

OBJECT

Challenging Objectification

The links between lap dancing and prostitution: personal testimony from a woman formerly in prostitution – 'Liane' *

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* Please note that 'Liane' is a pseudonym

"From 1999 to 2003 I worked in various brothels in and around London. I had previously worked in prostitution in Germany, having been pimped by my boyfriend. I mainly worked for one woman who, along with her husband, ran saunas/ massage parlours.

There was a clear link between the lap-dancing clubs and the brothels, although not formal. It is known that taxi drivers (including licensed black cabs) can receive commission for taking groups of men to lap-dancing clubs. However there were also minicabs that would then pick up punters from the lap-dancing clubs and bring them to the sauna. They would receive about £20 from the maid for bringing a group of men.

These punters could be some of the worst. There was a very aggressive 'pack mentality' and they would often be very rude and would be grabbing, slapping and touching us in the main seating area. They would often make very degrading comments about the way that women looked, often referring to women as 'mingers'. They invariably asked for group sex – it seemed important for them to have sex in front of their friends.

If they had been taking coke (which was quite often) or too drunk and were not able to get an erection or come in front of their friends they would take it out on us for not doing our job properly or not turning them on enough and would sometimes try to demand their money back. The sauna very rarely refused entrance to drunk or high punters, especially if there was a group of them as it would mean losing out on too much money. Nor were we allowed to refuse them.

I think that the fact that the men had come from the lap-dancing clubs meant that they had already stopped seeing us as human or individual. They would pick out women one after another to try out, to swap over and to score in terms of 'performance'. The overwhelming feeling that I got was that they really hated us.

During a period in which I wasn't working I was contacted by the brothel owner and she asked to meet up. She told me that she was planning to open up a lap-dancing club. She had previously been prosecuted for running brothels so she was aware that it was risky to continue operating her saunas. She told me that she could see why I no longer wanted to work at the saunas because of the high number of foreign women there (most of whom I know for a fact were trafficked) and that I had 'moved beyond that'.

What she proposed was that me and a group of other women who were working for her become escorts. Through doing this we could start paying her money (on top of the usual cut she would take) to get a 5% share in the lap-dancing club. Her proposal was that, once opened the lap-dancing club would act as a front for prostitution and it was made very clear that the women would be expected to have sex with punters either on or off premises.

I guess she saw this as a way of continuing her prostitution business but with less risk of the premises being raided. I declined her offer and I don't whether she did open the club.