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**“For Her Eyes Only”:
Male Strippers,
Women’s Pleasures,
and
Feminist Politics.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Sociology at Massey University.

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1997

Abstract.

This thesis explores women's experiences of male strip shows (specifically, the pleasures they gain from these) utilising a post-modern feminist perspective which emerges from a critique of some anti-pornography and radical lesbian feminist orthodoxies. This perspective includes a feminist 'politics of pleasure', in which popular pleasures are centralised as a site of political importance. Pleasures help organise women's inscription into dominant cultures, but also are sites where women's agency and resistance to norms of femininity and heterosexuality can be identified.

Semi-structured interviews with eight young women who attend male strip shows (as well as many informal conversations and observations) are used to understand the various types of pleasures available. These are discussed in relation to the social and cultural context of 1990s Aotearoa/New Zealand and feminist politics.

The conclusions of this research are that male strip shows can provide some safe spaces (physical and cultural) for women to explore their pleasures, sexualities, desires and fantasises, and that exploring these pleasures will have some positive implications for many women. That is, it can help empower them in some way: by experiencing what a utopian situation of 'freedom from personal and social constraints' would feel like; by having some control over the spaces and terms of their entertainments; by being active desiring agents without being objects to be looked at; by recognising the support of other women; and by denaturalising women's association with passivity, deference and 'innocence'.

This research also challenges commonly-accepted feminist understandings of popular culture, sexually-explicit material, women's pleasures and audiences arguing for a recognition of the diversity and creativity of women.

Acknowledgements.

My grateful thanks goes to the women who agreed to be interviewed for this research. Thank-you for sharing your experiences, insights and time with me. Without your generosity this thesis could not have been written. Thank-you also to the many others who shared their personal stories and ideas with me.

Big thank-yous to my supervisor Allannah Ryan. Right from the beginning you supported my proposal, reassuring me that this was not only an interesting, but an important topic to research. Your positive comments, patience and understanding made this a much less painful project than I envisioned.

To the post-grads in the sociology department: you provided much needed support, humour, and friendship. Thanks for listening to my grumbles! Thanks to Tracey for all the long lunch breaks where we shared ideas on pleasures and pornography. I am glad I'm not alone.

To my wonderful family whom I love dearly:

Lynne and Phil, you always encouraged me to do my best and always believed that I could. I am immensely grateful for the many ways that you given me love and support, providing the grounding from which I could explore and learn.

Lisa, thank-you sis for always being there, to listen, to advise, to share and to accept.

Jack and the memory of Monica, I am very proud to be your grand-daughter. Thank-you for everything you have done to help and encourage me.

Brian, you are an amazing friend, and one of life's nice guys. Thanks heaps.

Lastly and importantly Grant, your love and support has been vital to this thesis. Your kindness, caring and understanding are beyond compare. Knowing and loving you sustains my hope for empowering and respectful relationships between women and men. Thank-you for the freedom to be me and for the wonderful times and dreams we share. You are very special!

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