different sectors of the wider industry. Due to the high level of politicisation and exotification of the lives of sex workers, the community has become more wary of intruders and 'fakes',

resulting in some people pressing for less inclusion of those who sit higher in the whorearchy and experience less stigma. This can also be seen in the complexities of the sex worker terminology that was outlined earlier in the chapter.

5.4. Conclusion: A Strong Cross-Sectoral Community with Hierarchies

This chapter provided insights into some of the concepts that are required for any further analysis of the intersections of stripping with other sectors of the wider sex and adult entertainment industries, particularly the whorearchy and the boundaries of the sex working community. Although some members of the sex working community would contest the inclusion of strippers, I conclude that for the analytical usefulness of concepts like the whorearchy, it is crucial to view strippers as members of the wider sex working community regardless of differences in the nature of work. This chapter furthermore illustrates the presence of a strong cross-sectoral community of sex workers and adult entertainers. Political unity within the sex workers' rights movement, which firmly includes strippers, is strategically useful to challenge criminalisation, policing, and stigmatisation of all sex workers and adult entertainers.

The whorearchy is an undefined, but well-known concept that is in practice often mixed up with other forms of oppression and tends to change depending on personal boundaries and experiences. Notwithstanding the lack of consensus about the exact order, it is useful to look at it as a ranking system *between* different sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries that is based primarily on physical proximity to clients and level of criminalisation. Secondary factors, namely income level, riskiness, and perceived desperation, materialise the whorearchy *within* sectors. By spelling out the basis of the whorearchy, it can be called out alongside the deeply racist, misogynistic, queerphobic, and classist setup of the sex and adult entertainment industries and zoom in on its intersections rather than conflating them. Because the whore stigma is fundamentally based on racism, misogyny, classism, and heteronormativity (Pheterson, 1996), the whorearchy is also ultimately a product of these forms of oppression. Nevertheless, for further analysis of sex working communities, it is most useful to look at the whorearchy as an analytical tool that is derived directly from the whore stigma.

It is furthermore clear that the whore stigma highly impacts how sex workers and adult entertainers feel about each other and who they trust. This does not only impact their relationships to industry outsiders, including partners (see 6.1.2), parents (see 5.3.4), and state authorities (see 5.3.4), but also with their peers. The whorearchy has been identified as a result of internalised stigma since members of the higher ranked sectors use it to separate

themselves from those who experience more stigmatisation. In the following chapter, I will turn to the routines inside British strip clubs and focus on the ways in which stigma and precarity impact on the working lives of strippers on a daily basis.

6. The Intersection of Stripping and Full-Service Sex Work

After the previous chapter put a focus on theoretical concepts and the sex working community as a whole, this chapter is concentrated on what strippers actually do on a daily basis in order to maximise income in an increasingly precarious industry. Building on the conceptualisation of the whorearchy, I will explore how it is materialised in clubs and what the consequences are that result from it. Crucially for this, there is a significant crossover between the different sectors of the wider sex and adult entertainment industries. While many participants spoke about the normalisation of connecting stripping with online sex work, particularly with content creation on OnlyFans or similar subscription apps, there is also a large number of strippers who are currently or have previously been involved in full-service sex work. It is therefore unsurprising that some strippers have been successful at linking up their work in those two sectors and are providing sexual services to strip club clients and vice versa. However, this chapter argues that due to the setup of strip clubs and the legal frameworks of both the stripping and the full-service sex industry, this has become increasingly difficult and often impossible. Experiences of participants show judgemental behaviour from management, customers and between dancers, particularly once somebody is known to provide full-service sex work alongside stripping. This can negatively affect those who offer both lap dances and sexual services and even lead to severe safety issues as they have to keep their full-service work hidden from their colleagues.

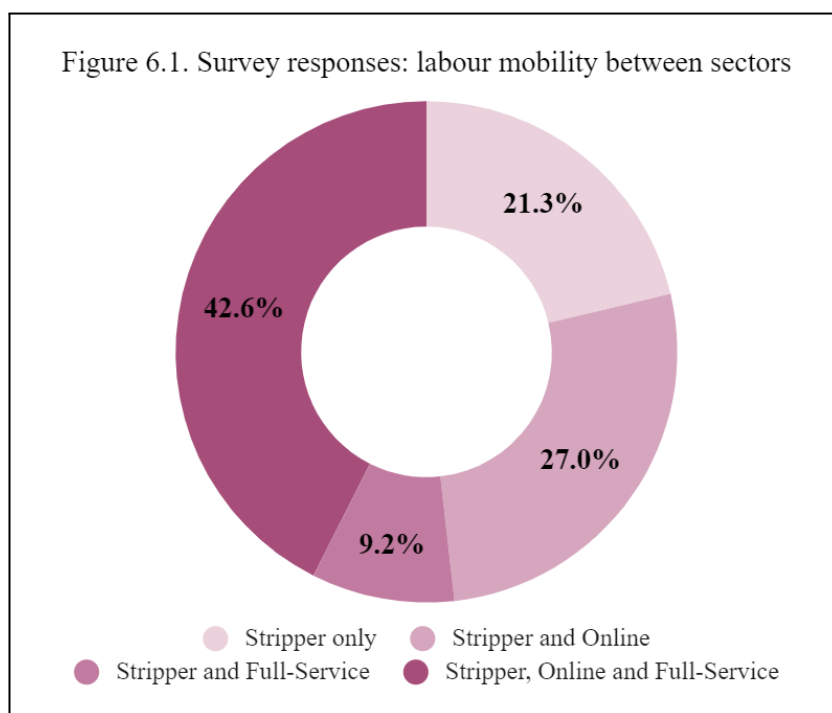
The experiences and views that participants have outlined in the survey, interviews and focus groups indicate that strip club-internal judgement of full-service sex workers is driven primarily by the competitive nature of stripping as well as the restrictive licensing regime in Britain. Based on participants' comments about the general atmosphere in their clubs, I will show that although the whorearchy is present in many sex worker spaces to a certain degree, participants who had worked in multiple sectors stressed that it is most visible inside strip clubs. After a brief contextualisation of how the crossover between the two sectors commonly takes place, this chapter therefore focuses on the pressure that the precarious working conditions create for strippers and how this results in club-internal stigmatisation of some dancers by others. Next, this chapter will examine the policing of Sexual Entertainment Venues (SEVs) and its role as an additional driver of precarity in the sector. I argue that a tightening and stricter enforcement of the regulation of performances in strip clubs has increased stigmatisation of (current and former) full-service sex workers inside clubs and further driven precarity in the sector. Finally, this chapter shows that the relationship between precarity and stigma in the stripping industry is reciprocal in nature, resulting in a continuous cycle which drives the stripping industry into a downward spiral.

6.1. Crossovers Between Stripping, Full-Service, and Online Sex Work

Existing literature has provided evidence that many sex workers and adult entertainers work in various sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries concurrently (see 3.4.4). Most research is focused on different avenues inside the full-service sex industry, showing that it is common for full-service workers to both work independently as escorts or on the street and in managed premises such as brothels, parlours or sex clubs (see Brouwers, 2022; Abel and Fitzgerald, 2012). Sanders et al. (2018) furthermore report that many in-person sex workers have also started an online presence that colludes with their offline business. This practice has naturally increased during the Covid-19 pandemic as many sex workers were unable to work in person during lockdown (Sanchez, 2022; Brouwers and Herrmann, 2020). Only 4.2% of strippers in Hardy and Sanders' (2014) sample had engaged in sexual services and 2.8% in pornography but the authors stress that 'this may be due to low reporting or a need to conceal other activities' (2014: 113). Nevertheless, the intersection between stripping and full-service sex work and especially the progression from one to the other has gained a lot of interest from researchers and activists, particularly those who aim to contribute to the fight to abolish the full-service sex industry (see Liles et al, 2022; Bindel, 2004) and other studies of the stripping industry show higher percentages of crossover. Liles et al. (2022), who interviewed 123 dancers in San Diego County in 2009, reported that 23.6% of their sample had engaged in full-service sex work. Although the majority of the literature focuses on full-service sex workers who also work in other sectors rather than centring strippers, the stripping industry is mentioned as of the income streams of many workers alongside online work, pornography, professional domination and other forms of sex work or adult entertainment (see Brouwers, 2022; Levitt, 2022; Toubiana and Ruebottom, 2022; Hester et al., 2019).

Although a certain crossover between sectors is evident in existing literature, the degree to which this study's participants utilised multiple income streams is exceptionally high with only 21.3% of survey respondents having only worked as strippers while just over half reported that they had offered in-person sexual services, nearly 70% worked in the online market, and 42.6% had experience in all three sectors. Figure 6.1 illustrates the distribution between different sectors. Crucially, the questions surrounding experience in the full-service and online industries included single instances ('Have you ever...?'), hence it is likely that not all respondents who have provided full-service or online services were doing so on a regular basis. Instead, some respondents may be comfortable providing sexual services instantaneously to some of their regular or favourite clients but would not consider themselves to be working in the full-service sex industry. The majority of interview and focus group participants had also earned money in other sectors and some reported having

worked for professional porn companies or in the fetish markets. Multiple participants reported having tried out other sectors but realised that they were not suitable for them for various reasons.



Although the potential for low reporting and inclusion of single instances may have skewed the results slightly, the degree of labour mobility (Alberti, 2014) between sectors in this study’s sample is exceptionally high which indicates that the increasingly precarious working conditions and earning potentials in the British stripping industry as well as the Covid-19 pandemic created the need for more strippers to engage in other forms of sex work or adult entertainment to make ends meet. In accordance with Levitt (2022), who found similar trends in her study of US-based dominatrices, I argue that the need for strippers to create multiple income streams is reflective of the wider labour markets moving towards increasingly flexible jobs that cannot provide a living wage by themselves, prompting more people to hold multiple jobs at the same time (Jones, 2021).

6.1.1. The ‘Debaucherous Slippery Slope’

Several interview and focus group participants had identified a public perception that stripping led to full-service sex work, a phenomenon that one focus group participant jokingly called the ‘Debaucherous Slippery Slope’. Others referred to stripping as the ‘gateway drug’ to other forms of erotic or sexual(ised) work and especially to full-service. While this was indeed the case for a small number of participants, the majority did not make that journey. However, many strippers reported starting online work after having been

introduced to it in the club. While this effect was evidently exacerbated by the need to replace stripping income during the national lockdowns (Hackett and Murphy, 2020), some mentioned having started creating content on OnlyFans or similar subscription sites even before the pandemic started because that was the norm in their club. By getting strip club clients to sign up to their OnlyFans, strippers were able to inform them about the days on which they worked in the club while also getting them to pay a monthly subscription fee and utilising this as an additional income stream. With regard to pandemic responses, which will be the focus of chapter 7, other strippers, some of which had already provided full-service sex work occasionally prior to the lockdown, reported going into the full-service industry full time when their strip clubs closed.

The high levels of crossover reported in the survey made sense to all participants, even those who had only ever worked in one sector. April (Scotland, stripper and online) pointed out that certain skills and body confidence are needed in all sectors of the wider sex industries as well as in adult entertainment and that therefore working in one often leads to working in another. One focus group participant stressed that ‘there’s a certain type of person who’s drawn to sex work’ and that those were likely to ‘kind of dip in and out of different sex works’. Rosie (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper, online and full-service) explained that ‘a lot of the times you have to [engage in multiple forms of sex work] to make ends meet’, which is a notion that is increasingly common in various parts of the gig economy (Jones, 2021). Rosie stressed that although she fully respected other workers’ decisions, she did not really understand why not everybody who worked anywhere in the wider sex and adult entertainment industries provided multiple different services at the same time as this had been the most logical and obvious step for her once she started stripping. She was wondering if some strippers were avoiding doing full-service sex work because of internalised stigma but stressed that she was also aware of different personal boundaries.

It’s like, the smell of them and all that stuff, that’s gross (laughs). Being near them is gross so you might as well do the full thing and get all the money.

Rosie (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper, online and full-service)

I mean, everything’s kind of everything to me. I’m like, if I find clients, I find clients, that’s great. But most of the people I find for full-service are from [advertising platform], but also I’d probably invite people from there to the club, and then like, take them somewhere else as well. So like, everything’s everything, you know.

Mildred (London, stripper, online and full-service)

To Rosie and Mildred, the sex and adult entertainment industries provided them with one pool of clients who could spend money on various different services. Due to the high income uncertainty of each individual sector, Rosie and Mildred combined them in order to make ends meet, resembling notions of Jones (2021: 59) of the contemporary labour market in general where some workers have to chase gigs by offering services on multiple platforms and in personal networks: ‘A new polarization beckons – and is perhaps already here – between those with a single stable career and those forced to walk dogs in the morning, clear houses in the afternoon and act as a hired friend in the evening, before searching for online tasks at night.’ While Rosie and Mildred did not mention any jobs outside of sex work or adult entertainment, others reported having picked up ‘day jobs’, often precarious minimum wage jobs to earn enough money to get by during times when income from sex work or adult entertainment is particularly low. Others mentioned that they had professional careers in industries including acting, modelling, and PR work, that they partly funded or subsidised through sex work and adult entertainment. Hardy and Sanders (2014) refer to these dancers as ‘strategists’ who work in strip clubs strategically for a number of years to kickstart other careers.

Clients were known to consume different types of sex work and adult entertainment as well and often they combined their visits of various different sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries. In the focus group of full-service sex workers, one participant mentioned that when she worked in a brothel, numerous of her clients had spent the night at a strip club and decided to see her afterwards:

God knows how many times I made the joke that I owe these women commission. You know, the guys go there and get worked up and then, you know. And I’m not saying that every guy who visits a strip club then goes and actually sees a full-service sex worker but yeah, that was very normal.

Focus group participant, full-service

Another participant mentioned that some of her colleagues would pick up clients in front of Stringfellows in Soho around the time when they knew that the club would close for the night. As mentioned earlier, many strippers furthermore managed to get their clients to subscribe to their OnlyFans or watch their webcam streams, either during or, in some cases, even before the Covid-19 pandemic. Particularly OnlyFans, Snapchat and Telegram groups were used as a means to stay in touch with regulars and lure them back into the strip club. In some clubs, this was encouraged by management while others had strict rules to prohibit dancers from passing out any information about their online presence to strip club clients.

That boundaries are inherently personal and different for everyone, as Rosie had mentioned, was furthermore evidenced by the fact that participants disagreed on which sectors were particularly suited for crossover. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this was highly dependent on the sectors in which they worked themselves. Georgina (London, stripper and full-service) stressed that for her it made sense to work in the strip club and as an independent escort at the same time while online work added a set of risks with regards to compromising her anonymity that she was not comfortable taking. With regards to the nature of work, all forms of in-person sex work or adult entertainment were similar to her while online work constituted 'a totally different avenue' because there was a physical barrier between the client and the provider. However, she was aware that many of her colleagues in the club also created content on OnlyFans or other online subscription sites. Most participants who had not done any full-service sex work but sold content online alongside stripping felt differently. The focus group that included only strippers who had never offered full-service quickly came to a consensus that online work and stripping went well together while full-service sex work was something entirely different. Although this was not factored in during recruitment, all participants of this particular focus group ended up having also worked on either webcamming sites or on OnlyFans during the pandemic and one participant was still webcamming alongside her job at the strip club. She argued that the skills needed for various forms of adult entertainment translated across sectors, while direct, full-service sex work required compromising one's 'bodily integrity' which constituted a physical boundary that she was not comfortable crossing. In the experiences of all the participants of that focus group, many adult entertainers circled between different forms of indirect sex work while full-service sex workers were a mostly separate group that tended to stick with that one sector. This stands in stark contrast to the experiences that Georgina described and illustrates the fact that the people who are employed in different sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries have contrasting views of the nature of the work in those sectors. It also shows that many strippers are not always aware of their colleagues' engagement in other sectors of the industries, particularly in full-service sex work. Although this was not the focus of this research project, there is also evidence for a crossover between the online and the full-service sex industry by people who do not work in strip clubs at all (Sanders et al., 2018). Jet (South West, stripper, previously full-service and online), for example, stressed that for her it was easy to combine webcamming and full-service sex work but she quit working in those sectors when she started stripping because of the need to hide engagement in other sectors from management and colleagues. This need will be described in more detail in section 6.2.3.

6.1.2. Is the Debaucherous Slippery Slope a One-Way Street?

Another question that prompted contrasting responses depending on participants' engagement in different sectors was whether strippers who had gone into the full-service sex industry would commonly return to the strip club. Many strippers who did not do full-service sex work but had watched some of their colleagues go into full-service, reported that, in their experience, they rarely came back to stripping. In the focus group of only strippers, participants came to the conclusion that once somebody became a full-service sex worker, they always stayed one and therefore did not want to work in the strip club anymore. The focus group of full-service sex workers who had not worked in stripping agreed with this assumption. Participants believed that those who had slid down the 'Debaucherous Slippery Slope' and ended up working in the full-service sex industry would not want to return to the strip club as working there involved more effort for less money. Some of the people that had worked in both agreed that stripping tended to be more demanding and strenuous than full-service sex work, that the clubs would take a large cut of the profit, and that stripping was frequently unprofitable. However, it was definitely not the case that all strippers who had provided full-service then avoided working in the stripping industry altogether.

As mentioned above, multiple interview participants worked in both sectors alongside each other. Some kept them separate while others were able to combine the two. Furthermore, Violet (North East, stripping and full-service, previously online) as well as one focus group participant who had started working for an escort agency during the pandemic wanted to go back to stripping once their clubs re-opened while also continuing their work with the agency. There were also several cases of people who solely worked in the stripping industry after having offered full-service as stripping was a more suitable form of work for them at that time. Jet (South West, stripping, previously online and full-service) had stopped offering full-service sex work after starting a relationship with someone who was worried about the potential risks she was taking in the full-service industry. Stripping was a compromise that they could both agree on. Jet had struggled with this ultimatum, as she called it, initially but ultimately understood the concerns of her partner and ended up agreeing to it. She stressed that they had spoken about it in depth and she was now convinced that her partner did not ask her to stop out of judgement or disgust for full-service sex workers but because they were worried that she would suffer physical violence which is why working in a relatively safe environment such as a strip club did not pose an issue. Rosie (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper, online and full-service) said that she offered sexual services beyond lap dancing usually but stopped whenever she was in a monogamous relationship, a practice that was mentioned in various survey comments as well. Stripping and, in Rosie's case, online sex work, however, was not viewed as cheating because there was no physical contact with the

client. Interestingly, Casey (South East, stripper and online) explained that although her partner had never asked her to stop working, she found it more difficult to talk to clients online and pretend to have feelings for them while she was also in a genuine relationship.

Previous research shows that the views of strippers' partners on their work can have a strong impact on their decision to leave the industry. Both Colosi (2010) and Hardy and Sanders (2014) describe several cases of strippers quitting their jobs because their partners asked them to, although they would have preferred to continue working in the club. April (Scotland, stripper and online) indicated that her decision to move away from stripping was influenced by her partner's struggles to accept her job although he never explicitly asked her to stop. What Jet's and Rosie's experiences show, however, is that stripping has the potential to act as a compromise or substitute for full-service sex work in these situations and that the 'Debaucherous Slippery Slope' cannot be viewed as a one-way street.

6.1.3. Stripping as a Dying Industry

A large number of study participants stressed that working in other sectors became increasingly necessary for many because, at least in the context of Britain, the stripping industry as it is known today is dying. Iris (North West, stripper), who had been working in strip clubs on and off for sixteen years, said that in her experience, there was significantly less personal crossover between different forms of sex work and adult entertainment when she first started while it was somewhat normalised now. This further explains the exceptionally high levels of crossover of this study's participants in comparison to existing research. Previous studies about Scotland (Lister, 2012) as well as England and Wales (Hardy and Sanders, 2014) have confirmed that working in strip clubs is significantly less lucrative than it used to be and that many strippers are concerned about the future of their club. Derived from fieldwork conducted a decade ago, Hardy and Sanders (2014: 7) stress that the stripping industry 'appears to have peaked and may now be in decline', indicating that the downwards trend of the industry has been going on for at least ten years. During the interviews, most of which were conducted while Britain was still in lockdown, several participants said that they were not sure if their club would ever be able to reopen as it had already struggled before the pandemic.

I don't think they'll open again, no. There used to be seven lap dancing clubs in [city] and there's now four. One big one and three very, very small ones. And they're all having to pay out of their own pocket to keep these clubs open. [City] is small, it doesn't need four strip clubs. I don't think all of them will survive this.

April (Scotland, stripper and online)

However, participants did not agree on the driving factors behind this deterioration of the industry. While Georgina (London, stripper and full-service) held the wide availability of online pornography responsible, the participants of the focus group of only strippers blamed sex workers who had offered sexual services to strip club clients. They argued that due to illegal solicitation in strip clubs, the licensing rules had become increasingly strict which led to the decrease in strip club patrons. The realities of full-service sex work being provided *inside* strip clubs and potential impacts on policies will be analysed in more detail in section 6.2 and the role that the licensing regime plays in the decrease of strip clubs in section 6.4. Regardless of the driving factors behind the dying of the industry, interviews and focus groups show that the fact that income potential is decreasing in stripping results in an intensification of trends of strippers entering other sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries alongside their work in the club rather than leaving the industries altogether. However, this puts many strippers into precarious positions with multiple jobs but low income certainty which exemplifies trends in the wider gig economy (Jones, 2021). In the case of strippers, this means that some are forced to break the law by combining sectors in ways that are unlawful or develop increasingly creative forms of earning an income, both online and in person.

Although the crossover between sectors has increased in recent years, sex workers have very diverse perceptions of the circumstances of their colleagues who work in slightly different ways. It has become clear that a large number of sex workers and adult entertainers switch between sectors or work in several simultaneously and that this is generally known in the wider sex working community. However, many keep quiet about their engagement in particular sectors, especially in the full-service sex industry, meaning that many strippers are unaware of their colleagues' work arrangements outside of the club. This secrecy about full-service sex work in strip clubs has devastating consequences for the safety of workers and will be looked at in the following section.

6.2. Linking Stripping and Full-Service Sex Work

In the interviews and focus groups, it quickly became clear that working in a strip club provides frequent opportunities to provide full-service sex work as many strip club clients are interested in paying strippers for additional services, either on strip club premises or in a hotel room or private residence after the end of the stripper's shift. However, there was no evidence in this study for sexual services actually happening *inside* British strip clubs in recent years as managers make sure to enforce no-contact rules that are written in the licensing legislation. Although it is difficult to pin down an exact date, there was a general feeling amongst participants that there was a 'crackdown on clubs' (Focus group participant,

stripper) after around 2016/17 with councils investigating clubs and eliminating the opportunity to provide anything beyond no-contact lap dances. This did not only include actual sexual services, such as oral sex or manual stimulation, but also slightly more intimate dances, hugs, or kisses on the cheek. The crackdown on these forms of contact which are occasionally referred to as ‘extras’ were overwhelmingly described by participants as a hindrance for strippers to work in the ways that they felt comfortable and safe.

6.2.1. What Are ‘Extras’?

Because laws, rules, and norms in the stripping industry vary between countries and have changed significantly over the years, it can be challenging to find suitable language to describe common practices in strip clubs that translates across different contexts. I chose the term ‘extras’, which I had in the past experienced to be a solely descriptive term that can also be found in some of the literature (Toubiana and Ruebottom, 2022; Hardy and Sanders, 2014), in order to introduce conversations about sexual services beyond lap dancing inside strip clubs. However, it quickly became clear that in the contemporary British context, the word ‘extras’ invokes strong, often emotional responses, demonstrating the need for a robust definition. Hardy and Sanders (2014: 82) define ‘extras’ as ‘breaking rules that were in place relating to touch and the degree of sexual contact that dancers could have with clients’. The vast majority of survey respondents considered anything beyond no-contact lap dances an ‘extra’ but there was some disagreement on touching and kissing. Some survey respondents as well as interviewees commented that they viewed ‘extras’ as everything that they were both comfortable with and legally allowed to provide for an additional fee, such as taking their shoes off during a lap dance, talking dirty, or verbally dominating a customer. They would not use the term to refer to anything that was against club rules or even the law. Others thought of ‘extras’ as the things that were not allowed in the club, i.e. anything that involved physical touch, or the services they were personally uncomfortable to offer. Because of the lack of a clear definition, a discussion evolved in the focus group of strippers around the boundaries of the term with one participant asking where exactly ‘a little touching’ ended and ‘extras’ started. She furthermore questioned the use of the term as she used to sell class A drugs to her customers in the club in order to persuade them to extend their time in private rooms which is evidently as illegal as soliciting for sexual services but had never been considered an ‘extra’, indicating that for her the term had little to do with what was legally prohibited and more with the intimacy of contact. It was furthermore pointed out by several interview and focus group participants that ‘extras’ was terminology that was only used by customers who wanted to find out whether a stripper was offering anything that her colleagues might not offer. A number of participants voiced their

discomfort and frustration about many customers' persistence to investigate and uncover who might be willing to provide sexual services. Some added that customers were known to lie about having already received offers for 'extras' in order to convince other strippers to offer them too. Lana (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper), for example, explained that customers would often tell her that one of her colleagues had promised free sexual favours if they booked a long private dance when she knew for a fact that this was impossible to offer in her club.

While there were different accounts of practices in other countries, all participants agreed that performing sexual acts inside the walls of a licensed strip club was basically impossible in Britain now. Some mentioned that, in many clubs, there used to be loopholes that managers knowingly kept open for strippers to bend the rules of the clubs' licences but this was no longer possible due to stricter enforcement of licensing conditions that started around 2016/17. The impact of the British licensing regime on the performances of strippers is subject of section 6.4 of this chapter and will be outlined in more detail there. Suffice to say, the implications of licensing conditions mean that, currently, it is impossible for strippers to provide any services beyond a no-contact lap dance inside strip clubs although, in a minority of clubs, this used to be common practice in the past.

The other element of full-service sex work in relation to strip clubs that participants mentioned is strippers meeting customers after the end of their shift to provide sexual services elsewhere or arranging to meet up at a different time. Participants reported that, in recent years, this had become less common because the majority of clubs made an effort to prevent this from happening through high levels of control which will be discussed more in 6.3. Yet, there were a few participants who were successful at turning strip club customers into full-service clients and vice versa in a similar way that some strippers managed to get their customers to subscribe to their OnlyFans. There were different ways in which this form of seeing customers outside of the strip club setting happened. While the majority of people who confirmed that they had done this before had agreed to do classic escort bookings which included providing sexual services and receiving cash for it, others reported meeting strip club clients for fun or in order to go shopping with them which more resembles what is often referred to as sugaring arrangements. Nelly (North West, stripper) occasionally met up with her regular strip club clients to go out for a drink or meal and get paid for that without providing any sexual services. Some furthermore mentioned that in some clubs it was common to agree to a meeting after the shift in order to persuade the customer to spend more money in the club but giving out fake numbers or simply not showing up to the agreed location. Some participants also mentioned seeing clients outside of the club setting without charging for the time spent together. Casey (South East, stripper and online) occasionally met

up with customers whose company she enjoyed so that they would buy her lingerie or take her out for food but she usually did not get paid. Iris (North West, stripper) mentioned that she had in the past gone home with customers who she found attractive without expecting them to pay. She also mentioned having dated people who she had met at work. There were several other accounts of strippers starting relationships with clients, either with a sugaring arrangement in mind or because they genuinely fell in love.

Most commonly, however, the phrase ‘going home with a customer’ included the direct provision of sexual services in exchange for money. Similarly to sexual services inside strip clubs, participants reported that this happened significantly less often or at least less visibly as many managers stopped tolerating any form of crossover of the two industry sectors, regardless of whether strippers were themselves comfortable with it. Considering the aforementioned growing need to work in multiple sectors alongside each other due to the downward spiral of the stripping industry, it is unintuitive that ‘providing extras’ or ‘going home with a customer’ seems to be less visible in strip clubs. It indicates that the legal framework seeks to keep the different sectors separate from one another (see 6.4), forcing strippers who also work in other sectors to build up separate client bases, hence increasing the workload in all of these jobs without providing income certainty. However, a small number of participants confirmed that they had found ways to bypass management and meet up with their clients nonetheless.

6.2.2. Strippers Who Work at the Intersection

Nearly all participants commented that whenever it became known that a stripper was going home with customers, it would result in judgemental and stigmatising behaviour towards them and often end in bullying from other strippers and management.

And then if anyone turns to do full-service sex work, you’re judged. There’s a lot of whorephobia within the strip club walls.

Georgina (London, stripper and full-service)

Especially if a new girl came to our club, when we found out she was doing it and none of us had any personal ties to her at all so it was an unbiased situation, I think you would naturally just look down on them.

Casey (South East, stripper and online)

Interestingly, there were several participants who shared views that although the whorearchy is a known phenomenon in all sex worker spaces, they found that it materialised the most inside strip clubs. Bella (South East, stripper and online) reported that, at least during the

Covid-19 pandemic, the other online sex workers that she had met did not care if their colleagues worked in other sectors while strippers were known to show animosity towards full-service sex workers. Georgina (London, stripper and full-service) and Rosie (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper, full-service and online) agreed that while they had experienced or witnessed the whorearchy in other settings, it was most obviously reproduced inside strip clubs.

Overall, there is a strong aversion from many strippers against all forms of full-service sex work inside British strip clubs. Furthermore, a large number of strippers also oppose any sexual services beyond lap dancing being offered to strip club clients, irrespective of where it happens. Several participants stressed that it would bother them if their colleagues offered more than them because it would put them at a disadvantage and result in the club ceasing to be a 'level playing field' (focus group participant, stripper) with customers only booking private dances with those who provided 'extras'. Participants of the focus group of strippers stressed that one of the things that they enjoyed about the setup of a strip club was that every dancer was offering the same things for approximately the same price which was compromised if some strippers bent or broke the rules. One survey respondent commented that this would 'mess with the whole business model' of the stripping industry and therefore result in less income for strippers who were not offering anything beyond lap dancing. Several survey and interview participants pointed out that their aversion against full-service sex work stemmed only from their concern that their own earning potential was affected by it rather than moralistic judgements. April (Scotland, stripper and online) spoke about 'undercutting', a term that also came up in Hardy and Sanders' study which goes as far as to describe a 'race to the bottom' (2014: 81) due to continuous undercutting and the provision of 'extras' by some strippers.

There were furthermore concerns about the overall reputation of the club. April (Scotland, stripper and online) argued that sexual services or touching happening in the private rooms could give clubs 'a bad name' because clients would talk about having been offered 'extras' there. Kleo (North West, stripper) said that some clubs in the area had a better reputation than others, depending on how 'dirty' and intimate the dances were that were offered there. In the strict no-contact clubs, some of her colleagues had made derogatory comments about clubs where strippers were known to be allowed to offer slightly more intimate dances. These comments illustrate the intensity of these dynamics in which the whore stigma drives strippers to judge their colleagues based on the number of inches of physical space to the client during a private dance. Valerie (Scotland, stripper and online) added that she had felt judged by her colleagues because her lap dances 'would look as if [she] enjoyed that' which

is a particularly fine balance to strike in terms of the performance of enjoyment that customers expect.

Some participants worried about some of the best customers being ‘siphoned off and taken outside’ (Focus group participant, stripper), further contributing to the stripping industry becoming increasingly unprofitable. Nelly (North West, stripper) added that most of the aversion of full-service sex work around strip clubs stemmed from this worry. In her experience, nobody would care if a stripper went home with a customer if that customer returned to the club on a regular basis and spent money there. To her, problems only emerged if dancers ‘stole customers’ which was known to happen in some cases.

I don’t think on the whole anyone’s really bothered if you go and have sex with the customer outside of work, but if you’re having sex or whatever, and that customer is not coming back, then it’s an issue. If you’re stealing a customer from the club, then that is an issue.

Nelly (North West, stripper)

Lastly, some participants voiced concerns about customers expecting sexual services from all strippers if they found out that one offered them. In the survey, this was the most common answer for why people were uncomfortable with full-service or ‘extras’ provided to strip club clients. Comments were made that a stripper offering sexual services would undermine the boundaries that their colleagues had set. One person added that she was ‘more likely to be groped and touched if someone is doing extras while in the same room’ and stressed that everyone’s boundaries needed to be the same in the club environment. During the interviews, a number of participants talked about their discomfort with customers continuously demanding sexual services because they had either been offered some from another dancer or, more commonly, had heard about this from another customer. As described earlier, customers were known to lie about this. Some strippers letting customers touch them during a private dance was seen as a reason for clients trying to also touch those who had not agreed to it. Several strippers also shared experiences of customers expecting to be able to touch because they were used to this in other clubs.

Boundary pushing from customers is a known phenomenon and has been described in previous studies about stripping (Hardy and Sanders, 2014), other forms of direct (Tremblay, 2021) and indirect (Sanders et al., 2018) sex work, and other industries such as hospitality (Ram, 2015). It has been established that the fact that strippers constantly have to be vigilant about clients trying to touch them against their will strongly impacts their wellbeing at work, as well as evidently an employment risk as managers might blame strippers for the unwanted touch and fire them. It was mentioned that in some clubs, there was a culture of covering up

sexual assault, including unwanted touch, although everyone reported that security was usually quick to kick out clients who had touched a stripper unconsensually. Many participants stressed that their club was very safe and regulated due to CCTV, security, and open dance rooms and that they experienced more consent violations in other settings of the night time economy but there were certainly some instances of clients getting away with overstepping sexual boundaries. As Casey (South East, stripper and online) pointed out: 'Once you've been touched by someone, you've been touched by someone. It doesn't help if a bouncer comes and breaks their nose and throws them out, it still happened.'

When interpreting the data collected for this research project with regards to judgemental behaviour towards those who do allow their clients to touch or provide other 'extras', it is therefore important to acknowledge the significant effects of boundary pushing by customers that might lead some strippers to blame their colleagues. In some extreme situations, participants indicated that they attributed sexual harassment and assault from strip club clients to the fact that they had been given the impression that 'anything goes' inside the club because of full-service sex work being promised to them. These tendencies show similarities with the wider societal phenomenon of sex workers as well as promiscuous women who are not sex working being blamed for instances of sexual assault, a notion that has been pointed out by sex workers many times (see Mac and Smith, 2018; Grant, 2014). Evidently, all participants were aware of the powerful impact of boundary pushing at work and some of those who had offered sexual services to strip club clients had struggled with the fear that they had actually contributed to this environment. Ultimately, however, they were reminded that they were not to blame for the inappropriate behaviour of their clients.

Not all participants felt uneasy about the crossover of the stripping and full-service sex industries. With the exception of issues with SEV licensing (see 6.4), the participants in the focus group of people who had offered both were significantly less troubled by the possibility of some strippers offering more services than others. The use of the term 'undercutting' was received with surprise as they did not view it that way at all. Although the participants stressed that they generally kept the sectors separate, they did not consider 'extras' to be undercutting other strippers due to the difference in the nature of services.

If they were literally going home with that client to give them a lap dance or a strip show at their house for a cheaper rate, then I would say that is undercutting. If they're going home with them to offer full service sex work, it's not undercutting at all. It's an extra service that they're offering. They're just giving something that the other girls aren't willing to.

Focus group participant, stripper and full-service

Hence, providing additional services was simply viewed as a strategy to be successful in the sector. Another participant of that focus group, who had only provided full-service sex work to one particular client in the past and said that this was not a usual income stream for her, stressed that although she was not comfortable with anything beyond a no-contact dance in most situations, she had to accept that those who did were simply at a comparative advantage and therefore likely to make more money. She added that it remained possible for her to earn a lot of money regardless. Another participant compared it to agency-mediated full-service sex work where some workers who were comfortable offering services such as duos with other escorts or anal sex would likely receive more bookings than those who did not which was viewed as normal in the full-service industry. Some interview participants agreed and stressed that it was any stripper's personal decision what they were comfortable offering and that it would not affect their colleagues' earnings as there would also always be customers who were only interested in lap dances. Mildred (London, stripper, online and full-service) added that accepting her colleagues' choices on services and rates was a crucial part of understanding the liberal-feminist slogan 'my body, my choice' and although she was occasionally startled if one of her colleagues dropped their rates significantly, she made a point of not judging or trying to prevent this but simply accepting that people had different boundaries.

And I've been guilty of this before, being like "wow, that's too cheap" or "Oh, that's too expensive." I don't do it anymore because I've had it pointed out to me that that's quite problematic. But especially working somewhere where you can set your own prices for everything and you hear one person doing something that you're doing for half the price, you're like "well, that's really fucked up because that means I'm not gonna make any money." But obviously, you can't think like that [...] because, you know, it's your body, your choice, if you want to do something and you're happy to do it for a certain price that's absolutely on you.

Mildred (London, stripper, full-service and online)

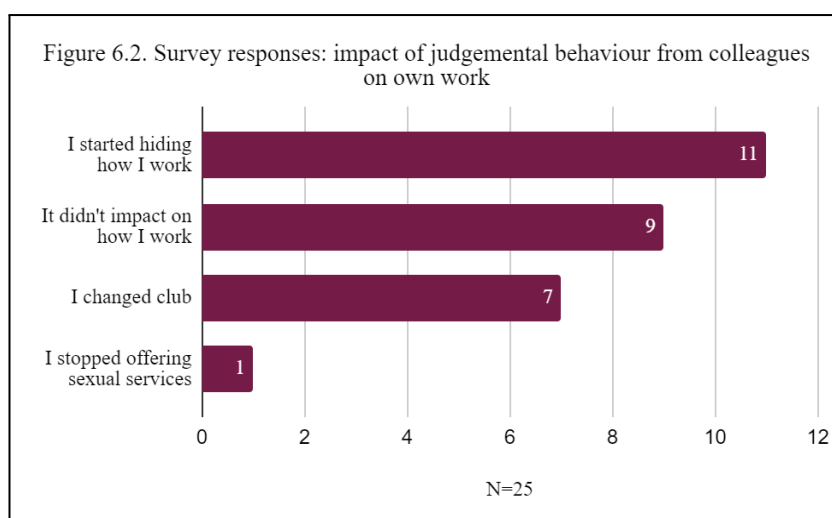
This comment points to wider discussions about price formation in the sex and adult entertainment industries as well as in self-employed markets more broadly. Like many other members of the sex working community, Mildred finds that judging her peers for their rates would only feed into the whorearchy and calls for unanimous support of those who are compelled to charge least due to economic necessity. Her initial discomfort, however, is more in line with price formation theories of many economic sociologists who describe the effects of individual pricing decisions on the collective power of workers to set their own prices within labour markets (Beckert, 2011), particularly within unregulated or illicit ones (Moeller and Sandberg, 2018), which explains the irritation of some strippers or members of

the sex working community about rates below the venue's average. What might be special about the sex and adult entertainment industries is the prevalence of conversations and discussions within the sex working community about the materialisation of the whorearchy, prompting some sex workers and adult entertainers to be particularly careful about commenting on their colleagues' rates. Crucially, Mildred's club is unlicensed, therefore de facto criminalised and therefore even less regulated than other places where sex work or adult entertainment takes place. Most licensed strip clubs have a minimum price set for private dances.

6.2.3. Secrecy Around Full-Service and Its Consequences

As a result of experiencing stigma from some of their peers, the strippers that are engaging in full-service sex work tend to hide how they work from their colleagues, management, and other members of staff in the club. As illustrated in Figure 6.2, the most common survey response about how those who had been judged for the way that they worked dealt with this judgement was 'I started hiding how I work'. Only one person reported that they stopped offering sexual services due to the judgement.

Several interviewees mentioned this tendency to secrecy as well. April (Scotland, stripper and online) admitted that although she had never been informed about any sexual services provided in her club from anyone else but customers who, as described above, were known to lie about it, she was also aware of the possibility that some of her colleagues would hide this from her because she was vocal about disapproving of linking the sectors. Rosie (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper, full-service and online), described that when she first started working in strip clubs, she had gone home with a client in a very open and obvious way and experienced bullying from her colleagues the next day, causing her to become more secretive



about it and making sure only to let a few people who she trusted know about what she was doing. This strategy was necessary for her to ensure that she would not lose her job but led her to feel more isolated about her work. Georgina (London, stripper and full-service) explained why this can lead to safety issues:

You have to be more conspicuous if you were going to give someone your number and meet them afterwards, you might not tell anyone where you're going, which you would generally do "Oh, I'm going to this hotel, make sure I'm safe. Let me turn my tracker on." But because of fear of judgement you don't and you run that risk, because you don't want the rumours to swirl around.

Georgina (London, stripper and full-service)

This quote shows how secrecy prevents sex workers from installing safety measures, such as letting a colleague know where they would be, and therefore creates additional risks of physical violence. It could furthermore be argued that this leads to the perception of strippers who do not offer full-service that going home with strip club clients is 'a very, very risky thing to do with your life', as one focus group participant put it. Some participants felt that the stricter enforcement of no-touching rules and prevention of sexual services inside strip clubs and the downward trend of the industry led to an increase in strippers going home with clients in order to earn enough money. The prevention of safety measures through stigmatising behaviour is particularly harmful at a time of increasing precarity of the stripping industry, in which many strippers are compelled to work in other sectors contemporaneously.

Furthermore, participants who were involved in both full-service and stripping stressed that they would not mention their previous or current involvement in the full-service sex industry to their colleagues, even if they kept the two sectors completely separate. Violet (North East, stripper and full-service, previously online) was planning on going back to the strip club after the pandemic but said that she was going to be careful not to reveal that she was also working for an escorting agency for fear of judgement and being fired from the club. This is despite the fact that Violet was vocal about disapproving of full-service being offered to customers who visit a strip club. She was still worried about losing her job in stripping if her managers found out that she sold sex on nights that she was not working in the club. Jet (South West, stripper, previously full-service and online) who had stopped offering full-service sex work altogether made sure that only the people that she really trusted knew about her previous engagement in that sector because she expected judgement. In addition to the evident mental impact that this need for secrecy has on strippers who also have

experience in full-service, this indicates that full-service sex work is stigmatised by some strippers that goes beyond the aversion of sexual services being offered inside clubs.

In conclusion, this thesis argues that the persistence of secrecy contributes to the club-internal materialisation of stigma towards full-service sex workers and prevents those who decide to go home with clients after their shift from putting safety measures in place. This stands in stark contrast to the evident potential of strip clubs to provide a relatively safe framework for full-service sex workers by acting in a similar way to an escorting agency. If clubs were able to allow strippers to meet their clients after their shift, managers could ensure that somebody knows where they are and send security guards if the sex worker was not responding to messages or calls after the agreed time. In interviews, it was discussed that this was a common practice in some clubs in other countries. Bella (South East, stripper and online) had also worked in Australia and reported that once a stripper had finished their shift, it was up to them if they wanted to see their clients outside of the club and there were similar comments from survey respondents about other countries.

6.3. The Competitive Setup of Strip Clubs

Participants explained that the setup of strip clubs is designed to result in competition between dancers. The presence of high competitiveness is also pointed out in much of the academic literature on British strip clubs (eg. Hardy and Sanders, 2014; Lister, 2012; Colosi, 2010) as well as in flexible labour markets more broadly, particularly when people are precariously employed (Lloyd, 2019; Alberti et al., 2018; Caraher and Reuter, 2017). As described in section 3.1.2, British clubs do not pay strippers a fixed fee for their shift but instead require them to pay a house fee in order to be allowed to work a shift there, resulting in strippers constantly being at risk of going home having lost money (Hardy and Sanders, 2014). Despite high levels of control through fines and threats of dismissal, management does little to regulate the club-internal market for private dances, resulting in an environment in which ‘all the women are in direct competition with each other for each customer that comes through the door’ (2014: 80). Although several participants pointed out that working closely together with some of their colleagues had many advantages, they were also aware that not everybody could win. One focus group participant compared working in a strip club with taking part in RuPaul’s drag race because despite everyone being ‘in it together’ and forming friendships, strippers are also constantly each other’s competitors and need others to earn less so that they can earn more. This illustrates the complexity of strippers experiencing the same stigma which welds them together while they are also competing against each other for business in an increasingly precarious and flexible market system. The fact that the stripping industry has overall become less lucrative in recent years but very few strippers

tend to leave the industry altogether exacerbates this further. In the focus group of only strippers, participants wondered about potential positive impacts of the high levels of competition and mentioned that they had been pushed to work harder and learn how to hustle faster. However, most interview and focus group participants voiced discomfort about the competitive nature of stripping and emphasised instead the camaraderie between strippers that developed despite this setting.

6.3.1. Cliques and Conflicts

It was common for more experienced dancers to take new strippers under their wing, introduce them to club dynamics and rules, and explain how ‘the hustle’ inside the industry worked until they were ready to take new dancers under their wing in turn.

I remember when I first started, there were these much older women who were making a lot of money and were kind of giving me pointers and tips. I think in a way it can be kind of nice, not whorearchy but matriarchy where it’s almost passing on your skills, things that you’ve learned before ultimately you’ll retire.

Focus group participant, stripper

So I was under the wing of somebody and then I progressed up the matriarchy, the whorearchy, and then I took them under my wing.

Focus group participant, stripper

Participants added that this used to be more common in the past and that the welcoming atmosphere towards new dancers had decreased in recent years. Nevertheless, the strong solidarity inside cliques and intensity of friendships between dancers was pointed out several times. This chimes in with Ashforth and Kreiner’s (1999) conceptualisation of strong occupational cultures in stigmatised occupations which explain how many individuals develop close friendships with their colleagues who are affected by the same occupational stigma. Toubiana and Ruebottom (2022) add that many sex workers make an effort to befriend people who work in the exact same sectors in order to preclude experiences of intra-occupational stigma. Nearly all participants mentioned that some of their closest friends were colleagues from the club and that stripping together created a special bond that other friendships could not reach. The terms ‘ride-or-die’ and ‘stripper wife’ came up in conversations regularly, further illustrating the complexity of strong occupational cultures which stand in contrast to the high levels of competition and corresponding conflict due to precarious and unregulated work environments.

Many interview and focus group participants reported that in most clubs, there were cliques of strippers who would work together closely, share customers, and try to get them to book double dances. Particularly in large clubs, being part of such a clique was seen as a crucial strategy to be successful in the industry and several participants described in detail who was included in theirs, indicating that their clique also had a strong impact on their lives in general. Valerie (Scotland, stripper and online) commented that the fear of being left out prompted her to bow to peer pressure and join judgemental comments about strippers who were offering more explicit sexual services. In the focus group of full-service sex workers, some participants added that they had experienced similar dynamics in brothels and dungeons as well as between independent sex workers. Some full-service sex workers wondered if the perception of strip clubs being particularly judgemental and bitchy environments was in part due to age as strippers were known to be younger on average.

I don't engage with that sort of behaviour whereas a lot of the younger girls see it as an opportunity to make a quick buck. To me, I'm looking at this as almost vocational. [...] But maybe some younger girls don't have the same kind of opportunities and they have to hustle harder and because of that, it brings out a ruthless nature which can be quite unpleasant at times.

Focus group participant, full-service

Another focus group participant commented that she was very appreciative of the fact that working independently allowed her to walk away from these situations:

I've come across women, full service sex workers, who have been spiteful, who have undercut me, who have been jealous if their clients have come to see me. I've experienced that, I just don't buy into it and I'm fortunate that I don't have to because I'm independent.

Focus group participant, full-service

In the same way that friendships were often very intense and passionate, conflicts and fights were known to heighten quickly. The majority of participants agreed that overall, most strip clubs were quite judgemental places. Georgina (London, stripper and full-service) described the club atmosphere saying 'it's like a jungle in there' since she had to watch every step at times in order not to incite conflicts with other dancers. Casey (South East, stripper and online) outlined that she had to spend significant time and energy into working out the constantly changing relationship dynamics in the club. Jet (South West, stripper, previously full-service and online) explained that particularly in some of the big clubs, the relationships between strippers are shaped by an often judgemental environment due to the nature of the

work. She added that she had worked in clubs in Europe where dancers lived together as well, further intensifying their relationships.

Everyone's wearing so few clothes and everyone's so judgmental of their own bodies and that then creeps out into judging other people's bodies because if you're comparing your body to someone else's body, you're also comparing their body to your body. And I think that that then gets really judgy sometimes. And everyone's always trying to lose weight.

Jet (South West, stripper, previously full-service and online)

Despite these telling trends, there were a few cases that stood in contrast to the more common experiences. Mildred (London, stripper, full-service and online) reported working in an atypical club where full-contact lap dances and sexual services were very common. Importantly, however, her club was not licensed as an SEV and therefore was criminalised under the Sexual Offences Act¹⁹. Another participant, Iris (North West, stripper), who had worked in licensed SEVs, reported that although she had gone home with clients (for free), she had never experienced any form of judgement from her colleagues about it. She stressed that overall, the strip clubs she had worked in had not been judgemental places and that 'the girls are generally happy to let each other work things as they need to work', including looking the other way if one of their colleagues exchanged numbers with clients or went home with them openly. Most of Iris' stripping experience had been in the mid to late 2000s although she had picked up occasional shifts until early 2019. There is therefore a possibility that these attitudes changed after councils started enforcing licensing rules more strictly around 2016/17. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that experiences of judgement inside strip clubs are not universal and strongly depend on the individual club. Marie (South West, stripper) also reported that she had never actually felt judged by colleagues at work but she also pointed out that several of her friends had told her that the atmosphere was not the same in other parts of the country.

Because obviously in [city], I think the clubs have a good atmosphere. And a lot of my friends who worked in other clubs in the UK, they said like [city] clubs are definitely one of the calmest where everyone's really lovely and friendly. So I guess that's just [city] as a whole.

Marie (South West, stripper)

¹⁹ The consequences of third party criminalisation on working conditions and relationships between workers have been described in detail elsewhere (Brouwers, 2022; Pitcher and Wijers, 2014) as have the risks of working in criminalised workplaces (Mulvihill, 2022; Mac and Smith, 2018; Pitcher, 2015; Cruz, 2013; O'Connell Davidson, 1998). It would be particularly interesting to investigate the relationships between strippers and full-service sex workers in these unlicensed clubs in more detail but this goes beyond the scope of this research.

The differences between different regions and even clubs became particularly apparent during a discussion between participants of the focus group of strippers in which one participant who had worked primarily in smaller cities in the South West of England was convinced that ‘extras’ were normalised in all clubs in London while a participant who was based there informed her that that had not been the case in years. This furthermore shows that there are rumours and perceptions of different regions that are not always accurate. The levels of judgement that were common in clubs significantly varied. Several clubs were mentioned in interviews by name for being known to have a particularly competitive and spiteful atmosphere. Valerie (Scotland, stripper and online) stated that fear of ending up in an overly judgemental club was the main reason that she did not travel for work more although this had been her original plan when she moved to Britain.

6.3.2. The Role of Management

In addition to the already competitive setup, management was also known to incite competition between strippers by trying to find out about small conflicts or disagreements and fueling those in order to prevent unionisation and get strippers to work harder and against each other. At the same time, managers ensure high levels of control over strippers through surveillance systems, fines, and threats of dismissal. The vast majority of participants showed resentment towards management and many stressed that they often acted unprofessionally in various ways. Elise (London, stripper) stated that most of the managers she had worked for seemed to have little understanding of how to run a business and showed little interest in it.

Everywhere I’ve worked there’s a problem with management, they’ve got no idea, it seems, how to run businesses, and they’re just not the best people.

Elise (London, stripper)

Nevertheless, various participants pointed out that managers tended to be very involved in potential fights between dancers which helped create a judgemental atmosphere, particularly with regards to people offering sexual services. Rosie (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper, full-service and online) even suggested that it was essentially management who enforced the whorearchy inside clubs. Violet (North East, stripper and full-service, previously online) and Georgina (London, stripper and full-service) agreed that most of their concern lay with management finding out that they were also working in the full-service sex industry but that this meant that they had to be secretive about it to their colleagues as well because management would try to find out about ‘extras’ from other strippers.

My concern with going back to stripping is that I couldn't let anyone know that I did this other job separately. I don't see why they'd find out to be honest but I wouldn't want to risk it because I could get sacked.

Violet (North East, stripper and full-service, previously online)

Although several participants pointed out that there were unwritten rules that prevented strippers 'snitching' on their colleagues, there were accounts of conflicts leading to strippers telling management about rules being bent or broken in order to get their colleagues fired. It appeared that managers were at times successful in preventing strippers from banding together and instead informing them about what might be going on behind their backs. Multiple participants mentioned that they either had reported colleagues to management or been reported by a fellow stripper for swapping numbers with clients or agreeing to customers touching them in a private dance.

However, Rosie (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper, full-service and online) also pointed out that although managers are often genuinely whorephobic or worried about being associated with full-service sex workers to avoid the stigma impacting on their business, another important incentive for them to prevent crossover between the sectors is the legal framework in which stripping and full-service sex work in Britain operate. Due to the criminalisation of all third parties in the full-service sex industry (see 6.4; Brouwers, 2022), strip club managers could be prosecuted if they provide premises on which workers can provide full-service sex work. Furthermore, there is a constant fear of strip clubs losing their licence due to no-touching rules being broken. This means that while managers often act unprofessionally and disproportionately, they are incentivised to do so by the legal framework. Georgina (London, stripper and full-service) concluded that 'management is just trying to do the job. They will always judge you'.

6.3.3. Peer Surveillance and Favouritism

One way that managers enforce high levels of control is through surveillance (Hardy and Sanders, 2014), not only by installing CCTV and constantly supervising strippers at work but also by creating incentives for strippers to inform them about their colleagues' behaviour. There were many accounts of managers openly having favourites who were able to get away with more than others. Some participants were aware that they were management favourites and reported exploiting that sometimes. Nelly (North West, stripper) described her position as the stripper who had worked in the club the longest and was close to management.

I was one of the first girls at our club. I've been there the longest, I've been there since we opened. So I kind of to an extent have a lot of say on how things .. Like, for

example, I could go to [owner] and be like “Look, this needs to change” or whatever or I could go to [manager] and be like “Look, she isn’t suitable here, blah, blah, we need to do something about it.” So maybe I’m at an advantage, not like favouritism, but like I’m quite fair and understanding, like how things should work.

Nelly (North West, stripper)

While Nelly stressed that she was ‘fair and understanding’, her position illustrates how managers are using favouritism to gain insights into what is happening within the stripper community which is, as outlined throughout various parts of this chapter, a tight-knit community with a strong culture and a tendency to keep outsiders at a distance.

Many participants reported that those who had worked in the club the longest as well as those who earned high amounts of money on a regular basis usually held the most power within strip clubs. Evidence of power hierarchies based on length of employment, usual income level, and closeness to management can also be found in previous studies of the stripping industry (Hardy and Sanders, 2014; Colosi, 2010). Casey (South East, stripper and online) stressed that her managers favoured the people who they knew were earning the most money and therefore also generated most income for the club. To Nelly (North West, stripper), the favouritism was mostly based on who had worked in the club the longest, a notion that Colosi (2013) also describes. Elise (London, stripper) stated that the factors that determine which strippers hold the most power are different in any club and really depend on who the managers like best so this can also include physical attributes, education levels, or how well dancers got on with their managers on a personal level. Evie (Midlands, stripper) added that her nationality and race impacted her managers’ views of her.

A lot of the other girls in the club we worked in were Eastern European and I feel like they got trash talked quite a lot. So, in that sense, I could be wrong, but my perception was that people felt like they were kind of - I don’t really know how to say it, there’s literally no nice way to say it. But I feel like the perception was that they were kind of like “dirtier” girls, essentially. And that me and a couple of other girls who were, you know, a bit more white and a bit more clean, like cleanly presented kind of thing, were the higher end girls, which is a horrible thing to say.

Evie (Midlands, stripper)

In this case, the power dynamics between strippers are impacted by migration status and (perceived) race; factors which also came up in the conversations about the whorearchy although, as argued in the previous chapter, I found it more useful to think of social hierarchies rooted in racism and xenophobia as adjacent and interlinked but distinct mechanisms to the whorearchy.

As Elise (London, stripper) pointed out, power dynamics differ between clubs and are ultimately decided upon by management who use favouritism as a tool of surveillance to ensure that they get informed about strippers breaking rules. By design, these power dynamics significantly impact how strippers engage with each other which includes how those who provide full-service sex work are treated. Rosie (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper, online and full-service) who had toured several clubs all over the country explained that if the strippers who hold the most power provide sexual services, everyone else is allowed to do so as well. Nelly (North West, stripper) added that one of her friends who was one of the highest earners of the club was known to occasionally go home with clients and management turned a blind eye. However, in most cases, managers ensured that their favourites complied with and even supported them in enforcing the no-touching rules.

6.4. The Legal Frameworks of the Stripping and Full-Service Sex Industries

Although the narratives that drive restrictive policing are similar in both sectors, stripping and full-service sex work in Britain are subject to different legislations and carefully kept apart. Full-service sex work is only legally possible if the sex worker operates and advertises alone in their own property and without the help of any third parties who are criminalised under the 2003 Sexual Offences Act (Brouwers, 2022). Furthermore, soliciting in the streets or in public places is criminalised which, crucially for this context, includes night clubs. Mac and Smith (2018) refer to this system as ‘partial criminalisation’ as all forms of collective work as well as street-based sex work are criminalised while independent, genuinely self-employed full-service sex work can be offered legally. As outlined in section 3.2, stripping is legislated and regulated under Article 27 of the 2009 Policing and Crime Act which transfers the power to set rules, conditions, and an appropriate number of SEVs to local councils. While soliciting offences cannot be bypassed through an SEV licence, local licensing committees would in theory have the opportunity to allow full-contact lap dances in their council’s jurisdiction. Due to the fact that all councils who have adopted a licensing policy have put no-contact rules in place, however, it could be argued that the British licensing regime of the stripping industry also constitutes partial criminalisation, with no-contact dancing being the only way to offer it legally although full-contact lap dances arguably constitute a form of stripping as well. As established in chapters two and three, any form of criminalisation any form of sex work or adult entertainment, including stripping, is both a consequence and a contributor to sex worker stigma (Armstrong and Fraser, 2020).

Although the vast majority of councils welcomed the ability to license strip clubs and published their SEV licence relatively shortly after the introduction of Article 27 in 2010 (Hardy and Sanders, 2014), several participants mentioned that the conditions of these policies were only enforced strictly in recent years. One focus group participant described how practices had changed after a ‘crackdown on clubs’ in 2016/17, following cases of customers bringing hidden cameras into two clubs in London and filming rules being broken.

You’ve gotta dance a fucking metre away from the customer, like, you can’t even fucking put your tit near their face. There’s no chance. Once upon a time, yeah [...]
But now, no, I don’t know any club with any stuff going on at the moment.

Focus group participant, stripper

So far, this chapter has shown that there were contrasting views on the morality and fairness of sexual services in clubs. The overly strict enforcement of preventing any physical contact between customers and strippers, however, was overwhelmingly seen as disturbing and irritating. By restricting the performances of strippers and legally prohibiting intimacy beyond a certain threshold constitutes a prime example of the whore stigma being used as a tool of control and oppression of female unchastity (Tyler, 2020; Pheterson, 1996). Participants described that they felt controlled and were not able to provide the services that they were used to, resulting in less opportunities for them to sell lap dances and earn money and further contributing to the fading of the stripping industry as a whole.

I believe the amount of contact we are allowed with customers while stripping is too ridged and ruins the experience for the customer, making them spend less money.

Survey respondent

Through this process, stigma directly leads to increased precarity and income uncertainty in the stripping industry. Other participants reported having to be overly vigilant during private dances to ensure that their clients did not touch their knee or elbow by accident because they were afraid of being accused of breaking rules. Evie (Midlands, stripper) described an experience where the club’s security guards had pulled her over several times because they thought she had let customers touch her, although she had been careful to stick to the regulations. They acted in an unnecessarily shaming way, which resembles the experiences of other participants who had been accused of bending or breaking the rules. One focus group participant stressed that although she personally would not consider offering sexual services, she had preferred to work in the clubs where ‘extras’ were prevalent before the ‘crackdown on clubs’ because in her experience, the customers in those clubs were often high spenders. She was frustrated by the strong enforcement of no-touching rules and pointed out that they were not protecting strippers but had actually led to a decrease in their

income. Another focus group participant added that a large number of her colleagues left her club when the rules got too strict because they were not earning enough and instead turned to working in other sectors entirely.

Hence, the partial criminalisation of both full-service sex work and stripping has a large impact on the performances of strippers and therefore directly impacts their income. On the one hand, particularly management might be worried about the possibility of being prosecuted as a third party in full-service sex work and on the other hand, both managers and strippers might fear their club losing its licence if conditions are breached. In this way, the legal restrictions actively contribute to the separation of the different sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries and therefore to the increasing precarity of strippers, particularly those who work at the intersection and are forced to keep part of their work hidden from colleagues. Participants who worked online confirmed that this also applies to the digital adult entertainment industries where workers are prevented from arranging in-person meet ups with their paying clients. On OnlyFans, for example, there is a number of terms that are banned in private messaging and posts (Easterbrook-Smith, 2022), many of which are associated with full-service sex work.

6.4.1. Impacts of the ‘Crackdown on Clubs’

Hardy and Sanders (2014) conclude that the introduction of Article 27 did not improve working conditions for strippers despite having the potential to. Building on the experiences of this study’s participants, I would take this notion further and argue that, although councils had already been able to put licensing conditions in place prior to the legal change, the licensing regime led to a stricter enforcement of these conditions which negatively impacts the working conditions and income potential of strippers. The ‘crackdown on clubs’ led to a further increase in precarity in the stripping industry due to the job insecurity that the licensing regime created on the one hand and the restriction of the freedom that strippers had with regards to how they performed a private dance on the other hand. Interviews and focus groups showed that concerns about SEV licensing constitute a constant stress factor in the lives of strippers. A number of participants described having been in situations where they had to worry if their club was going to close due to a change in their council’s SEV licensing which meant that they would suddenly lose their source of income. Others reported having worked in clubs that had to shut down because they had lost their licence for different reasons. The cases of Blackpool and Bristol which were discussing the introduction of a ‘nil’ cap during the time of the interviews were mentioned multiple times and several people said that they had to represent their club at council meetings, write letters to councillors, or get involved in campaigning to save their club in other ways. Two participants had been directly

affected by the undercover filming of dancers in Sheffield and Manchester in 2020, described in section 3.2.3, and nearly everyone had heard about these cases, empathising how stressful the potential of something like that happening in their club as well was to them.

I would like people to consider how exhausting it is that you not only have to do the job that you do but you also have the constant job of having to fight for the right to do your job.

Focus group participant, stripper and full-service

Evie (Midlands, stripper) mentioned that the zoning laws which restrict where an SEV is allowed to open had a significant stigmatising effect on the whole industry as strip clubs were publicly painted as spaces for objectionable and dirty activities. Furthermore, some participants held the overly strict enforcement of no-contact rules responsible for the fact that stripping had become less lucrative. It was reported that there was a number of strippers who had turned to working in the full-service sex industry instead because they were not making enough money in stripping anymore even though they had not originally planned on doing so. Everyone agreed that the earning potential in the industry had been significantly higher when councils had been more lenient about licensing conditions and a number of participants complained about particularly strict rules such as having to dance one metre away from the customer or not being allowed to touch other dancers. The fact that licensing conditions varied between regions and clubs significantly led to a lot of confusion and indicated that a lot of the rules were set arbitrarily. Furthermore, the strict enforcement of SEV licensing conditions likely contributed to the competitive atmosphere and overall precarity in most clubs because it had become harder for strippers to make enough money. Finally, some participants stressed that concerns around clubs losing their licence were the main reason for judgemental comments against full-service sex workers inside strip clubs.

6.4.2. Causes for the ‘Crackdown on Clubs’

There were contrasting views on the reasons behind the tightening of regulations. Most commonly, people mentioned the anti-sex worker campaigning of supposedly feminist groups that targeted individual clubs as well as the industry as a whole which corresponds with Hardy and Sanders’ (2014) assessment. One focus group participant voiced her frustration about the fact that they claimed to protect and support vulnerable women when in reality, the changes that feminist groups had managed to enforce had negatively impacted her working conditions and earning potential, resulting in the most vulnerable strippers leaving the industry and engaging in more risky forms of undercover stripping or full-service sex work. In addition, several strippers reported having been subjected to derogatory comments

from members of those groups online or in person. Others referred to a general move towards a more socially conservative society, particularly in more rural areas, as the main reason for the strict enforcement. April (Scotland, stripper and online) spoke a lot about the impact of slutshaming and misogyny, which constitute the core of the whore stigma (Pheterson, 1996), on the drafting of SEV policies.

Yet, some participants found reasons for the ‘crackdown on clubs’ in the behaviour of some of their colleagues. In the focus group of strippers, participants held people who had offered sexual services inside clubs responsible for the increase in regulations. They wondered if councils would have ‘come down hard’ (focus group participant, stripper) on strip clubs if there had not been instances of full-service sex work being offered to strip club clients. There were also comments on this in the survey.

If you didn’t have girls working as full service out of the clubs, I don’t think the councils would have come down as strictly on us. Do you know what I think? I think that division has led to us maybe being more strictly regulated. But then it hasn’t affected the full-service sex workers because they can just advertise with an agency and carry on. What it has done is made work for a stripper a lot harder.

Focus group participant, stripper

Councils are always looking for excuses to close our venues. If someone was offering extra services in the strip club. That club would definitely be investigated. As well as other clubs within the same town with the same council and most likely surrounding areas.

Survey respondent

Rosie (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper, full-service and online) and a number of her colleagues had been let go from their club after they had been secretly filmed by customers whom they had allowed to touch them. Nelly (North West, stripper) noted that supposedly feminist organisations had tried to get the clubs in her city to close by secretly recording strippers at work. She explained that the decision had been overturned because the evidence had been gathered illegally but due to this situation, the council had become stricter about enforcing the no-touching rules. Both situations can be seen as prime examples of how some anti-SEV campaigners are instrumentalising licensing conditions which were put in place in order to supposedly protect women to push councils to shut the clubs down completely. Hence, they are directly harming those who they claim to protect. Particularly the covert filming furthermore illustrates the ruthlessness of anti-sex worker groups that many participants mentioned.

Rosie (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper, full-service and online) outlined that a large amount of the judgemental behaviour that she had experienced inside strip clubs can be ascribed to some of those anti-SEV campaigns as they push councils to restrict the freedom of strippers to offer the services that they are comfortable offering. She stressed that this would force managers to enforce the separation of the sectors by contributing to the stigma against full-service sex work which ultimately trickled down to some strippers. The fact that some participants made full-service sex workers responsible for the ‘crackdown on clubs’ is likely to be a result of this trickle down effect. This negatively impacts the relationships between strippers who are comfortable to offer other services and those who do not and in doing so exacerbates the competitive and judgemental atmosphere in strip clubs. It can therefore be argued that the expansion of SEV licensing conditions has increased stigmatising behaviour inside strip clubs. This is surprising in some senses because there was also reason to believe that a partial criminalisation of the stripping industry may have led to more solidarity with the full-service sex industry which had already been subject to similar legislation.

6.4.3. ‘Strip Clubs Should Not Be Alternatives to Brothels’

As outlined in section 5.2, many strippers are supporters of the full decriminalisation of sex work and some reported engaging in or following political campaigning for it. Many participants pointed out the advantages of decriminalisation for full-service sex workers and stressed the need for safe working conditions in all parts of the sex and adult entertainment industries. In addition, there appeared to be a perception that the decriminalisation of sex work would prevent crossover between sectors because full-service sex workers would be able to legally work in managed venues that were separate from strip clubs.

I believe in full decrim. Strip clubs should not be alternatives to brothels.

Survey respondent

Australia is full contact and brothels are legal there as well so I don’t think people are doing extras in the club there so much because you could go to a brothel.

Focus group participant, stripper

However, there were also comments from people who had worked in countries where full-service sex work on managed premises was legalised²⁰ and mentioned that in practice more people worked in both sectors because they were legally less separated. Especially strippers who went home with strip club clients after work rather than providing sexual services inside the club were able to do so more openly than in Britain. Jet (Midlands,

²⁰ None of this study’s participants had worked in a fully decriminalised system so this notion only refers to places in which full-service sex work is legalised and regulated in some way.

stripper, previously full-service and online) added that when she worked in a country that had implemented the Nordic Model, managers and strippers were extremely careful to keep the sectors separate due to fear of prosecution. Others had worked in countries where full-service sex work was criminalised altogether and said that it was difficult to compare it with Britain because the entire culture surrounding the stripping industry was different. Overall, there was no clear impact on the degree of criminalisation or regulation of the full-service sex industry on how much the two sectors were overlapping. The premise that decriminalisation would automatically lead to more or less sexual services being offered to strip club clients is therefore flawed although it is important to acknowledge that this perception is common amongst strippers. Instead, decriminalising sex work would mean that those who work in both industries are able to do so more safely as they would be less likely to be forced to hide their engagement in the full-service sex industry.

6.4.4. A 'Sex Work Utopia'

Both the focus group of strippers and those who had offered both described a desire for a venue that spans across different sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries. Despite the awareness that under the current legislation, this would be illegal, several participants mentioned that they thought the lack of secrecy around sexual services would eliminate a lot of the animosity between strippers. One focus group participant described a venue she had worked in years ago in where 'hostesses' who typically went home with customers to provide full-service sex work worked alongside strippers who offered lap dances. Importantly, the dancers were not allowed to go home with clients and the 'hostesses' were not allowed to offer dances, keeping the two sectors separate despite being offered in the same venue. The club no longer exists and it was likely closed down because it operated outside of the legal framework although there is no way of verifying this. Nevertheless, it links in with the 'Debaucherous Slippery Slope' between the two sectors that was also described by full-service sex workers who saw clients in brothels or independently after they had got 'worked up' by strippers. Mildred (London, stripper, full-service and online) who worked in an unlicensed club where 'extras' were common described a particularly friendly atmosphere and close relationships between strippers despite differences in the services that they offered and prices they charged.

The fascination of working in a venue which had 'everything' (focus group participant, stripper and full-service) was ubiquitous among participants. The focus group of strippers discussed a 'sex work utopia', a strip club with a brothel and a webcamming studio where workers shared security, make up artists, and hair stylists. They were convinced that this would be profitable for strippers as well.

Would the guys necessarily only go for the full service girls? I don't think they would because there is a hell of a lot of guys who don't want that level of intimacy. They do just want a chat or a drink, a bit of a laugh and a flirt, they don't actually want to cheat on their wives.

Focus group participant, stripper

This comment illustrates that despite the desire to restrict the provision of full-service sex work to strip club clients, strippers are actually conscious of the fact that the demand for lap dances would not cease automatically with the emergence of full-service as an alternative. Participants of that particular focus group emphasised that full-service sex workers should not be allowed to offer dances and vice versa while in the focus group of people who had offered both, participants discussed a venue where workers could offer anything that they were comfortable with.

If it was somewhere where that was legal, and in doing so you wouldn't put everyone else's job at risk, that's fine, like crack on, do what you've got to do to make the money sort of thing. But because you're putting everyone else at risk, it would feck me off if in the UK someone was doing that.

Focus group participant, stripper and full-service

The fact that the concept of a shared venue came up in both focus groups as well as a number of the interviews without any prompts indicates that there seems to be a certain fascination with various sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries working together more closely, which suggests that, in the absence of criminalisation and stigma, many strippers would be happy to work more closely with other sectors. Despite this fascination with shared workplaces, many strippers are evidently conscious of their business model and concerned that the direct competition with people who also offer full-service sex work could affect their income. There is therefore a desire of some strippers for clear rules about what workers are allowed to offer in order to protect the earning potential of those who only offer lap dances. Experiences from focus group participants and Mildred show that there are instances of stripper and full-service sex workers working together harmoniously. This is particularly important at a time of increasing need for strippers to create multiple income streams by working in other sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries which is reflective of trends in the wider economy towards increasingly precarious jobs that cannot provide a living wage by themselves.

6.5. Conclusion: A Cycle of Precarity and Stigma

This chapter has shown that there are high levels of crossover between different sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries. Despite public perceptions of a ‘Debaucherous Slippery Slope’ that guides strippers into full-service sex work, the reality is less straight-forward with many strippers moving in and out of different sectors throughout their working life, either simultaneously or at different times. Because the stripping industry as it is known today is dying but strippers are not leaving the industry, precarity and income uncertainty in the sector continuously intensify, resulting in more strippers being compelled to cross over to other sectors alongside stripping. This reflects trends in the labour market more generally with a growing number of people working in multiple flexible and precarious jobs simultaneously in order to make ends meet (Jones, 2021). Viewing this chapter as part of a wider transition of work towards increasingly precarious labour illustrates the peculiarity of the SEV licensing regime.

There are two key mechanisms that use the whore stigma to drive precarity in the stripping industry, particularly for those who work at the intersection to full-service sex work: criminalisation and the whorearchy. Firstly, the SEV licensing regime, which constitutes both a direct result of campaigns that utilised stigma against strippers and a contributor to that stigma, as well as its increasingly strict enforcement in recent years has primarily led to increased policing of strippers’ performances which prevents them from providing the services that they are comfortable with. This results in a decrease in earning potential and hence more precarious working conditions. The closure of many clubs who lost their licence in the last decade further contributes to the income uncertainty and precarity of strippers. On top of that, the restrictive licensing policy and criminalisation compel strippers who work at the intersection to keep their engagement in full-service sex work hidden from their colleagues and club owners. As the cases of Jet, Violet, and one focus group participant show, strip club managers are likely to refuse to hire workers who have ever worked in the full-service industry, regardless of how separate they kept the jobs. Rosie and Georgina, who managed to combine their engagement in stripping and full-service despite the legal barriers, were forced to keep this a secret. Crucially, this secrecy directly results in safety issues for strippers as it prevents them from creating safety networks with their peers, a practice that is common within independent full-service sex work (Brouwers, 2022). The need to keep working at the intersection hidden from peers furthermore impedes effective linking of the sectors and therefore further increases precarity and income uncertainty for those who already work in several sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries. The only person who managed to work in both sectors simultaneously without the need for complete secrecy

was Mildred whose workplace is unlicensed and therefore criminalised. Generally, third party criminalisation in full-service sex work as well as SEV licensing regulation pushes strip club managers who fear prosecution to steer conflicts to provoke competition and use favouritism as a surveillance tool in order to ensure that strippers are unable to sell sexual services to strip club clients. While they are known to act unprofessionally and disproportionately, managers are simply fearing prosecution and loss of their licence for prostitution-related offences and hence feed into a wider system that legally separates full-service sex work from stripping.

Secondly, the stigmatising behaviour from councils and managers trickles down to some strippers who show animosity against their colleagues who work at the intersection. The heightened competition between strippers for customers pushes strippers to make judgemental or stigmatising comments about colleagues who have also engaged in full-service sex work. Despite strong occupational cultures (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999) between strippers which becomes evident through the importance of cliques and 'stripper wives', many strippers feel like the whorearchy is perpetuated inside strip clubs disproportionately. Crucially, there are also examples of unlicensed venues where strippers and full-service workers work together harmoniously, regardless of differences in the services offered or prices charged, further illustrating the impact of restrictive legislation on the whore stigma. Hence, I extend Armstrong and Fraser's (2020) point that criminalisation fuels societal stigma by showing its impact on community internal stigma; the whorearchy.

Overall, this chapter has illustrated the ways in which strippers are caught up in a cycle of precarity and stigma which continuously fuel and exacerbate each other. While the whore stigma is used to drive precarity in the stripping industry as outlined above, precarious working conditions fuel the whorearchy inside strip clubs due to high competition which creates the need for some strippers to feed into judgemental and stigmatising behaviour towards those who have created multiple income streams within the wider industries. The increasing precarity of the stripping industry furthermore contributes to stigmatising narratives that paint stripping alongside all other forms of sex work and adult entertainment as inherently exploitative by nature.

7. Moving Online During the Covid-19 Pandemic

When Covid-19 hit Britain in March 2020, the stripping industry shut down overnight which prompted a large number of dancers to enter the online industry instead. There is no question that this had a significant immediate as well as longer lasting impact both on the sex working community and on the lives of individual strippers, alongside other sex workers and adult entertainers. While many strippers transferred their business online, others relied on benefits and savings and some continued working in person despite contact restrictions, usually in the full-service sex industry or in sugaring arrangements. This chapter outlines the responses of strippers to the pandemic as well as its longer term impacts on the industry and the strategies of strippers to survive in it. The experiences of participants during the lockdowns indicate that despite the additional layer of criminalisation, that in-person sex workers were subjected to and which resulted in increased stigmatisation, the hardships that many sex workers and adult entertainers faced due to the pandemic brought the community closer together. The fact that many were forced to switch to a different sector resulted in a better understanding of adjacent industries.

Subsequently, this chapter will investigate the pandemic-induced growth of the online adult industry and particularly the prosperity of the subscription platform OnlyFans (Sanchez, 2022). Here, I argue that the normalisation of adult content online has had a powerful impact on how other sex and adult entertainment industries, including stripping, are being perceived by the wider society. Online sex work has given some sex workers and adult entertainers a larger platform, which they were able to use to distribute more educational content about their industries. It remains unclear to what degree this normalisation has trickled down to in-person sectors or if it has in fact marginalised them further. Either way, the popularity of OnlyFans that appears to exist in large parts of wider society creates a lot of hope and potential for sex workers and adult entertainers to reduce the stigma that is associated with their industries. Simultaneously, the rise of OnlyFans and similar apps illustrates the platformisation of adult entertainment and in many ways resembles the rise of the platform economy elsewhere (Wood et al., 2020; Prassl, 2018).

Similar to the increased importance of digital platforms for work, the pandemic also resulted in the expansion of online spaces for sex workers and adult entertainers to connect with each other, share information, and organise. In some cases, this has led to an increase in solidarity with workers in other sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries as the shift to online community organising has made the movement more accessible for those living in rural areas or being unable to attend in-person meetings for other reasons. This chapter explores these online spaces and the ways in which they linked different parts of the

community. After the previous chapter put a focus on what happens inside British strip clubs and pointed out the impact that restrictive policy has on the wellbeing of strippers, this chapter will concentrate on the experiences and views of participants with regards to what happens in other spaces where sex workers meet, either socially or for work.

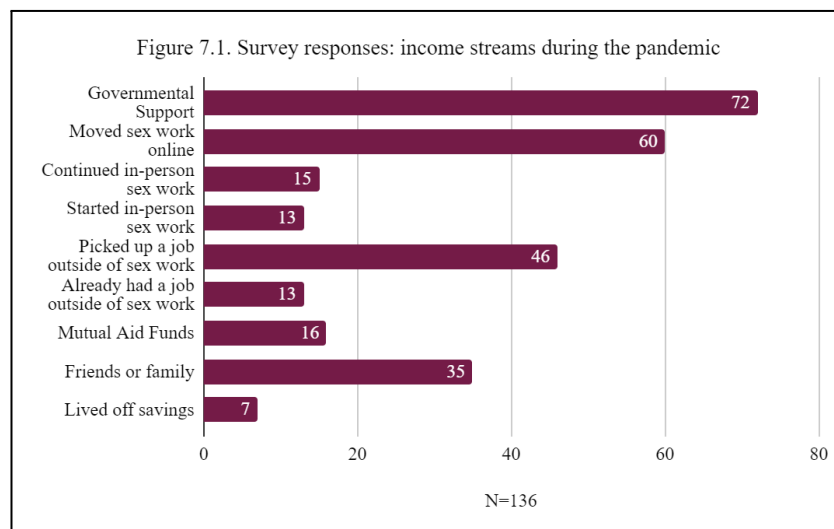
7.1. Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Stripping Industry

As outlined in chapter four, there is no doubt that this research project has been overshadowed by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on sex workers and adult entertainers. With the survey launching in March 2021 and interviews taking place between April and July 2021, while Britain was gradually moving out of the third lockdown, many participants were still strongly impacted by the loss of income that the closure of clubs in March 2020 had meant for them. Due to a lack of support from the government or potential employers, sex workers and adult entertainers were disproportionately affected by the lockdowns (Hackett and Murphy, 2020), including many of this study's participants. Lam (2020) argues that state authorities worldwide excluded sex workers from their support schemes and that this gap was instead filled by community internal support structures that were mostly organised and led by volunteers. Furthermore, the pandemic exacerbated the fading of the stripping industry described in section 6.2.3 as multiple strip clubs were forced to close indefinitely due to insolvency or because they lost their licence during the course of the lockdowns (Clare, 2022). Although the ability of this study to make future predictions is limited due to the constant change in the industries following law or policy changes alongside wider transitions towards more flexible and precarious work in all industries, the consequences of the pandemic are likely to have long-lasting effects on both the digital and the in-person sex and adult entertainment industries, including stripping.

7.1.1. Different Responses to the Closure of Clubs

Participants outlined different responses to the sudden change of the stripping industry when clubs unexpectedly closed in March 2020. Survey respondents reported a range of strategies to survive the pandemic financially, most commonly governmental support, entering the online adult entertainment industry, continuing or starting in-person sex work or adult entertainment, and working in jobs outside of the sex and adult entertainment industries, either in jobs that they had already had prior to the pandemic or in new ones. Importantly, a significant number of people also reported receiving support from mutual aid networks, friends, or family, illustrating the strong solidarity within the wider sex working community which I will discuss in more detail in the subsequent section after first outlining the most common strategies of participants to survive the lockdown financially. Figure 7.1 illustrates

the responses to this question to which participants could select multiple answers and furthermore add qualitative comments.



Most commonly, survey respondents had applied for governmental support such as Universal Credit or the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS), although several people pointed out that not all strippers were eligible for the SEISS grant because they had not been registered as self-employed for long enough. Marie (South West, stripper), for example, had only started stripping in 2019 and was therefore not eligible for the first round of SEISS payments although she had registered as self-employed as soon as she had started working in strip clubs. Nelly (North West, stripper) added that she missed the SEISS deadlines both times because they were not advertised well. Many interview and focus group participants mentioned Universal Credit as one income stream although most added that this was not enough to live on. Indeed, only seven survey respondents (5.1%) chose governmental support as their only response to this question.

Nearly half of survey participants indicated that they had moved their sex work online. A large number of interview and focus group participants had worked online independently, either on webcamming sites or in content creation for platforms like OnlyFans, and two interview participants worked for a webcamming studio. The experiences and success of participants in the online adult entertainment varied significantly with many describing the difficulties of relying solely on online work which is an unreliable income source due to rapid fluctuations in the market, changes in policing of adult content platforms and social media sites, and high competition in an unregulated market. While the precarity of online adult entertainers resembles the situation of many other gig workers with regards to income inconsistency, the financial discrimination of sex workers and adult entertainers contributes to their reliance on certain platforms (Easterbrook-Smith, 2022). A small number of

participants, however, managed to earn significant amounts of money in a relatively short amount of time and some even added that they enjoyed the work and preferred it to stripping. Overall, although many pointed out the difficulties of working online, digital adult entertainment constituted a useful and effective income stream for many strippers at a time where their usual workplaces were inaccessible (Sanchez, 2022). There was a strong feeling that despite the lack of appropriate governmental support, sex workers and adult entertainers had been some of the most successful workers with regards to shifting their businesses online. A number of participants voiced their admiration and respect of the creativity and resilience of some of their colleagues who had found ways to work around the restrictions.

Other industries sunk but not the hoes, we got on our fucking phones, you know. We're straight on it and it just shows the adaptability and this actual skill set of women in this industry.

Focus group participant, stripper

Just over one tenth of survey respondents reported that they continued sex working in person and another 9.6% added that they had picked up new forms of in-person sex work. Crucially, the survey question asked about 'income streams during the pandemic' without defining exact time frames so these results cannot provide clarity about the extent to which contact restrictions were broken. Only one interview participant explicitly mentioned providing in-person sex work during the lockdowns but several people met clients in person whenever contact restrictions would allow it. While the vast majority of people who worked in the in-person sex and adult entertainment industries during lockdowns provided full-service sex work, one survey comment mentioned 'Private dance bookings - strictly dance only' and Rosie (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper, full-service and online) offered domination sessions that did not involve sexual intercourse. Georgina (London, stripper and full-service) explained that some of her colleagues asked clients to get a Covid-19 test before meeting with them but that the majority of those who continued working were unable to make demands like this.

I mean, honestly, if you're selling sex in a pandemic, you're obviously pretty desperate. So who has the time and money to do that?

Georgina (London, stripper and full-service)

The use of 'desperation' in this comment draws interesting lines to discussions of the whorearchy in chapter five, indicating that the need for some sex workers to provide sexual services in person during the pandemic impacted the order of the whorearchy by adding risk of infection as a factor. Added stigma towards those working in-person has generally been identified as a consequence of the pandemic and has also been observed in a number of other industries such as health care provision and retail (Debus, 2021).

Several participants mentioned keeping ‘personal contact with regular customers’ (Survey comment) and entering various forms of sugaring arrangements, some of which included in-person meetings while others spent significant time texting or talking to their clients in exchange for a monthly allowance. Nelly (North West, stripper) mentioned that she had had ‘a little sugar daddy, [...] a guy that likes me’ who supported her for a while but she ended the arrangement when he started disrespecting her boundaries and demanding full-service which she was uncomfortable with. This links back to the discussion of boundary pushing customers outlined in 6.4.2 and furthermore illustrates that some tried to take advantage of the particularly vulnerable situation of strippers whose workplaces were shut down.

It is also important to point out that 34.1% of survey participants picked up a job outside of sex work and another 9.6% already had one. Of course, this includes many people who had left the sex and adult entertainment industries before the pandemic already or only worked in them part-time, but it is interesting to note that a relatively large proportion started working in other industries. In interviews, those who had picked up a non-sex work job during the pandemic were keen to return to stripping once clubs reopened, either full-time or alongside their new job which shows that for many, stripping is a convenient additional income that can in part be substituted with other jobs in extreme situations but constitutes a crucial part of people’s strategy to earn enough money in different parts of the gig economy (Jones, 2021), as outlined in the previous chapter.

Overall, many participants pointed out that although they had ultimately managed to find ways to make ends meet and were in a relatively stable position now, the pandemic had put them into significant hardship and posed challenges that working in the sex and adult entertainment industries had previously prevented them from experiencing. Bella (South East, stripper and online) mentioned experiences of homelessness and destitution and added that, at the start of the pandemic, she was dependent on mutual aid networks and support from friends. Although she ultimately found a job in the online industry, went back to university for her Masters, and was in a relatively comfortable situation at the time of the interview, her experience, alongside that of many others, illustrates the impact of the sudden and unexpected closure of an entire industry without the provision of viable alternatives or structural support for workers. Other participants reported engaging in forms of work that they were not comfortable with or working under inadequate conditions, either within the sex or adult entertainment industries or elsewhere.

Picked up nude modelling for amateur photographers (very unpleasant), got the odd [non-sex work] gig, but no full time employment. The pandemic has financially destroyed me as UC²¹ is not enough to live on.

Survey comment

One common experience was the loss of savings. While people were grateful that they had some savings to fall back on when the first lockdown was announced, many also pointed out that they were forced to use up savings that they had built up for years or even decades. Generally, the experiences of strippers further illustrate the failure of the British welfare system that has led to significant hardship of many precarious workers (Cai et al, 2022).

7.1.2. Long-term Effects on the Stripping Industry

This chapter has so far described the impacts that the sudden closure of strip clubs had on the lives of strippers in the short term. There are furthermore concerns about lasting effects that it has had on the stripping industry as a whole. As stated in the previous chapter, the stripping industry has been on a downward trend for at least a decade due to a number of reasons including restrictive licensing, cultural shifts towards a heightened visibility of sexualised bodies and the effects that the 2008 financial crash had on the disposable income of the middle class (see Hardy and Sanders, 2014; Lister, 2012). The pandemic has likely contributed to this trend in various ways, resembling trends in other precarious industries (Cai et al., 2022; Daniel et al., 2021).

As outlined in section 6.1.3, multiple strip clubs did not reopen after lockdowns ended because their owners had decided that they were not profitable anymore. April (Scotland, stripper and online) who was interviewed in late April 2021 said that she was not expecting all clubs in her city to re-open their doors after the pandemic because she suspected that at least some of them would not survive it financially²². Violet (North East, stripper and full-service, previously online) mentioned that her old club had been turned into a regular nightclub which she only found out about through social media. There were other comments about clubs struggling financially and not being able to re-open despite having an up-to-date licence. One survey respondent commented that they ‘had no idea if clubs will even reopen’ and several concerns were raised about the popularity of clubs after the pandemic, indicating that there was a lot of uncertainty about the future of the industry. Overall, it becomes clear that the income potential of the stripping industry has been negatively affected by the pandemic on top of licensing decisions that have forced some clubs to close down independently from Covid-19.

²¹ Universal Credit

²² At the time of writing, three of the four clubs that April mentioned are still operating.

Many strippers also decided to turn their backs to the industry or at least diversify their income streams because of the pandemic. Kleo (North West, stripper) reported that she had been planning on moving on from stripping and going to university even before March 2020 but ended up deferring and continuing her work in the strip club due to friendships and the potential for a 'good night' in which she could earn a lot of money easily. These pull factors of stripping have also been described by previous studies of the industry (Hardy and Sanders, 2014; Colosi, 2010). In Kleo's case, the temporary closure of her club and the resulting sudden loss of her income pushed her to leave stripping and invest into a different career by obtaining a university degree. One survey respondent told a similar story and Bella (South East, stripper and online) mentioned that she had got a Masters degree during the pandemic, indicating that this was not an uncommon occurrence. Others managed to use the time off to diversify their income, either inside the sex or adult entertainment industries or through non-sex work jobs. Like many strippers, Jet (South West, stripper, previously full-service and online) had always had non-sex working jobs at the same time as working in the adult industry and she managed to financially get through the pandemic by prioritising these jobs. Elise (London, stripper) had already had her own small business before the pandemic and only used stripping to substitute that income, and she was able to put a lot more time and effort into that business after clubs closed. Both Jet and Elise were planning on going back to stripping part-time once clubs reopened, an intention that the vast majority of survey respondents had as well. Of the people that indicated that they had worked in strip clubs up until they closed in March 2020, 93.5% planned on going back to it once it was safe to do so again, which means that only five people planned to use the pandemic as an incentive to leave stripping for good in the way that Kleo had. This is surprising considering the growing income uncertainty and precariousness of the sector. Only about one third of those 93.5% added that they were going to work fewer shifts in the club and continue the work or study that they had picked up during the lockdown, while 46.4% planned on working more in order to make up for the time lost and 17.4% did not expect to change their working patterns from before the pandemic. This is counterintuitive because, as findings of this study as well as previous research (Hardy and Sanders, 2014; Lister, 2012) have shown, it has become more difficult to live off stripping by itself which most strippers are acutely aware of.

One potential explanation for the high number of people who planned on going back to stripping despite the industry fading revolves around non-financial advantages of the work which have been outlined in the previous chapter as well as in other studies (Hardy and Sanders, 2014; Colosi, 2010, 2011; Grandy, 2008). Many participants stressed that they missed the camaraderie between strippers and the casual work atmosphere that many industries cannot provide.

I kind of miss the club, I never thought I'd miss it.

Georgina (London, stripper and full-service)

The main one that I worked at, it was so lovely. It was like, well the management were shit like they always are but the girls, we all really got on with each other and we all really respected each other. [...] And we all just used to do yoga on the stage together. It was so nice, honestly, that club.

Kleo (North West, stripper)

You make some really invaluable relationships. Yeah, I miss them.

Elise (London, stripper)

Colosi (2011) describes similar notions and even conceptualises stripping as a form of 'anti-work' whereby strippers focus on the fun and casual aspects of a work night rather than solely on the income potential of the industry. This is certainly true for a number of this study's participants as well who pointed out that the strip club environment led them to be able to sometimes treat work as a night out where they enjoyed themselves with their friends and made some money alongside it. April (Scotland, stripper and online) even stressed that now that she had mostly left the industry, she only occasionally booked a shift mostly to catch up with her former colleagues and have a drink with them. This is particularly important because it explains why many strippers are not willing to leave the industry completely despite the restrictive policing, increasing precarity and income inconsistency.

However, some participants who had shifted their stripping business online stressed that they had got to know the advantages of online work and became more aware of the downsides of stripping. Iris (North West, stripper), who had not worked as a stripper in several years but was planning to go back to it part-time, wondered whether strippers got used to online work during the pandemic and would have difficulties getting back to the club environment. She pointed out that a lot of people had struggled with social anxiety when contact restrictions were lifted because they had been isolated for so long.

A lot of people are feeling socially anxious about getting back out into social situations again and getting back into the workplace is a thing as well. So how is everyone going to feel when all of the sudden you're stood there in person, your competitors are there with you in person and your clients are there in person? That could be really strange.

Iris (North West, stripper)

One focus group participant explained that she ended up enjoying webcamming more and therefore only worked in the strip club occasionally. She found it especially interesting that

some of her strip club regulars preferred seeing her on cam now while others stopped paying for online services immediately after clubs reopened and they could see her in person again. Several people commented that they had learned to appreciate working independently during the pandemic, either in full-service or online, and did not want to go back to stripping full-time because they did not want to pay commission and house fees to the clubs. Some mentioned that they were not planning on going back to stripping because of ‘toxic management’ (survey respondent) or because ‘the clubs just exploit you’ (Violet, North East, stripper and full-service, previously online), indicating that there was growing awareness of the exceptionally exploitative business model of strip clubs. Others added that taking time off stripping had made them realise how exhausting it was. Kleo (North West, stripper) said that she was not planning on stripping again because she no longer wanted to work nights as this impacted her life so much. She explained that before the pandemic she never got up before mid-afternoon, even when she was not working because she had got so used to it, resulting in her not being able to see anyone she knew who did not work in the industry. Now that she had started university and was living during the daytime again, she felt like she had her life together more. One focus group participant who had worked in strip clubs and online stated that stripping was physically exhausting because of working long shifts, dancing in heels, running around and approaching customers. To her, working on OnlyFans during the pandemic meant a lot more downtime and more sociable hours. This relates to a discussion in the focus group of full-service sex workers in which participants stressed that they thought of stripping as ‘backbreaking labour’ (focus group participant, full-service) with awful working conditions.

I suppose, strippers to me are just fucking hardcore. A lot of the stuff that they have to put up with, the hustle just seems like an awful lot of effort for often less reward. You know, the stuff about having to pay for work, the lack of control, the judgement, having to put up with being in the frontline of a lot of dickheads. That’s what it looks like to me.

Focus group participant, full-service

This group was therefore wondering about the reasons why so many people went into stripping rather than doing full-service or online sex work. One participant even mentioned that she had caught herself ‘reverse-perpetuating the whorearchy’ by looking down on strippers because she felt like she had ‘got the smarter deal’ (focus group participant, full-service) by choosing to work for an escort agency instead of stripping. This outside view on the stripping industry is particularly interesting when considering the downward trend of the industry that has recently been exacerbated by the pandemic, resulting in higher

competition between strippers and a decline in working conditions. It stands in stark contrast to the perception of strippers who reported missing the club and being keen to go back.

Overall, the descriptions of participants suggest that the pandemic has had a disastrous effect on the stripping industry. This thesis suggests that this does not only impact the industry in the short term but has likely also permanently exacerbated the dying of the industry as it is known today. Some strippers are intending to go back to stripping while others are planning on continuing to work in their new sectors, either because working conditions are better or because they are anticipating a further decline in earning potentials in strip clubs as the industry diminished during the pandemic. Although this goes beyond the scope of this thesis, the recent cost of living crisis will likely contribute to the downward trend due to further reduced disposable income of the middle classes.

7.2. The Rise of Digital Adult Entertainment

As outlined in chapter six, some strippers had already had an online presence before the pandemic since, to them, it was straight-forward to combine it with their work in the strip club. Some even reported that clients would expect strippers to have an OnlyFans account and specifically ask for it.

But also people are acting like OnlyFans has only been around since the pandemic, but that's been around for years. I remember a guy asked me if I had an OnlyFans and that was like four or five years ago. I was like "what's that?" and he was like I should get one, he'd subscribe to my pictures.

Lana (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper)

Others only dipped their toes into online adult entertainment when strip clubs first closed in March 2020 but realised quickly that they were not comfortable with this mode of working. For some participants, however, the digital adult entertainment industry constituted a lifeline during the pandemic and they managed to transfer their work online, either independently or through Pay-TV channels. Online adult entertainment, and particularly independent content creation via subscription sites such as OnlyFans, grew massively after the first lockdown was announced, with platforms reporting large increases in sign up and overall revenue (Sanchez, 2022). The prosperity of online sex work during the pandemic has been discussed at length in the public as well as academic discourse with scholars stressing that the global lockdowns have exacerbated the trend of sex work and adult entertainment moving into digital spaces (Brooks-Gordon et al., 2021). Particularly the rise of independent content creation to platforms such as OnlyFans has transformed the work of porn performers who are now expected to entertain personalised subscription pages and become more approachable to fans

(Laurin, 2019). Sanchez (2022) stresses that OnlyFans constituted a viable option for many sex workers who otherwise would not have had any income streams. She emphasises the cultural importance that OnlyFans has had during the pandemic with many people who had not been involved in the sex trade before, including celebrities like Bella Thorne, creating accounts. This created the potential for positive media attention that could destigmatise sex work. At the same time, large numbers of sex workers and adult entertainers joined OnlyFans out of financial desperation and experienced risks such as doxxing (private information about content creators being published against their will), capping (content being stolen and published), and other forms of online harassment including rape and death threats (Sanders et al., 2019; Jones, 2015). Nevertheless, a large part of sex workers and adult entertainers who had worked in person, including strippers, were able to mitigate the financial impact of the pandemic through working online.

As indicated in previous chapters, 70.5% of participants had worked in the online adult entertainment industry at one point, although interviews and focus groups indicated that many had left it after a short period of time. Nevertheless, there is a strong crossover between stripping and online adult entertainment which has significantly increased through the pandemic. Like the labour market more generally (Jones, 2021; Prassl, 2018), the pandemic has accelerated the move of adult entertainment onto digital platforms who have high levels of control over the labour of their workers without providing the labour protections that exist in more traditional forms of employment. The same can be said about the full-service sex industry (Barbagallo and Hardy, 2021). Many non-erotic industries, such as web design, food delivery, or transportation (Wood et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017), also shifted to more flexible, platform-mediated work and often stand at the centre of academic work about the gig economy. As the experiences of this study's participants show, working in independent digital adult entertainment carries additional challenges, resulting in the work being precarious in different, often more intense, ways than stripping. The work on OnlyFans and similar platforms or on webcamming sites therefore neatly fits into the analytical framework of platform-mediated gig work.

Nearly all participants had at least tried to work online at one point before or during the pandemic with the exception of those who needed to remain anonymous for various reasons. Nelly (North West, stripper), for example, also worked as a model and did not want to compromise her career by someone finding explicit pictures of herself. Evie (Midlands, stripper) had already left stripping before the pandemic but stressed that the main reason why she never tried online work was because if somebody had found out about it, this could have ended her professional career outside of sex work.

For me a really big thing and one of the reasons I never did cam work was because in my career, if it was disclosed, you know, if people found out I potentially could be struck off and not able to work anymore – which is huge. Just the idea that your whole career could be ended if people found out you did this thing.

Evie (Midlands, stripper)

Kleo (North West, stripper) said that she was scared of repercussions in general as she had not decided on a future career yet and did not want her engagement in adult entertainment to impact this. However, the majority of participants had given either webcamming or online content creation a go and a small number had been very successful at it. Especially those who managed to start promotion immediately after the lockdown was announced or had already had an online presence before the pandemic were able to make use of the extreme expansion of the online market that materialised in March 2020. Three different forms of online sex work were reported by participants: performing independently on live webcamming websites, working as a presenter for a webcamming studio that was managed by a broadcasting company, or, most commonly, independent content creation for subscription platforms.

7.2.1. Independent Online Adult Entertainment: The Case of OnlyFans

The majority of participants decided to create an account on OnlyFans, a subscription website that allows adult content creators alongside other influencers. Casey (South East, stripper and online) stressed that most people chose this particular platform because ‘it’s a really well-known site and people trust it.’ The other platform that was mentioned several times is called AdmireMe which works similarly and was founded and is owned by a sex worker. Although both platforms are officially based in Britain, OnlyFans has a more international focus and set its currency to US dollars worldwide (OnlyFans, 2021) while AdmireMe started in and still mostly operates in the British online market where clients are charged in British pounds (AdmireMe, 2020)²³. It is therefore particularly popular here. Some participants reported having created accounts on both platforms and posting similar or the same content on both but the majority had chosen one of them.

Although all participants pointed out that independent online adult entertainment was not, as often assumed, ‘easy money’ but instead required large amounts of time and effort, some were very successful at moving their business online. April (Scotland, stripper and online), for example, managed to earn a relatively large amount of money during the first lockdown

²³ In 2020, AdmireMe announced the option for creators to set their subscription price to Euros or US Dollars instead of only British pounds in order to grow the site internationally (AdmireMe, 2020), a feature that OnlyFans does not offer.

by sending her subscription page to ‘bouncers that I knew, old colleagues, ex boyfriends or just guys that [I had] slept with one time or something like that.’ Rosie (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper, full-service and online) reported that she used any social media platform she could think of to distribute her OnlyFans page and had been successful at getting some of her online subscribers to book in-person meets with her once contact restrictions had been lifted. One focus group participant mentioned that her regular strip club clients had watched her webcamming shows during the lockdown and she had furthermore been able to get some of her webcamming clients to visit her in the strip club after it had reopened. Her business model further illustrates the strong linkage between stripping and the online adult entertainment industry in terms of clientele. Another particularly interesting case is Mildred (London, stripper, full-service and online) who co-founded a collectively run virtual strip club with some of her colleagues who she had met in the strip club that she had worked in before the pandemic.

Various participants stressed that there were advantages to creating content for a digital subscription website instead of working in a strip club. In addition to the aforementioned benefit of online work being less physically exhausting, Casey (South East, stripper and online) mentioned that she had more freedom over what she was posting and how often she would interact with clients. Rosie (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper, full-service and online) added that the atmosphere online was often more friendly and welcoming due to the lack of management. Several participants also pointed out that they experienced less stigma when they were selling content online than they had for stripping, which indicates that some people ascended in the whorearchy during the pandemic. Elise (London, stripper) added that if somebody was very popular on OnlyFans, this could potentially have a positive impact on their position in the club and make them more popular amongst strippers.

As outlined in 6.1, the crossover between online adult entertainment and stripping made sense to many participants as they managed to combine the two income streams easily. Before the pandemic, Casey (South East, stripper and online) used her OnlyFans account to sell content that she created with some of her colleagues as their club’s licence did not allow them to touch each other during a private dance. She therefore used the digital market as an extension of her stripping performance. As mentioned earlier, Lana (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper) reported that some of her customers had asked her to open an OnlyFans in 2018 already and several participants stated that in their club, it had been normalised to have an online presence and share the details with strip club clients. The fact that a large number of strippers who had not had an online presence before the pandemic entered the digital market in March 2020 indicates that this crossover has grown over the last two years and resulted in

even further linkage between the two sectors. Nevertheless, the majority of participants also reported significant disadvantages to online work in comparison to stripping.

7.2.2. The Downsides of Independent Online Adult Entertainment

The presumption that OnlyFans or AdmireMe were an easy way of making large amounts of money in a short period of time was strongly rejected by all participants who had worked online. Particularly promotion was experienced to be hard work which often took a long time to become rewarding. Building a follower base and getting enough people to subscribe to make the content creation profitable was described as a lengthy process which required a lot of social media and promotion skills, patience, and access to networks with other online adult entertainers. One focus group participant found that when she first started to work on OnlyFans, she was constantly on her phone, trying to reach out to a more international client base and ended up spending 16 hours a day on social media, promoting her content. For many participants, this was the reason that they stopped creating content after several weeks or months of building an online presence, even those that had been able to earn significant amounts of money in that time. April (Scotland, stripper and online) disclosed that her AdmireMe account was lucrative at first and she enjoyed promoting it but, after a few months, it became increasingly difficult for her to continue with it. Her decision to stop creating content for AdmireMe was also caused by the restrictive regulation of social media. She reported that because of anti-adult entertainment policies on platforms (Blunt et al., 2021), she was kicked off of several dating websites and had lost her personal Facebook and Instagram accounts with all her memories on it. This is an experience that other participants had had as well. One focus group participant explained how much being banned from Instagram impacted her business:

In the first 2 months, I made 6000 pounds from nothing, I gained 6000 followers in that time and then my Instagram got shut down and I lost everything. I lost all of my automated customers who would find my Instagram and then join my OnlyFans. I lost all of that and went from 6 grand in 2 months to 70 pounds in October because there was no automation anymore, there was no regular traffic, so it's a tough world.

Focus group participant, stripper and online

The systematic shadow banning and deplatforming of sex workers online has been of concern for the sex workers' rights movement globally, particularly in the United States where most forms of in-person sex work are fully criminalised, resulting in more reliance on the online industry even before the pandemic. Blunt et al. (2021) discuss how the regulation of platforms is often carried out by algorithms that are programmed to automatically exclude

sex workers or adult entertainers, reducing safe ways to advertise as well as access to support and information from peers. Attwood et al. (2021) add that while censorship of pornography and adult content has a long history, the number of restrictions and ‘subtler forms of censorship such as shadow banning (which limits the reach of sexual content without removing it entirely) and the creation of platform imaginaries which make sexual content and sex workers invisible’ (2021: 346) have increased in recent years. Particularly during the pandemic, when many adult content websites saw a surge in sign-ups overnight, a large number of workers found that their social media had been deleted which, as the comment of the focus group participant shows, frequently meant a sudden loss of earnings because social media was crucial to stay in touch with clients and advertise new content.

The sudden expansion of online adult entertainment furthermore led to an oversaturation of the market. The focus group participant whose Instagram account was shut down explained how it became harder to sell content once OnlyFans had become well-known:

There was a massive boom for OnlyFans and it was brilliant, I made so much money but then obviously everyone and their fucking uncle joined and now every trick in the book is either stamped out or overplayed so it’s hard.

Focus group participants, stripper and online

What she is describing here is that many advertising avenues, including dating websites and various hashtags, were promptly policed in a way that excluded adult content or became so overused that it became difficult to stand out. This led to an increase in competition that alarmed several participants who had built up an online presence before the pandemic already. Kleo (North West, stripper) said that although she understood why some of her colleagues joined OnlyFans after clubs closed, she felt sorry for people who had set up their accounts before the pandemic and had to deal with a sudden increase in competitors. Casey (South East, stripper and online) voiced her frustration about former in-person sex workers having to switch to the online market overnight without being able to plan and prepare their online business. She worried that the content of some people who had created an OnlyFans because the pandemic forced them to, was of lower quality, reflecting negatively on other online content creators who had worked on improving their online presence for years.

In addition to many in-person sex workers and adult entertainers shifting their business online, it was reported that large numbers of people, particularly women, who had not worked in sex work or adult entertainment previously, showed interest in creating an OnlyFans during the pandemic which further transformed the market and ultimately impacted on the community. Georgina (London, stripper and full-service) had witnessed frustration about people who had entered the online adult entertainment industry during the

pandemic because there was a perception that they just wanted a ‘quick buck’. Similarly, Nelly (North West, stripper) worried that many of the people who had joined OnlyFans during the pandemic would consider working in strip clubs once they reopened. She was concerned that the oversaturation of the online market would extend into a similar phenomenon in the stripping industry.

7.2.3. OnlyFans and Stigma

Notwithstanding the concerns about oversaturation and knock-on effects for other sectors, the surge in OnlyFans sign-ups was seen to have the potential to destigmatise sex work as a whole. Without prompts, nearly all interview and focus group participants stressed that the prosperity of OnlyFans during the pandemic had led to an increase in visibility and therefore a certain degree of normalisation of the sex and adult entertainment industries.

I think maybe OnlyFans is slowly becoming socially acceptable. Just because it’s become so big during lockdown, you know, I think most people will probably know someone who’s got an OnlyFans or will have seen someone who has an OnlyFans on Instagram or wherever. You know, Beyonce put it in a song.

Mildred (London, stripper, full-service and online)

Everyone’s talking about it. Like people in their day to day lives are talking about OnlyFans like they talk about Instagram. Whereas before OnlyFans, it was cam sites or clip sites. Nobody spoke about that.

Nelly (North West, stripper)

Because things like OnlyFans are so well known now, then that possibly could be helping to break down and actually remove some of the stigma and show that, you know, it’s a normal thing and normal people offer it and normal people use that service. So potentially, yeah, that could be making a difference.

Iris (North West, stripper)

I also think that because OnlyFans is so everywhere now, that that will kind of rub off onto the top parts of the sex industry to making it more, like it will move into being more acceptable. Because OnlyFans is everywhere, so many people are on OnlyFans.

Jet (South West, stripper, previously full-service and online)

Jet added that a lot of non-sex working women would talk about OnlyFans creators in an admiring way, stating that they would consider creating an account themselves if they had the confidence, rather than in the stigmatising or judgemental way that she was used to

hearing about sex worker and adult entertainers. Evie (Midlands, stripper) realised that on her social media feeds, online sex work had become more visible than other sectors ever had as many of her former colleagues were promoting their OnlyFans on their personal social media accounts, although they had never been public about their engagement in the stripping industry. Bella (South East, stripper and online) mentioned celebrities creating an OnlyFans which further normalised the platform. However, other people voiced frustration with celebrities using the platform which had been made profitable and known by sex workers. In the focus group of only strippers, the elitism in the online market was discussed in detail. One participant stressed that celebrities such as the actress and singer Bella Thorne were able to advertise their OnlyFans on their social media without fear of repercussions while most sex workers and adult entertainers were likely to have their accounts deleted. Another participant added that when Bella Thorne had announced that she had earned millions of pounds overnight, she had received inappropriate questions and assumptions about her own content on OnlyFans. Sanchez (2022) outlines the backlash that Thorne faced after falsely advertising her content as more explicit than it was and charging subscribers \$200. This prompted OnlyFans to change their pricing policies by capping subscription fees for all creators and increasing the time period between payouts from seven to 30 days, resulting in many sex workers not being able to access funds that they were relying on for an additional three weeks.

Overall, many participants witnessed a strong glamourisation of OnlyFans, with many parts of media and pop culture focusing on the high earning potential for seemingly little work, a finding that is common in wider literature as well (Easterbrook-Smith, 2022; Hamilton et al., 2022). Yet, among participants, there was little clarity on whether this glamourisation and higher acceptability of OnlyFans had a positive or negative impact on other parts of the sex and adult entertainment industries, particularly those who would traditionally occupy the lowest ranks of the whorearchy such as brothel- and street-based sex work. While Hamilton et al. (2022) find that many OnlyFans creators are hopeful that the popularity of OnlyFans would lead to a destigmatisation of sex work and adult entertainment in general, there were contrasting opinions amongst participants of this study. Some wondered if instead it would lead to a further exacerbation of the whorearchy with the highest ranks becoming more socially acceptable while in-person, full-service sex workers were met with even more hostility due to having to break contact restrictions.

I think one possibility is that it's created quite a palatable platform for sex work for the mainstream [and] I would think that creates a nice kind of whitewashed platform which separates it quite far from other sex work. Like, the women that have approached me to ask about Onlyfans, they obviously see it was very different than

doing other forms of sex work. So I think it's got that potential for that negative impact. But on the other side, we're talking about sex work more in the mainstream. And if we're talking about that, we're also talking about [other sex work] as well. So perhaps there is some benefit to it.

Evie (Midlands, stripper)

Jet (South West, stripper, previously full-service and online) discussed the Overton window, a public policy concept that describes the 'acceptable range of political discourse in a society' (Wright, 2019: 1), with regard to the attitudes toward OnlyFans. She compared it to right-wing populists who had been successful at shifting public discourse to the point where previously radical ideas such as leaving the European Union became socially acceptable. Jet argued that the normalisation of OnlyFans would have the potential to do the same thing for the normalisation of the wider sex and adult entertainment industries. Marie (South West, stripper) added that in her experience, the prominence of OnlyFans had 'opened up conversations about destitution, poverty and why people would go into that kind of work' as she had heard about a number of stories of people who had lost their jobs due to the pandemic and as a result decided to start producing adult content online. In this way, particularly participants who were organised in the sex workers' rights movement viewed the surge of OnlyFans as a tool to reach a wider audience and educate the public about sex workers' rights violations. Others were less hopeful about the impact of the rise of independent online sex work and emphasised the split between adult content creators and other, more stigmatised forms of sex work.

Although the oversaturation of the online market upset some adult entertainers who had worked online prior to the pandemic, platforms such as OnlyFans have normalised some parts of the sex and adult entertainment industries to some degree because it has given some workers a bigger platform which can be utilised to spread awareness about sex workers' rights. In the focus groups, however, there was a strong feeling that due to the increased visibility of OnlyFans, it had replaced stripping in the sense that industry outsiders viewed it as a way to 'make a quick buck' without putting in any labour. This led to OnlyFans creators experiencing more stigma than strippers who did not have an online presence. Interestingly, interview participants all placed OnlyFans above stripping in the whorearchy and concluded that strippers experienced more stigma. This further illustrates that dynamics of the whorearchy are in constant flux and impacted by levels of stigma from community outsiders, through media and pop culture. The fact that focus groups took place in late October and November 2021, nearly four months after the interviews and at a time where most contact restrictions were lifted, is one possible explanation for the change in perception of stigma against OnlyFans creators.

7.2.4. Managed Online Adult Entertainment

Another income source that participants accessed after strip clubs had shut down was working for a managed webcamming studio, either as a full-time job or alongside independent content creation. Both Bella (South East, stripper and online) and Casey (South East, stripper and online) started working for the same webcamming studio shortly after the pandemic started but had different experiences with the company, with Bella enjoying performing for the channel and preferring it to her work in strip clubs while Casey left within one week because she found customers to be particularly demanding and inappropriate. Although Bella reported a significant pay decrease from her work in strip clubs, she pointed out the advantages in comparison to stripping, particularly with regards to more professional management.

When I go to work in the studio, the producers are not like stripclub managers, like you're kind of in charge of them, they're there to help you.

Bella (South East, stripper and online)

Bella recognised less judgement of people working in other sectors of the sex or adult entertainment industries and overall more acknowledgement of the similarities to other forms of sex work or adult entertainment, especially full-service sex work which had been looked down upon in the strip club she used to work in before the pandemic. A contributing factor to a less judgemental atmosphere in the studio may have been the diversity of backgrounds that webcam performers had. Importantly, it seems that the secrecy surrounding full-service sex work that is prevalent in strip clubs does not translate to webcamming studios, with many performers being open about also engaging in full-service sex work or having done so in the past.

However, Bella also pointed out the notably high commission of 70% that the studio took from all earnings which contributed to her initial frustration working for the platform. Webcamming, both independently and through studios, has been identified as a prime example of the platform economy with forms of precarity that are common in wider platform capitalism, such as supposed flexibility that actually results in lack of income security and the need to work around clients' availability (Vlase and Preoteasa, 2022). There are strong parallels between studio-based webcamming and stripping, such as high commissions or fees as well as high levels of control of the performances and appearance without any income certainty (Vlase and Preoteasa, 2022). While the exact logistics of studio-based webcamming – alongside independent work on adult entertainment platforms – are beyond the scope of this research, it should be noted that the expansion of the digital platform economy within adult entertainment is closely linked to dynamics within the stripping industry due to

similarities in the setup as well as high crossover between the two sectors, which has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the general downwards trend of the stripping industry.

7.3. Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Community

Due to the restrictive legislation leading to further separation of the different sectors rather than creating a sense of solidarity which was outlined in chapter 6, I hypothesised that those who continued working in person would experience an increase in judgemental treatment from other members of the wider sex working community. However, findings show that there was a strong solidarity that strippers showed for their colleagues, regardless of how they chose to work during the lockdowns.

This stands in stark contrast to the increase in stigmatisation of in-person workers from community outsiders that was described by some participants as well as in stigma literature (Debus et al., 2021; Glerum, 2021). Jet (South West, stripper, previously full-service and online) described that she had witnessed non-sex workers making derogatory comments about sex workers more frequently during the pandemic. She suspected that this was in part due to the high sensitivity that she had observed in conversations about restrictions.

I think when people are not able to hug their mum or their grandparents or whatever and then someone is choosing to break the regulations because they need to work, to do this work that is, like, dirty, I think then people will look down on that even more.

Jet (South West, stripper, previously full-service and online)

Georgina (London, stripper and full-service) emphasised that if anyone needed to be judged over broken contact restrictions, it should be clients who chose to break restrictions because they ‘need sex so badly’ rather than the workers who simply could not say no to the income from sex work. To her, it was important to stress that nobody put themselves at risk on purpose but that she and some of her colleagues had made the decision to see clients where necessary because they had had no other forms of income during lockdown beyond Universal Credit which, as outlined earlier in this chapter, is rarely enough to live on. In her experience, the view that clients were to blame for contact restrictions being broken was generally held inside the wider sex working community as well and there was very little judgement from inside the community if anyone was known to continue working in person. This experience was confirmed by the majority of participants.

7.3.1. Mutual Aid Networks and Growing Solidarity

Most participants felt that the community was coming together more during the pandemic because there was an immediate understanding that all in-person sex workers and adult entertainers who lost their income from one day to the other simply had to find ways to survive somehow. Bella (South East, stripper and online) even stated that some of her colleagues who had previously made judgemental comments about full-service sex workers had changed their attitudes during the pandemic.

Before Covid, girls from the club I knew would post pictures about how they don't have sex for money, how they're not that girl. But now, everyone's just trying to make it through, you know. For the past year definitely, people have just been trying to survive.

Bella (South East, stripper and online)

There was furthermore a strong increase in the level of crossover between stripping and other sectors as many strippers started working online while others entered the full-service sex industry. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, only a minority of participants reported that they had either lived off savings and governmental support or got a job outside of sex work. Marie (South West, stripper) reported that her respect for online adult entertainers rose significantly when she realised how difficult and taxing it was to make money with content creation. Bella (South East, stripper and online) added that watching her colleagues find creative ways to create revenue online and show resilience despite not receiving much support from wider society or the state made her admire them even more than before.

In the survey, the answers to whether respondents' identification with the term sex worker had changed since the pandemic were mixed. While a 67.9% majority indicated that they had always identified with it strongly and 9.7% did not identify with it before or after the pandemic, there were 12.7% who said that they identified with it more and 9.7% who indicated that they identified with it less now. A few respondents added comments to explain their response. Of those who identified with it more, some described having entered full-service sex work due to the closure of clubs or having to utilise multiple income streams in different sectors, intensifying their connection to the wider sex working community. Of those who identified with the term less after the pandemic, a few commented that they felt disconnected from it because they had not worked in person for such a long time.

I feel odd saying I'm a sex worker/stripper even though I have not worked in the industry for a year, despite planning on going back to it asap.

Survey respondent

Yet, some of the strippers who had entered the full-service sex industry during the pandemic stated that they felt very isolated until they found other full-service sex workers to connect with. Rosie (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper, full-service and online) said that she missed working in the club because it meant having people to vent about work around her at all times. Now that she worked independently and did not know many other sex workers where she lived, she realised how much she needed direct contact with the community.

The sex worker-led organisation SWARM swiftly organised a hardship fund (Lam, 2020) which was mentioned by some participants as a source of support when they were unable to get by otherwise. Others said that they had donated to the hardship fund whenever they could and many participants spoke passionately about its positive impacts. While only a small minority of participants received payments from the fund, most at least knew someone who had and reported how important it had been for their wellbeing. Hence, the hardship fund not only provided a lifeline to some members of the sex working community financially but also constituted an essential part of sex worker culture throughout the pandemic (Brouwers and Herrmann, 2020). One stripper-led advocacy and community organising group that Elise (London, stripper) was involved with set up another, smaller hardship fund later in the pandemic.

Others disclosed that they had experienced and witnessed high levels of solidarity between different sex workers and adult entertainers with many instances of people sending each other money when it was most needed. Informal and often invisible mutual aid networks in sex working communities have always been particularly strong due to the lack of access to governmental support (Shimei, 2022) and the importance of those networks evidently intensified during the pandemic. This increase in mutual aid and solidarity as well as crossover between sectors suggest that many strippers felt more included in the wider sex working community which, as a whole, became more close-knit during the pandemic. This stands in contrast to trends reported in the previous chapters, where the whorearchy reinforced precarity in the stripping industry, whereas, during the pandemic, community-internal stigma decreased while income precarity rose.

7.3.2. Online Activism

Akin to the vast majority of sex work and adult entertainment, large parts of sex workers' rights activism were shifted online as well. Peer-led community organisations that used to host in-person breakfasts or support groups transformed their meetings into video conferencing calls, and advocacy or lobbying groups focused on online campaigning rather than organising protests or in-person events. Social media became increasingly important for

the wider sex working community to connect, reach out to new sex workers or adult entertainers, and spread information about the hardships that many were facing. This, alongside the increasing visibility of online adult entertainment due to the promotion of content on social media, resulted in the work of the sex workers' rights movement becoming more accessible to many members of the sex working community, including several strippers. Lana (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper) reported that despite having worked in strip clubs for nearly 18 years, she used the pandemic to educate herself on sex workers' rights issues properly. She stressed that due to the easy availability of educational content on platforms like TikTok, she became more aware of what was going on in the wider community and started looking into some of the issues in more depth herself. In this way, social media activism intensified her feeling of being a member of a wider sex working community and helped her to question her own prejudices about other forms of sex work or adult entertainment that she had never worked in. Other participants felt similarly about their use of social media during the pandemic and pointed out that they educated themselves about the issues that the people who worked in other sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries were facing. In the focus group of full-service sex workers, participants mentioned connecting with strippers on twitter and learning about the precarious working conditions, house fees, and the competitive setup through them, indicating that the stripper community also used social media to spread information. Iris (North West, stripper) furthermore underlined the importance of the pole dancing community on Instagram to promote sex worker-led organisations and stressed that she had found out about stripper-led activism through the posts of pole dance influencers. The relationship between strippers and pole dancers has in the past often been contentious with some pole dancers stressing their distance from strip clubs without acknowledging the origins of their sport. Iris' notion that campaigns of stripper-led organisations were shared within digital pole dance spaces therefore indicates positive change with regards to destigmatising stripping.

Another outcome of the increase in online activism is that some former strippers identified more with the stripper community again because of who they followed on social media. Evie (Midlands, stripper) mentioned that she felt 'more in touch with it again' after having lost contact with her colleagues from the strip club that she worked in several years ago. She added that she now also followed a number of full-service sex workers who had educated her on this sector that she had known very little about when she was stripping.

So the full-service sex workers [that I follow], I think hearing their opinions about things has been really important, I feel like I've grown from that and learned a lot from that. So I'm quite grateful.

Evie (Midlands, stripper)

However, some participants wondered about who was able to take up space online and be open about their engagement in sex work. Lana (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper) pointed out that the people that she followed on TikTok were mostly US-based strippers, OnlyFans creators, or independent escorts while she had never seen any content about street-based sex work on social media. Others stressed that they worried that the increased visibility of sex workers and adult entertainers on social media only depicted a glamourised and overly positive picture of the industries which, while successfully challenging stigma towards those high up in the whorearchy, did not provide space for workers in the most stigmatised sectors to be vocal about their experiences.

I'm not sure that that positivity would ever reach to people who are working the streets unless they start getting popular on Tik Tok. [...] You know, people are supporting the sex workers that they think are acceptable. So the strippers and the OnlyFans girls.

Lana (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper)

I think probably part of the problem is that the further down you go in that hierarchy, the less able you are to talk about your experiences, the more risk there is in talking about those kinds of experiences. And then that really just perpetuates the stigma because we don't know what goes on.

Evie (Midlands, stripper)

Finally, the success of online activism resulted in more accessibility to the movement. Some participants stated that they refrained from getting involved in the sex workers' rights movement offline because they feared being outed. Georgina (London, stripper and full-service) said that the possibility of being outed as a sex worker and the consequences that that would have for her job outside of sex work prevented her from being as involved as she wanted to be. Instead, she wrote about her experiences under a pseudonym and engaged in some online protests where she could remain anonymous. Lana (Yorkshire/Humber, stripper) even worried that going to a sex worker march as a woman would mean being perceived as a member of the sex working community rather than an ally 'just because you're there' which prevented her from going. This illustrates the evident barriers to collective organising that the sex workers' rights movement is facing. The rise of online activism made it easier for both Georgina and Lana to get involved. One focus group participant pointed out the importance of twitter where many sex workers and adult entertainers were able to remain anonymous but still exchange information with peers. The emergence of online sex worker spaces furthermore made the movement more accessible for many to get involved, particularly those who live in rural areas or cannot join in-person

meetings for other reasons, such as disability or care responsibilities that make travelling to different locations difficult.

7.4. Conclusion: Survival Beats Stigma

This chapter has shown the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on both precarity and stigma in the stripping industry by firstly outlining the diverse strategies of strippers to survive the sudden closure of their clubs, focusing particularly on the move to online work, and secondly engaging with the community-wide response to the pandemic which included strong mutual aid networks and online activism.

Principally, the pandemic has accelerated the cycle of precarity and stigma that was outlined in chapter six. The sudden closure of strip clubs not only left strippers with no immediate income during the lockdowns but also directly contributed to the ongoing downward trend of the stripping industry with many clubs having been unable to reopen after the lockdowns had ended. The corresponding expansion of the online adult entertainment industries, both independent and studio-based, created new challenges for workers with regards to income uncertainty and high competition, resembling many of the issues that platform workers face in other industries as well (Bessa et al., 2022; Prassl, 2019). Previous studies have argued that digital adult entertainment is a prime example of the gig economy (Easterbrook-Smith, 2022; Berg, 2016). Yet, some strippers have also discovered advantages of working on online platforms and have therefore remained in the digital adult entertainment industry alongside stripping in order to diversify their income streams as the stripping industry is dying. In addition to increasing precarity, contact restrictions created an additional layer of stigma from industry outsiders towards those who were working in person which ultimately led to more rigorous enforcement of prostitution-related offences, particularly soliciting laws (see Fedorkó et al., 2021). While the normalisation of certain forms of digital adult entertainment has the potential to destigmatise sex work and adult entertainment more generally, there are conflicting views about its contribution to the whorearchy and overall perception of the sex working community. Overall, the pandemic has illustrated the cycle of precarity and stigma and accelerated the downward spiral.

However, while in the previous chapter, the whorearchy constituted an essential element of this cycle and actively reinforced the dying of the stripping industry, community-internal stigma during the pandemic decreased and resulted in growing solidarity between sectors, which became visible through strong mutual aid networks and resounding online activism. This is due to a shared experience of having to find ways to survive after a sudden and immediate closure of clubs, resulting in many strippers struggling to make ends meet due to

the lack of governmental or official support, an experience that many other in-person sex workers and adult entertainers shared as well. Many strippers also picked up other forms of sex work or adult entertainment which increased understanding and, in some cases, respect for people working in other sectors. Furthermore, the increase in online activism provided new spaces for sex workers to connect and educate each other, that were more accessible for many people who had not got involved in sex workers' rights activism prior to the pandemic.

In conclusion, on the one hand, the pandemic has advanced the acceleration of the downward spiral of the stripping industry as well as the platformisation and corresponding precarisation of adult entertainment more generally. However, on the other hand, the extreme situation that strippers were put in after the sudden closure of their clubs also contributed to an overall increase in solidarity and understanding between stripping and other sectors.

8. Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis has provided a snapshot of the British stripping industry during and around the Covid-19 pandemic, illustrated its intersections with other parts of the sex and adult entertainment industries, and presented the unity, solidarity, and friendships as well as the conflicts, hierarchies, and rivalry between strippers and the wider sex working community throughout this uncertain and changing time. Due to increasingly restrictive licensing conditions, decreasing demand, and not least the temporary and permanent closure of clubs due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the stripping industry has been spiralling towards accelerating precarity with dropping earning potential and increased job insecurity, which has led to many strippers starting to work in other forms of sex work or adult entertainment alongside stripping. This has intensified the crossover between different sectors despite intra-occupational stigma as well as various legal restrictions of stripping, full-service sex work, and online adult entertainment which seek to prevent workers engaging in multiple sectors contemporaneously. These restrictions furthermore result in many strippers being forced to hide their working practices. This thesis therefore zoomed in on these intersections of stripping with other forms of sex work and adult entertainment and investigated them through a combined lens of stigma and precarious work. Overall, this thesis has argued that this heightened level of precarity which pushed strippers to pick up work at the intersections has made them more criminalised, stigmatised and ultimately more precarious.

Although originally unintended, the timing of this research meant that I was able to respond to the pandemic immediately and capture its impact on strippers in Britain instantaneously. Evidently, I did not expect my doctoral research to be disrupted by the rapid global spread of a deadly virus that changed the world beyond recognition within weeks and has since had devastating effects on all parts of human existence, and this thesis would look very different if this virus had been contained. This pandemic – and the political decisions made by the government in response to it – has uncovered the precarity of the stripping industry alongside many other precarious labour sectors and has further driven the platformisation of adult entertainment, therefore also heavily influencing this thesis. Because of the frequent changes in the industry that cannot be attributed solely to the pandemic but also to ongoing licensing battles, increasing labour organisation amongst strippers, and decreasing demand in live nude entertainment, this research can only provide a snapshot of the industry in the year 2021 which has proven to be a year with unique challenges for the industry and presents valuable insights into the business models inside the stripping industry as well as on its intersections with other sectors.

This chapter will summarise the key findings of this thesis and engage in more detail with the contributions the research makes to the wider literature, particularly the outline of a cycle of precarity and stigma in which strippers are caught up in, and a conceptualisation of the whorearchy. I will engage with the policy recommendations that follow from this study and touch on its contributions to trade union activism as well as campaigns against ‘nil’ caps. Furthermore, this chapter will suggest areas that went beyond the scope of this thesis but would benefit from further academic attention, and summarise some final reflections on this research project.

8.1. Summary of the Research: Focus, Aims, and Key Findings

The aim of this thesis was to provide an up-to-date picture of the stripping industry before and during the Covid-19 pandemic with a particular focus on its intersections with other forms of sex work and adult entertainment at a time of increasing precarisation and legal restriction. By applying a mixed methods approach which involved a literature review of both academic work and accounts from sex workers outside of academia, a self-administered online survey of 141 strippers, in-depth interviews with 16 of the survey respondents, and triangulation of the data in three sector-specific focus groups, it was possible to include a large number of voices and perspectives from inside the sex and adult entertainment industries while simultaneously being able to go into depth. The thesis investigated feelings of affiliation, belonging, and exclusion, as well as everyday experiences in precarious and often criminalised forms of work. This research was inspired and guided by both my lived experience working in the sex and adult entertainment industries and my continuous involvement in the sex workers’ rights movement, particularly in the United Sex Workers (USW) trade union. Regular informal consultations with other members of the wider sex working community furthermore ensured continual accountability and the usefulness of the research for the sex workers’ rights movement, and particularly for organising efforts of strippers. More direct benefit for those who shared their experiences, views, and opinions with me, which was of utmost importance for this research project, was achieved through direct financial reimbursement for interview and focus group participants in the form of shopping vouchers, community-transferred financial compensation through donations to three peer-led organisations (Brouwers, 2022), and the continual use of my access to academic resources and knowledge for the sex workers’ rights movement.

I started this research from the point of view that stripping, alongside other forms of sex work and adult entertainment, is and has always been a form of both stigmatised and precarious work (Easterbrook-Smith, 2022; Barbagallo and Hardy, 2021; Levitt, 2021). The literature review engaged with empirical studies of the conditions in British strip clubs

(Hardy and Sanders, 2014; Lister, 2012; Colosi, 2010) and clearly showed that the industry had been on a downward trend for at least ten years with strip clubs relying heavily on house fees and commission from strippers. Following this, this thesis identified the central role of the licensing regime which is the result of stigmatising political narratives and drives precarity in the sector in various ways. Alongside the transfer of licensing fees onto strippers' house fees and the closure of multiple clubs due to individual councils' decisions that Hardy and Sanders (2014) already uncovered immediately after the introduction of the legislation, the licensing regime has since established a culture of constant job insecurity due to the fear of any club losing its licence suddenly. Furthermore, this study's participants mentioned a 'crackdown on clubs' after 2016/17 which intensified this culture of constant anxiety and resulted in managers policing the performances more strictly which further decreased income potential as strippers are no longer able to sell private dances in the way that they are most comfortable with. Overall, the sector has been on an accelerating downward spiral in recent years due to the closure of clubs, restrictive licensing conditions, and a decrease in demand for live nude entertainment, and this thesis anticipates that, in the absence of significant structural change, the stripping industry as it is known today is dying.

However, despite this evident decline in income potential, this research did not identify any trends of strippers leaving the industry completely. Instead, many strippers have started to work in multiple sectors of the wider sex and adult entertainment industries alongside stripping, illustrating the importance of zooming in on the intersections of stripping with other sectors which have often been overlooked in previous research. There are two key mechanisms that drive the further precarisation and stigmatisation of strippers who work at those intersections, namely the policy framework and the whorearchy. The aforementioned overly restrictive licensing conditions have had negative impacts on the working conditions of strippers who work at the intersection to the full-service sex industry as it intensifies the legal separation of full-service sex work from stripping. Similarly, the policing of online spaces, such as OnlyFans, contributes to the separation of sectors by banning online adult entertainers from arranging in-person meetings with their clients or persuading them to book private dances with them at the strip club. On top of that, the whorearchy, which stigmatises people who work in the wider sex and adult entertainment industries according to their proximity to their clients and degree of criminalisation (see 8.3), interferes with strategies of strippers who work at the intersections. Several participants who were or had previously been working in the full-service industry as well pointed out that they had to be secretive about this in the club because they feared stigmatisation from their peers. As a consequence, the work of strippers at the intersections becomes even more precarious and stigmatised.

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated some of the trends towards casualisation and exploitation in stripping and intensified digitalisation and platformisation of adult entertainment more generally. While more time needs to pass to effectively assess the long-term impact of the pandemic on the stripping industry and the degree to which it has contributed to its downward trend, there are strong indications that large parts of live nude entertainment have been replaced by platforms such as OnlyFans, further intensifying the fading of the stripping industry as it is known today.

8.2. The Cycle of Precarity and Stigma

By applying a theoretical lens that combines stigma with precarious work, this thesis highlights the relationship between precarity and the drivers and effects of stigma, particularly community-internal stigma. It showed that, in the case of strippers in Britain, occupational precarity and stigma are interwoven and mutually aggravating in the following way. The social stigma that controls and oppresses all sex workers and adult entertainers evidently also impacts strippers and has been utilised to justify legal restrictions in the form of the Sexual Entertainment Venue (SEV) licensing regime. These legal restrictions have driven precarity in the stripping industry, resulting in increased competition which in turn intensified judgemental and stigmatising behaviour towards those who created multiple income streams in other sectors. This behaviour can in part be attributed to the fact that strippers fear not breaking even if their colleagues offer other services. The increasing precarity of the stripping industry also contributes to stigmatising narratives that paint stripping as inherently exploitative by nature. Finally, this research outlined how the whorearchy further drives precarity and removes safety features that strippers working at the intersections would otherwise be able to put in place, such as letting a colleague know their whereabouts or track each others' phones. What becomes visible is that strippers are caught up in a cycle of precarity and stigma which continuously fuel and exacerbate each other, resulting in increasing work and personal pressure.

The pandemic has accelerated this cycle of precarity and stigma by directly contributing to the ongoing downward trend of the stripping industry and by intensifying the growth of the personalised and direct provision of adult entertainment via online platforms rather than in clubs. Online adult entertainment created new challenges for workers including income uncertainty and even higher levels of competition. Contact restrictions created an additional layer of stigma and drove more rigorous enforcement of the Sexual Offences Act. While the normalisation of OnlyFans has the potential to destigmatise sex work and adult entertainment more generally, its contribution to the whorearchy and overall perception of the sex working community remains to be seen. However, the pandemic did temporarily disrupt the cycle of

precarity and stigma by sparking strong mutual aid networks and resounding online activism. Overall, many of the strippers who participated in this research grew closer to the wider sex working community and successfully built networks of solidarity, but the pandemic also intensified the compounded effect of precarity and stigma on strippers in the long term.

8.3. Conceptualising the Whorearchy

Because community-internal stigma significantly impacts the strategies of strippers who work at the intersections with other sectors, it was necessary for this research to provide a conceptualisation of the whorearchy as it materialises in Britain and particularly within British strip clubs. This thesis therefore also contributes to the recently evolving academic discourse about its effects on the wider community as well as the factors that impact its order. Building on and extending the existing work of sex workers (Sumner, 2020; Witt, 2020; Vixxx, 2019; Knox, 2014) and scholars (Fuentes, 2022; Toubiana and Ruebottom, 2022; Berg, 2021), this thesis developed an outline of the experiences of strippers in Britain, many of whom also work in other sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries, and their views of the whorearchy.

By distinctly focusing on the community-internal reproduction of the whorearchy rather than on encounters with community outsiders, this thesis concludes that the whorearchy is an informal hierarchy which is implied in all interactions sex workers and adult entertainers have with each other and is driven by structural whorephobia and misogyny which several participants mentioned as internalised influences on their own thinking and behaviour. In the context of British strip clubs, I conclude that physical proximity to clients and degree of criminalisation are the primary factors determining the order of sectors within the whorearchy, with hourly income, level of physical safety, and perceived desperation as secondary factors which establish hierarchies *within* sectors. Importantly, the demographic background of a sex worker or adult entertainer, including their proximity to whiteness and the middle classes, strongly impacts not only how much money they can earn in the sex and adult entertainment industries but also which sectors are accessible to them. Hence, I argue that while established systems of oppression and other social hierarchies are fundamental to the dynamics within sex working communities and strongly intersect with the whorearchy, it is most useful to refer to the whorearchy as a ranking of the different sectors within the sex and adult entertainment industries, i.e. as a hierarchy that is based on the kind(s) of sex work or adult entertainment that a worker engages in. Approached in this way, the whorearchy acts as an analytical tool that describes one particular hierarchy between sectors that is specific to the sex working community, rather than attempting to include all social hierarchies in it.

Although the exact order of the upper sections of the whorearchy is contested and heavily depends on the context in which workers interact, street-based sex workers are placed lowest in the hierarchy, followed by indoor full-service sex workers, a notion that is also consensus in the wider literature (Levitt, 2022; Toubiana and Ruebottom, 2022; Berg, 2021). The fact that there was no consensus on the ranking of strippers, OnlyFans creators, and porn performers amongst participants illustrates the complexity of the whorearchy as it is a messy, transient, and context dependent system of oppression. Nevertheless, the existence of the whorearchy and its contribution to the whore stigma are uncontested despite controversies about the minutiae of its exact order. In accordance with Fuentes (2022), this research has shown that (partial) criminalisation of some sectors as well as restrictive policing of others upholds the whorearchy and gives strippers the incentive to reproduce it in order to keep their jobs legal, illustrating the need for full decriminalisation of all forms of sex work in order to combat the materialisation of the whorearchy in sex worker spaces. The following section will engage with policy implications in more detail.

8.4. Implications for Policy and Research

In addition to the identification of a cycle of precarity and stigma as well as a conceptualisation of the whorearchy within British strip clubs, this thesis makes valuable contributions to wider social research about precarious work and stigma at work and calls for legislative change in order to protect strippers from labour market vulnerabilities.

8.4.1. Policy recommendations

As an industry that has been on a downward trend for at least a decade and in which labour organising is in early stages, the future of those employed in the stripping industry is likely to be even more precarious and shaped by income uncertainty despite working in multiple sectors contemporaneously. There is an urgent need to reform the legal frameworks of the sectors of the sex and adult entertainment industries by stripping them from criminal law and instead providing a robust framework based in employment law that grants labour protections to all sex workers and adult entertainers. Hence, this thesis contributes to the wealth of literature calling for the full decriminalisation of full-service sex work (Fuentes, 2022; Blunt et al., 2021; Brooks-Gordon et al., 2021; Pitcher and Wijers, 2014; Cruz, 2013; Kempadoo and Doezema, 1998) by adding a focus on the impact of criminalisation and restrictive policy on strippers. Particularly section 51A of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, which criminalises solicitation in public spaces, creates unnecessary safety issues for strippers who work at the intersection to the full-service sex industry and contributes to an environment of secrecy and judgement within strip clubs.

With regards to the stripping industry which stood at the centre of this research, this thesis did not find evidence of any positive change for strippers following the legislative change in 2010 that introduced powers for local councils to license and restrict SEVs. Although previous studies have clearly articulated the potential of the licensing regime to write labour protections and rights into local policy (Cruz et al., 2017; Hardy and Sanders, 2014), this thesis argued that handing powers to impose restrictions and conditions to local governments has ultimately impacted the wellbeing of strippers negatively and driven precarity in the industry. Despite claims about the usefulness of the licensing regime to protect women from violence, it contributed to the vulnerability of many strippers in the labour market. Hence, I support and find optimism in the resistance of strippers against the legislation which takes many forms. Alongside various cases in the employment tribunal which successfully proved worker status of strippers (see 3.1.3; Barbagallo and Cruz, 2021), unionised strippers in Bristol and Edinburgh ran the aforementioned campaigns against ‘nil’ caps in their cities. While Bristol City Council ultimately decided against setting a ‘nil’ policy, a judicial review in Edinburgh to challenge the council’s decision to ban strip clubs was announced. Due to the way in which judicial reviews work in Scotland (McCorkindale et al., 2015), club owners jointly submitted the motion and the USW union joined as an additional party. Their argument is in part based on the 2010 Equality Act and a successful outcome would have the potential to positively impact licensing legislation all over Britain.

The findings of this thesis are particularly relevant due to the ongoing recession and cost of living crisis that Britain is currently experiencing which is likely to drive more people into various forms of sex work and adult entertainment, including stripping, while demand is likely going down, resulting in many workers being pressured into working more or offering a wider range of services in order to make ends meet (Tridimas, 2022). After the pandemic increased the crossover between stripping and other sectors, the cost of living crisis adds another incentive for many strippers to utilise multiple income streams. Furthermore, the corresponding recession is likely to decrease demand for live adult entertainment even more, further contributing to the dying of the stripping industry in Britain.

8.4.2. Contributions to Wider Work and Stigma Literature

This thesis holds significance for the understanding of the British stripping industry, with wider implications relevant to the academic fields of work and stigma. Workers in other precarious industries, particularly in the gig economy, frequently face many of the issues outlined in this thesis, such as the misclassification of workers’ employment status and the corresponding lack of labour protections, high competition due to an oversupply of workers in an unregulated work environment, and inadequate support during the pandemic (Jones,

2021; Wiener et al., 2020; Alberti et al., 2019; Lloyd, 2019; Prassl, 2018; Wood et al., 2018; Caraher and Reuter, 2017).

The ongoing platformisation of adult entertainment mirrors various issues that platform workers in other industries are facing as well, such as high commission rates and levels of control, the necessity to work long hours, and extreme income uncertainty. Increased digitalisation and platformisation of work has resulted in most people who are employed in the gig economy having to work multiple jobs alongside each other in order to make ends meet (Jones, 2021), a trend that also stands at the centre of this research. However, due to the distinct legal frameworks of stripping as well as other forms of sex work or adult entertainment, strippers who work at the intersections to the full-service sex industry are prevented from doing so safely by telling their colleagues or managers about their whereabouts or clients, illustrating the crucial role that policy plays for the extreme precarity that strippers find themselves in.

Building on predictions from sociology of work scholars about further increasing flexibilisation (Jones, 2021; Kalleberg, 2021), this thesis has shown that the case of strippers in Britain during and around the Covid-19 pandemic can tell us a lot about the future of work in a number of different industries as it is a prime example of highly precarious work while simultaneously being stigmatised and, as a result, even partially criminalised through a restrictive licensing regime which further exacerbates precarity. Because strippers' working lives exemplify extreme precarity, the responses of strippers to increasing job and income insecurity are indicative of reactions of other workers whose jobs are threatened by further flexibilisation. Researching strippers' responses can therefore support the development of strategies to challenge growing precarity in labour markets more generally. On the one hand, this includes unionisation and resistance against the policies that drive precarisation and stigma and on the other hand, the dynamics in strip clubs illustrate the extensive materialisation of intra-occupational stigma in order to eliminate competition. Equally, the mechanisms that drive precarity in the industry are indicative of the impact of policies which are based on moralistic principles and justified by societal stigma on the wellbeing of workers. Insofar, the SEV licensing regime in Britain can be viewed as a direct consequence of stigma as a form of social control and oppression (Tyler, 2020). Furthermore, the role of the whorearchy in the cycle of precarity and stigma illustrates the significance of materialisations of social stigma from within stigmatised communities for the vulnerability of workers. Hence, this thesis also contributes to wider conceptualisations of stigma in precarious industries where it is used to control and oppress workers.

8.4.3. Future Research

The findings of this thesis were shaped by the Covid-19 pandemic to a large extent which offers unique insights into a community in crisis but also creates the need for follow-up research on the ways in which the impacts of the pandemic materialise long-term. This notably includes the ongoing digitalisation and platformisation of adult entertainment and the strategies that in-person adult entertainers, such as strippers, have developed to survive in these industries. While this thesis has briefly touched on how the platformisation of adult entertainment affects the stripping industry, research on its impact on professional porn actors, webcam performers, full-service sex workers and anyone else working in the sex and adult entertainment industries is in early days (see Easterbrook-Smith, 2022; Vlase and Preoteasa, 2022; Barbagallo and Hardy, 2021) and would benefit from further attention. Similarly, comparative analyses with the issues that gig economy workers face in other, non-sex working industries, such as food delivery, courier services, transport, or web design, would be particularly useful to strengthen the contextualisation of the work in strip clubs as well as on adult entertainment platforms as part of the wider gig economy.

The developments outlined in this thesis were significantly shaped and driven by the legislative frameworks surrounding stripping and full-service sex work in Britain. Comparing the British case with countries in which sex work and adult entertainment exist in different legal as well as cultural contexts would provide further insight into the role of criminalisation for the working conditions of strippers.

Another development that was touched on during fieldwork multiple times but goes beyond the scope of this particular research project, was the expansion of labour organisation within the stripping industry as well as sex work and adult entertainment more generally. In unison with Barbagallo and Hardy (2021), I am optimistic about the resourceful and resilient trade union activism that strippers have engaged in in recent years in order to prevent strip club bans to be implemented in their regions and organise against exploitative practices of their bosses. As part of the aforementioned judicial review in Edinburgh, the USW union was forced to work in collaboration with the strip club owners that they usually (and contemporaneously) organise against, resulting in novel and interesting forms of alliances which affect the bargaining powers of both club owners and unionised strippers in various ways. While these specific developments may be unique to the Edinburgh case, academic observation would likely add valuable insights into wider trends in labour organising in atypical work since sex work and adult entertainment are located at the extreme end of precarity due to criminalisation or restrictive policing.

Particularly with the increasing retirement of the contemporary stripping industry and the corresponding digitalisation of adult entertainment, collective labour protest faces new challenges that have been observed in other industries that are subject to high levels of platformisation, such as food delivery, courier services and transportation (Bessa et al., 2022; Joyce et al., 2020; Trappmann et al., 2020). Comparative analyses of developments in labour organising on adult entertainment platforms and platforms in other industries would be useful to illustrate if and how criminalisation of sex work and adult entertainment and stigma from political and social actors, such as mainstream trade unions, judges, and press, impact on sex workers' ability to collectively challenge platform practices. The increasing unionisation in the sex and adult industries illustrates the complexities of employment relations in an informal and precarious labour market that is at risk of criminalisation and would benefit from further comprehensive, timely research that cooperates with and directly supports the sex workers' rights movement.

8.5. Final Remarks: A New Way of Thinking About Sex Work

After decades of pathologising sex workers and adult entertainers in academic research, erotic and sexual(ised) work has become increasingly acknowledged as a form of work and many social researchers preface their work with the notion that they view sex work as work. More recently, multiple sex work researchers have begun to think about different forms of sex work or adult entertainment not only as a form of work but as an exemplary of *precarious* work and aligned it with the gig economy. Examples include Barbagallo and Hardy (2021) who describe the parallels of digitally mediated in-person full-service sex work with other platform work, Levitt (2021) who identifies the work of dominatrices to be located within the gig economy, and Berg (2021) as well as Easterbrook-Smith (2022) who outline the ways in which independent online content creation and pornography more generally resemble working conditions in flexible and precarious labour markets outside of sex work or adult entertainment. By engaging with performers in British strip clubs, which are at constant risk of criminalisation and have been on a downward spiral since the early 2010s, this thesis makes a key contribution to this new way of thinking about sex work, and therefore to a better understanding of the gig economy in general.

Within this new way of thinking, this thesis provides important insights into the mechanisms that drive precarity and stigma in all sex and adult entertainment industries in Britain because stripping occupies a unique position inside them. Due to the effects of the SEV licensing regime, the position of strippers in the whorearchy, and the exploitative set up of strip clubs, the experiences of this study's participants contribute to the understanding of sex work and adult entertainment as precarious work in a meaningful way.

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Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

Section 1: Survey

Do you consent to taking part? (Required)

Your participation is completely anonymous and you can withdraw from the study at any point before submission by simply closing the window

- Yes
- No

If no: send them to Sorry-you're-not-eligible-page.

Section 2: Where and when have you worked?

Have you ever worked in a stripclub or lap dancing club in Britain? (Required)

- Yes
- No

If no: send them to Sorry-you're-not-eligible-page.

How long have you been working / did you work in the stripping industry ?

- <1 year
- 1-2 years
- 2-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10+ years

How long ago did you work in the stripping industry?

- Up until clubs closed because of Covid-19
- Until less than one year before Covid-19
- 2-5 years ago
- 5-10 years ago
- More than 10 years ago

Section 3: Identification with the sex working community

Which of the following terms do you identify with? (Tick all that apply)

- Stripper
- Lap Dancer
- Exotic Dancer or Performer
- Erotic Dancer or Performer
- Nude Dancer or Performer
- Sex Worker
- Hooker
- Prostitute

- Companion
- Whore
- Other: [please specify]

Would you consider yourself a part of the sex working community?

- Yes
- No

Do you consider strippers to be sex workers?

- Yes
- No

Section 4: Identification with the sex working community

Would you consider yourself a part of the sex workers' rights movement?

- Yes
- No

Are you a member of a trade union?

- Yes, I am a member of a union that represents sex workers / dancers
- Yes, I am a member of a union for another job
- Yes, both
- No

Are you involved with an organisation that fights for the rights of sex workers?

- Yes, I'm active
- Not anymore but I used to be
- No but I follow it
- No but I would like to be
- No and I'm not interested in it

Section 5: Only if 10 is a or b:

How are/were you involved? (Tick all that apply)

- Advocacy or lobbying for the decriminalisation of sex work
- Trade union activism
- Legal support for sex workers who face criminalisation or immigration charges
- Financial support for sex workers
- Community organising (online or offline)
- Community education
- Volunteering for a sex worker support charity
- Other: [please specify]

Section 6: About your work

Are you or have you ever offered any sexual services online?

- Yes, I sell/have sold content online
- Yes, I offer/have offered webcamming services
- Yes, both
- No

Are you or have you ever offered any in-person sexual services or 'extras' apart from lap dancing/stripping? (Tick all that apply)

- Yes, I offer/have offered sexual services in stripclubs
- Yes, I meet/have met clients from the stripclub after work and offered sexual services
- Yes, I offer/have offered sexual services elsewhere in times when I was also working in a stripclub
- Yes, I offer/have offered sexual services elsewhere in times when I was not working in a stripclub
- Yes, multiple of the above
- No

What do you consider 'extras' in a stripclub? (Tick all that apply)

- Full Service / Sexual Intercourse
- Blowjobs and Handjobs
- Agreeing to the client masturbating during the lap dance
- Agreeing to the client touching the dancer during the lap dance
- Kissing
- Other: [please specify]

Do you mind if your colleagues are offering 'extras'?

- I don't mind if other dancers meet clients after work but I am against extras in the club
- I don't mind what other dancers do when they're not working in the stripclub but they should not offer sexual services to stripclub clients
- I'm uncomfortable working with dancers who also offer sexual services, regardless of how separated it is from their work in the stripclub
- No, I don't mind it
- I like it when my colleagues offer 'extras'
- I prefer it when I'm the only one offering 'extras'
- Other: [please specify]

Section 7: Only if 14 is a

Why? (Tick all that apply)

- I'm afraid my club will close if authorities find out
- If one of us offers extras, clients will expect that we all do

- It's not fair if some dancers offer extras and others don't
- It makes me feel like I work in a brothel
- I'm afraid that people in my private life will think I sell sex too
- It makes clients less interested in lap dances
- It's unhygienic
- Other: [please specify]

Section 8: Only if 14 is b

Why? (Tick all that apply)

- I'm afraid my club will close if authorities find out
- If one of us offers extras, clients will expect that we all do
- It's not fair if some dancers offer extras and others don't
- It makes me feel like I work in a brothel
- I'm afraid that people in my private life will think I sell sex too
- It makes clients less interested in lap dances
- Other: [please specify]

Section 9: Only if 14 is c

Why? (Tick all that apply)

- I'm afraid my club will close if authorities find out
- It makes me feel like I work in a brothel
- I'm afraid that people in my private life will think I sell sex too
- I'm not sure why it makes me uncomfortable but it does
- Other: [please specify]

Section 10: Experiences of judgement

Do you or have you ever felt judged for the way you work by any of your colleagues?

- Yes, I felt judged because I offer/have offered in-person sexual services or extras
- Yes, I felt judged because I offer/have offered online sexual services
- Yes, I felt judged because I don't offer any sexual services other than lap dances
- No, but I have witnessed judgemental behaviour towards other dancers
- No, but I felt judged for something else (ethnicity, gender, looks, habits, etc)
- No

Section 11: Only if 15 is a, b, or c

How did you experience judgemental behaviour from colleagues? (Tick all that apply)

- I've experienced physical violence from colleagues
- I've experienced emotional violence from colleagues
- I've lost friends
- I've felt uncomfortable at work because of judgemental behaviour

- I've felt unsafe at work because of judgemental behaviour
- I've felt disconnected from my colleagues because of the way I work
- It didn't have any impact on me
- Other: [please specify]

How did this impact your work? (Tick all that apply)

- I've stopped offering sexual services other than lap dancing
- I've started offering sexual services beyond lap dancing
- I've changed club / workspace
- I started hiding how I work from my colleagues
- It didn't impact how I work
- Other: [please specify]

Section 12: Covid-19

During the pandemic, what were/was your income stream(s)? (Tick all that apply)

- Governmental Support Scheme
- Lived of Savings
- Mutual Aid Funds and/or other financial support of sex worker support services (food parcels, vouchers, etc)
- Financial Support from friends and/or family
- Picked up a job outside of sex work
- Moved sex work online
- Continued sex working in person
- Picked up other forms of in-person sex work
- Other: [please specify]

Did you feel judgement from your colleagues about how you dealt with the pandemic? (Tick all that apply)

- Yes, I felt judged for meeting with clients in-person
- Yes, I felt judged for doing online sex work (content creation, Only Fans, camming)
- Yes, I felt judged for not doing any sex work during the pandemic
- No
- I left the stripping and sex industry before the pandemic already
- Other: [please specify]

Section 13: Future Plans

Did your identification with the term 'sex worker' change since the pandemic?

- Yes, I identify with it more now
- Yes, I identify with it less now
- No, I have always identified with it strongly
- No, I do not identify with it
- Other: [please specify]

When it's safe, do you plan on going back to lap dancing?

- Yes
- No

Section 14: Only if 19 is Yes

Will the way you work differ from the way you used to work before Covid-19?

- Yes, I will continue the work that I have picked up during Covid-19 and only continue stripping on the side
- Yes, I will have to work more to make up for lost income during the pandemic
- No
- Other: [please specify]

Section 15: Only if 19 is no

Why not?

- I make more money in other forms of sex work
- I make more money in my job outside of sex work
- I want to leave sex work all together
- I had already stopped working in the stripping industry before Covid-19
- Other: [please specify]

Section 16: About you

What age are you? [please specify]

What is your gender? (Tick all that apply)

- Male
- Female
- Non-Binary
- Not sure
- Other

Are you

- Cisgender
- Transgender
- Not sure
- Rather not say

Are you (Tick all that apply)

- Black or Black British
- Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups
- Asian or Asian British
- Arab
- White

Other:

Are you

- A British citizen
- An EU migrant
- A non-EU migrant

Section 17: Further comments

Do you want to be informed when this study will be published?

- Yes
- No

Would you be interested in participating in a focus group or interview about the relationship between lap dancers with the wider sex working community in the form of paid focus groups?

- Yes
- No

If so, please provide your email address: [please specify]

(Even if you provide your email, your survey answers will stay completely anonymous and can't be connected to you)

Section 18: Further Comments:

Do you have any further comments? [please specify]

Which organisation would you like the donation for your survey participation to go?
(Required)

- The East London Stripper Collective (ELSC)
- Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement (SWARM)
- The United Sex Workers of the World (USW)
- I don't care

Submit.

Confirmation Message:

Thank you so much for taking part!

Please feel free to contact me about any questions or concerns that you have about my research at tess.herrmann@york.ac.uk.

If you would prefer to speak to someone else or make a complaint, you can also contact my supervisors (kate.brown@york.ac.uk or sharon.grace@york.ac.uk)

Appendix 2: Topic Guide for Interviews

Introduction and Consent (5 min)

- Welcome the participant and get informed consent
- What pseudonym would you like me to use?
- Go through participant information sheet together and answer any questions the participant has
- Thank them for participating and transfer them the voucher

Personal Information (5 min)

- How are you doing?
 - Covid has impacted significantly on the sex industry and it's been a challenging year. Are you ok?
- How do you sex work?
 - What sector are you in now? What sectors have you worked in previously? How long for?
 - If more than one sector, do they overlap? How?
 - Do different sectors in the sex industry overlap in general? First ask about what they think and then introduce **survey** as a probe/prompt to go further

Whorearchy at work (20 min)

- Do you ever work with any other sex workers/ with other dancers?
 - How is your relationship with them?
- Some say that sex workers and dancers act judgemental towards each other based on how they work. Do you agree?
- Can you give me an example of a time you have felt judged for the ways in which you work? If not, can you give me an example of witnessing judgement towards one of your colleagues?
 - How did you/they manage these situations? If it was you, how did it impact on how you work?
 - What could have helped to manage it?
 - Present and discuss **findings from the survey** on judgemental behaviour. talk about **tweets** (only if more prompts are needed)
- Have you heard of the term 'whorearchy'? (only ask if the term hasn't come up in previous question)
 - Just to clarify we're talking about the same thing:
 - "The whorearchy is arranged according to intimacy of contact with clients and police. The closer to both you are, the closer you are to the bottom." (from Belle Knox, 2012)
 - Does this sound ok? Do you agree that that's the whorearchy? Would you like to add/change anything?

- Have you experienced it? If so, how? If not, have your friends/colleagues?
 - Get detailed descriptions of those experiences, but try to keep it to experiences *at work*
- How did you deal with it? What are your strategies to handle the whorearchy?
- How do you feel about the ‘whorearchy’?

This is the core of the interview, get detailed experiences, ask lots of follow ups

Whorearchy in activism (10 min)

- Are you involved in any advocacy or activism?
 - Especially sex work related but also mention other forms of activism. Make sure to figure out what kind of activism they’re doing / if there’s a community there to talk about
 - If other matter, are there any other sex workers in your activism bubble?
 - Make sure people don’t speak too long about this as it’s not too relevant what *exactly* they do
- Have you experienced the ‘whorerachy’ in activist spaces?
 - If yes, do you have an example?
 - Are hierarchies more or less prevalent in the sex workers’ rights movement in your opinion?

Whorearchy and Covid-19 (10 min)

- Briefly explain how you survived the pandemic financially (if comfortable)
- If you’ve moved sex work online, did that impact on your relationship with other sex workers? How?
 - Did this influence how you understood the sex industry? How about the whorearchy?
- In the **survey** I’ve conducted, it seemed like a large proportion [insert percentage] of the people who filled it out had moved their sex work online. There have also been a few conflicts during the pandemic between sex workers who kept seeing clients and those who went online (show **tweets**) - in your circle of friends (especially the sex working ones), how did you experience this?
- Do you think that the ‘whorearchy’ has been influenced by the pandemic and a large proportion of strippers and other in-person sex workers switching online?

Conclusion (5-10 min)

- Anything you want to add:
- Thank the participant again for the interview and repeat how they can best contact me about any questions, comments or concerns

Appendix 3: Topic Guide for Focus Groups

1. Strippers and 2. Strippers who have also offered full-service

FIRST BLOCK: WELCOME (15 mins)

1. Introduction
 - Welcome everyone and go through information sheet once again with everyone there, give everyone another chance to ask questions
 - Talk about how we communicate in the focus groups (raising hand function on Zoom, moderation, etc)
2. Icebreaker
 - Everyone introduce themselves: Name, Pronouns, best thing about stripping, worst thing about stripping.
3. Expectations
 - Introduce 'agenda': What we're going to talk about today
 - What do participants expect from this?
4. Terminology
 - What do you identify as? Stripper? Lap Dancer? Sex Worker? Prostitute?
 - i. See if discussion naturally goes into this direction, if not:
 - Findings: Controversy around 'sex worker' - Should strippers use the term 'sex worker' because solidarity or is that disrespectful to full-service workers?
 - i. Survey: 90% identify with 'sex worker' while 98.5% identify with 'stripper', bring in percentages of other terms if necessary/helpful (e.g. whore 21%, lap dancer 79%)
 - Use quotes only for prompts as needed:
 - i. But then, in some spaces, using the term sex worker, particularly having done other forms of sex work is kind of, it really also brings a lot of solidarity across different industries while being a stripper just does not have the same stigma. (Jet)
 - ii. I wouldn't say I wouldn't call myself a sex worker, because I feel like that has some.. I think there are other struggles that go with full service sex work that I don't have. And so it's a bit of a privilege thing really to be a stripper and not necessarily have to do any other or choose to do any other kind of sex work. (Evie)

SECOND BLOCK: IN THE CLUB (40 mins)

5. Competition and Extras
 - Are extras being offered in your club? How do we feel about them in general?
 - i. See if discussion naturally goes into this direction, if not:
 - Findings: Controversy around competition:
 - i. "undercutting"?
 - ii. What role do clients play?

- Use quote for prompts as needed:
 - it's your body, your choice, if you want to do something, and you're happy to do it for a certain price that's absolutely on you. (Mildred)
6. Follow Up: How separated should the industries be?
- Depending on the outcome of discussions around Terminology and Extras: To what degree do you see the stripping industry as part of the sex industry? Do you think that they can be separated? Do you think they should be separated?
 - Use quotes for prompts as needed:
 - i. So I think people should be- normal people that don't work in the sex industry should be aware that there is a difference from doing OnlyFans, from dancing in a strip club and to working in a brothel. I think that needs to be absolutely clear to the public that there's a difference here. (April)
 - ii. I think it has huge disadvantages, because it tends towards separating people into smaller groups. And sex workers are so marginalised as groups of workers anyway, at the point where you then separate them into smaller groups, you take away even more power. So I think it's really harmful in that way. (Jet)

[BREAK]

THIRD BLOCK: THE WHOREARCHY (30 mins)

7. Have you heard of the term “whorearchy”?
- Let them discuss what it is between themselves first, see if they get to agreement without prompts. Then introduce working definition:
 - i. The whorearchy is arranged according to intimacy of contact with clients and police. The closer to both you are, the closer you are to the bottom.
 - What do you make of this definition? Do you want to add or change anything? What do you think about the idea of the whorearchy in general?
 - How have you experienced the whorearchy?
 - According to the whorearchy, you’re somewhere near the top. What do you make of that?
8. What influences where in the whorearchy a sector sits? Is it *only* ‘intimacy of contact with clients and police’? Or other factors as well?
- If prompts needed:
 - i. Safety / risk?
 - ii. The law / criminalisation? →
If time and interest: (How) Should fssw be regulated? How about stripping?

FOURTH BLOCK: THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC AND ONLINE WORK (20 mins)

9. The Whorearchy and Covid-19:
- Give everyone the chance to explain how they’ve survived Covid
 - i. Only those who feel like sharing as there might be illegal and restriction breaking stuff

- Online Work: Rise of OnlyFans: Is there people in the group who made an OF in the pandemic? Let them talk about their experiences online for a little bit.
- See if conversation naturally goes this way, if not:
 - i. How do you feel about the fact that so many people moved to OF during the pandemic?
 - ii. How has the OF boom impacted on sex work stigma?
 - iii. If needed: Does the popularity of OF trickle down to other forms of sex work or does it separate the sectors more because one is less stigmatised?

10. If time: What do you think needs to happen for the sex working community to become less hierarchical and judgemental?
- Policies, but also individual actions, etc.
 - If time: What role does sex worker organising have for the destruction of the whorearchy?
 - Make sure to end on a happy and hopeful note

Thank you (5 mins)

- Make sure everyone has had the chance to speak about what's important to them. Ask if there's one thing that they felt like they want to underline as a message for the research. Wrap up all discussions.
- Contact details if they want to add anything via email.

3. Full-Service Sex Workers

FIRST BLOCK: WELCOME (20 mins)

11. Introduction
- Welcome everyone and go through information sheet once again with everyone there
 - Give everyone another chance to ask questions
 - Talk about how we communicate in the focus groups (raising hand function on Zoom, moderation, etc)
12. Icebreaker
- Everyone introduce themselves: Name, Pronouns, first word that comes to mind when you hear the words 'strip club'
13. Expectations
- Introduce 'agenda': What we're going to talk about today
 - What do participants expect from this?

SECOND BLOCK: RELATIONSHIPS WITH STRIPPERS (30 mins)

14. Do you know any strippers? What is your personal relationship with them?
- From where? Do you know if any of them also provide full-service?
 - Ask about judgement without steering conversation too much
15. Follow Up: How separated should the industries be?

- Is the stripping industry a part of the sex industry? How much can they be separated? How much should they be separated?
- Use quotes for prompts from strippers as needed:
 - i. So I think people should be- normal people that don't work in the sex industry should be aware that there is a difference from doing OnlyFans, from dancing in a strip club and to working in a brothel. I think that needs to be absolutely clear to the public that there's a difference here. (April)
 - ii. I think it has huge disadvantages, because it tends towards separating people into smaller groups. And sex workers are so marginalised as groups of workers anyway, at the point where you then separate them into smaller groups, you take away even more power. So I think it's really harmful in that way. (Jet)

[BREAK]

THIRD BLOCK: THE WHOREARCHY (30 mins)

16. Have you heard of the term “whorearchy”?
 - Let them discuss what it is between themselves first, see if they get to agreement without prompts. Then introduce working definition:
 - i. The whorearchy is arranged according to intimacy of contact with clients and police. The closer to both you are, the closer you are to the bottom.
 - Anything to add? Change? Does this make sense to everyone?
 - How have you experienced the whorearchy?
 - Try to keep discussion to hierarchies between fs and others - particularly strippers - and not inside fs industry (e.g. high earning escorts, sbsw, etc)
17. What influences where in the whorearchy a sector sits? Is it *only* ‘intimacy of contact with clients and police’? Or other factors as well?
 - If prompts needed:
 - i. Safety / risk?
 - ii. The law / criminalisation? → If time and interest: (How) Should fssw be regulated??

FOURTH BLOCK: THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC AND ONLINE WORK (20 mins)

18. The Whorearchy and Covid-19:
 - Give everyone the chance to explain how they’ve survived Covid
 - i. Only those who feel like sharing as there might be illegal and restriction breaking stuff
 - Online Work: Rise of OnlyFans: Is there people in the group who made an OF in the pandemic? How do others feel about it?
 - Does the popularity of OF trickle down to other forms of sex work or does it separate the sectors more because one is less stigmatised?
19. If time: What do you think is needed to make the sex working community less hierarchical and judgemental?
 - Make sure to end on a happy and hopeful note

Thank you (5 mins)

- Make sure everyone has had the chance to speak about what's important to them. Closing statements if wanted. Wrap up all discussions.
- Contact details if they want to add anything via email.

Appendix 4: Full List of Codes

- Judgement
 - Hiding how you work
 - Judgement by dancers
 - Hierarchies inside the club
 - Judgement for not doing extras
 - Judgement by management / third parties
 - Judgement by clients
 - Judgement by friends / partners / family
 - Judgement by wider society / Stigma
- Authorities
 - Law / Policy
 - Police Interactions
- Solidarity
 - Friendships and Solidarity from other SW
 - Strategies to mitigate effect of whorearchy
 - Tearing down the whorearchy
 - Impact / role of activism
- Theory
 - Definition whorearchy
 - Terminology
 - Internalised whorephobia / misogyny
 - Safety
 - Advantages
 - Disadvantages
- Online
 - OnlyFans
 - All other online platforms
 - Social Media
 - Judgement in the online market
- Crossover
 - Overlap / crossover
 - Separation of industries
- Other