Interview With Katryna
For HUM 2504: Introduction of American Studies, Prof. Emily Satterwhite, Spring 2010

Occupation: Exotic Dancer, Gold and Silver Dance Club, Roanoke VA
Time and Place: March 21, 2010, 5:00-6:00, Lora’s House, Virginia
Interviewer’s: Jessica Emanuele, junior Interdisciplinary Studies major from Rockville, MD and Lora Brightman, junior, Interdisciplinary Studies major from Blacksburg, VA

JE = Jessica Emanuele
LB = Lora Brightman
AD = Annabel Drucker
K = Katryna

K: I am an exotic dancer at Gold and Silver on Franklin Road in Roanoke and my stage name is Katryna [um] and for this interview I am only using my stage name of security reasons.

JE: And how long have you worked there?
K: I’ve been at the club I’m at now for a little over three years, But I have been dancing for about twelve and a half years.

JE: How about your family and a little bit about your background?
K: I was born and raised where I still live at now right outside of Blacksburg both my parents have passed away. When I was young, I was sort of close with my family but as we got older we all kinda grew apart, so now I’m not really close with any of my family at all. I just have my friends and all.

JE: Did you parents work at home or what did they do?
K: Yes, my father worked full time he worked for the Riffle Arsenal and my mother worked full time as a legal assistant and went to college as well.

JE: And, would you describe a typical day at your job and what you do?
K: Ugh, go into work, you get ready in the dressing room get into your outfits, costumes, whatever. You have to check in, check in with the manager, get your name on the books cause you have to pay fee’s to work there, check in with the DJ get your name on lineup so you can get a spot on stage. And then you wait for the customers to come in, you go up to the customers, welcome um, talk to um and try to get them interested in lap dances get um interested in going to the stage and tip and try to make sure everyone has fun and makes money.
JE: That sounds pretty good. [laughs] Um, Okay.

JE: Did you know that you wanted to be or did you know you wanted to be an exotic dancer or what did you want to be growing up?
K: Actually when I was growing up I wanted to be a rock-star because it was in the 80’s with all the hair, metal bands, and the good lookin guys. But, ugh, when I actually grew up I used to work at a bank, and I was into real estate, my mother did a lot in real estate and I learned about that. But I got very bored with the up tight conservative atmosphere, so I saw an add for dancers one day when I was working at the bank um and whence I tried it I decided I really liked it. It was fun and I’ve stuck with it.

JE: O, [laughs] um, how about getting to and from work? Is it difficult? Like your car situation or …
K: Well, um, I have my own vehicle. So you pretty much need your own vehicle if you work as far away from home as I do. Cause I’ve always had to drive an hour, whether I was working in West Virginia or in Roanoke, I’ve always had an hour. In West Virginia some of us used to carpool together. But since I’ve been in Roanoke there’s really no one close enough for me to carpool with. So I pretty much have to have my own vehicle.
JE: Gotchya

LB: What would you describe as like some of the political dynamics that go on in your work as far as like power and control like the way that business intersects with sex?
K: Well, all dancers are independent contractors. So, we pay the club to work there. So as far as boss power it’s limited to them enforcing the rules of the club. They can’t set schedules for us, tell us when to work and when not to work. As far as power trips with other dancers, it does happen from time to time. Some girls get aggressive from other people making more money than them. I try to stay out of all that drama cause it doesn’t do anything but hurt you. And as far as power with the customers, as a dancer, you always wanna make sure that you maintain the power because you don’t want to put yourself in a vulnerable or dangerous or insecure position. So, you make sure you stay on top of things, you lead the way, you show them a good time bring them along for the ride but you maintain control.

LB: Okay, um, have you ever been put into a situation where your safety was threatened?
K: Um, I’ve had customers get grabby and gropey. I’ve had to call security in the past. I’ve had to have customers escorted from the bar and left. One time at a club, we were doing one of those on stage special dances, where they pull the person on stage and the guy freaked out and shoved me and I shove him right back and knocked him right off the stage. So... [Laughs]
L: So they’ll let the customers up on stage with your?
K: Not at the stage I work at right now at a different club I used to work at. They would do this private, well not private, but this party type thing. Where the customer could pay so much get the customer on stage and they put him in a chair and put his hands behind his back and make him sit there and several girls would just dance around in a circle around on him. And he didn’t like it and jumped up and made a big scene and that’s what happened.
LB: But as far as safety goes, they have a security guards and everything?
K: They have bouncers, and ... but I’ve been in it so long I’ll tell the bouncers when I need you because I’ll already have the guy on the floor. If you wait for them to get to you, you can be hurt. That’s what I’m talking about, maintaining control. You have to stay in charge. You have to be on top of the situation and no matter how much fun your having or how very much fun the customer is having, you always have to keep in the back of your mind that you do not know this person. You do not know what they are capable of or what they could do.
LB: Okay, um. Before we move on, I wanted to. So you said that your manager is not allowed to give you a time schedule?
K: The, what they set the times as far as shifts. If you work a shift, you have to be in by a certain time and if you show up for that shift you are required to stay to the end of that shift. But as far as telling you what nights of the week you have to work, how many days a week you have to work, since we pay them to be there, they cannot do that. Now, they can make the rule that if you want to work on a weekend, which is when the business is better, you have to work at least one-week night or you have to pay extra fees. But that’s to make sure they have enough girls to run during the week when it’s slower and not everyone is just piling up on the weekends when it’s busier.
JE: So you pay the strip club? How does that work?
K: We are independent contractors, every night that we go in, um, we have to split so many of the lap dances we do, the club gets half of some. The new girls have to split all of them. I have been there long enough that I’m under the old rule, I only have to split so many. After that I get to keep all my lap dance money but there’s also what’s called a jot-box fee every night. We have to give them so much money to put credits into the jot-box for the music that we dance to.
LB: Okay, so it’s like a give and take thing.
K: Yea, we are independent contractors. We lease the club that we work at to sell our entertainment and our dancing.
JE: Do you think you get paid like pretty well for what you do?
K: Um. It’s hit or miss its give and take. I’ve had some nights where I go in there and it was so bad that I didn’t even make the gas money it costs me to get there. And then I have nights, the last two nights combined I made over 900 dollars.
JE: Wow!
K: So it depends, ah, I have what I like to call a “No Bitch Goal.” If I make 200 dollars in a night I am not allowed to fuss about it. I figure that’s worth me getting up there and showing everything I got to people I’ve never met before in my life.
JE: Yeah.
LB: So overall, would you say are satisfied overall with the money you are making?
K: Lately, it’s gone down really bad where the economy is bad. When the economy is bad our business gets bad when the economy gets good our business gets good. Um, and times a year affect it. Right now I’m not really happy and with the economy the way it’s in I would not recommend anybody start it because it’s not, it’s not what it used to be. Hopefully it will pick up soon. But, it’s taken me three and four nights to make what I used to make on one average night now.

JE: And what do you mean by seasonal?

K: Um, different times of the year are going to affect business. When, around Christmas time your not going to have much business because everyone is saving up for Christmas and stuff like that. Ugh, around March to April when a lot of people get their tax returns back your going to get a little spurt in business cause people get some play money. When the weather starts getting really nice outside and it warms up your going to have a decline in business cause nobody wants to be indoors at a bar everybody wants to be outside enjoying the weather and doing family vacations. So..

JE: Is this your only job right now?

K: Yes, I have been a full time dancer for over ten years now.

LB: How does your sexuality factor into what you do? Like do you feel like when your dancing is it like an authentic expression of your sexuality or are you feeling aroused when you are dancing are you more like putting up a façade and like acting more like a performance where your not actually feeling it?

K: Ugh, I enjoy dancing, I enjoy the attention but as far as true sexual arousal, no, I do not get truly sexually aroused when I’m dancing. Because I am the type of person that I only feel that way in an intimate relationship with someone I love. I’m not open sexually I don’t do the one-night stands I don’t do that’s a personal choice for me. Which might sound weird coming from an exotic dancer but when I’m on stage it is me because my stage performance is more energy. It is more putting on a show not so much to look like I’m having sex with someone as it is doing pole tricks, doing dance moves, and giving customers attention and entertainment.

like it’s a stigma that strippers have

K: Some customers automatically assume that you are a prostitute. I constantly am being propositioned. I’m constantly wanting to know if they are going to get sex or sexual favors for a twenty dollar lap dance. I’m constantly getting asked out how much for a date how much to go out. And that gets very old, that is, that is my biggest complaint about the job, is I hate being treated like a prostitute. If I was going to be a prostitute, I would not be giving the clubs so much money to be a dancer.

JE: Yeah.

LB: Um, and then so you get a stigma or labeled unjustifiable as a prostitute, which you don’t seem to be a fan of. And then, how does the like overall stigma of just being a dancer than I’m sure like exists out there just in the general population affect you?

K: Um, as far as people knowing I’m a dancer and being like, “O, she’s a stripper,” I don’t care about that because I am a dancer. If I was ashamed of it I wouldn’t be doing it. Um, I am not a prostitute I don’t do that but I have no problem with people saying I’m a dancer because I am. As long as they understand it is entertainment and it’s a job.

LB: And like you said you are putting on a performance.

K: Exactly.

LB: Um do you, in this like space in which you get to put on a performance do you feel, do you take it as an opportunity to as an artistic expression of yourself or is it more purely about?

K: When I am on stage it is definitely an expression of me. You can see my personality, I have customers tell me all the time that you can see my personality my energy when I am on stage. Um, I dance to the music that I like the old classic guitar rock and 80’s hair metal that I grew up with. I incorporate some of the newer rock because a lot of our, you know, customers are younger and they like the newer stuff. But I still it’s me! It’s my personality it’s me having fun.

LB: Cool.

LB: What ugh, describe your ideal conditions to perform? Like what kind of conditions enhance your performance the most?
K: Um, I like a good stage a clean stage and a good sturdy pole to dance on and I like a good crowd that’s having fun that’s wild up and that’s into the performance and into the scene into the whole party scene. I get more out of it when I’m up there dancing and people are hooping and hollering and throwing money and saying, “hell yeah,” you know and having a good time. When I look out there and I see them smiling and having fun that’s the best part of it for me. When I know that I am a part of showing somebody a good time and making them have fun.

K: The only thing is, just don’t go right up to the stage, and sit on a stool at the stage, and have the girl dance right in front of you with no tip money.
LB: Mmhmm…
K: If you’re going to sit right there, tip. If you’re just… if you don’t have the money to tip, just hang out and—and, you know, up against the bar… find a seat at a table and just hang out, and…
LB: So, you’re not, like, offended if… if… somebody’s just standing there in the corner….
K: Uhhhh… it would—honestly, it depends on the situation. Uh, we have a lot of, uh, customers that come in that are… they’re pretty much regulars: They come in, they just hang out, they say “Hey,” they might tip here and there but they won’t spend a lot of money. The only thing I don’t like is, uh… when the guys will come in and they will get right up against that rail as close as they can, lean over and stare as hard as they can at the stage, so they’re getting the show that everybody else who’s tipping is, but they’re not tipping, and then they won’t buy any dances, or, like when they’re trying to get their entertainment off everyone else’s tip money. I think that’s disrespectful, not only to the dancers, but to the other customers who do come prepared to take care of the dancers.
LB: Mmm…

JE: Have you ever wanted to quit dancing and do something else?
K: Mmm… I have; I’ve taken a few breaks here and there, uh, mostly when I got injured. Umm, but as far as doing something else, umm… I have not found another job that I enjoy as much as dancing. If I were to get out of dancing, I would probably want to go, ah… not be a dancer, maybe be a house mom somewhere, still work in a club, maybe be a bartender—still be around the environment, because I love the environment.
JE: Yeah…

JE: Did you go to school? Like, did you go to college or anything--
K: I never did go to college,
JE: You didn’t?;
K: …and that’s probably one of the problems, because without having any college degree or college education, it is impossible to find a decent-paying job, especially around here. Especially nowhere near making what I can make as a dancer.
JE: Yeah…. Man….

AD: Do you put a lot into taking care of your body? I mean, it’s cause I know that’s a huge part of--
K: Yes. In fact, that’s one of the things I love about dancing, is… that it forces you to take care of yourself, you know, dancing in itself is a work out; I tan; I use good moisturizers on my face; I fix myself up… I try to take care of my—I watch my diet… um, I’m thirty-five and… I’ve… been told that I look better than some of the twenty-year-olds that have been dancing.
JE: Yeah…
AD: Mmhmm.
LB: You look great!
JE: How about some of the physical stuff? I know doing the pole-work is hard; I heard you talk about that earlier.
K: It is. It is a very good workout. When I first started to dance, I did not have the strength to do it. I had to build up the strength and the agility… and… the… control and balance.
JE: Yeah?
K: I have noticed that girls that have started dance—if they have a ballet or gymnastics background, they pick up the pole much easier, cause they’re already in shape; they’re already, you know, balanced… and they have the strength to hold their body…
JE: Yeah…
K: …themselves.
JE: That’s crazy.
K: [laughs] Thanks.
LB: So, was it a lot of work, learning the pole?
K: Yeah, I had never broken a bone in my life until I started dancing.
LB: Oh, so that’s how you got injured….
K: Um… I put my left kneecap on the back of my leg; …I cracked the top of my right foot; I separated a rib; I’ve gotten concussions; I almost dislocated my shoulder, and… I’ve been one big bruise from head to toe from trying to learn the pole.
JE: Are there any… any health benefits from… being a dancer… like, from the club?
K: Oh, no. We get nothing from the club at all. We get no retirement, no—they did offer us one of those independent health plans, like you get as an—as an individual…. Uh, a couple of the girls got it and said it’s absolutely horrible; it’s a waste of money.
JE: Do you think this is, uh… your American Dream?
K: I wouldn’t say being an exotic dancer is my American Dream; I enjoy it as a… as a job and, you know, as a, I suppose, career, now. My American Dream is being on the back of my man’s bike out in the desert somewhere.
JE: Yeah…. That sounds good, especially on a day like yesterday.
K: Oh, yeah, it was nice.
JE: It was nice.

JE: Do you get a lot of free time with your job?
K: Umm… if I’m working several days in a row, no, because I have an hour drive each way, plus the time it takes me to get ready and get there and work a full shift and all, and… basic taking care of the house, and you know, just regular living. But, the cool thing about my job is I can take a day off whenever I want to. So, if I get overwhelmed; if I get too far behind in everything; if I just need some time for me, I don’t have to worry about calling in, telling the boss, fixing the schedule—anything like that. I just take a night off.
JE: What do you think is the most rewarding part of the job?
K: The most rewarding part of my job…. Everyone would expect me to say the money.
JE: Yeah….
K: No, it’s what I was talking about earlier; seeing a bunch of people out there smiling and laughing and having a good time, and… people coming in doing birthday and bachelor parties, and getting that big hug, saying, “Thank you; you really made our night.” That’s the best part.
JE: That’s fantastic…. That sounds so fun.
K: Yeah….

LB: How would you describe your ideal customer?
K: My ideal customer? …Actually, I have one. He’s been coming to see me for over ten years; he’s followed me through several different clubs…
LB: Really?
K: …And he’s a—he’s a friend, as well as a customer, over all this time. Ah, he comes in… umm… and… he… spends quite a bit of money—he’ll get fifteen or more lap dances; he’ll buy me whatever I want from the bar or whatever, and tips me really well… ah, never gets disrespectful; never gets out of line; is a perfect gentlemen… ah, lets me talk to him about my real life, you know, about what’s going on. Now I don’t get like that with everybody; like I said, he’s been coming to see me for ten years—that took time to earn that trust and all, but that is my ideal customer—someone that understands that I’m dancing, that I have a job to do, that I have money to make, and it’s all about just having fun and hanging out and enjoying the fantasy.
JE: And, will you tell us a little about your significant other and how that worked?
K: Umm… you want to know how we met?
JE: Yeah!
K: I was dancing, and this was over ten years ago, and… he—and he was in town working—this was up in West Virginia. And him and one of his coworkers came in, and I was the first girl on stage, and they tipped me, and… I went to go get dressed, I came back out, and they were over shooting pool, so I went over to say “Thank you for tipping me.” And… he looks at me—and this man’s like six-foot-five—big, scary biker dude.

JE: Ha.

K: And… he looks down, and he goes, “Look,” he was like, ah, “I’ve dated dancers; I’ve worked in these clubs—I know how it works.” He was like, “I’m not buying you some ten dollar drink and not I’m not buying some twenty-thirty dollar lap dance.” He was like, “When you’re on stage dancing, I’m going to come tip you, cause you’re working for it and you deserve it.” He was like, “If you want to come and hang out and shoot some pool, that’s cool. If you got to go make your money with customers that’s cool; I’ll talk to you. I was like “Okay,” there was nobody else in the bar…

JE: [laughs]

K: So we started shooting pool; started talking; next thing I know, the next night we went out to dinner, and, um… which… I would never do nowadays; back then I didn’t know any better.

JE/LB/AD: [laughs]

K: It was very dangerous; I should not have done it; I got lucky I didn’t get in trouble. Um… and… uh, his coworkers, they were like “She just wants your money, she just wants your money,” so when the waitress brought the—brought the check, I ordered separate checks and paid my own way, and he was like “Ha.” So, I think we… kind of set the standard right then, that he wasn’t after me for being a stripper, and I wasn’t after him for his money, and….

JE: Yeah….

AD: Aww.

JE: He doesn’t mind that you strip?

K: Oh, he loves it. He brags…:”My old lady’s thirty-five. She’s a stripper and she’s hot, and,” …

JE/LB/AD: [laugh]

K: He—actually at one point in time, he was a manager at a club that I worked at, so he was my boss at one time. So, the only problem we had was he kept calling me by my real name!

JE: Oh, yeah….

K: So, we had to start calling me by my stage name at home… [laughs]

LB: [laughs]

K: …because he kept calling me by my real name at work in front of all the customers!

JE: Would you ever want kids?

K: I don’t.

JE: No?

K: Nah… I have my puppy dogs; I’m happy with that.

JE: Yeah, dogs are good, huh?

K: So…

JE: Definitely. A lot of work.

JE: And… how about… home… like… do you help pay the bills? Do you make enough to help pay?

K: Oh, lord, yes.

JE: Yeah?

K: Oh, yes.

LB: More so than he does?

K: Most dancers do make more money than their significant others.

JE: Wow….

LB: Hm.

K: Well, unless the significant other has a very high-paying job, in which case she’s just dancing for fun and she doesn’t work enough to make to make that much money [laughing].

JE: [laughing] Yeah, right.

JE: And how far… um… you’re—you say you live in Blacksburg, right?

K: Oh well, I live right—I live outside of Blacksburg. I live out in Montgomery County, but I just refer to it as Blacksburg ‘cause everybody’s heard of it.
JE: Yeah, yeah. Definitely.
JE: And you… would you say that you’re living comfortably with every—with, like, the amount of money you’re making and stuff?
K: I used to be; right now, it’s gotten to be a struggle lately, with the way the economy’s been, but we’re moving. So we’re, uh… we’re going to be moving up towards the other side of Roanoke… um… pretty soon, and hopefully by the end of the summer we’re looking to move to California—we have some friends out there.
JE: Cool.
AD: Ooooh.
K: So, and I’m only going to be a couple hours from Las Vegas and I used to dance in Las Vegas. So, I’m going to go check out my old club that I used to dance at.
JE: Make more money…
K: Yeah, you do make good money, but there’s so much to do out there, you spend a lot.

JE: Do you think that your career affects your family life at all? Or, I guess both your parents have passed…. 
K: Both my parents passed away. My mother knew I was a dancer. And she was fine with it.
JE: Yeah?
K: Umm… she was actually hilarious. You know, I would show her outfits…
JE/LB: [giggle]
K: … and talk to her about stuff; she was just great. My dad I tried to keep it from, ‘cause both my parents were much older and he was kind of conservative, and I didn’t want him, you know, daddy’s little girl being a stripper….
JE: Yeah….
K: But, uh… the rest of my family knows and I don’t really care. And to be honest with you, I don’t care what they think. They’re not paying my bills; they’re not in my life; they don’t even call me to see how I’m doing.
JE: Wow.
K: So, I’m not close to them, and the only people I care—that… what they think are the people I love.
JE: Yeah.
K: And the people I love are going to accept me for who I am and, like I said, this is me; this is what I do.
If you like it, great! If you don’t, you can walk right out the same door you walked in.
AD: Definitely.
JE: That’s a great view.
LB: You seem like you have a very… healthy perspective on this whole thing.
K: No, I’m just a stubborn bitch.
JE/LB/AD: [laugh]

JE: Is that… that’s a lot of work, huh, maintaining yourself?
K: It is, but… once you get into a set routine, you get so used to doing it, that… and… I like it. It makes me feel good. Yeah… to fix myself up and look good. Yeah, I look at myself in the mirror now, and like I said, I’m thirty-five, and I’m like, “Hmm, not half bad,” ‘cause I’ve seen some of the people I graduated with, and I’m like, “Uh-huh, you didn’t think I was cute back then, what about now?!”
JE/LB/AD: [laugh]

LB: Do you ever wear wigs?
K: No.
LB: No?
K: Uh, a lot of girls do, but I don’t, ‘cause I don’t like them, and… one of the things I do when I dance is I fling my hair around, like they did in the old eighties videos and stuff—it’s part of my thing. And if I did, my wig would go flying across the stage…
JE/LB/AD: [laugh]
K: It wouldn’t look real sexy, so…
JE/LB/AD: [laugh]
K: It would look like something off Jerry Springer where someone flings a wig! [laughs]
LB: Um… what kind of things do you like to wear?
K: Uh, I pretty much wear two—I like to do two-pieces a lot, um… I have a lot of bikinis and I have a couple little booty-short and little skirt-and-top outfits. I do very few dresses because, it’s—I have one dress that I do wear—like on Mondays and Tuesdays, when a lot of business men come in to try and get a little more of an elegant look for their taste.
JE: Yeah.
K: But, it’s not really my style like the two-pieces, and I get a lot of compliments on having a flat stomach and little, like, nice curve in my waste, so I like to show that off.
JE: Definitely. If you got the body, you might as well show it.
LB: Yeah… Do you have fun picking out your costumes and stuff?
K: Umm… sometimes I do. A lot—I’ve got so much stuff from all my years of dancing—I have so much stuff that it’s been a— it’s been a long time since I’ve really bought new stuff. A girl at the club used to bring outfits in to sell and I’ve gotten a handful of those recently, but that’s really about it. I’ve just got so much stuff, that even if I wore something different every night, I could wear something different for… over a month. You know, ‘cause I have so much stuff.
JE: Yeah…
LB: That makes sense.
JE: Huh.

LB: Well it sounds like fun to me.
K: It’s fun; when you first start, it’s even more fun… and then once you get doing it for awhile… then it’s kind of… you know, it—it’s… it takes a more special night to make it as much fun when it was at first—like I said, a very busy night with everyone having a good time, and then when you get one of those nights where there’s not a lot of people, and everyone’s just sitting around, and you’re sitting there going, “I shaved my legs for this…?”
JE/LB/AD: [laugh]

JE: What’s your… least favorite part of the job?
K: Umm… the bruises, the aches, the pains, and the rude, disrespectful customers that solicit.
JE: Yeah… Must be kind of hard.
K: So… But at least, you know, it’s not like being a regular customer service representative: I don’t have to deal with any particular customer. If I don’t like somebody, or they’re disrespecting me, I can say whatever I want to to them and walk away. Or have them thrown out.
JE: You have a lot of power with that, I guess… with the customers?
K: Yes.

JE: Where do you see yourself in five to ten years?
K: Umm… hopefully in California, riding bikes, hanging out on the beach, and… my retirement plan is I have an invention that I’m getting patented right now…
JE: Cool!
K: And it has to do with the girlie… stuff, so, I’m hoping that—I mean, like, it has to do with artificial nails; that’s about as far as I would want to go before I get all my patent paper work….
JE: Yeah…
K: But, you know, I’m hoping that should go pretty well—good enough to at least retire on.
LB: That’d be great! So all of this will finally pay off in some totally different way than, like…
K: Yeah, becoming a dancer and having to get all fixed up, and—and everything, uh… introduced me to artificial nails, and I came up with an invention that goes with them.
AD: Cool!
JE: Yeah!
LB: That’s very interesting.

JE: Is there anything else you’d like to say about your job, or…
K: Just… um… any girls who are looking to get into it… think about it; there are dangers; there are hazards…. Uh… I’ve known dancers that have been stopped; that have been raped… uh, dancers get killed.
Um… be smart, you know, remember it’s a job…. Stay away from the drugs; stay away from the prostitution and sex, and… have a game plan for the future.