

401 Counterculture: The Straight Scoop on Life on the Pole in RI



RI Dancers and Club's look the other way type of attitude

The adult industry in Rhode Island has seen a very challenging 12 months. In August 2013, a 15-year-old girl was discovered dancing with a fake ID at Cheaters, long known to be an establishment of supposed ill repute. In November, undercover journalists documented prostitution being solicited at several clubs. In December, undercover Providence police officers busted dancers offering more than the menu services at Satin Doll right in down city. The local media has cried epidemic, and to believe the news reports, every dancer in every club in RI is selling herself with underage girls at her side. Mayor Taveras and Governor Chafee both called for massive reforms on strip club laws governing private dance booths and the hiring procedures of dancers. It would seem we have descended into utter debauchery and filth that is rotting the soul of the capitol city.

But what is really going on? Certainly the underage busts are a tremendous problem that should be dealt with as harshly as possible if it is found management was aware (there is not evidence of this). Is anyone surprised that dancers in a strip club may occasionally offer services barred by law? And why do we care? Are the girls victims or masterminds? Are they systemic or isolated incidents? The oldest profession in the world is the oldest for a reason; certainly prostitution will always exist in the Ocean State regardless of the presence or regulation of adult establishments. Is it fair to these businesses that they are subjected to gotcha journalism and targeted by police and levied heavy fines and/or suspensions of licenses for the actions of two consenting adults behind a closed door? Don't the police have more pressing matters in a city being ravaged by drugs and violent crime?

These are the questions we must ask ourselves before joining a witch hunt. We must put aside any prejudices and moral dilemma, look at the facts of the matter, and form an educated opinion.

To gain a full understanding of the situation, I sat down with "Brandy," a veteran former feature dancer in RI, and talked about the life RI dancers are leading, and if the recent negative attention is hype or a mere glimpse into a bigger problem.

Adam Schirling: How many clubs did you dance at in Rhode Island and for how long?

Brandy: I worked in two clubs here in RI for about 14 months.

AS: How soon after starting dancing in Providence did you witness prostitution occurring in the club?

B: As soon as I was done getting ready in the dressing room and got to the floor, I witnessed prostitution. My first lap dance, in a \$25-a-song booth, consisted of an 85-year-old man with a remote controlled vibrator in his pocket who loved to talk about bestiality. This was within the first 20 minutes that I ever worked as a dancer. The first club I worked at was more dive like. It was a more nasty strip club than a high-end escort type club, where I later worked. I have to say, the level of prostitution going on in both clubs I worked at was equal, but the money in the more high-end club was better for doing weird things.

It became clear to me, on my first day dancing alongside my sister, that prostitution is part of the gig. Some girls just didn't participate, and they walked out of work with \$100 to \$200 compared to the thousands some girls were making a night. I recall older, more experienced dancers saying, "Girl, we're gonna turn you into a whore! That's the way to get regulars. That's the way to get paid. "

AS: Did you personally know any underage dancers or were any ever discovered to be underage?

B: I'm sure that in my 14 months of dancing, I ran across a few underage girls. I don't personally know any. Management always checked IDs , made photocopies, and tried to make sure no underage girls were working the club. It would be bad news for them if anybody found out. Underage girls were bad for business, and no one wanted to get raided.

AS: Does management promote drug and alcohol use among dancers? Did you personally ever witness any overdoses among girls working?

B: Management did not give two fucks if their girls were fucked up on drugs or alcohol. If you were a newer girl and management didn't know how you acted when you were fucked up, they may make you sit a shift out or send you home if they thought they could get in trouble for having said fucked up girl work. But once they saw what a girl could handle without endangering the club, anything went. Management in one of the clubs found a rolled up wad of cash with cocaine stuffed inside. When the girl came running, looking for her cash, all management did was throw the coke in the trash and hand her her money. She didn't get in trouble at all. Another girl, she was top bitch in this club, nobody could top her. She was open about her dick sucking abilities, she was open with the fact that she was a prostitute. Management adored her. She got booked for all the bachelor parties on stage and always was invited to the most private VIP parties, athletes and politicians. She got caught selling coke and was suspended for a shift or two. Management would urge you to get a drink and relax, but sloppy, messy, stumbling girls was a problem for them. So they didn't encourage girls to be messy sloppy, but they did not care if a girl was coked up, on pills, drunk, falling, puking ... as long as you pulled yourself together before you hit the floor.

It was totally a look-the-other-way situation. One of the girls made excellent pot brownies and would sell them for \$5 a pop and they were ... so very good. The house mom at one of these clubs received pot brownies in lieu of tips once a week.

As far as straight up ODs, I never saw a girl being rushed to the hospital because she was going to die. But girls would routinely be nodding out, sleeping in a swivel chair set aside for such drug stupors. Newer girls who couldn't keep it together were refused the shift, because girls who walked around in 8-inch heels who were nodding out were liable to fall and really get hurt. Those shoes are no joke. Neither is heroin, though.

I mean, crazy shit, dude. For example, I can't take opiates, I'm allergic. But one old bag of a dancer would sell me Percocet every single time I got drunk. I told her to stop, but every time I had one too many she would take \$30 and give me one tiny pill. I would be sick for days after. It sucked. But these girls, the job, drugs are part of the gig. I'd say 60% of girls dancing are addicts. It's clear. Girls take the amount of money they need to buy 30 pills and divide that by how much dick they need to suck to make that money. For 30 pills, for one or two days worth of drugs. It's disturbing what some girls will do for drugs. Initially, I went into the business expecting more drugs and less prostitution. But it's pretty equal.

AS: Does management encourage prostitution among the dancers? Or is it more a look-the-other-way situation?

B: Does management encourage prostitution? They always supplied little paper cups and mouthwash in the bathroom of the dressing room. So ... It was routine for girls to come back from a champagne room and beeline for those little paper cups to get the fucking grossness out. You could almost bet money on who just participated in a sex for money exchange. When a girl walked out of a champagne room, you can see on their faces that look that says, "I just did something bad," mixed with the look of, "But I got \$500 for it." That shamed look mixed with a bit of pride.

If a girl got caught participating in prostitution in a club and arrests were made or the media caught on or if they got threatened by the police, they would have no other choice but to crack down. One club took more slats out of their doors to see more of the champagne room after one particular arrest or raid.

AS: How soon after you started working were you propositioned for prostitution? How often did it occur?

B: I was propositioned for prostitution the first day, and every single day after that until I stopped dancing. It happened 50% of the time. I would approach a man and he would make it known immediately that he was looking for more than a lap dance or an all nude champagne room. Immediately I knew if I was the girl for them or not based on what they wanted. I'm not saying I was a perfect angel, but straight-up prostitution wasn't my thing.

I've done hours-long champagne rooms or dinners where these men would talk to me for hours. Whole nights they paid for to talk to me. Those were the only regulars I ever had. Talkers. But prostitution runs rampant. Right now, as I'm typing this, I'm 100% positive there is a girl somewhere in a Providence club giving a blow job or having sex. Right now.

AS: Did cops, politicians or local celebrities ever try to curtail sexual favors due to their office while at the clubs? If you didn't personally witness it, was it talked about? Such as a police officer demanding sexual favors under threat of drug/prostitution arrest? What about sex between the owners and dancers?

B: I never was propositioned by police or politicians. I never saw the girls and owners mix. The house moms took care of the girls and the owners would come in once in a while to hand out free drink tickets. Clubs can't legally be brothels, so if it goes on it is rarely discussed. I don't know if there were ever girls who were forced to trade sex for freedom. But in one club, it seemed to always be protected by the owner's connections. He ran the most high-end strip club in RI, where girls were practically giving away blow jobs, and nothing really ever happens there. It's not in the know.

AS: Did you ever fear for your safety or the safety of other girls while working? Any incidents stand out in your memory?

B: Yes, of course you fear for your safety. You enter a dark club with hundreds of men with no windows and two bouncers. Hundreds of extremely horny and drunk men. But you put it in the back of your mind. You protect yourself. You never go home with anyone. You don't put yourself in a position to get hurt. There are bouncers, and I've never gotten really badly hurt on the job. The guys who like to strangle are scary. You can't be letting strange men in a strip club strangle you or pull your hair. I've heard some girls claim rape. But the doors are like an inch thick. Scream a little bit and the bouncers would break in and stop it. The girls, though ... When strippers attack, that shit gets real. Those heavy lucite heels can knock you out. Girls throw hot curling irons at each other, pull weaves out of other girls' heads. Bouncers trying to control 10 angry women in a dressing room the size of a closet can get really bad. I was never really bored though. You work, do your job, and go home, and you have rent money and savings and nice things. You bear the burden of seeing that dirty dark side of humanity. You try to live a normal life without letting the job consume you.

AS: Certainly dancers across the USA have similar tales for good and bad. What would you say was the worst part about dancing in a RI club? And what positives, if any, did you take from the experience?

B: Being treated like a straight up object takes its toll. I was turning into this empty, sexually confused, ugly person. The men can be just so vulgar, so crass. Like who in their right mind says to a girl, "I'll give you \$20 more for anal"? This is just what it is.

It's part of the gig. I'm happy I went into it with half a brain. There are things I did take away from it. I grew up. In the more high end club, I had to compare to the most put together, sober girls. I focused more on my health and what I put into my body when I was at home because I knew the amount of alcohol I was ingesting three nights a week was dangerous. I worked out and had the best clothes and makeup. I took away this — maybe imagined — power. I control my life. It's a really tough industry to endure. It gets painful to do after a while. That imagined power fades away, and you see it for what it really is: a brothel where they encourage you to make money by any means. The worst part is that it makes a person so jaded, it sucks the life out of you.

The best part is knowing the power of your actions, on men, on people in general. The worst part? Seeing some girls just fucking fade away.