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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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## **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.

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