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Stripped Book Review

In her research monograph, *Stripped*, Bernadette Barton gets an inside look at the world of strippers through a series of interviews with dancers and first-hand observation of strip clubs. She focuses on the tolls of stripping, especially the social stigmatization dancers face, the perpetuation of emotional and physical abuse in clubs, and the double-standards surrounding femininity and sexuality inside and outside of the industry.

The central concept of Barton's piece lies in her analysis of female sexuality and the androcentric "raunch culture" found inside and outside of club settings in the United States. Through her research, Barton finds that strippers' experiences reflect experiences of women in everyday life. Women must live up to "...the expectation that [they] be sexually available, self-objectivity, look—but not necessarily feel—sexy, and conform to a homogenized, highly groomed, patriarchal standard of pornified beauty" (Barton, p.26). Raunch culture, popularized in the mid-1990s and considered the dominant culture of today by Barton, pushes women to adopt an "androsexist" viewpoint, leading them to hyper-sexualize themselves and other women through the male gaze (Barton, p.15, 114-115). Barton posits, that under a patriarchal organization of society, women are labeled as "Madonna" or "whore". While women and femininity are already seen as inferior in our society, women are further segregated into "good" and "bad" subsets, dependent on their ability to properly conform to male-constructed standards of female sexuality (Barton, p.103). From an early age, women are taught to be sexy, but not too

sexy, as not to be seen as “the wrong kind of slut” (Barton, p.129-130). Under raunch culture in an androcentrically constructed society, women are forced to be hyper-aware of their sexuality, never veering too far to one end of the spectrum. If a woman does engage in “discreetible acts,” like sex work, she is labeled a “bad woman”. She, in turn, loses the privileges and protection that “good women” receive from men (Barton, p.69-70) and faces possible stigmatization, harassment, and assault as consequence (Barton, p.103). While present-day media culture glamorizes the “Girls Gone Wild” narrative of confident, sexual women, women are punished for displaying their sexuality in real-world scenarios (Barton, p.118).

While Barton’s piece focuses on the lives of strippers, much of her findings translate to the lived experiences of women from all walks of life. Female assimilation into patriarchal culture under androsexism places women in a double-bind, taught to be sexually attractive for men, but only to a point where their sexiness does not diminish their femininity. Barton believes that women require “both freedom from sexism and sexual freedom for full bodily autonomy” (Barton, p.195). In order to reach this, it is imperative for there to be a rejection of patriarchal ideals that place men and masculinity as superior to women and femininity. With Barton’s analysis of the double standards surrounding femininity and sexuality, we can not only better understand the stigmatization of sex work, but also the barriers to female sexual liberation and women’s bodily autonomy as a whole.

References

Barton, Bernadette. *Stripped, 2nd Edition : More Stories from Exotic Dancers*, New York University Press, 2017. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pitt-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4500660>.