



# Close Encounters: Intimate service interactions in lap dancing work as a nexus of 'self-others-things'

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## Abstract

Drawing on ethnographic research on lap dancing work, this paper focuses on how the subjectivities, interactions and settings that constitute the lap dancing industry come into being through three interrelated processes of encoding, embodying and embedding. In considering how these processes combine to 'enact' the industry, the paper draws on Merleau Ponty's understanding of the world as a dynamic nexus of 'self-others-things'. Focusing on how this nexus shapes lived experiences of intimate service interactions, the analysis considers how dancers continually negotiate customers' expectations of the service encounter given the ways in which these are: (i) encoded in depictions of lap dancing work in marketing and advertising materials on club websites; (ii) embodied by lap dancers through their interactions with customers; and (iii) embedded within the materiality of lap dancing clubs. The paper shows how intimate service encounters can be understood as the outcome of a nexus of 'self-others-things' through which particular organizational subjectivities and settings are brought into being through these three interrelated processes.

## Keywords

embedding, embodiment, encoding, gendered sexuality, lap dancing industry, Merleau Ponty, organizational settings, subjectivities

## Introduction

Based on an ethnographic study of a significant but under-researched sector of work, this paper considers how intimate service interactions are constituted, sustained and experienced or 'made' as

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embodied encounters.<sup>1</sup> Some 10,000 women are currently thought to work in the lap dancing industry, which is estimated to be worth at least £300 million a year in the United Kingdom alone (Taylor & Corcoran, 2012). There is a growing body of academic research highlighting the narrow range of subject positions and bodies idealized within the industry (Colosi, 2010; Hardy & Sanders, 2015; Mavin & Grandy, 2013; Sanders & Hardy, 2012; Wood, 2000), which is notorious for its sexualized displays of women's bodies in lap dancing clubs and on the websites used to advertise them. Yet as Frank (2007, p. 501, emphasis added) has noted, despite a growing interest in working life within lap dancing clubs, 'the ways that these venues ... are implicated in larger social, cultural, political, economic and intimate relationships, *processes and patterns of meaning making*' remains under-researched. With this in mind, this paper considers how the materialities and meanings that make up the lap dancing industry shape the experiences and perceptions of those working in it, examining what impact this has on the exchange relations involved.

We draw on an ethnographic study of lap dancing to show how the intimate encounters involved are signified and experienced, and are embedded within the material settings and meanings that constitute the industry. Throughout the paper organizational settings are understood as performatively constitutive of human interaction and vice versa (Ropo & Höykinpiro, 2017), that is, as 'a dynamic nexus of meaning and materiality in which work is embedded ... and identities and practices are played out and made meaningful' (Tyler, 2011, p. 1481). We aim to show how, through practices of encoding, embodying and embedding, highly prescriptive organizational subjectivities and settings come to be perceived as emblematic of lap dancing work. We use the term 'encoding' to refer to the symbolic practices involved in imbuing particular cultural depictions, in this case of female lap dancers and the intimate service encounters with which the lap dancing industry is associated, with specific denotations and wider cultural connotations. We consider how these are embodied, that is, lived in/through bodily materiality and intersubjective encounters, themselves mediated by the cultural associations encoded in websites and the wider meanings of lap dancing. By 'embedding' we refer to the ways in which these cultural associations, expectations and encounters come to be situated within the material particularities of specific organizational settings, in this case, lap dancing clubs.

Examining these interrelated processes, our focus is on how lap dancers are expected to take on a particular material presence through '*complex entanglements* that enact and circulate' idealized norms (Ford, Harding, Gilmore, & Richardson, 2017, p. 1, emphasis added). This brings to the fore the ways in which the subjectivities and settings that constitute lap dancing come into being through a 'complex entanglement' of intertwined processes of encoding, embodying and embedding. It highlights how the assumption of a material presence within the industry involves a dynamic nexus, in Merleau Ponty's terms, of 'self-others-things'. We show how this nexus is perceived and experienced, and in this sense sustains particular subjectivities within the context of the intimate encounters through which they are continually re-enacted.<sup>2</sup>

Mobilizing insights from Merleau Ponty's (2002) post-dualist ontology of the body, and Butler's (1993, 2000) performative critique of gendered liveability, we consider how organizational embodiment is produced as an object to be consumed, at the same time as it is subjectively experienced as the medium through which self, others and things engage with one another within the context of an intimate service encounter. The lap dancing industry is a particularly poignant setting in which to explore this complexity as the dancer's body is simultaneously produced and consumed, objectified and subjectively experienced; it is the medium through which lap dancers encounter their customers, at the same time as the embodied site on which that encounter is experienced. We consider how lap dancers experience this simultaneity, as well as the ways in which perceptions and expectations associated with this encounter are signified through processes of encoding. We also examine how they are embedded within the materiality of the industry, notably in the setting and substance of lap dancing clubs, in ways that shape and sustain the particularities of the encounter.

We start from the premise that perception, as a mode of embodied habituation of the social world, provides a valuable way of understanding how specific lifeworlds come to exist. Recent studies have explored how particular subjectivities emerge from the ways in which bodies are inhabited, in Merleau Ponty's terms. This emphasizes how the composite elements of embodied subjectivity, the materiality of bodies and the meanings attributed to them *make particular* the organizational sectors and settings we inhabit. A notable example is Dale and Latham's (2015) recent study of a UK-based not-for-profit organization that provides support for disabled people, highlighting the entanglement of embodied and non-human materialities. Michels and Steyaert (2017), in their study of the affective atmosphere of a music festival, also highlight organizational settings as emerging from embodied encounters between participants' bodies, their affective capacities and the material settings of those encounters. Taken together, this work reflects a broader interest in the social materiality of organizational life whereby organizational subjectivities and settings, meanings and materialities, are understood as mutually constituted through 'performative, material-discursive practices' (Hultin & Mähring, 2017, p. 586).

Drawing on Merleau Ponty, we argue here that such practices are part of the dynamic nexus through which the social (organizational) world emerges through what Merleau Ponty refers to as 'the system "self-others-things" as it comes into being' (Merleau Ponty, 2002, p. 66). We suggest that exploring the ways in which particular organizational settings are inhabited not only reveals the modes of subjectification involved in bringing them into being, but also how the settings themselves are 'made' through this system. To explore this, we ask the following questions: How are organizations encoded, enacted and embedded, through the embodied perceptions and lived experiences of organizational actors? What can these accounts of organizational encoding, embodying and embedding tell us more broadly about how organizational subjectivities and settings come to assume the 'material presence' they do?

In addressing these questions with reference to the lap dancing industry, we seek to make three interrelated contributions to the field. First, we offer empirical insights into the lap dancing industry, developing inroads that have been made in recent years into understanding the commodification of gendered sexuality within organizational life (Cohen & Wolkowitz, 2018; Sanders, Cohen, & Hardy, 2013). This literature has emphasized the increasing 'pornification' of contemporary culture (Attwood, 2006; Kingston & Sanders, 2010; Walter, 2010), and the need for more empirical research focusing on sex 'as a meaningful topic of inquiry' (Brewis, 2005, p. 403), as well as organizational settings as sensuous, performative spaces (Ropo & Höykinpiro, 2017). We do this by mapping out some of the ways in which idealized forms of gendered sexuality are encoded within the lap dancing industry's cultural landscape through corporate websites, considering how this impacts upon both the performances of lap dancers and the materiality of the clubs in which these performances take place. Second, we make the methodological case that, in order to fully appreciate the ways in which particular subjectivities and settings are 'made present', organizational research needs to consider (i) how work is *encoded* in the semiotic and symbolic landscape of the industry or sector in which it is situated; (ii) the way in which work is *embodied* through the day-to-day practices of organizational actors; and (iii) the way in which work is *embedded* within its particular socio-material setting. Third, we argue that Merleau Ponty's understanding of the world as a dynamic nexus of 'self-others-things' (Merleau Ponty, 2002, p. 66) helps us to make sense of the ways in which organizational processes bring particular subjectivities, embodied encounters and settings into being.

The paper begins by reviewing relevant literature on organizations as embodied phenomena, before considering Merleau Ponty's writing on body-world relations. We then examine recent research on lap dancing, before going on to map out the approach we took to our ethnographic study. Drawing on illustrative examples from our data, we make the case for a methodological

approach to studying organizational life that combines a focus on processes of encoding, embodying and embedding particular ways of being. Our discussion highlights how paying attention to these processes enables us to understand more about how specific organizational subjectivities, encounters and settings come to be experienced and sustained.

## Organizations as Embodied Phenomena

A wealth of literature has evolved in recent years focusing on organizational phenomena as embodied (Dale & Burrell, 2014; Haynes, 2012; Waring & Waring, 2009). Much of this has drawn attention to the extent to which labour markets are gendered and sexualized, and to how women especially are expected to embody a relatively narrow range of normative ideals (Kelan, 2013; Pettinger, 2013; Pullen, Rhodes, & Thanem, 2017). Sanders et al. (2013) emphasize that, in intimate service work, this is largely due to the proximal nature of the encounters involved. Empirical research such as Chugh and Hancock's (2009, p. 470) study of hairdressing has also highlighted the 'relationship between the architectural and spatial design [of the salons], and the embodied, aesthetic labour of the employees' in shaping and *situating* embodied perceptions and performances of interactive service work. Similarly, Cohen and Wolkowitz's (2018) recent writing on 'body work' emphasizes how the physical touch and manipulation of others' bodies is rooted in material, cultural and organizational constraints that compel particular gendered performances. Taken together, this research highlights how incorporating an analysis of the context within which embodied service encounters take place is crucial to understanding how the working body is lived and experienced in and through organizational settings, including those that compel and/or constrain particular ways of being. Further, echoing a vast body of feminist literature, Knights and Clarke (2017, p. 337) have argued that intersections between discursive, symbolic and material processes mean that inhabitation of our working bodies is often shaped by comparing our bodies to those of others, or to idealized images. How workers experience this bodily comparison in sectors of work and organizational settings in which their body is continuously on display is an important issue to consider. Further, calling for 'a more embodied understanding of identity', they argue that attempts to secure self-identity are largely dependent upon others whose expectations are 'unpredictable and uncontrollable'. In our discussion below, we show how others' expectations are framed to compel particular ways of embodying gender and sexuality, and of interacting. In doing so, we also demonstrate how these ways of being are the outcome not simply of self-other interactions, but of the dynamic, complex entanglement of self, others *and things* – in this instance, the materialities of lap dancing clubs and the websites used to advertise them.

In examining the relationship between embodied work processes and the material and symbolic contexts within which they take place, organizational scholars have increasingly turned to insights from phenomenology, particularly Merleau Ponty's writing (Dale & Latham, 2015; Hancock, 2008; Küpers, 2015; Riach & Warren, 2015). The latter draw largely on Merleau Ponty's (2002) understanding of embodiment as the experience of living in or through the body, developed most fully in his *Phenomenology of Perception* and in his later discussion of 'intertwining' in *The Visible and the Invisible* (Merleau Ponty, 2013).

Drawing on Heidegger's concept of *dasein*, or being-in-the-world, Merleau Ponty (2002) situates the body as always in a relation between self, others and the material world, simultaneously the active perceiving subject and passive, perceived object. For him, subjectivity is not simply the way we make ourselves, but the way in which the world appears through our situated embodiment within it. This 'body-subject' emphasizes how the psychical and physiological 'gear into each other' (Merleau Ponty, 2013, p. 79), as well as how perception animates the world in/through intercorporeal engagement. This dynamic relationship mediates both the self *and* the social world

without one collapsing into the other, so that embodiment, as a mediating nexus, connects self, others and the wider social world in ‘a knot of living signification’ (Merleau Ponty, 2013, p. 153).

This knot of signification is important to understanding how particular workplace settings and identities come to be not only experienced and perceived but are ‘made’, a theme to which we return below in our discussion of the lap dancing industry. Merleau Ponty’s account of the phenomenological method, as premised upon a commitment to the relationship between meaning and materiality, provides our analytical starting point. It does so in so far as we show how organizational settings are ‘made’ both through the ways in which they come to assume a particular material presence, at the same time as they make meaning. We illustrate how this takes place through processes of encoding, embodying and embedding, tracing how the perceptual field that constitutes the particular organizational subjectivities and settings we examine come to take the material forms that they do through what Merleau Ponty (2002, p. 122) calls ‘bodily schemas’.

Bodily schemas govern our inhabitation of the social world, shaping our interactions with others. If, as Merleau Ponty puts it, ‘we are literally what others think of us’, bodily schemas shape others’ perceptions of us, and vice versa, as a system of possibilities that both compel and constrain our inhabitation of the social (organizational) world, and our performative encounters within it. For Merleau Ponty (2002, p. 169), bodily schemas shape our experiences and negotiations of boundaries, capacities and ‘dispositional tendencies’, including those we have towards ourselves, and others. The connection between ontology and ethics in Merleau Ponty’s writing is particularly important to understanding his approach to how bodily schemas shape social relations. In his thinking, this connection is premised upon the post-dualistic view of the body as both subject-object noted above; while we are embodied, perceiving subjects, we are not isolated, self-centred subjects. On the contrary, precisely because of our embodied way of being in the world, we are caught up in social relations of mutual interdependency with others, just as we are situated in a material world that we are compelled to make sense of and engage with. From this perspective, therefore, ‘we both engage with the other and are engaged by the other in and through our bodies, and it is the body that provides for not only the possibility but also the necessity of inter-subjective intimacy’ (Hancock, Sullivan, & Tyler, 2015, p. 1725). Yet, although Merleau Ponty discusses the implications of bodily schemas for the ways in which we inhabit the social world, the *basis* of these bodily schemas – their origins, agendas and integration into our ways of being and performing ourselves – remain relatively underdeveloped in his writing. This leads us to consider below what compels or constrains our embodied performances within the organizational settings we inhabit, and how we learn and acquire these bodily schemas. This is a theme we explore with specific reference to lap dancing work, examining how particular bodily schemas come to be encoded, embodied and embedded within the industry.

## Making the Lap Dancing Industry

Lap dancing is a commission-based sales role that involves the buying and selling of topless and nude dances within a club setting.<sup>3</sup> Lap dancers may also sell so-called ‘sit-downs’, which involve the customer paying for a period of time with a particular dancer during which the dancer will drink, socialize with and dance for them. While not with customers, dancers are expected to perform on stage and interact with customers to entice them into paying for private dances or sit-downs.

There is a well-established body of research on the commodification of sexuality within organizational life, much of it focusing on the commercial exchange of sex (Brewis & Linstead, 2000; Hubbard & Colosi, 2012; Sanders, 2004, 2005). A growing interest in the lap dancing industry (Colosi, 2010, 2013; Grandy & Mavin, 2014; Hardy & Sanders, 2015; Hubbard & Colosi, 2015; Mavin & Grandy, 2013; Sanders & Hardy, 2012) has highlighted the bodywork and emotional



labour undertaken by dancers in order to perform ‘counterfeit intimacy’ (Barton, 2007) and to display an appropriately sexualized persona. The academic literature on lap dancing to date has focused largely on licensing and regulation (Hubbard & Colosi, 2012, 2015; Sanders & Campbell, 2013). Also highlighted have been the various risks (Sanders, 2005) and taints (Mavin & Grandy, 2013) attached to working as a lap dancer. Studies of the stigma attached to lap dancing work (Bradley, 2007; Grandy & Mavin, 2014) highlight overlaps with recent research on ‘dirty work’, which emphasizes how products, services or service providers come to be physically, morally and/or socially tainted as a result of the work involved and the nature of the exchange relationship. Hughes, Simpson, Slutskaya, Simpson and Hughes (2017, p. 106) in particular demonstrate the importance of considering what they describe as ‘the co-constitution of the material and symbolic dynamics of dirt’ in understanding how the taints associated with dirty work are embodied and experienced, and crucially, *embedded* within the material settings in which dirty work is carried out. Similarly, Ashforth and Kreiner (2014) note how, although the taints with which certain occupations are associated are widely recognized as being social constructions, relatively limited attention has been paid to how *context* shapes those constructions.

While such insights provide an important basis for understanding how lap dancing work is experienced, the focus of much of this literature has been on techniques adopted by lap dancers to separate their work selves from their private lives in order to manage the perceived taints with which their work is associated (Grandy & Mavin, 2014; Sanders, 2005). Much research has also focused on the workplace personas adopted lap dancers (Barton, 2007). Wood (2000, p. 15) in particular has described how a lap dancer’s workplace performance revolves around her becoming ‘a fantastical actor’. Deshotels and Forsyth (2006) similarly describe how the latter is enacted through the performance of ‘strategic flirting’, a technique used to entice customers into spending more time and money in a club. This means that only relatively limited consideration has been given to the wider symbolic or material contexts of these performances, or to the intercorporeal encounters through which they are enacted and experienced. At the same time, the significance of the material settings and of the semi-otic configuration of lap dancing encounters remains relatively under-researched.

Notable exceptions include Mavin and Grandy’s study (2013, p. 11), which pays sustained attention to the cultural construction and material context of lap dancing. They found that dancers increased their earnings by becoming skilled in performing ‘a narrow depiction of femininity’, embodying the physical attributes that they had come to associate with an idealized feminine sexuality within the industry. This takes the analysis of lap dancing work in an important direction, highlighting the ways in which the intimate encounters involved bring particular subjectivities into being. In doing so, it opens up questions about how dancers come to incorporate these compulsions into their bodily schemas, and what material resources they draw from in doing so. In particular, it emphasizes the role the media plays in shaping idealized perceptions of lap dancing (Grandy & Mavin, 2012); yet, as noted above, this theme remains relatively underdeveloped in the wider literature to date. In this respect, we seek to draw from and develop insights from Grandy and Mavin’s important work. We do so by connecting the ways in which the normative ideals that are encoded into the industry are embodied by the dancers and are embedded within the materiality of the club settings in a way that shapes specific expectations and perceptions of the intimate encounters involved.

In sum, several questions and issues emerge from the academic research on lap dancing to date. First, much of the literature focuses on bodily ideals. How do lap dancers perceive and habituate these, as part of what Merleau Ponty calls their bodily schemas, materializing them through their embodied performances? At its heart, this question highlights the importance of understanding more about the organizational processes through which lap dancers come to embody and enact the normative expectations compelling them to perform their bodies in particular ways. In turn, it is

also important to think through the processes through which lap dancers' workplace subjectivities and settings materialize these embodied performances. Finally, consideration needs to be given to the implications of these processes for how lap dancers and their customers perceive commercial encounters within the industry, given their respective expectations of the exchange.

Merleau Ponty's writing, as discussed above, provides fertile ground on which to think about these issues, and to consider how (and why) dancers are compelled to perform particular ways of being that embody the normative fantasies that Mavin and Grandy (2013) describe. We show how these fantasies are encoded and embedded within the material settings of the industry within the nexus of self-others-things that frames intimate service encounters. Although sexuality does have a presence in *Phenomenology of Perception*, sex and gender were notably underdeveloped themes in Merleau Ponty's writing. To address this, we supplement our reading of Merleau Ponty with insights from Butler's (1988, 2000) writing in order to explore how the compulsion to embody particular ways of being plays a performative role in the constitution of organizational settings, subjectivities and encounters. We do so specifically by drawing from Butler's writing on the cultural significance of what she calls 'the modes by which we are addressed and asked to take up the question of who we are and what our relation to the other ought to be' (Butler, 2005, p. 30). For Butler, it is only by taking up the subject positions that we are compelled, or 'hailed' into being that we are able to live intelligible, meaningful lives.<sup>4</sup> We consider how the lap dancing industry is constituted through what Butler calls the 'the scenography ... of construction' (Butler, 1993, p. 28), attempting to think through the importance of materiality (embedding) and signification (encoding) in shaping the embodied nature of the encounters on which the industry is based. In doing so, we show how lap dancers are compelled to take up particular modes of embodiment in order to inhabit liveable lives within the industry. In other words, in an environment in which their bodies are constantly on display, to be accorded subjective viability within the exchange relations, club settings and wider labour market, lap dancers must conform to the normative regimes framing customers' expectations of the service encounter. With this in mind, we consider how the nexus of 'self-others-things' frames the relationship between lap dancers and their customers within the context of the commercial encounters that form the basis of the exchange relationship in which they are embedded.

## **Encoding, Embodying and Embedding Commercial Sex within Organizational Life**

Our study of the lap dancing industry was based on three integrated forms of empirical data collection, undertaken over a twelve-month period in the southeast of England: a semiotic analysis of twelve club websites; eleven semi-structured interviews with eight lap dancers (one of whom was interviewed three times, another twice) and a total of nine participant observations conducted in six clubs (totalling 32 hours of observation). All three authors contributed to the research process, including research design and data analysis. However, only one of the authors, who has personal experience of working as a lap dancer, undertook the interviews and observations in lap dancing clubs.<sup>5</sup>

Drawing on Strangleman (2016), the semiotic analysis of the websites included identifying broad themes that emerged from the text; analysing specific images and artefacts on individual websites through reading both 'with' the text and sceptically; and drawing out underlying sets of meanings and discourses that recurred, or which were notably absent across the websites. Websites analysed included a combination of clubs where observations took place, and some in which they did not (depending on access).

Participation involved spending time in the club as a customer, watching live stage shows and interacting informally with dancers. Observations were covert to preserve the environment, but

were undertaken in accordance with institutional ethical requirements and drawing on insights from previous participant observation research (Baxter & Chua, 1998; Vinten, 1994) as well as the author's own experience of working in the industry, and of undertaking observational research. The ethical terrain involved had to be negotiated sensitively. As noted above, only the author who has experience of working in the industry undertook the observational research. On the one hand, this accorded a degree of familiarity with the setting, including a somewhat habituated understanding of its layout and behavioural norms. It also accorded a sense of embodied comfort and of being 'at home' in a (largely male dominated) environment in which some women may feel out of place as the only (other) women are generally dancers or bar staff. On the other hand, this also required a continual awareness of the importance of reflexivity, and of maintaining a balance between ethnographic immersion and critical distance. In practice, this involved being mindful of the risks of making assumptions based on prior experience that might overly constrain data collection. We tried to minimize this by undertaking iterative, collaborative data analysis, and by continually drawing multimodally from the three data sets (website analysis, observations and interview data). Further, any interactions with dancers during observations were respected as work (e.g. we did not distract them from their focus on earning a living), and at the same time, understood as performative enactments, reflecting the dramatic persona adopted by the dancers in the club settings. The interviews (outside of work time and space) were intended to provide a more critical, reflexive space in which dancers could explore their experiences of working in the clubs.

Observation schedules were developed to focus on the materiality of the setting, how dancers and customers embodied the space and how they brought the setting into being. Given that the focus was on understanding how encounters within the clubs are embedded within its materiality, a priority was to maintain immersion in the environment of the club setting while observations took place. Data was collected in the form of outline field notes taken during observations; full field notes were written up immediately afterwards focusing on the look, feel and layout of the setting and were opened up to iterative, dialogical analysis by the three authors and (subsequently) woven into discussions with participants in the interviews, in a fully anonymized form. As an example, when a dancer made reference during an interview to feeling exposed, for instance, we were able to draw on insights from the observational field notes to connect a shared experience and perception of feeling 'on show', partly due to the layout of the club interiors (a point we return to below).

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with women who either (at the time of the interview) worked as lap dancers, or who had done so within the previous three years. Interviews were between one and two hours long; the majority took place in cafes, pubs, or other settings of the participants' choosing. In addition, shorter follow-up interviews were conducted with four of the participants. These added details that the participant had thought about or experienced since the previous interview. The interview questions were relatively open, beginning with 'tell me about your job'. After this opening question, participants were asked: How do you feel about working in the club? How did you learn to do the work involved? Can you explain what happens when you perform a dance for a customer? What do you think customers want, or expect? Why do you think they expect this? What do you feel is being exchanged when you dance for a customer, what is the customer paying for, and what do you provide? Interviews also asked about perceptions and experiences of so-called 'VIP areas' (see below), and what impact dancers feel the websites have on their work, and on customer expectations. Prompts such as 'Why do you think that is?' and 'What makes you say that?' were used to gain clarity and depth of understanding, and to add reflexive detail. These were also intended to encourage dancers to explain their experiences and perspectives, avoiding reliance on assumptions resulting from mutual understanding (as participants were aware that the interviewer was an ex-dancer). For instance, when an interviewee said something like 'you know how it is', the interviewer would encourage elaboration, rather than



sharing taken-for-granted meanings. The age of dancers ranged from 21 to 34; years of experience of working in the industry ranged from one year to ten, with a *total* combined experience of 34 years. Pseudonyms are used below for both the dancers and venues to maintain anonymity.

Prior to the interviews, dancers were asked to bring an item with them that in some way represented the work they do. As O'Neill et al. (2002, p. 74) suggest, the use of visual stimuli in interpretative research can 'transgress the traditional boundaries of representation' and 'inspire praxis through a politics of feeling'. The objects dancers brought to the interviews enabled them to talk about issues that they might otherwise have overlooked, facilitating the interview as a reflexive space in which embodied, often ambivalent, experiences could be explored, and within which any presumptions about shared understandings could be reflexively challenged (see above). One example of this occurred when a dancer brought along a shoe, enabling her to articulate her sense of high-heeled shoes elongating her legs, and therefore building confidence in her ability to embody an idealized form on stage. Yet at the same time, she recalled the pain and difficulty of having to learn to walk and dance in shoes not designed for comfort or stability, and the interview sought to provide a space within which these embodied experiences could be articulated.

Analysis of the observational and interview data was conducted immersively (Calabretta, Gemser, & Wijnberg, 2017; O'Neill et al., 2002), achieved by reading and re-reading field notes and transcripts individually, with participants, and between the three researchers. We transcribed the interviews ourselves, and worked from the textual documents as well as the recordings, to maintain a sense of 'connection' with the data, and the voices of the participants, taking analytical cues from their tone and expressions. We followed this with a coding process in order to tease out key themes within and across the data sets that recurred across the websites, interviews and observations. For example, we considered the ways in which certain spaces are designated for so-called 'VIP experiences', professing to offer a more intensively intimate encounter. We identified this through our coding practices as having a presence symbolically and discursively (on club websites), materially (in substantive form, in the clubs) and interactively (in customers' and dancers' expectations of what form a dance might take).

To maintain an embodied and reflexive approach to data collection and analysis, we paid sustained attention to the 'self-others-things' nexus from Merleau Ponty (2002), trying to ensure that our approach was as integrated and intersubjective as possible. This involved us working in a multimodal reflexive loop (Emerson, Frez, & Shaw, 2011) rather than through a linear process of 'phases', collecting and analysing the website, observational and interview data simultaneously. We worked with the data as a collective whole, identifying recurring themes, allowing what Beane and Orlikowski (2015) call 'provisional settlements' to emerge, at the same time as teasing out contradictions and ruptures. This multimodal process of engaging simultaneously with the three data sets, each focusing respectively on processes of encoding, embodying and embedding, encouraged continual 'negotiation' with the data, as well as constant reflections on our own perceptions and presumptions and those of our participants. From this, we were able to gain insight into how, in this particular organizational setting, the nexus of 'self-others-things' comes to be lived and experienced, and to shape the encounters involved. We now turn to discuss the themes that emerged from this process.

## Encoding

An important part of our study focused on the ways in which an idealization of heteronormative feminine embodiment is encoded into the lap dancing industry, such that dancers and customers approach the encounter with a particular set of expectations in mind. As Hochschild (1983) has argued, these govern perceptions of what customers are reasonably entitled to during the

encounter. With this in mind, and focusing on the ‘knot of signification’ (Merleau Ponty, 2013, p. 153) referred to above, we conducted a semiotic analysis of lap dancing club websites considering how these websites contribute to the semiotic ‘landscaping’ (Gagliardi, 1990, 2007)<sup>6</sup> of idealized subjectivities in the industry. Through examining the websites, our aim was to understand how the service encounter is anticipated, and how the ‘self-others-things’ nexus is performatively encoded, such that dancers feel compelled to perform particular subjectivities on the basis of their perception that only a relatively narrow range of subject positions are possible, and desirable, within the industry. Idealized images and discursive reference points on the websites arguably ‘landscape’ customer anticipation and dancers’ expectations of the service encounter involved and, therefore, the ways in which dancers experience their bodies as both the subjects and objects of this encounter.

Perhaps to be expected, our data highlighted repeated patterns of heteronormatively prescriptive images of sexually idealized young and physically fit, curvaceous women’s bodies; what surprised us was how prescriptive this was, to the extent that there appears to be only an extremely narrow range of embodied forms through which a lap dancer might credibly assume a material presence. One notable example of this, a website for ‘Stars’, depicts repeated images of the same dancers in similarly themed outfits and styles, revolving around ‘school girl’, ‘emergency services’ and ‘Wild West’ costumes, all slightly different, but all embodying stereotypically sexualized heteronormative fantasies. Similarly, ‘Elegance’ depicts an image of four dancers lined up against a bar with their backs to the camera, all in ‘bunny outfits’ (referencing the Playboy brand) with bunny tails attached to the black lacy underwear they are wearing. Repetition of normative ideals is relentless and ubiquitous. For instance, the bunny girl image referred to above was one image on a reel that repeated on a loop on the Elegance homepage. The loop cycled through repeated images of women with toned, youthful bodies, in various themed outfits, perpetuating customer fantasies that the dancers have capacity to embody a range of personas, adding the illusion of variety, but for the dancers only a narrow set of ideal ways of being seem to be available.

In addition to this visual imagery, particular personality traits and expectations are signified through the repetition of keywords on all of the websites we examined. For example, ‘The Den’ and ‘All Things Nice’ repeated the word ‘friendly’ to emphasize the atmosphere of the club. This can also be discerned through a repeated emphasis on how welcoming and accommodating each club promises to be towards customers. For example, ‘All Things Nice’ promises ‘luxury private rooms designed for comfort’ and to ‘cater for your needs’. This subtly influences dancer subjectivity because, although the words are directed towards the customer, they provide insight into the intense level of sexualized emotional labour that the dancers are expected to embody, and which customers might reasonably anticipate from the encounter.

In this sense, drawing on Merleau Ponty (2002), we can think of these websites as important contributors to the ways in which lap dancers and customers come to perceive the bodily schemas that compel and constrain the dancers’ performance and persona. They show that what Merleau Ponty (2002) calls the perceptual field comes to be encoded in such a way that both the embodied forms of labour undertaken by the dancer, and the commercial nature of the commission-based exchange relationship, are occluded. Effectively, the websites frame a sense of perceived entitlement, a sense of anticipatory promise that serves to ‘set’ or stage the setting, prior to customers actually experiencing the materiality of the clubs, or their encounter with dancers’ bodies. While these expectations may exist as a result of established cultural or historical associations with lap dancing work, or with the sex industry more generally, the repetitive intensity through which they are encoded into the websites arguably distils these. ‘Spirit’s’ website, for example, is set up almost like a computer game, enabling viewers to merge the fantastical with the material setting of the club, offering potential customers an immersive experience. Arguably, the website intensifies this

sense of anticipation and immersion, by playing on the ambiguity of the encounter by simultaneously perpetuating a relatively narrow embodied aesthetic, at the same time as proffering a setting for customers that ostensibly provides an open series of possibilities within the clubs. It does so through, for instance, repeated allusions to VIP experiences offering ‘special treatment’, or ‘something more’.

It is when taken together that these images and discourses work to create the environment of the club, including the promise of its ‘friendly’ atmospheric qualities and the sexual availability of lap dancers, at the same time as setting very specific aesthetic parameters around the bodies of dancers, parameters which compel the performance of particular subjectivities and settings as the nexus of the service encounter.

## *Embodying*

Understanding how lap dancers embody their work, and come to performatively inhabit the clubs provided important insight into the impact of the websites discussed above on the dancers’ perceptions and experiences, as well as those of customers. Our semi-structured interviews helped us to understand how dancers make sense of and experience their work, revealing some of the ways in which encoding has profound effects on their embodied performance of lap dancing work. The interviews highlighted that a central part of their work involves negotiating the relationship between the anticipatory openness proffered to customers, and the relatively narrow boundaries set around what is aesthetically possible for lap dancers as these are encoded within the websites discussed above. For example, Texas (aged 20 with one year’s experience) illustrated one of the effects of this in her reference to public perceptions of lap dancers as sex workers: ‘They see things ... and they just assume that people that dance are prostitutes.’ Similarly, other dancers we interviewed referred specifically to the so-called ‘VIP experiences’ advertised on the club websites. For example, Katy explained, ‘You can get money from sitting down with a customer, you go to a VIP room and they’ll pay for an hour.’ Dancers felt that these set up a deliberately ambiguous and elusive promissory expectation that customers would experience ‘something more’ if they were prepared to pay extra. Katy referred to the pressure of meeting customer expectations when she explained: ‘There’s more pressure in the VIP area because you’re stuck with that person, and they have a clear idea that they are paying for something more, something that others aren’t getting.’

One of the effects of this, and echoing Knights and Clarke’s (2017) concerns cited above, is that dancers often referred to feeling self-conscious or inadequate as they compared themselves negatively to other dancers, or to their idealized perceptions of the corporeality of lap dancing work. Texas in particular emphasized this:

Comparing yourself to others is a big part of the job. Who’s making more money, who’s got the most fake tan on, who’s doing the most moves on the pole ... You’re all doing the same job and you think what are they doing and why have they got more dances, what are they doing that I’m not doing, how can I get more dances.

Similarly, Katy (a 29-year-old lap dancer, with six years’ experience) reflected on how nerve-racking her audition was, particularly the expectation that she would be able to portray herself in a sexy way that she found difficult to act out:

I was panicking and just, really awkward. In my head, before I got on stage, I had these moves that I thought would look really good and then when I got up there and did them, they were really s\*\*\*.

For Katy and other dancers (see Mimi, below) the stage seems to be something of a distilled setting that materializes the performative expectations and the embodied pressures the dancers feel themselves to be under. The nature of the stage as a working space, its particularity as a physical environment unlike any that they might encounter or inhabit elsewhere, combined with the dancers' limited opportunity to be able to practise their routines, accentuating their sense of exposure and ensuing anxiety. Taken together, this produced a sense of perpetual exposure for the dancers we interviewed, as well as the promise of validation – in the form of employment, in the case of an audition, or of invitations to do individual dances, in the case of stage performances within the clubs, that might result in increased earning for a night's work. Dancers felt, then, partly because of the competitive nature of the work they undertake, that they had to simultaneously 'fit in and stand out' (Knights & Clarke, 2017) in the ways in which they performed their bodies on stage, and in the club more generally, particularly through their encounters with customers. As Mimi (33 years old with one year of experience) described it, dancing on the main stage is:

Something you do to promote yourself because often you'll get off stage and get dances, you're in people's mind, it's good if you can make eye contact with people and make them feel like there's a bit of a connection when you're on stage.

Feeling exposed, but also feeling the need for exposure and to use that to build connection and what Wood (2000) calls 'counterfeit intimacy', was a recurring theme in our interviews. As Roxy (a 24-year-old dancer with four years' experience) explained, there is a danger that 'you get kind of stuck in the background, people don't notice you so much' and as the work is largely commission-based, but also involves lap dancers paying a house fee to a club ranging from anything up to £120, getting 'stuck in the background' could mean a dancer makes little or no money from a night's work.

Also of concern was the need to develop the skills required to negotiate the commercial terms of exchange while embodying a sexually alluring ideal. In practice, this meant embodying themselves as simultaneously desirable and desiring subjects, yet inhabiting a position within a transaction as a consumable object. Kitty emphasised dancers' self-awareness of this tension when describing her interactions with customers, and her own feelings about the encounter as a transactional one:

Flirt with them, make them think you really fancy them, you know. Act sexy with them ... I just saw money for whoever walked through the door, I didn't really feel much for the customers, as long as they were paying for dances!

Dancers also had to develop coping strategies enabling them to deal with the various demands associated with this process. Some of these involved relatively transient techniques such as using self-tan. This enabled the dancers both to meet aesthetic expectations influenced by the websites considered above, and to feel more confident under the unflattering lighting surrounding the stage in the club setting. Other strategies were more permanent, involving breast enhancement, for example. As Roxy noted, 'Nearly everyone has their boobs done and more and more people are asking me about my botox and where I go.' The dancers both reproduce the materiality of the setting, in and through their bodies, at the same time as perpetuating the normative ideals and expectations embedded within it through these kinds of practices.

Navigating bodily boundaries of reasonable expectation, especially those surrounding touch, was an important aspect of the dancers being simultaneously sexualized subjects and consumable objects, and of their experiences of their encounters with customers. Dancers recalled making use

of the materiality of the club setting in negotiating customers' attempts to touch them while they were dancing. For example, Katy explained how she uses a reference to security cameras as a way of deflecting unwanted attempts to touch her when she says 'I try and make out that I don't mind, but there are cameras so, I say, "I'm really sorry, but the cameras are watching me, I'll get in trouble".' Here Katy brings to the fore how objects such as cameras are not simply passive 'things', but form a constitutive part of the 'self-others-things' nexus, in Merleau Ponty's (2002) terms, shaping the nature of the encounter, and how it is experienced and negotiated within the club settings. In a similar way, Mimi spoke about how her dance shoes enabled her to perform the 'sexiness' required to embody the role of a lap dancer, particularly by adjusting the appearance of her body:

Stripping was the first time I wore high-heeled shoes, so you know that whole massive stiletto, short skirt thing. I would bend over in the mirror and think wow I look really sexy.

In this respect, a dancer's embodied subjectivity is made, in part, through material items such as short skirts and stiletto heels which enact, or 'bring to life', the idealized images of what it means to be or look like a lap dancer encoded into club websites. Dancers embody these ideals in ways that they feel will enable them to meet customer expectations, helping them to stand out enough to secure commissions for individual dances or 'sit downs'. The ways in which this nexus becomes embedded within the material setting of lap dancing clubs constitutes a third, related way in which the industry, and the forms of exchange on which it depends, is constituted.

### *Embedding*

The clubs we studied included relatively large main sections with smaller, more intimate areas where the majority of dances would take place, marked not just by the physical layout and style of the spaces, but also their lighting. In most clubs, the main area is where the bars are situated, as well as the stages and plenty of seating to accommodate large numbers of customers. Typically, the stage would form the focal point of the room with the seating arranged around this to encourage customers to direct their attention towards the stage and, more importantly, to encourage them to pay for individual dances or 'sit downs' that are charged separately, and which earn dancers commission (although clubs tend, on average, to retain around 30 to 40% of payments for individual dances). The main area is where customers would spend the majority of their time, drinking and interacting with friends and dancers and watching dancers perform on stage. While customers are in this area, dancers take the opportunity to sell dances and sit-downs to them by circulating the room and building rapport, as the following extract from our fieldnotes describes:

Dancers tended to be on their own or in pairs as they worked the room. They would move around the stage, slowly circling it and striking up conversation with customers on their way round. They tended to walk a few steps around the stage and pause, looking for customers to engage with, but subtly. Or they would walk up to a specific customer, introduce themselves and begin an interaction. ('Puma', January 2015)

Dancers are also able to earn tips during their stage performances within this space. When dancers sell private dances or sit-downs, they take customers to one of the smaller dance areas. The way in which the spaces are sectioned off in most clubs leaves smaller, private 'VIP' areas partially visible from the main club. We assumed during our observational research that this is deliberate, and interview data attested to this, as the promissory glimpses that are afforded to customers by this division of the space has the potential effect of enticing customers into wanting to see more, and paying extra. Indeed, this was noted in our observational fieldnotes, highlighting this sense of enticement



and wanting to know more about what goes on in these semi-private spaces ourselves. In this way, the smaller rooms and dance areas served as extensions of the club websites considered above, potentially seducing customers into spending more money by proffering an open-ended enticement to intimacy. For the dancers, this meant that they have to continually negotiate customers' perceptions of what is being offered, particularly as a result of the 'special' nature of the space as a materialization of the perpetual promise embedded into the exchange. Our observations highlighted how this partial visibility enhanced this sense of enticement. To illustrate, our field notes describe how the space in 'Peak' was divided to enable customers to partially view dances that were being performed:

Two of the private rooms had beaded curtains across the doorways, giving an effect of privacy but enabling some view of the room from the main club. This allowed customers to see just enough that they might want to experience it for themselves.

Overall the layout of the main space in the clubs facilitates an environment for watching women's bodies, adding to the objectification referred to above, and the sense of exposure the dancers experience. 'Katy' alludes to this sense of exposure when discussing why fake tanning was so important to her:

I wouldn't feel comfortable dancing thinking oh my god I look really pale, and the lighting isn't always very flattering so you have to be brown to look good.

This sense of exposure was also noted in our own fieldnotes during an observation in 'Champagne':

I realised that I felt a bit self-conscious when I needed to pee. I kind of put it off for as long as possible but eventually I had to take the plunge. The reason I was avoiding going was because I did feel like I would be watched while I walked across the club ... I had to walk past all the customers who were focused on the stage ... for me, as a woman who wasn't selling dances I became aware that I was in a space where we were supposed to watch women and I was a woman and to some degree would still be watched.

This emphasizes how the materiality of the clubs, in particular their layout, serves to stage women's bodies as objects to be consumed, at the same time as requiring the performance of sexualized subjectivity to sustain that consumption. This suggests that, in a similar way to the websites, the club setting provides the contours of possibility for how dancers embody customer expectations of the encounter. One notable example of this that we noted in our fieldnotes is how dancers routinely brush against customers as they move past them. This may appear to be accidental to customers, but in practice, it is often a reflection of the deliberately narrow walkways between the fixed seating areas that form an important part of the management of space within the clubs. This is because the lightest of touches served as an enticement to customers to pay for dances or sit-downs as a result of this seemingly unanticipated, and unstaged, intimate, bodily contact. These encounters produce a sensual awareness that might not otherwise take place, but which could result in a transaction, as a consequence of the ways in which the dancers inhabit the settings, and in which the intimate encounters of lap dancing work are embedded in the materiality of the clubs.

## **Discussion: Understanding the 'Self-Others-Things' of the Lap Dancing Industry**

Drawing from Merleau Ponty, we have thus far suggested that what constitutes the lap dancing industry is the outcome of a series of meanings that come into being through particular material phenomena that are perceived and experienced in the ways discussed above. Developing an

embodied, phenomenological approach to our study has enabled us to consider how the three inter-related processes of encoding, embodying and embedding performatively constitute the lap dancing industry. Taken together, these three processes form a nexus of 'self-others-things' that brings the particular organizational encounters, subjectivities and settings discussed here into being. Through this nexus, lap dancing becomes the 'material presence' (Harding, Ford, & Lee, 2017) that it is and is made particular as an organizational phenomenon. In other words, through the 'complex entanglement' (Ford et al., 2017) of these three processes, lap dancing work is 'made'. This 'making', a phenomenon that combines meaning and materiality, is shaped by the symbolic denotations encoded into lap dancing club websites as well as the wider connotations of lap dancing work and encounters that circulate through a culture of 'pornification' (Kingston & Sanders, 2010; Walter, 2010). It is perceived and experienced in the form of the embodied personas enacted by lap dancers, and the materiality of the lap dancing clubs in which their encounters with customers (and other dancers) are embedded.

Highlighting the performative nature of this (Butler, 1988, 2000) and situating it within the materiality of the lap dancing industry emphasizes the ways in which intimate encounters are constituted through a nexus of self-others-things, not as a 'system' in Merleau Ponty's terms, but as a dynamic and complex entanglement. Drawing insights from Butler's performative critique of gender constitution and of the normative regimes governing the inhabitation of culturally intelligible bodies enables us to critically reflect on the relatively narrow range of organizational, gendered and sexual subjectivities that are rendered possible, as viable ways of being a lap dancer within the parameters of this nexus. In this context, what is at stake for those involved is their capacity to embody the normative regimes of intelligibility, and therefore employment viability, governing lap dancing work as it is encoded, embodied and embedded within the nexus of self-others-things that constitutes the industry. In this sense, we have illustrated how the sexualized personas adopted by lap dancers (Barton, 2007; Mavin & Grandy, 2013; Wood, 2000), and customers' expectations of their performances (Deshotels & Forsyth, 2006), emerge in a way that compels very particular ways of being a lap dancer, and of interacting with customers. We have shown how this comes into being through complex 'processes and patterns of meaning making' (Frank, 2007, p. 501) as well as the material contexts within which these are, in Butler's terms, performatively enacted within the industry's 'scenography'. Analysing the processes of encoding that frame this, and of the lap dancing encounters that we have examined here, demonstrates how the bodily ideals on which much of the literature to date has focused become performatively enacted and habituated by dancers, through what Merleau Ponty calls their bodily schemas.

While our specific empirical focus has been on the lap dancing industry (responding to calls for more in-depth research on sexualized organizational spaces – see Pullen & Thanem, 2011), understanding the significance of encoding particular expectations and ideals into the cultural framing of intimate service encounters highlighting the importance of critically reflecting on the organizational processes through which workers in these kinds of sectors and settings come to embody and enact particular normative expectations more widely. Considering how these ways of being are materialized within specific organizational settings adds to our understanding of organizations as entangled, embodied and non-human materialities (Dale & Latham, 2015); illustrating how this is lived and experienced adds empirical substance to perceptions of organizations as constituted through multi-layered sensory processes. Our discussion of lap dancing clubs shows how organizational spaces such as these 'are experienced through emotions, imagination and embodied sensations ... [that] become active and performative through human engagement' (Ropo & Höykinpiro, 2017, p. 357) in such a way as to constitute expectations and experiences of the encounter involved. We have highlighted the importance of thinking through the processes through which lap dancers' workplace subjectivities and settings materialize their embodied performances as a nexus of

'self-others-things'. By emphasizing the interrelationship between the three processes of encoding, embodying and embedding, and illustrating how these processes interact in a particular workplace sector and setting, we have shown how organizational scholars might study intimate service encounters as a nexus of 'self-others-things' through which organizational subjectivities and settings are brought into being, that is, perceived, encountered and materialized or 'made', in particular ways. In other words, we have shown how these processes constitute a 'complex entanglement' (Ford et al., 2017, p. 1) that serves to 'enact' the industry through the circulation of, in this case, a very narrow set of heteronormative, gendered ideals.

Weaving in insights from Butler's (1988, 2000) performative ontology of gender has also enabled us to further develop conceptual ideas derived from Merleau Ponty's writing, emphasizing how the nexus 'self-others-things' compels particular performances of *gendered* embodiment and interactions that come to be materialized within the specific sector and setting considered above. As an example of what Butler (1993, p. 28) calls the 'scenography of gender ... construction', our study of the constitution of the lap dancing industry highlights the performative relationship between semiotics, materiality and subjectivity, as this relationship is made manifest in the 'intimate encounters' at the heart of the industry. Analytically, this takes the literature on the lap dancing industry reviewed above both back a stage (considering how expectations shaping dancers' performances and encounters with customers are encoded into the cultural landscape of the industry), as well as forwards, by highlighting the ways in which these performances and encounters come to be embedded into the materiality of the clubs. In this sense, we add to this literature by showing how the industry, and the subjectivities and settings on which it depends, involves more than simply an embodiment of particular idealized norms, but rather a dynamic nexus, or complex entanglement, of selves, others and things.

## Concluding Thoughts

Through the processes of 'making' considered here, lap dancing is simultaneously given a material presence and attributed meaning in the form of specific denotations and wider cultural connotations. This brings the industry into being in its particularity, in terms of the ways it is perceived and experienced by those involved, in and through its specific materiality. In this sense, although lap dancing is a relatively extreme form of sexualized service work, our analysis has emphasized the importance of adopting a multi-layered approach to researching sexualized occupations and settings (Brewis, 2005; Pullen & Thanem, 2011). We have highlighted the 'emblematic' (Cohen & Wolkowitz, 2018) significance of this, teasing out connections between the ways in which gendered sexuality is *encoded* into the industry, is *embodied* by lap dancers and is *embedded* into the materiality of club settings.

As noted above, much of the lap dancing literature to date has focused on the narrow range of subject positions idealized within the industry (Mavin & Grandy, 2013; Wood, 2000). We have sought to examine how these emerge, considering how they become inscribed into the bodily schemas framing dancers' subjectivities, and materialized in the organizational settings in which they are embedded such that the affective atmosphere (Michels & Steyaert, 2017) of lap dancing, and its material presence (Ford et al., 2017), take the particular forms they do, especially within the intimate encounters involved.

In this sense, while our focus has been on the lap dancing industry, several important insights emerge from our analysis for the ways in which we understand organizational life more generally. Developing the inroads that Merleau Ponty's writing has made into work and organization studies in recent years, and drawing from insights in Butler's writing on performativity, embodiment and liveability, we have emphasized the significance of subjectivities and settings in 'making'

organizational worlds. We have shown how lap dancers' embodied subjectivities are brought into being as a material presence (Ford et al., 2017). Viewing the nexus of 'self-others-things' not as a 'system', as Merleau Ponty (2002, p. 66) describes it, but as a dynamic entanglement, we have shown how, within the context of intimate service encounters, this nexus requires constant maintenance and negotiation. In doing so, we have emphasized the importance of the 'self-others-things' nexus to understanding the relationship between meaning and materiality, and particularly the role played by signification in shaping this relationship. In this sense, we have sought to contribute to a growing interest in understanding and studying organizations as embodied phenomena, highlighting the ways in which organizations constitute a nexus of 'self-others-things' through which the subjectivities and settings we inhabit emerge. In sum, we have sought to emphasize how organizations come to assume the material presence that they do through processes of encoding, embodying and embedding that shape and compel particular ways of being. While our research focuses specifically on the constitution of the lap dancing industry, it enables us to show how organizational phenomena more generally come to be experienced as complex entanglements of meaning and materiality that serve to normatively 'enact' the encounters between self, others and things on which they depend.

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## Notes

1. Here and throughout the paper we draw on Chen's (2017) concept of 'crafted intimacy', which highlights the ways in which embodied encounters in the sex industry often involve an intermingling of body work, feigned affection and monetary gain.
2. While the lap dancing industry remains something of an 'extreme' form of sexualized service work, studying these intertwined processes provides important insights into lived experiences of interactive service work more generally. Showing how these processes are constitutive of organizational encounters, and the expectations and experiences associated with them, we emphasize that while our specific focus is on the lap dancing industry, the analysis and argument have wider resonance.
3. Prior to 2009, lap dancing venues were licensed in a similar way to entertainment venues such as pubs and clubs with regulations in accordance with the Licensing Act (2003). What distinguished lap dancing venues from more mainstream entertainment venues at this time was a list of conditions that they were required to adhere to, for example, age-restricted entry and the provision of a statement outlining the specific nature of the entertainment to be provided within the venue. As a consequence of campaigns led by Object and the Fawcett Society (Colosi, 2013), lap dancing clubs came to be licensed under the Policing and Crime Act (2009) and became known as Sexual Entertainment Venues (SEVs) (Hubbard & Colosi, 2012; Sanders & Campbell, 2013).
4. Here Butler draws on the concept of interpellation as it is developed in Louis Althusser's (2006) discussion of the ideological processes through which particular subject positions are 'hailed'. For Althusser, it is through hailing that individuals become interpellated into particular subject positions. To illustrate this process, he makes reference to a police officer commanding, 'Hey! You there!' In the combined act of calling out, acknowledging and responding, the police officer and the person being hailed effect the latter as a 'suspect', someone who is required to account for him- or herself (e.g. their actions or presence). Through this process, even fleetingly, a particular subject position is taken up. Butler (2000) argues that the presumption of gendered subject positions is the outcome of a social process of interpellation through which particular ways of being are performatively enacted.
5. This was for methodological and practical reasons, including previous experience and understanding of the industry, and a network of contacts within it from which to develop a snowball sample.
6. Gagliardi (1990, 2007) uses the term 'landscaping' to refer to the ways in which the organizational

environment is managed aesthetically in order to imbue it with a set of meanings and associations such that it will be perceived, experienced and sensed in a particular way. Landscaping thereby constitutes the symbolic and signifiatory process through which an organization comes to be semiotically staged.

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**Melissa Tyler** is a Professor of Work and Organization Studies at the University of Essex. Her current research includes an ethnographic study of working in sex shops in London's Soho (Soho at Work, Cambridge University Press), and a book on Judith Butler and Organization Theory (Routledge).