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Stripped: Inside The Lives Of Exotic Dancers



Synopsis

What kind of woman dances naked for money? Bernadette Barton takes us inside countless strip bars and clubs, from upscale to back road as well as those that specialize in lapdancing, table dancing, topless only, or peep shows, to reveal the startling lives of exotic dancers. Based on over five years of research and from visiting clubs around the country, particularly in San Francisco, Hawaii, and Kentucky, *Stripped* offers a rare portrait of not just how dancers get into the business but what it's like for those who choose to strip year after year. Through captivating interviews and first-hand observation, Barton recounts why these women began stripping, the initial excitement and financial rewards from the work, the dangers of the life—namely, drugs and prostitution—and, inevitably, the difficulties in staying in the business over time, especially for their sexuality and self-esteem. *Stripped* provides fresh insight into the complex work and personal experiences of exotic dancers, one that goes beyond the “sex wars” debate to offer an important new understanding of sex work.

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Customer Reviews

“With *Stripped*, Barton makes an important contribution to the ongoing conversation about the effects of stripping on the women who actually take their clothes off. The polarized nature of the debates sometimes makes it difficult to say anything complicated about sex work—it is either said to be empowering for women or degrading to them. Yet, of course, things are never that simple—and Barton’s arguments provide a significant alternative to such binary thinking.”—Katherine Frank, author of *G-Strings and Sympathy: Strip Club Regulars and Male*

Desire. "Compelling. . . . This accessibly written, matter-of-fact book makes important contributions to what is known about the lives and experiences of the growing number of women who "dance naked for money. . . . Throughout, the author listens attentively to the shifting, insightful, diverse voices of women with whom she has a palpably respectful connection. Barton uses the complex picture that emerges to engage longstanding debates over the meanings of commodified femininity and sexuality." •Choice "Makes an impressive contribution to the sociology of work and its intersection with sex and gender studies at the theoretical and applied levels. It is an excellent examples of the rich data and critical methodological insights that can emerge in the course of engaged field research." •American Journal of Sociology "Stripped is a revealing book about a revealing (and controversial) trade that focuses on a philosophical clash between old and new school feminism." •Courier-Journal "Barton presents [exotic dancers] as open-minded intelligent risk takers who are "comfortable exploring things other people are scared of." •Carlin Romano, Philadelphia Inquirer "A terrific read! Stripped is the best kind of feminist work: original, honest, and deeply engaging. Barton's remarkable insights into the work and private lives of exotic dancers move far beyond notions of strippers as exploited or empowered to uncover more hidden aspects of this world." •Kathleen Blee, author of *Inside Organized Racism: Women in the Hate Movement* "The thrust of stripper scholarship is that both dancers and customers are more like your next-door neighbors. Some are your next-door neighbors." •Philadelphia Inquirer "Written clearly with very little jargon, this volume sensitively explores the lives of exotic dancers." •Noralee Frankel, *Archives of Sexual Behavior* "Fascinating, insightful, and surprisingly balanced. This book will take you way beyond Hollywood's clichés and into the realities of stripping, and you'll emerge with a deeper understanding of the pleasures and the costs of being the object of male fantasies." •Susan Bordo, author of *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*

Bernadette Barton is Professor Sociology and Gender Studies at Morehead State University in Kentucky. She is the author of *Pray the Gay Away: The Extraordinary Lives of Bible Belt Gays*.

The author has done an excellent job providing me with a view of a world which I haven't dared explore. I found this book to be well researched and unbiased, as well as well written and fun to

read. I was actually surprised at how much I can relate to a stripper's profession. In a way, it's a more raunchy section of the customer service industry. You have to give the customer what they want, make them feel like royalty, and the job can go from fun to crummy within the space of five minutes.

As a gay man, I did not expect to find much common ground with female strippers, but thanks to Barton's nonjudgmental and compassionate tone, and her steadfast refusal to pigeonhole the dancers into any particular academic theory, I found myself relating to the women--or well, at least some of them--as outsiders. I think anybody dissatisfied with the relentless commoditization of bodies and sexuality will find compelling stories and analysis in this book. Not that it's all doom and gloom: even as Barton describes the undeniable degradation--or toll--of sex work, she also focuses on the many ways strippers subvert the system in which they exist (or sometimes, sadly, don't). She writes with a pragmatic empathy and sense of humor that not only humanizes the dancers, but ultimately herself, which I have to imagine is her own trick of subversion in the often dry and constrained world of academia.

Read this in a seminar class. Unforgettable and filled with interesting, important information.

Found this book very repetitive. Everything the author had to say could have been communicated in half as many pages, or less. I also felt this book was not very well organized. More often than not, the transitions from text to interview dialogue and quotes were awkward and disjointed. I was also annoyed that the book was touted as an unbiased scholarly work which didn't demonize or glamorize the work of exotic dancers. The book most definitely cast a negative light on strippers and their work. The book left me wondering how Barton chose her "informants" and what her motives were in selecting the many lengthy quotes. I know a couple of exotic dancers (one of whom has been dancing for 17 years) and while they say their work is NOT EASY, they don't want out. It seemed everyone Barton spoke to wanted out of the industry, but just couldn't give up the money. Also, while neither of my dancer friends has been to college, their grammar is MUCH better than the grammar used by interview subjects in the book. Many uses of "aint" etc. If you are looking for an interesting and insightful book about this industry, my advice would be to keep looking.

Real interesting book. This book is the write up of a sociology study on the subject. There is nothing real dirty in the book. The author focuses on what the girls do the dancing and the impact of that

activity on the dancer. You see in the book how what they do does effect who they are. Through reading the book you will see this common day idea of segregating things in our lives is wrong. Activities in one area of our life say work like the girls in the book does have an impact on the mental frame of mind. You could argue how that happens and there is good reasons there to discuss. The shortfall on the book is the lack of statistical data to support the claims. However once you read the notes her collection method was focus group interviews. It is hard to get statistical reports from that. Overall it is a good book but for reasons most people will miss. After reading the book you will see the links between mind, body and soul.

I really enjoyed reading this book. I came across it for a research project about strippers. This book was a hit! I love the angle she writes on the dancers, without bias. She doesn't trash strippers like most fems would, strippers are people too! Surprisingly some are our future doctors... getting by in America is the root of the issue. I would recommend this book to refresh the one sided person, and for the fellows out there, don't be rude boys.

The read is not nearly as interesting as I thought it would be. Instead of detailing life as it is, Barton completely avoids Early Sexual abuse, detailed drug use and an expose' sexual relations that take place in the club and relationships thereof, as if to stigmatize the dancers negatively. I sincerely wish a Man would write the sane book without bias though detailing these things honestly accurately as Barton's view is a complete Lesbian whitewash. Nelson Jones

...a book about strippers that does not preach, that does not take sides or pass value judgements, and that does not denigrate or glorify the people who work in the sex industry. *Stripped: Inside the Lives of Exotic Dancers*, does exactly what the title suggests: it takes the reader inside the private lives of women who work in the sex industry, and it presents exotic dancers in such a way that the reader sees them first as people, effectively taking the women out from under the overwhelming shadow of their job title. Barton's writing style is precise, intimate, and candid, and it propels the reader right into the livingrooms and dressing rooms of exotic dancers. The book tackles the tar pit traps of the "sex wars", why/how women get into the sex industry, sexual identity, and the reality of working in the sex industry without getting bogged down in conflicting feminist theory. Yet Barton adds her voice to the sex industry debate in a way that commands attention from both the average reader and from those well versed in the intricacies of the "sex wars". This book makes its debut in a pop culture where young Hollywood starlets show just how blurry the lines are between acceptable

female behavior and sex industry work. Barton takes her readers back and forth across that line with facility and empathy, allowing the reader to finally determine for her/himself where that line actually exists. I look forward to her next book.

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