

# **Not Just Harmless Fun: The Strip Club Industry in Victoria**

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## **Abstract**

This report shows the burgeoning strip club industry in Victoria, Australia, harms women and communities. Strip clubs harm the physical and mental health of women who strip, as well as the opportunities of all women who want equal sexual relationships with men. Strip clubs create no-go areas for women, and are responsible for increasing violence in the community. The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Australia (CATWA) argues that strip clubs need to be understood as part of the industry of prostitution and regulated in the same way as brothels. This means that they would be licensed, subject to planning restrictions, unable to obtain liquor licenses, and owners would need criminal record checks. To ensure that strip club are not seen merely as entertainment venues, like other night clubs, they should be regulated as commercial sex venues.

## Who are we?

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Australia (CATWA) is the Australian branch of CATW International, a Non Governmental Organization having Category II consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. It works locally and internationally to end all forms of sexual exploitation of women, especially the violence of prostitution, trafficking and pornography.

## Our Position

**CATWA** believes the prostitution industry should not be narrowly defined as simply street and brothel prostitution, but should be understood as encompassing escort agencies, strip clubs and the pornography industry.

**CATWA** believes the prostitution industry poses a serious threat to women. The prostitution industry promotes a model of sex in which women are bought and sold as objects for men's pleasure. Prostitution requires the objectification of women in order to exist and it requires, and creates, women's continued inequality in order to function.

**CATWA** believes that prostitution harms both the women directly involved in it and women more generally. Prostitution is harmful physically and psychologically for prostituted women, and this is supported by an ever-growing number of sociological studies. There is now substantial evidence that prostitution is not experienced as 'just a job' but, for the vast majority of women, is experienced as a form of exploitation and sexual abuse. The prostitution industry poses a threat to all women through fostering a prostitution

culture, where the buying and selling of women is normal and acceptable.

**CATWA** believes that pornography and strip clubs can be seen to increase the legitimacy of the prostitution industry as a whole by depicting the commercial sexual exploitation of women as acceptable, and even entertaining and glamorous.

**CATWA** endorses the 'Nordic Model' of legislation as a way forward. The Nordic Model involves criminalising the buying of sexual services rather than criminalising women in prostitution. The model is based on an understanding that prostitution is a form of violence against women. The Nordic Model has been very successful in reducing prostitution and trafficking in many parts of Scandinavia.

## Introduction

Stripping is one of the most socially accepted systems of prostitution. It is often not seen as linked to other forms of prostitution although empirical studies suggest that stripping is often interlinked with escorting, brothel prostitution and pornography (Stark, 2006). For example, illegal prostitution often occurs on strip-club premises and it is common for owners of brothels to also own strip clubs and transfer clients and prostituted women between both businesses. It is therefore not surprising that women across all forms of prostitution, including stripping, experience similarly high rates of post-traumatic stress syndrome (Farley, 2003).

Strip clubs not only materially connect to other forms of prostitution, they also serve to normalise all forms of prostitution. Strip clubs are represented as more glamorous than many other forms of prostitution and are subject to less restrictions than other areas of the prostitution industry. Strip clubs are not subject to the same planning regulations as brothels, for example. In Victoria, strip clubs have access to advertising in the mainstream media that brothels do not and strip clubs, again unlike brothels, are allowed to serve alcohol on their premises. The frequenting of strip clubs has become so normalised in Australia that business functions are often held in King Street strip venues. According to one club owner this has even extended to

functions for the Victoria Police (Whinnett, 2010).

Given this process of normalisation, it is not surprising that the prostitution industry in Australia is expanding. The 2007 IBIS World report on 'sexual services' in Australia forecast a continuing annual revenue growth rate of 6.8 per cent for the sex industry. This growth is based in part on the fact that the boom in strip clubs had been 'particularly robust' (IBIS

World, 2007 quoted in Jeffreys, 2009, p. x). According to the Melbourne newspaper *The Age*, Victoria currently has 20 'sexually explicit venues' some of which can hold in excess of 1000 patrons (Fyfe, 2010) and many of these clubs, particularly those in Melbourne's King Street, have been linked to high rates of violence (ABC News, 2008).

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Rather than letting the expansion of the industry continue unabated, it is time to reconsider strip clubs. As a result of significant strip and lap-dancing club expansion in the UK, there has been a notable backlash from women's groups (object.co.uk) and even, in some instances, the mainstream media (Bracchi, 2008). Earlier this year Iceland banned strip clubs with the reasoning that 'it is not acceptable that women or people in general are a product to be sold', and this move received broad public support (Bindel, 2010). It is time that these issues were raised in Australia. Strip clubs need to be seen as a

form of prostitution which harms women and girls as all other forms of prostitution do. As stripping is a form of prostitution, as an absolute minimum it needs to be subject to the same restrictions. While the Coalition stands for the abolition of prostitution, as an interim measure in the Victorian context where brothel prostitution is legalised, we propose that the serving of alcohol at strip clubs should be prohibited just as the serving of alcohol is currently prohibited in brothels.

### **Strip Clubs and Prostitution: The Links**

Strip clubs enjoy much greater social acceptability than other aspects of the sex industry. A clear distinction is usually made between strip clubs and brothels, with strip clubs being described as 'entertainment' rather than 'sexual services'. They are promoted as socially acceptable for businessmen and corporations, stag nights and hen nights. Maintaining this distinction is important for their owners because in most Australian states prostitution venues are not allowed to serve alcohol, and are constrained by prohibition or planning and licensing requirements. As the sex industry expands domestically and internationally its forms are diversifying. Strip clubs are proliferating everywhere. Often brothel owners see strip clubs as more profitable than brothels and diversify, as did the owners of the *Daily Planet* in Melbourne, who now own the *Bar 20* strip club. In some cases brothels and strip clubs are connected and share the same building and customers. There is little research on strip

clubs in Australia and regulation is often confused and ineffective.

Rather than being separate, strip clubs and prostitution are interconnected. The activities that take place in the clubs are clearly sexual and often involve a good deal of physical interaction between male buyers and the women who strip. Strip clubs often provide links to other 'sex industry services' and in some clubs the full range of prostitution activities is available, even though they are technically illegal. In her 2007 book *Making Sex Work: A Failed Experiment with Legalised Prostitution* (2007), Mary Sullivan contends that strip clubs effectively operate as illegal brothels in Victoria (p. 197).

In 1999 an amendment to the Victorian Prostitution Control Act redefined 'sexual services' in order to prohibit several activities which were understood to be taking place in strip clubs. The Act includes masturbation as a sexual service and it defines this to include, 'whether or not the genital part of his or her body is clothed or the masturbation results in orgasm'. The Act did not foresee the rise in lapdancing which fits this definition. Strip clubs are increasingly offering what should be understood as sexual services and should be regulated in the same way as other forms of prostitution.

### **What happens in the clubs?**

A report on the strip club industry in Queensland described the activities that take place in private dances or lap dancing as follows:

[S]emi-nude or full-nude striptease performed for an exclusive audience (usually one person). It may involve 'open leg work'...Lap dancers will often rub their bodies against audience members in a sexually suggestive manner, and audience members will touch the dancers in a similarly intimate way...caressing, kissing or suckling dancers' breasts. The buttocks, back and thighs may also be caressed... (Jeffries and Lynch, 2007: 7).

The report concludes that 'many will be surprised at ... how sexually explicit the live adult entertainment industry is' (Ibid: 18). The degree of sexual contact taking place in the strip clubs of Melbourne is so considerable that an amendment had to be made to the *Prostitution Control Act* in 1999 to spell out exactly which activities would be considered 'prostitution'.

In Queensland, the stripping industry takes such forms as 'adult cafes', peep shows and outcall agencies offering:

masturbation, insertion (both vaginal and anal) and/or group acts ('girl on girl' only). Dancers may masturbate and insert objects (e.g. dildos, vibrators, vegetables and strings of beads into themselves or other dancers' (Jeffries and Lynch, 2007: 14).

Moreover, strip clubs in Queensland allow the practice of 'non-contact 'Dating' Services' as well as outcall striptease services from the clubs. Customers may take a dancer on a 'date' outside the club. There are guidelines that say sexual contact should not take place but the practice mirrors other common forms of prostitution in much of Asia (e.g. in the Philippines where men pay a 'bar fine' to

management to take women out for individual acts of prostitution).

There is a good deal of evidence from other countries that ordinary acts of prostitution take place on club premises in private rooms. For instance, two managers and four women who strip were charged with prostitution at the Scores nightclub in New York, which former

PM Kevin Rudd was exposed as having patronised, after undercover police officers were offered prostitution in the club (Sunday Telegraph, 2007). *Spearmint Rhino* clubs are franchised around the world, including Melbourne. In a UK *Spearmint Rhino* club in 2002, undercover police were offered

prostitution at five hundred pounds for thirty minutes in a private room (Bindel, 2004: 49). A report on strip clubs in Glasgow found from interviews with 'dancers' and male buyers that there were women in all four clubs in the town who were offering 'sexual services'. Half of the male buyers said they went to the clubs looking for prostitution (Bindel, 2004).

The impossibility of separating the activities of prostitution from those that take place in strip clubs has caused a minefield for local authorities who are usually responsible for regulation. Often women who strip are required to remain a set distance (e.g., 30 centimetres or a metre) away from male buyers. There is no monitoring in any jurisdiction as to whether these rules are complied with.

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## Strip Clubs and Violence: The Harms to Women

Strip clubs facilitate violence against women in a number of ways. American academic Melissa Farley (2005) has found that the emergence of private booths within strip clubs has led to increased physical contact between dancers and clients. This has led to dancers becoming more vulnerable to rape, whilst simultaneously providing 'protection' and 'anonymity' for the men who use them. The 'lap dances' that legally take place in strip clubs in Victoria are acts that place women in an extremely risky situation for sexual assault. In 2006, for example, the *Weekend Australian* reported the rape of a woman whilst she performed a private lap dance for a man at a King Street strip club (*The Australian*, 2006). The man 'lunged' at the woman, 'digitally raping her and refusing to let go even as she struggled and screamed' (*The Australian*, 2006).

In a US study, women in strip clubs frequently reported being 'spat on' and 'sprayed with beer', they report having cigarettes flicked at them as well as trash, condoms, golf balls and even dead animals (Holsopple, 1998). Men reportedly 'pull...women's hair', 'yank...them by the arms and ankles, rip... their costumes and attempt...to pull their clothes off'. Women are 'bitten, licked, slapped, punched, and pinched' whilst male buyers attempt to penetrate them vaginally and anally with 'fingers, dollar bills, and bottles', according to the testimony of Kelly Holsopple who worked

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in a strip club for a number of years, and then went back to research the venues (Holsopple, 1998). In her research she found that 100 per cent of strippers she interviewed reported being abused within the clubs.

Holsopple's research is highly relevant to the Australian context where dancers face violence not only from their male 'customers', but also

from club owners. Raymond Bartlett, owner of the Melbourne strip club *Goldfingers*, has been the subject of media attention in the past, most notably for an alleged assault of a dancer at his club in 1998 (Rule, 2000). The case that resulted in a fine of \$1000 for Mr Bartlett but no conviction involved allegations that he had 'kicked' and 'spat on'

a dancer who he had paid to perform for him (Rule, 2000). In 2003, the managers of a now defunct King Street strip club were charged with rape and assault, and were accused of using fear and intimidation as a management tool against 24 strippers (Milovanovic, 2003). These dangers of the strip industry have been acknowledged by the Victorian State Government's Prostitution Control Act Advisory Committee, which in 1997 found that 'incidents of physical and sexual violence, sexual harassment and stalking were common' in strip clubs (Sullivan, 2008, p. 200).

Strip club owners and operators are behind a push to blur the boundaries between stripping and prostitution. There is evidence that strip club operators 'pressure strippers to engage in practices they would rather avoid, such as lap dancing or prostitution' (Jeffreys, 2008). The experience of one woman working in a Cairns

strip-club clearly illustrates this issue. The woman worked at a 'no-touching' club, but was told unexpectedly one day that the club was going to allow 'touching'. The woman told journalists of her reaction to this change:

For me the equivalent is like working in a strip club, then you come in the next week and you're told it's a brothel, 'deal with it'... Now there are no rules to back me up and I'll be the bottom earner if all the other girls are doing it...That's not a choice. To me it's like a brothel now (Browne, 2008).

Another example of the brothel-like status of strip clubs in Victoria comes from a 2008 application to Glen Eira City Council (in suburban south-east Melbourne) for a two-storey stripping venue that proposed to accommodate '170 patrons to watch nude dancers on a main stage and on six raised pole-dancing platforms on the ground floor' (Moor, 2008).

The application included plans for a bar and spa downstairs and five private rooms upstairs, three of which were to have en-suite bathrooms (Moor, 2008). This example highlights the increased blurring of strip clubs and brothels and the potential for strip clubs to transition to fully fledged brothels in the future.

Trafficking into strip-clubs is another way that strip-clubs facilitate violence against women. This issue is gaining prominence in Europe. Julie Bindel's study, *Profitable Exploits* (2004), explores the relationship between strip clubs, violence against women, prostitution and human trafficking in Scotland. Bindel found that the owner of Scotland's first lap dancing

club, *The Fantasy Bar*, had been charged with rape and that, in another case, three Lithuanian women were trafficked into the UK to work in an Edinburgh strip club. In her media pack *Press for Change* (2006), Bindel claims 'prostitution services are increasingly available in so-called 'adult entertainment' venues', whilst women working in strip clubs may be 'drawn or coerced' into performing sex acts (p. 7). The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (International) and the European Women's Lobby have also been active in

conducting research on the strip industry and its relationship with human trafficking. Their joint study, *The Links Between Prostitution and Sex Trafficking: A Briefing Handbook* (2006), found that many women - 59 per cent of 119 respondents - had been trafficked into locations such as strip clubs. While there

is no research at this stage on trafficking into Australian strip clubs, Melbourne has been identified as a 'major destination' of trafficked women by the Australian Federal Police (*The Age*, 2009). The Coalition therefore advocates further investigation into this issue.

## **A Brief History of the Strip Club Industry in Victoria**

There is a dearth of information about the historical background of the strip club industry in Victoria. The little evidence that is available, however, shows that the Victorian strip club industry began in 1992 with the opening of Victoria's first strip club in King Street, Melbourne. Prior to this time, stripping did take place in pubs or nightclubs, but the

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industry was not as extensive or organised as it is today (Sullivan, 2007). The rapid growth and increasing normalisation of the global strip industry in the 1980s and 1990s (Jeffreys, 2009), led to an expansion of the strip industry in Australia. Since the establishment of the Victoria's first club, the size of the strip industry has increased alongside its acceptance in the mainstream.

Since the opening of the first strip club in 1992, the industry has burgeoned in Victoria with twenty licensed venues, and many other stripping related businesses in operation across the State (Fyfe, 2010). The evolution and expansion of the strip industry in Victoria is noted in the Victorian Liquor Licensing Commission<sup>1</sup> report, *King Street 1995: Enough is Enough*, which uncovered the extensive growth of late-night venues in the King Street precinct offering tabletop dancing (cited in Sullivan, 2007). More recently, national statistics show that stripping, in 2009, comprised up to 17 per cent of the overall sex industry within Australia, up from 12 per cent the previous year (IBIS World, 2009).

## **The Nature and Extent of the Strip Industry in Victoria**

The strip industry covers a wide variety of businesses ranging from strip shows, through

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<sup>1</sup> The Liquor Licensing Commission no longer exists, Consumer Affairs Victoria are now responsible for issuing liquor licenses.

to topless waitressing and mobile strippers and this makes it difficult to establish the full extent of the strip industry in Melbourne. The

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most publicly visible element of the industry is the so called 'gentlemen's clubs' the majority of which are clustered in the Melbourne CBD. Eight CBD strip clubs were identified through the *Yellow Pages* and Internet searches, a further four are listed in the inner suburbs (Northcote, Brunswick, South Melbourne and Collingwood). In addition, there is also a club listed in Frankston and

another in Geelong. The 'services' offered at these establishments are described in detail in the website analysis section of this report.

A more recent addition to the adult entertainment scene is the establishment of 'lingerie restaurants'. These operate mostly during the week at lunchtime, with limited evening openings. One of these restaurants, Cobbs in Carlton, promotes itself as being for 'discerning gentlemen', and its waitresses as 'sensual' and 'seductive'. The photos on its website show waitresses in g-strings and see-through tops and a clientele who appear to be made up entirely of businessmen. Another such restaurant, Shamiana, in the CBD, offers an 'erotic and different experience to the sophisticated and discerning diner'. Its waitresses wear only bras and skimpy underwear or g-strings. The restaurant also holds bucks parties, for which a burlesque performance can be organised. The restaurant will also provide a 'list of nearby table top

dancing venues for your group to continue the celebrations'. This further shows the connections between different branches of the sex industry.

The most commonly advertised type of strip activity in Melbourne comes not from the 'gentlemen's clubs' but from the agencies that provide strippers to different locations - private houses, yachts, clubs, offices - for a variety of occasions such as bucks nights, birthdays, office parties, and retirement parties. There were 43 listings in the *Yellow Pages* for stripping agencies (listings all contained the word 'strippers'). The following examples from [allhotstrippers.com.au](http://allhotstrippers.com.au) show typical 'services' and fees:

G string \$160: 12mins. R Rated strippers taking it to a cheeky level with 6 songs of pure excitement. The G may stay on... but NOTHING else needs to be left untouched.

Raunch \$190: 15mins. If a straight strip is not enough, this is for you. Legs are not kept closed, and things get creamy and oily for the stripper and for the designated victim!

Lesbian \$610: 25mins. DUO Striptease where our girls will put on the show of a life time for you and your friends. Live out the fantasy that all men dream of. Two gorgeous girls go all the way right in front of YOU!!

Fruit and veg \$390: 30mins. Xotic and raunchy...You will never think about 2 FRUIT and 5 VEG in the same way again - ever!!

The range of services and fees are similar across all of the agencies but there are a few unusual offerings. For example, the most expensive strip service that was found was the VIP Stretch Hummer package from [elitestriptease.com.au](http://elitestriptease.com.au) where, for \$2200, 'customers' can travel for one hour in a stretch Hummer and 'party with 2 of our delicious girls who will do a lesbian DUO performance in the Hummer for you and 10 friends'.

The normalisation of stripping and its integration into mainstream society is particularly obvious in the proliferation of strip and pole dancing classes in Melbourne. These classes are promoted as not only a legitimate form of fitness but also as a means of increasing self and sexual confidence. One strip studio, [hotpantsandheels.com.au](http://hotpantsandheels.com.au), describes its course as aiming to:

[T]each you the art of striptease and lap dancing. It includes everything from sexy dance moves, floor work, eye contact, rolling every part of your body to strip seductively and smoothly. Whether you are using a chair, a whip, a hat or strawberries & cream, this 8 week course will teach you a very raunchy routine that is themed (be it school girl, burlesque, or bondage) with the latest hottest music.

It is interesting to note that the 'school girl' theme is common in strip classes as well as in 'lingerie restaurants' such as *Maxine's* in Richmond, where one lunchtime a week is promoted as the schoolgirl day. This could be seen as promoting the sexual use of young girls.

Strip, lap and pole dancing also targets young women through wedding planning websites

such as [easyweddings.com.au](http://easyweddings.com.au), where it is promoted as a fun and edgy hen's night activity. A 'studio' called Hot Pants and Heels also advertises hens nights on its website:

You name the place and we will be there!  
We will send one of our professional showgirls to you and teach you how to lap dance and strip like a pro! We will even bring some costumes for the hen to practise in! Your sexy and fun session with your host will include a hot striptease routine as well as how to lap dance your man and each other!

The sex promoted by the prostitution industry and taught in strip classes is not an egalitarian sexuality suited to women's equality. It is the sex of prostitution in which women service men's sexual desires at the cost of their own pleasure and personhood. It is cause for concern that this type of sex is now forming the basis for married life in 2010.

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### **Strip Clubs and Harms to the Wider Community in Victoria**

Strip clubs foster violence in the wider community. The street that hosts the main strip club district in the city of Melbourne, King Street, topped a *Herald Sun* newspaper online poll as Melbourne's most threatening street in 2008. In a poll of around 3500 readers, the city club strip attracted 42.4 per cent of the vote. King Street was believed by readers to be more dangerous than even the area best known for street prostitution in Melbourne, Fitzroy Street St Kilda (Buttler, 2008). Local governments in Victoria have widely recognised the threat to community safety and

security that strip clubs bring to local areas. Geelong City Council, for example, challenged a planning application by a strip club owner in 2006, citing evidence from residents that they felt unsafe on the streets around existing strip club venues. A Geelong woman testified at the tribunal hearing that she was 'afraid to walk home at night alone after a number of incidents involving the *Alleycat* strip club' in Geelong. She testified that she had come to expect a certain amount of drunken behaviour after living in the CBD for five years but the number of incidents had sharply increased since the opening of the club (Craven, 2006).

The connection between the strip industry and violence is one that has long been acknowledged. The *King St 1994: Enough is Enough* report drew a link between sexually explicit entertainment, alcohol and violence. The Victorian

Prostitution Control Act Advisory Committee report of 1997 also noted that the environment created by strip clubs is conducive to the harassment of women (PCAAC, 1997). Strip club zones effectively create no-go areas for women because they create an environment that is 'unsafe for women and may be conducive to danger' (PCAAC, 1997, p. 11). Pauline Burgess, who was on the committee, noted evidence of club patrons abusing and harassing women outside clubs, with comments such as 'show us your tits' (quoted in Sullivan, 2007, p. 188).

Victoria police have tried unsuccessfully to stop strip clubs from operating in the city of

Melbourne, and have opposed alcohol license applications in order to effectively shut clubs down. In early 2010, Victoria Police lodged a liquor license objection with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal in relation to the Showgirls Bar 20 strip club, which is run by the nephew of the dead organised crime figure Robert Trimbole. Victoria Police claim John Trimble's King Street venue does not deserve to sell alcohol because it is failing to stop repeated violence in and around the club. In the documents that police lodged with the Tribunal, they claim that Bar 20 patrons have been involved in unruly behaviour that includes wild brawls and fighting among themselves and with crowd controllers (Moor, 2010a). The police allege twenty separate episodes of violent and drunken behaviour during the past two years involving Bar 20, including:

- A female constable being karate-kicked in the face while trying to subdue a violent man.
- A wild brawl among 150 alcohol-fuelled men in April 2009.
- Bouncers ejecting Daniel Gatto, nephew of Mick Gatto (gangland identity) and his friend, Bassem Jurdi, in September 2008 after the pair allegedly assaulted a man.
- A pool cue used to knock a man's teeth out.
- A patron dragged out of range of surveillance cameras and held against a tree as a bouncer punched him twice in the face and broke his nose.
- A drunk smashed in the head with a beer glass after he urinated on the

back of another man in the toilets (Moor, 2010b).

The police submission to the Tribunal described male patrons and staff of strip clubs as violent and drunk. In 2009, Victoria Police checked to see if *Bar 20* was abiding by its licence requirements not to allow drunken people on the premises and discovered so many that they did not have the staff numbers to arrest them all (Moor, 2010b). This report from police is disturbing because it shows that women

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are largely unprotected in clubs, which are apparently so overrun by such men that police are unable to intervene.

### **Alcohol Licensing and Victorian Strip Clubs**

The rise in violent crime incidents in Melbourne's strip club district has led to increasing concern about the role of strip-related alcohol consumption in fuelling violence in and around strip venues. This was evident in the strategy for addressing alcohol-related violence, *Restoring the Balance – Victoria's Alcohol Action Plan 2008-2013*, launched by the Victorian government in May 2008, which sought to introduce 'measures to address alcohol misuse, including preventing alcohol-related violence in and around licensed venues' (Department of Justice, 2010). The *Action Plan* led to the passage of the Liquor Control Reform (Licensing Bill) 2009, which introduced a 'risk-based fee structure' in Victorian licensing laws. This legislation saw

liquor licensing fees for Victorian strip clubs increase to \$30,000 a year (*Hansard*, 24 February 2010, p. 420), on the basis that such venues were identified by the government as 'high risk'. In September 2008, the option of banning alcohol altogether in strip clubs was raised by Consumer Affairs Minister Tony Robinson, following a number of violent incidents that occurred in Melbourne's CBD strip club district (AAP, 2008). The Minister noted the inconsistencies in Victorian laws on this issue, given that alcohol is banned in Victorian brothels but readily available in strip clubs which provide 'perhaps not the full suite of sexually explicit services, but a fair component of them' (Moor, 2008). Robinson ordered a Consumer Affairs review of liquor licensing for venues offering 'sex entertainment' in September 2008 (AAP, 2008), but the findings of the review do not appear to be available to the public.

The government's reluctance to ban alcohol in strip clubs is significant in view of the reasoning used to warrant the banning of alcohol in Victorian brothels. As a 2007 report by The Prostitution Control Act Ministerial Advisory Committee explains, the prohibition of liquor in brothels 'appears most closely related to the objective of promoting the welfare and occupational health and safety of sex workers' (PCAMAC, 2007, p. 27). The report states:

A ban on liquor in brothels may protect sex workers from the undesirable

behaviour of clients who are under the influence of alcohol, and the effects of alcohol on sex workers themselves including impaired judgment and lower diligence about personal health and safety (ibid).

The Committee also identified as another 'possible explanation for the banning of liquor in brothels', the objective of making 'brothels less attractive as a venue' (ibid). It explains, 'By banning liquor in brothels, the objective may have been to discourage people from attending brothels over other entertainment venues' (ibid). It is therefore surprising that such concerns, particularly those relating to welfare of 'sex workers', have not been extended to other aspects of the sex industry.

As a first step toward addressing the harm suffered by women as a result of the strip club industry, CATW

Australia recommends the total banning of alcohol in Victorian strip clubs. This is put forward with a view to reducing the threat to physical safety experienced by women both in the strip industry as well as in the wider community, and in seeking the eventual closure and banning of these venues.

### **Connections with Organised Crime**

There is evidence of considerable organised crime involvement in the ownership, management, security and patronage of strip clubs in Victoria. This creates several harms to the community. Strip clubs facilitate the development and profits of organised crime. Problems are created for policing and good governance. The violence associated with organised crime also spills out of the clubs to

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make the surrounding areas unsafe for citizens.

Victorian strip clubs in particular have come under some scrutiny in the media for their association with organised crime members. The shooting in Melbourne's CBD involving a Hells Angel motorcycle gang member in 2007, for example, was widely reported.<sup>2</sup> The bikie shot two men, killing one, after they attempted to stop him from assaulting a woman (stripper) who he was in a relationship with, on the street in Melbourne's CBD. Reports at the time indicated that during the weeks prior to the shooting, the bikie had been seen several times at the Spearmint Rhino, the strip club where his girlfriend worked as a dancer (McKenzie et al., 2007). The incident highlights the link between strip clubs and motorcycle gangs, with *The Age* quoting a former police officer and security company owner as saying 'bikie gangs, amphetamines and strippers' have always been part of the industry. '[Y]ou'd be stupid to think the motorcycle gangs weren't involved in some of the clubs along King Street and surrounding suburbs' (McKenzie et al., 2007). *The Age* also reported that underworld figures have 'a stranglehold on the city's largest clubs, which have a cash economy and access to girls, alcohol and drugs' (McKenzie et al., 2007).

## What Do Strip Clubs Actually Offer? A Website Analysis

<sup>2</sup> Hells Angel gang member Christopher Hudson shot two men, killing one, and assaulted his girlfriend a dancer at *Spearmint Rhino*, after leaving a King St nightclub.

In conducting research into Melbourne's strip clubs, CATWA has undertaken a content analysis of the websites of twelve Victorian strip clubs - or 'gentlemen's clubs' - including *Alleycat*, *Bux Parties*, *Centrefold Lounge*, *Dreams Gentlemens Club*, *Goldfingers*, *Hustler Club*, *Kittens*, *Men's Gallery*, *Pink Paradise*, *Showgirls Bar20*, *Spearmint Rhino* and *Xplicit Gentlemens Club*. Seven of these clubs are located in Melbourne's CBD, three in the inner suburbs (South Melbourne, Northcote and

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Brunswick), one in the outer suburbs (Frankston), and one in Geelong. This analysis indicates that the strip industry is engaged in glamorising the degradation of women. The clubs target 'businessmen' and the corporate sector, and try to ensure that male buyers are

repeat customers by encouraging them to attend as frequently as possible. The clubs market themselves as mere entertainment, rather than prostitution providers. They promote themselves to potential women workers as glamorous venues, rather than as quasi brothels, and so induct new generations of young women into Australia's sex industry.

### Membership

All of the clubs offered, or were in the process of offering, membership that gives men a range of 'perks', including free entry any time, free entry for guests, priority access, free alcohol, discounts on drinks and cigars, and so on. There is a clear emphasis on increasing the frequency of visits. For example the website for *Xplicit* gives a calculation of the saving a member could make if they attended the club every Thursday, Friday and Saturday

night for 51 weeks of the year. A number of sites also offered corporate membership. This appears to be an increasing problem in Australia, with business women now often effectively locked out of corporate events or forced to participate in an environment where women are openly objectified and degraded (Jeffreys, 2010).

### **Recruitment**

All but three of the websites advertised 'job opportunities' for women to work as strippers in the clubs. The information about recruitment emphasised that women did not need to have any experience in strip. One website states, for example, that 'no experience is required, we are more than happy to train you – all you have to do is be yourself'. Women need not have anything more than a 'love of partying, love of entertaining and a love of earning money' to qualify for a job as a stripper. One club directly appealed to 'ordinary women' by holding a regular Amateur Night (Hustler). The emphasis on not needing to have experience in stripping and the provision of on-the-job training enables strip clubs to act as a gateway to the sex industry. One Club (Kittens) advertises that it recruits women through the strip tease classes that it runs – 'Learn the art of 'tease'. All welcome. No nudity. Employment opportunities. Erotic exercise. Lots of fun'.

The websites focused almost solely on the so-called 'perks' of the job and work environment, with only one alluding to the possible dangers of the job, stating that training encompasses 'everything from podium dancing and pole tricks [to] talking to

customers and *ways to solve difficult situations'* (emphasis added). The majority of the clubs attempted to present the stripping environment as non-threatening by focusing on the 'all female management' and 'warm, friendly atmosphere'. One club advertises its 'buddy' system for new workers, whereby a woman is teamed up with a more experienced employee for her first two shifts to enable her to 'fit straight into the relaxed culture of the venue with introductions to regular clientele as well as other performers and staff, making the transition as supportive and easy as possible' (Hustler Club). The clubs also try to promote themselves as workplaces of choice by providing an 'encouraging atmosphere that will bring out the best in you', a 'luxurious environment with all the five-star amenities' and 'first-class facilities and a wonderful working environment'. They list a range of in-house bonuses, for example one club boasts that it provides 'enormous dancers dressing rooms with vending machine, tea/coffee facilities, showers, hair dryers, hair straighteners, gym, in-house hairdresser, in-house chef (complimentary food platters for dancers), masseuse, solarium, tanning products, dance choreographers, laundry facilities and dress retailers nightly'. All of this creates the image of a homely, caring environment in which women will be well looked after.

### **Functions**

The range of functions that the clubs advertised on their websites suggests the increasing acceptability of strip clubs as a 'legitimate' function venue and the viewing of strip shows as a legitimate 'activity'. The vast

majority of the websites boasted that their could cater for a range of functions, including:

- Private Functions
- Birthday Parties ('Surprise your friend with a lap dance he or she won't forget')
- Bucks Nights
- Hens Nights
- Corporate Events
- Work Functions
- End of Financial Year Boat Cruise and lunch (Hustler)
- Executive Meetings
- Office Parties
- Divorce Parties
- Large VIP Room
- Christmas Breakups/Functions
- Sport's Club Functions
- Golf Days ('Need sexy caddys?')
- Tradies Celebrations
- Bus, Limosine and Hummer Hire (Xplicit and Bux Parties)
- Or 'any excuse for the boys to go out and play' (Bux Parties)

The clubs market themselves as legitimate venues for events but their 'entertainment' relies on the degradation of women.

### **Business**

The push by clubs to appeal to businessmen was evident on many of the websites. One club (Men's Gallery) has a business card competition whereby leaving your card at reception might win you 'a complimentary party for yourself and ten guests to the value of \$200'. In their list of functions for which they could cater most Clubs included 'executive meetings' and other 'corporate events'. One club advertised a special End of Financial Year boat cruise and End of Financial

Year lunch. Lunch could also include topless waitresses. The clubs create an exclusive, masculine, misogynistic business culture.

### **Promotions**

Almost all of the clubs advertised different promotions and events, including:

- Amateur Night (Hustler)
- 'Girl of the Month' (Goldfingers)
- Australian Showgirl of the Year (Xplicit)
- 'So You Think You Can Striptease' Competition
- Lingerie party (Dreams Gentlemen's Club)
- Lucky door prize (Hustler)
- Miss Nude Victoria (Hustler)
- Rookie of the Year (Showgirls Bar20)
- Dildorama (Hustler)
- Merchandise/Logo Night ('wear any approved Spearmint Rhino logo item for free entry')
- Business card competition (Men's Gallery)
- Poker nights
- Music gigs (Xplicit)
- Televised sport - AFL (Xplicit)

The clubs diversify their offerings in order to normalise the venues and encourage a wider range of male customers. They seek to market themselves as exactly like night clubs, rather than brothels, even though strip clubs are clearly part of the sex industry and need to be understood as such.

### **Meals**

Part of the normalisation of strip clubs is their provision of meals. Patrons of *Hustler Club* can order, for example, a two-course meal in the dining room and be served by topless waitresses. Hustler Club suggests:



[c]ombining Maxine's restaurant with a hand full [sic] of Hustler Honeys and you've got a fun, friendly and sexy lunch that you won't forget!! Maxine's restaurant is open to the public by appointment for lunch every Thursday and Friday. For \$100 per person you will receive a beautiful two course set meal, and a desert that is best left to your imagination. And if required you can have a beautiful topless waitress cater to your every need.

Some clubs had their menu available on the website. By serving meals, the clubs are creating another revenue stream, ensuring that men do not have to leave the club to eat. They are also diversifying the functions that can be catered for on-site, including business lunches.

It should be a matter of concern that the clubs are now spreading into the suburbs, and taking with them the harms to the community and to women's equality, while pretending to be community conscious businesses. One of the clubs, which is located in the inner-city suburb of Northcote, advertised the ways in which the club was attempting to create a sense of connection and contribution to the local community – 'this venue has always provided a variety of entertainment for the local community and we will continue the standards of entertainment, but with a new modern up-market decor. Sit back with a few friends in a quiet surround and enjoy' (Xplicit).

## How Does Strip Affect You?

Strip clubs not only harm those women directly involved in them, they also harm the status of women more generally. The clubs foster a prostitution culture which constructs and reinforces women's inequality.

### A Harmful Prostitution Culture

The current branding of the strip industry as 'entertainment' diverts attention from the fact that it is aiding the normalisation of prostitution. Such normalisation has resulted in a prostitution culture, which has harmful effects upon not only the lives of women in prostitution but also of the lives of all women living within society. A culture of prostitution damages the possibility of creating relationships of equality, respect and honesty between women and men in the home, in the workplace and in all other areas of life. The strip industry is growing and patronage is increasing. Strip club

**Strip clubs not only harm those women directly involved in them, they also harm the status of women more generally. The clubs foster a prostitution culture which constructs and reinforces women's inequality**

advertising places women's bodies for sale on billboards in suburban streets. Through these practices, new generations of men are trained in accepting prostitution as a normal and acceptable facet of life. This inevitably affects the way that men relate to women in their lives: their family, partners, workmates and friends.

Equal relationships between men and women are still difficult for many to achieve. The existence of strip clubs, brothels, pornography and the advertising of these forms of sexual exploitation make it much harder. The

prostitution industry, of which stripping is one strand, creates and promotes the notion that women are objects for sexual use rather than equal human beings. It creates the idea that women can be bought and sold for men's sexual pleasure. A prostitution culture cements gender inequality and reinforces negative attitudes about women.

The prostitution culture also affects women and girls on a more intimate level by constructing the sex of prostitution as an ideal that they must meet in their everyday sexual relationships. The sex of prostitution requires women to actively service men as prostituted women have to do, irrespective of their pleasure and personhood. Men cannot be equal to women in sexual relationships if they are involved in the sexual exploitation of women in prostitution.

### **Harms to Equality: The new glass ceiling**

The increased social acceptance of the strip industry and use of strip clubs by male executives for networking, awarding of bonuses and socialising has had a detrimental effect on women's equality in the workplace. The use of strip clubs by male businessmen is now creating a new 'glass ceiling'. The acceptance and use of this form of prostitution adds a new dimension to the exclusion and limitation of women's participation in the workplace and work-related activities (Jeffreys, 2010). It is clear that the use of strip clubs for business is promoted by clubs in Victoria and it is also clear that this is likely to have a real effect on working women's equality. Women can attend meetings and suffer the pain and embarrassment of watching how other women are treated in the

strip clubs, or they can refuse to go, be excluded from important business events and risk losing the chance of advancement. Women executives cannot be equal in a prostitution culture where their male colleagues can cement deals by providing women from strip clubs to clients, or join clients in visiting strip clubs (Jeffreys, 2002).

## What Can You Do?

Now is the time to take a stand against the strip club industry in Australia. The strip industry objectifies women and normalises prostitution. Across the world women's rights organisations are challenging the mainstreaming of the strip industry; in the UK, action taken by groups such as Object and the Fawcett Society have seen important changes in the venue licensing of strip businesses (see [object.org.uk](http://object.org.uk)), and in March 2010, Iceland banned all strip clubs and made it 'illegal for any business to profit from the nudity of its employees' (Bindel, 2010).

You can be a part of this movement and challenge the legitimacy of strip in Australia by taking action in the following ways:

- Lobby your local MPs and councils to have strip clubs licensed as commercial sex venues that cannot sell alcohol. This would bring them into line with current legislation on brothels.
- Join CATWA on Facebook.
- Donate to CATWA so that we can continue this campaign.
- Girlcot non-strip entertainment venues run by sex industry operators.
- Discourage friends and loved ones from becoming consumers of the prostitution industry by attending strip clubs, i.e. on bucks and hens nights.
- Withdraw from events that normalise stripping such as poledancing or burlesque and be prepared to explain why.
- Make copies of the card attached to this pamphlet to explain why you will not attend stripping related events.
- Complain about strip club advertising to your local council and the Advertising Standards Board.

### DID YOU KNOW?

**The owner / director of the sex industry venues *The Men's Gallery*, *Centrefold Lounge* and *Beach Gentlemen's Club* also owns / runs the popular mainstream venues *Sorry Grandma!* and *Bubble Nightclub* (Whinnett, 2010).**

**The management company Planet Platinum (CEO John Trimble) which runs the sex industry venue *Showgirls Bar 20* also owns 50 per cent of the mainstream venue *The Royal Melbourne Hotel* ([www.planetplatinum.com.au](http://www.planetplatinum.com.au)).**

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## APPENDIX

CLUB	MEMBERSHIP	PROMOTIONS / FUNCTIONS	RECRUITING ON WEBSITE
A	<p>Introductory Membership (\$100): Our introductory memberships are valid for three months and provide the bearer with free entry any time.'</p> <p>Gold Hard Card (\$500): Gold hard cards come embossed with the member's name and provide free entry for bearer and two guests any time.'</p>	<p>Free DVD when you join mailing list, featuring the women from the club: 'You will also be kept up to date with all our special events and receive exclusive invitations and function offers!'</p> <p>Poker night: 'Now with Topless Dealers!'</p> <p>Multiple Poker Tables - Non-Stop Podium Dancing</p> <p>Penthouse Magazine giveaways on some nights.</p>	Yes
B	<p>Gold membership (\$350): 12 months free and priority access for you and one guest.</p> <p>Platinum membership (\$1,000): 12 months free and priority access for you and unlimited guests.</p> <p>Black membership (\$2,500): corporate member, 12 months free and priority access for you and unlimited guests, VIP reserved seating, 10% off alcohol and cigar purchases, no surcharges on ATM and chip transactions.</p>	<p>Sunday Night Logo Night</p> <p>Wear any approved 'B' logo item for free entry</p> <p>Win a free M-Spa (by joining free email/phone list)</p> <p>Mailing list</p>	Yes
C	<p>Platinum Membership (\$500): This prestigious membership provides unlimited free and priority entry for 12 months for bearer plus up to four guests. Platinum members receive a complimentary bottle of Chivas Regal with a personalised label stored at 'C' for your exclusive use plus priority function bookings and VIP invitations to our special events.</p> <p>Gold Membership (\$250): The Gold membership provides unlimited free and priority entry for 12 months, discounts on function bookings and a subscription to our mailing list for regular updates and invitations to our special events. Gold members also receive a complimentary bottle of champagne.</p> <p>Corporate Membership (\$60): This membership gives unlimited free entry for bearer and guest from 12noon - 9pm for six months and a subscription to our mailing list for regular updates.</p>	<p>Miss Centrefold Oceania 2010 Competition</p> <p>Weekly Poker</p> <p>Polestar: Weekly sessions at 'C' Show Room on the art of pole dancing.</p> <p>Register Now, on-line, and we will be pleased to forward you a Free VIP Gift.</p> <p><i>Competitions:</i> Business Card Competition: Win a Complimentary party for yourself and 10 Guests to the value of \$200.</p> <p><i>Functions:</i> 'How about a POKER FUNCTION - we can provide a professional table, dealer and chips free of charge! Perfect for Bucks Parties or just a boy's night out!'</p> <p><i>Meals:</i> 'Our kitchen has an extensive menu from mouthwatering canapes to a full 3 - course meal. The Buffet has a vast selection of both hot and cold dishes and our chefs can tailor a menu to cater to all your needs whether it be a business lunch or a large function for a special occasion.'</p>	Yes
D	Gold Memberships grant the cardholder and two guests free entry (additional	Tabletop dancing	Yes

	guests may be arranged prior to arrival) for a period of 12 months, priority entry into the venue & first right of refusal to special & ticketed events.	Fantasy Thursdays Fridays / Saturdays: 'spectacular stage shows performed by our professional showgirls as they take it all off for your viewing pleasure at 11pm, 12am, 1am & 2am'	
E	12 Month Membership (\$120.00): Entitles you and a guest to enter for Free, every Thursday, Friday and Saturday Night  'So what this means is that if you came every Thursday Friday and Saturday Night for 51 weeks and you would normally pay \$15 entry fee, plus your friend, then you save a whopping \$4,470.00. Pretty good deal if you ask us!'	Midnight Shows throughout the Year (e.g. Bubble bath show, Fire show, Dark angel show, Valentines show, Doubles show, Strawberry and Cream show). Australian Showgirl of the Year (2011) – Victoria Competition Psytrance and Strippers Explicit Woodstock Grand Prix Weekend Kinky Fetish Nights Splash: Female Oil Wrestling So You Think You Can Striptease Australia competition Watch Live Footy on TV	Yes
F	Memberships: Silver, Platinum, Gold. No details '\$100.00 Memberships are now available.'	<i>Functions:</i> Private room for bucks parties, Car wash.	No
G	Not listed	Different promotions each month (e.g. Jelly babes, Dildorama, Boat Cruize, Miss Nude Victoria, End of Financial Year Boat Cruise, End of Financial Year Lunch).  Different promotion most week nights (e.g. Amature [sic] Night Rodeo - 'ride the bull', Moulin Rouge, Fantasy Friday)  <i>Meals:</i> 'For \$100 per person you will receive a beautiful two course set meal, and a desert that is best left to your imagination. And if required you can have a beautiful topless waitress cater to your every need.'  Double D – Dinner and dance \$50 Triple D – Dinner, dance and de-stress (massage) \$75	Yes
H	'H' membership (\$250) Platinum membership (\$950) Mailing list	Lingerie party Platinum Party Package (incl. 14 guests, stretch hummer, bottle of spirits, 1 private dance) - \$1,000.00  Gold Party Package (incl. 10 guests, limo, bottle of spirits and 1 private dance) - \$800.00  'H' Party Package (incl. 20 guests, bottle	Yes

		of spirits, 1 private dance) - \$450.00	
I	'Coming soon'	<p>Dances start at \$20 for a short dance.</p> <p><i>Events:</i> Whether you are planning an evening with a few close friends or a party for the whole crew, Pink Paradise is the perfect place to celebrate. Whatever the event - birthday, bachelor party, divorce party, office gathering, corporate event, ... - we can customise your party experience to create the most unforgettable, fun and raunchy night for you and your guests.</p> <p>Admission fee is free for ladies.</p>	Yes
J	Not listed	<p>'J' Weekends: 'Pack your things for the ultimate 'J' Party weekend.'</p> <p>Topless Waitresses: 'We always have more topless as well as lingerie girls available than we have shown in the photo's. Due to privacy we are unable to show all the girls on our website.'</p> <p>Raunchy Show: 'This is a sexy fun show for every occasion. With use of oil or cream making a little bit of mess out of the birthday boy or buck &amp; it gives everyone a great laugh.'</p> <p>Bubble Bath: 'Now there is nothing better than finishing off a Raunchy show with a cool, relaxing bubble bath, your sexy stripper will 'clean up her act' with a sponge in her very own bath tub.'</p> <p>Strawberries &amp; Cream: 'This is far more exciting than any desert you can buy at the cake shop. Fresh strawberries &amp; whipped cream served to you by the hottest dish in town. Strawberries will never be the same again.'</p> <p>Hot Vibrator: 'If you need more, than this show is it!!! Your stripper uses not 1 but 2 or more toys!!! Combine the 2 vibes a string of pearls (hidden safely away) or maybe a banana or some other weird &amp; wonderful item that can be safely inserted or removed and you have a Hot Vibe Show. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED SHOW.'</p> <p>Fruit &amp; Veg: 'This show is basically the same as the Hot Vibe, except the vibrator is exchanged for some fruit &amp; veggies instead. This show is good to teach naughty boys to eat all their veggies!!'</p> <p>Limousines</p>	No



		Limo and hummer hire	
K	Not listed	Free APL Poker and Prawns Galore Women in Uniform Jelly Wrestling Mega Strip	Yes
L	<p>Silver card \$150 (you + 1 guest free entry at anytime for 1 year, valid from date purchased)</p> <p>Gold Card \$250 (you + 3 guests free entry anytime for 1 year, valid from date purchased)</p> <p>Platinum Card \$500 (you and all guests free entry anytime for 1 year, valid from date purchased)</p>	<p>Themed shows (e.g. Fantasy Show, Mini Show, Mega Strip, Fantasy Show, 3 Girl Show).</p> <p>Massage - 'Strictly Neck and shoulders only!!'</p> <p>Rookie of the Year</p> <p>Mega Show - 10.30pm Nightly Where every girl appears on stage naked!</p> <p>See a dancer that tickles your fancy? For as little as \$20, why not have her all to yourself in a private dance room - or share her with 3 of your friends!</p>	Yes

## NOTES

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