



THE HISTORY OF THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION

Part Ten—Inside the Dark World of Striptease

By Steve Gallagher

Last summer sports fans were shocked to hear that some of their favorite stars had been involved with prostitutes in a strip club in Atlanta. Sports figures such as Patrick Ewing, Dennis Rodman, Andrew Jones, and Terrell Davis were subpoenaed to testify in the racketeering trial of Steve Kaplan, owner of the Gold Club, who eventually plea-bargained for a reduced sentence.

Prosecutors charged that Kaplan had ties to the Gambino crime family and that the club was nothing more than a front for prostitution, credit card fraud, and money laundering. Former club manager Thomas “Ziggy” Sicignano testified that he arranged for dancers to have sex with a number of high-profile athletes. The fact is that strip clubs have been a breeding ground for prostitution ever since the Roaring Twenties when gangsters like “Lucky” Luciano and Al Capone used the huge profits from prostitution to boost their criminal careers.

Burlesque—The Beginning of Stripping

Burlesque began in the middle of the nineteenth century when comedians in cheap theaters spoofed (or “burlesqued”) the operas, plays and social habits of the upper classes. Over time, it became increasingly reliant on the display of shapely, underdressed girls to keep audiences interested. In a time when women went to great lengths to hide their physical form behind frilly dresses, the idea of young ladies appearing onstage in revealing dress became a sensation.

In those early days, burlesque was a collection of musical acts and parody, with heavily sexual overtones. Suggestive rather than bawdy, it used scantily clad women, music and comedy to attract large, predominantly male, audiences. Such comedians as Jackie Gleason, Fanny Brice, W.C. Fields, Red Skelton, Phil Silvers, and Bob Hope got their break performing in these tawdry theaters. By 1919, there were 900 theaters in the U.S. featuring burlesque. However, as Vaudeville continued along traditional lines of entertainment—establishing the foundation for today’s television and motion picture industries—burlesque gradually evolved into strip tease shows that operated on the fringes of legality.

In those early days, striptease was heavy on tease and light on strip. Since a woman would inevitably get arrested if she completely exposed herself, strippers learned to tantalize men through the “art” of suggestiveness. The stripper toyed with her male audience—constantly building on the hope that they would see more of her body.

Through the use of suggestive body movements and occasional flashes of flesh, she kept their mounting lust alive.

In 1929, striptease entered a new plateau when a fifteen-year old girl named Rose Louise Hovick—at her ambitious mother’s prodding—filled in for the star stripper (who had called in sick) in a burlesque theater. Her mother, ever the opportunist, saw this as Louise’s (the name she went by) shot at the big time. They chose Gypsy Rose Lee as her stage name. In the years to come she would bring a new credibility to stripping by her lewd flirtatious patter and seductive costuming.

Every era had its star performers. Blaze Starr utilized satin and feathers to enhance her performances in the 1950’s. Carol Doda simply used massive injections of silicone to tantalize men in the 60’s. By the 1980’s, subtle seductiveness had given way to crass nudity.

Today’s Stripping Industry

Striptease—like the rest of the sex-for-sale industry—has boomed in the past decade. According to one source, there are 5,700 strip clubs in the U.S., employing approximately 200,000 girls.¹ It seems that the proliferation of pornography has created an enormous army of sexual addicts, every one of whom continually seeks new ways to satisfy his cravings. The strip club provides one more avenue of illicit activity for the lust-filled man.

Why are so many girls willing to disrobe before the leering eyes of lascivious men? “Women in stripping are overwhelmingly motivated by the promise of wealth or a will to survive,” says Kelly Holsopple, once a stripper herself. “Strip club owners, managers, pimps and the media portray stripping as a glamorous way to earn big money fast and use this strategy to lure young women into stripping,” she alleges.

David Sherman, who managed strip clubs for 14 years, testified about his experiences in the business before the Michigan House Committee on Ethics and Constitutional Law. In that testimony, he described how he and others in the industry would recruit young girls to become strippers.

As far as female employees in adult entertainment nightclubs, as manager, everyone you hire you treat as a potential dancer. It really doesn't matter if she's hired as a waitress, hostess, or even a bartender. First, you must make the girl feel at home in an environment that is so abnormal that most people have to be made comfortable. In fact, you could almost say they have to be hardened to the club life. This is easily accomplished by working there as many hours as possible and by having all of the staff treat them as if they were long lost friends.

Second, after a few weeks, because the girl is now your friend, as a manager, you bring up how short you are on girls that night or how there are not enough amateur contestants. You ask them to please help, that they don't need to take their clothes off, but the club just needs an extra body. Usually, they happily agree to do this.

But, by this point, you are her friend and can make her feel guilty about not helping out more and ask her to please disrobe, as without her, you'll not make much money that night. She is needed. People who need her and customers who tell her how beautiful she is surround her. She now experiences a variety of emotions and, being human, needs to be needed. With this emotion fulfilled, she finds herself wanting to be complimented, which she is, and she wants to make money, which she can. You then play on "what more can a girl want?"

At this point, if she still has not disrobed, you let her know you no longer need her for her waitress position, but dancing is open if she wishes to still work at the club. This does not work unless she has incurred debts and needs the money, or she actually enjoyed the experience and doesn't want to lose her new friends. ⁱⁱ

The Effects on the Girls

There is no question but that those who run this industry are very evil men. They manipulate young women to become involved by appealing to their desire for money and attention. Nearly all of these girls are addicted to drugs and alcohol. Either they get into stripping to support an existing habit or they begin using to deal with the mounting shame of what they are doing. Sherman explains how this worked to his benefit:

Right from the start, drug and alcohol use is rampant. The dancers call it partying. They don't realize that they are medicating themselves in order to do the work they do.... Soon the new dancer starts running around with the more hardened and seasoned girls, who realize how much easier their job is being drunk, high or, more often than not, both. By now she's working until 2 a. m., staying out all night partying after work, and then grabbing breakfast with the girls....

Once dancing they get used to being objectified. It becomes as important to them to hear how beautiful they are 200 times a day as it is to actually make the money from the dancing.

Between the use of drugs to medicate what they do and hearing how beautiful they are all the time, they soon experience what I call BDA—Basic Dancer Attitude. This is when the dancer thinks that no matter what friends, children, husband and families think about her, it doesn't matter.

They can all be replaced because all of the patrons around her find her attractive, beautiful and idolized. Now, the dancers are truly caught in the adult scene. With friends and family gone from their lives, they exist alone in this dark, subculture of sex, drugs, alcohol and prostitution. All of this perverse living, to the dancer, is now just part of her normal lifestyle. After a couple of years at this level, the dancer realizes she is getting older and attempts to fit back into society. She tries boyfriends, school or really anything to cling to what is normal. Realizing that she cannot live in both worlds, she returns to the subculture of the adult business, actually

despising the real world. This leads to more dependency on drugs and alcohol, which now makes her 100% lost to this life. ⁱⁱⁱ

Kelly Holsopple, who interviewed 29 strippers about their occupation, recorded the following statements made by them:

- *I would never do it again. It was degrading.*
- *No doubt that it led me to prostitution and my pimp.*
- *Taught me how to control men and gave me a false illusion of control. Takes a long time to regain self-control.*
- *Don't do it. Once you do it, it is hard to get out.*
- *If there is any way you can avoid it...it is hard to get out once you start.*
- *I wouldn't recommend it. It is too stressful and I am always comparing myself to other women on the outside.*
- *I wish I had put more money away and had more education by the time I quit. I just didn't know it wasn't about success for us, it was about using us.*
- *I spent my entire young adulthood being abused. It is hard to undo all this.* ^{iv}

Ultimately, girls become involved in striptease because they want something that is being offered to them. As is true in any facet of Satan's kingdom, there is always a high price to pay. Other than the possibility of being transformed by the Lord from the inside out, the young ladies involved in the strip trade are usually ruined by their experience.

However, these girls are not the only victims here. The stripping industry has become one more source of corruption in society on a whole. The truth is that "Gentlemen Clubs" are actually the very opposite: they are gathering places of those obsessed with sexual perversion. Every night, thousands of men across the country are subjecting themselves to carnal displays of female flesh that leave them sexually frustrated. If they don't pay for sexual acts with stripper/prostitutes, they will leave the club looking for a place to act out their pent-up lust. It's no wonder then that statistics have proven that violent crime rises in locations that allow adult entertainment establishments.

The fact of the matter is that the striptease is not innocuous fun enjoyed by a few "good ole' boys." It is a spiritual assault on the decency of our nation. Tragically, it will be the good people of America that will inevitably suffer. The final remark made by one of these girls says it all: "*It is hard to undo all this.*"

ⁱ Citizens for Community Values, www.ccv.org.

ⁱⁱ The American Decency Association (www.americandecency.org).

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid.*

^{iv} Citizens for Community Values, www.ccv.org.

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