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Lexi Willicoxon
University of Mississippi

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**Magic Mike and the Male Body as a Source of Spectacle**

LEXI WILLCOXON

University of Mississippi

In *Magic Mike*, directed by Steven Soderbergh in 2012, the actors mimic the space and dominating performance of male strippers in strip clubs. For male strippers, the body is a source of entertainment and sexual allure used to entice and seduce paying customers. Typically, the female body is objectified, but in male strip clubs, it is the female patron’s turn to gaze at the male performers. By placing the male strip clubs in adult entertainment sections of town, the public has given permission for women to have a designated area to publically express their sexuality. Once inside the strip clubs, the focus on the confined space, the ideal male body, and passive reactions from female patrons are what allow male strippers to retain their dominance. Although women are encouraged to stare at and touch the performers, women attend strip clubs for entertainment and female camaraderie, not sexual pleasure. Therefore, women are still viewed as unable to have sexual desires outside of the private home sphere, where sexuality is only seen as acceptable between husband and wife. Women who go to strip clubs are not transgressing gender roles; instead they are forced to remain passive and docile, as male strippers become hypermasculine and dominant in a space reserved for females to express their sexuality.

The physical space of male strip clubs allows women and men to interact with one another in a publically sexualized atmosphere: a domain that has typically been reserved for male patrons and female strippers. Most strip clubs that advertise male strippers are in a “leisure district” of town; a space with ample lighting and large crowds.71 “Space is important in creating new sexual identities, but women’s leisure spaces are also spaces ‘where gender relations exist and are routinely reproduced’”.72 By placing the strip clubs near bars, late-night restaurants, and other forms of adult entertainment, women feel more adventurous and enticed to enter the strip club. Male strip clubs, because their location is in a space that encourages the public’s approval, allow women to feel “entitled” to view sex in public spaces, like their male counterparts who pay to see women strip, but the spatial differences force male and female patrons to be treated differently.73 In *Magic Mike*, bars surround the strip club, and Tatum seduces women to go to the strip club by buying them drinks and flirting with them.74 By using the surrounding areas to entice customers, the male strippers are showcasing their sexual allure and power to seduce females to enter the male strip club, the only place where women can publically embrace their sexuality.

By attracting female patrons to the strip club, male strippers are asserting their dominance over women in public areas. Although women have been given public areas to express their sexuality, these public spaces do not allow for the transgression of gender roles. Instead, traditional

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72 Pilcher, “A ‘sexy space’ for women? Heterosexual women’s experiences of a male strip show venue,”: 4.

73 Pilcher, “A ‘sexy space’ for women? Heterosexual women’s experiences of a male strip show venue,”: 4.

gender roles are strictly reinforced by the passiveness of the female patrons and the dominance asserted by male strippers. In order for male strip clubs to function, males and females rely on traditional gender roles to interact with one another.\(^{75}\)

_Magic Mike_, starring Channing Tatum, takes the audience inside a male strip club to showcase the dominating performance of male strippers. _Magic Mike_ reinforces gender roles by showing the male strippers as hypermasculine, and the female patrons as passive. Soderbergh accurately depicts the inside of a male strip club by focusing on the small space in relation to the large stage that dominates the room. In _Magic Mike_ the main feature of the strip club is a curtained stage, and the lack of space for mobility allows male strippers to assert their dominance over the patrons, who are constantly surrounded by the male strippers. Soderbergh uses low camera angles to enhance the dominating image of the male strippers. By keeping the cameras angled upwards towards the stage, Soderbergh captures the actors as dominating the audience and the female patrons because the male strippers are shown as powerfully standing over the camera. The female patrons in _Magic Mike_ are portrayed as young, attractive women who become obsessed and crazed when the male strippers come on stage. With women fanatically cheering on the performers, the men “treat their bodies as a tool - for them, it's an instrument of pleasure and commerce, often both at the same time”.\(^{76}\) _Magic Mike_ shows how the close proximity of the female patrons and the male strippers allows for gender roles to be enforced, which allows the men to become hypermasculine in order to dominate the passive female patrons.

For the male strippers, a hypermasculine façade is the key to being a successful stripper.\(^ {77}\) The use of costumes allows male strippers to present themselves as overly macho. Cops, Army guys, and construction workers are all popular costumes for male strippers.\(^ {78}\) These costumes represent male stereotypes associated with masculine jobs: assertive, dominant, and powerful roles.\(^ {79}\) In _Magic Mike_, Soderbergh uses costumes to add to the carnivalesque atmosphere of the male strip club. For example, Tarzan, a large man, dresses as the King of the Jungle, which enables him to dominate the women by picking them up and carrying them around.\(^ {80}\) Male strippers also rely on a strict diet and exercise regiment in order to achieve the perfect masculine body.\(^ {81}\) A hypermasculine appearance is what male strippers believe that female patrons are looking for, so some strippers even use steroids in order to create the perfectly toned body.\(^ {82}\) Tanning, shaving, and waxing are also preparations male strippers make before they appear on stage.\(^ {83}\) The Kid, one of the male strippers in _Magic Mike_, originally was hired for the night as an assistant who would help spray

\[^{75}\text{Maren T. Scull, “Reinforcing Gender Roles at the Male Strip Show: A Qualitative Analysis of Men who Dance for Women (MDW),” Deviant Behavior 34, no. 7 (2013).}\]

\[^{76}\text{Peter Suderman, "'Magic Mike' revealing look at male stripper." Washington Times, (June 29, 2012).}\]

\[^{77}\text{Scull, “Reinforcing Gender Roles at the Male Strip Show: A Qualitative Analysis of Men who Dance for Women (MDW),”: 1.}\]

\[^{78}\text{Scull, “Reinforcing Gender Roles at the Male Strip Show: A Qualitative Analysis of Men who Dance for Women (MDW),”: 10.}\]

\[^{79}\text{Scull, “Reinforcing Gender Roles at the Male Strip Show: A Qualitative Analysis of Men who Dance for Women (MDW),”: 10.}\]

\[^{80}\text{Soderbergh, Magic Mike.}\]

\[^{81}\text{Scull, “Reinforcing Gender Roles at the Male Strip Show: A Qualitative Analysis of Men who Dance for Women (MDW),”: 11.}\]

\[^{82}\text{Scull, “Reinforcing Gender Roles at the Male Strip Show: A Qualitative Analysis of Men who Dance for Women (MDW),”: 13.}\]

\[^{83}\text{Scull, “Reinforcing Gender Roles at the Male Strip Show: A Qualitative Analysis of Men who Dance for Women (MDW),”: 13.}\]
the strippers down with oil and set up their props and costumes. Although these superficial regiments may seem feminine, the excessive focus on body image allows male strippers to appear as hypermasculine as possible in order to entice female patrons. Male strippers must also deal with erections and whether or not to enhance their genitals. Enhancing the appearance of genitalia is up to the stripper, and one male stripper commented that “it’s not about size; it’s about how comfortable you are.” All of these superficial regiments are directed at seducing the female patrons, which influence how women should view their sexuality inside of the male strip clubs.

For women, being customers at male strip clubs forces them into stereotypical passive roles when it comes to sexuality. Many male strip clubs employ Master of Ceremonies, or MCs, which dictate to women how they are to respond to the male strippers, and what the rules are for touching and interacting. The MC in Magic Mike is Dallas, played by Matthew McConaughey. Dallas is a seasoned male stripper, and the owner of Xquisite Strip Club, the strip club that entertains the “ladies of Tampa.” As the movie begins, McConaughey is reciting a list of rules to the female patrons. By using MCs to control female patrons, there is “the assumption that women’s sexuality needs to be excited, and supervised, or that women do not know how to express sexuality in a public, and non-romantic way.”

Along with the MCs, the male strippers also use their hypermasculinity to dominate and control the female patrons. This hypermasculinity allows women to feel as if they are witnessing a show, not transgressing traditional gender roles. Seventy-one percent of women who go to strip clubs admit that they were not there for the “sexual encounter” or the “turn-on”, but simply for a night out with the girls. Male strip clubs allow female patrons to have a sense of camaraderie, as well as escape the “predatory heterosexual man” that lurks in nightclubs and bars in the leisure districts of town. Women go to strip clubs in order to bond with their female friends, especially on special occasions such as birthdays or bachelorette parties. By bonding with other females in male strip clubs, women are free to express their sexuality in a public atmosphere that does not shame them or attempt to repress their desires.

But once women leave the strip club, they must hide their sexuality and desires from the public. As male strip clubs have become more popular, gender roles in the private sphere have received pressure from women to relax the rigid restrictions placed on female sexuality. In a survey, forty-one percent of women admitted that they had attended male strip clubs despite the disapproval from their spouse.

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84 Scull, “Reinforcing Gender Roles at the Male Strip Show: A Qualitative Analysis of Men who Dance for Women (MDW),”: 13.
85 Scull, “Reinforcing Gender Roles at the Male Strip Show: A Qualitative Analysis of Men who Dance for Women (MDW),”: 15.
86 Scull, “Reinforcing Gender Roles at the Male Strip Show: A Qualitative Analysis of Men who Dance for Women (MDW),”: 15.
87 Scull, “Reinforcing Gender Roles at the Male Strip Show: A Qualitative Analysis of Men who Dance for Women (MDW),”: 14.
89 Pilcher, “A ‘sexy space’ for women? Heterosexual women’s experiences of a male strip show venue,”: 10.
90 Pilcher, “A ‘sexy space’ for women? Heterosexual women’s experiences of a male strip show venue,”: 12.
92 Pilcher, “A ‘sexy space’ for women? Heterosexual women’s experiences of a male strip show venue,”: 16.
93 Pilcher, “A ‘sexy space’ for women? Heterosexual women’s experiences of a male
become adamant about policing the public sexuality of women by dismissing male strip clubs and reinforcing the ideas that women do not have sexual desires. The paranoia that women cannot make their own choices regarding public displays of sexuality has become a court case. Recently, a nursing home has been sued because a son felt that hiring male strippers to “entertain” the female patients was wrong. The case proclaims that Bernice Youngblood, a resident of the nursing home, was “defiled”, and cites that Youngblood’s money was supposed to be locked up, and should not have been used on the strippers, reinforcing the idea that men believe women should have no sexual desires or spend money on viewing sexual acts in a public space. The nursing home defended itself by saying the male strippers were for “entertainment” and were done in “good faith”. The suit against the nursing home does not allow Youngblood to testify how she felt about the strippers. Instead, the son speaks on his mother’s behalf, thereby dismissing her sexual desires and her ability to decide for herself whether or not she wanted to view the male strippers. By stating that male strippers are immoral in a nursing home setting, the case also argues that male strippers do not belong in the public unless they are performing in strip clubs. Therefore, sexuality for women and the hypermasculine performances done by male strippers must be contained to the strip club.

Although women can now attend public shows of sexuality, gender roles and stereotypes are still being strictly enforced. Male strippers become hypermasculine and dominate the patrons, while females remain passive. The male strippers use their performances as an example of what women should find sexy. By portraying themselves as overly macho men, male strippers reiterate the sexual allure of power. *Magic Mike* mimics male strip clubs, and illustrates how gender roles are reinforced in public displays of sexuality by allowing men to don a hypermasculine façade, thus forcing women to remain passive.

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