

## Confessions of a Former Spearmint Rhino Lap Dancer: It's not all that empowering

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Whenever we see lap dancers depicted in movies or on TV, there is usually a *camaraderie* among the women. A group of **tough, badass chicks**, taking turns minding each other's kids while their friend graces the stage, to soon return with a **thong stuffed full of bills**.

But that wasn't my experience, nor that of my fellow dancers.

It's worth telling you where and when I danced, as not all countries have the same club rules (limits for what you will put up with from a patron), and times may have changed a little.

I danced from 2002 to 2005, in the south of England. I understood that our **house rules were stricter than most**, as the patrons weren't allowed to touch us – although of course they tried.

If a guy's quick hand movements were ever successful in grabbing a feel, it would leave me with the sort of gross feeling than no amount of hot water could wash away. **I truly resented those men most of the time.**

I shouldn't have been there, or at least shouldn't have stayed for as long as I did. But having no other job prospects and being quite afraid of change, I stayed **comfortably uncomfortable**.

Lots of us do this. I'm reminded of [Les Brown's](#) story about the dog laying on a nail.

There was a young man walking down the street and happened to see an old man sitting on his porch. Next to the old man was his dog, who was whining and whimpering. The young man asked the old man "What's wrong with your dog?" The old man said, "He's laying on a nail." The young man asked "Laying on a nail? Well why doesn't he get up?" The old man then replied "It's not hurting badly enough." — Les Brown

### **Sisters are doing it for themselves**

We were doing it for ourselves, but not as a collective. Everyone was out for their own, and the running of these clubs is designed to **pit girls against each other**.

Gentlemen's clubs like this have a **business model built on exploitation** – there, I said it. Clubs are over-filled with girls, sometimes more girls than customers, and each girl is paying a fee to be there. We are self-employed and losing money in the form of 'house fees' before our shift even starts.

Then we are expected to **behave like ladies** and not fight, when we are set up to fight for customers as we are so over-filled.

This is not a place you make many friends.

I also **lost friends outside of the club**. I now worked unsociable hours, and as some friends perceived it, had a **glamorous job** that made me different and worthy of jealousy.

**It truly didn't**, but they didn't understand. Our perception of a dancer carries quite a strong image of **glamour and wealth** — I mean, *I thought it was going to be amazing*, that's **why** I auditioned for a job there.

In reality I came home every morning feeling like I was doing the walk of shame from a regrettable one-night stand. I'd have makeup streaked down my face from the tears of self-loathing, sore feet from those **f\*\*king stupid shoes**, and I'd feel kind of used.

### **The male gaze**

Patrons pay a fee to enter the club. None of that goes to the dancers. Now the club is getting paid twice; once by the dancers and once by the patrons.

People, mostly men, come in to have a beer and watch the stage show, which in the U.K. they very rarely tip for – we do not have a tipping culture here. They **stare at us** performing on stage in our thongs, and keep staring until they get their fill.

Quite often they never accept the invitation of a private dance – our only opportunity to **get paid**. By the way, we don't keep the full amount of a private dance fee either – the club takes it's cut there too.

This is why the girls are so unhappy to be turned down for a dance. And this was a main factor in me developing such **loathing for the male gaze**.

Today, each time I feel eyeballs on me, no matter where I am or what I am wearing, in the back of my mind I'm transported back to that time when I felt like a **piece of meat**.

They say the club got it's name because the girls have to be thick skinned, like a Rhino. It makes sense.

### **I wanted it to be something it wasn't**

I wanted being a dancer to be an **art form**, something **creative** that would satisfy that part of my personality.

It wasn't.

I put **far too much time and effort** into my stage performances, which did little for my ability to earn. At the time I hoped that being amazing on the stage would lead to a queue of patrons wanting to **pay me** for a dance.

It didn't.

In reality, a patron might enjoy your performance on the stage, but in the UK they won't tip you. Then the second you step off the stage and start approaching patrons for a private dance, **they've forgotten who you are** as they are distracted by the next pair of boobs bouncing across the stage, and of course they have been drinking too.

The **girls who made money** didn't waste energy on their stage shows. Their sole focus was talking men into **those private booths** upstairs.

On the one hand **I admired their hustle**. On the other hand I just couldn't replicate it. That's not who I am.

This job really wasn't for me and I wish I'd figured that out sooner. It would have saved me many a winter night shivering in my underwear – *the club thermostat was set to accommodate men with their clothes on, not women with their clothes off*.

### **Who am I?**

The worst part about it is that **I lost my sense of identity**. This is my most painful confession.

The constant comparison between myself and other girls was soul destroying. A patron choosing between me and another girl with slightly bigger boobs or a slightly smaller waist was where my **sense of worth** was coming from.

That sense of worth hit an all time low before I finally moved on three years later. Of course, I moved on to the most **low skilled manual work** you can imagine, because by then I had no sense of **having anything to offer** the world.

If you have ever seen lap dancers portrayed on TV and been seduced into entertaining the idea for yourself, then please know these things first.

Those other girls are **your competition** first and foremost. It's not *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* or *Thelma and Louise*.

You will **hate men** with time. Or you will go **numb**. Neither is great.

You may **lose yourself**.

Be careful walking into a man's world (and that business model) and always have your own back. Nobody else will.