

OBJECT

Challenging Objectification

Personal account of auditioning for a lap dancing club – ‘Tina’*

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* Please note that ‘Tina’ is a pseudonym

“A friend of mine mentioned that she wanted to audition for Stringfellows, but wanted someone to go with. She knew I was quite confident about my body and asked me to come along. At first I thought it would be a fun experience. When she went to the audition though, I had thought more about it and decided I would not be able to do it - more the pole dancing than the exposure bothered me then. She went and got it - she had worked in the midlands as a stripper before drama school and was a great dancer.

A few weeks later I realised that I was totally broke. My parents and I were not on great terms at the time and I decided that I couldn't pass up the chance to earn the king of money my friend had mentioned. I went to the 'open auditions' that Stringfellows were holding on Thursday evenings. As far as I know they still hold these.

I went to the back door and was let in and shown to the female toilets to change. My friend had told me to wear heels and an evening dress with just a thong. The idea, she said was to go up onstage when they asked and take off the dress as fast as possible and then dance around the pole for 30 seconds. There were four other girls there with me to audition. The club was not busy and there were no girls working, but the club was certainly not closed - people seemed to have gathered to watch the auditions.

The first girl I chatted to was very young looking - although she gave her age as 18. She was Polish and had come to this country on her own when she was a teenager. She said she came here to learn English and get some education. She had been working at the Windmill in Hackney for 2 years on and off, but wanted to earn some better money. She asked me what my name was and when I gave her my real name she said I should dance under a false name - something I was aware my friend had done. At that point another girl, very good looking and older than me (perhaps mid twenties) chipped in and agreed. She was quite aggressive and seemed to have worked as a lap dancer before too. She was quite sneering at me and my inexperience and made it clear that she expected to get the job.

The other two there were both younger than me too - perhaps just 18. One was quite thin and one was much chubbier, but neither could speak much English. By this point I was really uncomfortable, and I was grateful that the Polish girl was really chatty with me. She seemed as desperate as I was for money so I confided in her that this was my last hope for this month's rent.

At that point a guy came over to us, sitting on sofas outside the ladies loo, and told us we would dance in two groups on the three poles on the main stage. It was a T shaped platform in the centre of the room with 3 pole dancing poles. I went to the front pole and the Polish girl and the sneering woman took the back poles. The music came on and I took off my dress as fast as I could. I couldn't see the faces of the people in the audience but I could hear the hum of them talking and laughing under the music. I tried to dance around the pole but did not do a good job I suspect as I was scared out of my mind! I just felt that I did not have the personal strength to be there. As soon as the music stopped we left the stage and dressed. I was shaking!

Then the other two girls danced, it was all over really fast and we all sat and waited for the man to come and tell us what they thought. It was really tense and I felt like throwing up. Part of me needed the job and hoped I had done enough and part of me wanted to run away. Some other girls came in and chatted to the first man. They wanted to dance and the guy seemed to know them - he told one she didn't have to audition and she went through to the ladies. The other one he told to come back next week.

Then he came to us and said we all needed to take some lessons in dancing on the pole and we needed to tone up our bodies. Then he walked off and we went back to the changing rooms. I just wanted to leave and not speak to anyone, but the Polish girl asked me what I was going to do. I said I wouldn't come back. The sneering woman was really angry and left fast. The Polish girl offered to get me a job. At first I thought it was a chance to earn the cash I needed and considered it. She told me I wouldn't have to audition if I gave her

name and recommended I come and talk to her boss the next afternoon. We left and the bouncers led us out. One of them told us to come back in a few weeks - I felt worst then, seeing in the bouncers eyes exactly how little they thought of us.

As we walked to the station together the Polish girl asked about the job. She said I would be PAID £50 to dance (different from Stringfellows where you pay £15 pounds at the start of your shift and £65 at the end). Then she described going around the bar with a pint mug before and after dancing. I was shocked. Then she told me about private lap dances which happened in a separate room. For that she intimated that the price was agreed with the customer. She gave the impression that this involved bartering and I became aware that she offered 'extras'. At that point I went another way to her.

I was totally out of my depth here and I never went to the Windmill, in fact I threw away the contact details on the journey home. The whole experience was disgusting to me - I had seen my friend going and earning lots of cash, she seemed not bothered by the whole thing, I guess because she was used to it. Eventually though she gave it up - it was exhausting as she had to work certain shifts in the week and was fined if she could not make it. She said week day shifts were not profitable and weekend shifts were very competitive. She described how women would pounce on any man who got out a credit card and how the atmosphere was one of fear. Also her partner at the time had a hard time dealing with it.

I had never thought about the effect of lap dancing clubs or the sex industry before this - always thinking these women had the power etc. My one small encounter with that culture made me realise what foul places they really are and I am ashamed of myself for being sucked into what I see as 'sexual propaganda' which surrounds the industry".