

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: THE JEZEBEL SPEAKS: BLACK WOMEN'S  
EROTIC LABOR IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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According to contemporary scholars of sex work in the digital age, information and communication technologies (ICTs) provide sex workers various affordances. Some of these affordances include new ways of business or marketing; greater security; more autonomy; and better wages. Much of this scholarship centers young white women working in specific fields of sex work that cater to young white men clientele. Thus, several questions remain about the affordances and constraints of the internet for sex workers of color. Affordances refer to the functional and relational aspects of objects that create possibilities for human agency through interaction with them. In this present study I use existing theories of the mobile internet and Black feminist thought to intervene into the sociology of sex work and the internet to show how Black women sex workers negotiate controlling images of Black women's sexuality on the social networking application Instagram. This study seeks to address the following broad research questions with respect to embodiment and labor: 1) In what ways, if any, do controlling images of Black women's sexuality emerge online? 2)

How do power dynamics within the matrix of domination shape racial-sexual hierarchies of worthiness and desirability online? And finally, 3) What sexual politics, if any, do Black women exotic dancers use on social networking sites to negotiate controlling images? To answer these questions, I use a mixed methods approach to examine the affordances of digital technology for Black women sex workers. First, I used GIS mapping software to visualize the locations of where Black women exotic dancers based in the Memphis, Atlanta, and D.C. metropolitan areas perform. Second, I distributed an online survey among this group of women to create an exploratory profile. Finally, I conducted a content analysis to explore the erotic labor of Black women sex workers as a form of racial-sexual and gendered embodiment and performance of sexuality. My findings indicate Black women exotic dancers use social networking sites (SNS) and the mobile internet to leverage racialized erotic capital into various entrepreneurial pursuits and forms of self-eroticism beyond exotic dance. Nevertheless, controlling images of Black women's sexuality popular within the discourse of contemporary rap music shape expectations around their erotic labor. As a result, the innovation of social networking sites on the mobile internet has done little to reshape the racially and economically marginalized landscape of strip clubs wherein Black women exotic dancers perform.

THE JEZEBEL SPEAKS: BLACK WOMEN'S EROTIC LABOR IN THE  
DIGITAL AGE

by

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## Preface

I can't quite pinpoint when I came to know myself as a Black woman. I do know I was still a child when I started to notice the assumptions people made about me simply because I had entered the room. Black girlhood is a very fleeting thing. You go from bubbles in your hair to braids are banned in a time span so short you start to wonder -- what's so different about you, Black girl?

There's all sorts of people and places who send you messages: parents, teachers, friends, lovers, schools, churches, and everywhere in between. They tell you you're not here and if you're here, you don't belong. You're not here because Black girls aren't supposed to be here - here where *you* can't be loud, and *you* can't be smart, and *you* can't talk that way, and *you* can't be dressed like that, and *you* can't wear your hair that way. Not *you*, Black girl.

A Black girl being here is predicated on a lot of things and much of it involves consuming and accepting messages that deny that she is indeed a Black girl. Instead, she is a bad girl, she's a minority girl, she's a low performing girl, she's a fast girl, she's not even a girl at all - she's a deviant, she's a bitch, she's a hoe, she's a thing to be owned, and tamed, because she's not human - she's a freak.

While popular imagination of the Black Mecca depicts it as a place where Black people have power and status, my reality as a Black girl in the suburbs of Atlanta reveals more of the same. For most of my childhood, I took a bus from my predominately Black neighborhood to a parking lot where I then got on another bus to go to school in the predominately white suburbs of Chamblee. That nearly all the kids

taking these buses were Black and most of the kids for whom the school was home were white - and in the Magnet program - was never lost on me.

In fact, I took it as another message. This message said that some Black girls were different from others. These Black girls participated in the Atlanta Chapter of Jack and Jill America Inc. These Black girls were descended from great grandparents who had been the first in their family to go to the Atlanta University. Their parents had been among the first to integrate historically white schools and universities. These Black girls sang in the choir at church or maybe just helped in the nursery. These were sacred Black girls meant to carry on the tide of Black excellence and keep the Black Mecca alive if they never let the mask fall and reveal themselves to be freaks.

To accomplish this, sacred Black girls, their male counterparts, and their families maintained a marginal space between the Black inner city and white suburbia that would come to define the entirety of the Black Mecca. Single or unmarried mothers, queer and trans women, and women working in the sex industry were all to blame for the social ills associated with Black women and girls. The culture and values of Black middle-class suburban Atlanta advocated that Black girl freaks be tamed at the same time Black popular culture wanted to unleash her for their own profit. While rappers, strip clubs, and reality television shows based in Atlanta popularized Black women as sexual freaks in mainstream media, the messages sent by the Black middle class rejected any and all women who might appear to be a freak.

So how does a Black girl become a freak? How does she become sacred? Where the messages teach you that being a sacred Black girl is easier, better, and empowering, the truth is being a Black girl freak in Atlanta just meant you were poor, working class, or attended public school in the city. The threat of the Black girl freak meant nothing other than the stability of the Black middle class would be undone by increasing visibility of poor and working-class Black women in mainstream popular culture.

Television viewers can turn into *Real Housewives of Atlanta* or *Love and Hip-Hop Atlanta* to get a completely different, yet interrelated interpretation that obscures who Black women in and from Atlanta really are in this paradoxical media environment. The inaccuracy of what reality television showed about where I lived was the first time, I started to question these messages. My friends and I would joke about how unrealistic these portrayals were, but then it occurred to us that maybe people, especially those who had never encountered Black people from anywhere, let alone Atlanta, believed these messages.

An interest in wondering whether reality television was sending harmful messages about Black women prompted the start of my academic journey. Prior to answering these research questions, I had read Claude Steele's *Whistling Vivaldi* as part of the curriculum for an undergraduate summer research program. The book taught me about stereotype threat or how marginalized people felt a self-defeating pressure to perform in environments structured to activate negative stereotypes about their intellectual capability. More importantly, the book taught me the ways that

scientific methods get used to study race, gender, and the ways these social constructs work together to shape the lived experiences of people living together in a society.

When I began to question the messages about Black women television, I was studying psychology at the University of Georgia and my interests afforded me the opportunity to work in a lab that focused on social psychology. At the time, the concept of implicit bias had just emerged as the hot new topic for people studying prejudice in psychology, which attributed racism to a dimension of cognitive activity that happened below the subconscious. People didn't know they were racist! The societal favor afforded White people was just an implicit bias.

I bring up the concept of implicit bias because it was the perspective that my mentors at the time suggested I account for in my research design for my honors thesis. I was interested in how white undergraduate students would respond to the depiction of Black Americans on reality television shows. According to proponents of the implicit bias thesis, any effect of prejudice I might find could be explained by Gordon Allport's contact theory. This theory holds that several factors explain prejudice including a lack of encounters between people of color and white people or encounters that fail to encourage equity and fairness between group members that don't have shared social characteristics.

This theoretical framework guided my research design as I created an experiment wherein, I primed participants with a video clip from four different reality television dating shows: *Flavor of Love*, *I Love New York*, *the Bachelor*, and *Rock of Love*. The casts of these shows had a varied racial composition. *The Bachelor* was my control show - a show produced by ABC that has still to this day has never depicted a

Black man as the lead love interest. Indeed, the show profits from perpetuating white romantic princess fantasies around heterosexual monogamy as a sea of mostly white women vie for the affection of one wealthy white man. I expected white undergraduate students were not only familiar with the show but watched it without thinking about the absence of people of color because they interpret whiteness in media as the default.

*Rock of Love* was my comparison show to *Flavor of Love*. These shows shared the same network home of VH1 but had a key difference. The lead of *Flavor of Love* was rapper Flavor Flav while Rockstar Bret Michaels headed *Rock of Love*. These respective leads embodied the Black-White dichotomy that defines performances of masculinity within these genres to this day. Nevertheless, each series starts the same way: a former male pop star invites an interracial cast of women to live with him in a mansion as they all compete against each other, sometimes even getting into physical and verbal altercations, an element largely missing in the context of the Bachelor.

The racial composition of the women cast to compete signaled the perceived desirability among the sexualized popular culture depiction of the women fanbases (or groupies) of these genres these castmates represented. Only one Black woman remained on the cast of *Rock of Love* after the elimination episode, a feature of all reality dating shows wherein a portion of the eye candy selected get sent back home before getting a chance to participate. The cast of *Flavor of Love*, however, contained both Black and white women up until the second-to-last episode, which precedes one of the most iconic moments of reality television show history during which a white

woman contestant responds to one of two remaining Black woman contestants by spitting in her face during a verbal altercation. The Black woman responded by shouting out a series of words bleeped out by producers before she grabbed the woman by the hair and proceeded to as we say in the south “beat dat ass.”

While my friends and I had largely responded to that moment as viewers in astonishment, awe, and admiration for a Black woman who would go on to create and live out her own reality television brand, I suspected viewing that very same moment would lead some white undergraduate viewers to confirm an unwillingness to engage with people of color because they would interpret this scene as confirmation that Black women were aggressive and violent.

I chose several clips among these set of shows that featured different aggressors to prime students before introducing the experiment. In *Rock of Love*, a white woman contestant antagonizes a Black woman before their altercation. In *Flavor of Love*, a Black woman contestant is the antagonist prior to her altercation with a white woman contestant. The clip from *I Love New York* also featured an altercation between a white man and a Black man, though the key difference for this show is that it starred Tiffany "New York" Pollard as a Black woman lead because she had secured an eponymous *Bachelorette*-esque spinoff based on her break out star status on *Flavor of Love*.

The effect I measured was how students would respond to potential encounters with people of color or topics related to race. The participants answered a survey asking them various questions about their background, attitudes on racial diversity, whether they had contact with people of color as classmates, neighbors, or

friends. Then, after watching the clip and confirming they had observed the incident in question, I asked the students to indicate whether they would like to participate in various events or activities, each of which signaled the possibility of interracial contact. I also asked the students if they would be willing to sign a petition against affirmative action - my primary measure for whether observing clips that depicted Black people as aggressive would illicit an unwillingness to engage in interracial contact.

My findings showed that white undergraduate students who reported having little interracial contact in real life were more willing to sign an anti-affirmative action petition after observing the clip from *Flavor of Love*. Interestingly, those who had observed contestants who had higher than average levels of interracial contact and observed contestants on *The Bachelor* having a mild verbal disagreement reported less of a willingness to sign the anti-affirmative action petition.

Finding an effect during this experiment got me hooked on the idea that I could use social science to understand why people reacted to Black women the way they did. Still, I didn't quite have a grasp of what an interest in Black women as a research topic would mean for me. I turned in my undergraduate honors thesis and then worried about trying to get a job in the slowly recovering post-2008 recession economy.

I landed a temporary gig as an office manager for a non-profit organization that specialized in preparing low-income students from the metropolitan Atlanta area for college or university. Like many cities throughout the U.S., the context of low-income in Atlanta almost always meant that anyone selected into these programs was

going to either be Black, immigrant, or an Appalachian white whose family never really made it in the big city. This encounter showed the way the Black Mecca sorted is children into sacred and sacrilegious. An entire industry exists around the notion that an organization can intervene and provide resources to baptize children with promise into the ways of bourgeoisie. I would also not stick around to find out just how well the process worked.

My transition to graduate school was not immediate. I left the office manager position to start as a marketing assistant at a mid-size company run by a family of people who had all attended my undergraduate alma mater. While working there, I assisted in a wide range of marketing activities including social media marketing. Social media marketing was my first exposure to the use of social media outside my own personal engagement with what were at the time relatively new platforms like Twitter and Instagram. I was preparing for graduate school while working in this position, hoping to delve deeper into my research on reality television. Then an incident changed the course of my research agenda forever, though I didn't know at the time how much social media would come to matter to me until after my first year in the sociology program.

In February 2012, George Zimmerman killed Trayvon Martin, a Black teenager who he had encountered when the boy was returning home from a local convenience store in Sanford, Florida. George Zimmerman, acting as a neighborhood watchman, walked free after an initial investigation wherein he claimed he'd killed the boy in self-defense after Trayvon had attacked him. Though we as Black Atlantans hadn't yet learned the term for it, we took to Twitter, Facebook, and other

social media platforms to express our outrage. Alongside Black internet users across the United States, we used hashtags and memes to demand justice.

Suddenly it was clear that bias wasn't so implicit. It was overt, intentional, not just pro-White but also anti-Black. The outcry led Florida's attorney general to file charges and a court date was set. Between the television coverage and social media dialogue, it seemed all of America had tuned into the proceedings. I followed along with the coverage as I worked, prompting a coworker to ask me if I "enjoyed," watching the trial, likening the news coverage to a court show like Judge Judy.

By the time George Zimmerman had been acquitted, I had already decided where I would be attending graduate school. Though I had observed the way Black people engaged with social media to call out this vigilante violence, and even participated myself, I did not recognize these grassroots organizing for the activism that it was. Indeed, it took until August 2014 for me to see the value of how Black people use digital technology to enact social change.

When Darren Wilson, a police officer based in Ferguson, Missouri, shot and killed Michael Brown, a resident of the Canfield Green Apartments where the killing occurred took to Twitter to document how the body of the recent high school graduate laid in the street. Black American social media users, who by then had formed their own community known as 'Black Twitter,' took to the platform to express their outrage.

But the outrage didn't stay on the internet. People took the streets to protest, calling for a grand jury investigation to indict Darren Wilson, who Like George Zimmerman had also gone home after killing a Black teenager without being charged.

Sometime between Michael Brown's death and the publicity generated around protests in Ferguson on the national news, #BlackLivesMatter had become defined as the rallying cry of a movement that would sustain activism offline and online against police brutality. Black undergraduate students - many of them raised as those sacred Black girls and boys - had abandoned the affirmations of exceptionalism inculcated them from bias. Furthermore, they were certain that this bias was not implicit but rather systemic. They demanded change from the top down and for them this was why Black lives mattered.

I started to study social media and activism as a research topic in September 2014 after I attended a town hall organized by the African American Studies Department at the University of Maryland. The town hall featured scholars, activists, students, and the university's police chief - who aimed to assure the Black students gathered there that the incidents they observed on tv would not happen to them - not those sacred Black boys and girls. The students called his bluff, describing their own experiences with the campus police force that had left them feeling racially profiled and dehumanized. For these Black undergraduate students, the threat was not out there - it was at home.

Toward the end of this townhall, a researcher from the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities spoke. He described how he and the team he worked with had designed a tool that enabled them to collect millions of tweets generated on the topic of Ferguson. He invited the scholars gathered there to participate in the analysis of this dataset.

Only a second-year graduate student at the time, I turned to my advisor for guidance. He agreed that this looked like an important topic but cautioned that if I took up research on social media, I would be going down a path that most sociologists had yet to explore. This meant that every skillset, every concept, every theory related to social media that I would need to understand what was going on with Ferguson, Black Twitter, and #BlackLivesMatter would be a thing that I would learn on my own and not through classrooms, conferences, or publications operated by mainstream sociology.

Nearly five years after I chose this research topic, I am still one of few sociologists interested in digital technology or social media activism. During this time, I found an intellectual community among scholars in the digital humanities, information sciences, and communications to help guide my research. Yet, I am the only sociologist claiming to be doing Black feminist digital sociology, the framework I have developed throughout these years to understand the ways social structure constraints the agency afforded internet users when they also identify as Black women.

What I learned through my study of Ferguson on Twitter was that even on social networking sites, Black women weren't here - even if we were the ones doing all the work to make here a reality. I observed that even when Black women sent messages online in support of violence against the Black community, Black men internet users and the mainstream media still chose to conflate the entire of the problem with those faced by Black cisgender men. When #BlackLivesMatter as an internet phenomenon came to center only Black men victims of police brutality,

Black women Twitter users took up #SayHerName, a call to action for Black women victims created by Kimberlé Crenshaw, the Black feminist legal scholar best known for her work on intersectionality.

Through my analysis of #SayHerName, I uncovered that intersectionality in action looked like a near total abandonment of the Black girl freak-sacred Black girl dichotomy. Whereas the values and culture of the Black middle class led to criticism of women victims like Sandra Bland for allegedly talking back or Korryn Gaines for allegedly endangering her child prior to their deaths, #SayHerName uplifted these women. Black women academics, college students, and bloggers uplifted single mothers, trans women, and sex workers, finding and creating a value and a here for all of us under the #SayHerName umbrella.

In this dissertation, I wanted to go a step further in breaking down the Black girl freak - sacred Black girl dichotomy. I want to center the ways Black women deemed unworthy of being here represent and see themselves. This project focuses on Black women exotic dancers that use the social networking site Instagram as a digital marketing tool. I am inspired not only by the intersectionality of Black women internet users, but also the paradox of an upbringing in a southern city that rebranded its Confederate legacy through its popular culture association with both well-to-do and ratchet Black women, rendering invisible the lives of those who lived in the here of the Black Mecca.

I expand on an ongoing conversation across a wide range of fields among Black feminist scholars invested in undoing the images that control Black women. I use many concepts coined and theorized from the standpoint from Black women and

informed by their lived experiences. It matters to me to disentangle and articulate the contours of contemporary Black womanhood considering new technologies through which others consume and disseminate messages about Black womanhood.

I choose Instagram as my site of analysis because of the ways I observed Black women represented in the images and videos uploaded by users of the social networking application. It seemed on this platform, Black girls had found a here where they could be loud, they could be fast, they could be sacred, and they could be freaks all within the same virtual space. Not only were messages being sent to Black girls or about Black girls - they were writing messages to themselves, to each other, and to the world. I choose to study Black women exotic dancers because of my upbringing during a time period where they represented all what Atlanta had to offer in the popular imagination of the Black Mecca and yet no one had asked them to give their opinion on the subject. This dissertation invites us to think not only about what we say about Black girls, but more importantly, take the time to listen to what they have to say for themselves.



## Dedication

*In memory of Tivana Alyse Stepney, also known as Vanity Redz.*

## Acknowledgements

As the child of Jamaican immigrants, I had little background knowledge about the spaces through which I moved as a child raised in the suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia. Why did I have to leave my second-grade classmates every few days to make a PowerPoint presentation in the Discovery program? Why did some of the Black kids in various neighborhoods throughout DeKalb County have to wake up at five in the morning to catch a bus to a parking lot where we caught another bus to our various middle and high schools? Why did the Southern Baptist churches I attended impress chastity upon adolescent girls of color while white girls our age were being introduced to birth control and the idea that sex before marriage was an outdated concept? I had no idea I could find the answers to these questions through research until I started undergrad at the University of Georgia. By then, I had to unlearn years of socialization about Blackness and womanhood that failed to empower me or other women I knew. Over a decade later, I have learned the answers to these questions and how to answer questions of my own. I would like to extend a thank you to all those I have met along the way who encouraged me up to this point.

To begin I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee. Thank you to my advisor, Rashawn Ray for his willingness to encourage my unconventionality and propensity towards critical, genre-bending research, teaching and scholarship. His unending support of students of color and students who challenge the status quo will go a long way to changing the face of sociology. Dawn M. Dow, for letting me be one of the first graduate students she worked with at the

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Several programs dedicated to critical thought and digital studies have laid the groundwork for helping me think critically about digital data analysis and the ways Black critical thought could inform my research. Thank you to the Critical Race Initiative for helping develop my understanding of critical race theory as a sociologist. Thank you to the organizers of Digital Sociology Miniconference at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society. Thank you to the organizers, to the members, and attendees who gave me a space to dialogue with fellow sociologists. Thank you to the Maryland Institute of Technology for the Humanities and its members for introducing me to the concept of empirical digital data analysis. Without the programming you put on generating scholarly dialogue, engaging researchers in skills training, and offering a space for non-White scholars to intervene in the still overwhelmingly white field of digital humanities. To the African American Digital Humanities Initiative: Thank you for hiring me as a graduate assistant. Words cannot describe how influential this role has been to me as a scholar and researcher. Thank you for helping me to take myself seriously as a scholar, expert, and exposing

me to the ways interdisciplinarity functions to push fields and disciplines to do groundbreaking work.

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## List of Abbreviations

AAVE	African American Vernacular English
ACS	American Community Survey
API	Application Programming Interface
BDSM	Bondage, Domination, Sadism, and Masochism
DM	Direct message
DMV	D.C., Maryland, and Virginia
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc
FOSTA	Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act
GIS	Geographical information system
GMT	Greenwich Mean Time
GPS	Geographic Positioning Systems
ICTs	Information and communication technologies
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning
Rte	Route
SESTA	Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act
SNS	Social networking sites
URL	Uniform resource locator

# Chapter 1: Introduction: Theorizing the Erotic Labor of Black Women Exotic Dancers on Instagram

## Background

I grew up in suburban Atlanta during the early twenty-first century where it wasn't unreasonable for me to come across Black women with a Strip Club Backup Plan. According to this plan, a Black woman facing difficulty forging her way along traditional pathways to upward mobility laid out by schools and colleges might divest from it all and invest in herself by trading out her schoolbooks for some stripper shoes. What more frequently went unsaid was that this backup plan was a last resort they expected to avoid based on their ability to leverage their social and cultural capital into a college degree and later a white-collar profession. However, the plan also did not represent a total negation or rejection of exotic dancer as an occupation. Indeed, most women with this plan made sure they maintained all the skillsets they would need should they take up shop working in this all-else-fails position: a curvy shape, well-manicured nails and hair extensions, a wardrobe of salacious and titillating attire, and the ability to twerk to the trap music anthems of the day.

The Strip Club Backup Plan for the most part appeared to operate mostly as fantasy for Black women who otherwise felt obligated to maintain their status and identity as part of suburban Atlanta's Black middle class. It did not map on to the reality of what leads most Black women in Atlanta to enter the exotic dance industry,

let alone the United States. Black women exotic dancers worked in a paradoxical space. On the one hand, their labor, bodies, and identities inspired an entire genre of rap music that would help propel Atlanta's music culture to the international stage. On the other hand, city politicians and suburban residents targeted the venues they worked in for closure, claiming they weren't family friendly or attracted unwanted elements.

The contradiction between the popular imagination of Black women exotic dancers in Atlanta and their lived experiences brings into question the social construction of Black womanhood and sexuality in the United States. Society perpetuates specific and contradictory messages about Black women and their sexuality. Contemporary sources of these messages include religious and academic institutions, rap music, reality television, and social media. Some of these messages depict Black women in sex work as a threat to moral order and respectability. Other messages treat them as a prop in contemporary rap music productions. In this project I explore how Black women exotic dancers negotiate these messages as users of the *social networking site* (SNS)<sup>1</sup> Instagram, a social networking application for mobile internet-enabled devices wherein users exchange audiovisual content through a follower-based virtual social network. I bring to light the ways Black women exotic dancers have used *information and communication technologies* (ICTs) to negotiate the popular imagination of their identities against the backdrop of the contemporary landscape of sex work for Black women in the urban South. I propose Black feminist

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to glossary for definition of terms used throughout this dissertation. Terms explained in the glossary are written in italics.

thought as a framework through which to examine how Black women exotic dancers use the features of Instagram to depict self-authored erotic performances that rearticulate these messages around sexuality and Black womanhood for their own gain.

#### Statement of the Problem

Sociological research on sex work and the internet tends to ignore how race, racism, or intersectionality shape the experiences of women in the sex industry. Furthermore, these studies generalize across groups of sex workers through studies that tend to center white women escorts or webcam models in North America and Europe that cater to middle-class white men. Though this scholarship suggests ICTs offer sex workers more agency and autonomy around their erotic labor, I argue historical and contemporary gendered and racialized messages around the sexuality of Black women constrains the agency and autonomy of Black women exotic dancers.

To date, only sociologist Siobhan Brooks has conducted a study of Black women in the strip club industry during the early twenty-first century using several qualitative methods: open-ended questions posed to exotic dancers, media analysis of websites managed by strip clubs, historical analysis, ethnography, and participant-observation in strip clubs. In the 2010 book *Unequal Desires*, Brooks defines *erotic capital* as “a socially constructed ideal model of beauty/attractiveness held by the dominant culture” (p.6) by which dominant culture and the general public ascribe value to bodies. According to Brooks (2010b), *racialized erotic capital* results from the ways physical features like “weight, skin color, speech patterns, gender presentation, and hair texture” (p. 7) lead to varied returns in the conversion of erotic

capital to other forms of capital. Through media analysis of websites and MySpace<sup>2</sup> pages managed by strip clubs Brooks found that strip clubs use race as “a signifier of dancer attractiveness and desirability” in their advertising on websites “geared toward a target audience based on race, gender, class, and geographic setting” (p. 71).

Brook’s research also demonstrates this online advertising perpetuates colorism in marketing materials that tend to feature white women and light-skin Black women or Latinas. Brooks writes that this practice “reinforces the idea that the bodies of dark-skinned Black women are more sexually accessible than those of lighter skin and/or other races” (p.76). and treats light-skinned women of color and White women as “an archetype of beauty as symbolic capital/profit” (p.78). Nevertheless, this study does not address the representation of Black women exotic dancers on social networking sites native to the mobile internet.

The New York City Stripper Strike exemplifies several problems related to the need to study how Black women exotic dancers use software applications designed for social networking on the mobile internet. In 2017 Gizelle Marie (@thegizellemarie)<sup>3</sup> used the *hashtag* #NYCStripperStrike in captions on several posts on Instagram to bring attention to racism and colorism in the strip club industry. Gizelle Marie stated “Race is a big problem in all strip clubs,” in a 2018 interview with Ariel Hernandez for *the Press Magazine*. She went on further to state that racial

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<sup>2</sup> MySpace is a social networking site founded in 2003 by Tom Anderson and Chris Dewolfe that enables users to create a personal profile to manage a network of friends, blog posts, and audiovisual content.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this document when I refer to the Instagram profiles of public figures, I will include their username with the ‘@’ symbol before it on first mention. By doing so, I adopt common convention among SNS users to indicate where to find their individual account on a platform online. This also allows non-SNS users to locate these accounts by entering the username with the ‘@’ symbol affixed into a search engine like Google.

bias meant that “Upscale strip clubs don’t hire black women” and that this bias extended nationwide, hypothesizing that “For every 100 women in a club, there are only about five to 10 black women, and that’s in all states in this country.”

Despite numerous academic articles that analyze data from social networking sites to study contemporary activism, this literature does not account for this phenomenon when it comes to Black women exotic dancers. Furthermore, sociological literature on social networking sites tends to rely on quantitative content analyses as opposed to qualitative analyses that address how members of various social groups use social networking sites as part of their daily lives. Indeed, the contributions of sociology to the understanding of the social forces that affect Black women as exotic dancers or internet users in the twenty-first century remains an underdeveloped research area. This study builds on Black feminist thought and theories of the mobile internet to fill this gap in the literature through a mixed methods analysis of how Black women exotic dancers based in the urban South negotiate racialized erotic capital on the social networking site Instagram.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to explore the use of Instagram among Black women exotic dancers. I use a sociological digital ethnography research design, which involves the use of online questionnaires, digital videos, SNS and blogs as virtual field sites of qualitative analysis (Hine 2005, Hine 2011, Hine 2015, Murthy 2008). I choose to collect multiple types of data and apply four different methods to corroborate results across analyses, bringing more insight to the study of Black women exotic dancers as Instagram users than made possible using these

methodological approaches separately. In this study, I use GIS analysis to map the location metadata of 74 strip clubs tagged by 68 Black women exotic dancers on Instagram to examine the "demonic grounds," which Professor of Gender Studies Katherine McKittrick (2007) argues materializes as the racialized and gendered spatial boundaries that shape the physical landscape and environments wherein Black women live and work, that I conceptualize as the hypermarginalization of strip clubs where Black women exotic dancers perform into predominately Black low-income regions of the Memphis, Atlanta, and DC. metropolitan areas. Second, I use content analysis of images, video, and text collected from the Instagram profiles of 70 Black women exotic dancers to explore how members of this group use Instagram to negotiate what sociologist Patricia Hill Collins terms controlling images in her 2004 book *Black Sexual Politics* to describe the messages and myths about the sexual behavior of Black women "designed to stamp out agency and annex Black women's bodies to a system of profit" (p. 56) derived from cultural ideologies about race and gender within a given sociohistorical context. Third, I rely on nonparticipant observation through a user account dedicated to the project to document the ways stakeholders within the strip club industry and potential clientele engage with and represent Black women exotic dancers on Instagram. Finally, I use descriptive statistics to interpret data collected from a cross-sectional survey of a non-probability sample of 21 respondents to explore the background and digital practices of Black women exotic dancers that use Instagram and perform in strip clubs based in the previously mentioned metropolitan areas.

## Overview of the Study

I select Instagram as a virtual field site due to its popularity as a smartphone application. According to Facebook, Instagram's parent company, the smartphone app has 1 Billion people users monthly. Instagram started as a social networking site application accessible only to users of iPhones. While several iterations of mobile internet-enabled phones existed during the late and early twentieth century, the introduction of the iPhone in 2007 changed the growing cellular phone market. The proliferation of a variety of internet-enabled, touchscreen mobile phones had significant effect on how people of color in the United States and worldwide accessed information and communication technologies. According to two fact sheets on the mobile internet and social media published by the Pew Research Center in 2018, 75 to 77% of adults in the U.S. they surveyed own a smartphone, regardless of race. However, only 32% of the White internet users they surveyed used Instagram whereas 43% of the Black internet users and 38% of the Hispanic internet users they surveyed did.

Users can post still images, recorded video, live video, and text as captions as time-stamped, location-specific snapshots of their daily lives and distribute it through a semi-closed virtual social network. Instagram is driven by an *influencer* culture as individual people leverage their virtual persona into social and economic capital by sharing audiovisual content that advertises products and services from their own or other brands (Uzunoğlu and Kip 2014). Users might provide a written description about their personal background and the products and services they advertise or direct links to a product websites or various online payment systems on the main page of

their user profile. These influencers operate on Instagram alongside individuals and corporations that use the app to conduct e-commerce. Thus, followers become customers, and individuals who use Instagram become entrepreneurs, making Instagram an important site for entrepreneurship in the digital age.

I use Black women exotic dancers as my empirical case to document how members of this group use the features of Instagram to stage virtual performances of erotic labor and the ways consumers and stakeholders in the strip club industry interact with and represent them. Recent scholarship reveals that the strip club function as an important site of contemporary Black sexual leisure through its association with hip hop music (Brooks 2010a, Brooks 2010b, Hunter and Soto 2009, Hunter 2011, Miller-Young 2014, Sharpley-Whiting 2007). However, as Mireille Miller Young, a historian and professor of Feminist Studies, writes in her 2014 book *A Taste of Brown Sugar*, the framing of Black women exotic dancers and strip clubs in hip hop has often involved the use of their workplace and bodies as a tool through which Black men rappers perform masculinity in music videos and pornography:

As a space for labor, consumption, networking, leisure, and sociality, the strip club has become a particularly significant site of late. This has been reflected in hip hop music and music videos, and in hip hop pornography. Moreover, the strip club has become a particular symbolic cultural practice that exists beyond its physical location; strip clubs are symbolically mobile, and we find them employed as tropes that bridge hip hop- influenced men's sexual consumption cultures and pornography... The tremendous talent of the exotic

dancers— indeed some of their moves belong to the province of acrobats—is valued for how it elevates men’s status as sexual managers, as pimps (p. 155).

The dataset I generate through the use of software that communicates with the Instagram Application Program Interface (API)<sup>4</sup> features over 40,000 images and video of 83 dancers from the metropolitan areas of the District of Columbia, Atlanta, and Memphis, offering a representation of Black women exotic dancers with more nuance than those generated in rap music productions. The following broad research questions guide this study:

1. *With respect to space*, in what ways, if any, does the use of SNS and the mobile internet among Black women exotic dancers map onto the landscape of the spaces and places wherein they perform erotic labor?
2. *With respect to the embodiment and labor*, in what ways, if any, do controlling images of Black women’s sexuality emerge online? How do Black women exotic dancers use SNS to negotiate this racialization of their erotic labor and virtual embodiment? How do the power dynamics shape within the matrix of domination shape racial-sexual hierarchies of worthiness and desirability online?
3. *With respect to technology use and digital practices*, in what ways do the features of Instagram as a mobile internet social networking application afford Black women a means to self-define and self-determine their labor as exotic

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<sup>4</sup> An API is a software service that enables users to communicate with software services that generate data and metadata from ICTs.

dancers? What constraints, if any, do Black women claim constraint their agency and autonomy as exotic dancers?

So far, I have provided an explanation of why I developed a project on the erotic labor of Black women exotic dancers that use Instagram to fill gaps within the sociology of sex work and the internet. The following sections set forth the conceptual and methodological framework that guides this study. I develop a theoretical framework that draws on Black feminist thought and intersectionality to expand on theoretical and empirical scholarship on virtual and material embodiment, sex work, and the mobile internet. Thereafter I conclude with an outline of the remaining chapters of this dissertation wherein I discuss methods, my interpretation of the findings, and a conclusive discussion on what these findings mean for the sociology of sex work, Black feminist thought, digital sociology, and internet studies more broadly.

### *Theoretical Framework*

This study breaks new ground in several fields: the sociology of sex work, Black feminist thought, digital sociology, and technology and internet studies. In this section I build on concepts and empirical research within these fields to theorize what I call Black feminist digital sociology. As I demonstrate in this section, the application of Black feminist thought as a framework to a sociological analysis of the use of the internet and digital technology fills gap in the literature within the sociology of sex work as it relates to Black women exotic dancers. First, I start with a review of the sociological literature on contemporary sex work and exotic dance. I draw on empirical research by Black feminist sociologists and historians to bring to

light the ways this literature fails to address the ways race, racism, and intersectionality affect Black women in sex work. Second, I fill this gap in the literature by drawing on two conceptual frameworks related to how Black women use the internet: 1) Black feminist technology studies developed by Safiya Noble (2018), a professor of Information and African American studies, and 2) Black cyberfeminist thought developed by Professor of Communications and Women and Gender Studies Kishonna Gray (2017). Finally, I use scholarship from Black feminist scholars of sociology, history, and geography in addition to internet and technology studies to extend the conceptual framework of Black feminist technology studies and Black cyberfeminist thought to encompass Black women sex workers as internet users. Taken together, this Black feminist digital sociology framework concerns itself with centering the lived experiences of Black women for the purposes of an interdisciplinary critical and reflexive sociological analysis of the ways the use and exchange of digital forms of information and communication shape contemporary social and power relations.

#### The Sociohistorical Context of Sex Work in the United States

As stated previously, only one study to date gives a specific focus to Black women exotic dancers (Brooks 2010b). In this section I outline literature across the social sciences and humanities that addresses several forms of sex work in addition to exotic dance to provide a sociohistorical context for sex work in the United States. Research on the legacy of sex work in the United States typically starts at the Progressive era which sociologist Kristin Luker (1998) defines as “the watershed period marking the transition from a kin-based, rural nation, to an urban industrial

one” (p. 601) between 1880 and 1920. During this time period members of the burgeoning middle class and propertied elite in the United States responded to the ways capitalism and industrialization reshaped modern social life with calls for reform, particularly regarding prostitution. Sociologist Ann M. Lucas (2013) writes that anti-prostitution policy emerged as a systematic effort “to defuse the threat to dominant values posed by working-class and immigrant communities, waged work, industrialization, urbanization, and anonymity” and “reinforce those decaying values among the new generation....especially women-to assimilate to middle-class norms of chastity, monogamy, hard work, and propriety” (p. 47).

Progressive reformers perpetuated messages about the “fallen woman,” to justify the expulsion of forms of prostitution like brothels and streetwalking from the public sphere, creating the occasion for greater surveillance of sexual commerce by law enforcement. Anti-prostitution policy such as the criminalization of sex work, zoning of regions red light or vice districts, and other forms of regulation succeeded in pushing forms of prostitution like brothels and streetwalking out of the public sphere throughout the United States. However, these reforms served only to shift the illicit economy of sex work further underground rather than eliminate it (Blair 2010; Haley 2016; Harris 2016a; Harris 2016b; hooks 2015; Hubbard 2009; Hubbard et al. 2008; Laing and Cook 2014; Lucas 2013; Robertson et al. 2012; Weitzer 2007).

While panic about "fallen women" likened white women prostitutes to victims of sexual enslavement in need of protection, Black women prostitutes continued to face higher rates of conviction, likelihood of maximum sentence, lower success rate on probation, a higher likelihood of returning to prostitution, and a greater likelihood

of sexual harassment due to racism in general (Blair 2010; Blair 2014; Haley 2016; Harris 2016a; Harris 2016b; Lucas 2013; Luker 1998; Miller-Young 2014; Mumford 1997; Tatum 2010; Weitzer 2007). New laws like Mann Act of 1910 instituted legal consequences for sexual relations between Black men and white women but gave no protections to Black women from sexual exploitation by anyone, regardless of the racial identity of the perpetrator. Additionally, racial segregation and anti-prostitution policy worked together shaped the spatial boundaries of where Black women prostitutes worked, relegating them to the more dangerous and underpaid jobs like streetwalking while white women prostitutes moved their work behind closed doors (Blair 2010; Bridgewater 2005; Brooks 2010; Collins 2000; Collins 2004; Cruz 2016; Dewey 2012; Haley 2016; Harris 2016a; Hubbard 2009; Jones 2015; Katyal 1993; Lucas 2013; McCarthy et al. 2012; Miller-Young 2014; Mumford 1997; Pajnik 2010; Sutherland 2004; Weitzer 2007).

Much of the Progressive Era coincided with the outmigration of Black Americans from the South to other regions of the United States due to anti-Black discrimination and the erosion of the agricultural economy in the decades after the end of slavery. Historians argue that young, single Black women moving northward and westward without spouses during the Great Migration threatened early twentieth-century social norms about womanhood because they worked and lived independently without spouses. These new urbanites incited a moral panic that threatened the Victorian ideals of the white middle class and respectability politics of the Black middle class as members of both groups pathologized working-class Black men as brutes and Black women as promiscuous through the policing of “vice” (Blair 2010,

Carby 1992, Collins 2004, Gussow 2013, Haley 2016, Harris 2016a, Harris 2016b, Miller-Young 2014, Mumford 1997). Rather than rely on the “fallen woman” rhetoric, reformers in the early twentieth century raised the specter of the “the blues woman” to target the dance halls, night clubs, and burlesque shows that the Black working-class women worked in. Zoning laws, surveillance, policing, and other legal tactics marginalized working-class Black women into vice or red-light districts after they had turned to sex work as an alternative form of labor due to sexual and financial exploitation they experienced while working in white-middle class households as laundresses or domestics (Carby 1992, Collins 2004, Davis 1998, Ducille 1993, Hammonds 1997, Harris 2016a, Miller-Young 2014, Simmons 1993).

Historian and African American Studies Professor Cynthia M. Blair provides a historical analysis of Black women prostitutes working in Chicago during the late nineteenth to early twentieth century reveals the ways racism pushed Black women into undesirable working conditions and exposed them to criminalization in her book *I've Got to Make my Livin'* published in 2010. The sources used in Blair's historical analysis included newspapers, records from Black churches, federal censuses, city guidebooks and directories, law documents from police records and municipal court records, papers published and distribution reform organizations, maps from the Sanborn Map Company, and the accounts of jazz and blues artists performing during that time period. Blair (2010) argues that Black women turned to prostitution as a means of survival, an act that “exemplified resourcefulness within Chicago's racially and gender-stratified industrial economy” (p. 48). For example, Blair writes that several Black women prostitutes and madams in Chicago worked in parlor houses or

resorts located in a diverse but segregated vice district known as the Levee where about 10% of the city's Black population lived from 1870 to 1900. During the early twentieth century "the number of African American prostitutes working in the Levee's brothels, saloons, and assignation houses declined considerably" (p.125) as anti-vice reformers and local police officials pushed them south of the Levee district so that "by 1910 the South Side sex district had become an almost entirely racially homogeneous leisure district" (p. 147). Blair ultimately argues that the convergence of racial segregation and anti-prostitution policy as a form of spatial politics created a Black Belt sex trade characterized by a concentration of sexual commerce into Black neighborhoods.

Historian Lashawn Harris documents similar processes within the underground economy of New York during the early twentieth century in her 2016 book *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Number Runners*, which offers an interdisciplinary historical analysis of data collected from several primary materials like anti-vice investigation reports, prison records, newspapers, and memoirs from Black public figures influential at the time. Harris argues the city's underground economy offered working-class Black women "employment opportunities, occupational identities, and survival strategies that provided financial stability and a sense of labor autonomy and mobility" and enabled them to "radically disrupt, violate, and push pass the limits of conventional and acceptable public behavior and performances for black women" (p. 2). Harris writes Black women in the city who performed indoor sex work in "furnished rental rooms and brothels, commercial businesses including massage parlors, speakeasies, and nightclubs; and within the comforts of their working and

middle-class residence" (p. 125) to reduce their visibility and vulnerability as streetwalkers. Additionally, Harris argues some turned to prostitution due to "economic calamity, family obligations, low wages and unemployment, and male desertion," (p. 135) while others did so out of "a profound desire and passion for sexual pleasure and fulfillment" (p. 136) or as an effort "to avoid one of the few occupations open to urban black women: domestic work" due to the "many physical and emotional challenges associated with household labor" (p. 138).

Like Blair (2010) describes about racial segregation in Chicago's sex industry, Harris (2016a) argues Black women sex workers working in New York during this time period still faced several challenges as both Black and white residents to push for anti-vice policies and policing due to the taboo of interracial sex between white men clients and Black women prostitutes prompted. Historian Kevin Mumford coined "interzones" to describe this geography of Black-White sexuality in early twenty-first century Chicago and New York in his 1997 book on the subject. Mumford (1997) argues the regulation of race and space in these urban spaces aims to minimize interracial sexual contact as "sexual racisms" function to "reshape historical realms ranging from urban social policy to everyday intimacies" (Mumford 1997: 173).

The sex industry in the United States continued to take shape under social conditions and a legal climate that marginalized workers and their clients as the Progressive Era ended in the 1920s. However, the following decades altered labor patterns for all members of U.S society as the postindustrial economy started to emphasize consumption and service over production and industry (Bernstein 2007, Fogel 2007, Jeffreys 2009, Kempadoo 2001, Miller-Young 2014, Mount 2016, Pajnik

et al. 2015, Sutherland 2004). The leisure culture of privileged European and North American men working corporate and professional jobs during after work hours and on business travel drove the commercialization, normalization, and internationalization of the sex trade. Normalization of sex work pushed countries in Europe and North America to end the conflation of prostitution with crime in favor of a legalization of some forms of sex work, though the victimization framework remained tantamount through anti-sex trafficking legislation (Bernstein 2001, Bernstein 2007, Colosi 2012, Hubbard et al. 2008, Hubbard 2009, Jeffreys 2009, Pettinger 2015, Sanders and Campbell 2014).

Sociologist Elizabeth Bernstein (2007) describes this phenomenon in her book *Temporarily Yours*. In the book Bernstein describes findings from a feminist and sociological ethnography that included participatory observation and 45 in-depth interviews of prostitution in the San Francisco Bay Area between 1994 and 2002. According to Bernstein (2007), post-industrial sexual commerce involves a performance of bounded authenticity defined as “the sale and purchase of authentic emotional and physical connection” (p. 103) in exchanges that offer more diverse and specialized set of sex products and services than during the Progressive Era. Additionally, sexual transactions no longer take place in red-light districts to maintain distinctions between public and private spheres, but instead occur throughout the city and suburbs in corporate strip clubs or through private ads as information and communication technologies erode the divide between public and private space. As a result, Bernstein (2007) argues that state interventions shift their legal focus to the demand-side of sexual commerce through the continued regulation of sexual

transactions on the street, the arrest and deportation of migrant sex workers, and sex-trafficking.

In this postindustrial economy citizens and governments continue to use legal tactics to marginalize the landscape of where sex work takes place. In a 2008 *Progress in Human Geography* article titled "Away from prying eyes? The urban geographies of 'adult entertainment'," a team of scholars in geography, criminology, law, and sociology argued that a politics of concealment shapes a geography of sex work. They argue that state uses the law to "limit sexually suggestive performances to specific urban spaces" through "the strategic isolation of sex-related businesses in locations where they excite least opposition"(Hubbard et al. 2008: 366). Regulation of sex work today normalizes and mainstreams specific forms of sex work to ensure "that certain forms of adult entertainment are accessible and visible in the urban landscape, while others remain hidden or marginalized" (p. 365). For example, Hubbard et al. (2008) argue that the gentrification of urban spaces at a time when sexual transactions constitute a form of recreation contributes to the urban economy and thus prompts governments to provide licenses for gentlemen's clubs and other sex-related venues that attract affluent clientele. Still, the authors note municipal governments in the United States have pushed sex-related businesses that serve people of color, migrants, and the working class to the fringes of cities "away from residential and 'family' spaces and toward industrial districts through a variety of 'command-and-control' techniques (ie, licensing, zoning and planning powers)" (p. 366) since the 1970s.

In *Unequal Desires*, Brooks (2010b) through her study of the area surrounding a strip club in the region between Park Avenue and South Bronx, New York that she calls Temptations and describes in the following words:

While walking around the area I take note of the surrounding institutions and businesses: Hostos Community College, a Medicare health rehabilitation service center, a sign advertising for taxi drivers, the Triborough Bridge, a diner, a public auto auction, a car wash/muffler repair shop, and a Kentucky Fried Chicken. There are no banks anywhere in sight, but there are many check-cashing places. South of Temptations is the Mott Haven neighborhood, which contains housing projects and more local business, although many buildings and businesses had been abandoned and are boarded up (p. 25).

According to Brooks (2010b) the landscape around Temptations exemplifies desertification or decline of neighborhoods that results from depopulation and destabilization due to economic disinvestment and abandonment. Furthermore, Brook notes that people of color make up most of the clientele, club staff, and exotic dancers who frequent strip clubs located in these neighborhoods. Additionally, residents in the area that Brooks interviewed described these venues as low class compared to venues that cater to a clientele made up mostly of professional white men and an equally white staff and selection of exotic dancers.

Indeed, sociologist Mary Trautner argues the organizational culture of contemporary strip clubs cater to specific assumptions and norms about sexuality to maintain a clientele of a certain class status in a 2005 *Gender and Society* article titled “Doing Gender, Doing Class: The Performance of Sexuality in Exotic Dance Clubs.”

Trautner conducted 40 hours of direct observation in strip clubs located in Pueblo, Arizona. In the article Trautner writes both strip club management and exotic dancers themselves use appearance, style of performance or dance, and interactions between clients and dancers to distinguish themselves from spaces perceived as ghetto. Furthermore, clients use the physical environment in and around the strip club as well as the allowances around different types of sexual behavior to determine class status for themselves. Trautner notes that those that frequented clubs that hire disproportionately hire Black and Latina dancers described the venues as “blue-collar” and the women that work there as “ghetto-looking.” These two studies show that even in the postindustrial era, Black women exotic dancers disproportionately work in predominately Black, low-income regions of urban areas.

In this section I have provided a brief discussion of the sociohistorical context for sex work in the United States from the late nineteenth century to present day. I have highlighted the ways the regulation of sex work worked together with anti-Black bias and discrimination to shape the outcomes of sex work for Black women from the Progressive to the postindustrial eras. In the next two sections, I identify gaps within the literature on sociology of sex work and the internet as it relates to Black women exotic dancers to argue for the use of Black feminist technology studies and Black cyberfeminist thought as a departure point for such an investigation.

#### An Overview of Scholarship on Black Women in Sex Work

In her 2012 *Labor Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* article, Susan Dewey, a professor of Gender and Women's Studies, offers a concise review of

the five major trends in labor-oriented feminist scholarships on sex work in the social sciences and humanities:

(1) Sex work's close resemblance to many other forms of feminized labor; (2) the interconnected nature of sex work with other aspects of the economic processes that impact the working poor; (3) the prominent (and generally unacknowledged) role sex work plays in economic systems; (4) how public debates over sexual morality often appear at critical moments of social change; and (5) regulation, migration, and control (p. 114).

Scholarship in the humanities and social sciences examining sex work from the perspective of Black women is scarce, but points to distinct experiences and perspectives in and on sex work for Black women working in prostitution or pornography.<sup>5</sup> As a result, much of the current research on contemporary sex work fails to account for how colonialism serves at the foundation of erotic and sexual labor relations in the U.S. Indeed, the advent of the enslavement of Africans by the Portuguese in the 1440s ensured that the relation between sex and capital for Black women was predicated on the exploitation of their sexual labor as a form of reproductive technology (Beal 2015, Bridgewater 2005, Collins 2004, Davis 2003, Kempadoo 2001, Millward 2010, Nishaun 2016, Shinn 2016, Stevenson 2013, Threadcraft 2016, Umoren 2015, Williams 1944, Willoughby 2017).

To date three sociologists have studied Black women in sex work. Earlier in the chapter I described findings in Brook's book *Unequal Desires* from the only

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<sup>5</sup> Scholarship on Black women sex workers also exists in the fields of public health and medicine but tend to center on STD transmission rates and drug abuse, two topics beyond the scope of this dissertation.

sociological study of Black women exotic dancers published since 2010. I build on the concept of racialized erotic capital Brooks sets forth in this book through a digital ethnography of the ways “erotic capital is affected by variables such as weight, skin color, speech patterns, gender presentation, and hair texture” (p. 7) for Black women exotic dancers that use Instagram. Sociologist Stephanie L. Tatum argues Black women prostitutes labor in a racist environment that exposes them to acculturated stress or “the hostility and discomfort felt by Blacks when their interactions with Whites are negative” (p. 313) in a chapter published in the 2010 anthology *Black Sexualities*. Due to this acculturated stress, Tatum calls for legal protections and access to mental health resources to help these women cope with the psychological distress that results from racist and sexist abuse in sex work. However, since my analysis does not address prostitution or include metrics meant to capture experiences of stress, I turn to scholarship on pornography to provide further insight for my analysis.

Angela Jones used a mixed methods approach that included statistical analysis as well as nonparticipant and participant observation to produce the only sociological study that concerns Black women sex workers and the internet in a *Sexuality & Culture* article titled “For Black Models Scroll Down” published in 2015 in which she argues Black women face significant hurdles working as webcam models, which Jones defines as “a cohort of sex workers who use highly stylized chat rooms to sell a range of erotic fantasy to online voyeuristic patrons—from benign conversation to exotic strip tease to explicit sex act” (p. 777). Jones expands on Brook’s concept of racialized erotic capital and argues that “race impacts bodily capital or how body

work is perceived, evaluated, and then rewarded” (p. 791) in online sex work. For example, in the article Jones describes findings from a statistical analysis of camscores, ranking values that ranged from 0 to over 20,000 assigned by an algorithm, of 343 webcam models that used such a website to facilitate transactions between themselves and their clients and finds that a racial disparity existed among the webcam models in terms of which racial and ethnic groups tended have low camscores (below 499) versus high camscores (7500 or above):

The notable data presented here is: white women are overrepresented amongst models that have high camscores. There is only one black-identified model amongst the high camscore range, and no Hispanic models. There are, however, 11 models who identified as Other or Various Ethnicities, as well as 4 Asian models. Women of color are disproportionately found amongst models with low camscores (p. 789).

Ultimately, Jones concludes that these findings offer more nuance to Bernstein’s concept of bounded authenticity because “the success of many white models is not just about successfully accomplishing emotional labor or demonstrating bounded authenticity...instead it is also in part about their whiteness” (p. 795) and as a result “the affordances of online sex work presented in the existing literature are highly racialized and not evenly felt” (p. 796). I agree with Jones’s argument that racialized erotic capital means that Black women sex workers that use the internet will not experience equal returns on in their investment of erotic article labor. Nevertheless, webcam modeling represents one occupation among a spectrum of roles made possible for sex workers through the internet. I therefore extend

scholarship related to the racialization of erotic labor on the internet to incorporate an empirical case that offers a focus on both a different type of sex work and virtual field site through an analysis that centers Black women exotic dancers.

Miller Young offers additional insights about how Black women represent their sexuality and identity on the internet in her 2007 a chapter titled "Sexy and smart: Black women and the politics of self-authorship in netporn" published in an anthology titled *C'lickme: The Netporn Studies Reader*. Miller-Young provides a comparative analysis of pornographic representations of Black women on internet sites run by White men producers and those created by and managed by Black women. She shows how Black women represent themselves on their sites as "the ideal of what they imagine to be glamorous, sex, provocative, smart, and savvy" (p. 211) while sites managed by White men showed Black women through the lens of their own racialized fantasies. Miller-Young uses these analyses to build on the concept of cybertypes, a term coined by Professor of American Cultures Lisa Nakamura to describe how images communicate racial and ethnic identity on the internet (Nakamura 2013). Miller-Young uses this concept to argue "a racial economy of desire" of the virtual world ensures that "Black women's bodies are both invisible and hypervisible" as cybertypes function to communicate the message that Black women act "as underclass, technophobes on the margins of the digital revolution, or as cyberhoes that lurk in crack alleys, far from the hustle and bustle of the information super-highway" (p. 206). Nevertheless, Miller-Young also emphasizes the way Black women perform a cultural labor through self-authorship of their own internet porn sites that "subverts, or queers the heterosexist, racist capitalism of

cybercultural space"(p. 208) as this internet-based self-authorship affords Black women "possibilities for economic advancement, fame, autonomy, and control of their image, away from the contrivances of pornographers" (p. 210).

Miller-Young provides a broader look into her historical research on Black women in pornography in her 2014 book *A Taste for Brown Sugar* in which she describes findings from an analysis of historical archives, interviews with porn stars, and nonparticipant observation. Miller-Young writes that different and complicated social messages about the sexuality of Black women occur over time across four iterations of pornographic film made possible by advancements in technology: Race porn, soul porn, black video porn, and hip-hop pornography. Across time, however, Black women in pornography have engaged in what Miller-Young describes as an "illicit eroticism" that "manipulates and re-presents racialized sexuality—including hypersexuality—in order to assert the value of their erotic capital" (p. 10) and thus enables Black women performing in pornography to demonstrate erotic autonomy as a sex worker. Miller-Young describes the race porn of the pre-World War I era made possible by early photography and film technology as "sometimes regressive, posing blackness as the object of denigrating, anachronistic fantasies" due to the racial-sexual fetishes of White men consumers that the genre catered to, but also "sometimes transgressive, allowing a venue for socially critical or racial and gender nonconforming intimacies" (p.52) as Black performers used their bodies, voices, and actions to assert sexual agency in the post-slavery United States. Miller-Young argues the soul porn of the 1970s meant that for the first time "black audiences had unprecedented access to black erotic image" in films that communicated that Black

people possessed erotic agency though white men producers and directors continued to generate images that reinterpreted this “newly assertive and politically situated black sexuality through a white male gaze of fear, anxiety, pleasure, and titillation” (p. 102).

Miller-Young (2014) goes on to argue that videotapes rapidly increased the consumption, production and distribution of pornographic films and “these technological developments changed the adult industry’s engagement with black women as sex objects and sex workers” (p. 106) during the 1980s as producers of pornography started to recognize Black men as a target market alongside the usual white men clientele. Miller-Young writes that as a result “black video porn presented this dual perception of African American exceptionalism and conformity to the basest stereotypes of racial deficit” (p. 112). The hip-hop pornography that followed in the 1990s really took off with the emergence of what Miller-Young terms a “celebrity-rapper-oriented pornography” (p.143) started to center Black men as consumers and producers of porn distributed on the internet and DVD:

For commercial hip hop artists, pornography was another gainful venture that mobilized their stardom for profit. It also allowed them to have a kind of creative freedom to showcase sexuality that was impossible in more censored formats, like music videos and live performances. These videos often revolve around the fantastical lifestyle of famous rappers as they go on concert tours or have orgiastic house parties in multimillion- dollar estates with a harem of sex workers—mostly played by real- life black exotic dancers and porn stars (p.143).

According to sociologist Margaret L. Hunter and Education Studies Professor Kathleen Soto, the pornification of rap music includes visuals and lyrics that speak to pornography-related themes while also portraying women Black women as sex workers, most often as strippers. The authors write in a 2009 *Race, Class, & Gender* article titled “Women of Color in Hip Hop: The Pornographic Gaze” that this pornographic gaze cast Black women into two roles: The video hoe represents male sexual pleasure and the loyal girlfriend represents supreme female submissiveness. Enforcing this distinction enables men to create distance between themselves and women as well as the ensuing humiliation and degradation associated with their lyricism.

While I do not take up internet-based pornography like Miller-Young (2007), I do demonstrate the ways in which Black women exotic dancers as a means to self-author their erotic performances. Given the continued relevance of pornographic imagery to hip hop music, I consider Miller-Young’s work in *A Taste for Brown Sugar* relevant to my analysis for several reasons. First, I am drawn to illicit eroticism as “a framework to understand the ways in which black women put hypersexuality to use” (Miller-Young 2014: 10) and use digital ethnography to uncover how Black women exotic dancers use social networking sites to “use sexuality in ways that necessarily confront and manipulate discourses about their sexual deviance” (p. 16). Second, I agree with Miller-Young that these messages emerge as a “ho discourse” in rap music productions that label any Black women in sex work a ho, the “black vernacular hip hop version of the super- sexual Jezebel or whorish “naughty woman,”” (p. 144). Additionally, I speculate hip-hop music continues to provide an

important and influential source of messages about Black women in sex work. I demonstrate that contemporary rap music discourse also portrays Black women exotic dancers as a “bad bitch,” a new characterization of Black women exotic dancers that emerged as a complement to Black men consumers and producers of hip hop media that re-envisioned the strip club as a site to perform an illicit hypermasculinity. However, my study diverges from Miller-Young’s historical analysis of Black women in pornography to center Black women exotic dancers through a mixed method of how they use Instagram.

Jennifer C. Nash, a professor of African American Studies and Gender and Sexuality Studies, builds on Miller-Young’s archival work through a close reading of Black women in various pornographic films in her 2014 book *The Black Body in Ecstasy*. Nash studies racialized pornography or “hard-core moving-image pornography featuring black women” through racial iconography, a method she innovated in which she uses critical interpretative closed reading practice that center “an investigation of the ecstasy that racialized pornography can unleash” (p. 2) to address the ways racialized pornography functions as a historical and technological phenomenon that interprets racial-sexual tropes about the sexuality of Black women for the pleasure of the viewing audience. For example, Nash does a close reading of the marketing of racial-sexual difference in the film *Black Throat* that reveals that the actual behavior of the Black women performers in these films contradicts notions of racial-sexual difference:

If the black throat resembles the white throat, and if racialized pornography can never capture imagined racial-sexual difference, the difference narrative is

always necessarily unstable, and can be unmade and undone in any moment. Indeed, *Black Throat* reveals that black female protagonists are instrumental in exposing that bodies are bodies, that throats are throats, that the imagined “them” is always already quite similar, if not identical, to the imagined “us.” (p. 145).

Overall, *The Black Body in Ecstasy* challenges Black feminist thought that has “produced a singular theory of representation that presumes the violence of the visual field” and “emphasizes how dominant visual culture perpetuates “controlling images,”” by offering a perspective that proposes “resistance and recovery are possible only when black women act as authors of their own images, taking the site of violence—the visual field—and making it a space for performing their wholeness” (p.147). While I do not adopt racial iconography as a method or examine racialized pornography, I do extend Nash’s argument to the ways Black women exotic dancers negotiate the visual field of Instagram through a content analysis and nonparticipant observation of the audiovisual content that they generate on the social networking site Instagram.

Ariane Cruz, a professor of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, also takes up the topic of Black women in pornography in her book *The Color of Kink* published in 2016. In the book Cruz coins the phrase politics of perversion to describe a conceptual framework that seeks to “to queer “normal,” to unveil its kinks, disclose its ethical foundation, and destabilize its privileged zenith on a hierarchy of sexuality” and answer “larger questions of the relationship between perversion and the queer limits and potentials of non- “normative” sexual desires and practices for black

women” (p. 10). Cruz uses data from a textual analysis, interviews, and archival material to engage in a close reading of race play pornography, on-screen sexual performances that depict a specific racialized BDSM practice that toys with societal notions of race to argue that the types of racial-sexual fantasies that emerge in BDSM race play pornography reveal “how the contradictory dynamics of racialized pleasure and power through eroticizing racism” (p. 33) and what Cruz calls racial- sexual alterity. Racial-sexual alterity describes “the perceived entangled racial and sexual otherness that characterizes the lived experience of black womanhood” and “expresses the importance of both race and sexuality as complex social constructions that are imposed on and enacted by the black female body” (p. 33). To demonstrate this, Cruz engages in a close reading of several internet porn sites that depict BDSM race play and argues the choice of the moderators of an internet porn site to label sexual performances by Black women with term “Ebony,” “signals pornography’s continuing understanding of black female sexuality through skin color” (p.173). Furthermore, this label obscures videos of Black women that do not have this label attached because they do not appear in search results. Cruz also shows that the ways consumers who leave comments on videos that feature Black women often choose to discuss race without referring to the Blackness, often invoking racial-sexual tropes about the hypersexuality of Black women that ultimately lead these very same websites to draft policies against racist commentary.

Ultimately, *The Color of Kink* concludes with a call to “expand the critique of pornography’s repetition to see it as reflective of, as contesting, and as engendering larger reiterative performances of identifications of power such as race, gender, and

sexuality” (p. 215). I appreciate how Cruz’s concept of racial-sexual alterity captures the ways these images function to communicate the same and different messages about the sexuality of Black women. Additionally, the politics of perversion offer a lens through which to interpret the experiences of Black women in sex work beyond the heteronormative frames set forth in most scholarship on Black women and sex workers as separate groups. In my study I consider the racial-sexual alterity that Black women exotic dancers must negotiate on Instagram. While I do not adopt the politics of perversion as an overarching methodology, I do make effort to as Cruz (2016) writes “read marginal sexual desires and practices while illuminating the many binaries that these sexual performances engage and deconstruct” (p. 17) through my analysis of Black women exotic dancers on Instagram with attention to how they perform both LGBTQ and heteronormative sexualities.

In this section I showed how existing scholarship on Black women in sex work provides a framework to consider the complexity of racialized erotic labor for Black women. This literature shows that racialized and gendered messages about the sexuality of Black women shape the ways clients and producers of sexual products and services treat Black women sex workers. Additionally, this literature shows the ways Black women sex workers managed to secure erotic capital and leverage this racialized hypersexuality into sources of profit. Nevertheless, this literature alone does not provide enough support to analysis of Black women exotic dancers on the internet because most of these studies focus on pornography.

When they take the internet into account, these scholars rarely address the implications of their research for Black women that work as exotic dancers or use

social networking sites. In the next section I turn to research in the sociology of sex work and the internet. I show why the limited research on Black women in this field calls for greater engagement with Black feminist technology studies and Black cyberfeminist thought to flesh out a conceptual framework for the study of Black women sex workers as internet users. To do so I expand the reach of these Black feminist digital perspectives to incorporate sex work as an empirical case for the analysis of social networking sites by building on theories of the mobile internet. In turn, I use concepts from scholars of Black feminist thought in geography and sociology to broaden the ways theories of the mobile internet engage with race in the conceptualization of virtual embodiment made possible by information and communication technologies. Taken together, this Black feminist digital sociology framework calls for the use of Black feminist thought alongside theories of the internet to conceptualize the ways Black women as internet users offer insights that both confirm and contradict our current understanding of contemporary sex work.

#### The Case for a Black Feminist Digital Sociology of Contemporary Sex Work

Some scholars might argue that a comparative case study to exotic dancers of another racial group would provide greater clarity about the racialization of erotic labor and the mobile internet. Others might argue that no sex workers derive any real autonomy or power from the use of information and communication technologies because of the ways sex work reinforces gendered dynamics of capitalist exploitation. However, I argue research on sex work and the internet perpetuates some of the pitfalls of the broader field of internet studies, which tends to emphasize the potential of ICTs to democratize social relations and fails to recognize that, as sociologist

Deborah Lupton states in her 2014 book *Digital Sociology*: “Digital technologies are not neutral objects: they are invested with meanings relating to such aspects as gender, social class, race/ethnicity and age” (p. 124). Social networking sites do not enable Black women to evade bias “because the world is neither post-racial nor post-sexist, there will always be limits to how Black female bodies are articulated and re-articulated” (p. 342) as Education Policy Studies Professors Erica B. Edwards and Jennifer Esposito write in their 2018 *Communication Culture & Critique* article “Reading the Black Woman’s Body Via Instagram Fame.” Historically, Black women experienced sexual enslavement during the antebellum era. Thereafter, their marginalization into domestic and service work pushed them into the sex trade as members of the middle class used anti-vice and anti-trafficking legislation to justify the marginalization of sexual commerce into predominately Black, low income neighborhoods throughout the twentieth-century (Blair 2010; Harris 2016a; Mumford 1997). Therefore, Black women in sex work operate within a sociohistorical context shaped by a legacy of exploitation and marginalization that differs from the history of sex work for white women.

Jones critiques scholarship in sociology that addresses sex work and the internet due to its focus on the *affordances* of information and communication technologies and “note the positive changes in the work experiences of these workers” (p. 559) in a 2015 *Sociology Compass* article titled “Sex Work in the Digital Age.” Jones writes that these affordances tend to include: 1) the reduction of bodily harm and physical violence; 2) better wages and more desirable clients; 3) cheaper advertising, screening and recruiting; 4) fewer negative interactions with law

enforcement; and (5) opportunities for political engagement. According to Jones, the focus on affordances in this literature “is altogether too optimistic” because “these scholars neglect the dangers that emerge online... and neglect the diversity that exists among types of sex work aside from prostitution (e.g., webcamming and prodommes) and among sex workers themselves (race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, ability, etc.)” (p.559).

Due to this bias in the literature, Jones (2015a) suggests several areas for further research on sex work in the digital age: 1) the diversity and complexity of sex work online; 2) the rise of the individualization of erotic labor; 3) how the local context shapes the migration of sex work online; 4) the dangers and privacy issues of being online; 5) the reactions of law enforcement to online sex work; 6) how the erotic labor becomes racialized; 7) how intersectionality relates to sex work online; 8) sex work other than prostitution; and 9) sex work beyond the gender binary. In this study I use a mixed methods approach to the study of how Black women exotic dancers use Instagram that draws on theories and concepts by both scholars of Black feminist thought and scholars of the mobile internet.

Noble’s Black feminist technology studies and Gray’s Black cyberfeminist thought demonstrates why centering the standpoints of Black women as internet users yields insights about the ways what Collins (2000) calls the matrix of domination functions as the “overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions” (p. 228) on the internet. Additionally, both perspectives emerge out of Black feminist thought which Collins (2000) defines as the “knowledge gained at intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender [that] provides the stimulus for crafting and

passing on the subjugated knowledge of Black women’s critical social theory” (p. 8 – 9). Scholars of Black feminist thought in the social sciences and humanities draw on the framework of standpoint theory to demonstrate how the lived experiences of Black women complicate assumptions about social processes, practices, and identities. Black feminist scholars that research the internet study how Black women use digital technology as a resource to innovate a racialized and gendered digital presentation of self and identity (Bailey 2016, Brock, Kvasny and Hales 2010, Brown et al. 2017, Brown 2018a, Brown 2018b, Edwards and Esposito 2018, Ellington 2014, Gabriel 2016, Gaunt 2015, Gray 2014, Gray 2018, Johnson and Nuñez 2015, Jones 2015b, Jordan-Zachery 2012, Noble 2018, Rapp et al. 2010, Schott 2017, Steele 2017, Stokes 2007, Wright 2005).

Noble’s book *Algorithms of Oppression* published in 2018 proposes Black feminist technology studies as a framework for the analysis of racialized and gendered identities on the internet and how information and communication technologies mediate power relations through the matrix of domination. Noble uses a close reading of the results the Google search engine returns when seeking out Black girls to conceptualize technological redlining defined as “the ways those digital decisions reinforce oppressive social relationships and enact new modes of racial profiling” (p. 1) as an example of algorithmic oppression, a concept Noble advances as an alternative to the digital divide concept popular in the social sciences that presumes technological deficiency among Black internet users and a corrective to the colorblind rhetoric disseminated by Silicon Valley that the internet is a democratizing tool. Noble contends that “women, particularly of color, are represented in search

queries against the backdrop of a White male gaze that functions as the dominant paradigm on the Internet in the United States” (p. 59) that results in an information ecosystem wherein the most popular search engine results for Black girls were those that led to pornographic websites because the algorithms that technology corporations invest in have mechanisms that generate traffic to sites that sexualize identity of Black women and girls.

According to Noble (2016), the social practices related to the sexual categorization of Black women predate search engines. First, Noble argues the controlling image of the Jezebel forms the basis for the sexualization of Black girls. According to Collins (2000; 2004), racial ideologies shape the sexual exploitation of Black women via four controlling images: the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare mother and the Jezebel. The Jezebel emerged during slavery to depict Black women as more sexually aggressive and available than passive, ladylike White women. Furthermore, this controlling image served as a tool by which the state restricted Black women’s reproductive rights and erased them as victims of sexual assault (Collins 2000, French 2012, Threadcraft 2016, West 2006). As a result of these findings, Noble argues the study of the representation of Black girls on the internet provides an example of “the ways in which search engine results perpetuate particular narratives that reflect historically uneven distributions of power in society” (p. 71). Second, Noble suggests that the way algorithms structure access to information in search engines have imported the biased classification practices that created the Dewey Decimal System and Library of Congress Heading System onto the internet. These practices of hyperlinking, indexing, and ranking do not reflect a universal or

objective standpoint, but rather a social construct that reflects the dominant group's perceptions of the social groups they marginalize. Furthermore, these classification practices enable Silicon Valley corporations like Google to act as a "broker of cultural imperialism" (Noble 2016: 86) as they maintain a monopoly over information and the technologies needed to access them.

Gray makes a similar case for the ways Black feminist thought informs the study of the internet in the 2017 piece "They're just too urban': Black gamers streaming on Twitch" published in the anthology *Digital Sociologies*:

Specifically, Black cyberfeminism concerns itself with three major themes: (1) social structural oppression of technology and virtual spaces; (2) intersecting oppressions experienced in virtual spaces; and (3) the distinctness of virtual feminism. (p. 358).

While Noble explored intersecting oppressions on the internet through the matrix of domination, Gray draws on the concept of intersectionality for analytical purposes. According to Collins (2015), intersectionality as an analytical framework "examines social formations of multiple, complex social inequalities" (p. 5) to study how individuals and social groups negotiate social constraints to exhibit agency through the inclusion of multiple social categories as units of analysis. Indeed, Black feminist scholars have long argued that Black women have long used intersectionality as an analytical framework and critical praxis to articulate their pursuit of individual or group agency in the face societal constraints, chief among them the legal and economic infrastructure of the United States (Collins 2000, Crenshaw 1991).

In this piece Gray argues intersectionality is integral to Black cyberfeminist thought because “marginalized users of any technology must confront and work to dismantle the overarching and interlocking structure of domination” (p. 559) of intersecting oppressions such as race, class, and gender. Gray relies on thematic and critical discourse analysis of messages exchanged among users of an internet discussion board forum to investigate online discourse and colorblind racist attitudes among gamers that use Twitch, an internet-based social networking site wherein users play live video of themselves doing various activities to another set of users who observe and comment in a chatroom. According to Gray, the discourse among this group framed Blackness as deviant and marginal to mainstream gaming culture. For example, when some users responded with a critique about the use of the N-word among non-Black Twitch users, they received a response from other users that urged them “to just accept the reality of racism by normalizing these acts,” engaging in a “process of normalizing [that] creates a racialized hierarchy where Black users and any user associated with Blackness are relegated to the periphery of the culture” (p. 363). Based on these findings, Gray ultimately concludes that “virtual spaces are direct mirrors of historical segregation as overt racism permeates” (p. 364) because of the way the presence of “marginalized bodies disrupt the norm of the space designated for privileged bodies” (p. 366) even on the internet.

Like Noble I draw on the concept of controlling images to reflect on the social construction of Black women’s sexuality as a social force that constraints the choices, agency, and autonomy those society perceives as both Black and woman can embody. I adapt Gray’s Black cyberfeminist thought using intersectionality as an analytical

framework to examine how race, gender, and other social categories vary the erotic capital Black women can access using digital technology.

Furthermore, I use intersectionality to study the dynamic interplay between the structural and cultural processes that create the unequal distribution of power across social categories through an assessment of the ways racialized erotic capital functions amongst Black women exotic dancers that use Instagram.

While Noble and Gray address intersectionality and controlling images in their conceptualizations of the internet through the standpoint of Black women, neither scholar takes up the sexual politics that Black women internet users adopt to push back against inaccurate representations of Black womanhood popular in the media or online. Additionally, though they elaborate on the ways intersecting oppressions affects Black people in virtual space, they do not address what Black women internet users contend with in their offline physical landscape. Lastly, these frameworks do not apply Black feminist thought to the mobile internet. I address these gaps by extending their reach through existing concepts in Black feminist thought and theories of the mobile internet.

In this study I expand Black cyberfeminist thought and Black feminist technology studies to incorporate Black sexual politics, which Collins (2004) defines as “a set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race, and sexuality that frame Black men and women’s treatment of one another as well as how African Americans are perceived and treated by others” (p. 349). Historian and African American Studies Professor Evelyn Hammonds argues three factors have contributed to the contemporary social construction of Black womanhood in the United States in the

decades after the end of the Civil War in her 1994 piece for the journal *Differences* "Black (W)holes and the geometry of Black female sexuality." First, Hammonds argues society perpetuates the belief that Black womanhood and femininity exists in direct opposition to White womanhood. Second, Hammonds contends that Black women develop a complex set of sexual politics to resist the mischaracterization that portrays them as hypersexual, sexually deviant beings. Finally, Hammonds suggests that Black women pursue this self-definition in tension with the racial-sexual myths associated with dominant discourse about Black womanhood. To identify the specific ways Black women exotic dancers might respond to the controlling images, I look to several conceptualizations of Black sexual politics to reflect on the spectrum of self-presentations Black women have historically relied on to represent themselves as sexual beings. These concepts include the politics of respectability, the culture of dissemblance, the politics of pleasure, and illicit eroticism.

Historian Evelyn Higginbotham coined the phrase politics of respectability in her 1993 book *Righteous Discontent* to describe the movement among Black women in the Baptist church from 1880 to 1920. According to Higginbotham, these Black church women founded a Woman's Convention during the early twentieth century within the larger National Baptist Convention, a church organization that serves Black Baptist churches. Their politics of respectability involved emulating the values and norms of the white middle class to exert influence over poor and black working-class people and communities as a form of racial uplift (Carolyn De Swarte 1997).

Higginbotham (1993) writes that endorsement of these politics within the church organizations involved in the Women's Movement birthed a larger secular

Black Women's Club Movement (Rabaka 2012). In her 1984 book *When and Where I Enter*, historian Paula Giddings writes that middle-class and elite Black women founded their own clubs after most of them were excluded from the World Columbian Exposition in 1893 when the "Lady Managers" that presided over the women's exhibits refused to let them participate because they did not have a nationally recognized women's organization. According to Giddings, their movements coalesced into the national organization when 36 clubs joined together to form the National Federation of Afro-American Women first presided over by Margaret Murray Washington.

Historian Darlene Clark Hine coins the phrase culture of dissemblance to describe the sexual politics Black clubwomen adopted alongside these politics of respectability in the 1989 *Signs* article "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West." Hine writes that Black women maintained a public silence on their own sexuality via a "culture of dissemblance" as a form of security against sexual violence to demonstrate the capacity for Black women to conform to white middle class norms and values about womanhood. However, at times the racial uplift these club and church women pursued looked like denigrating and devaluing the cultural practices of their poor and working-class counterparts including "sexual behavior, dress style, leisure activity, music, speech patterns, and religious worship patterns" (Higginbotham 1992:272) . This approach assumed poor and working-class Black women lacked structure, exhibited behavior that threatened the race, and needed reform. Further, these politics had the effect of discouraging Black women from speaking out about sexual abuse and speaking up about their sexual desires in

the public and private sphere (Hammonds 1994, Hammonds 1997, Higginbotham 1992, Higginbotham 2017, Hine 1989). Furthermore, social reformers alleged working class and poor Black women migrating out of the South were in danger of becoming “blues women,” ensnared by the sexual deviance of urban dancehalls and night clubs (Carby 1992; Collins 2004; Davis 1998; Ducille 1993; Hammonds 1997; Harris 2016a; Lindsey 2017; Miller-Young 2014; Simmons 1993; Umoren 2015).

In this study I reflect on the ways the politics of respectability and culture of dissemblance have historically encouraged a sexual conservatism among Black women. These politics of respectability communicated a fear of invoking the hypersexual Jezebel controlling image that dated back to the antebellum era. Collins (2004) writes that “the controlling image of the jezebel” depicted “Black women’s bodies as sites of wild, unrestrained sexuality that could be tamed but never completely subdued” (p. 54). Black feminist scholars argue the Jezebel controlling image survives today due to tropes of sexually assertive Black women in rap music productions that portray them as ‘freaks’ or ‘hoes’ (Collins 2004; Sharpley-Whiting 2007; Miller-Young 2014). Additionally, Black men rap music entertainers often evoke the strip club and Black women sex workers in their lyrics to bolster their performance of masculinity (Brooks 2010b, Hunter and Soto 2009, Hunter 2011, Miller-Young 2014, Sharpley-Whiting 2007). In their 2017 song “All Ass,” members of the Atlanta-based rap trio the Migos rapped in the chorus: “Yeah, beat the pot, beat the pot, beat the pot, oh / Bad bitches walkin' out with bags at the store (bad) / Stripper girl shakin', all ass on the pole (all ass aye, all ass aye).” While some lyrics suggest that as a bad bitch, a stripper has some status for her sexuality, her body, and

ability to gain cash, other lyrics reinforce the ho controlling image Miller-Young describes in *A Taste for Brown Sugar*. In his 2018 song “Pop Out,” Atlanta-based Lil’ Yachty rhymes that he “Servin’ these stripper hoes dick /You suckin’ me, yeah, and I know it” before later declaring “You a hoe thot and I know this.” That these artists have endorsements with major corporations like *Sprite* and received nominations or awards from both the Recording Academy and the Billboard Music Awards suggests that the association of Black women sex workers with the controlling image of the Jezebel continues well into the twenty-first century as a means to capitalize off the sexuality of Black women, most notably through the representation of Black women exotic dancers and other sex workers in hip hop media including lyrics, music videos, reality television, and pornography. Despite the ways this characterization of Black women exotic dancers as hoes within rap music has persisted for well over a decade, this study is the first to analyze the ways Black women exotic dancers themselves use social networking sites to as a tool to talk back to these representations.

Due to the continued existence of the characterization of Black women exotic dancers as hoes within rap music, I consider the ways Black women use images, video, or text to evoke the sexual conservatism associated with these sexual politics especially in relation to the way’s the space of the contemporary strip clubs upholds the expectation that Black women exotic dancers will offer the hypersexual performance of the “bad bitch.” To do so, I use nonparticipant observation, content analysis, and online surveys to document the ways Black women perform erotic labor outside the hypersexualized content of the contemporary strip club. While I consider the conservative sexual politics of Black women, I also consider the ways they

historically conceptualized more liberal and radical orientations to their own sexuality starting with the blues woman.

During the Progressive Era, the Jezebel trope evolved into the blues women as poor and working-class Black women migrated to urban areas and relegated prostitute, singers, burlesque dancers, and other Black women working in the blues music industry to what Ethnic Studies Professor Reiland Rabaka describes as “the realm of licentious, evil, ignorant, and immoral womanhood” (p.22) in the 2012 book *Hip Hop’s Amnesia*. Rather than turn to churches or women’s clubs, some working-class Black women during the early twentieth century developed their own sexual politics within other terrains, most notably in urban dance halls where they articulated a subversive discourse around sexual subjectivity for Black women (Carby 1992, Collins 2004, Davis 1998, Ducille 1993, Hammonds 1997, Miller-Young 2014, Rabaka 2012).

Hazel Carby, a professor of American Studies and African American Studies, elaborates on the sexual agency of the blues women in her 1992 *Critical Inquiry* article “Policing the Black Woman's Body in an Urban Context”:

The blues women brought to the black, urban, working class an awareness of its social existence and acted creatively to vocalize the contradictions and tensions of the terrain of sexual politics in the relation of black working-class culture to the culture of the emergent black middle class. In doing so they inspired other women to claim the "freedom [they] so ardently desired." (p. 755).

Scholars of hip-hop feminism argue that like the Jezebel, Black women rappers, sex workers, video models and other Black women in rap music represent the contemporary blues women through a sexual politics that centers pleasure and self-eroticism (Bradley and Lee 2019, Collins 2004, Cruz 2016a, Davis 1998, Edwards and Esposito 2018, Harris 1996, Miller-Young 2014, Morgan 1999a, Morgan 2015, Rabaka 2012, Tate 2015). For example, Joan Morgan, a hip-hop journalist and feminist writer, argues Black women can look to contemporary Black music for a version of sexuality that represents them as agentic and self-serving in their pursuit of pleasure in her 2015 article “Why We Get Off: Moving Towards a Black Feminist Politics of Pleasure” published in *The Black Scholar*. Morgan argues the lyrics and erotic performances of Black women dancehall artists show how Black women create erotic maps that “exist on an expansive spectrum, which could include non-heteronormative submissiveness, hypermasculinity, aggression, exhibitionism, and voyeurism” to conceptualize a Black feminist pleasure politics that functions “as a liberatory, black feminist project [that] elevates the need for sexual autonomy and erotic agency without shame to the level of black feminist imperative” (p.39) that offers an alternative perspective that illuminates the intersection of Black womanhood with LGBTQ identities and diverse ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

Contemporary hip hop feminists have yet to take up the subject of sex work and the mobile internet. I draw on Morgan’s politics of pleasure to build on a “black feminist sexuality theory that is inclusive of pleasure and the erotic” (Morgan 2015: 38) to argue Instagram is a rich site of analysis for studies that undertaken a focus on the ways Black women use hip hop to articulate feminist principles and values. I

return to Miller-Young's concept of illicit eroticism to consider how the women I study articulate such a politics of pleasure from their standpoint as both Black women and exotic dancers. Specifically, I examine the ways Black women exotic dancers use the features of Instagram to "refigure the racial logic of sexual respectability and normativity" (Miller-Young 2008: 264) through a content analysis and non-participant observation of how the erotic performances they reveal in the audiovisual content they post to their profiles.

Taken together, the academic literature on Black women's sexual politics point to a range of possibilities on how Black women negotiate racialized expectations of hypersexuality. Overall, Black feminist thought offers a lens through which to consider the ways embodiment happens as a racialized and gendered process of social construction situated in a material and historical reality. Nevertheless, none of these scholars address the ways Black sexual politics plays out on social networking sites popular among mobile internet users such as Instagram. Additionally, while these scholars address the social construction of Black womanhood as an identity, they do not bring up the ways this social construct extends to structural processes such as geography. In this study I turn to theories of the mobile internet and Black women's geographies to conceptualize the ways the material embodiment within the strip club interrelates and contradicts the virtual embodiment on Instagram for Black women exotic dancers.

McKittrick argues geographic analysis from the vantage point of Black women reveals four social processes in the 2007 book *Demonic Grounds*. First, the study of Black women's geographies helps us to understand the social construction of

identity through place. Second, the study of spaces and places that Black women do and do not inhabit help us to understand the spatial politics of the social construction of Black womanhood and femininity as geographic enslavement. Third, these analyses help us understand the spatial practices Black women use to move across and beyond geographic enslavement. Finally, analyses of Black women's geographies help us to understand geography as an alterable terrain. Overall, McKittrick contends the social construction of space and place relies on racial-sexual codes of the body to create geographies that result in the differential placement of humans across a shared terrain. To describe this phenomenon, McKittrick coins the phrase demonic grounds to argue that the study of Black women's geographies can reveal the spatial logic of domination as a process that enacts visible social difference within the physical environment:

The geographies of black womanhood, as demonic grounds, put forth a geographic grammar that locates the complex position and potentiality of black women's sense of place. Demonic grounds can be detected through the biocentric categories of race and sexuality (black femininity), political locations (black/Caribbean feminism), and alongside social theories and ideologies, such as white European and Euro-American feminism, patriarchy, and black/Caribbean studies. By adding the variable of race-sexuality to existing grounds of human being, black femininity establishes a slightly different path through social theories and ideologies as well as material and conceptual geographies (p. 133-4).

Though I agree with the importance of Black women's geographies for the understanding the social construction of race and place, I recognize that no study to date has taken up a geography of Black women in the contemporary sex industry or Black women that use mobile internet-enabled social networking sites like Instagram. In this study I incorporate the demonic grounds through the creation of digital maps that plot the strip clubs where Black women exotic dancers used Instagram's location feature to tag an image or video at. I argue scholarship on contemporary sex work that tends to center only the shift from the Progressive to postindustrial era also obscures the modernization of colonialism and Jim Crow segregation as means by which to keep Black people in their place during this same time period. To address this gap, I use Instagram as a source of data to map the locations of where Black women exotic dancers based in the urban south travel.

Recognizing that McKittrick's concept of demonic grounds does not address the social construction of Black womanhood in virtual space, I turn to two theories of the mobile internet to flesh out this Black feminist digital sociological analysis of contemporary sex work. First, I turn to the concept of the selfie assemblage developed by Professor of Communication Aaron Hess in the 2015 *International Journal of Communication* article "The Selfie Assemblage." Second, I turn to Professor of American Studies Jason Farman's mobile interface theory described in his book of the same name published in 2012. I bring these frameworks in conversation with the previously mentioned concepts developed by Black feminist scholars to conceptualize how the spaces Black women inhabit as exotic dancers get

re-articulated through the social and individual practices involved in the performance of erotic labor online.

According to Hess (2015), the selfie assemblage “is a constellation of multiple elements of existence within contemporary technological culture that expresses—even copes with—the affective tensions of networked identity” (p. 1631). Hess argues selfies represent a unique form of communication made possible through information and communication technologies that involve user-generated content expressed to audiences networked through various social networking sites. For scholars, the concept of the selfie assemblage helps us consider the way we interpret the function of the use of images to represent oneself on social networking sites:

To read selfies as primarily self-oriented provides an entry point into selfies as cultural capital or statements of identity and individualism. Reading selfies as device-oriented underscores the relationship between technology and the body, while their networked quality speaks of the social relationships of mass dissemination. Finally, examining them in relation to physical space hints at the relationship between materiality and digitality (p. 1642-3).

According to Hess, selfies also involve a digital representation of how we understand material spaces and bodies within them as a function of locative and networked media technology. Therefore, selfies also express a sense of place despite their dissemination through a vast network in virtual space through both staged performance and authentic self-presentation. Ultimately, the concept of the selfie assemblage explains how locative and networked media enable mobile internet users

to bring together the self, physical space, the device, and the network, thus embodying several otherwise separate modes of existence in one act using selfies.

Hess (2015) describes taking a selfie as “a form of place expression, meaning that selfies are about the placement of one’s self in a place at a time” that invites “considerations of everydayness as filtered through both our smartphone screens and the decorum found on social networks” (p. 1636). Furthermore, users of image-based social networking sites on smartphones show that “material spaces are not only framed by the device, they are re-presented and enhanced using Instagram or other smartphone apps” (p. 1639) because “the device not only (re)frames the position of the body and materiality, it does so with a new language of space, place, and presence” (p. 1640). Most of the data in this study includes audiovisual content each user generated themselves using their smartphone’s camera and video recording features otherwise known as selfies. For this reason, I follow the assumptions set forth by Hess in my analysis of the ways Black women exotic dancers represent themselves throughout time and space. Specifically, I am interested in the ways Black women exotic dancers use Instagram to share images and video in and beyond the strip club.

Hess does not speak explicitly to the ways race, racism, or intersectionality mediate the power relations at play in the construction of networked identities made possible through the selfie assemblage. Though Black feminist thought informs my choice to examine Black women exotic dancers as a case study of Black sexual politics, controlling images, the demonic grounds, digital sociology, and the sociology of sex work, the field does not account for how to conceptualize

embodiment in virtual spaces. Black cyberfeminist thought and Black feminist technology studies fill this gap through an analysis of the ways the internet mediates power relations through the matrix of domination to reveal the complexity of embodying an internet user as a Black woman. Nevertheless, these frameworks do not address the virtual embodiment of Black women on the mobile internet. Therefore, in this study I set forth the concept of racial-sexual selfie assemblages to capture the ways the matrix of domination functions to structure the affordances and constraints of information and communication technologies for Black women exotic dancers in pursuit of virtual self-embodiment.

While Hess's selfie assemblage provides a way to think about how Black women represent themselves within strip clubs, it does not address the ways movements between these spaces map onto broader landscape. I turn then to Farman's 2012 book *Mobile Interface Theory* to conceptualize digitizing the demonic grounds of contemporary sex work. Farman argues embodiment occurs through cognitive perception and bodily sensory engagement. For this reason, we should see the mobile technology interface as not just medium and content, but rather a "set of cultural relations that serve as the nexus of the embodied production of social space" (Farman 2012: 64) informed both by proximity and alterity. According to this mobile interface theory, cultural beliefs about race, gender, and other social categories shape embodiment as a spatial practice. This perspective thus recognizes that the social forces that shape the interpretation of bodies in the material world do the same work in the virtual world.

Farman (2012) also conceptualizes the sensory-inscribed body to describe the ways bodies and technologies inform the production and signification of space as both physical landscape and its digital augmentation. This idea of embodiment “conceived out of a sensory engagement across material and digital landscapes” also “simultaneously incorporates socio-cultural inscriptions of the body in these emerging spaces” (p.48). Farman argues users of social networking sites that use the technology to tell stories treat information and communications as tools to help facilitate a mode of communication that allows them to engage with and ascribe meaning to space through an embodiment of multiple, asynchronous histories in the posts they upload. For example, the understanding of the mobile interface as a social practice reveals how social networking site users create virtual embodiment using their smartphone’s Global Positioning Systems (GPS). The use of this locative technology also social networking site users to turn their smartphone screens into a tool to markup urban spaces through mapping, tagging, linking, and sharing of images associated with a specific longitude and latitude.

Based on Farman’s argument, I recognize the sensory-inscribed body as a strong conceptualization of how users of social networking sites like Instagram remain situated between the virtual and material world using the mobile interface of smartphones as an embodied practice. While Farman addresses social media like Instagram, he does not draw attention to the ways the embodied practice of urban markup offers a lens through which to study the landscape of contemporary sex work. Additionally, mobile interface theory does not speak to how the matrix of domination structures both embodiment on the internet and the affordances of social networking

sites for members of marginalized groups. Therefore, I return to McKittrick's demonic grounds to argue that the urban markup produced by Black women exotic dancers on Instagram as they tag images of themselves at strip clubs provides a means through to examine the relationship between the spatial arrangements of Black women's sex work in the contemporary urban South and the historical social construction of Black women's sexuality via the controlling image of the Jezebel. Overall, the Black feminist digital sociology of contemporary sex work presented here reveals the ways Black women exotic dancers use Instagram to articulate their sexual politics, negotiate controlling images, and represent themselves in physical and virtual space.

### Outline of Chapters

In this study I pursue a Black feminist digital sociology of contemporary sex work and the mobile internet. In this chapter I identified gaps within the literature on the sociology of contemporary sex work as it relates to Black women. Further, I drew attention to the ways research on Black women in sex work yields insights about the social construction of sexuality in the United States as a racialized and gendered process and could benefit from an analysis of these processes as it relates to Black women sex workers that use social networking sites. Lastly, I expanded on Black feminist thought and theories of the mobile internet to advance a conceptual framework for a sociological digital ethnography of Black women exotic dancers on Instagram. The remaining chapters detail the methods, findings, and conclusions drawn from this analysis.

Chapter 2 outlines the methods and data that I used in this analysis. I use sociological digital ethnography of Black women exotic dancers that use Instagram and the mobile internet as a tool to manage clientele for multiple forms of feminized labor. I offer a description of Instagram as an information and communication technology. I describe how sociological digital ethnography draws on qualitative methods for the purposes of studying digital data and how people use information and communication technologies. Specifically, I use a mixed methods approach that includes nonparticipant observation, online surveys, GIS analysis, and content analysis to study data mined from the profiles of Black women exotic dancers that use Instagram.

Chapter 3 involves a GIS analysis of the strip club locations that the women in my dataset tagged images or videos of themselves at using Instagram's location tagging feature. This analysis reveals the marginalization of these strip clubs into predominately Black, low income neighborhoods of metropolitan areas both within their home city and in other regions of the United States. I argue the use of GIS mapping enables a digitization of the demonic grounds Black women inhabit as laborers in contemporary sexual commerce. Furthermore, these results reveal how a focus on erotic labor that negates the materiality of labor on the mobile internet fails to grasp how twentieth-century Jim Crow segregation and twenty-first century gentrification shape the spaces and places wherein Black women do sex work.

Chapter 4 presents findings from the content analysis of images, video, and text generated by the women in my sample. I argue that Instagram enables Black women exotic dancers to act as stripperneurs because the mobile internet lowers

barriers to entry to the participation in entrepreneurship using various e-commerce tools. Additionally, I use the codes I developed through non-participant observation to categorize this audiovisual content to argue the racialization of erotic labor on the mobile internet involves what I term bad bitch pose, which involves the importation of the a newer iteration of the hip hop hoe described by Miller-Young (2014) through the virtual racial-sexual embodiment of Black women via the online discourse of users of information and communication technologies.

Chapter 5 draws on the findings from the descriptive statistical analysis of responses to an online survey to examine the importance of digital technology and mobile internet use among Black women exotic dancers in the urban South. I argue this analysis offers important insights for the sociology of sex work and digital sociology in relation to the ways these fields typically characterize Black women as sex workers and internet users.

Chapter 6 concludes this dissertation to present the Black sexual politics of mobile internet as a framework through which to understand the racialization and sexualization of embodiment in the age of the mobile internet. I elaborate on four areas wherein digital sociologists and scholars of contemporary sex work interested in the internet can use Black feminist thought to push their research beyond the assumptions of existing scholarship. I argue Black feminist perspectives on space, embodiment, labor, and technology shift the conclusions drawn from research on sex work and the internet away from the general affordances of digital technology to the ways the matrix of domination structures these affordances, leading to different experiences for marginalized women as erotic laborers in the twenty-first century.



## Chapter 2: A Black Feminist Digital Sociology of Contemporary Sex Work: Methods and Data

### Introduction

While digital technology use and the digital practices of sex workers continues to grow as a research topic, no study prior to this one looked at exotic dancers as an empirical case. In this project I show how the use of digital technology and digital practices of Black women exotic dancers speaks to several issues important to the sociology of sex work and internet studies. I depart from prior research in several ways. First, I document how the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) among Black women exotic dancers provide insights about issues related to the racism, colorism, and the racialization of erotic labor in sex work. Second, I extend the sociology of sex work and the internet beyond a focus on young white women, pornographers, and prostitutes by centering Black women exotic dancers. Finally, this study centers strip clubs in the urban southern United States, a rarely explored setting in the literature on sex work, to provide insight on how the strip clubs that serve as entertainment venues for the consumption of contemporary rap music also map onto broader landscapes of residential and economic segregation.

As stated previously, this dissertation seeks to answer three broad sets of research questions:

1. *With respect to space*, in what ways, if any, does the use of SNS and the mobile internet among Black women exotic dancers map onto the landscape of the spaces and places wherein they perform erotic labor?
2. *With respect to the embodiment and labor*, in what ways, if any, do controlling images of Black women's sexuality emerge online? How do Black women exotic dancers use SNS to negotiate this racialization of their erotic labor and virtual embodiment? How do the power dynamics shape within the matrix of domination shape racial-sexual hierarchies of worthiness and desirability online?
3. *With respect to technology use and digital practices*, in what ways do the features of Instagram as a mobile internet social networking application afford Black women a means to self-define and self-determine their labor as exotic dancers? What constraints, if any, do Black women claim constraint their agency and autonomy as exotic dancers?

In this chapter I describe decisions behind the choice of data used in this analysis and the reasons why I rely on sociological digital ethnography as the mixed methods approach used in this study. The methods in this sociological digital ethnography include content analysis, GIS analysis, non-participant observation, and descriptive statistical analysis. First, I provide an explanation of what I mean by sociological digital ethnography as I describe Instagram as a virtual field site and the data points, I derived therefrom for the content analysis and GIS analysis. Second, I explain how I went about generating a sample for content analysis, nonparticipant

observation, and the online survey. Finally, I elaborate on the ways I operationalized Black sexual politics, controlling images, racialized erotic capital, and the demonic grounds for analytical purposes as I used a mixed methods approach to answer questions about these concepts.

### *Defining A Sociological Digital Ethnography of Instagram*

Digital ethnography involves the study of observation of online communications and practices using traditional ethnographic techniques to understand the cultural context of the internet (Beaulieu 2004, Caliandro 2018, Hine 2015, Murthy 2008, Postill and Pink 2012, Varis 2014). While sociologists in the United States have conducted quantitative analyses of large-scale datasets generated from sociologists few have explore qualitative analysis of social networking sites. The few digital ethnographies in the field of sociology have studied several topics including activism, web designers, television viewership, parenting, scientific knowledge, eating disorders, illicit drug trades, and various forms of sex work (Beer and Burrows 2017, Brown et al. 2017, Drucker and Nieri 2016, Ferguson 2017b, Hine 2005, Hine 2011, Jones 2015a, Jones 2015b, Jones 2016, Lupton, Pedersen and Thomas 2016, Ray et al. 2017, Schott 2017). The breadth of scholarship that constitute digital ethnographies of SNS occur outside sociology in the fields of communication, digital humanities, science and technology studies, and information studies. However, prior to this study neither scholars in the humanities nor the social sciences have used digital ethnography to study Black women exotic dancers.

In this study I apply digital ethnography as a methodological toolkit for my analysis of Black women exotic dancers and Instagram. The analytical strategies I use

to accomplish this digital ethnography include nonparticipant observation, content analysis, GIS analysis, and online surveys. Due to my narrow interest in Black women exotic dancers that use Instagram and perform in strip clubs in Atlanta, D.C., or Memphis, I do not generalize the interpretations beyond these groups. Therefore, rather than study individuals as a subset of a population, I study their digital practices to get a sense of what social processes related to internet affect the members of this group. Additionally, Instagram as a platform has specific features that other social networking sites or applications may not. Therefore, the interpretation of my findings represents the affordances and constraints of Instagram for Black women exotic dancers that use the features of the software to perform erotic labor.

#### Instagram as a Virtual Field Setting

Many of the methodological choices that I made in this study relate to my choice of Instagram as a field setting so I find it pertinent to offer a description of the social networking site that breaks down its features and what users can leverage from it. Instagram's features change regularly as the software development team behind it

introduce new features or alter existing ones. Therefore, I only describe the features of the application relevant to this study. Figure 2.1 provides an example.

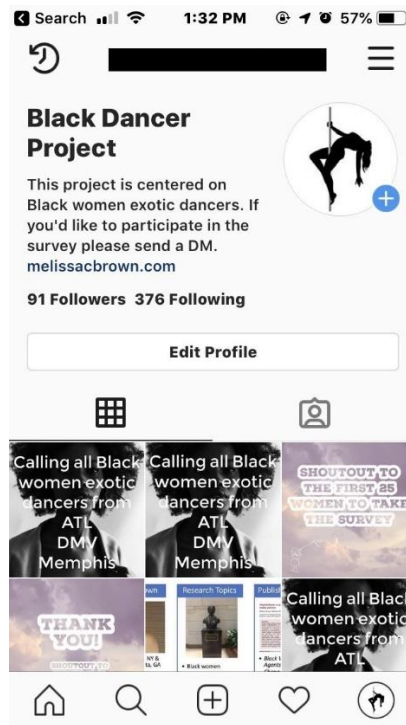


Figure 2.1 A screenshot of the Instagram profile used in this study.

Each user of Instagram manages one or several user accounts denoted by a self-chosen username. They can choose between a personal account or business account, which permits free access to more analytical tools like a chart that shows the age ranges of your followers. Each user account comes with a profile page where they post their own images, videos, and other details. Where I have written Black Dancer, Project is the Full Name field where people write their names or some other descriptor. Users on Instagram use the biography section just below this field where I have written “This project is centered on Black women exotic dancers” to describe themselves or the purpose of their profile pages. The URL field where I have written “melissacbrown.com” offers users an opportunity to link to an external website. The

profile picture field where I have pictured the silhouette of a woman dancer on a pole to show an image a featured image of their choice, usually of themselves or their logo, allows users to represent themselves independent of their timelines, symbolized as a grid just below the edit profile button. To the right of this grid is the tagged photos and videos feature where users can access images that other users have tagged with their username. Above the edit profile button includes the number of accounts an Instagram user follows and the number of accounts that follow them.

Figure 2.2 provides a screenshot of some of the additional features of an Instagram profile. The features pictured here look and act the same whether a user visits their own or someone else's profile. The largest area of this section of an Instagram profile belongs to the image users upload, where I have featured words written in white text imposed on a lavender gradient background. Below the image section include several symbols. The like button symbolized by the outline of a heart allows users to like images. The speech bubble symbolizes the comment function so that users can leave a text-based statement on the post of the image. The triangular symbol mimics a paper airplane and options an option to send a link to the post to one of the users an account follows through direct messages (referred to as a DM in Figure 2.2), a separate function of Instagram that enables dialogue between users outside of the timeline. The shape to the right below the image symbolizes a bookmark, which allows users to save their own or other's posts in a personal gallery.



Figure 2.2 A screenshot of the image and video post section of the Instagram application.

Below this set of symbols include the likes section. This section features the profile pictures of the users as a button that links back to these usernames in a separate list once clicked. After the phrase ‘liked by,’ Instagram provides the username of at least one mutual follower and the number of other user accounts that liked the image. Users can also write a caption in the section to the right of their username where I have written “Calling all Black women exotic dancers!” The caption can include text, emojis, and two forms of hyperlinked text. A mention includes placing an ‘@’ before a username to create a hyperlink directly back to that user’s profile. A hashtag includes the use of the ‘#’ symbol before any type of text to link to other posts on Instagram that feature text. Below the caption, Instagram

provides a section for comments and replies on each post where other users can leave text-based statements including with emojis. In the section below that Instagram provides the date that the image is posted. Finally, all user accounts feature a bar at the bottom of their profile pages that includes a home button, a search button, an add image button, a likes button, a button that links to the main page of their user profile.

Instagram provides several features in a sequential process when users decide to upload an image or video the application by clicking the button in the center of their profile page that features a plus sign enclosed by a rounded square. First, users decide if they want to post multiple images and video at a time or just one. Then users can recolor these images using a set of filters provided by Instagram. They can also use several image editing features including that allows to adjust the orientation, brightness, contrast, structure, warmth, saturation, highlights, shadows, vignette, or color of the image and fade it, tilt shift it, or sharpen it. In the final step pictured in Figure 2.3 users write the caption of their image. They then choose to tag other usernames or add a location; which Instagram requires access to the GPS on the user's smartphone to function. Users can choose from the predetermined options Instagram assumes by location or click the add location button to search for additional locations. This section also includes a longer list of auto-populated locations Instagram determines from the user's proximity to them.

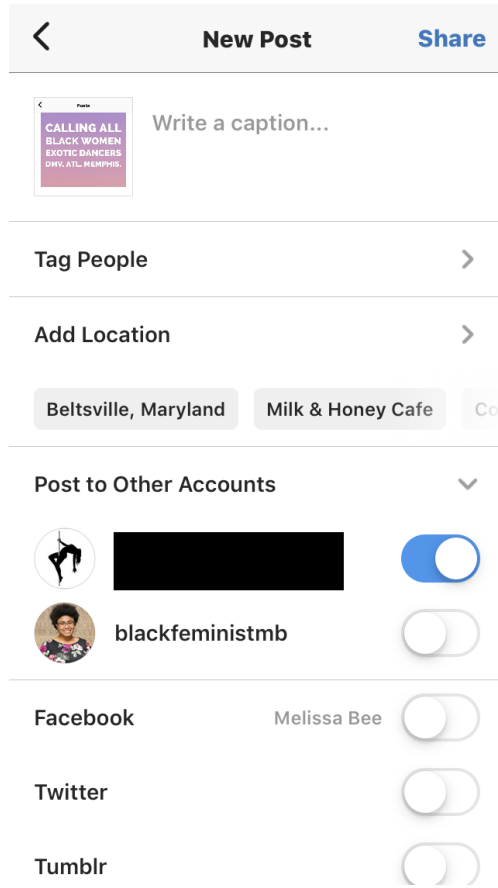


Figure 2.3 A screenshot of the caption and location feature of Instagram.

Users of Instagram can access their timeline using the home button on the main page of their user account. They can also view a timeline population on the search page, which includes four sections. This location data gets used as part of the Places Instagram's search which enables users to scroll through images or video tagged at a specific location. The 'Top' and 'Accounts' section includes hyperlinked profile pictures of suggested user accounts to follow and those that the user has recently viewed. Users can enter the usernames of other Instagram users to find their accounts. This feature only yields usernames and provides no other information. The 'Tags' section enables users to search for images or videos associated with a particular hashtag. Users can only search for one hashtag at a time and the result leads

to a separate page that provides information about the number of posts associated with the hashtag, a hyperlinked image to the a set of Instagram stories associated with the hashtag, a follow button so the user can have images associated with the hashtag directly fill their timeline, and two tabs called top or recent. The ‘top’ tab typically shows the images that feature the hashtag with the highest level of engagement (frequency of comments, replies, or likes) while the ‘recent’ tab usually shows Instagram posts associated with that hashtag as they appear in chronological order.

#### Online Publics and Online Crowds

I apply a framework for digital ethnography proposed by Alessandra Caliendo, a Lecturer in Branding and Digital Media, in a 2018 *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* article titled “Digital Methods for Ethnography: Analytical Concepts for Ethnographers Exploring Social Media Environments.” Caliendo argues in a 2018 that the purpose of sociological digital ethnography should be to follow "the circulation of an empirical object" within the context of "a given online environment or across different online environments" to observe "the specific social formations emerging around it from the interactions of digital devices and users" (p.570). Building on digital methods, actor-network theory, and multi-sited ethnography, Caliendo offers several analytical concepts and research strategies to study "the practices through which users and devices construct social formations around an object on the move" (p.570). This emphasis on social practices rather than online communities encourages ethnographers to consider other concepts such as publics and online publics, crowds, self-presentation as a tool, and users as a device.

Caliandro (2018) describes online crowds as "a social formation of individuals who “gather virtually, behave and act collectively and produce effects and phenomena which would not be possible without the Internet” (Russ 2007, 65)" (p. 562). While Caliandro does not define online publics outright, he does suggest the definition of public advanced by sociologist Gabriel Tarde capture several the phenomena that occur on the internet:

Tarde defines the public as “purely spiritual collectively, a dispersion of individuals who are physically separated and whose cohesion is entirely mental,” and whose bond lies in the simultaneous “awareness of sharing at a same time an idea or a wish with a great number of men” (Tarde 1901 [cited in Clark 1969, 53]). Anyway, how can a dispersed set of individuals share at the same time the same idea and accrue an awareness of such sharing? The answer is simple: via technological devices (p.564).

In this study I conceptualize online crowds and online publics as users that visit the profiles of the exotic dancers in this dataset to leave comments, likes, or replies to comments on a dancer's profile. While the data made available to me through the Instagram API offers only the frequency of comments, likes, and replies and not the content of the text used in replies or comments. Therefore, I rely on nonparticipant observation and field notes to document the ways other Instagram users engage with the images, text, and videos in which the dancers in my dataset perform erotic labor.

### Self-Presentation as a Tool

Caliandro (2018) proposes the concept of self-presentation as a tool of analysis to “measure the degree of involvement of a user within a given social formation” and “reconstruct the collectively built and shared cultural structure” to capture how users of social networking sites rely on self-presentation to “convey a public image of themselves that is constructed on a repertoire of symbols” that have shared cultural meaning and value within that social network (p. 566). In this study I use content analysis and online surveys to study how Black women exotic dancers use self-presentation as a tool to perform erotic labor as they share images, video, and text in which they represent sexuality, femininity, Black womanhood, and entrepreneurship on Instagram.

### Users as a Device

Caliandro expands on actor-network theory "which consider non-human actors as quasi-subjects and human actors as quasi-objects (Latour 1988)," to argue that "it is possible to conceptualize the Internet user as a device (or a sensor) producing meta-data" that provides researchers a tool to better describe the "spatial and semantic context of investigation" (p. 568). For example, Caliandro describes hashtags on Instagram as the ways that users "circumscribe a discursive space and self-categorize their own contents" (p. 569). In this study I use the location metadata Black women exotic dancers to map the landscape of the contemporary strip club industry in the urban South. I also use content analysis and non-participant observation to categorize the text metadata, including emojis and hashtags, the exotic

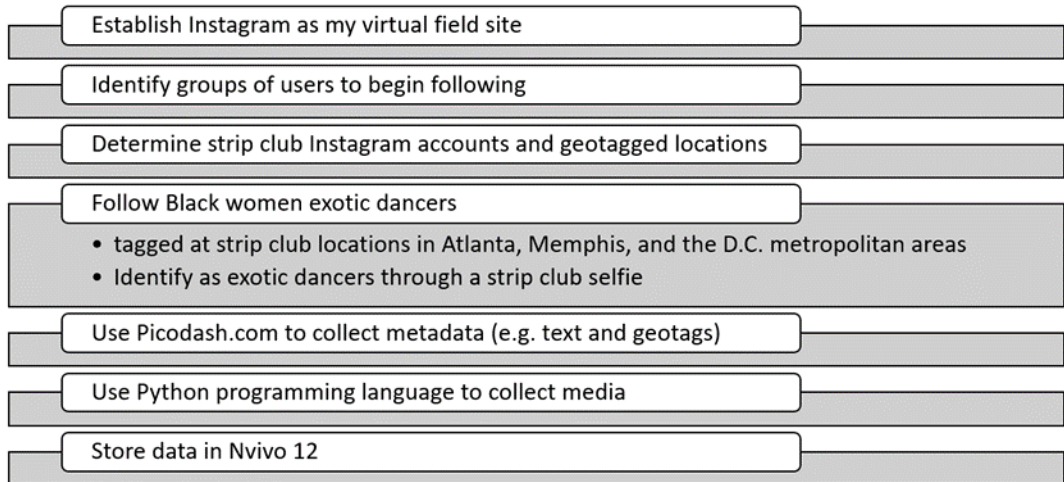
dancers in my dataset generate to self-categorize as individuals that embody certain ethnic, gender, racial, and sexual identities.

#### Data Collection Procedure

Figure 2.3 shows the steps take in this study to generate a dataset. I established Instagram as my virtual field site by creating a public profile account profile to follow the user accounts that I study in the content analysis, nonparticipant observation, and GIS analysis as well as to contact potential respondents for the online survey. I also created a new email address to further ensure my prior use of Instagram did not influence these since Instagram uses your contact information to determine suggestions for user accounts you should follow. However, despite that effort, Instagram periodically suggested that I followed people that I already know. I therefore did not choose to use this feature to find users to follow as it appeared accessing it would narrow my selection to people who shared contacts, which could potentially restrict my observations to one or several closed networks.

The first step I took in building this dataset involved reading the biography section of public user profiles of stakeholders in the strip club industry to locate user accounts managed by Black women exotic dancers. These accounts included those managed by exotic dancers, those that marketed specific strip clubs in the cities of interest in this study, and those run by industry professionals including promoters, photographers, men's magazines, makers of exotic wear, and bartenders.

## Data Collection Procedure



*Figure 2.4 The data collection procedure for this study.*

Ultimately, I chose to focus on Black women exotic dancers who work in strip clubs located in Atlanta, Memphis, and D.C. to generate insights about a previously unexamined population and to account for how the legacy of Jim Crow materializes in the landscape of contemporary urban sexual commerce. To select these cases, I determined each profile as a potential case if the user 1) used the location feature on Instagram to tag an image or video of herself at a strip club and the caption of the image suggested she was actively working at the club on the dated image, 2) used a hashtag that included the name of a strip club relevant or hashtag that included the name of the city and the phrase strippers, or 3) appeared on a user profile associated with the other previously mentioned groups and had their username featured either as a hyperlinked mention of it in the caption text of the image, a hyperlinked tag of the username directly on the image, or the username or stage name featured as a hyperlinked hashtag.

I chose these different strategies because of patterns of tagging usernames that I observed within the few first days of my observations. For example, when an exotic dancer took an image of themselves in a strip club, they almost always did so as a selfie while backstage with a caption that invited users to come see them at a strip club. They would then tag either as the username of the club, a hashtag of the club's name, or by tagging the location of the strip club. I recognized that a number of these images also included a hashtag that included both the name of the city and the phrase strippers, which often revealed images of women from across the United States. This strategy proved most useful for Atlanta and D.C. while the hashtag for Memphis appeared to connect to images of accounts managed by users affiliated with the strip club industry. While hashtags do not link directly back to user profiles, I did use them to find the accounts in two ways. First, I clicked on the hashtag and scrolled through images until I found one that linked to the user account of the dancer until I found an image that included their username. Second, Instagram's search feature to see if the hashtag corresponded with a username.

Therefore, my sampling method involved taking a non-probability, snowball sample of cases that followed the following inclusion criteria: women 1) identified as Black; 2) were actively worked as exotic dancers in strip clubs located in the metropolitan areas of D.C., Memphis, or Atlanta during the period of data collection; and 3) had publicly accessible profiles on the social networking site Instagram on which they advertised themselves as exotic dancers. Table 2.1 shows the data profile for the sample generated from my primary target population for this study. The primary units of analysis for this study are the posts submitted to Instagram by Black

women exotic dancers located in the urban South. The target sample size included 33 dancers from each city for a total of 99 dancers. Changes in Instagram’s API altered the quality of data derived from the platform.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, some users either deleted their accounts on their own or had their accounts deleted by Instagram. The final sample size included 83 dancers in total: 32 from Atlanta, 29 from D.C. and 22 from Memphis.

*Table 2.1 Number of Files Collected for Each Dancer by City*

<i>CITY</i>	Dancers (N)	Dataset size (GB)	Images and Videos (N)
Atlanta	32	18.68	17, 586
D.C.	29	13.18	14, 221
Memphis	22	5.51	9, 912
TOTAL	83	37.37	41, 919

I used the software service Picodash.com to export the metadata of the user accounts I followed in each profile into a spreadsheet. This information included: the username of each account, the URL for each image as seen on Instagram in a web browser; the date the image was posted in GMT; the frequency of likes for each image; the text of the caption including emoji, the frequency of comments, the identification number name, latitude and longitude of each location as tagged by the user, and the user’s full name as entered by the user. I then used the Python programming language to install and operate Instagram-scraper, a command-line software that I used to download images and video posted by each user. For further

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<sup>6</sup> Instagram’s parent company Facebook changed permissions to access data through their APIs in April 2018 weeks after the former director of research at Cambridge Analytica Christopher Wylie alleged the firm funded by conservative hedge fund owner and former computer scientist Robert L. Mercer had exploited the personal information of millions of Facebook users to assist then candidate Donald’s Trump presidential campaign using data the firm had purchased from a data scientist named Aleksandr Kogan in 2015.

analysis, I imported the metadata and images into NVivo 12, excluding video due to the incompatibility of the file format with the software. I then use qualitative analysis software to collect and code the images these users share to organize and summarize the data.

*Non-Participant Observation of Racialized Erotic Capital and Controlling Images on Instagram*

Nonparticipant observation refers to a method of data collection for field research that involves either structured or unstructured observation of members of a social group without direct interaction. Researchers that apply this method select what to observe, record events of interest through field notes, and then categorize or count the frequencies of these events, thus encoding them with meaning (Singleton Jr. and Straits 2010). I engaged in daily nonparticipant observation for the duration of a nine-month period to document patterns in the social dynamics related to the accounts I had followed to answer two broad research questions:

1. What type of patterns emerge in terms of how followers and other Instagram users interact with and engage Black women exotic dancers that perform erotic labor online using comments and replies?
2. What, if any, similarities and differences arise in terms of the body types, skin tones, and hair textures Instagram profiles associated with strip club venues feature in the images and videos of exotic dancers they place on their profiles?

3. In what ways does the engagement of Instagram users with exotic dancers through comments, replies, and captions reinforce racialized erotic capital or controlling images?

As I wrote and reviewed memos of my observations, I determined that exotic dancers varied the setting, fashion, cosmetics, and the posture of their bodies within an image or video to perform erotic labor. Additionally, I recognized that these profile pages functioned to represent each user as an exotic dancer and in other roles, most notably as an entrepreneur. After I achieved theme saturation, I used these observations to construct codes that I later used to interpret the data through quantitative and qualitative content analysis, which I describe later in the chapter.

Studies that use social networking sites that adopt nonparticipant observation do so to ensure that the participation of the researcher does not alter the dynamic of the communications under observation (Park et al. 2019). I chose nonparticipant observation because this approach to data collection for digital ethnography permits me to record and observe patterns of behavior relevant to my research questions without potentially altering the field site by inserting myself as a researcher. I considered this particularly important given the ways algorithms drive engagement on Instagram and other social networking sites. If I had commented or liked images these dancers had posted, I would have inadvertently converted that action into a data point based on the ways the Instagram software quantifies those actions. Still, this study differs from traditional and digital ethnographic definitions of nonparticipant observation that emphasize no visibility to actors in the field site (Singleton Jr. and Straits 2010). I used a public Instagram profile that had links to information about

myself and my personal Instagram account because I used this same account to find respondents for the online survey. I took this approach to take into account what Farman (2012) describes about reciprocity as a feature of social networking sites that researchers can leverage to gain access into the virtual communities they desire to study. By making both the study account and my personal account visible to the community I researched, I made myself public to those I was watching so that when I did engage, they could know my status as a researcher-observer. Relative to my potential respondents, I had the insider status of being a Black woman, but the outsider status of a person who had never done sex work. I made sure to make this status plain to potential respondents by providing a link to my personal Instagram profile account, where I provided additional information about myself as a scholar and researcher through my biography section and a link to my personal website.

I also rely on nonparticipant observation to observe digital practices not collected as part of the dataset of images, video, and metadata from the 83 accounts of exotic dancers. Specifically, I reviewed the timeline at least twice a day for about ten to fifteen minutes each time to observe the ways the women in my sample used the features of Instagram in real time. This included the observation of stories, a feature of that website in a separate section from the timeline where users post images and recorded video only accessible to viewers for 24 hours, unless the user saves the story to the highlights section of their profile so that other users can view it later. The Instagram story features also enables users to stream live videos directly to their followers through the application. I also used nonparticipant observation to observe patterns in the user activity of those that commented on the dancer's images as well

as users affiliated with the strip club industry. I used memos to document and described consistent pattern in the ways these users engaged with or represented these exotic dancers. Through this methodological approach, I observed how strip club management and other professionals invoke controlling images through marketing materials. Additionally, I documented the ways these user profiles import the racialized erotic capital of the strip club online as reflected in their tendency to feature images of light skin Black or Latina women in their marketing materials.

*A Content Analysis of the Sexual Politics and Erotic Labor of Black Women Exotic Dancers*

Content analysis enables researchers to identify and define a set of criteria by which they categorize the symbolic content related to their units of analysis. (Singleton, Jr. and Straits 2010). Many of the empirical studies across a wide range of fields that center on the use of internet social networking sites rely on content analysis as a methodology (Brown et al. 2017, Caliandro 2018, Fox et al. 2018, Kim and Kuljis 2010, Lai and To 2015, Moorman and Harrison 2016, Ray et al. 2017, Stein 2009). I use content analysis to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways do Black women exotic dancers rely on a racialized erotic capital to perform erotic labor on social networking sites? In what ways do patterns emerge among Black women exotic dancers in terms of how they present their faces and bodies through image or video and use text (e.g. username, caption, hashtags, replies, and comments) for the purpose of erotic labor?

2. What practices do Black women exotic dancers use to form an online presentation of self on Instagram and how does this self-presentation compare to how other users on Instagram represent them as determined by nonparticipant observation? What features, if any, of Instagram do Black women exotic dancers use to leverage their erotic labor into work and streams of income beyond exotic dance? How do these digital practices enable Black women to exhibit their sexual politics?

Table 2.2 shows the final dataset for the content analysis. This data includes 73 rather than 83 dancers because I chose to include dancers for whom the images and video collected through the Instagram-scraper software matched up with the metadata I collected from Picodash.com.

*Table 2.2 A Profile of the Data Used in the Content Analysis*

	Dancers (N)	Media Files (N)	Dataset Size (GB)
Atlanta	30	14, 201	12.9
D.C.	25	10, 140	6.46
Memphis	18	6,998	3.34
Total	73	31,339	22.7

For this study, I use the software Nvivo 12 to analyze the images, text, video, and metadata collected from Instagram. The text search and word count query feature enabled me to analyze the corpus of text generated from captions of images. I use nodes to categorize each image into codes that correspond to themes broadly related

to how the setting, poses, and fashion used in the media I analyze. I then report whether an element of a text, image, or video corresponds to a certain category for each user in the dataset. I rely on the appearance of a category per user rather than a frequency of category per user due to the size of the dataset. Additionally, due to the way the algorithm functions on Instagram, I cannot reliably assume the use of a metric based on the total frequency of a category for each user would validly or equally indicate the intensity, value, or importance for a theme (Singleton Jr. and Straits 2010). Table 2.3 provides a brief description of each of the nine categories that emerged through my analysis. The first two categories, “cosmetic femininity” and “rear view” reflect the way exotic dancers used the positioning and the adornment of their bodies to perform erotic labor. “In the club” and “boudoir,” the third and fourth categories, reflect the way Black women exotic dancers alter the landscape of their erotic labor through the type of setting that provides the backdrop to images of themselves. Finally, the remaining categories indicate how Black women exotic dancers use Instagram to forge into multiple industries related to and beyond exotic dance, cultivating the identity of the ‘Strippreneur.’<sup>7</sup> These various forms of entrepreneurship include modeling, promotion, headlining, online sex work, or distribution of various products and services for profit. Since content analysis and non-participant observation do not permit me to consider the motivations of the behaviors I observed and categorized or whether these behaviors to place at specific

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Strippreneur’ is a term coined by Gizelle Marie, the previously mentioned leader of the #NYCStripperStrike, to describe the way exotic dancers leverage their erotic capital into various entrepreneurial pursuits.

places within the landscape, a supplement these findings with other analytical strategies.

*Table 2.3 A Description of the Codes Used in this Study*

Cosmetic femininity	Images that display one's ability to conform to normative beauty standards through certain cosmetics, hairstyling, and fashion.
Rear View	Sexual agency expressed via the self-eroticism of one's backside using camera technology and posing.
In the club	The use of social networking sites to document both front stage and backstage as an exotic dancer when on site at a strip club. Dancers also use livestream videos, particularly when backstage preparing to transition front stage.
Boudoir	The use of images of erotic labor in the home enables that often are coupled with light-hearted or soft song lyrics in the language of the caption of the text. Fashion includes anything from a t-shirt and cotton shorts to lingerie. While often in the bedroom, also might include kitchen or bathroom.
Modeling	Images that were done for professional men's magazines, digital publications, or a photographer's portfolio
Products and services	The use of one's profile to market businesses that often-centered beauty products or fashion. Often involved the use of various e-commerce tools.
Promotion	The use of one's profile to advertise the products or service of other entrepreneurs. Typically involves service providers or sellers of products associated with the strip club industry like rap artists or makers of exotic fashion wear.
Headlining	An image that depicts the dancer on a flyer for an event or night at a strip club and describes them as the featured dancer.
Online sex work	Posts that allude to additional erotic offerings through services mediated by internet-based platforms other than Instagram (e.g. Onlyfans).

*A GIS Analysis of the Demonic Grounds of the Exotic Dance Industry*

In addition to nonparticipant observation and content analysis, I used GIS software to create maps of the strip club locations each dancer tagged themselves at whether through geotagging, hashtags, a mention of the username of the account associated with the club or writing the name of a club as text in the caption. This GIS analysis addressed several research questions about the physical landscape of where Black women exotic dancers based in the Atlanta, Memphis, and D.C. metropolitan areas perform. These questions include:

1. What is the median household income and percentage of population that is Black in the counties where strip clubs are located that Black women dancers perform at?
2. Do Black women exotic dancers tend to dance in areas of counties that have a higher percentage of Black residents and a lower median household income than the surrounding county?
3. Where do Black women exotic dancers based in the urban South travel to perform outside of their own state and do the socioeconomic characteristics of these environments mirror their local environments?

I use data from several sources to answer these research questions. First, I collected the locations of strip clubs based on a sample of 68 of the 83 dancers using metadata generated from Instagram. I identified where each user had tagged an image of themselves at a strip club by using the location name field provided in the metadata. However, sometimes Instagram users do not geocode their images, identifying location instead as text or a hashtag in the caption of an image. After

implementing these strategies, I used Microsoft Excel to manage a spreadsheet of the names, addresses, latitude and longitude of these locations. I noted whether dancers tagged themselves within their local area or in an out-of-state location to document the travel patterns of dancers. This data comes from a dataset constructed from a specific set of users. These users had to have provided location data for each strip club as either geocodes embedded in the metadata of images or the text in caption and hashtags. Therefore, even if a dancer in my dataset had pictured themselves at a club, I had no means by which to determine where they had performed if they did not identify the club in the previously mentioned ways.

After constructing this spreadsheet, I then accessed supplemental data from the U.S. Census Bureau in the form of the 2018 TIGER/Line Shapefiles for each U.S. county, the 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Demographic and Housing Estimates, and the 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates for median household income in the past 12 months inflation-adjusted to the value of the dollar in the year 2017. To visualize this data through maps, I imported them into QGIS 3.6 for Windows, an open-source GIS software application. I visualize strip club locations as dots on the map, varying colors to communicate which metropolitan area I map racial demographics through the percent Black of each county visualized as a color gradient divided into five classes ranging from 0 to 86.9% Black. I also use a color gradient to visualize household income within each county divided into 16 classes in increments of \$4,999 from less than \$10,000 to \$200,000 or more. Finally, I mapped the surrounding transport infrastructure using symbols for primary roads, railroads, and airports. Overall, my use of GIS software enabled me to identify and

map the demonic grounds of contemporary sex work using the workplaces of Black women exotic dancers as units of analysis for several digital maps. Since the 2017 ACS does not provide information about racial demographics for specific blocks, I compared the locations of these strip clubs to the Justice Map, which visualizes median household income data from the 2017 ACS and racial demographic data at the block level using data from the 2010 census. The web-based user interface incorporates the Google Maps API to provide a base map for data visualizations.

Table 2.X provides information about the three cities of interest in this study. I chose to map strip clubs where Black women exotic dancers in Atlanta, D.C., and Memphis perform at for several key reasons. First, each area has a shared and unique history of Jim Crow segregation. During the early to mid-twentieth century, policies such as redlining, racial zoning, and restrictive covenants defined the boundaries of the Black communities that formed in the postbellum migration of former slaves throughout the South (Aiken 1990, Brownell 1975, Gotham 2000, Hall 1983, Logan 2017, Logan and Schneider 1984, Marshall 1937, Ware 1989). The boundaries of the Black neighborhoods founded in the early twentieth century have shifted little in the twenty-first century, except for in cases of gentrification that push members of the Black middle class and working class out of long-established communities (Goetz 2011, Holloway and McNulty 2013, Hubbard et al. 2008, Lichter, Parisi and Taquino 2012, Omi and Winant 2015, Paris 2001, Raymond, Wang and Immergluck 2015, Shaver 2019, Squires, Friedman and Saidat 2016).

*Table 2.4 Racial and Economic Demographic Profile of Atlanta, D.C., and Memphis*

City	Population (N)	% Black	Median Household Income (\$)
Atlanta	472,506	37.7	\$53,843
D.C.	681,170	46.4	\$75,506
Memphis	652,752	64.4	\$38,826

Source: 2016 American Community Survey. N = 83 including dancers whose data is used in GIS mapping or content analysis. Excludes dancers that took online survey.

While the studies of Black women prostitutes in the early twentieth century that I described in Chapter 1 recognize how racial segregation shaped the landscape of sex work for Black women, all these studies focus on areas in the Midwest and Northeast Black women migrated to during the Great Migration. They do not address exotic dancers, strip clubs, or the landscape of sexual commerce in the twenty-first century United States and how Jim Crow segregation shapes it. To fill this gap my analysis of the location of venues where Black women exotic dancers in the urban South work reveals their hypermarginalization into strip clubs located in counties and zip codes with a higher percentage of Black residents and a lower median household income than the surrounding areas due to the ways. I contextualize these locations using supplemental data from the U.S. Census Bureau and American Community Survey (ACS) that provides information about the surrounding racial and economic context of these strip clubs.

Second, each of these cities has a history of a Black middle class that emerged as college-educated and business-owning Black people moved from the inner cities to the suburbs during the twentieth century. These Black middle-class suburbs act as a

buffer between the inner city and white suburbs that export sex work to Black communities, though members of the Black middle class have historically decried sex work in their communities as well (Bayor 1996, Blair 2010, Bonilla-Silva 2006, Davis 1998, Durham 2012, Giddings 1984, Harris 2016a, Hess 2009, Lacy 2007, Mumford 1997). However, in the twenty-first century, the Black middle class in these areas have seen periods of expansion and decline due to recessions and financial crises that may altered the landscape of their communities. Furthermore as gentrification affects poor Black communities through the closure of subsidizing housing, it also prices out members of Black working-class and middle-class communities (Freund 2010, Green et al. 2017, Holloway and McNulty 2013, Jackson 2015, Lacy 2007, Palardy, Boley and Gaither 2018, Paris 2001, Raymond, Wang and Immergluck 2015, Rugh and Massey 2010, Shaver 2019, Smiley, Rushing and Scott 2014). While historians have described the ways members of the Black middle class enacted a politics of respectability to police the leisure spaces of the Black working-class and poor, prior research does not address how the spatial and economic restructuring of the Black middle class from the twentieth century to present maps onto the landscape of contemporary sex work. In this study I show how strip clubs in the urban South are concentrated in regions where members of the Black middle class live at the county level but tend to be in lower income areas at the block level. Therefore, I argue that the strip club locations are hypermarginalized both racially and economically.

Though scholars like Hubbard et al. (2008) argue some forms of contemporary sex work enjoy visibility within the landscape of mainstream adult

entertainment districts, only Brooks (2010a) and Trautner (2005) have done sociological studies of this landscape in relation to strip clubs. Their findings indicate Black women rarely have access to predominately white strip clubs, which tend to favor light skin or biracial Black women and Latinas over dark skin women, because clients, club owners, and either other dancers consider them ghetto or low class, a description also reserved for the venues that did hire Black women and the neighborhoods they were located in. However, these studies do not look to strip clubs in the urban South and do not investigate the travel patterns of Black women exotic dancers beyond their local environment due to their reliance on ethnographic methods alone to collect their data. To fill this gap, I use GIS software to map the strip clubs where Black women in the urban South perform in their local areas and when they travel across the United States. My findings indicate that Black women exotic dancers tend to travel to strip clubs in areas both locally and nationally that have a higher percentage of Black residents than the surrounding blocks and county. Additionally, the locations of these strip clubs can be found in all predominately Black areas of the urban South, regardless of the class status of the residential areas. Therefore, I argue the Black Belt sex trade Harris described in the book *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Number Runners* extend to the urban South and still exists today.

Finally, each of these urban areas has a long history in terms of Black arts, culture, and leisure. Each city has districts where Black residents went for leisure and entertainment during the nineteenth and twentieth century – Decatur Street in Atlanta, U Street in D.C., and Beale Street in Memphis to name a few. Blues music and culture flourished in the spaces and places as working-class and poor Black people

inhabited in the Jim Crow South as they took leisure in the music that narrated the soundtrack of the pleasures and the pains of Black life in the early industrial South (Baker and Phelan 1907, Cooper 2017, Godshalk 2005, Green 2006, Hess 2009, Ingham 2003, Lindsey 2017, Mixon 2005, Pye 2007, Sarig 2007). Black people constructed these districts for themselves as they worked to form their own neighborhoods as predominately white local governments and residents used legislation to exclude them from the commercial districts, leisure districts, and residential areas that they desired for themselves. As white Southerners took steps to demarcate racial boundaries around physical spaces, they also pushed sex work and other informal labor into these districts, treating them as vice or red-light districts in need of moral policing and anti-vice law enforcement. For example, in his 1907 report on the aftermath of anti-Black riots in Atlanta, journalist Ray Stannard Baker described Decatur Street where the riot took place as “a street of low saloons, dives, negro “clubs” and pawnshops, frequented by the lowest class of both races” before he notes “A few days before the riot an investigating committee counted no fewer than 2455 idle negros in the 40 saloons of Decatur street.” (Baker and Phelan 1907:4).

Today, the strip club is the focal point of much of contemporary rap music culture in the urban South, particularly in Atlanta, the birthplace of mainstream southern rap music (Brooks 2010b, Byrd 2004, French 2015, Gaunt 2015, Miller-Young 2008, Miller-Young 2014, Pérez 2015, Sarig 2007, Sharpley-Whiting 2007, Vaught and Bradley 2017). While Atlanta’s strip club scene has gained notoriety through reality television shows, films, and references in rap music, the landscape of the Memphis and D.C. strip club industry has only recently entered the lyrical

repertoire of contemporary music as popular rappers from these regions gain mainstream visibility. For example, Memphis rapper Yo Gotti invokes the stripper-hoe trope in the 2017 song “Rake It Up” that features recording artist Nicki Minaj. To open the song he chants “I tell all my hoes, “Rake it up / Break it down, bag it up”” in the opening chorus before he rhymes “I made love to a stripper (stripper), first I had to tip her” in the first verse. By August 2017 the song had reached 22 on the Billboard Hot 100.<sup>8</sup> Despite how the character of Black culture and leisure has changed from the blues to the hip hop era, previous scholarship does not account for whether the landscape of Black leisure and entertainment districts in these cities has changed as well. Furthermore, previous research does not consider the ways contemporary locations reflect the persistence of anti-vice policing tactics and Jim Crow Segregation into the twenty-first century. To address these gaps, I use digital maps to visualize the landscape for Black women in the contemporary exotic dance industry. I argue the persistence of a landscape of sex work specific to Black women reveals the long reach of post-slavery spatial politics into twenty-first century.

The use of both GIS data and digital data requires a knowledge and skillset premised on understanding software programs or data formats typically not used in sociological research. Sociologists interested in taking this approach must turn to other fields in digital studies to supplement their understanding of GIS and digital data analysis. For me this involved learning how to use GIS software as a team member of the African American Digital Humanities Initiative (AADHum). This

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<sup>8</sup> Lamarre, Carl. 2017, "Yo Gotti Taps Nicki Minaj for His Twerk-Filled Video 'Rake It Up'": Billboard. Retrieved 06/03/2017, 2019 (<https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/hip-hop/7934251/yo-gotti-rake-it-up-video-nicki-minaj-blac-chyna>).

instruction in GIS specifically centered how to use this software to map places and spaces related to Black culture and life in the D.C. metropolitan area. In this study I expand this training to document the location of strip clubs not only in the D.C. metropolitan area, but also in Memphis and Atlanta.

*A Survey of the Digital Practices of Black Women Exotic Dancers as Technology Users*

My final analytical strategy involved a descriptive statistical analysis of responses from an online survey of 21 respondents with public Instagram profiles that identified as Black women exotic dancers who had worked in the metropolitan areas of interest to this study. I used an online survey for several reasons. Since these respondents had public profiles, the interpretation of these results might not compare to how women in this same group that manage private profiles might respond. Nevertheless, the use of an online survey to study Black women in the exotic dancer industry had several benefits. First, this approach enables me to go beyond the limitations of the other methods I used. Content and spatial analysis helped me explore representations of the social life and world of Black women exotic dancers. An online survey allows me to engage with Black women exotic dancers directly. Second, an online survey enables me to ask dancers about other stakeholders in the strip club industry that I do not study directly. I learn perspectives about club owners and clients that I do not observe due to my focus on exotic dancers alone. Finally, this online survey has the potential to spur further research. Other scholars can use or modify this questionnaire to ask questions related to sex work and the internet. However, future research invested in

the use of more complex statistical methods must take steps to achieve a sample size that approximates the population of interest.

After I obtained permission for human subjects' research from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Maryland (UMD), I made the approved survey accessible on Qualtrics. I generated a new snowball sample using the same strategy I did to generate cases for the content analysis. Then I distributed an invitation to potential respondents through direct message on Instagram. Whenever dancers indicated they would like to participate in the online survey, I sent them a link to the Qualtrics survey for them to complete, which began with documentation about the study for review prior to indicating their willingness to participate and the question "Do you identify as a Black woman or a mixed race Black woman?" thereafter for those who agreed to participate. The survey generated 31 responses between March and December 2018, however, final analysis excludes all cases that did not complete the survey according to Qualtrics. Each respondent received a \$10 Amazon gift card via email for their participation.

Respondents first chose among a set of eleven shades what they perceived their skin tone to be. Then they provided an alias other than their stage names for the purposes of identification for open-ended questions. Second, dancers provided demographic information including their year of birth; the zip code of the area they had lived at for most of their childhood; the family structure during their childhood; current relationship status; number of children; age of at first childbirth; year their child was born; the zip code of the area they currently lived; sexual identity; if they rented or owned their current home; the composition of their household; and highest

level of schooling. Third, dancers provided information about themselves as a worker including: weekly earnings; monthly spending on work-related purchases; how they spend their earnings; financial hardships; jobs outside of exotic dance; and their anticipated career trajectory.

Respondents answered several questions about themselves as exotic dancers including why they first decided to dance; whether they worked day or night shift; days they danced per week; their stage name; whether they performed alone or with a partner; whether they shared their profit; the attitudes toward them they perceive from clientele, celebrities, club management, and other club staff; their means of transportation; whether they travel out of state to perform; the names of the clubs they had most recently performed at; the racial and ethnic composition of dancers and clientele at these clubs; whether they dance at private parties; whether they participated in other forms of erotic labor such as modeling or headlining; and an open-ended question that asked them to react to the term “bad bitch.” Specifically, I asked "Hip hop music has popularized the idea that some women are "bad bitches." Would you describe yourself as a bad bitch? Describe why or why not." I included this question to capture personal views on the performance of erotic labor expected from clients in strip clubs.

Finally, respondents answered several questions about their use of SNS and digital technology. First, they described the type of technology they used on a regular basis including devices and SNS. Second, they ranked their preferred SNS. Third, they answer questions about Instagram including their username; the strategies they use to gain followers; the number of years they’ve advertised on Instagram; whether

strip clubs promote them on Instagram; celebrity dancers they follow on Instagram;  
and their experiences with harassment on Instagram.

## Chapter 3: Digitizing the Demonic Grounds: A GIS Analysis of Strip Clubs in the Twenty-First Century Urban South

### Introduction

In 2018 WBY, Inc., the parent company of Follies strip club located in a suburb in Dekalb County northeast of Atlanta filed suit against the county because it alleged the city of Chamblee where it is located had violated several of their civil rights.

According to an article written for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution in December 2018, Chamblee created a new adult entertainment ordinance in October of that year in legislation that “includes several statements describing adult businesses as havens for criminal and immoral behavior and justifying the changes as necessary to reduce blight and improve quality of life”(Mitchell 2018).The law also required dancers to remain partially clothed, banned lap dances and alcohol, and instituted more restrictive hours of operation. The position of this North Atlanta suburb toward strip clubs did not stray too far from that of its neighbor in the northwest, Sandy Springs, which had succeeded in getting three strip clubs shut down after a judge ruled in favor of an injunction the clubs had instituted against nudity and alcohol in these venues under threat of arrest (Kass 2018).

The use of nuisance ordinance legislation in the twenty-first century to police strip clubs does not happen just in Atlanta. In June 2018 Memphis law enforcement raided a popular strip club named V Live before the Shelby County District Attorney’s Office declared the property a nuisance and had it shut down (Spiewak 2018). Two years earlier Prince George’s County, home to several suburbs in the

D.C. metropolitan area, ordered twelve strip clubs to shut down after implementing stricter zoning restrictions for adult entertainment businesses (Hedgpeth 2016).

As I found in this analysis, one characteristic these clubs have in common: Black women exotic dancers. Despite the ways local governments continue to regulate the places and spaces where Black women exotic dancers perform, no previous study has used GIS analysis to visualize what this landscape looks like. In this chapter I draw on the demonic grounds and mobile interface theory as a conceptual framework through which to study the spatial politics of contemporary sex work. I use data from 67 of the 83 performers in the larger dataset that I also used for the content analysis and nonparticipant observation. They tagged images of themselves in 74 different strip clubs across the United States (see Appendix A). Using strip clubs as my primary unit of GIS analysis, I argue the geographies of strip clubs Black women exotic dancers map through the use of various features of Instagram offers insights into the ways zoning practices rooted in Jim Crow era segregation and anti-vice legislation explains why Black women exotic dancers tend to perform in low-income, predominantly Black regions of each metropolitan area. Furthermore, I show the ways physical boundaries like the transportation infrastructure of metropolitan areas keep these venues distant from other districts of the city including mainstream adult venues. Lastly, I show how the landscape around the venues they travel to outside their home state mirrored that of their hometown strip clubs. Through these visualizations, I localized the offline context of exotic dance to the surrounding county and nearby city, but also show the ways racial segregation in the strip club industry occurs at the national level. Ultimately, this

analysis contributes a macrostructural analysis of segregation in the strip club industry to research that to date largely emphasizes microlevel interactions and social practices.

*Where Black Women Exotic Dancers based in Atlanta Perform in Local Venues*

In the *Demonic Grounds*, McKittrick (2007) describes Black women's geographies as "the last place thought of" to describe "geographies of black femininity" as "not necessarily marginal, but are central to how we know and understand space and place" (p. 62). This conceptualization of Black women's geographies suggests that the marginalization of the places where Black women move throughout the physical landscape operates as a central function of what McKittrick describes geographic domination. While McKittrick identifies geographic domination through an analysis of the transatlantic slave trade, my study finds that "the spatialization of the racial-sexual black subject" (p. xvi) appears within the landscape of the contemporary Atlanta strip club industry.

Table 3.1 summarizes the number of dancers based in Atlanta who tagged an image of themselves at each club. 24% of the dancers had performed at Blue Flame Lounge. 17% performed at Stokers located in Clarkston, a suburb of Atlanta. 14% had performed at Club Wax located north of Hapeville. 14% of dancers had performed at Follies. 10% performed at Club Babes, 10% performed at Onyx, and another 10% performed at V Live Atlanta. For the remaining ten clubs, at least two different dancers had tagged an image at Dream Gentlemen's Club, Magic City ATL, Pin Ups, and the Cheetah Lounge. Five different women tagged an image of

themselves at Club Blaze, Club Platinum Atlanta, Goldrush Showbar Atlanta, Stiletto Gentlemen’s Club, and Tease Atlanta.

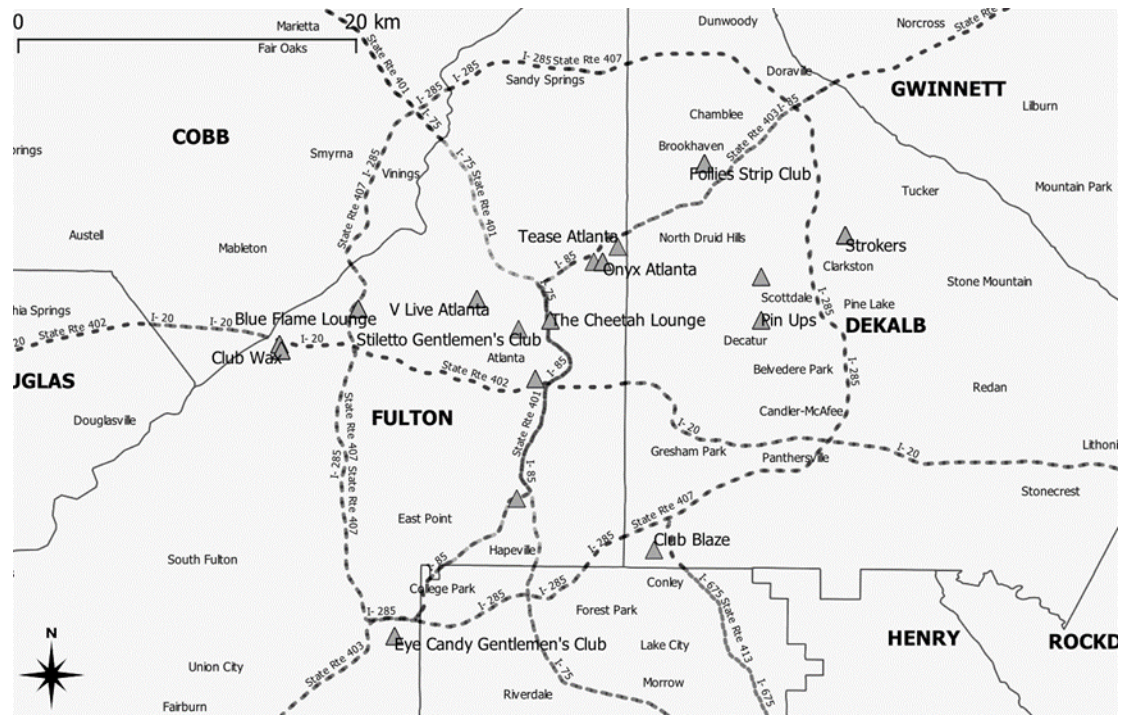
*Table 3.1 Local Strip Clubs Where Black Women Exotic Dancers Based in Atlanta Performed (N = 17)*

Name of Clubs	N	%
Blue Flame Lounge	7	24
Stokers	5	17
Club Wax	4	14
Follies Strip Club	4	14
Club Babes	3	10
Onyx Atlanta	3	10
V Live Atlanta	3	10
Dream Gentleman's Club Atl	2	7
Eye Candy Gentlemen's Club	2	7
Magic City ATL	2	7
Pin Ups	2	7
The Cheetah Lounge	2	7
Club Blaze	1	3
Club Platinum Atlanta	1	3
Goldrush Showbar Atlanta	1	3
Stiletto Gentlemen's Club	1	3
Tease Atlanta	1	3

I speculate one of the reasons why so many Black women had tagged images of themselves at Blue Flame Lounge has to do with its popularity in the Atlanta hip hop music scene both as a reference and a space for Black men rappers to perform. However, a similar argument can be made for Stokers, Follies, Onyx, Magic City, Pin Ups, Club Blaze, and Club Platinum, all strip clubs mentioned in the lyrics of popular rappers throughout the twenty-first century. For example, to open his 2010 song “Sexy Girl Anthem,” Atlanta-based artist Roscoe Dash rhymes in the chorus “Shout out to Stokers, Magic City, Pin Ups and Club Blaze/ All the folks at Onyx, Body Tap, coming to the world from Blue Flame.” Therefore, I stress that the number of women at each club does not reflect its significance to Black women exotic

dancers or the larger hip-hop entertainment industry in Atlanta. Still, the ways rappers name and list strip clubs that Black women exotic dancers I have followed perform at offers a useful tool to consider the ways these strip clubs have rebranded over time. Body Tap referenced by Roscoe Dash rebranded to Diamonds of Atlanta in 2011, a renovated venue that became V Live Atlanta in 2016, where three of the dancers in my study tagged an image of themselves, after Atlanta-based rapper T.I. purchased the venue and hosted a job fair to find new talent (Coleman II 2016, Thrillist 2011). Interestingly, T.I. had thrown his 31<sup>st</sup> birthday at Body Tap in 2007 (XXL Staff 2007) , suggesting the relationship between rappers and strip clubs where Black women perform in Atlanta has now evolved into a corporate business as V Live strip clubs have purchased or built several strip clubs throughout the United States.

Map 3.1 shows a visualization of the 17 clubs where the 29 Black women exotic dancers based in Atlanta performed locally. Gray triangles visualize the location of the strip club. Several clubs were clustered around the I-75 and I-85 interstate systems while the remainder were located alongside state highways or routes. Clubs located east of I-85 past Druid Hills and south of State Rte 402 past Gresham Park are in more suburban parts of metropolitan Atlanta. Clubs west of I-75 along State Rte 402 are in an exurban region where institutions founded after the Civil War to serve the Black community like the Atlanta University Center that includes Morehouse College, Spelman College, Clark Atlanta University, and Morris Brown College still stand today.



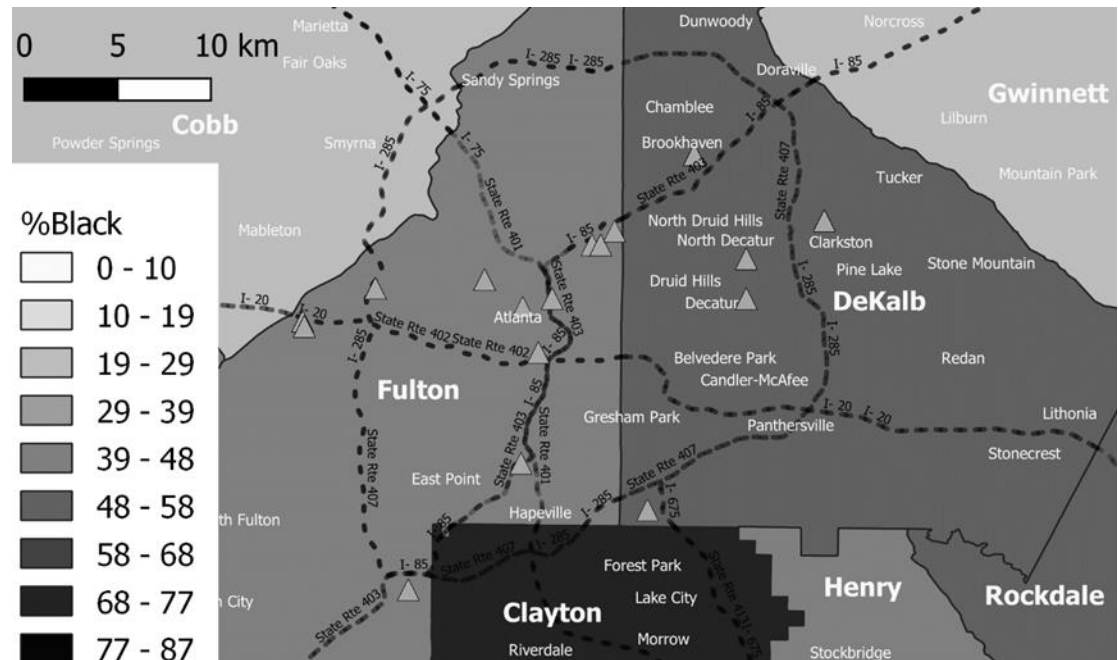
Map 3.1 The Location of Strip Clubs Where Black Women Exotic Dancers Based in Atlanta Perform

As stated in earlier chapters, Jim Crow segregation necessitated that Black people created their own leisure, entertainment, and business districts throughout the urban South. Part of my aim in this study is to uncover whether contemporary strip clubs map onto these spaces today. In his 1997 book *Black Atlanta in the Roaring Twenties*, historian Herman Skip Mason Jr. provides a portrait of the arts and entertainment district Black Atlantans frequented in the early twentieth century. According to Mason Jr., Decatur Street south of Five Points, named for where the railroads that ran through Atlanta converged, housed several venues where vaudeville and blues artists would perform. For example, homegrown Georgia artists like Thomas A. Dorsey, also known Georgia Tom, as well as Ma Rainey and her Black Bottom band performed at 81 Theater located at 81 Decatur Street.

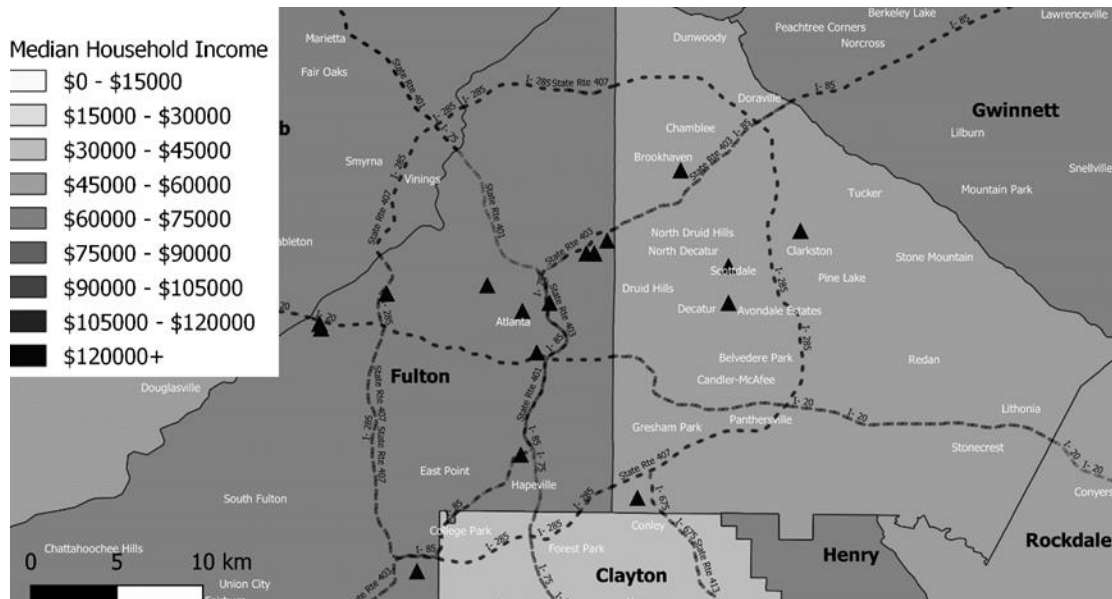
Today this strip no longer includes such venues. Instead, someone leaving 81 Decatur Street would encounter the Georgia State University library, bookstore and student center on the corner of Decatur Street and Courtland Street. Indeed today, there are no arts or entertainment venues on this strip as this region now houses several government buildings in addition to those owned by Georgia State University. Based on these findings, I argue the collapse of a concentrated arts and entertainment district through processes of gentrification explains at least one of reasons why strip clubs in the Atlanta area are not concentrated in one region of the city.

The Racial Demographics and Income Distribution of Areas Surrounding the Strip Clubs in Atlanta

Map 3.2 shows the racial demographic characteristics of this region based on the percentage of Black people in each county. Map 3.3 shows the income distribution for each county where dancers based in Atlanta performed at clubs there.



Map 3.2 Percentage of Black population in the metropolitan Atlanta area by county.



Map 3.3 Median household income in the metropolitan area by county.

Most of these strip clubs are in two counties with a sizeable population of Black residents: Fulton County (N = 1,010,420; 44.1%; \$61,336) and Dekalb County (N = 736,066; 54%; \$55,876).<sup>9</sup> While the median household income for these counties falls within a few thousand dollars of the median household income of the entire United States (\$57, 562), they exceed that of the state of Georgia (\$52,977) due in part to the concentration of several Black middle class neighborhoods in these counties. The chapter “Atlanta: A Black Mecca?” written by a trio of sociologists published in the 2007 anthology *The Black Metropolis in the Twenty-First Century*, offers a portrait of how the new Black middle class in Atlanta took shape. According to Bullard, Johnson and Torres (2007), Black people with middle class incomes and some residents that earned lower incomes moved to the suburbs as the city’s Black population increased during the 1970s and 1980s. While Black middle-class residents

<sup>9</sup> Throughout this chapter I use the parenthetical notation shown here to provide data from the American Community Survey that includes the total population of residents (N), the percentage of Black population in the described area (%), and the median household income for that area (\$).

purchased homes, their poorer counterparts moved into suburban rental units built after the 1996 Olympics. Bullard, Johnson and Torres (2007) write that by 2004 Atlanta had the third-largest Black population of any metro area in the United States as Black homeowners and businesses flocked to Atlanta due to its growing economy and proximity to the Atlanta University Center, the area where Atlanta's first Black middle-class neighborhoods were founded. However, they note that the growing representation among Black people in the middle class also mapped onto a decline in the percentage of white residents as 80% of units built in Atlanta between 1990 and 2000 were single family homes built mostly in northern Atlanta suburbs of Gwinnett, Cobb, and Fulton counties. Thus, Atlanta took on a central-city residential segregation pattern that included suburban enclaves for the Black middle class.

These findings therefore corroborate previous scholarship that identified how Black middle-class neighborhoods in the twentieth century did not escape proximity to venues where women performed sex work (Blair 2010, Harris 2016a, Mumford 1997). Furthermore, I argue that even in twenty-first century, strip clubs in Atlanta map onto the landscape shaped by the historical and contemporary Black middle class. For example, while no strip clubs stood in proximity to Georgia State University, Magic City located at 241 Forsyth Street Southwest is about a five-minute drive from the Atlanta University Center, a consortium of historically Black colleges founded in the nineteenth century. Peaches of Atlanta, a club not tagged by dancers in my study, is also about a five-minute drive from this collection of colleges to its location at 779 Ralph David Abernathy Boulevard. Images taken at this location tagged at this location on Instagram and the Instagram account associated with the

club (@peaches\_of\_atlanta) suggest this venue also hires Black women exotic dancers and serves a predominately Black clientele.

Table 3.2 shows the total population, percentage of the total population that is Black, and the median household income of each zip code the strip clubs where Black women exotic dancers based in Atlanta tagged images of themselves are located in. All 17 clubs except those located in 30030, 30324, and 30345 were in areas that had lower median household income than the surrounding county. The zip codes where the strip clubs located in 30030, 30324, and 30345 not only have a lower percentage of Black residents but also have a higher median household income than the surrounding counties. The location of the Cheetah Lounge is the only exception to this overall pattern due to its proximity to an area with a lower percentage of Black people but slightly lower than average median household income than the rest of Fulton County. However only 2 out of the 29 dancers based in Atlanta had tagged an image of themselves at that location.

*Table 3.2 Racial and Economic Demographics of the Strip Clubs Where Black Women Exotic Dancers Based in Atlanta Perform at the Zip Code Level*

Zip Code	Name of Clubs	N	%	\$
30318	Blue Flame Lounge Dream Gentleman's Club Atl Stiletto Gentlemen's Club V Live Atlanta	49,788	53.1	44,586
30336	Club Babes Club Wax	393	83.5	-
30288	Club Blaze	9,467	75.7	51,639
30324	Club Platinum Atlanta Onyx Atlanta Tease Atlanta	26,521	16.2	66,748
30349	Eye Candy Gentlemen's Club	73,310	91.8	46,998
30345	Follies Strip Club	25,831	22.5	71,914
30315	Goldrush Showbar Atlanta	34,973	81.1	27,525
30303	Magic City ATL	49,788	53.1	44,586
30030	Pin Ups	28,170	22.7	77,789
30021	Strokers	23,978	50	32,349
30308	The Cheetah Lounge	17,559	32	59,945

Source: 2017 American Community Survey. N = Total population for that zip code. % = Percentage of total population that is Black. \$ = Median household income (data not available for zip code 30336).

Maps 3.1 – 3.3 and Table 3.2 depict that few of these clubs are near Atlanta’s predominately white neighborhoods. However, the identification of clubs located in areas that appear predominately white or higher income using zip code data do not provide a full portrait of the racial and economic demographics where these clubs are located. Follies located south of Brookhaven stands along the Buford Corridor, home to a community comprised of a large concentration of Latinx, Asian and other immigrants (Bohon, Stamps and Atilas 2008) (Bohon, Stamps and Atilas 2008; Walcott 2002). Tease Atlanta in zip code 30324 closed sometime around 2017. Pin

Ups in Decatur, Georgia located on East Ponce de Leon Avenue and Club Platinum on Piedmont Road and Onyx Atlanta on Cheshire Bridge Road are in blocks with a higher percentage of Black residents and lower median household income than the surrounding area according to the Justice Map.

McKittrick (2007) argues “prevailing spatial organization gives a coherency and rationality to uneven geographic processes and arrangements” and uses the example of a city plan to describe how it “can (and often does) reiterate social class distinctions, race and gender segregation, and (in)accessibility to and from specific districts” resulting in a built environment that “privileges, and therefore mirrors, white, heterosexual, capitalist, and patriarchal geopolitical need” (p. 6). For the city of Atlanta, this need started out as an effort to keep Black and White residential areas separate in the decades after the Civil War. Historian LeeAnn B. Lands describes the formation of these neighborhoods in a 2016 *Journal of Planning History* article titled “A Reprehensible and Unfriendly Act: Homeowners, Renters, and the Bid for Residential Segregation in Atlanta, 1900-1917.”

According to Lands, real estate developers interested in rebuilding Atlanta after the Civil War designed neighborhoods like Inman Park, Druid Hills, and Ansley Park as “exclusive, all white, and monoclass” (p. 103) suburbs to the northeast of the predominately Black areas that had converged near the city’s center in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. These neighborhoods emerged in part in response to reduce racial heterogeneity in neighborhoods throughout the city through racial zoning, segregation ordinances Atlanta adopted as part of its comprehensive city plan in 1922, according to Lands. Before then, the Georgia

Supreme Court had ruled a 1913 ordinance unconstitutional in 1915. Despite the U.S. Supreme Court ruling all racial zoning illegal in the 1917 *Buchanan v. Warley* case, city governments and real estate developers in Georgia and across the United States continued to rely on the comprehensive plans written with racial zoning in mind, sometimes changing only the language used to describe these regions, well into the twentieth century (Bayor 1996, Freund 2010, Gotham 2000, Lands 2016, Rothstein 2018, Silver 1997, Ueland and Warf 2010).

While Fulton and Dekalb counties have a large Black population today, each contain several predominately white neighborhoods in the entire region north of State Rte 401 and I-85 in Fulton County as well as north of State Route 403 in Dekalb County. Many of these neighborhoods like Druid Hills and Inman Park include those founded through racial zoning. One of these areas also includes Buckhead, the contemporary entertainment and business district that had been a predominately white suburb north of Atlanta until then Mayor William B. Hartsfield incorporated it into the city limits in 1952 to increase the population of white residents (Bayor 1996, Haley 2016, Hess 2009, Holloway and McNulty 2013, Sarig 2007). Despite the wide range of bars and nightclubs located in the northeast part of Buckhead today, a strip club where Black women exotic dancers perform is not one of them. Instead, the strip clubs nearby to the east of Buckhead, Onyx and Club Platinum, are separated from the district by I-85.

Indeed, most strip clubs in Atlanta that Black women exotic dancers perform at are in areas bounded by the highway systems that run through the metropolitan area. Though previous studies on Black women exotic dancers or the history of Black

women in sex work does not offer an explanation as to why the interstate highway state system shapes the landscape of the strip club industry in Atlanta in the twenty-first century, other scholarship offers some insights. Harvey K. Newman, a professor of Public Administration and Urban Studies, argues the development of the interstate highway system, the airport, and the opening of a convention facility called the Georgia World Congress Center propelled growth in the tourism industry of suburban Atlanta in a 2002 *Urban Affairs Review* article titled “Decentralization of Atlanta’s Convention Business.” According to Newman, in 1989 the Georgia Supreme Court overturned a law the state general assembly had passed against the sale of alcohol in strip clubs a year earlier. This prompted the proliferation of strip clubs throughout the metropolitan during the 1990s, many of which were in proximity to convention centers:

By 1995, there were more than 50 clubs operating throughout the metropolitan area with at least five near the Georgia International Convention Center in College Park, three located near the Cobb County convention facilities, three in DeKalb County, and two in Gwinnett County. All of the metropolitan area’s nude dance clubs faced additional competition from spas and massage parlors that operated as thinly disguised prostitution shops. Some of the dance clubs responded to this competition by offering new services such as interactive entertainment in private rooms (p. 243 – 244).

The proximity of strip clubs to convention facilities explains where some of the Black women exotic dancers perform today. For example, Magic City is a five-minute drive south of the Georgia World Congress Center, located in downtown

Atlanta. The club is also about a 15-minute drive north of the Georgia International Convention Center, located to the west of the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport in College Park, Georgia, which is also a predominately Black suburb in Fulton County. Black women exotic dancers in this study also performed at Goldrush Showbar a seven-minute drive northeast of the airport, Club Blaze a 13-minute drive east of the airport, and Eye Candy Gentlemen's Club about a 17-minute drive southwest of the airport.

While Newman's argument explains where some of these dancers perform, it does not address why nearly all these strip clubs are in proximity to the interstate. Geographer Andrew Ryder argues contemporary cities have shifted away from concentrating adult entertainment districts into one region of the city in a 2004 *Urban Studies* article titled "The Changing Nature of Adult Entertainment Districts: Between a Rock and a Hard Place or Going from Strength to Strength?" According to Ryder, a suburbanization of adult entertainment has broadened the boundaries of adult entertainment due to several factors including the increase in motor vehicle ownership and normalization of sex as recreation. However, Ryder argues that an increase in suburbanization does not equate to marginalization, a point with which I disagree. Historian Ronald H. Bayor argues Atlanta used several tactics to segregate Black neighborhoods from predominately white areas including roads and highways in his 1996 book *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*:

Through zoning, urban renewal and relocation, the building and placement of public housing, annexation efforts, racial agreements on which land would be used for housing, and the use of highways and roads as dividing tools, white

city leaders planned to guide and segregate the black population and maintain a majority white city (p. 54).

All the strip clubs in Atlanta located in suburbs also stand in or near small shopping plazas with other venues, usually fast food restaurants or other small stores. Those near the city core tended to stand in or near industrial parks. Both Brooks (2010b) and Trautner (2005) describe strip clubs located in such areas, away from the mainstream entertainment districts of the cities they studied, that hire Black and Latina dancers and cater to a non-White clientele as low class or ghetto. Given the results of these earlier studies and the history of racial segregation in Atlanta, I argue the pattern of strip clubs where Black women exotic dancers perform at alongside interstate highways and major roadways reveals the ways the use of transportation infrastructure as a tool to divide racial groups in the metropolitan area continues today. Therefore, I argue that in addition to the collapse of the Decatur Street arts and entertainment district, the demonic grounds of the strip club industry in Atlanta reveals the persistence of racial zoning as an organizing framework for this southern city.

*Where Black Women Exotic Dancers based in Memphis Perform in Local Venues*

Hubbard et al. (2008) writes that the state uses the law “to limit sexually suggestive performances to specific urban spaces which are evidentially not part of the public realm” (p. 366) through a politics of concealment. By the late twentieth century the politics of concealment against sex-related businesses involved the use of zoning ordinances that prohibited their proximity to other adult businesses or family-oriented areas. However changes in the ways sex-related businesses operate and the types of

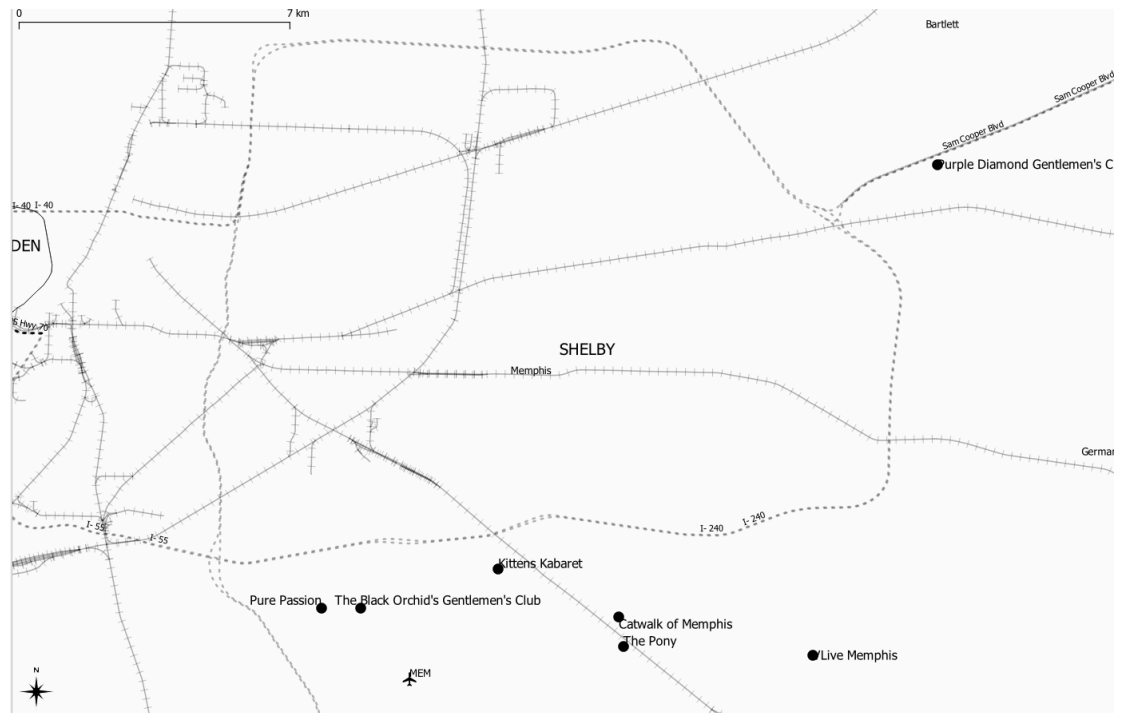
services they offer has resulting in “the ‘mainstreaming’ of many elements of the sex industry” as an increase in affluent male consumers and more liberal attitudes towards sex contributes “to the representation of sex-related businesses as recreational settings” (p. 369). Nevertheless, the mainstreaming of sexual commerce means that governments award licensing only to certain venues that attract business clientele, resulting in “contemporary urban landscapes of commercial sex [that] are thus increasingly corporatized” (p. 372) as city officials rely on zoning to separate sex-related businesses from areas of the city where affluent residents visit. As McKittrick (2007) states the “prevailing geographic rules have a stake in the ghettoization of difference and/or the systemic concealment of physical locations that map this difference” (p. 9). Therefore, I argue that the landscape of strip clubs in Memphis where Black women exotic dancers perform indicates how the city’s transportation infrastructure functions as a tool to conceal these venues and keep them distant from other districts in the metropolitan area.

Table 3.3 shows the locations of the strip clubs where Black women exotic dancers based in Memphis performed. 15 of the 67 dancers in this analysis were based in Memphis. 8 out 15 dancers had performed at Kitten’s Kabaret. Five performed at Pure Passion and five also performed at VLive Memphis. Four performed at Catwalk of Memphis, two at Purple Diamond Gentleman’s Club, two at the Black Orchid’s Gentlemen’s Club and one at the Pony.

*Table 3.3 Local Strip Clubs Where Black Women Exotic Dancers Based in Atlanta Performed (N = 7)*

Clubs	N	%
Kittens Kabaret	8	53
Pure Passion	5	33
VLive Memphis	5	33
Catwalk of Memphis	4	27
Purple Diamond	2	13
The Black Orchid's	2	13
The Pony	1	7

Though I argued previously that the number of dancers based in strip clubs in Atlanta did not indicate the relevance of the club, I do not make the same argument for the seven clubs based in Memphis. I found that my strategy to identify potential cases of Black women exotic dancers to follow did not work as easily with Atlanta and D.C. While Black women in Atlanta and the D.C. metropolitan area performed at 17 different clubs in their cities, Black women in Memphis performed in seven clubs in their city. Moreover, as I show in Map 3.4, most of these strip clubs were in the same general location. All clubs but one located along Sam Cooper Blvd located in East Shelby County were located south of I-240 and north of the Memphis International Airport. Pure Passion and The Black Orchid's Gentlemen's Club were both located on East Brooks Road, a long strip of road that includes several commercial businesses like auto shops and fast food restaurants.



Map 3.4 Local Venues Where Black Women Based in Memphis Perform

V Live Memphis was situated among a similar array of businesses on South Mendenhall Road southeast of I-240 before it closed. The Pony is located along Winchester Road, which intersects with South Mendenhall Road, slightly isolated on a corner north of the other businesses in the area that make a large industrial park. The Catwalk of Memphis is located northwest of the Pony between several auto shops and a paint store. Finally, Kitten’s Kabaret, which is permanently closed, was once northwest of the Pony and Catwalk of Memphis on Lambs Place, surrounded by several buildings that housed operations by FedEx.

One reason why I suspect more dancers performed at certain clubs in Memphis corresponds to prior research about racial diversity among performers at strip clubs. In *Unequal Desires* Brooks (2010b) writes racism and classism serve a structural and symbolic function in shaping the exotic dance industry as clubs use

marketing techniques that “overproduces images of White and mixed-race people as sexually desirable” (p. 100) to socially construct a desired male clientele. Only one dancer tagged an image of themselves at the strip club the Pony, which brands itself as “America’s Strip Joint.” This woman identified as mixed-race on her Instagram profile and appeared to have light skin and appeared to wear her hair both straightened and curly. Images on the club’s Instagram, last operated in 2016 featured 34 posts of videos, flyers, and professional photos of white women dancers.

While the strip club does not appear to have an active dedicated Instagram account, images tagged at the location on Instagram include those posted by women and staff who work there. Many of these images also include official marketing materials like flyers. For example, some of these images included flyers advertising the 2019 Exotic Dance Invationals, an annual competition for which The Pony would serve as the site of the East Competition of the invitational during June 5 – 7, 2019. The flyer reveals two Black women as competitors in the Showgirls Division as well as an image of another Black woman who had one the competition in 2017, though she appeared in the background with her face filtered through red tint and all of her body blocked by text and images of white contestants. All women pictured regardless of race have their hair straightened. Based on these findings and prior research, I contend that only one dancer in this dataset performed at the Pony because she possessed at least some of the characteristics that would make her marketable in an environment that clearly perpetuates white women as a standard of beauty. In the next section I show this exception helps highlight the construction of the landscape of

the strip club industry in Memphis as a racialized spatial process that displaces Black women into certain environments and excludes them from others.

#### The Racial Demographics and Income Distribution of Areas Surrounding the Strip Clubs in Memphis

I exclude a map of the racial or income demographics of Shelby County (N = 937,847; %58.7; \$48,415) because dancers did not travel to strip clubs beyond the immediate Memphis metropolitan area (N = 654,723; % 63.9; \$38,230). Table 3.4 provides the racial and income demographic of the locations of each strip club by zip code. Pure Passion is in an area where over 90% of the residents are Black, but the median household income is higher than the rest of the Memphis metropolitan area. However, checking this data against the Justice Map at the block level shows that the blocks where Pure Passion stands has a median household income of less than \$30,000.

Table 3.4 Racial and Economic Demographics of Areas Surrounding Local Strip Clubs in Memphis

Zip Code	Clubs	N	%	\$
38115	VLive Memphis	41,417	82.7	31,183
38116	Pure Passion The Black Orchid's Gentlemen's Club	40,446	94.2	40,433
38118	Catwalk of Memphis Kittens Kabaret The Pony	38,973	76	32,809
38134	Purple Diamond Gentlemen's Club	44,098	48.8	46,720

Source: 2017 ACS

The rest of the clubs in Memphis are in areas with a higher percentage of Black residents and a lower median household income than the surrounding metropolitan area. Purple Diamond Gentleman’s Club appears to be an outlier because the zip code has a higher median income than the areas where other strip clubs are located and is the only area where less than 50% of the population is Black. Unlike other strip clubs in Memphis, Purple Diamond is in a small area with other entertainment venues like sit-down restaurants and a night club. However, only two dancers in the study tagged images of themselves at this location, one of whom who appeared to be light skin with straightened hair extensions and a brown skin woman who wears in a variety of ways including her natural afro hair texture, straightened hair extensions, or braids. Browsing the Instagram page for this strip club (@purple\_diamond\_memphis) reveals a profile page like the one managed by Pony.

Most of the videos and flyers feature white women, though some of the women also appear to be light skin Latinas, though their representation leaves a lot to be desired. For example, one flyer posted in 2016 featured a Latina woman draped over a counter next to two plates of tacos. The text on the flyer reads “Taco Tuesdays 2 for \$6 Anyway you Like” in all caps around the woman’s head. All other women featured in flyers for events like Thanksgiving, the Super Bowl, and Christmas Eve appeared to be white. Therefore, while I argue Purple Diamond appears to be a more diverse space than the Pony, its marketing materials and location in a mainstream entertainment district suggest it largely hires white women exotic dancers to attract white men consumers. Preference for white women dancers in Purple Diamond located in the mainstream entertainment area of the city supports prior research that strip club venues located in these districts tend to cater to white men or affluent clientele in the private business sector (Bernstein 2007, Brents and Sanders 2010, Brooks 2010b, Hubbard et al. 2008, Ryder 2004). Therefore, Black women exotic dancers are an exception to the rule in this space rather than the norm.

As I argued regarding some of the strip clubs near the airport in Atlanta, proximity to the Memphis International Airport offers one explanation as to why most of the strip clubs that Black women exotic dancers tend to be in the same region of the city. If a person were to drive from the airport looking for a strip club, it would take them seven minutes to reach Catwalk of Memphis and the Pony to its east and 13 minutes to get to V Live Memphis. A drive west of the airport would lead to the Black Orchid’s Gentlemen’s Club or Pure Passion in about seven minutes. Though not tagged by dancers in this study, two clubs in the area were also nearby these strip

clubs before they permanently closed. Finally, Candyland is another club the dancers in my study did not tag and image of themselves at, however the club is about a nine-minute drive north of the airport, although images tagged at the location on Instagram do reveal that Black women exotic dancers perform there.

While some passenger flights do depart out of and arrive to this airport, it also serves as the major hub for the cargo airline FedEx Express. FedEx, alongside the automotive parts retailer AutoZone and the private research hospital St. Jude's, is one of the largest employers in the predominately Black city, whose officials historically have supported the development in this business through its investment in the transportation and logistics infrastructure of the region (Gnuschke 2004, Rushing 2004, Smiley, Rushing and Scott 2014). Sociologist Wanda Rushing explains in a 2004 *City and Community* article how the city's transportation and logistics infrastructure serves an important function in the global economy.

For centuries, its elevation and narrow river crossing at this place attracted Native-American trade and transportation. These same natural advantages shaped European exploration, American western expansion, and antebellum trade in cotton and slaves. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the city's central location and transportation infrastructure played a major role in the movement of goods and people across the continental United States. Now, its location—equidistant between Monterrey, Mexico, and Toronto, Canada—is vital for the implementation of NAFTA and the growth of North American commerce (p. 68).

Nevertheless, as Bayor (1996) writes “In Memphis, Tennessee, "the interstates have . . . served as boundaries to the black community" on the north side” (p. 259). Christopher Silver, a dean of Design, Construction, and Planning, argues cities have longed used “zoning as a tool for social reform as well as land use control” as “a way not only to exclude incompatible uses from residential areas but also to slow the spread of slums into better neighborhoods” in a chapter titled “The Racial Origins of Zoning in American Cities” published in the 1997 book *Urban Planning and the African American Community: In the Shadows*. According to Silver, the early twentieth-century zoning movement had the objective of enforcing spatial boundaries between racial groups through racial zoning initiatives and comprehensive city planning. A zoning map provided on the Shelby County Tennessee government website indicates that the region where the Memphis International Airport is has been zoned as commercial and industrial since 1922 and shows this zoning remained unchanged in 2016. At the time of the 1922 city plan, Black residents of Memphis tended to live at lower elevations in areas of the city deemed cheaper and less desirable than the areas near the central business district (Brownell 1975). However, between 1940 and 1950 the percentage of Black homeowners in South Memphis decreased after the city introduced thousands of public housing units south of Poplar Avenue. North Memphis, where more affluent Black families tended to reside, had only 280 units of public housing by comparison. Therefore, Memphis city officials during the mid-twentieth-century ultimately relied on public housing, neighborhood planning, and slum clearance tactics to marginalize poor Black residents south of the

city's central business district, a process that helped keep these communities distinct from white middle-class residential areas (Lauterbach 2016, Silver and Moeser 1995).

While Memphis has the highest percentage of Black people of any metropolitan area in this study, the percentage of the population that is Black in the zip codes where these strip clubs are located exceeds the percentage of Black people living in Memphis, a similar pattern found around most of the strip clubs in Atlanta. However, one key difference is that strip clubs in Atlanta might be in areas that are predominately Black or lower-income at the block level, but not necessarily at zip code level, while all but one of the strip clubs Black women exotic dancers were in zip codes where the percentage of the population that is Black and median household income that exceeded that of Memphis and Shelby County. Therefore, the strip clubs where Black women exotic dancers tend to perform are also in the areas where poorer than average Black households reside. I argue the concentration of strip clubs in southern Memphis in these communities reflects the history of racial zoning in this city first implemented through the 1922 comprehensive city plan and then maintained through housing public projects implemented throughout the mid-twentieth century.

Based on previous research that argues Black women sex workers historically have worked in the leisure districts Black people founded during the twentieth century (Blair 2010, Harris 2016a, Mumford 1997), Beale Street just east of the Mississippi River about a fifteen-minute drive northwest of the airport today, should have had several strip clubs in the area. Indeed, only a block away from Beale Street on Gayoso Avenue was the red-light district where brothels were located during the early twentieth century before progressive reformers targeted them for closure (Davis

2018). Sociologist Zandria F. Robinson describes the role Beale Street played for Black culture during the early twentieth century in “Soul Legacies: Hip Hop and Historicity in Memphis” published in the first volume of the 2010 anthology *Hip Hop in America: A Regional Guide*.

Hailed as the “Main Street of Black America” and the Harlem of the South, Beale Street (see sidebar: Beale Street) served as a formalized space in which business, blues music, juke joints, dancing, gospel music, churchgoing, and liquor drinking combined to serve as the cultural basis for contemporary black performative and spiritual cultures in Memphis and other regions (p. 555).

A person visiting the Beale Street Entertainment District today would not find brothels, strip clubs, or any other venues that cater specifically to Black arts, entertainment, and culture. Instead Beale Street now markets itself as destination that offers museums, blues-themed clubs and restaurants, and a handful of public parks for tourists interested in learning about Memphis’s contribution to American blues music. I emphasize that this area is marketed as historically American rather than Black due to the ways the city has re-envisioned this area in the twenty-first century. I do so to argue that the exclusion of strip clubs from this space helps market the contemporary Beale Street as a family-friendly space that caters to a demographic other than those who founded it. For example, a visit to [Bealestreet.com](http://Bealestreet.com) homepage reveals an advertisement for the Kix on Beale concert series happening throughout the summer of 2019 in Handy Park. The flyer welcomes members of all ages but does not feature a single Black artist on any of the scheduled four dates. Therefore, just like Decatur Street in Atlanta, Beale Street no longer functions as a space for Black leisure and

entertainment because of the gentrification of these spaces, thus explaining its distance from the locations of the strip clubs where Black women exotic dancers perform in Memphis today.

Robinson (2010) argues Memphis has its own influence in the rise of southern rap in the early twenty-first century thanks to acts like Eightball and MJG, Project Pat, and the rap collective Three 6 Mafia. However, these early acts tended not to invoke the strip club or strippers in their lyrics, preferring instead to liken themselves to pimps and the women whose attention they commanded as hoes. For example, Three 6 Mafia invokes this imagery in the 2005 hit “Poppin’ My Collar” which features Project Pat. In their opening chorus Member DJ Paul chants “Now ever since I can remember I been poppin’ my collar,” a reference to a gesture made by Black men who portrayed pimps in Blaxploitation films known for flamboyant fashion. He goes on to repeat “poppin’ my collar” twice before declaring “now ever since I can remember I been workin’ these hoes/ And they better put my money in my hand (In my hand).” The song also contains a sample from the 1973 song “Theme of the Mack” written by Motown artist Willie Hutch for the original motion picture *The Mack*, a film that follows a character named Goldie as he attempts to become the biggest pimp in Oakland. Therefore, I suspect one reason why fewer strip clubs are in Memphis where Black women perform as compared to D.C. and Atlanta reflects a popular imagination that only recently started to encompass Black women as sex workers outside of prostitution.

Despite the small size of the Memphis strip club industry, these venues still function as spaces where Black people can congregate to enjoy or perform rap music.

For example, V Live Memphis made headlines in 2017 after Atlanta-based rapper visited the club and spent over \$20,000 at the location (Ayers 2017). However, this same strip club closed in 2018 after a court order declared the venue a public nuisance after a 15-month investigation that had started (Dries 2018). While Kitten's Kabaret closed due to a fire, the club also faced legal trouble due to the arrest of two managers Memphis police allege surveillance video shows on the scene when the fire started (Jones 2018). Scholarship on sex work indicates that city officials have long relied on nuisance ordinances to shut down prostitution since the Progressive Era. City officials have also historically used nuisance ordinances to police the places and spaces Black people congregated at for leisure during the early twentieth century (Freund 2010, Hubbard 2009, Laing and Cook 2014, Lucas 2013, McCarthy et al. 2012, Weitzer 2009). Therefore, like strip clubs in Atlanta, another issue facing Black women exotic dancers based in Memphis is the potential loss of a place of employment due to law enforcement.

Ultimately, I argue these findings show that the demonic grounds of the strip club industry in Memphis shows how cities marginalize Black women exotic dancers into venues located in industrial and commercial zones shaped by Jim Crow era racial zoning practices as it gentrifies the historical Black leisure district as a source of capital for the city's tourism industry. This marginalization leaves them subject to precarious employment due to the preference for white women in mainstream strip clubs closer to the center of the city and the regulation of these marginalized venues through zoning legislation such as nuisance ordinances.

*Where Black Women Exotic Dancers based in the D.M.V Perform in Local Venues*

In the *Demonic Grounds* McKittrick argues “racial-sexual domination is an ongoing spatial project” wherein the “ideological naturalization of black women is correlated to the production of space” (p. 121). McKittrick’s concept of demonic grounds shows how the processes that go into the social construction of Black women’s geographies result from spatial hierarchies that make social and economic differences between racial groups material and real. While McKittrick does address segregation as a type of geographic domination meant to materialize racial differences within the landscape, the historian does not explore this type of spatial domination specifically. Additionally, while McKittrick does insist that processes of geographic domination continue to shape Black women’s geographies of the contemporary landscape today, *Demonic Grounds* does not take up the case of the geography of the strip club industry for Black women exotic dancers in the twenty-first century.

While historians have shown the ways anti-vice reform and racial segregation marginalized Black women in prostitution during the twentieth century, no previous study took up the relationship between geography and Black women working in strip clubs in the urban South. So far, I have shown in the case of Memphis and Atlanta, Black women exotic dancers tend to perform in venues not located in mainstream entertainment districts and where districts once dedicated to Black entertainment and leisure no longer exist. Instead, strip clubs where Black women exotic dancers in the urban South perform exist in regions marginal to the city’s central business district either in Black suburban enclaves in the case of Atlanta and isolated industrial or commercial districts like in Memphis. Furthermore, the processes that shaped the

areas surrounding these environments date back to racial zoning, the process that shaped regions of racial difference in these cities during the Jim Crow. In this section, I suggest the pattern of clubs as relatively concentrated near the beltway or the D.C. boundary maps onto the movement of Black people toward northeast D.C. and Prince George’s County, Maryland.

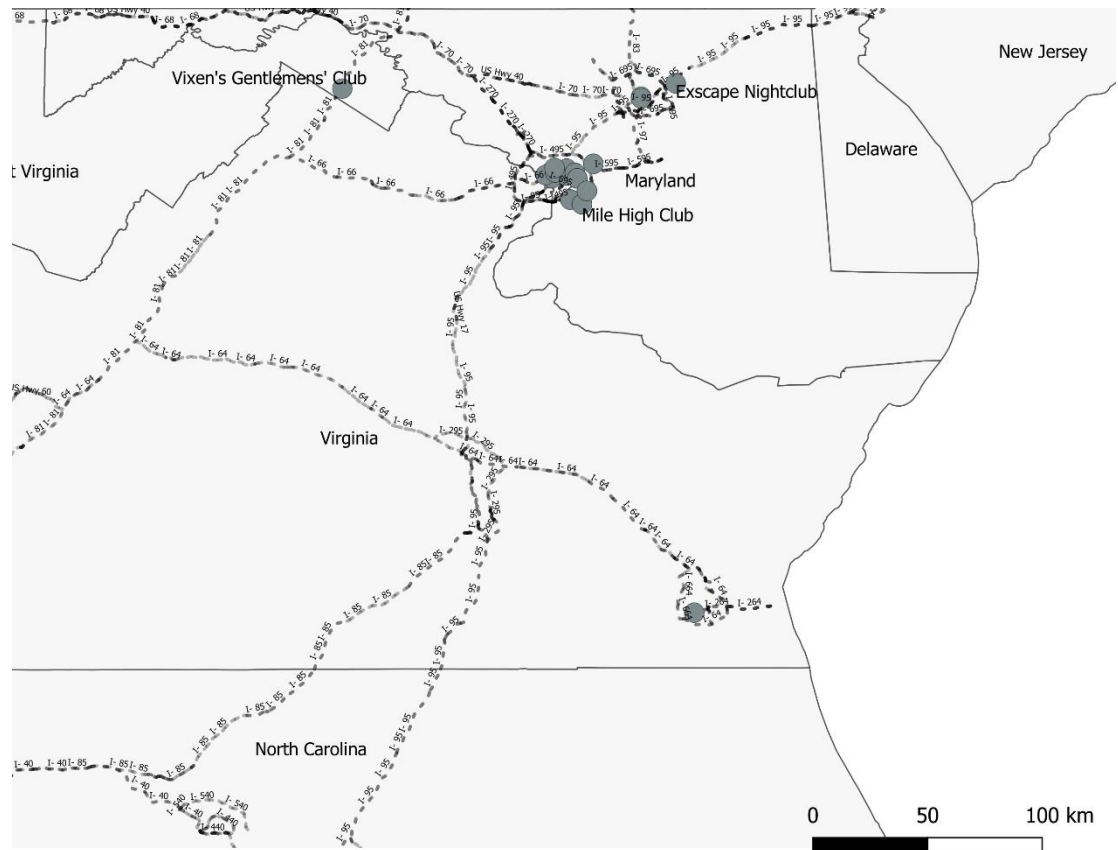
Table 3.5 shows the strip clubs Black women exotic dancers based in the D.C. metropolitan area. The 23 dancers based in this region performed at 18 local clubs: 11 in Maryland (Bazz & Crue, Club Fuego, Ebony Inn Restaurant, Excape Nightclub, Mile High Club, Mustangs, Norma Jeans, Scores Baltimore, Sinsaysionals, Two O’Clock Club and X4B Luxury Hall); Five in D.C. (Good Guys Club, Macombo Lounge, Mpire Club, Stadium Club, The Camelot Showbar and The House); and one in Virginia (Pure Diamonds).

*Table 3.5 Local Strip Clubs Where Black Women Exotic Dancers Based in the D.M.V. Performed (N = 18)*

Clubs	N	%
Stadium Club	9	39
Mile High Club	5	22
The House	4	17
Club Fuego	4	17
Ebony Inn Restaurant	4	17
Bazz & Crue	3	13
X4B Luxury Hall	3	13
Macombo Lounge	2	9
Norma Jeans	2	9
Sinsaysionals	2	9
Excape Nightclub	1	4
Good Guys Club	1	4
Mpire Club	1	4
Mustangs	1	4
Pure Diamonds	1	4
Scores Baltimore	1	4
The Camelot Showbar	1	4

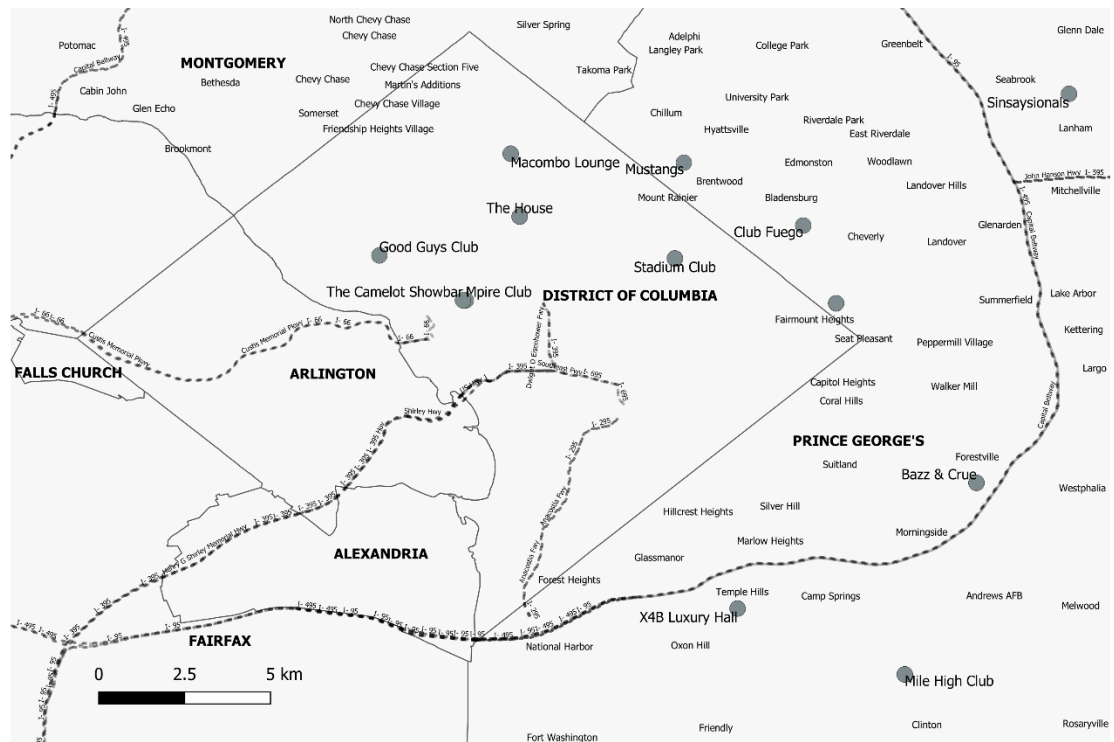
Map 3.5 show where Black women exotic dancers performed within the

region of D.C., Maryland Virginia. The D.C. metropolitan area has several strip clubs where Black women exotic dancers perform at like Atlanta, but for different reasons. While dancers in Atlanta performed only in suburbs immediately around the city, Black women exotic dancers tended to perform in suburbs of D.C. suburbs based in Prince George's County, Maryland and occasionally traveled to clubs based in Baltimore or Virginia. I speculate this pattern reflects the social and organizational structure of the D.C., Maryland, Virginia region as a tri-state area. Nevertheless, five dancers had performed in four different clubs in Baltimore as compared to one dancer who performed at Pure Diamonds Gentlemen's Club in Portsmouth, Virginia.



Map 3.5 Locations Where Black Women Exotic Dancers Perform in the D.M.V.

Map 3.6 focuses on the D.C. metropolitan area alone. The Capital Beltway (I-495) that surrounds the D.C. metropolitan area and Potomac River Basin serve as the primary physical borders around these locations. The Capital Beltway opened officially in 1964 after the passage of the Federal Highway Act of 1956. The interstate highway system contains two directions for travel – clockwise in the Inner Loop and counterclockwise in the Outer Loop (Korr 2008). 7 of 11 clubs based in Maryland are outside the District of Columbia boundaries in Prince George’s County and four of these seven clubs are located within the beltway. Five clubs are based inside the D.C. city limits and include Good Guys Club, the Camelot Showbar, Mpire Club, the House and Stadium.



Map 3.6 Locations Where Black Women Exotic Dancers Based in the D.C. Metropolitan Area Perform

I argue the shift of the venues where Black people can find leisure towards Prince George’s County represents the advance of gentrification within the beltway as

exemplified by the growth of D.C.'s mainstream entertainment district DuPont Circle. I elaborate on this further with a discussion of the racial demographics and median household income distribution of the regions surrounding these strip clubs.

The Racial Demographics and Income Distribution of Areas Surrounding the Strip Clubs in the D.M.V.

Map 3.7 shows the racial demographic breakdown of the D.C. metropolitan area by county. 15 out of 24 dancers had performed at clubs based in the District of Columbia (N = 672,391; 47.8%; \$77,649). The House is in area where one in four residents are Black and 4 out of 24 dancers had performed there. Nine dancers had performed at Stadium, five had performed at the Mile High Club and two dancers had performed at Macombo Lounge. All three clubs are in areas that have a higher percentage of Black residents than the rest of the District of Columbia. Good Guys Club, Mpire Club, and the Camelot Showbar are all in regions of D.C. that are less

than 5% Black. Only 2 of the 24 dancers had performed at these clubs.



Map 3.7 Racial demographics of counties surrounding locations where D.M.V.-based dancers perform

Map 3.8 provides a visualization of median household income at the county level. The Good Guys Club, where the median household income is the highest in this dataset, is in the proximity of the U.S. National Observatory and the District of Columbia’s Embassy Row. The House is just north of Howard University in an area filled with other entertainment venues like restaurants and bars. The Camelot Showbar and Mpire Club are both located in DuPont Circle, the District of Columbia’s entertainment district filled with restaurants, bars, and nightclubs.



*Map 3.8 Median household income of counties surrounding locations where D.M.V.-based dancers perform.*

The physical environments of Macombo Lounge, which is permanently closed, and Stadium tell a different story about adult entertainment in the district. Macombo Lounge once stood between tire shops and a liquor store on a relatively deserted strip of Georgia Avenue Northwest. While Stadium is in an area with more development just north of the U.S. National Arboretum, these surrounding businesses were like those that surround Macombo Lounge. Indeed, as Table 3.6 shows, a thorough understanding of the racial and income demographics of the district require a closer analysis.

Table 3.6 Racial and Economic Demographic characteristics of Local Strip Clubs in the D.M.V.

Zip Code	Name of Club	N	%	\$
20007	Good Guys Club	27,142	4.2	123,154
20010	The House	33,654	25.3	81,106
20011	Macombo Lounge	67,257	60.8	65,327
20018	Stadium Club	20,146	79.7	63,764
20036	Mpire Club	5,836	4.1	80,977
The Camelot Showbar				
20706	Sinsaysionals	40,168	68.4	74,700
20735	Mile High Club	38,445	84.9	104,925
20743	Ebony Inn Restaurant	40,025	87.9	60,942
20747	Bazz & Crue	38,503	89.7	60,583
20748	X4B Luxury Hall	38,521	86.1	66,421
20781	Club Fuego	11,378	29.4	74,241
20782	Mustangs	32,674	39.2	65,622
21202	Norma Jeans	21,788	59.8	44,656
Scores Baltimore				
Two O' Clock Club				
21220	Excaped Nightclub	40,444	22.1	64,139
23701	Pure Diamonds	23,731	51.9	49,514

Source: 2017 American Community Survey

According to Brooks (2010b) strip clubs that cater to white clientele tend to “reinforce the value of whiteness in the form of light skin and women who have physical features resembling European ancestry” (p. 77) by using images of light-skin or mixed-race Black women in their marketing materials. This bias prompts some Black women to adopt strategies to manage racial bias such as racial passing by playing up their European ancestry when clients inquire about their ancestry or additional emotional labor to confront controlling images of Black women as

hypersexual or gold diggers (Brooks 2010a). Therefore, I speculate why I saw so few Black women exotic dancers at these two clubs relates to the ways they market to a predominately white clientele.

The same dancer, a light-skin Black woman who also identifies as mixed-race on her Instagram page, performed at the Camelot Showbar also performed at Good Guys Club. The Camelot Showbar located in Dupont Circle markets itself on its website [camelotshowbar.com](http://camelotshowbar.com) as a venue “on M Street, Northwest in prestigious mid-town, Washington D.C.” that provides “an entertaining, comfortable and secure environment featuring the city’s most beautiful exotic dancers, waitresses, and bartenders” in what they describe as “a classy, conservative atmosphere.”<sup>10</sup> Its Instagram page looks similar to the Pony’s in Memphis in that it features mostly white woman, though I found one video of a brown-skinned Black woman dancer who wore her hair straightened and blonde and a photo of the dancer I had followed. Notably, the club refers to its performers as showgirls rather than dancers, a strategy that I imagine helps bolster its marketing as a more conservative space than similar environments. Looking up images of the club tagged at the location on Instagram reveals a racially diverse clientele including Black men and women. However, a light-skin woman of Asian descent was the only other dancer of color I saw images of as I scrolled through them.

The Good Guys Club is located on Wisconsin Avenue just across the street from the United States National Observatory and a 12-minute drive northwest of the

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<sup>10</sup> 2019c, "About Camelot Showbar": Lutz Creative Group, LLC. Retrieved June 10, 2019 (<https://camelotshowbar.com/about-us/>).

Camelot Showbar. On the biography section of its Instagram page, the club markets itself as “a good time with some bad girls” and “the top club in the Washington, D.C. area.” The page features all-white women except for a light-skin dancer of Asian descent. Additionally, when I searched images tagged at the club on Instagram’s location feature, I only found the image of the light-skin Black woman dancer. Given the page also features an image of Asian men as clientele posing just outside its bar, I suspect hiring an Asian dancer is an effort to cater to have their dancers reflect their clientele. The gallery section of [goodguysclub.com](http://goodguysclub.com), the club’s website, features only images of white women.

While Brooks addresses playing up trace European ancestry as a type of racial passing, she does not elaborate on whether dyeing their hair blonde or wearing it straight is another strategy they use. However, the brown-skinned woman I identified as a dancer at the Camelot Showbar appears to use this strategy as did a dark-skinned woman who performed at the Mpire Club located on M. Street Northwest on the same block as the Camelot Showbar. Mpire Club does similar marketing to the other two clubs in that it features on its Instagram page images of white women dancers. The website for Mpire Club describes it as “DC’s premiere high-end gentleman’s club” that has real estate in the “the coveted Golden Triangle Business District between Georgetown and Dupont Circle.” The description on the homepage signals the type of clientele they seek stating that the venue offers relaxation after a long day or a space to host a business lunch for “distinguished clientele” seeking “discrete service and unrivaled exotic entertainment.”<sup>11</sup> Strip clubs like Mpire Club, Camelot Showbar, and

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<sup>11</sup> 2019b, “Homepage”: The Mpire Club. Retrieved June 10, 2019 (<http://mpireclub.com/>).

Good Guys Club all fit the profile of what other scholars have described as the mainstreaming of the adult entertainment industry (Bernstein 2007, Hubbard et al. 2008, Hubbard 2009, Ryder 2004). They are situated in proximity to the wealthy, predominately white business district of the District of Columbia, a city currently undergoing racial and income demographic transformation through gentrification (Green et al. 2017, Lindsey 2017, Paris 2001).

The House differs from Macombo Lounge and Stadium Club in that the area surrounding it has fewer Black residents and a higher median household income than the broader District of Columbia. While images tagged on Instagram show that the House strip club is a space wherein mostly Black women exotic dancers perform, on the very same block is a yoga studio that, like the management of the House, operates a business Instagram page. A quick study of this social media page shows a different type of imagery regarding women and body work. Images fill the page of mostly white women giving a smile while wearing athleisure wear and doing a variety of yoga poses. In contrast, the Instagram page for the House includes many videos of light-skin and brown-skin Black women exotic dancers performing at the club. The page features some photos of dark-skin Black women exotic dancers, though these images appear to be from professional modeling shoots rather than the club. One reason why I speculate this page features Black women exotic dancers is due to the man who manages the page, a light-skin Black man who often inserts himself in the videos he records of the dancers. Brooks (2010b) describes a similar preference for light-skin Black and Latina women in her analysis of strip club pages managed by a predominately non-White staff. Even venues managed by people of color enact this

bias because such biases result from individual tastes that the role of management empowers these people to enact as a systemic process by using these tastes to guide the choice of who they represent as working at the club in their marketing materials. Indeed, none of the four women who had tagged an image of themselves at this location appeared to be brown skin.

The Macombo Lounge twenty minutes to the northwest of Stadium appeared to have attracted dancers from across the district before it closed according to the images tagged at the location on Instagram. For example, in February 2017 the venue hosted a ‘Battle of the Beltway’ event that featured seven different dancers. All but six appeared to be Black woman. The now empty building stands on a street corner in the 5300 block of Georgia Avenue Northwest alongside rowhouses in an area that features several other shops and fast food restaurants along the main street.

Stadium Club opened on Queens Chapel Road after its owners purchased the nude dance license of Nexus Gold, located in D.C. at First and I Streets Southeast before it closed down to make room for a land development project that included the stadium where D.C.’s baseball team the Nationals play (Hedgpeth 2010). On its website Stadium describes itself as “a progressive nightlife institution” that “redefines nightlife in combining leading DJs, state of the art sound & lighting, and the most talented exotic entertainment in the industry.” To date it is the only D.C.-based club with a national reputation among consumers of rap music due to its inclusion in rap music lyrics. For example, D.C. native Wale rapped “Bounce, bounce, bounce, fool, I ain't gotta say too much/ It's fan participation keeping rainy in the Stadium” in his 2013 song titled “Clappers,” which is a regional AAVE term for dancers who perform

twerking in spaces such as strip club. The club capitalizes off its recent notoriety through events that feature popular rappers from across the United States. I therefore imagine dancers seek to work there more so than other clubs in the region. Its Instagram profile features a variety of Black women exotic dancers of different skin tones, though most appear to be very curvaceous in shape. The page also features images of current popular rappers like Megan thee Stallion, Lil Durk, and Pardison Fontaine enjoying the venue, surrounded by exotic dancers.

Half of the 24 dancers based in this area performed at 12 clubs in Maryland in predominately Black neighborhoods, except Excape Nightclub in Baltimore County (N = 828,637; %27.4; \$71,810) where one dancer performed. Of the remaining ten clubs, seven were in Prince George's County (N = 905,161; 63.2%; \$78,607) and the other four were in Baltimore City (N = 619,796; 62.8%; \$46,641). One reason why I think Black women exotic dancers performed in more strip clubs in Prince George's County than they did in D.C. is due to the formation of Black suburban enclaves in the county along its D.C. border. In the 2007 book, *Blue-Chip Black* sociologist Karyn R. Lacy describes findings from an ethnography of the Black middle-class communities of Prince George's County, Maryland and Fairfax, Virginia. Lacy argues several factors helped shape the formation of Black middle-class communities in Prince George's County including school desegregation, the diversification of law enforcement staff, and tax breaks for housing construction. Per Lacy, Black people started to form neighborhoods in northeast Washington during the 1940s and 1950s. Black middle-class neighborhoods started moving deeper into Prince George's County as white middle class residents moved further into the county, away from the

beltway leading to a predominately Black population by 1990. However, a closer examination of the location of these strip clubs shows that the pattern of racial demographics and median household income varies within the county.

Club Fuego and Mustangs are both located in Hyattsville, Maryland (N=18,225; 30.4%; \$73,627) an area of that has fewer Black residents and a higher median household income than the rest of the county. However, the Justice Map shows that the block the strip club is located on, across from the University of Maryland's Prince George's Hospital County and the county's health department on Baltimore-Washington Parkway, has an 84.4% Black population at the block level and is in a census tract where the income is only a few hundred dollars shy of the county's median household income. Mustangs in West Hyattsville on Chillum Road a thirteen-minute drive northwest of Hyattsville is in a census tract with a lower median household income than the county and a block where 80% of the population is Black according to the Justice Map. Mustangs is in a venue located next to an automotive service shop across the street from a shopping plaza that also includes a U-Haul storage service center. Club Fuego is also next door to a storage center for CubeSmart on Jackson Street. It is also between a bakery and a pastry shop on the same block as an Impact Parts automotive store.

When I looked at the images associated with the clubs on Instagram on the profile pages and Places tab, I found that Club Fuego used images of light-skin Latina and Black women on its flyers. This makes sense given that 39.7% of the population of the city includes Hispanics or Latinos, the largest non-white population in the area. Mustangs did not have such pictures but the exotic dancers who tagged images of

themselves at that location were Black women. Therefore, these strip clubs are more like Follies in Atlanta, Georgia located in the predominately Latinx Buford Corridor. Additionally, these clubs are not situated in a mainstream arts district like those found in DuPont Circle. Furthermore, their locations show that proximity to areas with a higher median household income and lower Black population do not always map onto mainstream entertainment districts like DuPont Circle. Instead, they are on blocks that differ from the surrounding zip codes due to the higher concentration of Black residents and lower median household income.

The Ebony Inn Restaurant in Fairmount Heights and Bazz & Crue in Forestville are the only other two clubs located inside the Capital Beltway in Prince George's County. These clubs are in zip codes that have a higher percentage of Black population than the county, but also a higher median household income. In this way, these clubs are like those located in Atlanta, Georgia. The Ebony Inn is located on Sheriff Road. Aside from a sign that reads "Dining & Dancing" on the front of it, the venue markets itself as a place to order "Famous North Carolina Bar-B-Q." Bazz & Crue, now permanently closed, used to stand on Marlboro Pike. The club was one of twelve targeted by Prince George's County for closure after the county council passed legislation that restricted adult entertainment venues to light industrial or warehouse areas (Hedgpeth 2016). Prior to its closure, the club stood in a shopping plaza between an authorized shipping center for FedEx, UPS, and DHL and a hair salon. While Ebony Inn remains open, it is located on a block between a liquor store and an animal clinic. The larger area is mostly residential and suburban. Still, according to the Justice Map, this block is 91.5% Black in a census tract that borders

several areas in Prince George's County and the northeast boundary of D.C. with a lower median household income than the rest of the county and district. Therefore, while being inside the beltway typically maps on to the areas of the city that have a higher median household income than the areas outside of the beltway, this does not appear to be the case for the locations of the venues where Black women exotic dancers perform. As a result of the new laws enacted in Prince George's County, I suspect the closure of Ebony Inn is eminent, though it might continue to operate as the restaurant it markets itself as. While such a strategy protects the business owners, it does little for exotic dancers who rely on the venue for income.

X4B Luxury Hall, Mile High Club, and Sinsaysionals in Prince George's County outside the beltway were also targeted for closure in 2016. While X4B Luxury Hall did close, Mile High Club and Sinsaysionals remain open. All three clubs are in zip codes that have a higher percentage of Black people and a higher median household income than the rest of Prince George's County. Before it closed, X4B Luxury Hall was in Temple Hills on Brinkley Road in the same plaza as the Jumbo Food International Supermarket. The shopping center is surrounded by condominiums and apartment complexes and a church a bit further down the road. According to the Justice Map, the block is 90.8% Black and the median household income range falls within \$49,000 - \$54,000, higher than the rest of the county. Prior to its closing the club had an Instagram profile page associated with it where it posted flyers advertising events for local rap artists. For example, the profile page includes a flyer for a birthday bash for the artist 3OH Black in July 2018 with such events like a \$100 Clapping Contest, presumably an event wherein women compete by twerking

and the crowd determines who they consider the best from shouts and applause. All the flyers feature Black women, though most of them appear to be light skin. Images tagged at the strip club location on Instagram shows that most clients appeared to be Black men and women.

Mile High Club is in Clinton, Maryland on Aaron Lane just off Branch Avenue, a local thoroughfare. Mile High Club appears to meet the Prince George's County law requirements because it is located between several automotive shops. The larger area includes various commercial venues like a storage center, a grocery store, and a few motels. The few residential areas nearby appear to be subdivisions that feature multi-story family homes. The block is 70% Black though the median household income of this census tract exceeds that of Prince George's County. The profile page on Instagram for the Mile High Club features a variety of Black women exotic dancers in terms of body type and skin tone, a light skin Latina dancer on a post advertising Cinco de Mayo, and a white woman dancer on a post advertising the club's dayshift. Notably, most of the images tagged at the location are uploaded by the club itself, suggesting that despite their use of Instagram to market their page, they prefer to not have clientele post images while at the club.

Like the Mile High Club, Sinsaysionals also meets the criteria of the Prince George's County zoning regulations due to its proximity to several automotive services on Lanham Severn Road in Lanham Maryland. The venue is alongside tracking for Washington D.C.'s Metrorail system and across the street from residential areas that include subdivisions of multi-story family homes. While this block is predominately Black, the Justice Map shows this census tract has a higher

median household income than the rest of Prince George's County. Like the other clubs, Sinsaysionals advertises events that feature local rap artists on its Instagram page. However, unlike the other clubs, the flyers tend to feature images of women who do not actually perform at the club, unless they are hosting that night alongside the DJ. The women chosen for flyers appear to be light skin Black or Latina women. Occasionally, the backsides of the dancers appear in promotional videos as they are filmed twerking inside the club. Images tagged at the location show the dancers and staff tend to be Black as are the clientele. I suspect the use of women not actually in the club is for the same reasons Brooks (2010b) found in their study of the use of light-skin Black women in marketing materials for one club she studied invokes racial passing and a "racial omission [that] distorts the number of women of color who work at Conquest... and masks the racialized hierarchy of hiring practices at the club" (p. 79). Potentially, obscuring the identities of the women who work in the club helps Sinsaysionals attract clientele that might not otherwise visit a club that featured Black women exotic dancers.

The clubs based in Prince George's County are like those located in Fulton and Dekalb County, Georgia in that those inside the beltway are in areas that have a higher percentage of Black residents and a lower median household income than the rest of the county and zip code. However, the clubs based in the county outside the beltway differ from those in the metropolitan area because they were in predominately Black areas where the median household income exceeds that of the zip code and the county. I speculate that the presence of strip clubs in these areas has to do with the ways this region of Prince George's County has become home to much

of the Black residents of the D.C. metropolitan area in the wake of gentrification that also altered the landscape of U Street, the historic epicenter of Black creativity and leisure developed in the early twentieth century (Lindsey 2017). Historian John N. Ingham writes about the formation of U Street in the 2003 *Business History Review* article titled “Building Businesses, Creating Communities: Residential Segregation and the Growth of African American Business in Southern Cities, 1880-1915.” Ingham writes that the U Street corridor formed in northwest Washington in the late nineteenth century in the Shaw district. This Black business district after members of the Union League took interest in founding venues like restaurants, billiard halls, theaters, and retail stores. The only other Black residential area at the time had form simultaneously in southwest Washington. According to Ingham, black business districts such as the Shaw district offered Black people a means through which to develop their own residential areas, manage their own businesses, and solicit spaces and places in communities formed out of necessity due to residential segregation.

Based on Ingham’s research, I argue that the gentrification of these spaces has the effect of disrupting not only Black-owned business, but also leisure and entertainment just like in Atlanta and Memphis. The closest strip clubs to U Street are those located in the DuPont Circle area well over a ten-minute drive away. While U Street does have a few venues for entertainment like a theatre, museum, and a few lounges and restaurants, none of these spaces cater to an exclusively Black clientele. For example, U Street Music Hall is a small concert venue located on the same block as the African American Civil War Museum. The people performing there for the 2019 summer line up come from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds,

leading to a diversity of genres performed in the same space. However, none of these artists are rappers, the type of artists for whom Black women exotic dancers generally perform.

One different dancer performed at four different clubs in the Baltimore area. While only 5 out of 24 dancers traveled to clubs in Baltimore, I speculate this reflects that dancing in this part of Maryland, though normal, happens infrequently. For one, the transportation infrastructure between Baltimore and the D.C. metropolitan area for the most part requires travelling by car due to lack of affordable or convenient public transit options between the two regions. For another, the number of clubs in Baltimore suggests that the city has its own industry and therefore likely hires dancers more local to these venues which include Norma Jeans, Scores Baltimore, Two O’Clock Club, and Excape Nightclub. Norma Jeans located on Custom House Avenue just off I-83 bills itself as “the best adult entertainment in Maryland” on its Instagram profile page. The flyers and videos the page shows feature Black women exotic dancers, bartenders, and waitresses. Images tagged at the location suggest most of the clientele are also Black and that the Black women exotic dancers that work there are generally based in Baltimore. Norman Jeans is only a two-minute drive from the Two O’Clock Club on East Baltimore Street. East Baltimore Street is like East Brooks Road in Memphis in that it is home to several strip clubs – a total of nine including the Two O’Clock Club. This strip of road has the nickname of the Block due to its history as a red-light district. A group of public health scholars from John Hopkins University offer a description of the area in their 2012 *Health & Place*

article titled “This is our sanctuary”: Perceptions of safety among exotic dancers in Baltimore, Maryland”:

The Block, located in downtown Baltimore, Maryland. The Block is comprised of approximately twenty exotic dance clubs, bars, fast food restaurants, and other adult-entertainment establishments. In the past sixty years, The Block has transitioned from a several block long strip known for its burlesque houses to a 1.5 block segment consisting primarily of bars and exotic dance clubs. Accompanying this transition, The Block has become increasingly known for drug-related activity (Smith, 2000). Despite the illegal status of prostitution in Baltimore City, as far back as the 1940s, investigations suggested that bars and clubs on The Block were involved in the promotion and facilitation of sex work (Hill, 2008) (p. 562).

Despite the importance of the Block to Baltimore, I found Black women exotic dancers only in the Two O’Clock Club, a former burlesque house popular during the mid-twentieth century (Hanscom 2009). Images tagged at Two O’Clock Club on Instagram show a predominately Black clientele. The images of exotic dancers tagged at the location feature Black women exotic dancers as well. I speculate so few Black women exotic dancers perform at clubs other than Norman Jeans and Two O’Clock Club is due to the Block’s proximity to Baltimore’s revamped waterfront known as the Inner Harbor. The seaport dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> century as shipping port for the Mid-Atlantic area. However, the area was redeveloped starting in the mid-twentieth century as a tourist attraction complete with hotels, an aquarium, historic ships, and the Camden Yards Sports Complex which includes the

M&T Bank Stadium where the football team the Baltimore Ravens play, a race track, and Oriole Park where the city's baseball team plays (Ingram 2015, Warren and McCarthy 2002). The Block differs from the red-light districts in Memphis, D.C., and Atlanta because it still exists despite this redevelopment. I speculate one reason why is because of the mainstreaming of the Block through its marketing as a historic district. In this context Larry Flynt's Hustler Club on East Baltimore Street is a mainstream attraction, particularly due to its association with the famous pornography producer and the pornography magazine *Hustler*. A visit to [baltimorehustlerclub.com](http://baltimorehustlerclub.com) shows images that call invite women to apply as entertainers or servers. The most prominent flyer on the homepage shows an event that features a webcam model by the name of Reya Sunshine. This woman and the two featured on the job flyers appear to be white. Images for the club's profile page show images of white women entertainers and a mostly white clientele though some Black men are pictured as customers at the club. Images tagged at the venue show only one light skin Black woman exotic dancer at the club. When dark and brown skin Black women are pictured at the club, they appear to be there only as customers. Therefore, while Black women are welcome to spend money on the Block, it appears they are only invited to earn it in certain spaces.

Scores Baltimore is the only other strip club in Baltimore City that a Black woman exotic dancer in this dataset tagged an image of herself at. Now named the Penthouse Club Baltimore, the club is about a five-minute drive north of Norma Jeans, also just off I-83 on Fallsway. The club is near a parking garage, a prison, and a hot dog restaurant. There are few images tagged at the location when it was named

Scores Baltimore, though images for #scoresbaltimore show a mostly white clientele and white women dancers. Images tagged at the location for The Penthouse Club Baltimore show little difference in terms of clientele. Images for the profile page for the Penthouse Club Baltimore also show only white women exotic dancers. On the homepage of its website penthouseclubbaltimore.com describes the venue as “Baltimore, MD’s most sophisticated Gentlemen’s Club.” The one woman who tagged an image of herself is light-skin and identifies as biracial, a common pattern observed in predominately white strip clubs in the D.C. metropolitan area, particularly among those clubs that market themselves with certain class markers in their website descriptions.

Excape Nightclub differs from the others in Baltimore due to its distance from the Inner Harbor. The club is located on Pulaski Highway in Baltimore County, about a 25-minute drive northeast of Norma Jeans. Like strip clubs in Prince George’s County, the venue is mostly surrounded by industrial or commercial lots though a forest separates it from a residential subdivision. Images tagged on Instagram at the club show a racially diverse clientele though images of only white women exotic dancers appear on the Places tab. Due to its location, the club is the only one in this study based in Baltimore County, a predominately white area with a higher median household income than Baltimore City. The woman who tagged an image of herself here is brown-skinned and curvaceous. I speculate that the racially diverse clientele prompts the club to hire more than light skin Black women. Nevertheless, the overall pattern for Baltimore suggests that proximity to a red-light district does not offer Black women exotic dancers more opportunities for work because most of the clubs

there hire white women exotic dancers, regardless of how racially diverse their clientele is.

Only one dancer performed in Virginia at Pure Diamonds located in the predominately Black city of Portsmouth, Virginia (N = 95,536; %55.1; \$48,727). The Instagram profile for the strip club shows flyers that feature Black women exotic dancers. Similarly, the images I found when I entered the name of the club on the Places tab of Instagram showed Black women exotic dancers, Black staff such as DJs and bartenders, and Black clientele who had tagged images of themselves at the location. However, Pure Diamonds is not located in a city like Baltimore or in Black suburban enclaves as is the case for those located in Prince George's County. Instead Portsmouth, Virginia is like Memphis, Tennessee in that its primary function is to provide land space for transportation and logistics infrastructure, specifically the Norfolk Naval Shipyard. Additionally, the building is surrounded by automotive shops and a recycling center, suggesting that this strip club, like those in Prince George's County, only get to exist provided they are situated in an industrial or commercial zone.

Ultimately, the pattern of strip clubs where Black women exotic dancers in the D.C. metropolitan area perform reveals the ways racial segregation is maintained in a racially diverse tri-state region. Colorism, specifically favoritism toward light-skin Black women, appears to determine who gets marketed by strip clubs in the D.M.V. and where they might work including the mainstream entertainment district in DuPont Circle. Historically, skin color hierarchies have ensured that light skin Black and Latina women have benefitted from a social capital that conflates light skin with

beauty, leading to higher rates of education, income, and marriage (Hunter 2002). This favoritism extends to the strip club as confirmed in Brook's *Unequal Desires*. One reason I think colorism matters for Black women exotic dancers in D.C. is because of the legacy of the mulatto elite that founded the early Black middle class during the nineteenth century that held the majority of the power among Black D.C. residents until World War I (Lacy 2007). I imagine the perception about Blackness and beauty that favored the features of Black people with European ancestry today.

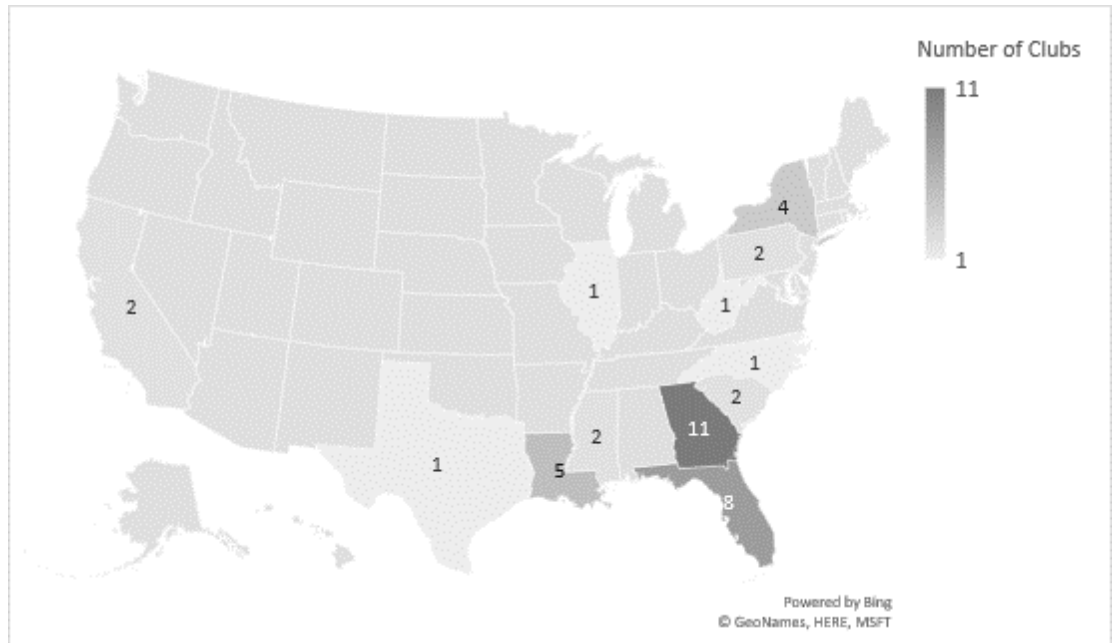
The lack of Black owned businesses on U Street also contributes to the distribution of strip clubs through the D.C. metropolitan area. Without a district dedicated to Black business, arts, and entertainment, Black people seeking out strip clubs where Black women exotic dancers perform must travel to Prince George's County or Baltimore. However, the Prince George's County council has deliberately targeted all the strip clubs within its boundaries for closure, unless they relocate to warehouse and industrial areas. As a result, these venues are not considered part of the mainstream adult entertainment industry in D.C. Therefore, as I have argued for Memphis and D.C., the demonic grounds of the contemporary strip club industry in the D.C. metropolitan area results in part from legislation that intends to marginalize these venues and conceal them from view in the public sphere.

#### *Where Black Women Exotic Dancers Perform Throughout the United States*

While McKittrick argues that the demonic grounds help illuminate the geographic domination of Black women's bodies through their concealment and marginalization within the landscape, *Demonic Grounds* also sets forth the notion that Black women's geographies also includes sites of resistance. While I have argued that cities in the

urban South keep Black women exotic dancers contained by restricting the venues, they work into specific areas distant to the city center, I do not suggest that these geographies reveal only disempowerment. Indeed, these maps show that Black women exotic dancers continue to persist as a cultural force for Black entertainment and leisure despite the ways the governments of the cities and counties they are in actively work to minimize and eliminate twentieth century Black leisure districts from the twenty-first urban landscape. In this section I suggest that the ability to travel out of their home state affords Black women exotic dancers to broaden their clientele, even as they perform in venues located in areas of urban areas largely like those in their own hometown.

Map 3.9 shows a map of the U.S. generated in Microsoft Excel that displays a gradient grayscale and the frequency of strip clubs in the state visited by all dancers in the dataset. A darker shade of gray corresponds to the number of strip clubs in that state as shown on the map. 9 of the 15 dancers based in Memphis, 7 out of 23 of the dancers based in the D.C. metropolitan area, and 8 out of 29 dancers based in Atlanta traveled out of state.



*Map 3.9 Strip Clubs in the United States Black Women Exotic Dancers Based in the Urban South Travel To*

Most dancers in this study performed in clubs in the southeastern United States or the East Coast when they traveled out of state. Dancers based in Atlanta had traveled to California, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Texas. Dancers based in the D.M.V. had traveled to Georgia, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. Dancers based in Memphis had traveled to California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and New York. The only states where all dancers crossed paths included Georgia and New York. I therefore argue that travel across state lines for dancers tends to involve regional rather than transnational.

Table 3.7 shows the number of dancers that performed at each state and the percentage of Black people that make up the state’s population. Georgia the highest number of clubs (N = 20) where all dancers had tagged an image of themselves on Instagram, followed by Maryland (N = 12), Florida (N = 8), Tennessee (N = 6), and

Louisiana (N = 5). Black people make up about 13% of the total population of the United States. Demographic data from the 2017 ACS show Black people make up 32.3% of Louisiana’s population, 31.3% of Georgia’s population, 24.9% of the population of Maryland, 17.8% of the population of Tennessee, and 15.4% of Florida’s population.

*Table 3.7 Number of Strip Clubs Black Women Exotic Dancers Based in the Urban South Travel to in the U.S.*

States	Number of Clubs	% Black
California	2	5.8
Florida	8	16.1
Georgia	11	31.3
Illinois	1	14.3
Louisiana	5	32.2
Mississippi	2	37.6
New York	4	15.7
North Carolina	1	21.5
Pennsylvania	2	11.1
South Carolina	2	27.2
Texas	1	12
West Virginia	1	3.6

Black women exotic dancers likely travel to perform in strip clubs located in Georgia and Florida is due to the relationship strip clubs in the major cities of these states have with the rap music industry. I described the relevance of strip club venues in Atlanta to contemporary rap music earlier in this chapter. I consider Miami to be like Atlanta in terms of the relevance of the strip club venues to both the local and national rap music entertainment industry. Five of the seven strip clubs based in Florida that 11 dancers in this study traveled to were in or near Miami. Rappers like Uncle Luke and the 2 Live Crew helped bring Floridian rap music mainstream in the late 1980s (Sarig 2007). Though the group’s early songs did not invoke images of the

strip clubs, they did address twerking as a sexualized form of dancing that could arouse men. For example, in the 1996 song “Shake a Lil’ Somethin,” group member Brother Marquis opens up the song with the lines “Bitch, I wanna see you shake it/ Bend on over, butt-ass naked.” Contemporary rap artists from Florida bring more readily make references that invoke strippers or local strip clubs, particularly King of Diamonds. For example, in the 2011 song “Hustle Hard (Remix)” by Florida-based rapper Ace Hood, Miami native Rick Ross raps in the second verse “Hundred deep in that K.O.D / King of Diamonds that's me nigga.” References to Miami-based clubs are not limited to artists in Florida or even those rapping on tracks with Florida-based rappers. For example, Toronto native Drake mentions King of Diamonds in his 2010 song “Miss Me” when he raps “Yea, Call up King of Diamonds and tell Chyna it'll be worth the flight /I'll be at my table stackin' dollars till the perfect height,” in reference to not only the club, but also Blac Chyna, a celebrity exotic dancer who got her start in the Miami strip club industry. Therefore, I imagine dancers invested in gaining visibility within this industry travel to clubs in Atlanta and Miami to gain entrance into a market with mainstream visibility in Black U.S. culture.

Louisiana is another state where numerous rappers have contributed to the contemporary rap music soundscape, particularly out of Baton Rouge and New Orleans. The same cities also contributed heavy to the soundscape of early twentieth century blues and jazz music (Davis 1998, Farshid 2011, French 2015, Grem 2006, Gussow 2013, Ngô 2014, Rabaka 2012). 3 out of 5 of the clubs that dancers visited in Louisiana were in New Orleans, one in Baton Rouge and another in Prairieville, a city located about 22 minutes southeast of Baton Rouge. While none of these cities have

strip clubs that have made it into the lyrical repertoire of contemporary rappers, I speculate Black women exotic dancers performed in these strip clubs due to the large population of Black residents in these cities. 54.8% of the population in Baton Rouge and 59.8% of the population in New Orleans is made up of Black residents. While Prairieville is a predominately white city, Kitten's Gentlemen's Club on Airline Highway where one dancer in this study performed hires Black women exotic dancers and staff and serves a predominately Black clientele per the images tagged at the location on Instagram. The club also offers the stage to up and coming local rap artists to do live performances with the dancers performing alongside them. I even came across a video of two white man rap artists performing there, though in the video posted it did not appear any dancers had chosen to perform with them. Ultimately, that seven dancers travelled to Louisiana to perform at strip clubs there suggests the Black cities of Louisiana remain an important site of cultural production in the urban South and Black women exotic dancers who travel there do so to capitalize off the proximity to one of few remaining predominately Black urban centers.

New York has also figured significantly into the cultural production related to contemporary rap music. Scholars of rap music have long pointed to New York as the birthplace of hip hop. Some of the U.S.'s biggest rap stars have hailed out of the boroughs of the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens (Edwards 2015, French 2015, Hess 2009, Hunter 2011, Rabaka 2012, Sarig 2007, Sharpley-Whiting 2007). All four of the clubs the women in this study performed at where located in either Brooklyn or Queens. New York, however, is also home of Starlets Gentlemen's Club, the venue

participants of the New York stripper strike accused of racism and colorism (Ferguson 2017a). The Instagram profile page for Starlets does indeed only feature more light skin ethnically ambiguous women of color than it does brown skin Black women of color. Despite the clear preference for light skin women of color for bartender and dancer roles, the club appears to hire Black men in roles such as DJ. Images tagged at the location on Instagram also showed that the venue had Black men rappers like Philadelphia rapper Lil Uzi Vert visit and based on the images, spend stacks of cash. However, a staff picture taken at a Christmas party in 2016 showed a staff of all light skin white or Latino men. While images of clients are few in far between, more than likely due to a policy against pictures in the club, I notice that most clients appear to be men and women that resemble the club's staff. Considering that Brook's study of the strip club industry examined venues in the New York area, the colorism that continues there today suggest little has changed since *Unequal Desires* was published in 2010.

Black women exotic dancers also performed at clubs in cities where at least 4 in 10 residents were Black when they travelled to Jackson, Mississippi; Rowesville and Columbia, South Carolina; and Charlotte, North Carolina. Once again while these strip clubs have yet to enter population imagination through the lyricism of rappers, these strip clubs are in cities where the legacy of Black cultural production through music dates to the early twentieth century blues era and extends into today's rap music soundscape. The populations and legacy of these cities for Black people in the urban South differs from where Black women exotic dancers performed in Dallas, Texas; Bunker Hill, West Virginia; and Sacramento and Gardena, California.

Nevertheless, travel to these cities where less than 3 in 10 residents were Black did not always mean that dancers performed in predominately white settings. Vixen's Gentlemen's Club in Bunker Hill, West Virginia appears to attract a racially diverse though predominately white clientele according to the images tagged at the location on Instagram. The club invites Black rap artists like Trina from Miami, K Camp from Atlanta, and Fat Trel from D.C. to host after parties or perform concerts at the location. On its Instagram page it shows flyers and images of white women exotic dancers only. The one Black women exotic dancer who had tagged an image there in this study had brown skin and a slimmer build comparable to many of the white women exotic dancers hired at the venue. Images tagged at Club Fantasy in Sacramento, California on Instagram show images that feature Black and Latina exotic dancers on flyers. Videos inside the club showed mostly Black women exotic dancers and a predominately Black clientele. Starz in Gardena, California is only a short distance from Compton, a city where about 30.9% of the population is Black. Images and video tagged at Starz on Instagram showed Black women exotic dancers and a predominately Black clientele. The club's profile page also showed images of Black women exotic dancers and Black men customers. However, it did not appear that the venue solicited rappers to perform or host events there. DG's A Gentlemens Club Dallas in Texas describes itself as "Home of the Baddest Urban Club in TX" on Its Instagram page. Posts on this post show only Black women exotic dancers and a predominately Black clientele. Images and video on this profile page show that the venue offers a space for rappers like Houston's Sauce Walka and Atlanta's O.T. Genesis and Kap G to perform or host birthday parties.

My findings indicate that even when Black women exotic dancers located in the urban South traveled out of state, they performed in strip clubs located in racial and economic demographic areas like their own because they traveled within the southeastern United States. Additionally, all these spaces were defined by geographic isolation into areas of the city that looked wholly different from the spaces allotted for mainstream adult entertainment (Colosi 2012, Hubbard et al. 2008, Hubbard 2009, Sanders, Hardy and Campbell 2014). Yet their labor in these venues attracted consumers of rap music and rap music artists to converge, creating space for contemporary Black leisure and entertainment across the United States. Therefore, I argue the demonic grounds of the contemporary strip club industry also highlight the importance Black women's sex work has for the contemporary rap and entertainment industry across the United States, particularly in cities that have a large Black population.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I used the strip club as a unit of analysis to study the geographies of Black women in the contemporary exotic dance industry. I used Instagram as a source of data to create maps with GIS software of the strip clubs where Black women from the urban South performed throughout in the United States. I then used data from the U.S. Census to visualize the racial and income demographics of the surrounding counties. I sought to ask three broad research questions about the socioeconomic demographics of strip clubs in Atlanta, D.C., and Memphis, whether these areas differed from the surrounding zip code or county, and how these areas compared to the areas Black women exotic dancers travelled to when they left their hometowns.

My findings indicate that when the landscape of sexual commerce for Black women remains largely unchanged from the twentieth century. I draw three primary conclusions from these results. First, the results indicate racial and economic segregation continues to shape the landscape of contemporary sexual commerce. However, in this new landscape Black women exotic dancers do not have access to a leisure district with venues with Black entertainment and culture. Second, this GIS analysis shows transportation infrastructure of highway and roadway systems serves as a physical boundary between the public spaces of contemporary sex work and the broader community. Furthermore, city and county officials use zoning ordinances and licensing restrictions to regulate where these venues are, keeping clubs that hire mostly Black women exotic dancers excluded from mainstream entertainment districts. Lastly, these findings show how contemporary Black women in the exotic dance industry work within segregated spaces to the extent that they can access various forms of social capital like colorism or racial passing to make themselves desirable to a non-White clientele.

Blair (2010) uses the term “Black Belt sex trade” to describe “the increased concentration of prostitution within the Black Belt” (p. 229) in early twentieth century Chicago. The term “Black Belt,” functions to describe not only the regions of the southern U.S. where enslaved Black people worked on plantations, but also the concentration of Black Americans into certain regions of the U.S. during and after the Great Migration (Biles 1988, Blair 2010, Lichter, Parisi and Taquino 2012, Omi and Winant 2015). Studies specific to the D.C., Memphis, and Atlanta metropolitan areas find residents in Black neighborhoods have long grappled with decreased mobility in

these regions due to lower rates of car ownership and nonexistent or ineffective public transit (Basmajian 2010, Bayor 1996, Bayor 1998, Brown et al. 1972, Brownell 1975, Hall 1983, Lands 2016, Nelson 2001, Walcott 2002). The physical environments of these strip clubs took many forms: Some strip clubs were isolated into standalone establishments in former or current industrial or commercial zones; some were in Black residential areas as unit within a larger strip mall; few were zoned alongside other contemporary adult leisure venues like bars, dance clubs, or restaurants. Others had closed permanently due to regulation, licensing, or law enforcement issues. That many of these clubs had buildings located in suburbs was an unexpected finding, but confirmed previous scholarship that suggests sex-related businesses deemed beyond dominant norms of appropriate sexual behavior get positioned away from areas considered family friendly (Hubbard 2009; Hubbard et al. 2008) and that these areas often include predominately Black residential areas (Blair 2010; Harris 2016a; Mumford 1997). Additionally, the concentration of these strip clubs within low-income areas of metropolitan regions of each city ensures their exclusion due to the class-as-sexual difference organizational culture of strip clubs subsumed under mainstream adult entertainment. Finally, the politics of concealment around contemporary sexual commerce involves the racialization of sex work performed by Black women through spatial marginalization. Therefore, this GIS analysis evidences that the landscape of contemporary sexual commerce continues to maintain distinct boundaries around white and Black sexual leisure.

## Future Research

These findings support prior research on the racial segregation of sex work in the twentieth century, therefore complicating assumptions about the mainstreaming of sexual commerce and the spatial politics that shape the sex trade. Additionally, through Farman's mobile interface theory and Caliandro's conceptualization of the user as a device, I use Instagram as a source of information to plot the points of Black women's geographies in the strip club industry as well as longstanding and new patterns of racial segregation, thus offering a new application of McKittrick's concept of the demonic grounds. Based on these findings, I argue the Black Belt sex industry continues into the twenty-first century. Therefore, future research should address the extent to which the Black Belt sex trade remains a space where Black women sex workers face hyper-surveillance from law enforcement.

My analysis offers support for qualitative studies published on racial segregation in the contemporary strip club industry and other forms of sex work (Brooks 2010a; Brooks 2010b; Jones 2015a; Miller-Young 2008; Miller-Young 2010; Miller-Young 2014). It also offers a stark contrast to scholarship on the ways postindustrialism and neoliberalism have shifted the boundaries of sex work for the white middle class (Bernstein 2001; Bernstein 2007a; Bernstein 2007b; Bradley 2008; Trautner 2005). While these studies indicate white women in the strip club industry work in corporatized environments due to the mainstreaming of sexual commerce, my findings show that Black women exotic dancers in the contemporary urban South work in strip clubs located in environments largely structured by Jim Crow era segregation and the Great Migration. Future scholarship invested in macrostructural

analyses of sex work that address neoliberalism, postindustrialism, or progressivism must also take structural racism like segregation into account.

The conclusions in this GIS analysis point to several avenues for future research. First, the dataset in this analysis comes from a snowball sample of Black women exotic dancers from specific regions of the urban South. Questions remain about the racial and economic demographic areas that surround the strip clubs that Black women perform in local to the Northeast, Midwest, Southwest, or West Coast. Second, this group of exotic dancers do not reflect the universe of all exotic dancers. For example, some dancers do not post images of themselves in the club on their Instagram profile pages and others might prefer another social networking sites, do not use SNS, or do not use the mobile internet altogether. Potentially, dancers might represent themselves in space online through means not made visible via spatial analysis. To clarify whether the patterns observed here might vary, future research on sex work and the mobile internet should consider the value of varying the virtual field site or comparing to women who do not use social media at all. Additionally, future research should consider gathering location information via other forms of data collections. Finally, the spatial politics that surround Black women's sex work might not extend to other women of color. Future research should consider the ways non-Black women of color in the strip club industry navigate the racial and spatial politics around the Black-White binary color line.

## Chapter 4: Bad Pitch Pose and the Stripperneur: A Content Analysis of Black Women's Erotic Labor on Instagram

### Introduction

On February 10th, 2019 Belcalis “Cardi B” Almanzar became the first woman to win a Grammy award for best hip-hop album for a solo album. Cardi B’s rise to fame began on Instagram, which enabled the young woman to broadcast images and video of her daily life from her hometown of the Bronx. An ever-growing number of followers observed her six-year transition from an exotic dancer in the New York City strip club industry to a VH1 reality television star and now to one of the world’s most popular contemporary rappers (Ahktar 2017). Cardi B’s ability to command attention from over 45 million followers on Instagram as of June 2019 has given her access to a wide range of industries typically foreclosed to Black and Latina women exotic dancers.

The historical racialization and commodification of Black women’s erotic labor underlies the popularity of a figure like Cardi B, an Afrolatina of Dominican and Trinidadian descent. Nevertheless, her career trajectory represents an exceptional case of what exemplifies an increasing convergence of contemporary sexual commerce with popular culture. However, her experience raises several questions about how Black women exotic dancers use the features of Instagram to exert agency around their identities and erotic labor, particularly within the broader context of how Black women from various backgrounds make use of technology today. For example, a 2017 report prepared by the Nielsen Company found that the number of firms

majority-owned by Black women increased by 67% between 2007 and 2012 as compared to a 13% increase in the number of firms majority-owned by white women (Talton et al. 2017). The report also highlights how Black women take advantage of social networking sites and online shopping services both as consumers and producers in industries like food, fashion, health and beauty.

The Nielsen Company represents just a handful of media and corporate outlets that have expressed an interest in Black women entrepreneurs and their internet use in the past few years. Yet, the subtext of most of these stories or reports depicts Black women entrepreneurs as college-educated and middle class. In this way mainstream media uses entrepreneurship to perpetuate the controlling image of the Black Lady. According to Collins (2004) Black women in the middle class “encounter a curious repacking of the controlling images generated for poor and working-class Black femininity” as they pursue their careers through a controlling image “designed to counter claims of Black women’s promiscuity” based on the notion that “achieving middle-class status means that Black women have rejected the unbridled “freaky” sexuality now attributed primarily to working-class Black women” (p. 139). I argue this content analysis of Black women exotic dancers introduces nuance into the contemporary understanding of Black women as entrepreneurs, producers, and consumers that use the internet. I show how Black women exotic dancers on Instagram use the features of the social networking site to act as what Gizelle Marie described as stripperneurs - women who leverage their erotic capital to act as entrepreneurs in fields related to and outside of the exotic dance industry.

I draw on Noble's Black feminist technology studies and Gray's Black cyberfeminist thought to reflect on the virtual embodiment of Black women's sexuality on Instagram. I expand on these frameworks through the application of theories of the mobile internet and concepts from Black feminist thought related to Black sexual politics. Specifically, I expand on Hess's concept of the selfie assemblage as a framework to understand virtual embodiment on mobile-internet based social networking sites to describe the process of racialization and sexualization that prompts Black women exotic dancers to perform a set of Black sexual politics that portrays a more nuanced performance of eroticism and sexuality than those expected within the strip club and rap music productions.

In this chapter I describe findings from a content analysis of the images, video, and text posted by Black women exotic dancers on Instagram to argue that they perform a racialized erotic labor to articulate an erotic identity through the negotiation of controlling images of Black women exotic dancers as hypersexual, hyperfeminine bad bitches. Black women exotic dancers rely on the variation of setting, poses, and fashion at times invokes the bad bitch trope and offers more nuanced representations of sexuality and femininity. Additionally, I describe how strip club personnel use Instagram accounts to enforce a racialized erotic capital on the internet that perpetuates certain features as ideal among exotic dancers. Ultimately, I argue that though social networking sites enable Black women exotic dancers to leverage erotic capital into other internet-based entrepreneurial pursuits, stakeholders in the strip club industry use their pages to perpetuate a racialized erotic capital that centers light skin and curvaceous women as the most desirable among

Black women exotic dancers. Therefore, Instagram offers Black women exotic dancers only limited ability to challenge racialized and sexualized hierarchies of desirability since the entities that perpetuate these beauty standards also use the social networking application.

*Self-Presentation as a Tool of Analysis of Racialized Erotic Capital on Instagram*

Caliandro (2018) argues research on social networking sites yields useful insights from the examination of self-presentation as tool of analysis rather than an object of analysis. When researchers study self-presentation as an object of analysis, their findings show that users of social networking sites rely on self-presentation as a strategy for the management and maintenance of online and offline social networks. Caliandro argues in favor of the use of online self-presentations as tools of analysis “to (1) measure the degree of involvement of a user within a given social formation... and (2) reconstruct the collectively built and shared cultural structure” (p. 566). To do so, researchers should observe the ways people take on social roles an online social formation. For example, I would argue the way Cardi B engages her followers as an Instagram user when she chooses to use livestream to fact check media reports about herself or her family mimics how she engaged as a reality show star during confessional scenes of *Live and Hip Hop*. Yet these confessionals differ from the format of reality television shows in that she can respond to and engage with her followers during the livestream. On *Love and Hip Hop* Cardi B had to wait for the reunion episode before she could defend herself before a live audience. Therefore, the structure of the online social formation that emerges between Cardi B and her followers is a virtual reality television show reunion episode.

In this chapter I use the online self-presentation of Black women exotic dancers as a tool of analysis regarding racialized erotic capital. I identify the ways the social roles that Black women exotic dancers take on Instagram enable them to act as erotic laborers and entrepreneurs within the same online social formation. Therefore, I offer an assessment of the Black sexual politics Black women exotic dancers use to act as agents of erotic autonomy despite the ways other Instagram users portray them as objects of racialized sexual desire.

#### A Typology of the Erotic Labor of Black Women Exotic in Images on Instagram

In the 1997 books *Live Sex Acts* Wendy Chapkis, a sociologist and professor of Women and Gender's Studies, describes paid erotic labor like prostitution as a type of service work "where the meaning and terms of sexual exchange are vulnerable to cultural and political contestation," a perspective that permits a focus "on factors enhancing or limiting a worker's power relative to clients, employers, and colleagues" (p. 57). According to Jones (2015b) Black women sex workers that use the internet perform a racialized erotic labor due "the ways in which race and nationality conditions financial outcomes for these workers" (p. 779) as a result of the differential value attributed to their erotic capital. Sociologist Adam Green defines erotic capital as "the quality and quantity of attributes that an individual possesses, which elicit an erotic response in another" (p. 29) in a 2008 *Sociological Theory* article "The Social Organization of Desire: The Sexual Fields Approach. Brooks (2010a) expands on this definition to suggest racialization shapes erotic capital for exotic dancers leading to unequal outcomes for women based on attributes like their skin tone, hair texture, or weight. I extend Brooks' and Jones's argument to suggest

that the body work Black women exotic dancers do on Instagram involves alternating the setting of their images, the fashion they wear in these images, the way they style their hair or faces, and the way they posture their bodies.

Table 4.1 provides a quantitative summary of the range of codes used to identify the performance of erotic labor among 70 of the 83 Black women exotic dancers that I analyzed in the GIS analysis.

*Table 4.1 Typology of Images Shared Among Black Women Exotic Dancers*

Category	Total (70)	Atlanta (29)	D.C. (23)	Memphis (18)
Cosmetic femininity	98.6%	100.0%	95.7%	100.0%
Rear view	94.3%	96.6%	87.0%	100.0%
In the club	81.4%	89.7%	78.3%	72.2%
Boudoir	68.6%	69.0%	73.9%	61.1%
Modeling	54.3%	48.3%	65.2%	50.0%
Products and services	35.7%	34.5%	43.5%	27.8%
Promotion	34.3%	37.9%	34.8%	27.8%
Headlining	20.0%	10.3%	30.4%	22.2%
Online sex work	15.9%	13.8%	21.7%	11.1%

N based on dancers whose images and videos matched available metadata.

I argue these categories capture the varied online self-presentations Black women exotic dancers use to communicate a diverse range of messages about sexuality and femininity that at times exploits controlling images and at other times rejects them.

Cosmetic femininity and the Virtual Cover Girl on the Instagram Runway

I use the term cosmetic femininity to describe the way Black women exotic dancers used the self-facing camera of their cellphone to display images of

themselves that centered on their face and hair. About 98.6% of dancers in my sample posted images that I categorized as cosmetic femininity. In these images women often wore freshly styled hair, lipstick or gloss, and other makeup. Their hair in these images tended to be straightened hair, hair extensions, or wigs. Sometimes they styled this hair in loose waves or curls, but rarely posted such images while wearing kinky or afro-textured hair unless they were braids. These pictures typically occurred outside the setting of the strip club, when a woman was going about her day. For example, some women posted pictures or videos from the driver seat of their vehicles. When one dancer based in Atlanta chose to post this type of visual as a video from her car, she played with her braids, running her fingers down the length in a gesture that communicated how smoothly the texture of it flowed through her fingers. She had background music featuring the song “Cash Shit” by the Atlanta-based Black woman rapper LightSkinKeisha playing through her car speakers. In addition to showing her face and hair, she also showed her outfit, fitted jeans that emphasized her curves and a sheer top over a bra top, exposing her waist and stomach.

The category of cosmetic femininity reflects the way the performance of beauty, and a specific type of hyper-feminine beauty, is erotic capital not only on Instagram, but other social networking sites premised on sharing audiovisual content. I suspect this type of online self-presentation reflects the beauty standards perpetuated by beauty and fashion influencers. As users of social networking sites, influencers generate content for a given audience by acting as opinion leaders in relation to certain brands or products, thus making potential customers out of their followers. Women dominate the fashion and beauty industry as both influencers and the

audiences that follow them (Sokolova and Kefi 2019). However, I argue that the type of beauty that influencer marketing encourages on social networking sites often entails performing to a standard normalized by white heteronormative expectations of beauty by making a profile page a virtual space to pose as a cover girl. The iconography of the American cover girl started during the early twentieth century as photographs of the faces of women started to appear on the front cover of high-end magazines. Magazines used cover girls to communicate the values of society throughout each decade as attitudes about gender equality, race, immigration, sexuality, and other social issues took shape during the twentieth century. Furthermore, the women featured communicated societal ideals about the desirability of women in terms of facial features, hair type, body shape, and weight (Ferguson 1981, Kitch 2001).

Historically, the covers of mainstream magazines did not feature Black women. When Black women did appear as cover girls on Black-owned magazines like the NAACP's *the Crisis* magazine, they often communicated respectability and other Black middle-class values as a way to push back against sexual stereotypes about Black women (Williams 2006). While Black women like supermodel Naomi Campbell or pop star Beyoncé Knowles as the first Black cover girls on the cover of mainstream fashion and beauty magazines like *Vogue* and *Elle*, the assumptions about beauty these outlets communicate using certain cover girls remain unchanged. Even in the twenty-first century cover girls continue to be mostly white women, thin women, women who do not wear their hair afro-textured, and women with celebrity status who always wear the latest fashions, hairstyles, and cosmetics.

Black women exotic dancers performing cosmetic femininity not only adhere to the beauty standards popularized by the U.S. magazine industry during the twentieth century, they also present themselves in a manner that contrasts with the ways that mainstream hip-hop publications or strip club marketing materials present them. For example, the early twenty-first century saw the popularization of magazines targeted to Black men consumers of hip hop music. Periodicals like *King* and *Black men* magazine chose Black women video vixens, exotic dancers, and other sex workers, as cover girls because many of these women had to have a reputation among hip hop consumers as well. For example, former exotic dancer Draya Michele, who also starred in several seasons of the VH1 reality series *Basketball Wives*, appeared on the cover of the September 2012 issue of Black men magazine. She appeared with her backside to the camera wearing a black swimsuit that exposed her back and some of her rear as she looked over her own shoulder. Her hair was styled in loose curls while her face was made up with sheer pink coloring on her lips, a smoky eyeshadow on her eyelids, mascara on her eyelashes and eyeliner framing her eyes. She also had bronzer or highlights on her cheeks and arched eyebrows. Many of the cover of Black men's magazines during the twenty-first century featured Black women of similar status in similar poses and clothing. Ultimately, these men's magazines portrayed Black cover girls in ways that conformed their representation in rap music productions.

While brands today have not made the choice to use Black women exotic dancers other than Cardi B as fashion and beauty influencers, I argue Black women exotic dancers on Instagram represent a convergence of the hip-hop cover girl and the

all-American cover girl in one space and in one body. While their hairstyling and cosmetics might conform to white heteronormative standards of beauty, their fashion choices don't typically include the runaway fashions of mainstream cover girls or the bared bodies found on the covers of hip-hop magazines. Furthermore, these Instagram users often generate these images themselves rather than pose for a professional photographer producing images on behalf of a magazine. Indeed, the presentation of cover girls results from a production which includes a director, a stylist, make-up artists, and several other stakeholders invested in making women appear a certain way on magazine covers.

Black women exotic dancers on Instagram, on the other hand, choose everyday settings like their bathrooms or cars to pose as cover girls. Their fashion communicates their personal sense of style in addition to a sense of feminine desirability and tends to be far more conservative than what they wear in the strip club environment. This type of hyperfeminine posturing then can offset the hypersexuality of the erotic labor of the strip club with a type that enables them to present as demurer and more traditional as a woman, tapping into U.S. values about femininity. Additionally, while cover girls historically appeared first on magazines marketed to men, Black women exotic dancers as virtual cover girls on Instagram also communicate to women followers who participate in the virtual culture shaped by Black women beauty influencers that started out on YouTube (Ellington 2014, Neil and Mbilishaka 2018). For example, one Black woman exotic dancer based in the D.C. metropolitan area posted an image of herself wearing a full face of make-up, a short haircut, and a low-cut sleeveless top. Since she featured just her face, hair and

upper half of her body against a dark backdrop, her setting was obscured. Black women Instagram users left comments like “beautiful” or used emojis like 😍, ❤️, 🤩 while describing the women while Black men used words like “fine” or “sexy” to describe her in the picture. This exemplifies how comments and followers as a feature of Instagram enable the virtual cover girl to reach a broader audience without needing to pose for a magazine that caters solely to Black men. This erotic labor is racialized in that her identity as a Black woman and exotic dancer makes her desirable to a market shaped by the tastes of men invested in hip hop music industries and women invested in beauty and fashion industries. If she can perform this narrow hyperfeminine beauty on Instagram, she can rely on cosmetic femininity as a strategy that translates her erotic capital into social capital by using her own camera and Instagram profile to generate content and share content to her admirers.

#### Rear View: Black Women’s Bottoms as Racialized Erotic Capital

Rear view as a category captures what I argue is an expression of sexual agency among Black women exotic dancers via the self-eroticism of their own backside through poses that center the buttocks in the frame of the image to showcase their desirability. Sociologist Shirley Anne Tate writes about Black women’s bottoms as erotic capital in her 2015 book *Black Women’s Bodies and the Nation*. During the colonial era Europeans characterized African women’s bottoms as excessive and grotesque as compared to the thinner frames of European women. Today, however, the racial otherness of Black women’s bottoms serves as an aesthetic some women purchase through surgery or silicon injections. The shift in attitudes towards Black women’s backsides, Tate argues, reflects the ways the white gaze frames and

fetishizes Black women's bodies while awarding praise and desire to women like Kim Kardashian. Tate notes that when Black people describe Black women's bodies, for example in rap music lyrics, they focus "on Black women's rears as objects of desire...which challenges existing ideas of grotesquerie and deviant female sexuality...precisely because they differ from white hegemonic standards of beauty" (p. 54-55). Still, rap music also perpetuates misogyny and hypersexualization of Black women's bottoms for the purposes of bolstering the masculinity of Black men lyricists. Tate argues when Black women center their bottoms for themselves, for example as Caribbean women do through dancehall performances, they push back against the politics of respectability and "reveal their bodies to reclaim them from the hold of middle-class gender discourse of the devout, sexually repressed, maternal Black woman" (p. 59) by using performances of their bottoms to invite the gaze of an audience of their choosing. I argue Black women exotic dancers on Instagram perform this type of subversive display of sexuality through poses that position their backsides in the center of the frame. Further, they invite the gaze of onlookers online as well as throughout physical space in terms of the variety of locations and settings they choose to bare their bottoms.

94.3% of the women I followed on Instagram posed with their backsides to the camera in a variety of settings while wearing a variety of fashions. Sometimes the photos have been taken another anonymous photographer, but they also act as their own photographers through strategically taken selfies. For example, one Atlanta-based dancer takes this pose while wearing a two-piece bikini and stilettos in the club in three separate photos on her Instagram. In these photos, the entirety of her backside

shows in the thong bikinis she wears. For one image, she writes the caption “Baddie with the fatty,” a phrase that puts together two Southern Black Vernacular English colloquialisms. Baddie is derivative of the term ‘bad bitch,’ to imply attractiveness and desirability. Fatty refers to the size of one’s backside but more explicitly, a backside that it is large, curvy, fit, and toned. She also chooses this pose in a photograph of herself in what appears to be a living room setting while wearing a pair of sweatpants and a black top. In another picture she sits on the edge of a sink in what appears to be a public bathroom. In this image she wears jeans and a long-sleeve top. The iPhone she holds in her hand blocks her face as she uses the camera on the back of the phone to take an image of herself in the mirror.

I argue Black women exotic dancers present their backsides to the camera frame due to the association of large, curvy bottoms with the dance movements Black women exotic dancers perform to contemporary rap music songs. For example in the 2012 music video for the song “Bandz a Make Her Dance” by Memphis rapper Juicy J, the representation of a Black woman exotic dancer involved only her silhouette as she performed various tricks on pole interspersed with other scenes of him and his friends throwing money, surrounded by various women of all races as he raps “Short hair like Nia Long / Loose one she don’t need a loan/ She start twerking when she hear a song/ the stripper pole her income.” He goes on to set a scene the Black woman exotic dancer’s role is to get nude for a wealthy rapper while other, poorer men look on as part of a status game as Juicy J states: “Rich niggas tipping / Broke niggas looking/ And it ain’t a strip club if they ain’t showing pussy.” Scholars argue rappers like Juicy J invoke the strip club and Black women sex workers most often through

the controlling image of the ho, which treats the sexuality of Black women as transactional, cheap, and always for sale (Hunter and Soto 2009, Hunter 2011, Miller-Young 2014).

In *A Taste for Brown Sugar* Miller-Young (2014) argues dance moves like the booty clap “forms an important part of the modern black stripper’s repertoire” because Black women exotic dancers derive value from the move not only for its difficulty but also because it requires “properly fleshy bottoms,” an example of one important way “the racial aesthetics that valorize curviness often run counter to the dominant norms of thinness occupied by white women in the sex and media industries” (p. 173). I recognize the erotic capital attributed to the bottoms of the Black women exotic dancers I observed through the responses of their followers. One D.C. based dancer posted an image on her Instagram profile that showed her inside the club with her bottom toward the photographer wearing a thong and a crop top. As a caption, she wrote 🍑 to symbolize her backside. This reference to a Black woman’s bottom as a peach derives from a Southern Black Vernacular English colloquialism that likens the Black woman’s buttocks to the fruit due to its roundness, evenness, and firmness. The image received over 200 likes and ten comments, several which included the use of the 😍 emoji to denote desirability and approval. Since the quantity of likes and quality of comments are an important social capital for users in the participatory culture of social networking sites (Bohn et al. 2014, Tripodi 2016), for Black women exotic dancers these interactions signal their Instagram provides them access to an audience without the gatekeepers of hip hop media or the strip club industry managing access to these followers.

During slavery, the display of a Black woman's naked wide hips and large bottoms on auction blocks rendered their bodies a site of fertile profitability ripe for exploitation as a form of colonial era reproductive technology meant to generate more bodies from which colonizers extracted value through their unpaid labor (Tate 2015). I argue Black women's backsides remain a site of profitable on the strip club stage and that social networking sites like Instagram enable Black women to derive social capital from poses that center their bottoms regardless of the setting. Doing poses that center their bottoms is a type of racialized erotic labor that exploits rather than negates the controlling image of Black women as hypersexual Jezebels as they use captions to communicate affirmations of the desirability of their own backsides. However, Black women exotic dancers also strike a rear-view pose in various mundane locations – bedrooms, parking lots, or while seated on the edge of a bathroom sink. Black women not only gain financial capital from this pose in settings like the strip club or professional photoshoots, but also maintain a following of users on Instagram who use comments to show desire toward these women for possessing curvy, round bottoms.

I consider this type of body work what Miller-Young (2010) describes as illicit eroticism because as sex workers, these Black women exotic dancers use the rear-view pose and features of Instagram in a manner that “manipulates and represents racialized sexuality—including hypersexuality—in order to assert the value of their erotic capital” (p. 10). Therefore, the Black woman exotic dancer's behind itself is not a site of hypersexuality or excess, but rather a source of racialized erotic power to be amplified based on the setting she accesses this pose in. Furthermore, the

use of Instagram provides them an opportunity to represent their bottoms in settings that differ from the ways they appear in rap music productions often only as props to Black men rappers' exploits.

#### How to Build a Bad Bitch: Transitioning from Back to Front Stage in the Strip Club

About 80% of the women in this analysis uploaded Instagram posts of images or videos set inside the strip club. These Instagram users used the camera on their phones to record and Instagram as a virtual site to document the front stage and backstage of their work as exotic dancers while on site at the strip club. This documentation of what goes on in the strip club differs from practices used by strip club management prior to the existence of Instagram. During the early twenty-first century, strip clubs would hire professional photographers and videographers to document what happened in their clubs, but many did not permit consumers, staff, or performers to film inside the venues. These images were often edited into commercials that strip clubs would distribute on their websites and social networking sites like Facebook, YouTube, or MySpace (Brooks 2010a).

Strip club management also permitted rap artists to record music videos in their venues. For example Club Onyx where several dancers in this study performed in Atlanta provided the setting for the 2011 song "Throw This Money," by rap trio United Street Dopeboyz of America also known as U.S.D.A. Black women exotic dancers make their first appearance in the video in a nanosecond long shot of a group of them in the locker room stretching with their backsides to the camera. For the rest of the video they are seen on stage in shots that focus almost entirely on their backsides performing various pole tricks and twerking. In one scene a pair of dancers


are filmed licking the medallion of one rapper's chain before they start to kiss each other as the chorus plays: "Go on shake this ass bitch, imma throw this money," playing into a masculine aesthetic similar to that portrayed by Memphis native Juicy J and his peers Atlanta's 2 Chainz and New Orleans's Lil Wayne in his music video for "Bandz a Make Her Dance." Through this portrayal Black men rappers depict Black women exotic dancers as sexual freaks and hoes bolstering their performance of hypermasculinity (Hunter and Soto 2009, Hunter 2011, Miller-Young 2014). The way Black women exotic dancers portray themselves in the club on Instagram tells a more nuanced story.

Sociologist Erving Goffman proposed dramaturgical analysis as a framework for the study of social interactions in his 1956 book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. According to Goffman, people use informal language and behaviors while backstage or when they do not feel compelled to conduct themselves more formally before a certain audience. While people usually take care not to engage in behavior or language perceived as offensive when frontstage or in the presence of audiences for whom they are expected to perform respectability or formality, Goffman interprets performing backstage behavior on the frontstage as both symbolic of intimacy and disrespect for others present. Sociologists Alicia D. Cast and Jan E. Stets argue "proliferation of social media communication such as Facebook and Twitter provide new venues for self-presentation" (p. 350) in their piece "The Self" published in the 2016 *Handbook of Contemporary Sociological Theory*. According to Cast and Stets, the backstage of social networking sites "involves the preparation of content that eventually gets posted over social media (the front stage region)" (p.

17) through actions like drafting status updates or editing pictures before sharing with open's followers. This conceptualization, however, does not address the features of mobile internet-based social networking sites like Instagram. My observations of the ways exotic dancers used various features of Instagram shows the mobile interface has introduced more complicated modes of self-presentation.

Through the mobile interface Black women exotic dancers perform a process that I term bad bitch pose. I use the term pose to refer to the ways this erotic labor involves actions in preparation for and in maintenance of the erotic performance expected in the types of strip clubs these Black women exotic dancers perform in. The setting of the strip club for Black women exotic dancers includes doing pole tricks, twerking, and performing sexuality as depicted in most rap music because of how these venues market the services they provide. These depictions often strictly portray the front stage setting of the club that forms the base of consumer operations during business hours including the dance floor, the DJ area, the bar, V.I.P. area, and the platform or stage performers dance on. When the women I observed posted images of themselves inside the strip club they chose to use the same images as the strip clubs themselves, but also used their smartphones to depict themselves backstage in the locker room or off the stage in spaces like at the bar.

For instance, one Memphis-based dancer posted an image provided by the photographers hired by the strip club that shows her swinging through the air upside down, her right leg wrapped in a metal hoop while she stretches her left leg up towards her head in a sort of half split. In another image on the same post she shows herself doing a split on the pole. She tags the photographer in the caption and quotes a

lyric from the rapper Drake to describe his photography skills as “the best I’ve ever had.” She describes herself uses a hashtag to compare herself to an angel in flight in addition to using her own username as a hashtag. The image receives over 250 likes and thirteen comments. More women than men leave comments, but all show affirmations of support (e.g. “I love this!”) or acknowledgment of her beauty (e.g. “Omggg u so fineeee hunny ”).

This dancer also posted an image of herself in the strip club in the locker room, which constitutes the strip club’s backstage because dancers go into this space to prepare their appearance prior to entering the main area of the club. Yet through Instagram the mobile interface provides the exotic dancer to convert this offline backstage into an online frontstage. In this picture she stands in front of a mirror with her phone in hand to use the camera on the back of the phone to produce an image of her reflection. This reflected image shows her wearing all black lingerie – a corset, a pair of panties, sheer lace leggings, and stilettos. Her hair appears straightened down to the middle of her back and her make-up that blends into her natural brown skin tone. Her caption includes an invitation to catch her “fucking it up at the playground” of the Memphis-based strip club where the locker room she posed in was located. The image receives over 450 likes and over 20 comments from men and women. While the comments acknowledge her beauty (e.g. “So beautiful, Like always”), others lead to potential opportunities. For example, one commenter describes themselves as a photographer interested in “work[ing] together to boost your career.” Another commenter tags another Instagram user and states that she could be a girl for an after party for the Bi-cenntial Beatdown Championship Boxing Fight held in May 2019 at

the FedEx Forum, a sports arena in Memphis. Instagram then not only permits Black women exotic dancers to encourage followers to become clients of themselves as exotic dancers, it also lends them the space to market their erotic capital to potential erotic labor markets outside the strip club industry.

On Instagram Black women exotic dancers to show a multiplicity of representations in the strip club as they also pose backstage in the locker room and share them through selfies. Hess (2015) applies the concept of assemblage to selfies to describe what such images inform us about regarding embodiment in the digital age:

Within technological culture, selfies illustrate the complexities and desires inherent to smartphones, networks, and self-expression. As rhetoric, selfies provide clues into meaning-making practices expressed through vernacular visualities composed on devices that follow users from intimate spaces in the home to public places and shared across social networking sites (p. 1632).

These selfies serve as an important tool to narrate the practices of erotic labor a Black woman exotic dancer sees as valuable to herself. For example, the dancers I observed did not tend to post images of themselves with other women that appeared more playful than the way groups or pairs of Black women exotic dancers are shown in rap music productions. For example, one dancer based in Atlanta posted an image on her profile of herself with another dancer. Both were light skin Black women of similar skin tone. They were posed with their backsides to the camera while standing with one foot on the lower step of the stairway before them. They both wore their hair slightly wavy and appeared to be wearing exotic wear fashion that allowed their

backsides to be mostly exposed. The caption read that their backsides looked so desirable that it made “y’all” think about a lap dance. This y’all directed at the Instagram users would come across the post who she also invited to see her and her “sis” at the Memphis-based club they were posing in. The use of y’all to describe her followers denoted a familiarity to the over 500 users who liked the image the 20-plus mostly men commenters who showered the Instagram user and her friend with compliments that use emojis for emphasis (e.g. “Stairway to heaven 😍”, “Damn very sexy 🍑🍑🍑🍑🍑🍑🍑🍑”). That she described the woman as sis also offers a different portrait of the relationship Black women exotic dancers share with each other that invokes familial ties rather than the sexualized relations portrayed by Black men rappers.

Many of the strip club profile pages post these images in addition to those produced by the photographers they’ve hired for the front stage setting. As a result, the images Black women exotic dancers created for themselves through the mobile interface allows them to have a self-portrait treated as marketing material for the venue rather than one produced through the lens of the photographers working at the club. This type of work therefore makes the bad bitch an aesthetic they activate in the setting of the club and invite both the venue and potential clients to have access to in that setting. Instagram then enables these Black women exotic dancers to recontextualize the space of the strip club and their presence within it as a place where they invite others to engage them and their peers through a sense of familiarity that might lead to an erotic exchange, for example a lap dance. I argue since Instagram enables an online representation of the offline backstage and access to

various images of the same Black woman exotic dancer in various contexts outside the main stage of the strip club, the actions Black women exotic dancers take within it to represent their environment undoes the hypersexualization of their labor as portrayed in rap music productions.

#### The Black Women's Boudoir: Performing Sensuality in the Domestic Sphere

Almost 70% of dancers in this dataset performed erotic labor in the domestic space of spaces that appeared to be in bedrooms or bathrooms of their homes. The erotic labor performed through posturing, fashion, and poses contrasted strongly with representations of Black women exotic dancers in the strip club. Whereas attire in the strip club included exotic fashion wear design to expose nearly all of one's stomach, breasts, and buttocks, the attire worn at home includes t-shirts, shorts, or a pair of bra and panties. Whereas Black women exotic dancers in the club adorned cosmetics and styled hair, they often wore no makeup and did not appear to have styled their hair in any particular manner. Sometimes they wear a bonnet or other protective hair covering. Additionally, while Black women exotic dancers in the club might vary the setting within the club (e.g. in the locker room, at the bar, or on the stage), the primary settings in the home for performances of erotic labor included the bathroom, right in front of the mirror, or in a bedroom, most often in the bed.

For instance, one D.C.-based dancer posted an image she had created by using her iPhone's camera in the mirror of a bathroom. She wore a crop top that left her torso exposed to show her navel. With this crop top she wore a pair of women's boxer brief style underwear. Since the smartphone blocked her face in the reflected image, she used the gesture of playing with her hair straightened hair by pulling a handful of

it upward above her head to show its length. As a caption she chose a series of emojis to imply her body shape resulted from fitness and not surgery. Though the picture received over one hundred likes, only one man left a comment saying he was on his way to imply he found the image inviting.

A dancer based in Atlanta posed before a mirror as she filmed herself with her smartphone. She wore her hair in braids and make-up that blended into her brown skin tone. Her outfit included a bra and high-waisted pair of panties. In the first video in the post she uses the camera to show herself playing with her braids and caressing her flat stomach. The second video in the post shows her caressing her stomach again before she plays with her hair again. The video includes music from Ginuwine's song playing in the background. Additionally, she has used features of either an editing software or another social networking application to impose a crown of virtual butterflies fluttering around her head. For a caption she has written that her body is a natural blessing alongside of series of emojis that include a blue butterfly, a Jamaican flag, and two different sets of heart emojis. The image received over 2500 likes and over 60 comments mostly from Black men who described her as "Gorgeous", "Sexy u cute", "Popping", and "Beautiful."

I argue Instagram affords Black women exotic dancers a means to embody a softer femininity and sensuality from within their own homes. Paired with these more subtle clothing choices, the bed and the mirror function as tools through which Black women exotic dancers posture themselves in a manner that distinguishes the hypersexual racialized performance of erotic labor, they are compelled to adhere to on the stages of the strip club thus negating the controlling image of the Jezebel.

Miller-Young (2014) writes that historically Black boudoir images of Black women during the nineteenth century rarely showed Black women posed solo or Black couples together. Instead these images tended to depict them as handmaids or attendants to the white woman subject of the photograph or doing sexual acts with white men. This positioning of white women and Black women's bodies enforced the idea of a contrast that "asserts the symbolic power of white, feminine, idealized beauty" (p. 36). The way Black women exotic dancers perform eroticism in domestic spaces on Instagram does not reinforce such racial-sexual stereotypes.

What Black women exotic dancers do by tapping into the eroticism of boudoir photography using selfies taken with their smartphones is unsettle assumptions about Black women and sexual excess. They turn Instagram into a gallery of boudoir photography wherein they are not only subject of the photograph but also often the photographer, a departure from late nineteenth century depictions. I argue this self-representation of eroticism in the domestic space without the makeup, stage, lights, and exotic wear of the strip club is a subversive act wherein Black women exotic dancers use setting, fashion, and styling to withdraw their presentation of sexiness from hypersexualization to titillation or coy flirtation. The choice to use the filters Instagram or other photo editing software softens the lighting in these images to provide these erotic photographer-subjects a means to center themselves in a light that contrasts starkly with the disorienting flashing, colorful lights of the strip club and the Hollywood veneer of professional lights for model and video shoots.

While Black women exotic dancers on Instagram do not operate absent the pornographic gaze of Black men participants in hip hop music industry, the social

networking application does present them an opportunity to perform in ways not limited to the constructs of the bad bitch. This enables Black women to locate the “bad bitch” specifically within the context in their role as exotic dancers, as they often invoke this performance when positioned within the setting of the strip club itself. I contend that when Black women exotic dancers present themselves in this way, they portray themselves as a “girl next door” figure. Typically, the girl next door figure in media characterizes what a group of sociologists describe as “the wholesome, demure, and polite—but fun-loving—interactional style characteristic of affluent white women” (p. 111) in a 2014 *Social Psychology Quarterly* article titled ““Good Girls’’: Gender, Social Class, and Slut Discourse on Campus.” The girl next door figure communicates sexuality and wholesomeness but also emerges in sex work as a performance that clients seek authenticity from white women exotic dancers (Bernstein 2007, Kitch 2001). Given the exclusion of Black women from the boudoir and erotic photography popular during the twentieth century and portrayals as the girl next door figure, the way Black women exotic dancers that I observed used Instagram represents an important affordance as a tool to reframe expectations around their sexuality.

#### *The Mobile Interface as the Strippreneur’s Virtual Storefront and Art Portfolio*

As stated previously, Gizelle Marie, an Afrolatina exotic dancer based in New York City, coined the term Strippreneur to describe herself on her Instagram profile. I use this term to describe the way Black women exotic dancers in the urban South leverage their erotic capital on Instagram to pursue various types of labor opportunities beyond and related to exotic dance. Using Instagram and other internet-

based software, many Black women exotic dancers turn the mobile interface into a virtual storefront that also functions as an erotic marketing portfolio. In this way Black women exotic dancers join other contemporary laborers who rely on social networking sites and digital tools to supplement their income such as influencers or workers in the gig economy (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders 2017, LeRoy 2017, Ravenelle 2017, Sokolova and Kefi 2019, Uzunoglu and Kip 2014).

#### Instagram Hip Hop Modeling

More than half of dancers (54.3%) had posted themselves in images that were done for professional men's magazines, digital publications, or a photographer's portfolio. These images generally had a photographer's studio as their backdrop, a watermark from the photographer or publication, or included a tag or mention of the photographer or publication in the caption. A dancer based in Memphis posted an image taken of her by a photographer where she stood before a wooden chair with her backside to the camera. Wearing a plain bra and thong underwear, she draped a denim jacket under her butt to emphasize its roundness. She wears make-up that blends well with her brown skin and long straight hair in a ponytail. The caption describes her body as petite but include the word 'damn' in all caps likely to imply that despite being a slim woman she possesses a sizeable backside. This seems confirmed by one of the eight comments that simply states "#sheesh." Nearly 350 users liked the photo. The dancer also used the tagging feature to tag the usernames of the Instagram accounts of the brands from which she obtained the jacket and the underwear set she wore. Additionally, she used the tagging featuring to include the username of her hair

stylist and make-up artist on the image. In this way, the dancer provides photoshoot credits like those shown alongside images of models in fashion magazines.

Modeling for Black women exotic dancers involves labor in multiple ways. First, they model when they appear alongside rappers in concerts or music videos. They model when they work an event like a car show or a rap concert. Second, they identified as a model or an image for modeling purposes when they were featured on promotional materials for strip clubs or rap music productions. Finally, they identify as models whenever they have their photograph taken as part of a professional photographer's portfolio. For example, a dancer in Atlanta posted an image of herself wearing red lingerie, golden-brown curls that reached down to her waist, and a face full of glamour make-up. The image showed her kneeling on what appeared to be a wooden platform set aflame, a likely pyrotechnics trick. In the caption she writes that she had fun shooting with the best photographer ever and praised their professionalism. She then mentioned the username of the makeup artist and the hairstylist. The image received nearly 1750 likes and over 125 comments from both men and women including one that stated "Put that in a magazine 📖" to which the dancer replied "I am already working on it" with a 📖 emoji and thumbs up emoji that matched her complexion.

I speculate that the representation of one's self as a model is a calling card to get paid to promote an altogether separate but interrelated part of the ways Black women perform erotic labor as part of hip hop's sexualized leisure culture. Furthermore, the use of Instagram to present as a model reflects the ways fashion and beauty influencers on Instagram have come to displace the supermodel of the editorial

and runway fashion industries. For instance, Maxim.com, the website for the men's magazine *Maxim*, has a dedicated page that leads to articles of Instagram models.<sup>12</sup> Many Instagram models work within the hip hop music industry and their presence has instituted a new iconography in the lyrics of contemporary rap songs. In his 2017 song "El Gato's Revenge" Atlanta rapper Gucci Mane raps "European idol, Instagram model /Drankin' out the bottle, heard she like to swallow," which suggests that the way rappers describe Instagram models sexualizes these women in a way that contradicts how these women represent their work in their own virtual modeling portfolio on Instagram. I argue Black women exotic dancers use images produced for photographers or publications rather than just those generated by their own smartphone or strip club photographers signals a professional status as a "model." By representing one's self as a model, Black women exotic dancers suggest a value for their erotic labor that is not tied to the strip club alone.

#### Digital Candy Ladies: How Black Women Exotic Dancers Do Business on Instagram

When I was in middle school, I would always stop by the candy lady if I wanted to get an Airhead candy or a Blow Pop during the summer. The candy lady also happened to be my hairdresser who would do my and my sister's hair in her kitchen using some of the same tools you would see in a professional beauty shop. While the candy lady in my neighborhood served a small apartment complex in suburban Atlanta with her wares, many Black Americans can attest to the candy lady in their neighborhoods and the diversity of their offerings. The candy lady

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.maxim.com/tag/instagram-models>

exemplifies the way Black women in working-class and poor neighborhoods have conducted business as part of the informal economy (Blair 2010, Harris 2016a). I argue that the way Black women exotic dancers use digital practices to participate in the informal economy in the virtual space also reveals how the gig economy itself operates as a formalization of sectors of the informal economy using social networking applications to mediate transactions.

Over one in three dancers (35.7%) indicated that they sold various products or services outside of exotic dance. Almost all these entrepreneurial pursuits involved some form of feminized labor. Products that dancers sold included clothing, hair extensions, or beauty and skin care products. Services that they offered included doing makeup, styling hair, or cooking. The beauty industry and hair salon has long served as a space where Black women could engage in entrepreneurship (Giddings 1984, Neil and Mbilishaka 2018, Wingfield 2008). A D.C.-based dancer used the biography page of her Instagram profile to describe herself as a master cosmetologist that specialized in hair and lash extensions. She also offered a link to a website where people could schedule a wig hairstyling appointment. A separate website she had embedded on the page, she sold predesigned wigs. Her Instagram profile showcased her talent. Several posts showed her crafting a wig on a mannequin's head or styling a client sometimes inside a hair salon. Her posts also depicted her inside a salon alongside women taking course work in cosmetology that she had helped educate according to her. The chronological order of posts on suggest that this woman desired to have the images on this Instagram page reflect her transition from dancer and model to professional cosmetologist. Linking to a scheduling website and a product

website on Instagram turned the profile page into a space where followers could admire her work before deciding to engage in the transaction in a manner similar to how catalogues or posters of hairstyles in salons did before people turned to the internet for fashion and beauty inspiration.

Some dancers based in the D.C. area I observed teamed up together to brand themselves as a member of entertainment groups that offered modeling, hosting, dancing, or headlining. Individual dancers often used a joint Instagram profile or hashtag to manage the services they offered. One joint Instagram profile provide an email address and a phone number of a person to contact for bookings. Posts on the page featured flyers for which that featured their image in the center and a caption that advertised the event they would be performing at. Most of the images also included images of the dancers posing as models for another photographer. The captions for these images would mention the username of the dancer's account and then invite users to book the featured model by contacting the email listed in the caption.

When Black women exotic dancers use the social networking site to book their own clients directly and present themselves as professional talents, they circumvent the need to rely only on the ways strip clubs or rap music productions present them and the exposure they gain from this affiliation. Beauty and fashion influencers have also relied on social networking sites to obtain access to opportunities that modeling agencies would have acted as gatekeepers to prior to the normalization of the use of internet-based portfolios to showcase one's skills. Jackie Aina, a Black woman beauty influencer who gained popularity on YouTube,

appeared as the cover girl for the June 2019 of *Essence* magazine, a monthly magazine that primarily markets to Black women readers. YouTube also provided a space for Black women interested in styling their natural hair to advertise homemade hair products, hairstyling strategies, and fill in a gap in a market that catered to Black women with chemically processed hair up until the late 2010s (Ellington 2014, Neil and Mbilishaka 2018, Talton et al. 2017). I contend the way Black women exotic dancers use of Instagram represents the ways social networking sites has enabled workers to circumvent the corporatized market relations that have long acted as gatekeepers within the participation of various creative and entertainment industries, echoing back to the ways Black women participated in the informal economy during the early twentieth century (Blair 2010, Harris 2016a).

A few of the women I observed offered services as performing artists often as rappers or singers, though some also did paintings. A few also worked as pole dance instructors leveraging their strip club talent into a job in the women's fitness and wellness industry. Finally, some women managed roles and occupations as students or as workers in the service or care industry. For example, an Atlanta-based dancer described herself as both a nurse and a pole entertainer in the biography section of her profile. The images she posted showed her in two different pole dancing settings. She had taken one image with her smartphone in the mirror of a fitness studio that included poles installed in the wood dance floor. Another image appeared to be taken by the photographer of the strip club she had mentioned in the caption. While she sat barefaced with her hair tied up in tanktop, sports bra, and shorts in the fitness studio, she appeared seated with her backside to the camera on the stage of the strip club

wearing what appeared to be leather underwear with a mesh top and stiletto heels wearing her hair styled and loose over her shoulders with a full face of make-up. For this dancer pole dancing represented an opportunity to express oneself physically as an artist and for the purpose of fitness. The Instagram profile page permits a juxtaposition of the types of pole dance that varies the setting and the context, but keeps the person presented in the image the same. Through Instagram Black women exotic dancers exhibit a greater fluidity between their roles as workers than the self-presentation expected in the strip club permits.

#### Erotic Influencers: How Black Women Exotic Dancers Advertise on Behalf of Others

Over 1 in 3 exotic dancers (34.3%) used their Instagram accounts to promote for others in the strip club and hip-hop music industry. Dancers used their bodies to model clothing from makers or distributors of exotic wear; the cosmetics created by or cosmetology performed by Black women; the artistic endeavors of Black men photographers who used the dancers as subjects of photos; and the music productions of Black men rappers. For instance, an Atlanta dancer posted an image of her fingernails which had intricate designs and colors. She used the caption to mention the username of the name artist and wrote the username directly on the image of her nails. Cardi B did similar for her nail artist Jenny Bui who even after she reached mainstream pop star status. This action led several fashion and celebrity gossip blogs and magazines to court the nail artist for an interview about her life and what it was like to know Cardi B before the fame. Another dancer in Atlanta shared a video of herself twerking while in a club with her backside to the lens of the camera. The club's music played in the background of the video as she performed. The outfit

appeared to be a mesh top and matching pants. The dancer used the caption to include a mention of the username of the clothing designer. The video received nearly 3,000 views and a dozen comments. While I do not find evidence that the dancers I observed have such an outsized effect on the fame of the people they promote, I do see that this practice of promotions on Instagram reflects a common practice of using reviews on social networking sites as a virtual word-of-mouth advertising, an important practice for members of a community historically marginalized from representation through corporate marketing practices. This type of use of Instagram reflects the way an influencer culture shapes the engagement between users on the application.

20% of exotic dancers in this dataset had posted an image of themselves superimposed on a promotional flyer that indicated they were to be a featured dancer for a night or weekend at a specific strip club location. Headlining involved appearing as a featured dancer on the promotional flyers for a day and time at a specific strip club. A dancer based in D.C. posted an image of herself and two other performers on a flyer for an event in a Jacksonville, Florida strip club described as an invasion due to all the dancers hailing from the D.C. metropolitan area. The flyer included the date of the event and the usernames of the Instagram accounts for each dancer above the phrase 'Performing Live' in all capital letters. The dancer used the caption to invite users to come to the event. This use of Instagram to document one's self as a headliner signals to followers that they travel to perform in clubs outside of their home base because they have achieved access a status as exotic dancers for whom strip clubs show an investment in marketing as exclusive and elite. Black women

exotic dancers therefore communicate the value of their erotic capital on Instagram that sets them apart from other dancers.

#### Webcam Modeling and Other Sex Work Online

Few dancers (15.9%) that I observed identify as participants in forms of online sex work such as webcam modeling on their Instagram profiles. A dancer based in Atlanta exemplifies the strategies these women used when they signaled their use of virtual platforms. Her biography page included references to exclusive content and described that her profile page had an age limit of 21 and above because she sought only a mature audience. The dancer used the highlight feature of Instagram to preserve images she had taken through the story mode on the app to advertise other social networking sites she used and the username for various money exchange applications. The profile also included a link that went directly to the website where she advertised access to photos or images of her for a monthly fee to the subscription service payment style used for various other internet-based media services like Netflix or Hulu. For this dancer, the captions of the images of herself taken by professional photographers provided advertisement for the exclusive content she promised on the website she had linked to in her biography page.

I speculate one reason why so few of the women I observed advertised this way likely relates to the terms of service the company that manages the application has set forth in regard to adult material. While the terms of service forbid outright solicitation of sex on its platform, it does not forbid adult entertainers from using the website and even provides the designation of ‘Adult Entertainment Service’ or ‘Adult Entertainment Club’ under its business profile classification. Furthermore, well-

known current and former pornstars manage Instagram profiles with millions of followers. Some white women pornstars like Sara Jay, Jenna Jameson and Stormy Daniels have verified accounts symbolized by blue check next to their username names that indicates the authenticity of the account holder has been verified by Instagram. Still, Instagram enforces a policy against sex workers perceived to have violated the terms of service by temporarily or permanently suspending their accounts.

I also speculate another reason why so few women in this study used these services reflected the distinctions some exotic dancers see between themselves and other sex workers. Historically, striptease developed out of burlesque industry of the early twentieth century and survived in clubs that permitted women to perform lap dancing or pole dancing. The mainstreaming of the adult entertainment industry included the acceptance of striptease and strip clubs as cities enforced sanctions against public prostitution (Egan 2003, Frank 2016, Hanna 2003, Hanna 2016, Hubbard et al. 2008, Hubbard 2009, Ryder 2004, Weitzer 2007, Weitzer 2010). Therefore, I imagine many of these dancers do not participate in online sex work due to the stigma attached to more criminalized forms of sex work.

The Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) passed in the U.S. House of Representatives in 2018. The bill updates section 230 of the Communications Act of 1934 that imposes penalties to anyone who operates interactive computer services that promote prostitution. The U.S. Senate simultaneously passed the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) to reframe language around liability for communications providers related to the dissemination

of material deemed in violation of decency provisions in the Communications Act of 1934. Sex work rights advocates argue these policies have a negative effect on women who use the internet to protect themselves from sex trafficking and limits their erotic autonomy.<sup>13</sup> My findings show that Black women sex workers on the internet use social networking sites to manage their entrepreneurial goals, yet the mainstream media often centers college-educated Black women from middle-class and elite backgrounds. For example, the 2018 *Forbes* 30 under 30 list for young movers and shakers in the world of retail and e-commerce featured only one Black woman: Iyore Olaye, who graduated from Cornell University.<sup>14</sup> I argue concern about supporting Black women entrepreneurs, tends to ignore the ways Black women sex workers leverage their presence on social networking sites into sources of income. That said, any discussion of Black women entrepreneurs should consider how the politics of respectability help Black women gain visibility as entrepreneurs fails to address.

#### How Black Women Exotic Dancers Present on Instagram Across Cities in the Urban South

Some images remained a trend across dancers from the different cities while others appeared to be more redundant among dancers within the same city. Except for the case of Atlanta, where slightly more women identified as online sex workers (13.8%) than they then did headliners (10.3%), all trends related to other poses and entrepreneurial suits head in the same direction, wherein fewer and fewer women

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<sup>13</sup> <https://stopsesta.org/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/profile/iyore-olaye/?list=30under30-retail-e-commerce#767864365c26>

engage in that practice. The distribution of women who choose certain poses and entrepreneurial pursuits in Memphis tended to always fall between the representation of these poses and entrepreneurial pursuits among dancers in Atlanta and D.C. I suggest that this reflects the ways the strip club industry in Memphis has not gained the visibility or profitability of those based in the D.C. and Atlanta metropolitan area. Dancers in Atlanta and D.C. have access to more strip clubs and venues where mainstream celebrities in the hip hop industry frequent.

Compared to dancers from Memphis and D.C., a greater share of dancers in Atlanta posted images in the club (89.7%) or promotional material (37.9%) for events like rap music productions at the strip club or other entertainment venues. I speculate one reason why more women based in Atlanta posted images in the club and promotional material reflected the significance the strip club industry in this city has to its internationally recognized rap music industry. These dancers have access to numerous strip clubs recognized among hip hop artists based there who use these venues as sites for their music videos or places to seek out entertainment. A Black woman exotic dancer interested in using their erotic capital to delve into the entertainment industry might feel inclined to use their profile pages to advertise a local rapper's event or show herself performing at a well-recognized strip club.

Compared to Memphis and Atlanta, a greater share of women in D.C. used their pages to post erotic images of themselves from their own homes (73.9%), images of themselves produced for a digital or print publications that feature erotic photos of Black women (65.2%), images that marketed various products or services (43.5%), headlining as the featured dancer at a club (30.4%) or invitations to access

their nude images or other erotic imagery through online services other than Instagram (21.7%). I contend the way Black women exotic dancers in the D.C. metropolitan area relied on these strategies shows the ways strip clubs in this area marketed the venues to the city's professional class. These other forms of work tied together with their roles as exotic dancers enabled them to portray themselves as business savvy and erotic just as the term *stripperneur* suggests.

### *How Black Women Exotic Dancers Use Video on Instagram*

I analyzed the videos the Black women exotic dancers in this dataset posted to Instagram through nonparticipant observation due the limitations of Instagram as a platform for video. Videos on Instagram can be distributed as a post directly on a user's timeline or as a story posted in a separate section above the user's timeline. Unless the user who uploaded the story chooses to save the video separately as a highlight, the video disappears for a user's followers within 24 hours. Videos on Instagram are essentially proprietary in that they aren't intended to be stored or observed independent of the mobile interface. Therefore, they can't be amassed into a dataset a coded in the same way that the images can. Rather than provide a quantitative breakdown by city, I describe the two sets of practices I identified related to how Black women exotic dancers used Instagram to perform erotic labor.

First, Black women used exotic dancers to present their skills as twerk performers. Second, Black women exotic dancers used video to engage in performances of flirtation with the camera, or rather used the lens of the camera to emphasize parts of their face, hair, and body (usually their breasts and buttocks) that they believed were considered desirable on Black women. Finally, Black women

exotic dancers used the camera of their mobile phones and the live function of Instagram to provide a view of themselves in action, usually getting ready to perform while backstage at the strip club.

#### Twerving for the 'Gram: The Illicit Eroticism of Black Women's Booty Dances

In reference to twerving Miller-Young (2014) writes that in addition to "stripper performance aesthetics and strip- club culture, booty- centric performance is also an essential tool for online video performers" as women in the working class center their backsides on platforms like YouTube because "the booty is a key site where these women work upon their bodies, to discipline them to conform to the most desirable kind of fleshy black feminine embodiment" (p. 172). However, Miller-Young also contends that these websites have led to the mainstreaming of the dance through the co-optation and appropriation of Black women's aesthetics in the music of pop artists like Miley Cyrus. Ethnomusicologist expands on the role of the internet in shaping perceptions about Black women and twerving in the 2015 *Journal of Popular Music Studies* article "Youtube, Twerving & You: Context Collapse and the Handheld Co-Presence of Black Girls and Miley Cyrus." Gaunt contends websites like YouTube create a context collapse wherein the proliferation of videos of Black women and girls twerving on the internet gets lost in translation as their movements get interpreted by viewers outside of the lived context wherein Black people developed these dances. Due to this context collapse internet users pick up twerving not as a Black cultural phenomenon, but rather an internet phenomenon that they participate in due to their exposure to it through mainstream popular culture. Gaunt argues that whereas Black women and girls perform twerving online as a means of

self-expression and self-presentation, non-Black viewers perceive these movements as hypersexual or salacious while also giving more views and praise to white women who share similar videos on YouTube. My findings show Black women exotic dancers display multifaceted and diverse performances of twerk that relocate this dance move that they do not restrict to the strip club alone.

Black women exotic dancers that posted twerk videos did so directly to their timeline, unless they were filming themselves performing a routine that they then livestreamed through Instagram's stories feature. At times, they showcased them twerk as an exotic dancer within the context of the strip club while performing a pole dance. A dancer based in Atlanta used her Instagram profile to post a video of herself twerking on stage at a strip club located in her city to the song "Bodak Yellow" by Cardi B. The caption of the post invited users to come and see her at the club which she named by tagging the username of the Instagram profile associated with the club. The video received nearly 30,000 views and 200 counts. Several comments here seemed more explicit than those posted on other types of content the women I observed shared. One man wrote the phrase "Face Time 🍑 🍑," to imply that he desired to perform a sexual act on the dancer. Another commenter wrote "Damn you look fine! And I bet you're fun as hell in the bedroom!" Such comments reveal the ways users on Instagram reinforce controlling images by projecting their desires onto the erotic performances of Black women exotic dancers.

Other times, dancers would showcase themselves twerking throughout various mundane landscapes much like the way they engaged in rear view poses. Rap music was almost always the musical accompaniment to these twerk performances. A

dancer in Memphis uploaded a video to her profile of herself twerking to bounce music, a genre of Southern Black music innovated in New Orleans that features beats and chants meant to encourage fast twerking. The video appears to have been filmed by the dancer's passenger who cheers her on as the film takes place with her just outside her open car door as the car's speaker plays song lyrics that encourage the listener to bounce it. The video received nearly 1500 views and over 30 comments. Once again commenters rendered the performance explicit through statements that projected sexual desire. One commenter wrote "Do that on my face 🍆 🍑," while another man wrote "Damn miss no draws 🍆 🍑 🍑 🍑," a statement of pure speculation given that the dancer had worn a full length dress that covered the entirety of her body while doing the performance. The choice to sharing twerk videos filmed in public settings reflects what Gaunt (2015) calls batty-werk to describe the ways Black women use twerk videos as a form of personal expression on video using their bodies to communicate cultural blackness.

#### Flirting with the Camera

Black women exotic dancers that flirted with the camera used the self-facing camera on their mobile phones to film parts of their body. This use of the camera to pan across one's body usually started at the face and hair, at which point the dancer would use the self-facing camera as a sort of mirror as she primps and checks her makeup or hair. The camera then often goes across the woman's breasts, often showing cleavage alone. Some women then take the camera across their stomachs on their way to their backside, while others move the camera lens directly from breast to buttocks. Occasionally, a woman will use the same hand with which she played with

her hair to give her breasts or buttocks a playful squeeze. Flirtations with the camera usually end once again on the woman's face and almost all offer a coy smile or kiss as a flirtatious gesture.

I argue that within the context of the strip club, a flirtation with the camera is a virtual 'come hither,' when captioned with text that invites clients to visit her at whichever strip club location, she is currently posing in. Outside the strip club this camera flirtation invites admiration from Instagram followers in recognition of the how beauty functions as erotic capital on the social networking site. Furthermore, this type of camera work indicates that as Instagram users, Black women exotic dancers see their self-presentation in such videos to engage with followers as an audience because as they flirt with the camera, they flirt with the Instagram users that view the video. Such a self-presentation exhibits the capacity for erotic autonomy among Black women that communicates what Morgan (2015) describes as a politics of pleasure.

#### Livestreaming from the Locker Room

Black women exotic dancers that use the livestreaming in the strip club often do so while in the locker room. In these videos Black women exotic dancers show themselves putting on makeup, getting their hair styled, or getting dressed in their outfit for the evening. Livestreaming in the front stage of the club often looks like a flirtation with the camera. In real-time dancers engage with followers who can like or comment on the live action of the dancer's transition to the front stage of the strip club through the Instagram application's mobile interface. I contend dancers use this type of livestreaming as a strategy to communicate that they are currently at work, a

useful tactic given the asynchronous format of Instagram's timeline.<sup>15</sup> Thus, as individuals interested in marketing their services in the now, Black women exotic dancers livestream to overcome the limitation of an algorithm not designed to capture immediacy.

A dancer in Atlanta used the livestream function to engage in a flirtation with the camera while at a strip club in the city. Viewers of the video immediately showered the comments with 😍 emojis as she observed her reading their comments as she stood in the club, smoking from a hookah pipe – an amenity that many contemporary strip clubs provide – as she danced to the rap music playing in the club. This type of dancing differed from the twerk videos or pole tricks marketed as the sole purpose of Black women exotic dancers in the club. She merely shimmied her shoulders as she blew smoke. She never states a word, only occasionally using her fingers to caress her waist-length wavy hair. This self-presentation on Instagram contrasts to how rap music productions depict the setting of the strip club and how Black women exotic dancers work within the space. I argue that the red and purple halo that circles around an avatar of a Black women exotic dancer's profile image once they begin a livestream video from the locker room of the strip club functions similarly to the metaphor of the red light that signaled a brothel was open for business in the early twentieth-century. When Black women exotic dancers livestream, they represent themselves as real and their erotic labor as work. Filming this process

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<sup>15</sup> Instagram's timeline functions as a list viewable on the mobile interface wherein all images and some recorded videos are accessible directly through a user's profile. This media is only viewable to other users as they view the Instagram interface through their own accounts through a timeline shaped by an algorithm known only to the company itself.

enables followers to observe the effort that goes into building the fantasy consumers seek when they visit strip clubs. Such a strategy reflects how Instagram affords these dancers a means to present themselves in real life and outside the visual fantasies of contemporary rap music productions.

*The Racialized Erotic Labor of Self-Branding and Virtual Embodiment on Instagram*

In this section I describe how Black women exotic dancers use text on Instagram.

Overall, exotic dancers used the username, full name, and biography fields allotted on their personal Instagram profiles to signal several aspects of identity including status as an entrepreneur; professional roles in the sex work industry; adherence to heteronormative forms of femininity; illicit eroticism; hometown; and class-based or monetary status symbols. Additionally, I describe findings from my nonparticipant observation of the online publics and crowds that engage Black women exotic dancers on Instagram, I considered: (1) How users interacted with the Instagram accounts of Black women exotic dancers through the use of comments and likes; and (2) How users that managed Instagram accounts related to Black women exotic dancers represented them when they were associated with promotional pages or strip club venues. I observed the social characteristics of online crowds and determined that most engagement through comments is done by Black men Instagram users, but the presence of Black women and non-Black Instagram users suggests the audience for Black women exotic dancers is more diverse than strip club demographics suggest. Furthermore, I observed that strip clubs and promotional pages reinforced a beauty ideal that favored light skin Black and Latina women with curvy body types as found in previous research (Brooks 2010b). Ultimately, online crowds and publics

use Instagram to reconstruct and reinforce the racialized erotic capital Black women grapple with offline.

The Use of Text on Instagram to Perform Racial-Sexual Identity

Chart 4.1 shows the categories for usernames, full names, and biographies by city.

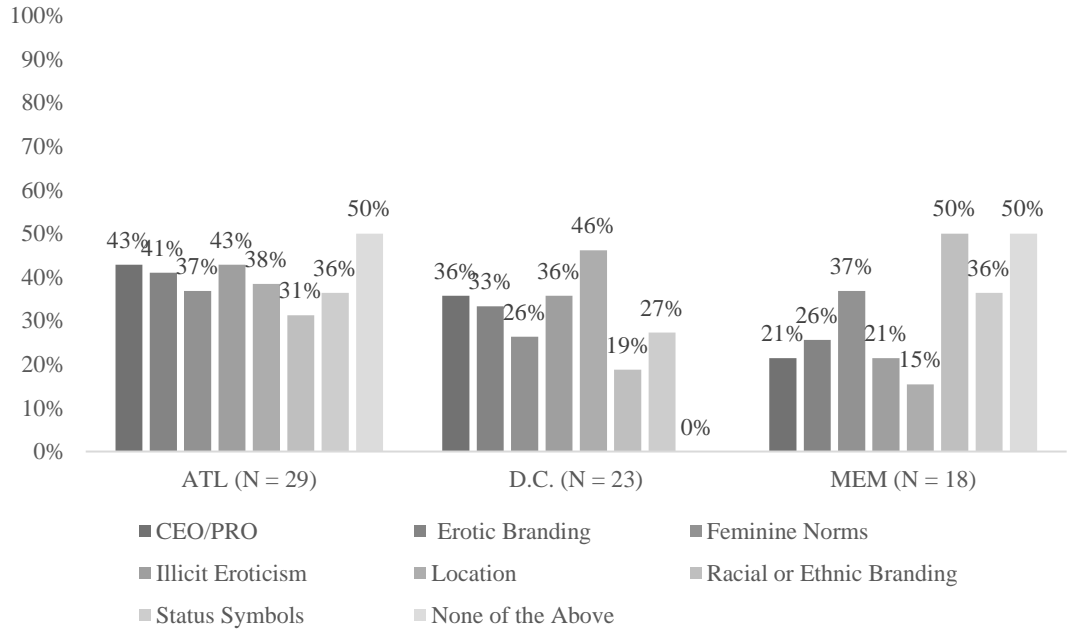


Chart 4.1 Categories of text use per dancer for Atlanta, D.C., and Memphis

*CEO/PRO.* Some of the women I observed used their biography section to signal their entrepreneurial pursuits outside of exotic dance. They described these occupational roles or provided a direct link to an Instagram page wherein they managed the selling of products and services. A dancer in Memphis described herself as an owner of a name brand that she managed on a separate Instagram profile she had mentioned in the biography. This Instagram page led to a profile that advertised custom exotic wear and other apparel that she had handstitched.

This usage of Instagram to showcase one’s products reveals how social networking sites offer Black women exotic dancers to participate in the informal

economy in which they market and sell products they created themselves without relying on a corporation. Instead they use their profile pages as catalogues and product websites. The self-designation as owners, CEOs, and professionals demonstrates that the focus on entrepreneurship in the twenty-first century that centers on Black women with elite backgrounds fails to consider how social networking sites have made person-to-person commercial exchanges simpler for all.

*Erotic Branding.* I use the term erotic branding to describe the erotic labor of signifying one's status as a sex worker using symbols like a booking email address, terminology like "naked hustler," or "adult entertainer," to communicate their identities as a professional sex service worker in the biography section of their profile. This might also include the use of phrases like "stripper" or "model" in one's username. Erotic branding through the text of one's profile page or username was the only practice that more dancers used above all others across the three cities. I argue this erotic branding reflects the innovation of using one's stage name at strip club venues to name their digitized erotic persona.

This digitization of the stage name also includes using the username in hashtags. I observed that hashtagging a username provided a way for dancers to maintain their digital persona in several ways. First, dancers used hashtags of their usernames in the comments of images of themselves featured on the Instagram profiles of other users. Second, dancers used hashtags to maintain their digital persona across images whenever they changed the username of their account or created a new account. Including the prior username as a hashtag in images or in the biography section ensured that users who sought the dancer out under the previous

name would still find their account. Lastly, they used their usernames in the captions to invite followers to see them at the club by placing the phrase ‘Ask for’ before their stage name. I contend the use of hashtags reflects a way Instagram provides Black women exotic dancers agency of their identities as exotic dancers and erotic laborers as they use these tools to draw attention to the profile page and market themselves to potential clients.

*Normative feminine norms.* Scholars of Black women in sex work often contend that they must perform a racialized erotic labor due to stereotypes about the hypersexuality of Black women. However, this scholarship fails to address the ways femininity remains defined through heteronormative social constructs that attribute certain characteristics to the desirable feminine woman. Rather than rely strictly on racialized performances of femininity alone, the women I observed communicated feminine norms for beauty and personhood through conventional references to beauty in their usernames, full names, or biographies. For example, some dancers included “barbie” or “doll” in their username, adding some type of descriptor that modified this identifier to be unique to themselves by mentioning or example a physical feature of their body. Other dancers used their biography section of their profiles to identify themselves as mothers and describe themselves through language like “pretty” and “beautiful.” Sometimes, they used emoji text like red lipstick, red lipstick stained lips, and a hand with nails in the process of being painted to perform this kind of femininity. Alongside performances of illicit eroticism and displays of their backsides as racialized erotic capital, I contend that the use of terms associated with femininity

for all women shows that the racialization of erotic labor involves performing Blackness in addition to broadly accepted understandings of beauty.

*Illicit eroticism.* I used Miller-Young's concept of illicit eroticism to illuminate how Black women exotic dancers used text to negotiate the racialized expectations of their erotic labor. For example, some exotic dancers engaged in illicit eroticism through references to popular characterizations of Black women in rap music. Those that modeled for rap music videos described themselves as video vixens in the biography section of their profile pages. In music videos rappers portray video vixens as hyperfeminine beauties that cater to their every sexual whim. Aside from a few celebrity vixens, they rarely receive individual camera time, name recognition, or lines to speak (Balaji 2010, Miller-Young 2014, Wingfield and Mills 2012). Video vixens using Instagram offers a means to observe their lives and identities beyond their representation within rap music productions.

Others described themselves as 'boss ladies,' tapping into an iconography related to the bad bitch trope wherein the Black woman companion to the Black man rapper-hustler is just as capable of earning cash through. Many Black women rappers describe themselves as "boss bitches" in their song lyrics as Cardi B did in the 2018 song "I Do," when she rapped "I'm in a boss bitch mood/ these heels are Givenchy, ho/These are some boss bitch shoes/If you ain't no boss bitch, move." I argue self-defining as a boss lady or bitch communicates a status as not just a worker, revealing a sophisticated understanding of their place within society's hierarchical labor relations. I contend that through this type of illicit eroticism, Black women exotic dancers undo the notion that Black women sex workers do little more than act as

goldiggers or cheap hoes (Brooks 2010b, Miller-Young 2014, Rebollo-Gil and Moras 2012, Sharpley-Whiting 2007).

Black women exotic dancers also used text to describe their backsides as a form of racialized erotic capital through rap lyric references or descriptions of their bodies using common parlance among speakers of Black Vernacular English. A dancer in Atlanta described her backside as an apple that she would put in “yo” mouth. Black Americans have long used the phrase Apple Bottom to describe curvaceous backsides. For example, St. Louis rapper Nelly founded the clothing line Apple Bottoms to sell jeans to women with curvaceous backsides in the early 2000s. This clothing line filled a gap for women whose bodies did not fit the proportions sold by mainstream denim companies like Levi’s or the Gap. Black women have long criticized the fashion industry for not embracing the curvaceous bodies of Black women. Through the ways Black women exotic dancers embrace their curves on the social networking site, I argue Instagram provides a space that they turn to a standard of beauty informed by intracultural understandings of desirability ascribed to their bodies rather standards set by the mainstream fashion and beauty industry.

*Location.* Dancers signaled their location using text to communicate their current geographic location or former hometowns. This included direct reference to a city or state in one’s username or biography through the name of the city, name of the state, or the phone number area code for that metropolitan region. Dancers also signaled their willingness to travel in their profile pages by including an emoji of an airplane in the biography section.

Use of these type of location identifiers mimics how rappers refer to their hometowns and popular urban centers in their lyrics (Forman 2000). For instance, Blocboy JB, a rapper from Memphis, featured Canadian rapper Drake on a 2018 song titled “Look Alive.” Drake, whose father hails from Memphis, opens the song with the lyrics “901 Shelby Drive/Look alive, look alive” which references both the city’s area code and the name of the county Memphis is located in. I contend that these types of shout-outs both within rap music and in the digital practices of Black women exotic dancers serve to tie their identities to a Black geographic space and place. Such practices exemplifies what McKittrick McKittrick (2007) discusses a politics of resistance observed through Black women’s geographies as these women use the features of Instagram to embrace where they are from and communicate where they are willing to go.

*Racial/Ethnic Branding.* Previous research indicates Black women exotic dancers engage in racial passing to capitalize off the perceived value given to Black women of lighter skin or mixed-race heritage (Brooks 2010b). My findings indicate that Black women exotic dancers use the features of Instagram to emphasize rather than downplay their Blackness. For example, Some Black women exotic dancers in this dataset signaled ethnicity from predominately Caribbean or African nations by using text to describe their heritage in their profile pages. They also used flag emojis in their biography sections or in the captions of their images to denote a specific heritage. I argue this practice leverages racialized exotic capital due to the exotification Black women from the Caribbean and Africa experience in Europe and North America (Tate 2015).

I also observed that Black women exotic dancers also engage in racial branding using Black Vernacular English in their usernames, biographies, and captions. Sometimes they would use descriptions such as “Black,” or “Chocolate” alongside feminine titles like “Lady” or “Beauty,” to communicate they perceived their femininity as associated with their womanhood. Others also used the phrase “melanin” to refer to their skintones, a common practice among Black people who use this term for the macromolecule responsible for natural pigments in one’s skin. A dancer in D.C. used such descriptors in the caption an image of herself posing with her butt to the camera as she sat with her legs in a pool. This professional shot displayed her in a swimsuit that left most of her back and butt exposed as she looked over her shoulder biting the tip of her finger. She describes herself as a “Badd lil vibe,” another variation of the term bad bitch. She hashtags the phrase chocolate and melanin as well as a hashtag that references her natural locked hair. The image received over 2500 likes and 90 comments. One woman commenter wrote that the image made her “proud to have locs and black and woman!!! Get it girl!” This post and response from commenters exemplifies how Black women in general have turned to their own conceptualizations of beauty in the face of their erasure from mainstream depictions of beauty in media (Hobson 2018, Miller-Young 2014, Morgan 1999b, Tate 2007, Tate 2015, Thomas, Hacker and Hoxha 2011). Instagram affords Black women exotic dancers to present themselves before an audience invested in their physical features as a beauty standard not only for the dancers, but also for Black women more broadly.

*Status symbols.* Some Black women exotic dancers that I observed used text, including emoji, as signifiers of high or elite class status. For example, some dancers included an emoji of a stack of cash. Others would include emojis of money bags, a queen's crown, trophies, dollar signs, shoes, and other signals of materialism. Others also included a reference to cash in their name, using similar conventions as popular rappers who refer to cash through colloquial terms derived from Black Vernacular English or through respellings of various European fashion brands like Dior or Versace. The naming of one's account and exotic dance persona also often included references to other European symbols of elite status such as expensive French champagnes. A few dancers also gave themselves titles associated with monarchy such as duchess or queen.

Black women exotic dancers that reference European brands or cash engage in a practice popularized in contemporary rap. Rappers use references to these status symbols as means to communicate their upward mobility and proximity to wealth (Mohammed-Baksh and Callison 2015). Atlanta rap trio the Migos released a song titled "Versace," in 2013 in which they bragged about how their clothes came from the high-end label founded by Italian fashion designer Gianni Versace. In the music video they appear surrounded by thin, mostly white women models, who strut the hallways of a massive mansion wearing pieces from the clothing brand. While this music video production reinforces the notion that only high-fashion brands should adorn only the bodies of thin white women, Black women exotic dancers liken themselves to such brands or the embodiment of high class.

I argue Black cultural practices rooted in afrocentrism related to the use of these signifiers informs the way these dancers invoke this symbolism. Black people have long used the phrase queen as a term of endearment for Black women and references to Black queens parallel the ways Black people embrace figures like Cleopatra, Nefertiti, and Nzinga to displace mainstream understandings of monarchy tied to the European continent onto African continent. Through this Black queen imagery, Black women perform respectability that runs counter to the controlling images that characterize them as ghetto or low class (Baldwin 2004, Reid-Brinkley 2008). This practice has long had a place in hip hop among women rappers such as Queen Latifah and Nefertiti who gained popularity in the early 1990s (Rabaka 2012). Therefore, Black women exotic dancers might use text to bolster their status.

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## How Online Crowds and Publics Engage Exotic Dancers on Instagram

I have described how commenters engaged Black women exotic dancers through examples that referenced the specific type of labor they portrayed in certain posts. Here I describe general conclusions derived from nonparticipant observation. Black women exotic dancers had a diverse following, but the affordances of visibility for users on the platform appeared to lead to a fractured representation of the online crowds that formed in the comments, likes, and follower counts of Instagram accounts run by Black women exotic dancers. A review of the profile pictures and biographies of followers of Black women exotic dancers tends to overwhelmingly include other Black people. Most of these Black people appear to identify as men. A few of the followers are tangential to the strip club industry through hip hop, for example, most appear to be following as consumers. White men followers were relatively rare comparatively, but Black women exotic dancers had more white men followers than they did followers that were non-Black men of color. Racial diversity was greater among women followers, though most of them appeared to be Black women. It also appeared that many women that followed Black women exotic dancers worked in the industry themselves or in another affiliated field like cosmetics, bartending, or modeling.

While many studies of social networking sites use follower count as a metric for engagement between the group of users under study and the broader virtual environment, this focus on aggregated quantity of followers renders the individuality of each user less visible. Through my analysis of the content of comments I observed the quality of reactions that users have to the ways the women I followed performed

erotic labor. My observations revealed a range of user commentary on images wherein Black women exotic dancers performed erotic labor. All commenters emphasized the dancer's perceived desirability through more racy compliments whenever a dancer posed a rear view or twerking picture. For example, some users would post a tongue emoji to imply licking or a smiley face with a droplet of liquid on its lips to imply drooling. Many other commenters would speculate about whether the dancer had recently gained, or lost weight based on the perceived size of her backside. Users appeared to interpret sensual imagery like boudoir style photos as "beauty" while responding to sexual imagery popular in the strip club and other hip-hop aesthetic productions as "sexy."

Though Black people made up most users that I observed commenting and following each dancer account, the way Black men and Black women reacted to a post a dancer had made did not always match up. All respondents tended to use terms that would admire the dancers' beauty or femininity, however men sometimes provided more explicit detail about their physical attraction than did women. Black men commenters also engaged in the practice of attempting to solicit erotic labor from them, often inquiring about their relationship status or whether they would be accessible at the local strip club or one in that user's city.

A D.C.-based dancer posted an image that received over 400 likes and over 20 comments from a photoshoot where she posed next to a piano while wearing a bra, panties, and high heels. The caption included a reference to a line from a clip from the show A&E show *Beyond Scared Straight* that had gone viral on social networking sites among Black users. She tells her followers good morning before using a hashtag

where she uses the word bitch alongside the feminizing word 'sweet.' She then used emojis to symbolize the role each username she had mentioned after the emoji had played in the photo shoot including a hair stylist, make-up stylist, clothing stylist, the tattoo artist, and the photographer. In the comments most people described her with terms like "queen," "beautiful," or used emojis like 😊 or 🍑. While one woman commenter left the reaction "My bitch badd," as a compliment, a man user left the response "Beautiful Sexy Hot Legs With Your Sexy Nude High Heels."

Collins (2000) describes the way rap music introduced a contemporary iteration of the jezebel through the portrayal of Black women as hoochies "constructed as a woman whose sexual appetites are at best inappropriate and, at worst, insatiable, it becomes a short step to imagine her as a "freak." (p. 83). Miller-Young (2014) makes a similar argument about the ways rap music in the late 2000s to early 2010s depicted Black women as hoes. According to Miller-Young, hip hop's engagement with pornography in the early twenty-first century influenced the representation of Black women's sexuality. What the comments I observed show indicate that the controlling images result from what Hunter and Soto (2009) described as the pornographic gaze. Further I argue that the self-presentation of Black women on Instagram as erotic evokes a similar and yet distinct response because in the case of comments on Instagram, hypersexuality is in the eye of the beholder. I speculate the socialization of Black men through hip hop music regarding the sexuality of Black women also explains why men regardless of the type of erotic performance on display commented more frequently and sometimes made more overtly sexualized comments.

That non-Black women and men tended to only engage through likes and not comments suggest that there's sexual politics around the visibility of acknowledgment of desire for Black women exotic dancers that Instagram enables users to maintain by liking instead of commenting. The rare appearance of non-Black men of color and white men in comments often involved this user asking the dancer to perform erotic labor in a capacity other than what she had advertised, whether as a girlfriend or a prostitute. I speculate some that socialization factors into the ways non-Black men engage Black women exotic dancers too. More than likely, they perceive Black women similarly to the ways white men consumers of pornography see Black women pornstar as objects of sexual fetish (Cruz 2016a, Miller-Young 2014). Additionally, considering how few Black women that I observed performed at strip clubs where white men made up the clientele, I speculate Instagram offers a new means for encounters between white men clients and Black women exotic dancers.

#### How Strip Club Stakeholders Represent Black Women Exotic Dancers on Instagram

While the way users interact with Black women exotic dancers on Instagram through comments and likes provides information about the online crowds that form through the interactions mediated by its mobile interface, this dynamic does not provide a complete portrait of how users engage Black women exotic dancers on Instagram. I observed two additional types of accounts that used images of Black women exotic dancers on their profiles: accounts managed by strip club venues and accounts managed by promoters working in the strip club and hip-hop music industry. While these accounts are usually run anonymously, those that did identify the user behind the account always were run by Black men.

These accounts communicated a hypersexualized depiction of Black women exotic dancers in four different ways. First, these accounts used pictures that Black women exotic dancers had posted to generate followership on their pages to manage online crowds of followers. However, these accounts rarely featured women who had dark skin; women with natural hair; or women who were thin or fat. Some flyers and promotional materials went so far as to exceptionalize Latina and immigrant women by marketing events where all women present would be from outside the U.S.

Second, these pages often relied on pictures of women that did not endow the woman in the picture with any identity. Pictures and videos of dancers would be juxtaposed against captions marketing an event or venue with no reference to the dancers other than “come see the hottest/baddest” to use their desirability as a marketing tool. These pages also posted images of Black women twerking at a venue with only their backsides in the frame of the camera. They rarely shared images or video of a dancer outside of her role as a performer, except for when they used images of her posing as a model for a professional shoot. These images with no name and no face looked like the silent but twerking representation of Black women exotic dancers in rap music videos set in the strip club. Third, these pages also often posted only portions of Black women’s bodies with no identifying information, sometimes as images edited as memes to generate conversations about which body type of Black woman was more desirable. Through captions these accounts would encourage followers to decide which woman among a group whose members varied in terms of shape, body weight, or skin tone, which they preferred. Commenters, mostly Black men, tended to very curvaceous and light skin women when they participated in these status games.

Based on these findings I contend that while the accounts run by Black women exotic dancers used images to both reinterpret racialized exotic capital, those managed by stakeholders in the strip club industry only represented Black women exotic dancers in ways that reinforced the objectification of the Black woman's body via the pornographic gaze of Black men in hip hop. As a result, while Instagram offers Black women exotic dancers a means to self-present as they choose as erotic laborers, this virtual space also remains one wherein Black men construct a representation of the desirable Black woman exotic dancer and use Instagram to disembody and distort their real identities for their own visibility. In this way the strip club plays a defining role in the racialization of erotic capital for exotic dancers on social networking sites like Instagram.

### Conclusion

This chapter uses findings related to a content analysis of images, video, and text from Black women exotic dancers that use Instagram to argue Black women negotiate the racialization of the performance of erotic labor online through nuanced performances of sexuality and femininity. Due to the historic racialization of Black women's sexuality, this chapter sought to answer several research questions related to the performance of erotic labor by Black women exotic dancers in the contemporary era. First, this identified patterns in how Black women exotic dancers use images, video, or text to perform erotic labor on a mobile internet application designed for social networking. Second, this chapter mapped out the characteristics of the types of online crowds and publics Black women exotic dancers engage with on this platform.

Finally, this chapter demonstrates how Black women exotic dancers leverage racialized erotic capital into forms of labor or entrepreneurship adjacent to or beyond exotic dance.

Sociologist Angela Jones posed the following question regarding race and sex work in her 2015 *Sociology Compass* piece: “The racialization of erotic labor is woefully underdeveloped in the overall literature on sex work. How do racialized discourses affect the ways workers market and sell sexual services online?” The conclusions I have arrived at here support conclusions drawn from several previous studies that find stratification within the contemporary sex work industry due to racialized erotic capital and the marginalization of Black women through tropes of hypersexuality that devalue their erotic labor (Brooks 2010a; Brooks 2010b; Cruz 2016a; Cruz 2016b; Jones 2015a). Additionally, these results showed that strip clubs, entertainers and promoters use Instagram profiles to perpetuate ideals of desirability and beauty that favor light skin Black and Latinx women. These same pages also showcase Black women of a certain body type who perform a sexuality indicative of the “bad bitch” trope associated with contemporary hip hop. Therefore, a constraint of ICTs for Black women in sex work is that the very tools that could empower them to represent themselves enables people other than Black women exotic dancers to use the same tools to represent this group as they desire. Nevertheless, further research should attempt to capture that extent to which this value varies across skin tone, hair texture, and other aspects of the body.

My conceptualization of the ways Black women exotic dancers use Instagram expands on Black feminist thought and theories of embodiment on the mobile internet

in several ways. I argue that for Black women exotic dancers, the controlling image are encoded onto sensory-inscribed bodies to racialize erotic labor online through the pornographic gaze of Black men Instagram users. Furthermore, race, gender, and erotic capital functions as the “socio-cultural inscriptions” or codes through sensory-inscribed body mediates the social relations mediated by the mobile interface. Still, these findings indicate that Black women sex workers negotiate these controlling images through a racialized self-eroticism engendered with complex portrayal of femininity and sexuality. They then leverage this racialized erotic capital into a marketing tool for other sources of income outside of exotic dance.

#### Future Research

I argue this analysis of digital content generated by Black women exotic dancers on Instagram provides insight about the digital practices used to negotiate racialized and gendered expectations of sexuality and femininity. While the findings from the online survey I describe in the next chapter provides insights into these digital practices as well, a content analysis enables a look at the performance involved in perpetuating a certain identity online. Furthermore, the metadata from social networking sites included captions, location data, and engagement for each visual provides further context suitable for quantitative content analysis. Lastly, I derived a larger sample of Black women exotic dancers via the use of data from social networking sites than I did from the use of an online survey. I recognize this as an affordance of data mined from a social networking site on which Black Americans overindex on relative to their representation in the broader population (Talton et al.

2017). This representation differs strongly from the historical underrepresentation of Black people within datasets that capture data through online surveys.

While this analysis focuses on Black women sex workers, the findings here have implications for research on labor and the internet outside of contemporary sex work. These findings indicate that a clear market for Black women exotic dancers exists on Instagram. However, major stakeholders shape the politics of desirability around Black women as sex workers, demonstrating a clear bias towards women of lighter skin tone and with straight or wavy hair. Thus, future research on the racial stratification of labor should seriously grapple with the extent to which colorism stratifies capital in contemporary U.S. industries both within and beyond sex work. Future research should also consider the experiences of non-Black women sex workers, sex workers outside the exotic dance industry, and sex workers that use social networking sites other than Instagram.

## Chapter 5: A Survey of Contemporary Black Woman Exotic Dancers in the Urban South

### Introduction

In 2015 GQ.com released a short documentary by Lauren Greenfield that looked inside Magic City strip club in Atlanta, Georgia. Like many documentaries the film features segments wherein in people of influence in the industry narrate about their lives through scenes that depict aspects of their lived experience. While this film included interviews by one a DJ named Esco and rap artist Future, several scenes and interviews center the Black women exotic dancers that perform at the venue. This documentary highlights certain aspects of their lived experiences such as why they entered the strip club industry. Regarding the reasons why they decided to start stripping, one dancer stated they needed more money than working shifts at two different jobs could offer. Another stated she needed more money to pay for school after she enrolled in college.

The dancers also discussed how their backsides offered them erotic capital not only in the club, but also the wider community of Atlanta. So much so that one dancer claimed she reserved certain acts like “bustin’ it open,” where one dances with their naked backsides openly exposed towards the face of a viewer, for big spenders who have thousands to spend. One dancer elaborates on the way erotic capital functions at Magic City as she describes how a status hierarchy exists in the industry related to how dancers earn more. While a dancer who earns a \$100 in a night might prefer not

to have people see her pick up such a small sum off the floor, a dancer who earns thousands of dollars might eagerly collect her money and stuff it in larger plastic bags. The dancer goes on to say how she sees exotic dance as a pathway to visibility and a career that involves making much larger sums of money for hosting at the same type of clubs she now performs at.

Though this film offers a glimpse into the ways Magic City served as a site of artistic and cultural production for Black men working in hip hop, gives less attention to the Black women exotic dancers whose labor makes hip hop relevant to contemporary night life and leisure culture among the Black Americans that reside in Atlanta. Few projects whether academic or journalistic provide perspectives about the strip club directly from the women who work in them. I have taken a mixed methods approach to data analysis for the purposes of making Black women exotic dancers the focal point in the discussion of the contemporary strip club.

In this chapter I describe the use of digital technology and social networking sites among Black women exotic dancers based in the urban centers of the southeastern United States. In an online survey I asked Black women exotic dancers what type of ICTs they use and how they perform erotic labor on Instagram by advertising their work as an exotic dancer. I also asked how they described the strip club environment they work in and their experiences therein. Through a descriptive statistical analysis of responses, I investigated the background, experiences, practices, attitudes and opinions of 21 Black women exotic dancers based in Atlanta, Memphis, and the D.C. metropolitan area that used Instagram. Respondents indicated Instagram affords them a means to advertise themselves and maintain ties with various

stakeholders in the strip club industry. However, regardless of these benefits, they still report colorist and anti-fat bias in the strip club. Lastly, respondents showcased divergent attitudes towards the controlling image of the “bad bitch,” when asked an open-ended question about whether they identified as one. Such responses indicate while Instagram and digital technology offer some agency over interpersonal relations, the experiences they report in the strip club reveals an industry shaped by sexual politics that disadvantage some Black women.

#### *Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents*

Table 5.1 shows the demographic characteristics for the 21 Black women exotic dancers included in the final analysis. Respondents reported an average age of 28 and ranged from 20 to 37 years of age. Since no datasets provide nationally representative samples of exotic dancers, I cannot confirm if this average age reflects the broader population of dancers in the United States. Respondents started exotic dance as a profession between the years of 2003 and 2017 though most (43%) began during 2016 or 2017. When asked how they would describe their sexual identity, 52% of respondents indicated that they identified as straight. Another 43% identified as bisexual or open to dating multiple genders. One respondent chose “I am not sure” to describe their sexual identity. Most respondents completed at least some college (52%). The majority (86%) of respondents indicated they lived in the Southeast as a child. 67% of respondents resided in the tri-state area of Maryland (42%), Virginia (19%) and D.C. (5%). The remaining respondents lived in Tennessee (14%), Georgia, (10%), Texas (5%) and Kentucky (5%). Most respondents (57%) identified their current relationship status as single.

Table 5.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 21)

Characteristics	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum		
Age	28.43	4.60	20	37		
Start of Dance Career	2014	3.76	2003	2017		
Number of Children	1	0.98	0	3		
<i>Education</i>	Frequency	%			<i>Relationship Status</i>	Frequency %
Some college	11	52.38			Never married	12 57.14
High school	5	23.81			Cohabiting	5 23.81
Bachelor's Degree	3	14.29			Divorced	1 4.76
Associate Degree	2	9.52			Divorced, new relationship	1 4.76
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	Frequency	%			Non-cohabiting partner	1 4.76
Straight	11	52.38			Married	1 4.76
Bisexual	9	42.86				
Not Sure	1	4.76				
<i>Region - Hometown</i>	Frequency	%			<i>Living Arrangement – Youth</i>	Frequency %
Southeast	18	85.71			Both parents	10 47.62
Northeast	2	9.52			Single mother	8 38.1
Southwest	1	4.76			Foster care	2 9.52
<i>Region - Current</i>	Frequency	%			Single father	1 4.76
Maryland	9	42.86			<i>Living Arrangement - Adult</i>	Frequency %
Virginia	4	19.05			Alone	8 38.1
Tennessee	3	14.29			Partner	6 28.57
Georgia	2	9.52			Family Members	5 23.81
Kentucky	1	4.76			Roommates	2 9.52
Texas	1	4.76				
Washington, D.C.	1	4.76				

During childhood, most respondents (48%) lived with both their parents during most of their childhood. Respondents current living arrangements varied. 38% of respondents lived alone. 28% lived with a spouse or romantic partner. 24% lived with family members and 10% resided with roommates. Interpretation of the data must consider the shared characteristics among these respondents. As stated previously, most respondents lived in the Southeast during childhood, worked a job other than dancing, did not have children, lived in the tri-state area of Maryland, Virginia, and D.C., were single, and had at least some college education. I speculate that many of these respondents came from the D.M.V. because of their familiarity with my institutional affiliation at the University of Maryland. Thus, these results do not reflect the universe of Black women exotic dancers or their experiences.

### *The Work Experiences of Black Women Exotic Dancers*

#### General Finances

Table 5.2 shows responses to questions about how respondents earn and spend money. 57% of respondents described their financial situation as better than the previous year. 81% indicated they had not received non-government financial assistance from friends, significant others, or family members in the past year. Respondents indicated which groups of people they have supported financially in the past year with the earnings from dancing. These groups included immediate family members like spouse, children, or romantic partner; adult family members like parents, grandparents, and other relatives; and friends, roommates, or other people not related to the respondent. 48% indicated they supported individuals from all three

groups. Only 10% of respondents indicated they used their earnings to take care of only themselves.

*Table 5.2 Responses About Financial Situation, Financial Assistance, and Financial Support (N=21)*

<i>Financial Situation</i>	N	%
Better	12	57.14
Stayed same	5	23.81
Worse	3	14.29
No Response	1	4.76
<i>Financial Assistance</i>	N	%
No	17	80.95
Yes	4	19.04
<i>Financial Support</i>	N	%
Family, Friends, and Relatives	10	47.62
Immediate Family	3	14.29
Other Relatives	3	14.29
Friends	2	9.52
Self	2	9.52
Friends and Family	1	4.76

Table 5.2 provides data about the financial circumstances of sex workers.

Historians have argued sex work during the twentieth century gave Black women access to a financial stability the mainstream labor market in urban centers did not (Blair 2010, Harris 2016a, Miller-Young 2014, Mumford 1997). Scholarship on contemporary sex work indicates that women no longer turn to sex work out of extreme poverty, but rather as an option among the various forms of feminized labor the service industry has introduced into the economy (Bernstein 2007, Dewey 2012, Frank 2016). The Black women exotic dancers I surveyed find their financial situations improved by dancing rather than worsened and do not seek financial

assistance from members of their social networks. Instead, all but two of them have used their earnings to act as financial providers to members of their networks. Based on these findings, I contend sex work provides a means to an end for women invested in taking care of not only themselves, but also their loved ones.

#### Work as a Dancer

Table 5.3 shows responses to additional questions related to the scope of their work as exotic dancers. Respondents performed at private parties an average of five times a year. They danced at clubs where an average of 70% dancers were Black women and an average of 61% were Black. These responses support the findings from the GIS analysis in Chapter 3 that indicated most Black women exotic dancers that I observed did performed in clubs that served a clientele largely made up of Black clubgoers. Additionally, these responses substantiate observations made in the content analysis in Chapter 4 where I showed how Black women exotic dancers performed a racialized erotic labor that involved using cultural signifiers of Blackness and femininity. These responses indicate that this racialized erotic labor probably results from their tendency to perform in venues that function as leisure and entertainment spaces for Black residents in the D.C., Atlanta, and Memphis metropolitan areas.

This table also shows that the women I surveyed had a divergent set of reasons as to why they chose to dance. Respondents chose multiple explanations from a list that included immediate financial need, a personal desire to dance, the need to supplement other sources of income, the need to have income while seeking other employment, and a desire to use exotic dance as a steppingstone to another career.

Table 5.3 Responses to Questions about Work as a Dancer (N = 21)

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Number of Private Parties Per Year	5.10	7.63	0	30
% Black Dancers	70.19	29.14	10	100
% Black Clientele	60.75	27.02	15	100
	N	%		
Immediate financial need	14	66.67%		
A personal desire to dance	11	52.38%		
Supplement other sources of income	11	52.38%		
Income while looking for other jobs	10	47.62%		
Steppingstone to another career	7	33.33%		
<i>Travel Outside the State?</i>				
Yes	13	61.9%		
No	8	38.1%		
<i>Shift</i>				
Night	11	52.38%		
Both	8	38.10%		
Day	2	9.52%		
<i>Do You Dance with a Partner?</i>				
Solo	14	66.67%		
Partner	7	33.33%		
<i>Do You Split Earnings?</i>				
Not Required	18	85.71%		
No Response	2	9.52%		
Percentage	1	4.76%		
<i>How Do You Travel to Work?</i>				
Personal Vehicle	16	76.19%		
Ride sharing app	11	52.38%		
Borrowed Vehicle	5	23.81%		
Local Transit	5	23.81%		
Regional Transit	1	4.76%		

67% indicated that they danced out of an immediate financial need. 52% indicated they had a personal desire to do dance. 52% indicated they used the earnings from dance to supplement other sources of income. 48% indicated they used income from dance while they looked for other jobs. Finally, 33% indicated they had a desire to use dance as a steppingstone to another career. These responses lend

further support to the idea that exotic dance for Black women involves doing labor for the reasons most people go to work. Exotic dance provides income that satisfies an immediate financial need as the dancer in the GQ.com documentary I mentioned earlier explained when spoke about desiring money for school. This job can also supplement other sources of income. As I observed in Chapter 4, many Black women exotic dancers manage their own business ventures such as hairstyling or fashion design. While I argued that Instagram afforded these dancers a means to market their entrepreneurial pursuits, these responses indicate that exotic dance supplements this income as well. Yet the desire for almost half of these respondents to dance while seeking out another job indicates that exotic dance provides a temporary source of income as these women transition into another industry. For one third of these respondents, exotic dance offered a steppingstone to another career. My observations in Chapter 4 indicate that these careers could include modeling, hosting events, headlining as a dancer, or even becoming a rapper. Overall, these responses show that Black women look at exotic dance to earn cash as they pursue other goals.

The women I surveyed also answered several questions about the strip club environment they typically work in. 86% of dancers worked at clubs where they did not have to share their earnings with other staff or the club. 67% of respondents indicated that they danced solo. 62% had traveled in the past three months to perform at strip clubs out of state. 52% worked only at night. That most dancers did not have to share their earning indicates they work in strip clubs that do not tax their earnings. I learned about the concept of taxation earnings from one of my former students, a young Black woman who also performed as an exotic dancer under the name of

Vanity Redz. She also elaborated on this practice during an interview for a 2018 *Forbes* article on the New York stripper strike. According to the article, strippers in New York where she was dancing at the time dealt with house fees from the venues that they worked at that could amount to hundreds of dollars deducted from their earnings (Burns 2018). I speculate one reason why so few of the women that I observed did not pay such since they worked in venues in the urban South that did not participate in this practice.

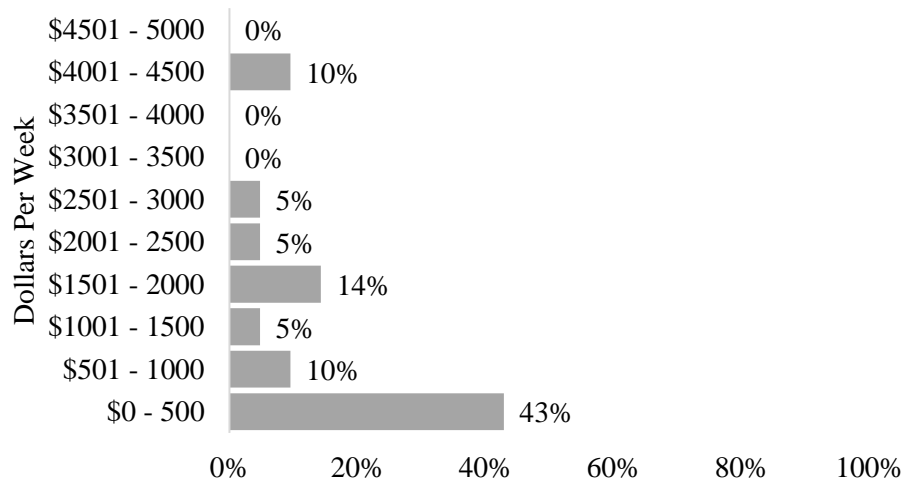
Tivana “Vanity Redz” Alyse also explained to me that dancers sometimes performed as duos to earn more tips, but most dancers preferred to perform solo. The responses from my survey indicate that 2 in 3 dancers did indeed prefer solo performances. Almost 2 in 3 dancers travelled out of state to perform, a practice I mapped in Chapter 3 and documented through nonparticipant observation and content analysis in Chapter 4. Out of state travel reflects the transnational character of the strip club industry and the capacity of individual Black women exotic dancers to capitalize off it. Over half of dancers performed only at night at their hometown strip clubs. This finding indicate that exotic dance remains largely a leisure and entertainment activity associated with the broader nightclub industry.

Respondents identified the forms of transportation they use to get to the venues they dance at. 76% relied on a personal vehicle. 52% used ride-sharing smartphone applications like Uber and Lyft. 24% had borrowed another person’s vehicle. 24% had traveled by airplane for travel to out of state venues. 10% use local transit like a bus or taxi. Finally, 5% indicated they used regional transit like Amtrak. I observed through the GIS analysis described in Chapter 3 that many of the venues

where Black women exotic dancers perform have no proximity to their city’s rail systems or other forms of public transit. The travel patterns of exotic dancers indicate that they require access to a personal vehicle to get to work or the funds to use ride-sharing software applications.

Chart 5.1 shows the weekly earnings of respondents answered several questions about their how they spent their earnings as exotic dancers. 52% of respondents indicated that they between \$0 to \$1000 per week.

*Chart 5.1 Weekly Earnings (N =21)*



This finding contrasts strongly with the controlling image of Black women sex workers as gold diggers (Brooks 2010b, Collins 2004, Sharpley-Whiting 2007). I discussed earning money in the strip club with two Black women exotic dancers based in Memphis during separate follow-up interviews over the phone. Both women confirmed that earnings at the strip club fluctuated depending on what nights of the week they chose to perform or the energy of the crowd. Sometimes they went home with no money at all. Other nights they could go with thousands. Nevertheless,

inconsistency in earnings characterized much of their evenings, resulting in regular earnings of a few hundred dollars per week.

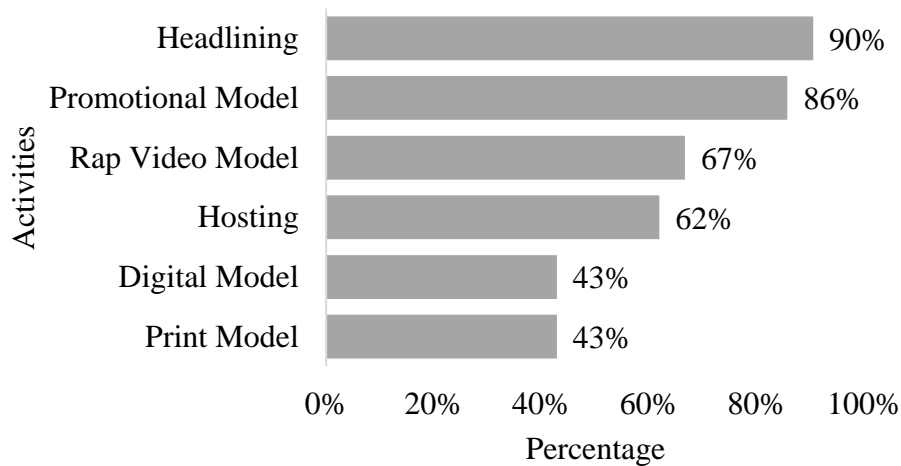
Chart 5.2 shows how much respondents spent per month on clothing and beauty products including makeup, hair, and nails related to exotic dance. 67% indicated that they tend to spend between \$0 to \$500 per month on clothing. 38% spent above \$500 but no more than \$1000. 14% spend between \$1001 to \$2000. While the controlling image of the gold digger undermines the reality of how much these women earn per week, the controlling image of the bad bitch lends an explanation to how much money these women invest in fashion and beauty products. This controlling image popularized in contemporary hip-hop sets forth an image of a woman whose body and beauty gives her access to cash and other material objects. The concept of bad bitch likely entered the popular imagination of U.S. Black hip hop in 2000 when Miami rapper Trina released her first album “Da Baddest Bitch.” Since then the phrase bad bitch has appeared in countless songs performed by both Black men and women rap artists.



While she never confirmed it herself, the hip hop gossip media rumor mill reports the multiplatinum recording artist started in the strip club herself. Nevertheless, Trina's discography provides an audiovisual embodiment of the illicit eroticism Miller-Young (2014) describes in *A Taste of Brown Sugar*. I argue this beauty standard means Black women exotic dancers must invest in beauty products and fashions that enable them to conform to the image of the bad bitch when performing at the club. The content analysis in Chapter 4 showed that many Black women exotic dancers regularly visit wigmakers, hairstylists, make-up artists, and makers of exotic fashionwear. A few of them also designed their own products and services to sell. I speculate the amount of money one must spend to conform to the contemporary strip club's standard of beauty might drive many of these women to pick up a new skill and then profit from it for themselves.

Chart 5.3 shows how many respondents indicated activities they had done in the past year included: headlining or being a featured dancer at a club; featured dance on a promotional flyer; hosted an event at a club; posed for a print publication; posed for digital publications; and modeled or danced for a rap music production. 90% were featured in a rap music production. 86% were featured in a club's promotional material. 67% hosted an event at a club. 62% headlined at a club. 43% had posed in print publications. 43% posed in digital publications.

Chart 5.3 Erotic Labor Outside Exotic Dancing (N = 21)



The content analysis in Chapter 4 shows the hip hop entertainment and strip club industries rely on Black women exotic dancers to perform the types of erotic labor covered in Chart 5.3. Strip clubs rely on Black women exotic dancers for headlining and promotional modeling due to the beauty standards espoused by their target clientele – Black men consumers of hip hop music. Hip hop music has relied on the characterization of Black women as sex workers, especially exotic dancers, to sell records and provide imagery for music videos (Hunter and Soto 2009, Hunter 2011, Miller-Young 2014, Mohammed-Baksh and Callison 2015, Sarig 2007, Sharpley-Whiting 2007, Stallings 2013). That 2 in 3 of the dancers I surveyed had modeled for a rap music video reflects that many Black women exotic dancers see their labor as intimately tied to hip hop music as well. I argue the same for their participation in hosting in the night club industry. As one of the Magic City dancers in the GQ.com documentary observed, hosting provides Black women exotic dancers opportunities to earn thousands of dollars while clothed but requires earning status first as a dancer. This likely explains while 9 in 10 dancers have headlined as exotic dancers at various

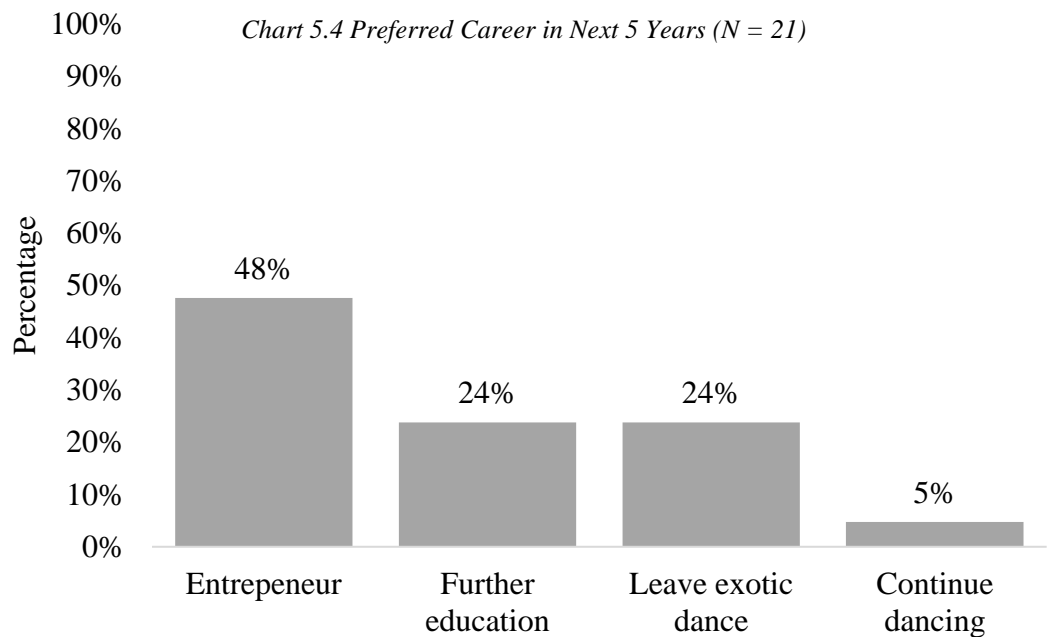
strip clubs. I argue headlining provides a means to gain social capital as an exotic dancer through their association as an exclusively featured dancer for an event at a strip club sponsoring them.

#### Work Outside of Dance

Respondents answered questions about the work they did outside of exotic dance and their preferred career path in the next five years. 71% responded “yes” when asked whether they performed work outside of dancing in the past year. Respondents provided a wide range of jobs and personal entrepreneurial endeavors when prompted to list them: doing hair or makeup; pole lessons; temporary government contractor; full-time nursing student; a nursing agency; receptionist; smoothie maker; bartender; operations consultant; store management; cosmetology; waitress; cashier; personal trainer; clothing line owner; event planning; rapper; sales associate; brand ambassador; model; escort services and webcam modeling.

Many of the jobs they described mirrored the biography section on the Instagram profiles of the dancers I studied through content analysis and nonparticipant observation. Dancers use Instagram to market themselves as hairstylist and makeup artists or pole fitness instructor. However, the responses to this survey show that many women work in the service industry as well doing low wage work such as cashier or waitress. These responses support findings in previous research that suggests Black women turn to jobs in the adult entertainment industry like exotic dance to supplement their incomes due to limited access to high paid service or professional jobs (Blair 2010, Brooks 2010b, Harris 2016a, Miller-Young 2014).

Chart 5.4 shows preferred career paths among respondents in the next five years. Each respondent chose from one option each. 48% stated they prefer to start their own business. 24% said they would like to continue or pursue further education. 24% would like to switch to a career outside of dance. Finally, 5% responded that they would like to continue dancing.



The content analysis in Chapter 4 indicates entrepreneurship seems a popular pathway for Black women exotic dancers that use Instagram. As I argued in that chapter, the popular imagination of Black women in entrepreneurship perpetuated by the mainstream media showcases and centers those who have an elite college background. One reason why I suspect that this rhetoric around Black women entrepreneurs particularly in the technology industry privileges women with Ivy League educations likely has to do with the framing of tech entrepreneurs in general. For example, a popular meme related to contemporary entrepreneurship references how the founders of companies like Microsoft, Facebook, and Apple dropped out of

college to start their own businesses. This framing characterizes these men as autodidacts who created the prototypes of their lucrative technologies in dorm rooms or their parents' garages (Cottom 2015). These narratives operate as emblems of the contemporary technology entrepreneur that many Black technology studies scholars critique as an attempt to universalize the experiences of white men with middle class upbringings (Cottom 2015, Gray 2012). My findings show that Black women exotic dancers desire to create their own businesses too. Therefore, these responses offer an alternative understanding of who pursues entrepreneurship in the twenty-first century.

### *The Digital Practices of Black Women Exotic Dancers*

67% of respondents identified Instagram as their primary platform when asked to rank these social media services in order of preference for the purposes of advertising their dancing. Preferences for other platforms tended to diverge, but 33% chose Snapchat as their second choice and another 33% chose Snapchat as their third choice (see Appendix for full table). That the number one social networking site of choice skewed towards Instagram likely reflects my choice of Instagram as a recruitment site. Still, that Snapchat comes in as the second or third favorite among a number of these respondents likely reflects the affordances of that social networking sites as well.

Snapchat like Instagram offers a social networking sites wherein users exchange audiovisual content through the mobile interface. Owned by Snap Inc., Snapchat differs from Instagram due to its primary feature as an application wherein the audiovisual content exchanged on the platform disappears within twenty-four hours. While no study to date has addressed the use of Snapchat among exotic

dancers, prior research does suggest sex workers in other industries like escort services have made use of the social networking site for advertising purposes (Sanders et al. 2018).

#### Preferred Devices and Social Networking Sites

Table 5.4 shows responses to questions about digital practices and digital technology use. Respondents were asked to indicate which technology they had access to from the following list: smartphones, computers, tablets, printers, fax machines, scanners, and home internet access. They also answered questions about the types of social networking sites they used including Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, messenger apps, a personal website, and email. Lastly, they answered a question about how long they had used Instagram for. Consistent with previous research, the use of the mobile internet and social networking sites shapes the daily lives of these respondents as individuals, Black women, and sex workers (Evans, Riley and Shankar 2010, Farman 2012, Gray 2015, Jones 2015a).

All respondents owned more than one digital technology device. 95% of the respondents indicated that they use either an iPhone, Android phone, or other smartphone. 71% stated they had home internet access. 61% of respondents indicated that they use either a desktop computer, laptop, or MacBook. 38% indicated that they had regular access to a printer. 29% reported having access to a printer. Another 29% reported having access to an iPad or other tablet. 19% indicated that they had regular access to a fax machine.

Table 5.4 Responses to Questions about Digital Technology (N = 21)

<i>Technology Type</i>	N	%
Smartphone	20	95%
Home internet	15	71%
PC or laptop	13	62%
Printer	8	38%
Scanner	6	29%
Tablet	6	29%
Fax machine	4	19%
<i>Social Networking Sites</i>	N	%
Instagram	19	90%
Snapchat	13	62%
Twitter	7	33%
Facebook	6	29%
Email	6	29%
Messenger apps	3	14%
Tumblr	3	14%
Website	1	5%
Other	1	5%
<i>Length of Instagram Use</i>	N	%
0-6 months	4	19%
6 months – 1 year	4	19%
1 – 3 years	9	43%
Over 3 years	2	10%
No response	2	10%

All but one respondent indicated they used at least one of several social networking sites. Four of them used Instagram only. 91% indicated that they used Instagram. 62% indicated that they used Snapchat. 33% indicated that they use Twitter. 29% indicated that they use Facebook and another 29% indicated they use email. 14% indicated they used messenger apps like WhatsApp, GroupMe, and Facebook Messenger. Another 14% indicated they used Tumblr. One respondent each indicated they used personal website or some service other than those previously

listed. Lastly, 43% of respondents indicated they had used Instagram between one to three years for the purposes of advertising their work as exotic dancers.

The use of smartphones to a greater degree than home internet or other technologies among these women mirrors the rate of usage among Black American mobile internet users across the broader population (Pew Research Center 2018). Information scientists André Brock, Lynette Kvasny, and Kayla Hales offer a critique of the digital divide, the dominant framework on social inequalities and technology use, in their 2010 *Information, Communications, and Society* article “Cultural Appropriations of Technical Capital.” The trio argue that research on the digital divide “consistently link underserved groups with deficit models of attainment” (p. 1040) and suggest marginalized groups “lack material access, lack mastery of digital practices and literacies, or lack value systems promoting the educational achievement necessary to acquire base proficiency in digital systems” (p. 1041).

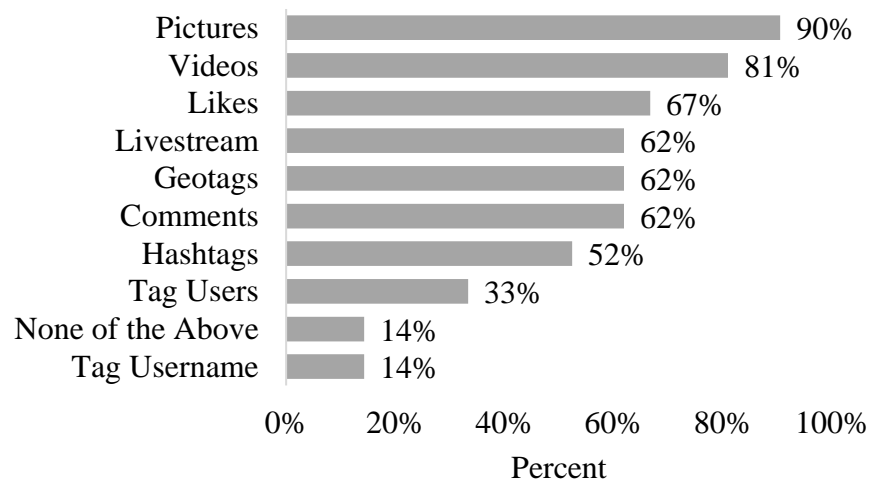
Building on Bourdieu (1986), they use Black feminist thought to contend that members of marginalized groups leverage cultural and technical capital to appropriate technology for their own purposes. This perspective thus pushes back against deficit models of technology uses “to posit that the articulation of cultural touchpoints promoting a more diverse set of beliefs will raise ICT participation rates by underserved populations” (p. 1056-7). As I described in earlier chapters, Black mobile internet users in the United States participate in mobile internet-based social networking sites at a higher rate than White mobile internet users (Pew Research Center 2018). Therefore, I contend that the preference for smartphones among Black women exotic dancers exemplifies yet another way Black people have leverage

information and communication technologies as means to participate in virtual Black cultural spaces.

#### Use of the Features of Instagram for Advertising

Respondents answered questions about how other social media users engaged them on Instagram. 48% indicated that clubs do ask for permission and tag their usernames when they use photos of the respondent. They reported an average of 4 incidents per month of online harassment. Chart 5. 5 shows responses to several questions about how respondents use Instagram to advertise themselves as exotic dancers and how other users engage them on the platform. All dancers used at least two of several strategies including sharing video, sharing pictures, commenting or replying to comments on pictures, tagging other users in their pictures, livestreaming, liking pictures posted by other users, and using hashtags to hyperlink text.

Chart 5.5 Digital Advertising Practices on Instagram(N = 21)

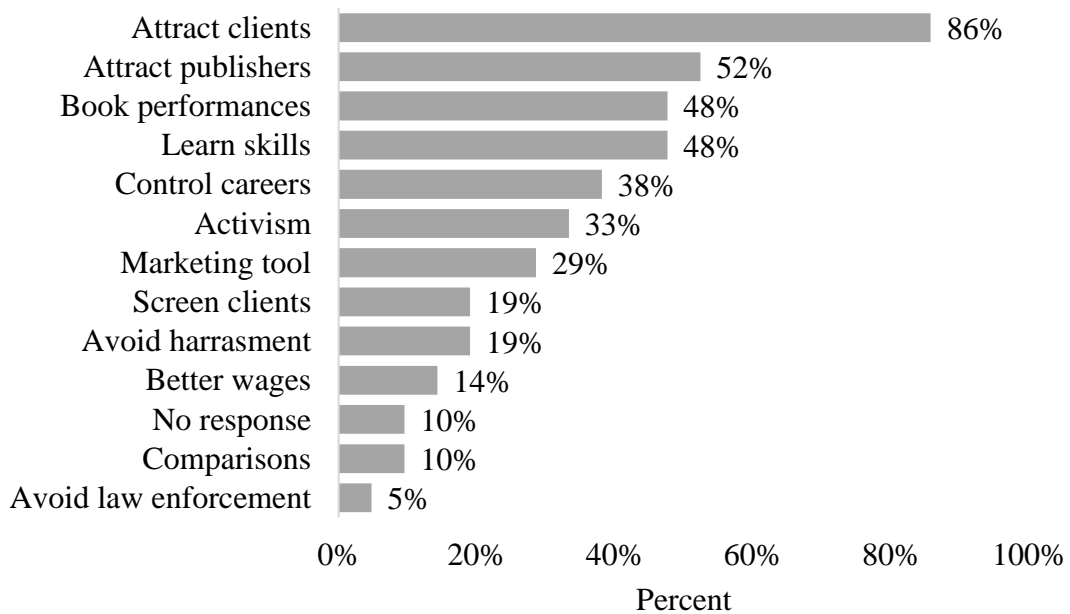


90% of respondents indicated they preferred to share pictures of themselves. 81% used videos. 67% liked pictures posted by other users. 62% used comments or

replied to comments posted by their followers. 62% tagged their location. 62% of respondents livestreamed their videos. 52% hyperlinked the text they wrote using hashtags. 33% tagged other users in their pictures. 14% tagged themselves in pictures posted by other users. Finally, 14% either did not respond or used a tactic other than those described previously. Based on these findings I argue dancers relied heavily on the interactivity that Instagram affords them as a social networking site premised on using these features to grow a following and maintain engagement.

Chart 5.6 shows what affordances Instagram provides for their exotic dance careers. Respondents could choose from a list of choices. All respondents chose more than one strategy. Two gave no response.

*Chart 5.6 Affordances of Instagram for Exotic Dance (N = 21)*



86% indicated that they used Instagram to attract more clients including clubs or private parties. 52% indicated they used Instagram to attract publishers like modeling magazines or online publications. 48% indicated that they use Instagram to

learn skills from other dancers while another 48% indicated that they use Instagram to book performances. 38% of respondents indicated that they use Instagram to control their careers. 33% use Instagram to show activism for issues that affect exotic dancers. 29% used Instagram as a cheap and easy marketing tool. 19% use Instagram to avoid harassment while another 19% use the platform to screen clients. 14% use Instagram to demand better wages. 10% used Instagram to compare themselves to other dancers another 10% provided no response. Finally, 5% used Instagram to avoid harassment from law enforcement.

While previous studies have investigated Instagram and other social networking sites as marketing tools and the strategies people use on these platforms, few studies look at sex workers or Black women. My use of a Black cyberfeminist framework to examine digital practices reveals the ways internet users embody the intersections of race and gender in the virtual space. Rather than argue that online marketing among Black women exotic dancers suggests some type of difference from other groups, I argue the tendency for scholarship to generalize from the standpoint of white women sex workers regarding the affordances of information and communication technologies also reinforces the deficit model of the digital divide as well. The women I have surveyed reveal the ways digital technology use among internet users from marginalized populations reflects universal principles of marketing on the mobile internet.

The erotic labor Black women exotic dancers due goes beyond what they do online to showcase themselves. Black women exotic dancers promote nightclubs, rap music, and events often owned and operated by Black men. I argue these findings

reveal several insights about the complexity of erotic labor for Black women in the twenty-first century. First, these results show how sex workers often do labor to promote on behalf of someone other than themselves. Second, these findings indicate that Black men consumers and producers in the sex industry structure the sites of erotic labor for Black women exotic dancers. This contrasts to research related to pornography that suggests White men are the primary consumers and producers of sexual content about Black women (Cruz 2016a, Miller-Young 2014). I suspect that this difference in audience reflects the ways the rap music industry continues to use the strip club as a site of cultural production, particularly in the urban South. Lastly, these findings show digital practices represent only a portion of the broader strategies exotic dancers use to perform erotic labor.

#### *Negotiating Racialized Erotic Capital in Contemporary Hip Hop and Strip Clubs*

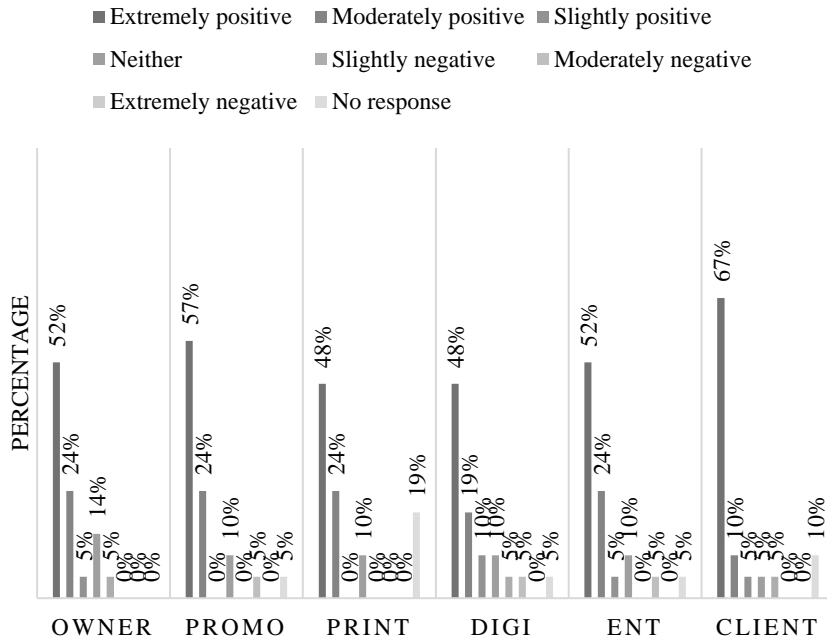
I asked the women I surveyed several questions about the attitudes they perceive from groups of people they encounter in the strip club and hip-hop music industry. This offered me an opportunity to see if Black women exotic dancers would report recognizing the preferences for light skin or curvy women, I observed in the nonparticipant observation of Instagram accounts in Chapter 4.

#### The Degree of Positive Feelings Black Women Exotic Dancers Perceive from Strip Club Stakeholders

Chart 5.7 shows responses to the feelings from certain groups of people each dancer perceived towards themselves. These groups included club owners and staff, club professionals, digital publications, print publications, clubgoers, and celebrities

or entertainers. 81% reported positive feelings from all groups except print and digital publications. 76% experienced positive feelings from digital publications. 71% perceived positive feelings from print publications.

*Chart 5.7 The Degree of Positive Feelings Black Women Exotic Dancers Perceive From Strip Club and Hip Hop Industry (N=21)*



Nearly half of respondents indicated they experience extremely positive feelings toward themselves from digital and print publications. Over half of respondents indicated the same level of positivity from clubgoers, club professionals, and club owners or staff. Since most of these responses skew toward extreme positivity, I speculate most respondents assume favoritism towards themselves as individuals do to their own experiences. Through content analysis I found instances about how strip club management pages featured Black women exotic dancers as did promotional pages. Therefore, I also interpret these findings as an indication that the Black women exotic dancers I surveyed do not generally express a sentiment that

their work environment perpetuates negative feelings toward them. Since some of the respondents did indicate they had experienced negative feelings from clients or print publications, I speculate that these negative feelings might relate to biases toward skin tone or body shape in the strip club industry. To that end, I also asked the women I surveyed about whether they sensed members of these same groups preferred women with a different body type or skin tone than themselves.

#### Preferences for Curvaceous or Light Skin Women Among Strip Club Stakeholders

Table 5.5 shows responses to questions about a preference for women of their skin tone or body type. As expected, most respondents (43%) of respondents recognized a bias for women lighter than themselves among club owners. 38% sensed this bias among professional entertainers. 29% of respondents noted a preference for women lighter than them among club professionals such as DJs and promoters. 24% of respondents also noted this preference among each of the following groups: print publications, digital publications, and clients. 57% of respondents felt clients preferred their own body type. 53% of respondents felt print publications preferred women of their body type. 53% of respondents also perceived this preference from club professionals. 48% of respondents felt digital publications preferred women of their own body type. 48% of respondents felt club owners preferred women curvier or slimmer than themselves. 48% of respondents also felt professional entertainers preferred women curvier or slimmer than themselves.

Table 5.5 Perceived Skin tone and Body Type Preferences in the Strip Club Industry  
(N = 21)

<i>Skin Tone</i>	Owner	Promo	Print	Digi	Ent	Client
Varied Preference	29%	29%	33%	43%	29%	29%
Prefer women lighter than me	43%	29%	24%	24%	38%	24%
Prefer women of my skin tone	24%	38%	38%	29%	29%	43%
Prefer Women darker than me	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
No response	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%
<i>Body Type</i>						
Own body type	38%	52%	52%	48%	38%	57%
Curvier or Slimmer	48%	33%	29%	38%	48%	29%
No preference	10%	10%	14%	10%	10%	10%
No response	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%

Consistent with prior research on sex work and colorism (Brooks 2010a; Miller-Young 2010; Miller-Young 2014), respondents identify skin tone and body type norms shape the preferences in the exotic dance industry. Brooks (2010a), for example, notes the value of light skin for mixed-race exotic dancers:

This so-called back door to Whiteness allows some mixed- race dancers to play on the social construction of their race and, therefore, can have it be an asset, because light skin is often valued over darker skin, especially in marketing techniques used by club owners in advertising (p.79).

Over half of respondents indicated that club owners and clubgoers preferred women lighter than themselves. Nearly half of respondents indicated they perceived this preference from club professionals, entertainers and celebrities, photographers, and digital publications. When asked about bias towards certain body types, about 2 out of 3 respondents indicated club owners or staff and entertainers preferred women curvier or slimmer than themselves. Over half of respondents indicated clubgoers,

club professional, photographers, and digital publications preferred women curvier or slimmer than them as well.

Findings from the content analysis showed this very same marketing practice used on Instagram profiles managed by strip clubs. That strip club stakeholders show a preference for Black women of a certain skin tone and body type reveals the long history of colorism that has stratified Black women since the antebellum era. For example, historians have documented the existence of a “Fancy Trade” in southern port cities where Black, mixed race, and Creole women with light skin got auctioned as sex slaves (Green 2011; Miller-Young 2014). Colorism persisted throughout the twentieth century into the twenty-first century through media that favored light skin actresses, beauty pageant winners, and models (Miller-Young 2014; Tate 2015).

Society has also communicated expectations around body type for Black women for just as long. Slave traders imparted more value to Black women with large breasts and buttocks on the claim that these physical features indicated fertility (Bush 2000, Collins 2004, Haley 2016, Tate 2015, White 2001). The notions of sexual value in the discourse around Black women’s bodies persisted well into the twentieth century through tropes on various media and music. By the late twentieth century, the bodies of Black women, particularly those whose figures are read as “thick,” or at the intersection of curvy and slim, reflects a racialized body standard driven by the tastes of Black men and communicated today in the context of rap music, pornography and reality television (Brooks 2010b, Byrd 2004, Collins 2004, Herd 2014, Hunter 2011, Lundy 2018, Miller-Young 2014, Pérez 2015, Pickens 2014, Rabaka 2012, Shange 2014, Sharpley-Whiting 2007). My findings provide additional evidence that

controlling images continue to shape Black women's erotic labor in the twenty-first century.

*How Black Women Exotic Dancers Self-Identify in Relation to Mainstream and Popular Concepts of Femininity*

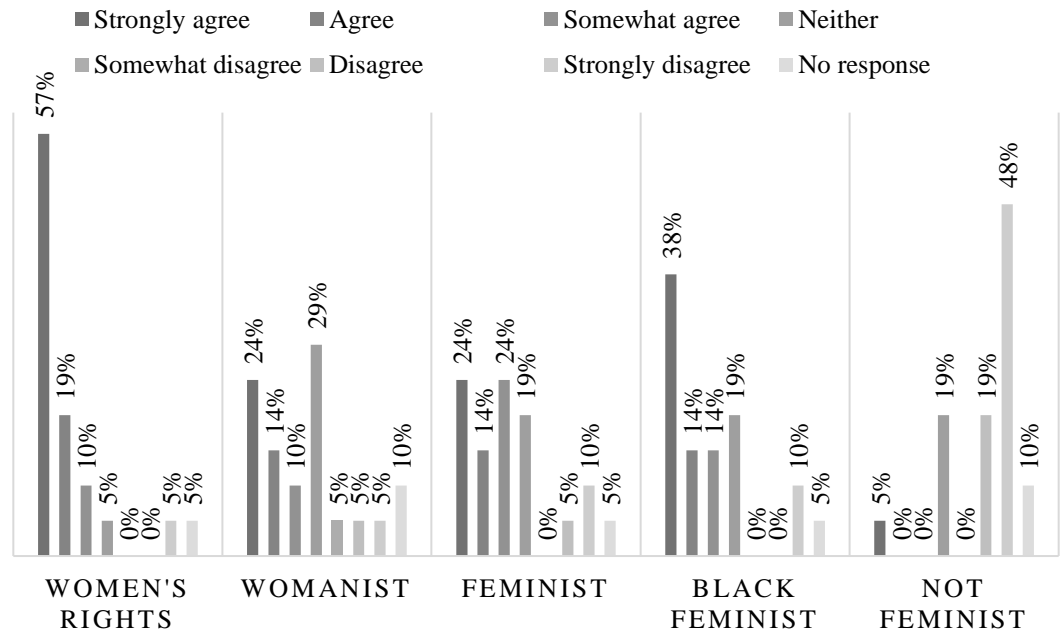
Feminist Self-Identification

Feminist analyses of sex work in the debate for its legalization historically have taken different stances on the extent to which this form of labor operates as a gendered form of exploitation against women. Scholars in favor of legalization or decriminalization have found evidence sex work has provided women attempting to escape poverty a means to earn income outside of low wage service work positions. Scholars opposed to the legalization of sex work contend this form of labor reinforces patriarchal relations due in large part to the way men profit from sex trafficking and exploitation of minors, women of color, migrants, and women in poverty (Bernstein 1999, Bernstein 2007, Brooks 2010a, Chapkis 1997, Cruz 2016a, Cruz 2016b, Frank 2016, Harris 1996, Jeffreys 2009, Jones 2016, Miller-Young 2010, Miller-Young 2014, Nash 2014, Sanders and Campbell 2014, Sutherland 2004). Nevertheless, neither of these approaches have considered the extent to which women sex workers self-identify as feminists or which type of feminism they ascribe to. Further, cyberfeminist frameworks including Black feminist technology studies and Black cyberfeminist thought, do not take up the notion that sex workers identify as feminists since the groups most analysis in Black feminist digital studies that address feminism

center on forms of activism. To fill this gap, I asked the women I surveyed about their feminist affiliations.

Chart 5.8 reveals personal identification with feminism. 86% agreed that they supported women’s rights. 67% of respondents disagreed with the notion that they have no opinion on women’s rights. 67% agreed that they identified as a Black feminist. 62% agreed that they identified as feminist. 48% agreed that they identified as a womanist.

*Chart 5.8 Feminist Self-identification (N = 21)*



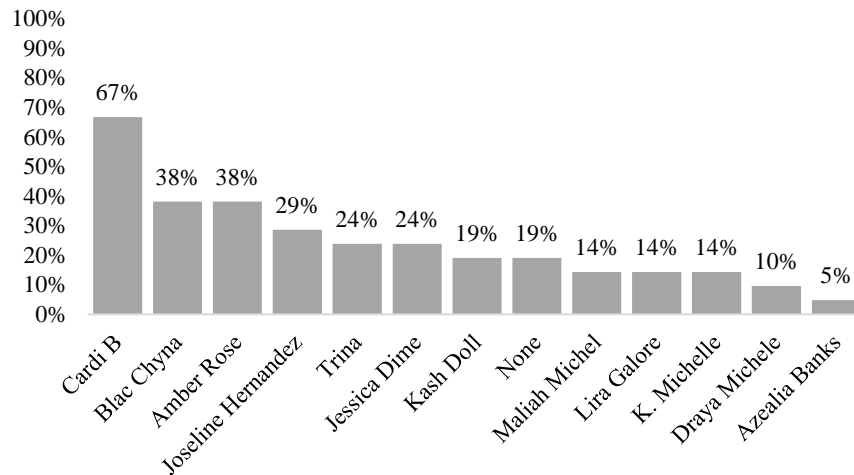
These responses provide justification for the expansion of Black feminist digital studies frameworks to encompass Black women sex workers as feminists. Further, they substantiate perspectives on Black women who do labor in Black leisure culture like the blues women or hip hop vixen possess an alternative feminist politics in regard to sexuality (Carby 1992, Collins 2000, Collins 2004, Cooper 2017, Davis 1998, Ducille 1993, Emerson 2002, Haley 2016, Hammonds 1997, Harris 2016a,

Lindsey 2017, Lomax 2018, Miller-Young 2014, Rabaka 2012, Simmons 1993, Umoren 2015).

#### Affinity for Celebrity Black Women Stripperneurs

As stated previously, contemporary representations of Black women in hip hop as strippers has extended to reality television, particularly through VH1's *Love and Hip-Hop* franchise. I speculated that perhaps the co-presence of Black women celebrities who had a history of working in the strip club industry and then gained visibility through reality television or work in the hip hop industry offers one reason why a Black woman exotic dancer gravitates towards Instagram as a social networking site. To answer this, I asked the women I surveyed to indicate which celebrity stripperneurs they followed on Instagram. Respondents had the option to choose multiple women and to indicate if they followed someone not listed. The women listed included Amber Rose, Maliah Michel, Trina, Blac Chyna, Joseline Hernandez, K. Michelle, Cardi B, Lisa Galore, Jessica Dime, Draya Michele, and Azealia Banks. Chart 5.9 shows who respondents followed on Instagram as a source of inspiration among a list of Black women exotic dancers and other women associated with the strip club industry who had achieved celebrity status.

Chart 5.9 *Celebrity Stripperneurs Black Women Exotic Dancers Follow for Inspiration (N = 21)*



67% of dancers indicated they followed Cardi B, a rapper and former reality television star from the VH1 series *Love and Hip Hop*. 38% of dancers followed Blac Chyna, a former exotic dancer who also models and formerly starred in the reality television on *Rob & Chyna* on E! 38% also followed Amber Rose, a former exotic dancer who has since modeled, acted, and hosted an evening talk show on VH1. 29% followed Joseline Hernandez, a Puerto Rican former exotic dancer who starred in the Atlanta spinoff in the VH1 series *Love and Hip Hop*. 24% followed Trina, now a well-known rapper who also stars in the Miami spinoff of the VH1 *Love and Hip-Hop* series. 24% followed Jessica Dime, a Floridian who turned her stint in the strip club into a music career and a spot in the Atlanta spinoff of *Love and Hip Hop*. 19% of women followed rapper Kash Doll. Another 19% expressed no source of inspiration. 14% follow Maliah Michel, one of few active celebrity strippers. Another 14% follow Lira Galore, a model and video vixen. 14% also followed K. Michelle, an R&B singer and star in the Atlanta spinoff of *Love and Hip Hop*. 10% followed

Draya Michele, a former reality star on the show that also owns a clothing line.

Finally, only one respondent followed rapper Azealia Banks.

Cardi B as the most frequently cited source of information among this group of Black women exotic dancers likely indicates that these respondents see Cardi B's pathway as an option for their own lives. Cardi B frequently discusses making it out of the strip club through rap music in her lyrics and interviews. While Blac Chyna has the greatest exposure as a reality star, I speculate that nearly 40% of respondents followed her for inspiration due to the ways Blac Chyna made a name for herself while still performing as an exotic dancer. Blac Chyna later gained mainstream media exposure through her relationships with California rapper Tyga and reality television star Robert Kardashian, the brother of her former friend and reality television icon Kim Kardashian. Amber Rose, one of Blac Chyna's best friends, rose to fame through her relationship with Chicago rapper Kanye West, Kim Kardashian's current husband. Therefore, I contend one reason Black women exotic dancers that I surveyed might cite these women as inspiration results from their ability to leverage their racialized erotic capital into mainstream media exposure through their connections to contemporary celebrity figures.

While Joseline Hernandez, Trina, and Jessica Dime have all appeared on one of the VH1 *Love and Hip-Hop* spinoffs, they all differ in terms of how they gained visibility prior to the reality television show. Both Joseline Hernandez and Jessica Dime worked in the Miami strip club industry prior to appearing on *Love and Hip-Hop Atlanta*. Trina maintained celebrity as a woman rapper who had turned the bad bitch into her signature persona through her music prior to appearing on *Love and*

*Hip-Hop Miami*. Nevertheless, I speculate these women all communicate an example to Black women exotic dancers of how they might leverage the controlling image of the bad bitch into lucrative opportunities and visibility on reality television. Further, though less than 20% of respondents followed Kash Doll, Maliah Michel, Lira Galore, and K. Michelle, I contend they likely follow these women for the same reasons they followed other women listed which includes reality television visibility or proximity to mainstream celebrity figures.

#### Self-Identification as a Bad Bitch

In previous chapters I described how the controlling image of the bad bitch emerged in hip-hop to communicate a standard of desirability that ultimately exploited the image of Black women high-status and high-earning hypersexual vixens. Yet except for the cases wherein Black women exotic dancers themselves perform rap music, no project prior to this study considered the extent to which self-defining as a bad bitch occurs as a shared sentiment among members of this group. I asked the women I surveyed if they would you describe yourself as a bad bitch and to describe why or why not. I then coded the responses as -1 for negative reactions to the term, 0 for neutral reactions to the term, and 1 for positive reactions to the term.

14% of respondents stated they had no opinion on the term. 57% of respondents rejected the term for some reason or other, generally focusing on negative connotations around the words “bad” and “bitch.” Many of these respondents used other descriptors as self-affirmation (emphasis added in italics):

“No, I wouldn’t consider myself a bad bitch I don’t come off as one and I don’t refer myself as one. *I prefer myself as a beautiful woman.*”

“No because I’m not a bad Bitch *I consider myself a lady*. Even tho I’m doing this job that *doesn’t define me outside of here* so no I’m Not a “bad bitch” but being in this industry I would see why people would popularized bad bitch because that’s basically saying your the shit.”

“No, I’m bad because *I have the whole package personality, smart, beautiful, nice body* but I’m not a bitch so no I don’t refer to myself as a bad bitch.

These responses show how some Black women exotic dancers consider this characterization an inaccurate misrepresentation of their whole selves. Respondents recognize the “bad bitch” to be an expectation client have of Black women who perform exotic dance. I argue these respondents embrace a politics of respectability by which they distance themselves from the stigma associated with the terms “bad” and “bitch.” For these dancers, the terms operate distinctly as negative descriptors indicative of a certain type of woman that they do not see themselves as.

The 29% of respondents who embraced the term bad bitch found empowerment in the identification (emphasis added in italics):

“Yes I would consider myself a (bad bitch) like the word nigger or cunt. *I like to turn derogatory words into power*. It get used so often in my profession that it’s become just part of my everyday vocabulary. a bad bitch to me is *a woman socially desirable, fashionable, hard worker and intuitive and she gotta be BLACK lol*.”

“Absolutely. I’m savage, I’m wild, I’m nasty, I’m what you may call BAD. And though I’m sweet, kind and caring - *I’m not nice. Nice is a*

*pleasantry, created by the oppressive force as a word to counteract any unwanted behavior as “not nice” and acceptable behavior as “nice”. I proudly call myself a Bitch. I yell, I swear and I make shit happen.”*

*“In the world of dancing, yes. I am a bad bitch. You have to believe you are a bad bitch in this atmosphere even if you are faking it. When a dancer gets tips or a customer makes it “rain” on her, she feels like the baddest bitch in the club because the customers are looking for the baddest bitch in the club, when they walk through the doors and go to the ATM machine.”*

These respondents showcase an illicit eroticism in their summation that when the two terms function together, “bad bitch,” communicates aspects of feminine power and independence that they feel define them and their work. Based on these findings, I argue the racialization of erotic labor prompts Black women exotic dancers to rely on the politics of respectability or an illicit eroticism to negotiate the controlling image of the bad bitch perpetuated in contemporary rap music. Overall, I contend the duality of sexual politics among contemporary Black women exotic dancers invokes that of divergence of clubwomen and blues women during the Progressive era (Carby 1992; Collins 2004; Davis 1998; Ducille 1993; Haley 2016; Hammonds 1997; Harris 2016a; Lindsey 2017; Miller-Young 2014; Rabaka 2012; Simmons 1993; Umoren 2015). Therefore, the assumption the sexual politics of sex workers invokes a distinct perspective from middle-class Black women fails to consider how sex workers rely on the politics of respectability to self-define as a

person for whom the sexual politics imposed upon them feel incongruent with their self-identification.

### Conclusion

Through a descriptive statistical analysis of an online survey, I examined the extent to which Black women exotic dancers use the mobile internet and SNS to perform erotic labor. The contemporary strip club functions as a space where Black women exotic dancers not only perform erotic labor, but also where Black men profit as entertainers, photographers, DJs, and promoters. The emergence of the strip club as a stage for Black men rappers in the urban South places Black women exotic dancers in the position of negotiating the gendered and racialized expectations projected onto their erotic labor. As a result, while Black women due turn to the mobile internet and social networking sites to market themselves, they continue to labor in an industry in which men largely profit as entrepreneurs while they work as independent contractors. Ultimately, this chapter provides new understanding about the use of information and communication technologies among Black women exotic dancers and forefronts the racialization of erotic labor as a social constraint that digital technology does not appear to resolve or overcome. Specifically, this literature broadens the scholarship on affordances of digital technology for sex work to include Black women exotic dancers in recognition of the constraints of colorism and body type preferences in the strip club and hip-hop music industries.

## Future Research

These findings indicate that future research on sex work and the internet should reflect on the ways audiences and strategies for erotic labor vary depending on the social factors that shape the industry under inquiry. Based on these findings, I have several suggestions for research on sex work and the internet. First, future research should recognize that information and communication technologies not only function to alter the configuration of unequal social relations, but also function to keep them the same. Second, future research on sex work and the internet should consider how the need for reliable transportation affects sex workers who do not rely on internet-only forms of sexual commerce to earn money. Third, future research should investigate whether attitudes or experiences vary among exotic dancers based on whether they use digital technology or the type of digital technology they use. Finally, respondents tended not to opt into the follow-up interview or respond to requests for follow-up interviews despite indicating a willingness to do one. Only two respondents, both based in Memphis, completed a follow-up interview. Finally, future research should take up the interview method for the study of Black women exotic dancers that use the mobile internet and social networking site as marketing tools to uncover more nuanced findings than those made possible through the descriptive analysis of aggregated responses to close-ended questions.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion: A Black Feminist Digital Sociology of Contemporary Sex Work

### Introduction

In this dissertation I have examined how processes of racialization and sexualization shape the digital practices, sexual politics, and landscape of Black women's erotic on the mobile internet. Through the application of Black feminist thought as an analytical framework, I have analyzed 1) how structural racism shapes the urban geography of contemporary sexual commerce in the urban South; 2) how ICTs enable Black women sex workers to leverage racialized erotic capital into various entrepreneurial pursuits and; 3) how racialized erotic capital prompts Black women sex workers to develop a set of sexual politics by which to negotiate racialized and gendered notions of social desirability on the mobile internet. These findings indicate conclusions drawn from empirical analyses within the academic literature on the affordances of digital technology for sex workers are complicated by the interrelations among the social constructs of race, gender, and sexuality addressed in this study. These conclusions include 1) Digital technology affords sex workers a degree of erotic autonomy that provides better labor terms and conditions; 2) the internet facilitates an expansion of sexual commerce and; 3) digital technology expands sex work beyond boundaries that have historically tied the workplace to a specific locale. My research demonstrates race differentiates the experiences of women sex workers as users of the mobile internet. For Black women exotic dancers these differences involve: 1) The racialization of erotic capital wherein stakeholders

in the strip club and hip hop music industries perpetuate narrow ideals around desirability through the controlling image of the “bad bitch”; 2) Black women exotic dancers continue to work in strip club environments that cater to Black men clientele in venues located in predominately Black, low income areas; and 3) Black women leverage racialized erotic capital on the mobile internet through the use of the mobile interface as a virtual storefront and Instagram as a virtual marketing portfolio.

Critiques of ethnic studies scholarship and critical race theories like Black feminist thought or intersectionality theory allege 1) an incompatibility with methodology associated with traditional social science research and 2) a complexity regarding the measurement and articulation of multiple analytical dimensions and categories in the study of social life (Choo and Ferree 2010, McCall 2005, Nash 2008, Takagi 2015). Though I acknowledge the complexity of analyzing social life across multiple categories and dimensions indeed rings true, my research shows that critical race theories highlight the dynamic processes of the power relations that shape sex work mediated by the mobile internet. Previous research fails to address differences in the cultural and structural constraints that shape how sex workers use the mobile internet. My research shows that the differences in constraints shapes the experiences and practices of not only about Black women exotic dancers, but other groups of sex workers as well. Ultimately, the digital practices and sexual politics of Black women sex workers detailed in this study serve as an empirical challenge to assumptions around sex work in the digital era and underscores the need to account for interrelations among race, gender, and sexuality in theories of embodiment in virtual spaces. The results of the analyses in this dissertation demand scholars revisit

the dominant analytical framework within existing research around the affordances of ICTs for sex work to critically engage with the standpoints that inform these perspectives.

I have proposed what I call a Black feminist digital sociology of sex work to describe how Black women sex workers are confronted by and negotiate a racialized erotic capital through interactions mediated by information and communication technologies. Black feminist digital sociology offers different assumptions about how sex workers grapple with space, embodiment, and autonomy to perform erotic labor. This perspective assumes that 1) the virtual and material landscape are largely mirrored in terms of boundaries that constrain the workplace; 2) the matrix of domination shapes the sensory-inscribed body and the selfie assemblage through processes of racialization and sexualization; and 3) the controlling images of race, gender, and sexuality provide context for the negotiation of erotic labor through interactions mediated by the mobile interface. The assumptions outlined here capture the racial, sexual, and gender codes of virtual embodiment not addressed in dominant understandings of sex work in the digital era. Black women exotic dancers, like many contemporary workers, recognize the affordances of social networking sites for the purposes of marketing and managing a clientele. While I have provided a profile of an alternative framework of racialized erotic labor, Black women exotic dancers demonstrate a complex set of sexual politics that this perspective alone cannot predict. However, my research shows the racialization of erotic labor online prompts Black women sex workers to negotiate controlling images through a sexual politics informed by expectations derived from contemporary Black American music culture.

In this dissertation I provide a framework that goes beyond existing research to more fully capture how the intersectionality of race, gender, and sexuality shape the performance of erotic labor on social networking sites not only for Black women, but for all women. Nakamura (2002) warns us about the ways the interfaces of Web 1.0 internet technology reified social categories like race through cybertypes or “images of racial identity engendered by this new medium” (xiii). My current findings necessitate that scholars of contemporary sex work and the internet attend to the racial-sexual sociocultural inscriptions imposed upon the sensory-inscribed body. Through a GIS analysis of where Black women exotic dancers perform, this research highlights how structural racism continues to confine Black women sex workers to certain spaces. The content analysis of Black women exotic dancers demonstrates the ways internet users import the racialized erotic capital of the strip club and hip-hop music into the virtual space, thus projecting an ideal standard beauty onto the sensory-inscribed body through a racial-sexual selfie assemblage. These processes impact all bodies, not just Black women. Finally, responses to the survey I distributed to Black women exotic dancers revealed an intraracial diversity about the performance of erotic labor in the strip club.

For the Black women exotic dancers in this study, social networking sites are an important toolkit for professional goals beyond exotic dance. Additionally, information and communication technologies enable a multi-faceted representation of one’s sexuality and femininity beyond contemporary controlling images of Black women sex workers found in rap music productions and reality television. Therefore,

the evidence drawn from this group of Black women exotic dancers prompts us to more closely examine the racialized sexual politics of all sex workers.

*Black Feminist Thought and Sex Work in the Digital Age*

In this section I argue Black feminist digital sociology offers a lens to offer alternative perspectives about contemporary social phenomena related to sex and digital technology: 1) the technology industry; 2) sex trafficking legislation; 3) and hip-hop music. I propose the framework of Black feminist digital sociology to offer a means through which to recognize the ways the matrix of domination shapes processes of virtual embodiment on the mobile internet. From this perspective, we can recognize the value of critical race theories as an analytical framework for the interpretation and analysis of contemporary sex work in the digital age.

A Black Feminist Perspective on Contemporary Sex Legislation

Black feminist digital sociology enables a consideration of contemporary legislation around sex trafficking. Previous research on sex trafficking legislation and Black women suggests that these statutes tend to fail to protect Black women. Instead, they expose Black women to increased law enforcement and surveillance (Blair 2010, Chong 2014, Harris 2016a, Mumford 1997). Beyond that, governments have historically used sex trafficking legislation to police sex acts that occur within the context of paid transactions through various forms of sexual commerce (Dewey 2012, Farley 2015, Jackson 2016, Jeffreys 2009, McCarthy et al. 2012, Pajnik 2010, Sanders and Campbell 2014, Sanders, Hardy and Campbell 2014, Schauer and Wheaton 2006, Van Meir 2017, Weitzer 2005, Weitzer 2007, Weitzer 2009, Weitzer 2010). The Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA)

passed in the U.S. House of Representatives in 2018. The bill updates section 230 of the Communications Act of 1934 that imposes penalties to anyone who operates interactive computer services that promote prostitution. The U.S. Senate simultaneously passed the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) to reframe language around liability for communications providers related to the dissemination of material deemed in violation of decency provisions in the Communications Act of 1934.

Advocates for sex workers rights argue this legislation encourages corporations like Instagram and Facebook that manage social networking sites to block sex workers from their platforms. For example, Survivors Against SESTA note on the non-profit organization's website that "Websites which engage with the sex trade have to assess their liability of holding content related to the sex industry... with the threat of very expensive litigation hanging over their head" (Survivors Against SESTA 2019b). My findings suggest that Black women exotic dancers rely on social networking sites not only to market themselves as part of the sex work industry, but also to engage in other forms of labor unrelated to sex work.

#### Black Women in Hip Hop Music

This study showed the ways that contemporary Black women exotic dancers operate in a strip club industry that runs in partnership with contemporary hip hop music leisure and entertainment culture. My findings show that Black women remain marginalized within a strip club industry that expects them to project their erotic labor through the controlling image of the "bad bitch," made popular in contemporary rap music performed by Black men from the urban South and signified through the

persona of rapper Trina from Miami. However, recent years have seen a growth in the representation of Black women in contemporary hip hop music. Acts like Nicki Minaj, Cardi B, Megan Thee Stallion, and numerous others have brought back a Black feminine energy to hip hop popularized by women like Lil' Kim, Missy Elliott and Foxy Brown in the late twentieth century. Cardi B represents an intersection between hip hop and sex work never articulated in the soundscape that sexualizes Black women through the lyrics of Black men rappers. From a Black feminist digital sociology perspective, I argue the recent emergence of series of Black women rappers who use audiovisual imagery to the bad bitch tap into a beauty standard made more prominent through social networking sites and the use of digital technology to share music.

#### Black Women in the Technology Industry

Black feminist thought offers a means through which to consider the implications of digital technology at an infrastructural level. While my findings show how Black women sex workers use technology as consumers, little evidence suggests they participate in the production of technology as engineers. Only 6.5% of Americans in engineering and architecture occupations are Black or African American according to the 2018 Current Population Survey. Excluding Asian women less than four percent of engineering bachelor's degree holders are women of color (Rincon and Yates 2018). My own research suggests that Black women exotic dancers, like many women, tend to work in fields outside of the sex industry that capitalize off the feminization of labor. Historically, a disproportionate number of Black women have worked in service and care work for less than enough for a living

wage and thus turned to sex work to supplement their incomes (Bernstein 2007, Blair 2010, Brooks 2010b, Harris 2016a, Jones 2015a, Jones 2015b, Jones 2016, Miller-Young 2014, Mumford 1997).

What would digital technology look like if Black women exotic dancers engaged technology as producers rather than users? What important insights might a Black woman sex worker offer prior to the construction or design of a certain device or machine meant to facilitate social interactions via the internet? For example, one reason why the insights of Black sex workers might matter is a recent advancement in technology at the intersection of the internet of things and artificial intelligence: sex robots. While contemporary news media and scholarship has started to address the ethical, social, and cultural disruptions made possible by anthropomorphic machines designed for sexual pleasure, none have taken up the implications the modeling of human-robot sexual relations on prostitution-client sex relations (Levy 2007) have for Black women sex workers or sex robots coded as Black women.

## Appendices

*Table A.1 Preferred social networking sites for Black women exotic dancers ranked from 1 (most favorite) to 9 (least favorite). (N = 21)*

FB	IG	SC	email	text apps	Other	Tumblr	Twitter	Site
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1	1	1	3	4	2	3	2	3
1	1	1	3	4	2	3	2	4
2	1	2	4	5	2	4	2	4
3	1	2	4	5	3	5	2	5
3	1	2	4	5	4	6	3	5
4	1	2	5	7	4	6	3	5
4	1	2	6	7	4	6	3	5
4	1	2	6	8	4	6	4	5
4	1	2	6	8	7	7	4	5
5	1	3	6	8	7	7	5	6
5	1	3	7	8	8	7	5	6
6	1	3	7	8	9	7	5	6
6	1	3	8	9	9	7	5	7
6	1	3	8	9	9	7	5	7
7	2	3	8	9	9	8	6	7
8	2	3	8	9	9	8	6	8
9	2	6	8	9	9	9	7	8
9	6	7	8	9	9	9	9	8

*Notes.* Zero indicates no response.

Table A.2 Location of Strip Clubs Tagged by Black Women Exotic Dancers on Instagram by Region.

D.M.V.	Atlanta	Memphis	Out of State
<i>Maryland</i>	Blue Flame Lounge	Catwalk of Memphis	ACES New York
Excaped Nightclub	Club Babes	Kittens Kabaret	Angel's NYC
Bazz & Crue	Club Blaze	Pure Passion	Black Diamonds
Club Fuego	Club Platinum Atlanta	Purple Diamond Gentlemen's Club	Bottoms Up Strip Club
Ebony Inn Restaurant	Club Wax	The Black Orchid's Gentlemen's Club	Cameo Charlotte
Mile High Club	Diamond Club Atlanta	The Pony	Club 21 Gentlemen's Club
Mustangs	Dream Gentleman's Club Atl	VLive Memphis	Club Climaxxx Miami
Norma Jeans	Eye Candy Gentlemen's Club		Club Fantasy
Scores Baltimore	Follies Strip Club		Club Lust NY
Sinsaysionals	Goldrush Showbar Atlanta		Dancers Gentlemen Club
Two O'Clock Club	Magic City		DG A Gentlemen's Club
X4B Luxury Hall	Onyx Atlanta		G5ive Miami
<i>Virginia</i>	Pin Ups		King of Diamonds Miami
Pure Diamonds	Scores Atlanta		Kitten's Gentlemen Club
<i>District of Columbia</i>	Stiletto Gentlemen's Club		Mascaras Gentlemen's Club
Good Guys Club	Strokers		Passion's Men's Club
Macombo Lounge	Tease Atlanta		She She's
Mpire Club	Tease Gentlemen's Club		Silver Foxx
Stadium Club	The Cheetah Lounge		Starz
The Camelot Showbar	VLive Atlanta		The Gentlemen's Club: The Office
The House			The Jungle Gentlemen's Club
			The Official Angels Gentlemen's Club
			The Playhouse Gentleman's Club
			VLive New Orleans

Vanity Grand's Cabaret  
Vault  
Vixen's Gentlemen's' Club  
VLive Jackson  
Vlive Miami

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*Notes. Total number of clubs = 74. Total number of dancers = 67.*

## Glossary

*affordances* – The possibilities for human agency through functional and relational aspects through interaction with a technology.

*digital practices* - The behaviors and actions that take place in the virtual social spaces generated using information and communication technologies.

*erotic capital* - A type of capital based on the social construction of value given to bodies according to ideal standards of beauty spread by dominant culture and adopted by the public.

*erotic labor* - The effort, energy, and work put into performing sexuality.

*hashtag* – Hyperlinked text denoted by a ‘#’ prior to a word or phrase.

*influencer* - an individual that leverages their online presentation of self into various forms of capital through the advertisement of products and services on their profiles on social networking sites.

*information and communication technologies* - networked technology like e-mail or social media that facilitate communication and the exchange of information using internet-enabled devices and software.

*metadata* - descriptive information that corresponds to each unit of data. For data analysis of social networking sites, the term refers to the attributes of each image and video posted by the users in a dataset.

*racialized erotic capital* - The variation in value or worth of erotic capital based on factors like skin tone, body type, hair texture, and ethnicity.

*social networking sites* - Internet-based software applications that enable users to engage in a participatory culture through the creation, upload, and exchange of user-generated audiovisual content.

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