

Sexual Contact Rife at 'Highly Regulated' Spearmint Rhino Flagship

Summary

During a 2 hour visit by undercover investigators the following was observed:

- **Lap dancers touching their own genitals and breasts**
- **Dancers putting their breasts in the face and mouth of investigators**
- **Dancers straddling investigators**
- **Strippers touching investigators' genitals**
- **Dancers placing their feet on benches**
- **Dancer giving her phone number**
- **Generally, Guards 'turning a blind eye'**
- **Very high ratio of dancers (20) to punters (8)**
- **Spearmint Rhino has 63 CCTV Cameras**
- **Camden Council's secret *on site* spot checks and checks of club CCTV footage always show the club as fully compliant with all licensing conditions and no rules breached**
- **Management and performers always provide signed testimonies at the club's annual licensing hearing stating that no rules are ever broken**
- **Camden has a long list of incidences at its strip clubs, has a policy for zero clubs, has been taken to court many times by its strip industry, could easily shut every club on the legally unchallengeable grounds of inappropriate locality yet relicenses them year-on-year**
- **Councillors just approved a new draft policy on strip clubs relying heavily on the idea that 'stringent regulation' is already imposed. Council officers knew of the breaches but did not tell Councillors. Councillors refuse to withdraw draft even in light of this information.**

Background Information

- Two Private Investigators, former police detectives, visited Spearmint Rhino, Camden posing as punters. Information was gathered using legally and ethically approved techniques as routinely used by the police when undercover. Video evidence was also gathered as proof of visit. Their reports (redacted to fully preserve lap dancers' anonymity) are in Appendix 1.
- These same investigators showed extreme levels of sexual contact at Spearmint Rhino Sheffield ¹ (a 'VIP dance' was women having sex with each other) - under the same management as the Camden branch.

¹ <https://notbuyingit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Sheffield-SR-PIs-Redacted.pdf>

- They also showed widespread sexual contact, including women trying to prostitute themselves, at Manchester’s strip clubs ².
- These findings mirror similar expose’s in 2018 at the Windmill Theatre ³, again by private investigators, and at Ealing’s LA Confidential ⁴, by undercover trading standards officers.
- However, rule breaches and abuse is an industry-wide phenomenon. We have found nearly 100 incidences at over 60 clubs (1/3 of the entire UK strip industry) ⁵. These range from sexual contact to assaults, drugs, prostitution, trafficking and pimping.
- Testimonies from dozens of former lap dancers ⁶ alongside research ⁷ (evidence from more than 200 individuals) show that harassment and assault of strippers is also routine.
- This was reiterated in 2018 by a journalist who went undercover in several clubs – predominantly in Camden and Westminster ^{8,9}.
- Camden’s strip clubs have a long track record of pimping, sexual contact and other breach of licensing conditions, yet their licenses are renewed year-on-year ¹⁰.
- The Spearmint Rhino chain has a 2 decade history of drink spiking, sexual contact and prostitution *on site* and pimping outside – particularly in Camden ¹¹.
- Councils do *not need evidence of harm* in order to refuse a strip club license or relicense. They have the absolute right (which *cannot* be legally challenged) *not* to relicense any strip club currently in operation on the grounds of locality alone ¹².
- Camden Council has 7 strip clubs, despite a policy that states zero are appropriate anywhere in the borough.
- Camden’s strip club (SEV) licensing policy is also unlawful. It treats pre-existing clubs differently from, and preferentially to, any potential new clubs: it presumes *new* clubs will be *refused* a license but *not* existing clubs.

² <https://notbuyingit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Manchester-Redacted.pdf>

³ <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/historic-soho-lapdancing-club-the-windmill-theatre-faces-closure-after-sting-finds-performers-flout-a3736546.html>

⁴ <https://www.ftbchambers.co.uk/news/ealing's-la-confidential-loses-its-sev-licence>

⁵ www.notbuyingit.org.uk/StripSleaze

⁶ <http://notbuyingit.org.uk/Publications#Performers>

⁷ <http://notbuyingit.org.uk/Publications#Research>

⁸ <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/presidents-club-sexual-harassment-business-lap-dance-vip-exploitation-a8177691.html>

⁹ <https://londonist.com/london/features/this-is-what-it-s-like-being-a-lap-dancer-in-london>

¹⁰ <http://notbuyingit.org.uk/Publications#PressCamden>

¹¹ www.notbuyingit.org.uk/Publications#PressRhino

¹² www.notbuyingit.org.uk/StripLaw

What Women's Groups Want

- Spearmint Rhino's license withdrawn
- All performers offered support out of the strip trade into safe, alternative work
- Camden to cease licensing its entire strip industry on the grounds of inappropriate locality and the impossibility of regulating it (supporting all performers out as it does so)
- Camden's new strip club policy to call for zero clubs, with no preferential treatment given to clubs currently licensed and to cease licensing the strip trade under it
- All Councils to follow suit
- Compulsory, ongoing training for all Councillors and Council staff across the UK on the realities of the strip trade and the impossibility of regulating it
- Ultimately a law change to end the licensed strip trade as it cannot be regulated and whose wide-ranging harms (for strippers as well as women in wider society) cannot be mitigated
- **Petition: www.notbuyingit.org.uk/Petition**

Camden's Strip Clubs Codes

- Dancers may not intentionally touch a customer during a performance
- Dancers may not permit a customer to touch them during a performance
- Dancers may not straddle the customer
- Dancers may not touch their own breasts, anus or genitals with their fingers, lips or tongue.
- Dancers may not intentionally touch the genitals, anus or breasts of another dancer, nor knowingly permit another dancer to touch their genitals, anus or breasts.
- Dancers may not perform any act which simulates masturbation, oral sex or sexual intercourse, including the insertion of any object, including their own finger, into the anus or vagina.
- Dancers shall not solicit for gratuities or payment for sexual favours.
- Dancers shall not engage in any act of prostitution, i.e. the receiving of gratuities or payment for sexual favours

Appendix 1: The Visit in Detail

The club was visited by 2 undercover investigators, former detectives. These are their redacted accounts (all identifying information about lap dancers removed):

Investigator 1

Upon entry, a doorman stated there was 'no touching of the girls' and no filming. In the men's toilets there were notices outlining the rules for customers including words to the effect that 'customers may not touch dancers during a performance, customers may not make offensive remarks to dancers, customers may not intimidate dancers, customers may not ask dancers to perform any sexual favour, customers may not masturbate or engage in other sexual behaviour and that any customer failing to keep to the Customers Code of Conduct will be ejected'.

There were about 8 male customers in the club. I would say during the time I was present there were approximately 20 dancers in total.

Whilst at the bar, I was approached by a lap dancer, Dancer G. She said she used to work at the club as a waitress but now danced there. She asked if I wanted a dance saying the prices ranged from £20 to £600 depending on the length. The £600 dance also included a bottle of champagne.

While we were speaking, she constantly touched my chest and back and occasionally put her arms around me. She also stood and leant her crotch and upper thigh against my knee. At one point another lap dancer walked by and Dancer G reached out to her. The dancer introduced herself as Dancer F. We agreed on a dance with both performers at £40 each. They then led me to the dance booth area. Before the dance neither woman explained what I was or was not permitted to do.

Dancer F & G

- Dancer F sat on the bench next to me, leant into me and touched my chest.
- She leant forward and revealed her breasts by pulling her top aside and pushed them into my face. She subsequently took the top off.
- Dancer G touched her breasts outside her bra and her vagina outside her knickers.
- Dancer F got on to the bench seat next to me and leant across my lap pushing her trunk down on my lap on all fours by placing her hands on the bench seat next to me.

- G took off her bra and cupped and squeezed her breasts. She pushed her breasts into my face and touched her lower abdomen above her vagina.
- Dancer G cupped and squeezed both breasts and her abdomen. She then turned, leant forward and pushed her buttocks down onto my right knee.
- F leant forward with her legs apart and stroked her anus around and down her vagina.
- G then placed her left foot on the bench seat on my left and sat down into my genital area.
- G reached around under her vagina and buttocks then slapped her left buttock. She leant forward into my face pushing her breasts into my mouth and chest.
- During the dance, Dancer F said we could go to a private area

Dancer H - £40

I returned to the bar area and was approached by another lap dancer, Dancer H. She asked if I wanted a dance and stated it would be £100 and then £80. I told her I had already have a dance for £40. She agreed to a £40 dance and led me to the booth area.

- When we arrived at our booth, I noted there was a dancer in front of a customer in the next booth. She was naked and moved forwards as if to straddle him.
- Dancer H pushed herself into my face and placed her right foot on the bench seat on my left side.
- She touched her vagina outside her knickers.
- She reached up her left leg and facing away from me stroked her left buttock and thigh.
- She pulled her top down to expose her breasts and took off the garment.
- The dancer in the booth next to me knelt on the floor and stretched forward on a customer.
- Dancer H then leant on the bench seat next to me touching her breasts.
- She asked me to sit back and she leant forward pushing herself on me touching both breasts.
- The doorman who had been at the end of the booth then approached her and said she must keep both feet on the floor and no contact. He then walked away.
- I asked the dancer what he said, and she said 'he said no contact' and that she was annoyed as she had not done anything wrong.

- Dancer resumed the dance stroking her buttock. Two people walked past.
- She came up close to me and put her left foot up on the bench seat next to me and pushed her breasts forward towards my face and across my mouth.
- She sat on the floor in front of me and cupped her breasts. She then leant forwards on all fours on the floor and placed her hands on the bench seat next to me and then leant up on the bench seat on her side.
- The same doorman then approached and said to her 'no forwards' or 'no floorworks' or words to that effect. The doorman then stated he did not know what it is but that he had heard it on the radio. She then spoke to the doorman out of my earshot. A further doorman with dark hair and a dark beard approached and stood looking from the main floor area. She then stated she was not allowed to put her feet up and that she did not want to do anything wrong. I heard the doorman say 'discuss' and 'Stefan'. The doorman then walked away.
- The dancer leant up on the bench seat and I asked what he had said and she said it was so annoying as she was not doing anything wrong and that he had said 'no forwards' or something similar.
- She resumed the dance, went down on her haunches, leant back and stroked her vagina outside her knickers.
- The dance then finished. I asked her if I had done anything wrong and she said no.

Investigator 2

Shortly after arriving, I visited the toilets. On the front of one of the toilet cubicles there was a notice setting out rules for customers. I noticed a man and women standing inside the gents and two women in one of the cubicles, talking and laughing. Upon leaving the cubicle, the two women were standing by the sink. They spoke to me briefly and told me they had seen 'The Chocolate Men' (a troupe of black male strippers).

On arriving at the bar, I was approached by a dancer, Dancer J, who immediately started touching my thighs and leaning into my lap, so the sides of her body were touching my groin area. I then paid for a standard lap dance.

Dancer J – £40. Additional £20 to ‘suck on breasts’

- Dancer J took me to a booth in the middle of the gallery and sat me down.
- I noticed at this point that a security officer had positioned himself at the entrance to the gallery. He stood about 15 feet from me on the entrance steps facing away from the gallery looking at the main body of the club. During the dance he remained in this position I did not see him once monitor the dance. He appeared to be standing there so he could respond to a dancer if she called for help.
- Dancer J removed her dress and started dancing at this point she said ‘I can touch you’.
- At different times throughout her dance she placed her feet on the bench beside me.
- She used her shin and knee to apply pressure and rub the area of my genitals.
- She massaged her breasts pushing them together.
- She faced away from me, bent over and pushed her bottom into my groin.
- At one point she put her leg on the structure of the seat behind my head and pushed her genitals close to my face.
- She bent over in front of me and rubbed the outside of her anus with her finger. She then rubbed the front of her genitals.
- She put one foot on the bench leant across my lap and simulated sexual intercourse by moving her crotch up and down over mine, although there was no contact as she did this.
- She then squatted on her haunches facing me and leant against the back of the wooden structure in front of the seat. She then used her fingers and rubbed up and down over the front of her genitals to simulate masturbation.
- Throughout her dancing she spoke to me. At one point she asked me to guess her age. She asked how many sexual partners I currently had and what my favourite sexual position was.
- She asked me if I wanted a ‘milk shake’ whilst pushing her breasts together and said it would cost an extra £20. She then pushed her breasts together leant forward and rubbed them around my face and nose. She pushed her nipple of one breast and then the second inside my mouth.
- At the conclusion of the dance she thanked me and started to get dressed. I asked her if I could have her number. She said I could but that she would give it to me when we got back to the bar, gesturing towards the security officer.
- We went back to the bar and she gave me her number which I entered into my mobile.

Dancer K – £45 (£100 requested)

My second dance was with Dancer K:

- *En route* to the dance area, Dancer K stated that the dance would be £100. I said I didn't want to pay that much. She said that would be for 15 minutes. I told her I just wanted a straight naked dance. She confirmed a short dance and then asked for £50. I said I didn't have that much and showed her I had £45. We agreed £45 for the dance.
- Dancer K took me to a seat sat me down and then started to dance. She removed her clothes.
- She massaged her breasts in front of me and moved them close to my face.
- She rubbed her genitals revealing a diamond stud through her clitoris.
- During the dance she placed her feet on the bench beside me.
- During the dance she also spoke to me and asked if I liked big breasts. She flexed her chest muscles so her breasts moved.
- Again, throughout this dance a security officer was standing on the steps at the entrance to the gallery but at no time did I see him watch, or in any other way monitor, the dance.
- After thanking her for the dance, I left her in the gallery and returned to the bar. Whilst at the bar I was approached by another dancer. We began a brief conversation but she left when I declared that I was leaving imminently to catch a train.