

# How do I Identify as a Sex Worker

Over the past fourteen years of my life, I have had to learn to embrace a rather dichotomous identity: that of my stripper persona and my non-stripper self. From the first moment I struggled to stay upright in a pair of Pleasers, I harboured a degree of disdain towards being associated with the term stripper. I never wanted to be associated with it, nor disclose that I was one to anyone outside of the industry. To the outside world, I was a 'student bartender,' or any other label I could convincingly regurgitate to the masses. During these early years, I conformed in a sense to the negative stigma associated with being a stripper; rejecting the identity simultaneously as I adorned it.

In a sense, I 'grew-up' in this industry, working in a variety of clubs: from 'dollar-dances,' to lesbian shows, to 'friction' dancing, to full touching, and to non-touching. It was not until I reached my 30s, that I finally became comfortable identifying as a stripper and embracing the other self I had created. Furthermore, I identified not only as a stripper, but as a sex worker.

Not every stripper will identify as a sex worker. In fact, most sex work organisations and non-strippers would argue that stripping and sex work are two distinct realities and do not intersect with one another. I have found in my experience the opposite to be true. Stripping (in all its varied forms) entails selling one's sexuality (as opposed to penetrative sex) and intimacy through diverse mediums. At times that has entailed limited to no physical contact with a client, relying instead on your 'naked counselling' skills for hours on end. At other times the sale of my sexuality has involved profound physical contact with clients and other workers (ie: lesbian shows), to the point that I found that I was only omitting penetration and direct genital contact.

Strippers, in both my opinion and experience, sit comfortably under the umbrella of 'sex workers.' As strippers, we face similar manifestations of stigma associated with our work as other sex workers do. We face similar barriers to services and have similar

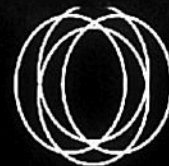


Art work contribution from Ms Darq  
www.missdarq.com/exhibitions/#/stripped-2013/

concerns regarding privacy and confidentiality. We experience the same inconsistencies with work and clients. We experience the same 'balancing of dyadic identities' (or 'two lives'). We are all 'sisters of seduction;' we just 'sex work' differently. The main difference that I have noticed as I have matured in this industry, one lap dance at a time, centres more on service provision. As most strippers are not recognised as sex workers by sex work organisations, strippers are denied services that they could greatly benefit from. Herein lies the only crucial difference.

*I am Sophie: a sex worker broadly, and stripper specifically.*

## SALOME'S CIRCLE



Salome's Circle

**peer support and rights-based advocacy  
group for strippers, exotic dancers, and  
show girls, past and present.**

**Salome's Circle is a group that meets monthly in the CBD  
providing a space to:**

- Combat social isolation & debrief**
- Access transition support if desired**
- Provide/exchange education/assistance on taxes,  
finances and resumes**
- Access stripper/exotic dancer friendly services  
and resources**

**Contact us for further information or  
to join our circle!**

**[www.salomecircle.org](http://www.salomecircle.org)**

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