

The Naked Truth

By Morgan Pearce

"Everything I do isn't just for money, this is something I've started and really haven't felt a need to stop," said Carmel Johnson, an exotic dancer at the Pearl Necklace in Fayetteville, NC. Johnson attends Fayetteville Technical Community College and is pursuing an associate degree in Criminal Justice. Johnson and the other interviewed strippers' names have been changed to protect their privacy. Johnson is a 24-year-old female who has been stripping on and off for five years.

Some women claim they strip because it is a lucrative job.

Johnson explained that stripping and dancing was her escape from being a shy girl and she believes being a stripper has made her who she is today. "I'm 24-years-young! I'm beautiful, and this job is one that I know can pay my bills. It's even helping me get through school, books aren't cheap," said Johnson.

Many women turn to exotic dancing at hard times to stay financially stable. College can be a financial roller coaster for anyone attending it. Students have to worry about going to class and getting work done for each class they are taking up. Some jobs aren't easy to work with a full time student schedule. Exotic dancing has become the answer for some college students, male and female. Lemondrop.com states that one in four strippers has or is working towards some type of degree.

Melissa Lyons of Fayetteville State University wrote her master's thesis on "Exotic dancers in Fayetteville" for her graduate program in psychology. Lyons explained that dancers deal with emotional work with their clients and themselves and exotic dancing can be a demanding and emotional job. She said that while doing her research over the two years many of the dancers said that the media influences certain stereotypes about strippers. Lyons also said that out of the 10 dancers involved with her research none of them said that they would dance without the money.

The cost of living has gone up significantly in the last decade and this is a hard time for anyone trying to find a job. Many places are downsizing and not doing much hiring. The holidays are approaching and usually seasonal workers are needed for places but this year the need for seasonal workers is not as big because some business just can't afford it. Unemployed students who thought that maybe they could earn a little extra cash during the holidays might be in for a surprise.

"I have eight children who always are going to need me to provide income in the house until they are old enough to work," said Marsha Carson, a stripper at Platinum Cabaret in Fayetteville, NC. Carson said she even goes to South Carolina a couple times a month to strip if money is too slow in Fayetteville.

Carson is a first year student at Fayetteville Technical Community College and has lived in Fayetteville her entire life. "I have several things on my record from when I was younger and it's hard for me to find work. I don't agree with getting paid minimum wage and there is no way I would be able to support my kids off of \$7.25 an hour," said Carson. Carson has been stripping for over 10 years now and explained that if she wasn't a stripper she would not be taking classes and working towards a degree. "I can't get a loan, my credit is horrible but my job allows me to pay my tuition out of pocket and still be able to take care of my kids. Am I happy? Yes," said Carson.

Both Johnson and Carson claimed they could make between \$100-\$300 on a week-day and up to \$500 or more on the very busy weekends. Any college student would love to have that amount of money coming in daily but the option of stripping is not just for anyone.

Past criminal behavior, other psychological factors also contribute to these highly debated types of careers. Jessica Jones, a sociology major at Fayetteville State, explained that some women don't strip for just simply stripping but their past experiences affect their decisions to strip. "Some of these women have been abused, raped, and have had traumatic experiences in their past. Some women use stripping as a release to feel important to someone. The money is great for them, but they also love the attention too," said Jones.

(CONTINUED
ON PG 15)