



The Art of Striptease

Stella

By and For Sex Workers
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This document is part of Stella's booklets collection:

XXX Guide
Rights Guide
C it's no Joke
Dear Client
Dope Guide

Contributions:

Thanks to Stella's team and to all sex workers who contributed in the Art of Striptease
since its first edition

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Introduction

With the support of Stella, *The Art of Striptease* was created by and for women who work in the sex trade as dancers. Stella is a community group dedicated to improving the lives, health and working conditions of sex workers. Stella promotes the decriminalization of sex work so that all women can live and work safely and with dignity.

The Art of Striptease contains loads of information for women who practice the art of nude dancing. The subjects covered include dancing in private, placement agencies, lap dancing (contact dancing), health, etc.

This advice, most of it provided by dancers, does not attempt to influence you to commit illegal acts or acts that could harm your health. The guide is meant to help you take control of your life, your work and your working environment. *The Art of Striptease* is a complement to The XXX Guide that is for all sex workers. You can obtain a copy by calling Stella.

Where to Work?

Each place is different. Before going to work in a bar, a peepshow, or for a placement agency, be sure that you know how they operate and what your working conditions will be. To avoid unhappy surprises, an interview with the owners and a visit to your future workplace are strongly recommended.

– Clubs and Bars –

You should ask yourself a number of questions when you are looking for a club to work in. Many bars, on top of not paying a basic salary, require that you pay a certain amount to work there. This amount, called “bar service” is redistributed to the doormen, the DJ, the barmaids and the waitresses.

Find out about the club's policies. For example, some clubs require that the women pay a penalty for lateness or when they can't work, no matter what the reason is. You know, you can shop for a boss and a bar!

When you get a job in a new club don't forget to inform them if you have a tattoo or piercing. Also, inform the owner before the first meeting if you are Black or of any other "ethnic" origin. Unfortunately, many bar owners have prejudices and hire only a limited number of women of color.

The owners and employees generally are understanding when you don't have much experience. On the other hand, be careful that no one takes advantage of your lack of experience.

Ask questions about how to work on the stage and on the way the bar operates. Ask all the questions that you think are necessary for your safety and well being. When you perform on stage an erotic couple, don't hesitate to charge the bar for these special dances even if you are receiving a basic salary for working the evening.

Don't let the owner intimidate you or threaten you. If ever you feel that you are not comfortable in a place, don't hesitate to leave. There are dozens of clubs where you can work and you will find one that meets your needs.

Clubs that do not require you to perform on stage are often clubs that allow complete sexual relations with customers. Be sure to make your limits very clear from the start so that you will not be sent to one of these establishments if that is not what you want.

As with agencies, an owner may want you to dance for him. You are not required to agree to this kind of request, whether it comes from the owner or a club employee. If you do accept, be sure that you will be paid for these dances.

– Placement Agencies –

A placement agency is an intermediary between you and your future employer. If you want to work in a bar where there is just straightforward dancing (with no contact), or where you can dance, for \$10 a shot, in a private booth where the client can touch your breasts and buttocks, or in a bar where complete sexual relations are allowed, whether in Montreal, throughout Quebec, in Ontario, abroad, or over the internet, the agency can help you find a workplace where you will feel comfortable and which meets your needs. Generally, the agency's service is free but, in certain cases, you must pay the chauffeur service.

Employment agencies are not all the same. It is your responsibility to shop around to find one which meets your needs and respects your concerns about the type of workplace you are looking for. When you are searching for the right agency, don't be afraid to ask questions or to meet with agency personnel in order to be sure that they are running a serious, professional business and that the booking agents respect your concerns.

The employment agency which you have chosen may want to interview you. If this is the case, remember that the interview must be conducted with respect and that you should not be obliged to undress.

During the interview, if the employer wants you to strip in front of him, or touch you, you can ask why and refuse. No employee or owner has the right to touch you without your consent. Don't be afraid to say no the first time. Right from the start, you will have established your limit.

When doing business with a new agency, you can verify if it is legitimate. Ask for their business card, then check the yellow pages or, by telephoning 411, see if the agency really exists.

Depending on their clientele, some bars reserve the right to refuse to hire dancers with body piercings and tatoos. If this applies to you, it is recommended that you notify the agency beforehand in order to avoid misunderstandings and needless travel expenses.

Always check on the bar where the agency is sending you to dance. Ask for the bar's telephone number and verify with them the salary, the accommodations, the type of dancing performed there, or any other information that seems pertinent. If the agency refuses to give you the phone number, think twice about their honesty.

– Dancing on the Internet –

A new twist in the world of erotic shows, dancing on internet is a form of sex work already performed by thousands of women around the world. These internet sites are reserved for adults.

There are a number of ways to work on the net. You can work in your own home or in a studio. Some women run their own internet dancing businesses, others work for agencies.

If you want to work from home on your own or for an agency, you need to have the equipment, ie. a webcam, a computer and a high-speed Internet.

The most conventional way to work on the net is to work in a studio, or at home, for a company that offers this kind of service. The on-line clients can "chat" with you, i.e. talk with you via the internet. If a client decides to spend time alone with you, he pays for you to go into a private room where you dance for him. He watches you on a monitor in his home or office. There is no guarantee that he is alone. He can watch you with other persons present. It is also possible to host your own website and do on-line dancing on your own.

There are review sites on the Internet where customers can discuss your performance. It is important to remember that, once you are on the web, you have no control over what clients say about you. And don't forget that once your face is launched on the web, you could be recognized even 20 years later!

The salary varies from one company to another. Some studios offer a basic salary for the day's work plus a percentage of what the client pays to be alone with you. Others pay an hourly rate or simply a rate per minute depending on the time you are in the private room. You can find job offers in the classified ads in the newspaper or through a placement agency.

— Private Shows —

Private shows can take place in a client's home, in a hotel room or in a room reserved for these kinds of shows in a club. The clients hire the women in a bar or through a placement agency. These shows are performed for an individual client or for a group during a special occasion like a bachelor party. Many dancers don't do private shows because of the question of safety. If you are thinking about doing private shows, here is some advice to help with the question of safety.

Be certain that someone knows where you are going. Before leaving the club or the agency, give the name and address of the client to someone you trust. Try to get the client's real name by verifying an identity card and, if the show is for a number of people, be sure there is one person who is responsible for assuring your safety during the evening.

Insist on having a man present in the place where you do your show. If the person who accompanies you can't be present, inform him of the time when you will finish so that he can be there to pick you up. Your clients should be aware that someone is there to check on your safety.

If you are going unaccompanied, leave as much information as possible about your "call" in your car or in a visible place in your apartment. Should there be problems, someone can call you or find you.

When you arrive, call someone to give them the client's exact address. If you have no one to call, leave the message on your answering machine.

If possible, always return to the same hotels and develop good relations with the employees. Choose rooms with telephones so you can ask the reception desk to call you at a specific time to signal to your client that his time is up and he must leave. A room near the reception area is recommended so, if you need to scream, there is a better chance that you will be heard.

Ask to visit the room alone before starting the show. You will be able to determine if there is someone hiding in the room.

Before the show starts, have a clear idea of what the client wants. Be firm about your limits and collect your fee before starting.

Never allow yourself to be attached or blindfolded during a private show and don't accept contracts that include sadomasochist play unless it is you who controls the game. Once the show starts, don't let anyone else enter the room.

When the show is finished, don't leave with the client. Ask that he pay for your taxi or leave with the driver from the agency or the person who accompanied you.

Well-Informed Dancer

Dancing can be difficult. If you are familiar with the labor standards and basic safety rules and you maintain good working relations with the other girls, it will be possible to make your workplace more agreeable while avoiding possible abuse from clients and owners.

– Cabins and Isolation Booths –

In some bars and peepshows, the cabins, or isolation booths, are supervised by cameras. If this is the case, you can inform your client.

Be careful when you dance in a cabin, some are poorly supervised. Don't take off your panties — it is a small barrier but it should not be neglected!

When you dance in a cabin, one trick is to hold the client's hands while you dance. Then, at least you know where they are.

– Safety on the Stage –

Avoid using creams or oils that do not penetrate the skin. If you use creams, apply them at least 30 minutes before your show. Then you can be sure that the pole and the stage are not slippery and thus avoid accidents for you or your colleagues.

Check carefully before your show to be sure there is no water on the stage. Lots of dancers use water and ice during their shows and a pool of water can cause a serious accident!

Be sure that the poles are solidly attached to the ceiling and the floor.

– Tricks of the Trade –

It may happen that a client hires you for the whole evening and has you dance without paying after each dance. Calculate exactly the number of dances you performed for the client and how much he owes you. You can ask him for the money he owes you when he orders a drink. Or use a package of matches to count the number of dances you did for him: each time you finish a dance, fold a match. Even with this trick, make sure that the client pays you regularly.

When you perform an erotic show on a bed or a rug, charge each spectator the amount you charge for watching your show.

If you talk to a client and you have the impression that he is not going to pay you to dance, tell him that the time you spend with him will be charged. This will assure that you don't waste your time or lose money!

Choose short songs for your stage shows.

Don't take the remarks and comments that clients make about you to heart. You can't please everyone!

Watch out for bits of toilet paper and tampon strings, under the black lights they sparkle!

Watch out for black light — it brings out imperfections. Use a sticky tape or a brush to remove cat hairs and lint from your clothes.

Choose your clothes and shoes carefully. Tight clothing or shoes are very uncomfortable and can hurt you.

Take a self-defense course.

– The Date Rape Drug –

Be careful! Never accept a drink that a client brings you. Your drinks should be served by the waitress or barmaid. If you change tables, take your drink with you and watch it carefully. If you go on stage, give your drink to another dancer or a bar employee.

There is a traffic in two substances called the "rape drug": gammahydroxybutyrate and Rohypnol. These substances are known because they are used by rapists. Many women (and men too) have been raped, robbed or assaulted after someone put a "rape drug" in their drink.

Everyone is vulnerable. The advice that follows is valid when you are working or when you go out with your "gang" to a bar.

What does it look like? Sold as a capsule or a powder, the drug is odorless, colorless and tasteless. That's why rapists and aggressors use it. It is an insidious drug that can create lots of harm.

The effects: The effects are very rapid. They cause a loss of consciousness that can last up to 12 hours. It is like a hospital anesthetic except you don't sleep. When it wears off, you can't remember anything you did. And, often, as with too much alcohol, you become uninhibited.

Signs of intoxication: After a drink or two, you feel like you've had 10. If you don't drink alcohol, you should still be careful because the drug is just as dangerous when it is put in non-alcoholic drinks except it takes longer to feel the effects.

What to do? Right away, tell someone you trust and go as quickly as possible to a hospital or a CSSS. Don't let the client, even if he is very nice, accompany you to the emergency room. But, if possible, do not go alone.

If you think you were drugged and sexually assaulted, you should go to a hospital as quickly as possible. Hospitals generally have services for sexual assault victims where you can get help.

After a sexual assault, it is very important to go to the hospital immediately. It is also recommended that you don't wash, brush your teeth, eat or drink (insofar as that is possible), or change your clothes (though you may remove them and place them in a bag to be used as evidence). This will make it much easier to collect evidence which may be vital if you decide to file a complaint against your aggressor. (A sexual assault evidence kit must be compiled within 72 hours after a sexual assault.) Moreover, preventive treatment for STIs is available to rape victims and must be administered quickly. (Consult the Dope Guide for time frames.) You always maintain the right to either accept or refuse these treatments.

Keeping Healthy

Dancing as a trade can be difficult at times and your body is your equipment for your job. All the more reason to take good care of yourself. In this section, the issue is your health and ways to avoid all the big and little "boo-boos" that come with your work.

– Hygiene –

Be sure that the poles on the stage are always clean. They could have vagina secretions on them that could transmit yeast infections.

Don't exchange your make-up with the other girls. There is always a chance of infection from hepatitis or herpes from exchanging make-up pencils as well as lipsticks.

You can use antibacterial gels that are available in drug stores. Use them on hands and body often. They kill the majority of germs that can be found at your work place.

Wash you hands as often as possible, before and after touching a client and before touching yourself.

During a contact dance, you can put a scarf or a cloth on the your client's lap to avoid coming in contact with semen or dirty clothes.

In an erotic bed scene or on stage, use you own blanket or rug and always try to use the same side.

You can use Baby-Wipes tissues to wash your vulva but be careful not to use the perfumed ones. They can cause an infection.

If you decide to work during your menstruation, it is recommended to use a sponge (a sea sponge cut in half) rather than a tampon. It is invisible and it's more comfortable. Ask your gynecologist.

– Sexually Transmitted Infections –

STI means sexually transmitted infections. STIs have no symptoms in 90% of infected people. They are widespread and can infect anyone. STIs are transmitted during unprotected oral, vaginal or anal sexual relations.

Certain STIs are caught during body-to-body contacts and by handling contaminated objects like dildos, vibrators, sheets, underwear, etc.. Using a condom is the best way to protect yourself against STIs.

If you think that you have an STI or that one of your clients is sick, consult a doctor. You should continue to protect yourself even if you are taking antibiotics for an STI. The fact that you are using antibiotics doesn't guarantee that you are no longer infectious and doesn't protect you from other sexually transmitted infections.

Don't loan your tooth brush or your razor because you will be at risk for contacting hepatitis or HIV because of the tiny scratches found on skin and in the mouth. Also, the risk of infection with oral herpes is present.

Avoid exchanging underwear with the other dancers. Vaginal discharges can carry yeast infections and there is always the risk of getting crabs.

If you dance in private and you use sex toys, use only those you brought with you. If that is impossible, put a condom on the toy and change it each time you put it in a different orifice. This can help reduce the risks of STIs and other infections.

If you sniff heroine or cocaine, don't share whatever you use to sniff with others. The part inserted in the nose could carry blood and transmit hepatitis.

The girls from Stella's Dancer-Escort Project go out on visits. You can invite them to your club or agency where they could offer free vaccinations against hepatitis A and B as well as lots of advice, tools and information.

If you want more information about STIs, get a copy of the XXX Guide from Stella. Or we can send it to you through the mail (discreetly wrapped!). Also, the girls from Stella directed and produced a short film aimed at sex workers' clients. This comedy discusses the question of condoms, respect for sex workers (of both sexes) and lots of other subjects. Copies are available at Stella if you want to show it at the club or the agency.

– Breast –

Breasts tend to change their form during a lifetime. Examine your breasts once a month, a week after your period. You will learn to know their form and the normal lumps that they may have.

Breast cancer: One woman in nine is at risk for developing breast cancer during her lifetime. Generally, if the cancer gets early treatment, the majority of women survive. Therefore it is important to know how to detect it in order to prevent the worst.

Breast implants: If you have breast implants, check often to be sure everything is ok. Examine your breasts regularly and learn how to verify the state of your implants. If your implants are leaking, or if you find something that is unusual, consult a doctor immediately.

– General Health –

Eat the best possible meal before going to work. Dancing is very demanding, hard physical work.

Bring your lunch, it's cheaper and often healthier than restaurants.

Avoid overdoing it with drugs when you work because abuse can make you lose control of the situation.

Enjoy life ! Take the time to please yourself: take a vacation, read, do physical exercises, etc. Other activities allow you to create some distance between you and the job.

If you feel empty, depressed, unmotivated in your personal life and at work, maybe you are having a "burn out". Take the time to stop, to get some distance from everyday life, to think about yourself. Sometimes, it is worth it to consulting a doctor. If you don't know where to find help, you can call Stella. We can help you find the support that you need.

Working Conditions

The place where you decide to dance will have a major influence on your working conditions. Thus it is important that you make a choice that conforms to your lifestyle and that offers advantageous working conditions for you.

– Salary, Holidays and Working Hours –

When you are hired, ask about the minimum number of hours per day and days per week that you must work. Ask about the flexibility of your working hours. Ask the owner if you can choose the days and the shift you want. Also, ask what you should do if you are sick or if something unforeseen occurs and you can not come in to dance. Dancing is not illegal: as a worker you have rights and you can insist that they are respected.

– Labor Standards –

The Quebec Labor Standards Commission is a provincial governmental agency whose role is to see that the rights of all workers are respected. You can always make an anonymous complaint. Remember, in each province the labor standards are different. So, if you work outside Quebec, find out what standards apply locally.

You can complain to the Commission for a number of reasons:

- The employer is not respecting the terms of your contract.
- The employer refuses to pay you.
- If you feel that your employer is abusing you by lacking respect, if he doesn't respect your limits.

If you have questions, contact the Commission des normes du travail du Québec at 1 800 265-1414 or 514 873-7061 because each case is treated differently depending on the situation.

– Working Outside Canada –

Working and traveling at the same time is a very interesting option but, to do it, you have to be well prepared. There are a lot of things to think about and to foresee. Here is a list that will help you plan your trip:

Find a local organization that offers services for sex workers. No doubt they will be able to provide you with lots of useful information about the local industry. There are hundreds of activist organizations and community groups like Stella around the world. You can find lots on the Internet or ask for information at Stella. You can also get a copy of ConStellation, Special Working Conditions and read chapter: “Working Safely as an Exotic Dancer”.

If you want to find a club that meets your needs when you are there, visit as many as you can, talk to the girls who work there, find a local placement agency that you can trust.

Contact the Consulate or Embassy of the country where you are going to obtain a work permit and to know more about the laws concerning working as a nude dancer.

A valid passport is required to travel outside Canada and some countries require a visitor's visa plus vaccination certificates. Verify what is required depending on your destination.

You can use a placement agency situated in Quebec that will help you find a bar outside Canada.

There are some countries like the United States that do not admit people with a judicial record. Find out before you make all your preparations. Checking could save you from wasting your time and money!

If you have colleagues who have worked outside Canada, ask them about the bars where they worked and with whom they “did business”. This could be very useful.

Find out the exchange rate for money. Certain countries use only their own money (or American dollars). Almost all credit cards and bankcards work outside Canada. Make sure that yours do.

Before leaving, make sure your destination is known. Tell someone you trust when you are leaving, where you are going, the address where you can be located and the address of the agency or clubs where you will be working.

Illegal entry and travelling, either very far away or in the United States, is risky. If that is your situation, there are resources that can help you. The internet website for Femmigration is one. Also, many countries have community groups and organizations that offer confidential support for migrants and for sex workers.

Law and History

The legal situation of erotic dancing have changed through times,
and each municipality and province has discretionary powers when
deciding which laws they will or will not apply. It is important to know
thoroughly the law, your rights and the rules of the place where you
intend to work. Read this section to find further advices and keep in
mind that the informations in this section might change!

– History –

Erotic dance is not a new phenomenon. In the 19th century, Egyptian belly dancers worked in circuses that traveled across America. They were the pioneers. At the time, belly dancers caused indignation, even more so because they were foreigners. However, we know that well before the arrival of circuses, women danced in private in brothels and in private homes.

One erotic dancer whom everyone seems to remember is Lili St-Cyr, an American who danced in Montreal in the 1940s. She was the first to strip on stage. At the time, it was chic and provocative to say that they had a date "to see Lili St-Cyr on the Main".

The story of Lili St-Cyr is important because she was the first dancer to confront the law and the judicial system. At Stella, we have a lot of written documents and audio-visual materials that recount her life.

Today, strip clubs are part of Quebec's urban and rural landscape. Each city and village has its Dollar Store, its French Fry wagon and its strip club next to the church.

In North America, particularly in Quebec, a number of legal trials concerning nude dancing were won thanks to the tenacity and solidarity of dancers. In the United States, dancers organized a union. The founders of Stella and of the Sex Trade Workers Rights Coalition are also dancers. Let's tip our hats to all these women!

– The Law and Your Rights –

What follows is a brief summary of the legal situation in 2010. But remember, each municipality and province has discretionary powers when deciding which laws they will or will not apply. Moreover, certain club owners do not tolerate all that that the law permits. It is important to know the law thoroughly, your rights and the rules of the place where you work. On Stella's Internet site, and in the ConStellation, Special Working Conditions, you will find a lot of useful supplementary information, for example: what to do when you have been arrested and the definition of a "bawdy house".

In Canada, it is legal to perform contact dancing, i.e. contact dancing including touching the dancer's breasts and ass. In the winter of 2011, the Quebec Court of Appeals judged that contact-dancing is illegal in Quebec and punishable (for dancers) with a criminal charge of "being found in a bawdy house". To our knowledge, no arrests have been made in the city of Montreal since the judgment. We are waiting to see how (and if) this new decision will be applied (or not) in Montreal.

Resources

Different widely held social myths and the numerous laws concerning sex work can make access to quality services difficult. Quality service is delivered with respect and without discrimination. Don't accept being treated with contempt or arrogance. You are a full citizen with the same rights and liberties as everyone else.

– Stella –

Stella is a community group created and run by sex workers and ex-sex workers. Stella is for people who identify as female and work in the sex trades: women, transsexuals, transvestites. If you are a prostitute, an escort, a nude dancer, a masseuse, a phone sex specialist, a dominatrix, a porn actress or model, Stella can be useful in your work.

Stella's mandate is to improve the quality of your life in addressing the risks that threaten you like violence, sexual harassment, and illnesses. Also we provide you with the necessary tools so that you can take control of your work, your safety and your health.

Stella achieves its objectives:

- By offering you support and information
- By sensitizing and educating the public and service providers about your reality
- By fighting the discrimination you live with
- By promoting the decriminalization of your trade.

Stella offers you a range of services and activities:

- Reception, active listening, references to community, medical, legal and other services
- Street work (providing support for you where you work)
- Materials for, and advice about, HIV prevention (condoms and needles)
- Materials for, and advice about, preventing violence, for example The Bad Tricks and Aggressors List
- ConStellation, a magazine written by and for sex workers
- Information meetings on various themes
- Community suppers
- Accompaniment (when you need support)
- Medical Clinic, ensuring complete confidentiality and requiring no medical insurance card.

Resources

If you have any problems with community organizations or institutional services, Stella's team can help.

Sex Work

Stella
514 285-8889

Alliance Féministe Solidaire (AFS)
www.alliancefeministesolidaire.org

Catwoman - Estrie, Sherbrooke
819 823-6704

Catwoman - Mauricie, Trois-
Rivières
819 374-5740

Catwoman - Drummondville
819 474-2484

Catwoman - Valleyfield
PACT de rue
450 370-2402

Catwoman - St-Jérôme
450 431-7432

Catwoman Québec
418 641-0168

ÉMISS-ère - Montérégie
450 651 9229 #29
514 984 0030

Projet-Vénus Laval
450 669 3099
450 669 1680

PROJET L.U.N.E.
www.projet-lune.org

V.I.P. - Québec
418-933-0690

Rézo
For men
514 521 7778 #224

Community and Institutions

Gambling: help and referrals
514 527-0140
1 800 461-0140

Grossesse-secours (pregnancy)
514 271-0554

Montreal Sexual Assault Centre
514 934-0354

SOS violence conjugale
For spousal abuse victims
514 873-9010

Women's healthcare centre
514 270-6110
514 270-6114 (abortion)

Clinique médicale de l'Alternative
514 281-9848

Drugs: help and referrals
514 527-2626 ou 1 800 265-2626

Suicide-Action Montréal
514 723-4000

Inform-elle
Legal support service, information
and reference.
450 443-8221

Commission des droits de la
personne et des droits de la
jeunesse du Québec
514 873-5146

Montreal Legal Aid
514 842-2233

Labor Standards Commission
514 873-7061

www.chezstella.org



There is always a chance of infection from hepatitis or herpes from exchanging make-up pencils as well as lipsticks.



Eat the best possible meal before going to work. Dancing is very demanding, hard physical work.



Choose your clothes and shoes carefully. Tight clothing or shoes are very uncomfortable and can hurt you.



Watch out for bits of toilet paper and tampon strings, under black light they sparkle!



Bring your lunch, it's cheaper and often healthier than restaurants.



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