

Burlesque: experience or trigger for transformation? The journey from spectator to entertainer

Gerda Szász



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<p>The objective of this thesis is to explore whether attending a live burlesque event can be categorized as a single isolated experience, or rather an opportunity for an individual to face a dilemma and recognize an aspiration, thus embarking on a transformational journey. Mapping the experience journey of the guest highlights the important touchpoints of a well-designed compelling experience, while mapping the journey from the audience to the stage might shed a light on the transformational trigger potential of this artform. Analysing the journey to the stage of spectators turned performers is essential in understanding if there are common motives behind their urge to perform or turning points they've all gone through leading to the outcome of change in traits.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of the thesis consists of two parts. In the first part "The art of exaggeration" introduces the term of burlesque, presents the reader with a short history of the artform, followed by describing the burlesque and neo-burlesque scene in Finland. This chapter also contains a portrayal of the motives behind wanting to perform burlesque. The second part of the theoretical framework focuses on burlesque as an experience by examining the anatomy of a burlesque event, as well as the experiencescape and psychology of an optimal experience. This is followed by distinguishing experiences from transformation, depicting transformation triggers and guiders of transformations.</p> <p>The research method used is qualitative, the data was gathered using thematic interviews and observation. Focusing on the quality and diversity of data gathered, seven knowledgeable performers were selected with different amount of performing experience, representing the "audience member turned performer". The interviews varying in length from 26 to 92 minutes were conducted between 27.04-13.05, transcribed for analysis and processed using thematizing. Observation was used to analyse the complexity of 3 consecutive burlesque events, focusing on how these experiences were designed and constructed.</p> <p>A burlesque show at its best represents an exquisitely designed, unique and meaningful experience that engages the audience on many levels and creates a world one can escape to and feel accepted in. Seeing burlesque live for the first time does make a big impact on its viewer by encompassing aspects that resonate personally with audience members and can be perceived as a trigger for transformation for those who are ready to begin their journey. The progress of transformation is made up of experiences, most turning points common between the performers having gone through this process. Regardless of the motives behind wanting to perform, stepping on the burlesque stage itself requires having gone through a transformation. As an outcome, performers will not only have obtained new skills and knowledge, but also traits.</p>	
Keywords Experience, burlesque, transformation, empowerment, community, wholesomeness	

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1 Introduction

Through the course of human development and progression of economic value a shift away from goods, commodities and services has been noticeable in favour of offerings providing tools and means for personal development. The modern individual has been identified as allocating more value to experiences that will aid personal growth and transform them into their better selves. Despite experiences and transformations being less transient than services and goods, the individual seeks for something more enduring than a memory, something more than any goods, commodities or services can offer. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 242.)

Lived experience represents a highly personal, intimate and intense way of experiencing the world. The complex and continual interaction of various influences towards which people possess awareness are the ones forming cultural meaning and people's identities. Parading a palette of diverse performers and acts on stage, audience members will generally connect with certain aspects that resonate with them and thus form the peak experience. This is the meaningful experience within the entity that holds the most intensity.

Ahmed (2004 in Green 2016) explains how peak (musical) experiences form and it fits this artform and guest/aspirant relation perfectly. According to him intensifications of feeling is how people recognize and allocate value to their surroundings, objects, other people and eventually, themselves. The inner world of an individual consists of their previous encounters and evolves during their lifetime, this and habitual behavioural patterns heavily dictate what is bound to resonate with the individual and provide most intensity. Meaning is mediated by feeling, thus the meanings mediated by the most intense feelings will be the ones that persist. (Green 2016, 2.) This is why the impression of seeing burlesque live for the first time might constitute a peak experience or meaningful one and should be explored as the trigger for a performer to start their journey to the stage.

Burlesque as an artform is unique in creating a world for its performers and audience members that is accepting as well as appreciative of everyone regardless of age, gender or body size. The individual sitting in the audience of a well-designed burlesque show usually doesn't even realize how many levels he/she might be engaged on. One feature that proves most intense, captivating and liberating is breaking out of the standards and beauty ideal society has set for women. This usually constitutes the moment of epiphany for most viewers when they realize that one can refuse to adhere to set beauty- and behavioural standards and still have a right to exist (Innanen 2019).

The concept of beauty is a cultural and social construction where the power of the masses concretises in both good and bad. This means there are set standards one should strive to adhere to. The mainstream media and commercial scene dictates what women should look like and there's a whole industry built on women's insecurity and keeping them feeling like they're not enough as they are. (Mehr 2019, 189.)

Throughout history, women's bodies have been treated as mere objects for another's gaze, exposing women's bodies through sometimes awful practices to fit the norms. In many cultures, women's value is dictated by their ability to bear offsprings and they lose their value once they are not young and beautiful anymore. There was not much space for women who are powerful, confident and intelligent, especially for ones aware and in control of their sexuality. As a liberation struggle, feminism strives to eradicate domination in all its forms. (McAfee 2018.) It's surprising how even in Western societies most people don't question these beauty standards exploiting women's insecurity and how female empowerment is still news for some.

As a feminist artform, burlesque questions and protests against these narrow norms by providing a platform for women who are aware of their power, embrace and celebrate their "unfittingness" into these set norms by being fierce, unapologetic and bright (Mehr 2019, 187). According to Weldon (2010), this artform represents celebrating real beauty with an entire community and world of performance built around people, especially women behaving inappropriately for their age, size, gender and background. Performers do not become the most celebrated only for their traditional beauty, contrary to this, untraditionally beautiful women are being celebrated because of their energy and passion. Burlesque will not eradicate a looksist world thriving on ruling out women based on their size and body-type, but will magnify the worth of the ones willing to fight it. (Weldon 2010, 224-226.)

Burlesque thus addresses an issue as old as time, one many women (as well as individuals of other gender) can relate to and have probably been fighting against, hence the powerful and intense reaction to witnessing it so impressively displayed on stage. This meaningful experience is what this thesis explores, whether it shares more of the characteristics of an isolated experience or a trigger for a transformational process.

The aim is to shed light on the effects of this experience and follow the transformation process the performers go through en route to the stage, as well as display the transformational outcomes. The theoretical framework is built on a short history of burlesque and the scene in Finland, followed by discussing experiences and transformations as economic offerings and methods of learning and personal growth. The methodology chapter introduces the

qualitative approach of the research and provides an insight on how the data was gathered, followed by the description of the way the research was conducted as well as notions of reliability and validity. The research findings are discussed in chapter 5, including how the interviewed performers view burlesque as an experience, highlighting that seeing burlesque for the first time represented a meaningful experience. This is then followed by their journey to the stage, pinpointing the common turning points along the way. The findings are then concluded by discussing the outcomes of the transformation process. Chapter 6 wraps it all up with conclusions based on the findings and suggestions on how burlesque events can be crafted into an even more engaging entity, driving the possible aspirants wanting to perform to hopefully utilize the services of burlesque schools to achieve their aspirations.

1.1 Research objectives and delimitations

Burlesque has the power to absorb and immerse the audience better than most artforms, that's why it's important to analyse it from an experiential perspective. Describing the journey from spectator to stage is one way of trying to pinpoint what kind of process one goes through before the transformation ensues as well as during the process, but it most certainly isn't the only one. Seeing how many people go through the same process (although it's personal for everyone) is fascinating and left me with an urge to explore the motives of why and how this happens.

I thought that since seeing burlesque for the first time, as well as being immersed in its world packs such a strong punch and represents a meaningful experience of a level most audience members have not experienced before, it might trigger different transformation processes in most individuals present. Why does this happen to some, but not others? How does it happen, how do people end up as burlesque performers, what are their motives? Does their journey to the stage always start from seeing burlesque live for the first time? Does it entail a transformation process, if so, is it a similar journey for all? What are the outcomes of the transformation? These are some of the questions this research is attempting to answer.

The objective of this thesis is to examine how burlesque works as an experience, exploring the fine line between it being an exquisitely designed absorptive-immersive experience and a trigger for transformation, depicted by the once audience member's journey to the stage. The aim is to determine the possible turning points that led the passive spectator into wanting to express themselves through this artform. Seeing that this happens quite often, I also wanted to explore if seeing a burlesque show is more of a transformation trigger than an experience.

For the transformation elicitor the key is to design an experience that engages the spectator and carries them off to another world, but which at the same time poses a “dilemma” that alters the customer’s world view and triggers the transformation process. Transformations within the experience economy appeared after experiences and are relatively new terms representing a rather uncharted territory, only briefly discussed in literature dealing with experience economy and design. Transformation as a term is more well-known and explored within the field of transformative learning and tourism, both of which will be utilized in this thesis.

Analysing the experience journey is crucial in identifying the turning points that “hook” the audience and make them want to come back for more or possibly start the metamorphosis of spectator into entertainer. Without a well-designed immersive-absorptive experience, the spectator may be left with a feeling of being overwhelmed and caught off guard, as well as a feeling of being left out, assuming the role of mere passive spectator.

In the light of knowing the series of changes that cumulate into a wholesome transformation in an enthusiast, burlesque can really be considered a unique artform. Not much is known about transformations, but Pine & Gilmore (2011) point to it being the next step on the progression ladder of the economic value. People nowadays have the tendency to focus more on accumulating non-material value rather than material, hence the importance of studying these economic offerings. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 17-18.)

The target are once audience members turned performers, whether they have experience of performing once, a handful of times, or have been part of establishing the burlesque scene in the country. Qualitative research in the form of semi-structured theme interviews was used to obtain rich, personal and detailed information on the individuality of the process, interviewing seven performers having gone through the “transformation”, providing a good and diverse picture of their journeys. The interviewees were chosen based on their presence and activity in the scene, some earning a living from it, some performing for fun and self-actualization, all sharing the passion for this artform.

As this phenomenon and exploring burlesque from an experience/transformation angle represents a rather uncharted territory, I considered it important to shed light on the process. One might wonder why people are so drawn to willingly place themselves outside of their comfort zones (which performing burlesque in front of an audience is) and what is at the end of the transformation process? Without diving deeper into the psychological benefits of such a transformation, people usually come out at the other end self-realized, confident, empowered, self-loving and with an openness not many other genres provide.

1.2 Structure of the report

The theoretical framework will first cover the history of burlesque in chapter 2, 2.1. taking us through the evolution of this artform, culminating in its revival called neo-burlesque. Subchapter 2.2. will guide us through the evolution of burlesque in Finland from the early years to the neo-burlesque wave and 2008 when the first Helsinki Burlesque Festival put this small country on the map. 2.3. covers the reasons why this artform is this revolutionary and stirs so many emotions by describing the motives of burlesque performers and what urges people to choose this form of self-expression.

The second part of the theoretical framework in chapter 3 discusses burlesque as an experience, subchapter 3.1 introducing us to the anatomy of a compelling experience. 3.1.1 elaborates on the experience landscape, 3.1.2 depicts the experience journey and touchpoints at a burlesque show, followed by the psychology of an optimal experience in 3.1.3. 3.2 will guide us through the realms of experience and transformation in an effort to distinguish them and draw a line between the two economic offerings. The concept of transformational learning will also be introduced. 3.2.1 will explain how meaningful experiences are most often triggers for transformation, while 3.2.2 will discuss the elicitors when it comes to the fifth economic value: the guiders of the transformation. In the case of burlesque, the transformation may happen individually, or by utilizing the services of burlesque schools or teachers, in abundance nowadays in Finland.

After having put together the theoretical framework to support the research, chapter 4 will discuss the research methodology and will take us through the research process. In subchapter 4.1 the choice for using qualitative research will be explained, followed by describing case study in 4.2. Starting from subchapter 4.3. the reader will be guided through the research process, 4.3. presenting theme interviews and observation as research methods, followed by conducting the interviews in subchapter 4.4, finally explaining reliability and validity in 4.5.

Chapter 5 will deal with the results of the interviews, presenting the findings on the experience/transformation considerations of the interviewees, as well as depicting their journey to the burlesque stage, the data processed by thematizing. In subchapter 5.1, we discover how these performers perceive burlesque shows as experiences and find that in their case the first show was also a trigger for their journey to the stage and transformation. 5.2 presents the transformation process by examining the impression of their first live show they attended (5.2.1) and its artistic triggering effects. In 5.2.2 we delve into the concepts that

have resonated with them during the first show as well as the motives driving them to perform. With 5.2.3, themes around their debut as a burlesque performer are discussed, 5.2.4 sharing their post-performance impressions. 5.3 concludes the results with portraying the outcomes of their transformation.

Chapter 6 concludes the findings and reflects on possible development areas when it comes to building experiences or wanting to trigger or guide transformations.

2 The art of exaggeration

Burlesque is an artform meant to evoke feelings and elicit a response from the audience. With the venue decoration, over the top outfits, hair, make-up and overwhelmingly diverse set of numbers paraded on stage it is no wonder burlesque is also known as the art of exaggeration. (Mehr 2019, 21.)

This chapter offers an insight into the dazzling and rather mysterious world of burlesque and neo-burlesque, its development in Finland and the motives behind people wanting to perform burlesque. Dealing with these subjects, as well as reviewing the relevant literature on the history of burlesque and its evolution brings us closer to understanding this artform's nature and why it has been captivating the audience throughout its existence.

2.1 A short history of burlesque

Dating back to Byzantine times, burlesque as a form of self-expression has been around and dividing opinions for centuries. As an artform, it has evolved greatly over the years incorporating influences from satire, classical ballet, variété, cabaret, vaudeville, revue and striptease, having formed into a unique, odd and enticing mixture of entertainment, rarely leaving any spectator unaffected or unimpressed. There is something rebellious, scandalous and rather exciting about the world of glamour and tease that has kept this form of entertainment alive for so long, even after being legally banned for a while in the US.

Burlesque is a performance artform involving theatrical and/or dance elements, based on the tension between covering and revealing body parts. The etymological roots of the word lay in the Italian "*burla*", "*burlesco*" and French "*burlesque*" meaning joke, satire and exaggeration. If a word had to be chosen to best describes this form of art, it's exaggeration. (Mehr 2019, 21.)

According to Mehr's (2019) detailed description, this artform is known for having surpassed several cultural, esthetic and social boundaries throughout history, and has therefore met strong resistance, especially in the US. Artists have been arrested on the grounds of immorality, receiving fines or even spending a few nights behind prison bars. Although burlesque is no longer considered an immoral form of entertainment in Western society, it is still considered a marginal artform, enjoying relatively little coverage and visibility in media. Things have changed for the better since the 1900's, especially in Finland, but even in the 2010's, people who have not familiarized themselves with the subject can't tell the difference between burlesque and strip tease, respectively seeing it mostly targeting a male audience.

In the beginning of the 1940's a decline in the burlesque scene was visible, with an inevitable demise that ensued in the 1970's. Although the darkest times for this artform are over, many people who have not familiarized themselves with its history still see burlesque as female objectification and anti-feminist, which is why neo-burlesque is here and packs a stronger punch than ever. (Mehr 2019, 6-11.)

Burlesque saw its resurrection in the new wave embracing the refugees from the swing dance scene, strippers who've had enough of pole dancing, dancers, artists looking for a better, more creative space to express themselves through art and regular people in love with old Hollywood glamour. No matter what the background of the burlesque artist, they all have a few things in common, like the fact that it all started as a hobby that has gotten out of hand and has opened doors for them, making it possible to turn it into a job. Most burlesque artists also share the love of vintage glamour and consider any "excuse" to curl their hair and adorn themselves with rhinestones and glitter a good one. When it comes to creating art, burlesque artists are no exception, they also strive for uniqueness and creating a character and stage persona that is based on their individual personalities and taste. It is self-expression in its purest form. (Baldwin 2004, 41-62.)

The early 2000's marked the new wave of burlesque with yearly festivals appearing throughout the US, the earliest one organized in New York in 2003. This served as an inspiration and trendsetter for future producers of burlesque festivals worldwide. After the first festival, London was the next to follow in 2007, Toronto and Helsinki in 2008, Paris and New Orleans in 2009, Barcelona in 2011, Berlin in 2013 and Amsterdam in 2014, a whole network of burlesque festivals connecting the world by now. (Mehr 2019, 86.)

Neo-burlesque is a postmodern artform also containing traces of untamable sub-cultures not fitting into any definition box, breaking the shackles of any genre they try to attribute it to. It can be undefinable to its very roots, given that while most think a performance always includes stripping, some have chosen to do numbers where instead of taking clothes off and teasing, they tease as they get dressed, or do the whole performance nude while mimicking stripping. So, the only definition that's always applicable really is that it's a performance artform happening in a given space, which usually has at least K18 rating due to its public and unapologetic nature. Encompassing a wide spectrum of performances, the acts one sees on stage can usually be split into two categories: glamour acts enrooted in classical burlesque, or with classical elements, designed to engage the esthetic senses, focusing more on beautiful movements, glamour and sensual peeling of gloves and stockings and neo-burlesque numbers making a powerful statement and encouraging the viewer to engage in a deeper thought process. (Mehr 2019, 110.)



Image 1. A classical number performed by The Ravishing Shangril-La Rubies
Under the Mistle Tease 2019



Image 2. A neo-burlesque number with comic elements. The Shangri-La Showgirls Under the Mistle Tease 2019

Neo-burlesque routines will take a stand and show references to current culture and events, often having a storyline and possibly elements of comedy. The two styles are usually also blended into a new entity, incorporating and layering classic moves into neo numbers, as well as constructing a storyline to “back up” classical acts. (Weldon 2010, 36.)

Acts can further be categorized into parade numbers (usually classical acts) and ones with a storyline, the latter more typical of neo-burlesque numbers. The lines between these categories are very fine if not non-existent, categorizing them also going against the liberal nature of the artform.

The magic and attractiveness of neo-burlesque can be narrowed down to breaking out of the traditional body size, gender requirements and overall boundaries of classical burlesque. The acceptance of different body sizes and overall humanization of the body is the soul of this new wave. The strength of this artform lies in challenging the norms of conventional sexuality and people’s apprehension of what kind of body should be showcased on stage, this is why, in many ways it’s much more powerful than its predecessor, because it makes a point of making a statement.

Burlesque shows nowadays are more than perfectly sculpted bodies being exposed to the audience, going way beyond the esthetic aspect. Seeing how people of different shapes and sizes enjoy themselves while performing on stage is a powerful experience, one that triggers considerable emotions in most viewers, challenging their views on healthy body and self-image. (Baldwin 2004, 82-83.) Having had its ups and downs along the way to a point when it has vanished almost entirely, it has now made its comeback and living its golden age. Burlesque has morphed into an artform providing a more diverse and inclusive setting than ever for both entertainers and spectators.

Even though this artform rebels against society’s beauty norms, in line with the diversity and inclusiveness of the genre, there’s space for performers who also honour the tradition of classical glamour and old-Hollywood beauty standards. Dita von Teese made her debut in the early 1990’s and is seen as one of the pioneers of the new wave, considering burlesque a world of illusion, fun and dreams (Von Teese 2006, xix.). She embraces the heritage of burlesque with classical glamour numbers tailored to her style.

2.2 The Finnish scene

Finland has been involved in the burlesque scene from as early as the 1800’s, when foreign troupes toured the country and sold out most venues. When it comes to the domestic scene,

more is known about the history of revue than that of burlesque. Several venues staged burlesque acts, Punainen Mylly (from 1946 to 1965) being one of the most famous ones. With the worldwide decline in the popularity of burlesque, the Finnish scene soon followed the tendency.

A more active involvement in the scene can be noticed with the rise of neo-burlesque in the 2000's, when the country began producing its own burlesque shows, then festivals, followed by establishing dance studios focusing on teaching burlesque. The age of neo-burlesque marks the revival and blossoming of this artform, now encompassing even more performance styles, meaning that a burlesque act can be anything from a classical fan dance to a piece making a political statement or even a comedy act.

The golden age of classical burlesque and cabaret having slept into oblivion, in the beginning of the 2000's, Finnish people interested in this artform had to travel abroad to catch live performances. In 2004 Bettie Blackheart and Frank Doggenstein travelled to New York to see burlesque, their first show taking place in Starshine Burlesque Club, where they saw Little Brooklyn perform among others, who was later a guest of the second Helsinki Burlesque Festival. This was also the year Bettie Blackheart bought her first tassels and constructed her first act, later becoming the establisher of the Finnish burlesque scene.

The pioneers in the Finnish scene shared the love for the esthetics of burlesque, a handful of artists enchanted by the world of glitter and brave self-expression founded "Dr. Sketchy's Anti-Art School" in Helsinki, marking the beginning of the neo-burlesque wave in Finland. Among the founding members were Sini Muuronen (Sugar Kane) and Petra Innanen (Bettie Blackheart), the latter holding the title of the Mother of Finnish burlesque. Burlesque was very much an underground artform back then, finding its way to fetish clubs and movie nights, taking forms Blackheart describes as "protoburlesque".

The idea to organize the first festival was inspired by the London Burlesque Festival, the first ever of its kind in Europe in, organized in 2007. Then came the revolutionary year of 2008 and the first *Helsinki Burlesque Festival* was organized in February by Blackheart and a handful of other artists, taking the risk that it might be a flop. Nobody really knew if there was enough demand for a burlesque festival and if the tickets would sell at all. The event was promoted by putting up flyers in different small shops and to the organizers' surprise, the festival sold out in a week. Unsure of just how prepared Finland was to embrace this artform, it came as a surprise to the organizers that with such little visibility and advertisement every single day of the festival was sold out and the audience was all dressed up and very exhilarated throughout the festival. After having to turn people away due to the

space limitations of the venue, the festival was later moved from restaurant Kaisaniemi to Gloria, a theater with a much bigger capacity.

The organizers tried to engage the audience members to dress up according to the event with declaring a “best costume” contest on the flyers, not sure what to expect. The response was overwhelming and people arrived wearing amazing costumes and creations. This proves that the demand for such a festival was present and people were ready to finally see burlesque live and immerse themselves in this world. With the first festival everyone who was just observing the scene online and doing the research now had an experience of what burlesque looked like enjoyed live. This mobilized people who were interested in performing to construct their first numbers and go beyond the mere theory aspect of enjoying burlesque.

Although the festival brought in big names from abroad, building up a Finnish burlesque artist stock was essential, so the first Newcomer’s Night was organized in 2008 in Wäiski, a restaurant ship which hosted innumerable burlesque events after. This gave birth to now legendary names in the Finnish neo-burlesque scene: Olivia Rouge, Tinker Bell, LouLou D’Vil, Cherry Adorable, Stella and Lunatrix Polaire, to name just a few. The first Finnish burlesque troupes also premiered here: Burlesque Polaire and The Itty-Bitty Tease Cabaret. Enjoying an amazing popularity and fully packed venues, the festival was organized every year, culminating in a grand finale in 2017.

On the now inactive webpage of the festival we can still find this text:

“Helsinki Burlesque Festival was one of the first of its kind in Europe. Our aim was to show the audience the best of the best in Burlesque. Once a year Helsinki became a city of sparkles, attitude and joy when the creme de la creme from all around the world travelled to show what they got to the burlesque hungry Finnish audience. “

(Helsinki Burlesque 2017.)

Naturally, not all were ready to embrace this new artform sweeping the nation and even today there are people as well as media channels wanting to determine who has the right to step on stage and show off their bodies. This is fuelled by the views of those who still find it difficult to see bodies of different sizes on stage. The history of trying to degrade this artform is long and burlesque will probably always remain an artform that some find shocking and upsetting. It does in this sense fulfill its purpose of stirring emotions. Due to its nature, being a marginal artform can be considered a positive thing, since it strips itself of the need to please the mainstream audience, and will thus always find its way to the people who are ready to embrace it. (Innanen 9 May 2020).

Having the country's own artists fly the burlesque flag was essential in developing one of the richest and most active burlesque scenes in all of Europe. After the first wave in 2008 there was no turning back and the burlesque craze took over the whole country, with small towns also staging their own performances. The scene has changed a lot in the past 10 years, with several burlesque schools as well as other establishments offering an insight to the genre as well as a wide range of workshops and classes one can polish their skills at. One immerse oneself into burlesque onto any level they are comfortable with. (Mehr 2019, 93-102.)

The first burlesque classes and workshops took place at the festival, attendees including most of the now big names in the Finnish burlesque scene. As the demand for such knowledge and skills was high, burlesque teaching commenced, first by teaching bachelorette party workshops. Being able to have burlesque themed bachelorette parties really made this artform accessible to the public who wouldn't have found its way to it otherwise. At a bachelorette party burlesque constitutes an acceptable form of naughty fun. Everyone from the bride's youngest sister to her mother will ravage through their wardrobes in search for the perfect outfit and will bump and grind to the rhythm. When the moment comes, they will peel their gloves like they've done this before and at the end of the class will consult together with the group on how these newly learned skills could be introduced in the bedroom at home.

As burlesque becomes more popular, more and more people will gather their courage and take to the stage, mostly inspired by shows and encouraged by how vulnerable but also fun and empowering it looks to be there under everyone's eyes. For most audience members turned performers it's incredibly liberating to be finally able to assume themselves and their sexiness in front of others. (Mehr 2019, 159-160.)

The popularity of burlesque also meant that classes were and are offered by people who don't have the necessary skills to teach it or don't adhere to certain standards. In an effort to tackle this and bring some standards to burlesque teaching, the Finnish Burlesque Institute was founded in 2011 to support the operating possibilities and development of entities providing burlesque education to aspirants of both the amateur and professional level. The aim of the institute was to conduct commonly defined quality criteria to ensure the survival and vitality of the scene. The pioneers of Finnish burlesque constitute the core team of instructors, later joined by burlesque ambassadors. They offer a wide range of classes and workshops from those focusing on teaching classical movements to the ones covering the new, more experimental wave. The institute encompasses a multitude of artists teaching in

different places and events, as well as the ones who have founded their own burlesque studios. (Burleskiinstituutti 2020.)

The Shangri-La School of Showgirls is the first burlesque studio established in Finland, founded by burlesque artists Tinker Bell and TurrboCherry. In addition to this, major cities have their own studios and classes, burlesque having found its way to different dance studios and other establishments, making it a very accessible hobby. The artists teaching at these facilities normally also perform, coach teams or individuals on their journey to the stage, as well as produce burlesque events.

A movie has also been made on the subject of the burlesque “metamorphosis” and its many positive effects called “Full of Love – Escape from a Deep Freeze” portraying Bettie Blackheart’s passion that gave birth to the Finnish burlesque scene and the movie director’s journey from burlesque dance class attendant to the stage. On her journey towards empowerment, she surpasses her tendency to hide her femininity caused by childhood trauma, discovers the right to own her body and sexuality, finally growing up to be the woman she was born to be. (Full of Love – Escape form a Deep Freeze 2019.)

2.3 Motives of a burlesque performer

Neo-burlesque celebrates and glorifies women of all sizes even though these don’t fit the narrow esthetic norms dictated by society. It is also about fantasies and as a member of the audience, one is presented with a wide range of bodies, some of which they can identify with, doing things audience members may have dreamt of, but never dared go through with. Having had an empowering experience, most audience memebbers walk out of a burlesque venue with an improved self-image and a new found self-confidence. It is tease, also in the psychological sense of the word. (Baldwin 2004, 82-83.)

In the words of burlesque artist Bambi the Mermaid (Baldwin 2004), the endless possibilities of self-expression, personality and skills is what’s most captivating about burlesque:

“No matter if you’re skinny, flat-chested or very curvy, you can be short or tall, black or Asian. You can be whatever, if you have self-confidence, a smile, a nice costume and number, you have a place in the burlesque society. And t’s not just any place, it’s one that celebrates beauty.” (Baldwin 2004, 80-81.)

So why is it that someone is left with an urge to take their clothes off in public, given that women’s public performances and sexuality has been controlled throughout history?

The motives of burlesque artists has been a puzzling topic depicted in media since the 1930's. At that time burlesque was viewed as a synonym for white slavery, depicting burlesque artists as victims, especially given the fragile age some of the most famous artists like Margie Hartyn, Gypsy Rose Lee and Georgia Sothern made their debut, the latter at the fragile age of 13. Many artists at the time were seeking refuge on stage from unbearable home conditions, domestic violence, or were simply on a quest for financial independence. (Mehr 2019, 6-11.)

Bettie Blackheart explains that the reason she performs is that she's able to define her own role on stage and can behave unscrupulously, acting against all the norms set for her by society. She finds it liberating that burlesque enables her to see her own good features and forget society's demands to look a certain way. On stage she's unapologetic and refuses to cover her body up under any circumstances. That's empowerment at its best. (Mankinen 2017.)

Things have changed since then and nowadays burlesque is mentioned along the lines of an enabler for women's cultural and spiritual development. The numerous positive effects of putting oneself "out there" are well-known, but Weldon (2010) lists the beneficial effects of this pro-female artform and the reasons behind the urge to perform burlesque. The power of it all lies in women gaining control and breaking society's norms:

- a) When women are restricted from certain behaviors due to a lookist society and they engage in them anyway, it's a powerful statement of courage.
- b) When women want to try out roles they feel they've always been denied and they get assume those personas, they are likely to gain courage to try other things they feel they've been denied.
- c) When women get to play with exaggerating their appearance of gender with drag, they gain a sense of control over it and might lose their fear of gender appropriateness and restrictions.
- d) When women have the opportunity to act out a dangerous role in a safe environment, they learn to evaluate and seek out safe environments.
- e) When women believe that they had to choose between the role of Madonna or whore find an undomesticated role between the two, they understand that they can embrace both roles.
- f) When a woman deliberately puts herself into a position where she knows she can be celebrated, it makes her aware that this is a choice she can make.
- g) When a woman deliberately puts herself into a position where she knows she can be mocked, but she survives it, it can make her feel less fearful in any mocking scenery and less likely to make decisions based on a fear of being mocked. (Weldon 2010, 228-230.)

The sense of community is strong in the burlesque world, and there are multiple elements and motives binding performers together. Typically, burlesque performers want to do something different, something that hadn't been done before, stretch and break boundaries, shake up old-school body images of who's allowed to be on stage, perhaps also ponder upon the wide palette of gender spectrum. They may also have a shared love for divas,

theatre, old movies, different visual cultures, circus performances, all things out of the ordinary, surprise factors, art in general, dance, drama, fetishes, underground culture, but most importantly the feeling of freedom and enjoying seeing different aged and sized performers freely and proudly celebrating their bodies on the stage. Each person is free to create, through their own experience and on their own terms the art they want to study. (Innanen 9 May 2020.)

3 Burlesque as an experience

It is important to know how these shows are built in a way so powerful, that being a mere spectator at a burlesque show might trigger the need for one's transformation into an entertainer. This chapter will review the relevant literature on experience design, experiences and transformations, as well as a walkthrough of the customer journey of a spectator attending a burlesque show.

Burlesque tantalizes and provokes in a way not many artforms do. Given the exaggerated and unapologetic nature of this artform, for first timer's it's usually clear after the first show if they fall madly in love with the genre or'll never set foot at another burlesque venue again.

According to Weldon (2010), burlesque easily fulfills the only demand made on its audience to have fun by providing an intoxicating mix of amazing community, great humor, spectacular music and exquisitely constructed costumes, classifying it a stunningly designed experience. (Weldon 2010, 228-229.)

3.1 The anatomy of a compelling experience

When defining '*experience*', either used as a noun or a verb it can have attributes such as subjectivity, involvement, emotion and learning. As a noun it describes the psychological, spiritual and emotional learning outcomes resulting in an individual's involvement in activities. As a verb it describes a transformation process that embodies an individual's participation and leads to the above-mentioned outcomes. (Gao et al. 2017, 3.)

Pine & Gilmore (2011) defined experience from a business perspective: "Experiences are events that engage individuals in a personal way"; but we can assume that their definition of experience from a consumer perspective would be an engaging, enjoyable, and memorable encounter for those consuming these events. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 17.)

From the progression table below, we can observe how customer's thirst for development and self-growth has pushed the demand from wanting commodities and goods to aspiring for immersive experiences and possible transformations. This has in turn put pressure on businesses to grow and evolve from companies providing merely goods and commodities to ones staging experiences through customization and cutting back on commoditization.

This natural evolution of economic value as well as change in customer preferences and demands has led to companies having to enrich their knowledge and expand their expertise

beyond manufacturing goods and providing services to evolving into an entity responsible for a memorable customer experience.

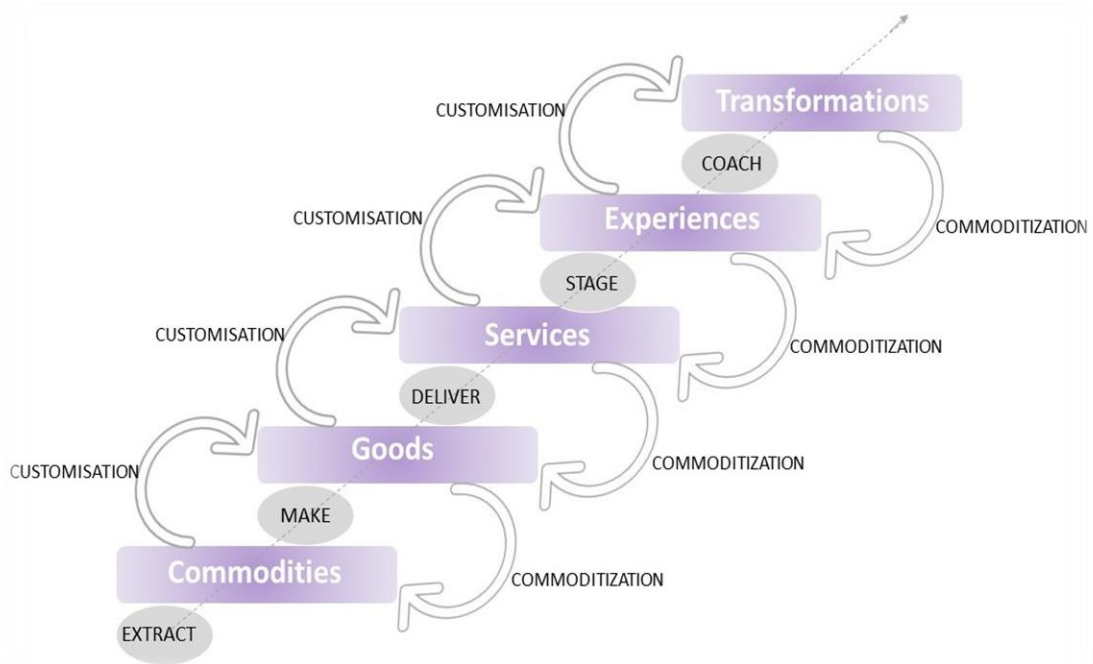


Figure 1. The progression of economic value (adapted from Pine & Gilmore 2011)

The ever-growing urge for companies and individuals to grow and develop has created a demand for something that surpasses the realms of commodities and goods. Having emerged as the fourth “stage” in the progression of economic value, experiences encompass and utilize all the previous stages, using services as the stage and goods as props to engage an individual, thus creating a new value.

Commodities are fungible, goods tangible, services intangible, whereas experiences are memorable. Despite their intangibility, experiences have gained more and more value over the years in the eyes of the consumer due to their power to propel the guest into “another world” and their endless customizability to everyone’s individual needs. Due to their complexity and power to engage the senses, experiences rightfully hold the top position on the axis of the progression of the economic value.

Being a player in the experience economy requires a deep understanding of psychology, the customer and its needs in order to be able to tailor and customize experiences into significant and memorable ones. Given the personal nature of experiences, the experience stager will have to do much more than offer goods and services, it is responsible for the experience resulted in the individual.

A well-designed experience is one that keeps living on in the individual also after the experience itself took place. This individual will have been engaged on either a physical, spiritual, personal, or emotional level, or in some cases all the levels mentioned above, all at the same time. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 17.)

There are many reasons why people are not content with only purchasing goods, commodities and services anymore. According to Travis & Gilowich (2010), buying experiences make people happier than purchasing goods. Despite their intangibility, experiences are highly desired and valued, because they enrich people's lives in a way no goods or commodities can. It is human nature to want to have all senses engaged to form a holistic experience that leaves its mark. The more levels it engages in an individual, the more powerful and memorable it is. As the experiences derive from the staged event engaging with the individual's previous state of mind, they are personal by nature, and no two experiences are the same. Although the entertainment industry is believed to provide the leading example in delivering complex entities of well-built and tailored experiences, it too needs to perfect its memorable experience "formula" and customize experiences to individual needs in order to keep up with guest demand. (Travis & Gilowich 2010, 147.)

While there is no perfect recipe for building a rich and engaging experience, Pine & Gilmore's (2011) figure on experience realms displays the formula of engaging guests on several dimensions quite beautifully. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 46.)

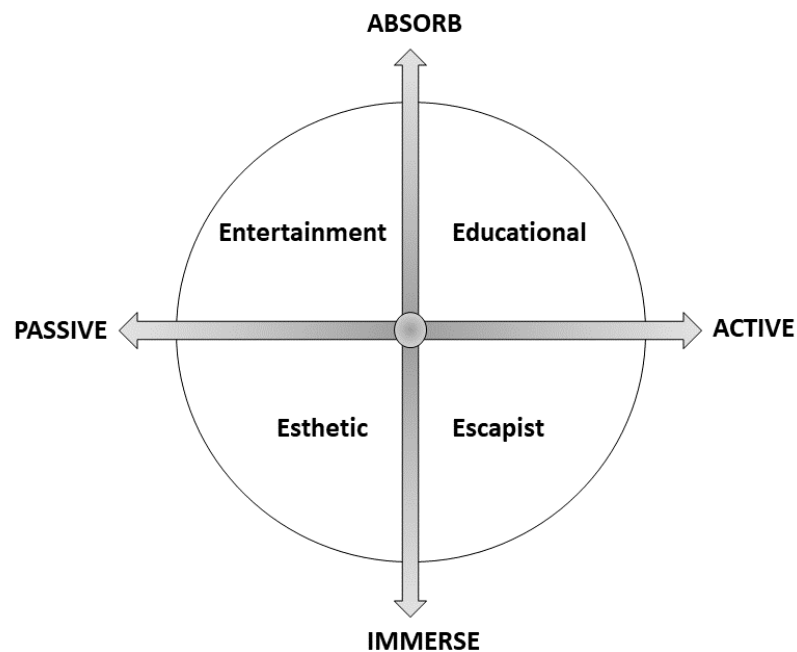


Figure 2. Experience realms (adapted from Pine & Gilmore 2011)

In Figure 2 above the horizontal axis depicts customer participation, from passive participant not influencing the experience to actively taking part in creating and moulding it.

Experiences are staged with the desired result in mind and while an experience that involves little to no active participation of the guest may be easier to stage, the ones that involve active participation have been proven to engage the guests more. The vertical axis displays customer connection to the event, either being immersed in or absorbed into the experience. Absorption in this context is defined as “occupying a person’s attention by bringing the experience into the mind”, so it requires less active participation and immersion as “becoming physically a part of the experience itself”, meaning the guest is actively taking part in molding the experience. (Oh et al. 2007, 119-132.)

Coupling these dimensions creates the 4 realms of an experience: entertainment, esthetic, educational and escapist and a fully engaging, uniquely and optimally personal experience can be created by blending these 4 realms in different ways, creating the “the sweet spot”. This “sweet spot” can differ from guest to guest based on their individual mindset and needs, therefore companies wishing to survive in the experience business need to understand these needs and tailor the experiences to individuals. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 46-47.)

According to Pine & Gilmore (2011) finding the sweet spot in constructing a compelling experience means creating a mnemonic space, a tool that aids the creation of memories, detached from the uneventful world of goods and services. It means a design which once you enter, will keep you coming back for more. The secret of engaging experiences lies within blurring the boundaries and blending the realms of Entertainment, Esthetic, Educational and Escapist in compelling ways. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 64.)

There are also other, more psychological approaches to experiences, grouping them into emotive–cognitive and extraordinary–ordinary. Since experience is very personal, emotion should also be discussed when it comes to this topic, since it holds such a key role in vivid memory. (Walls et al. 2011a, 10-21.)

When it comes to a wholesome and immersive experience, neo-burlesque is on top of the list. There are not many artforms that take their audience on such a roller coaster of emotions as a burlesque show. As a member of the audience one might experience a wide palette of feelings ranging from the serenity of witnessing something esthetically pleasing to shock, pleasure, ecstasy and the anger of being faced with though political facts.

On a burlesque stage one might see classical parade number with the emphasis on the outfit and esthetics, or a totally unusual number with a story line that can cover any subject imaginable. One can witness anything and everything from a classical feather fan dance numbers to popular characters, even dinosaurs or hamburgers stripping.

I've been attending the club shows of Rubies Productions since 2014 and consider them well constructed experiences, although a bit on the absorptive side. I've also interviewed one of the producers about the matter. These shows are structured in a similar manner around a theme, so the spectators know what to expect, but the tension remains unbroken due to the individual acts and artists being very different. Club shows are easier to "personalize", because the producers can decide on how to build the whole show to be as engaging as possible.

The interviewee also raised the importance of keeping the event diverse and engaging throughout the evening, as well as focusing on decoration, hence harmonizing the impressions with positive cues. During these shows professional performances are balanced out by first timers; classical numbers with neo-burlesque numbers, also it's very important to have something "crazy" and over the top at every event.

The viewers are then further engaged with audience participation, the final offering being an intriguing mixture of entertainment covering a wide variety of genres, designed to keep the audience on their toes until the very end. It helps that they always try to put themselves into the shoes of the audience and think what would work best. Burlesque audiences are smart and experienced, so they always try their best to offer the best and most diverse they can. The audience at a burlesque event is very supportive, but one must never take their cheering and applause for granted but should instead strive to prove they're worth the craze. (Bachér 2020.)

A sense of familiarity is created with these shows, proven by the fact that one always sees familiar faces when attending. The concept is already very well built with keeping the same audience coming back and "recruiting" new members all the time. Many also find their way to the burlesque studio this way and start their journey to becoming performers themselves.

3.1.1 The experiencescape

The concept of *experiencescape* encompasses the whole environment where the production and consumption of the experience takes place, facilitating connections between companies and customers. (Pralhad & Ramaswamy 2004a, 4-9.)

The way people imagine and perceive their surrounding environments is called a *scape*. Given the personal nature of experiences, these different perceptions become present in a form according to which people react either positively or negatively toward these scapes (Appadurai 1996, 8-13). The concept of experiencescape thus refers to the process by which these elements are cognitively assembled by the individual into a meaningful whole.

Although experiences are characterized by intangibility and being dynamic, their reliance on matter and space allows the investigation of behaviours, as consumers participate by generating their own experiences in a given space (Campos, Mendes, Valle, & Scott 2018). According to Comic & Kalmic (2015, 56.) the consumption of the experience relies on physical space and is as such “anchored in space”.

Experiencescapes comprise a useful analytical tool within the service economy in understanding the crucial cognitive and physical aspects of the consumption and production of experiences. (Hall 2005, 106-110.) Samuelsen (2010) understood the importance of experience-based value creation, stating that the sum of social, cultural and material elements is where experiences are derived from. (Samuelsen 2010, 1-29.)

The expression of experience co-creation is derived from observing the proactive interactions between the supply and demand dimensions. It is through interactions and the collaborative efforts of suppliers and customers that the experience is created. (Ramaswamy & Guillard 2010, 101-110)

3.1.2 The experience journey and touchpoints

A person attends a burlesque show, experiences the whole range of emotions from confusion to ecstasy and is left with a hunger for more. In most scenarios, the feelings one has experienced during this performance are so intense, an obsession to get immersed in this form of entertainment is developed, followed by the first steps towards transformation. This usually manifests itself by keeping an eye out for upcoming performances and/or signing up for burlesque classes.

Most people who get hooked on burlesque are powerfully visual people captivated by the esthetic aspect of it all, as well as the intellectual and creative aspects. These people experience a sense of enlightenment after being provoked to question and ponder upon their relationship towards what they saw on stage, simultaneously challenging the way they see themselves and how they view the world. As all successful forms of art, burlesque poses

questions and offers a range of answers and solutions to them, leaving the choice to the audience member. (Mehr 2019, 9-10.)

When it comes to analysing and developing experiences, tools used in service design can also be applied here. Of these tools, mapping the customer experience journey and its touchpoints will help us determine the “roller coaster” of emotions an audience member at a burlesque show is taken on, furthermore, it brings us to understand what customers are doing, feeling and thinking while interacting with the experience. These maps displaying the touchpoints also describe this interaction with depth and richness. (Polaine et al. 2013, 105.)

Service- as well as experience design has a very customer centered approach, which means that service and experience providers need to meditate the interactions between customers and service/experience in a way that facilitates deeply personal connections between the two parties. (Saffer, 2010, 26.)

Stochorn & Schneider (2011) define *touchpoints* as every contact point between customer and the service, respectively experience provider. The sum of these touchpoints where the users interact with the service or experience compose the customer journey map, one of the most important and commonly used tools in service and experience design. Typically, a customer journey is time-based and multi-channelled. (Stichorn & Schneider, 2011, 35-37.)

In order to portray the experience journey depicted on the map below, I interviewed one of the friends I took to see burlesque for the first time. I invited this person to accompany me to Rubies Production’s Christmas show and asked about impressions and the experience journey after. The typical show has 3 sets including 4-6 numbers per set with half an hour intervals inbetween, it also includes a raffle, an audience participation contest as well as a prize for best dressed audience member. Their shows are usually constructed according to the same scheme and are designed to be immersive experiences, the audience being able to choose their level of immersion. It is a safe space, implying that audience participation is encouraged, but not mandatory, people can choose their level of immersion.

Before the burlesque show

The experience journey began with an invitation to the Facebook event by a friend who is a seasoned burlesque enthusiast. The event page is usually very informative and in line with the teasing nature of the genre, since the performing artist’s names are not all announced right away, but are presented one by one along the way, keeping the audience already on their toes and building the excitement. Since the event is organized by artists

who also own Studio Shangri-La, information on burlesque dance classes and events supporting this event are also shared on the page, so one can attend some genre related classes beforehand if desired.



Figure 3. Burlesque show experience journey map – Rubies Club page 1

The most common mistake someone who's never seen burlesque live makes is thinking they'll witness a cabaret/revue show or something similar to the "Burlesque" movie which has not much to do with the whole genre. They watch the movie for reference. This is in a way good, because the shock and thus the powerful positive effect their first live show will have on them will be bigger and might hook them easier.

There's a whole ritual of getting ready for such an event, and our heroine has done some research on appropriate dresscode (even though there is none) and attire, also asked their friends for help. Preparing for such an occasion is already part of the fun and such was turned into a social affair with friends spending quality time getting ready together.

At the burlesque show

Upon arriving to the venue most guests are surprised by how at home they feel amongst the colorful crowd of characters and also realize that they are terribly "underdressed". The array of colorful characters is mesmerizing and one instantly feels like having stepped into

another world. This is the kind of event one may wear absolutely anything to, especially the pieces in one's closet one deemed too much for any occasion.

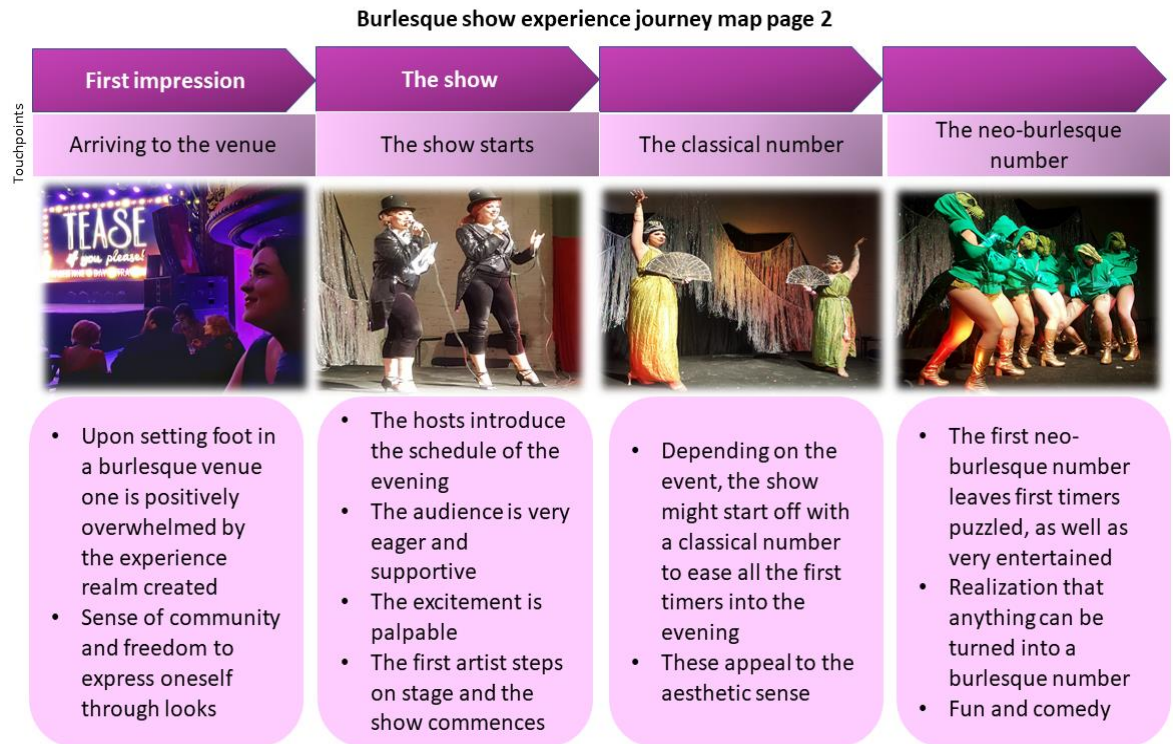


Figure 4. Burlesque show experience journey map – Rubies Club page 2

The show was hosted by the event producers Tinker Bell and Turrbo Cherry, owners of Studio Shangri-La. First order of business was informing the audience of the schedule, introducing the vendors present (there are burlesque related accessories for sale as well as handmade jewelry and clothing) and finally surrendering the stage to the first performer. The sets were built up to be balanced, usually classic numbers mixed in with more modern performances and comedy numbers to ensure entertainment consistency. The burlesque coaching graduates also made their debut that night, the audience welcoming them with support and enthusiasm. Seeing the first-timer's possible uncertainty on stage "humanizes" the performers, creating a connection to audience members seeing burlesque for the first time. There was also an international artist performing that night, the headliner of the show performing in the last set, the organizers also taking over the stage as artists.

For a first timer the classical and esthetically pleasing or purely comedy numbers were easier to watch and appreciate, while more modern performances left them feeling a bit overwhelmed. Not all numbers are designed to be easy to watch or process, but those are usually the ones that have a more powerful message. It depends on the viewer and the expectations one has from such a show which type of performance they will relate to. Usually a burlesque show will leave everyone with some emotions stirred, if not induced by

any particular number then by the ease and carefree manner people show off and celebrate their bodies of all shapes and sizes on stage.

The first show usually starts a process first uncomfortable by shattering one's perceived picture of seeing perfectly proportioned cabaret/revue girls, then gradually moving towards appreciating the artists putting a lot of time and effort into designing such numbers that are more difficult to watch, but have a more important message.

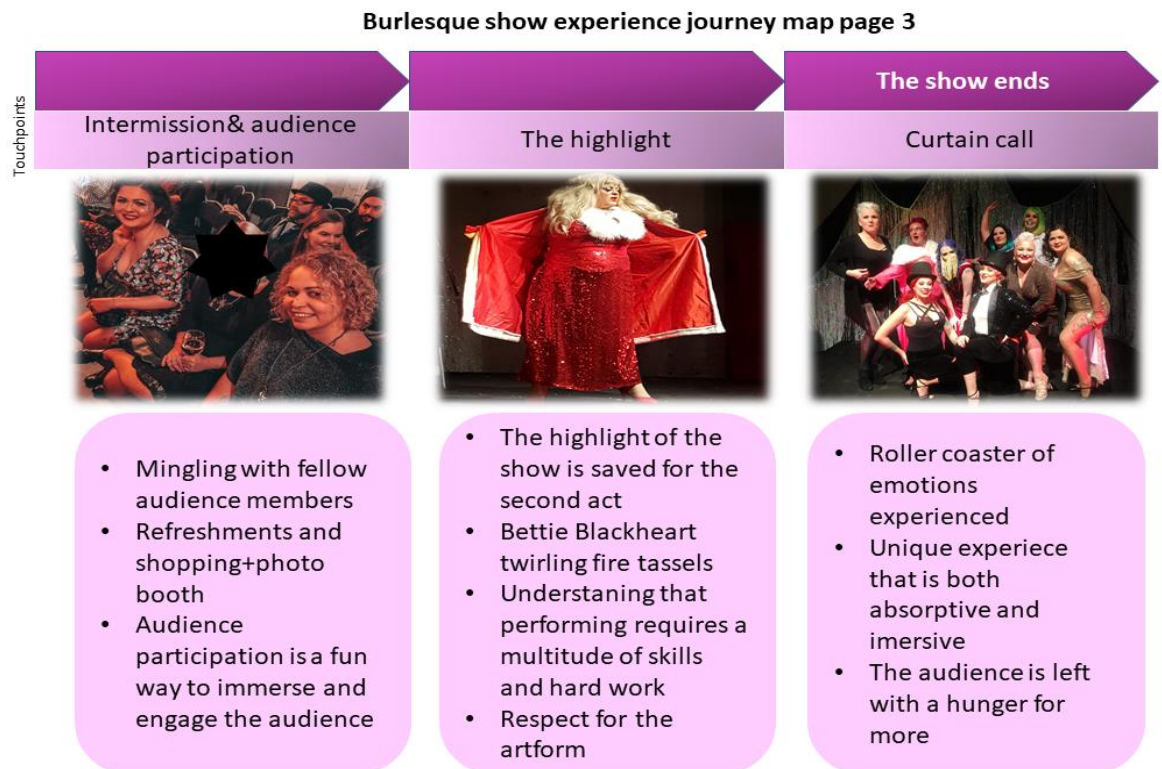


Figure 5. Burlesque show experience journey map – Rubies Club page 3

Audience participation is something first timers usually sit out, but these are very entertaining for the passive viewers as well. Such contests might involve eating as many cookies as possible that are placed on one's face without using any hands or "mummifying" a friend in the most esthetic manner at the Halloween show using toilet paper. Prizes for the winners might range from cruelty free beauty products to burlesque accessories and gift cards for Studio Shangri-La classes. These were fun ways to lighten the mood and immerse the audience even more into the experience. Curtain call was when the new audience member was happy and slightly overwhelmed to have experienced all this and couldn't wait to start processing. It took her a while to process and fully comprehend what she just saw and experienced. The sensations that arouse after such a show determine if there's going to be a sequel for this, possibly immersing oneself better into the buresque world.

After the burlesque show

Having been part of such a well constructed experience, this first timer was left with an urge to see and know more. This might also mean immersing oneself in the literature and documentaries done on the subject. This step is essential if one wants to submerge into the world of burlesque as an active member.



Figure 6. Burlesque show experience journey map – Rubies Club page 4

3.1.3 The psychology of an optimal experience

In the quest to construct the ideal experience, we also need to take into consideration the inner world of the viewer, this being a very big factor in them interpreting the experience. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) states that experiences can also be categorized into autotelic and exotelic ones.

As a term "*autotelic*" refers to a self-contained activity, one that does not include the expectation of future benefits, but is done for the enjoyment and reward of doing the activity itself. It derives from the 2 Greek words "auto" and "telos", translating into self and respectively goal. Typically with autotelic experiences the individual focuses on the experience itself without giving much thought to the consequences. *Exotelic* experiences

represent the ones that have the consequences of the actions in focus, in contrast with the autotelic ones. The difference in these two qualities lies in the motives of the one undertaking the activity, which the author very well demonstrates with a simple example: teaching children with the goal of turning them into upstanding members of the society is considered exotelic, while teaching them because one enjoys interacting with them and seeing them learn is autotelic.

Similarly to what we've seen with the realms of experience how their mixing is unavoidable in the efforts to create a compelling experience, not many experiences are purely exo- or autotelic, either. Some might start out as exotelic with a specific goal in mind and not much focus on the experience and enjoyment of the process, but might in a lucky scenario turn into autotelic ones, the kind of activities people do because it brings them joy.

Autotelic experiences immerse us into feelings we don't often have in the course of our lives, that's where their value lies. These experiences have the power to lift the course of life to a different level. Through this, alienation may give way to involvement, helplessness to a feeling of control and boredom to enjoyment. It has the potential to make life more intense, rich and meaningful. (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 69-70.)

In the light of this aspect of involvement in the experience, burlesque can well be categorized as a mainly autotelic one, both for the viewer and the performer. Viewers would not attend these events unless they enjoyed the uniquely intense and engaging experience. Furthermore, given the high demand for creativity, endurance and the gaining and further developing of different skillsets, performers would not undertake the constructions of new numbers if they didn't enjoy the experience of the creative process.

3.2 From experience to transformation

The rise in the demand for individually tailored meaningful experiences is mostly driven by people's thirst for knowledge and understanding of the value and life enrichment achieved through these. Examining the development of the economic offerings, it is no surprise that the demand for ever more personalized experiences enabling growth is pushing companies towards revising their approach into designing and guiding transformations.

Distinguishing experiences from transformations

According to Pine & Gilmore (2011), some argue that as with experiences, transformations are also a mere subclass of services. Given the effectual *nature of the economic offering* and outcome of transformations, an outcome the other economic offerings cannot produce,

transformations can indeed be classified as a distinct economic offering. Unlike the other offerings, the effects of transformations last beyond their consumption.

Although it's usually hard to draw the line between where an experience ends and a transformation begins, experiences and transformations do have economic distinctions. They can be distinguished based on their economic offering, such as their economic function, the nature of the offering, their key attitudes, methods of supply, sellers and buyers of experiences and transformations, as well as their factors of demand. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 252-254.)

	Experiences	Transformations
Economic function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide
Nature of offering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memorable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectual
Key attribute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual
Method of supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revealed over a duration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained through time
Seller	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elicitor
Buyer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspirant
Factors of demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traits

Figure 7. Economic distinctions between experiences and transformations (adapted from Pine & Gilmore 2011, Table 9-1, 253.)

Based on their *economic function*, transformations can be classified as the most complex of the economic offerings so far, given that they encompass the rest of the offerings. While experiences are staged, transformations are guided, requiring the use and balanced blend of commodities, goods, services and experiences by the transformation guide. This makes transformations the most valued of economic offerings, since they address the root of all needs and give us the answer to why the buyers purchase the commodities, goods, services and engage with the experiences. Experiences create memories based on them being events to which the buyer reacts, whereas transformations change the whole being of the buyer.

The *key attribute* of individuality means that transformations do not exist outside the changed trait of the aspirant but represents the change itself. Experiences are inherently personal, meaning that what meaning one makes of a certain experience is based on past experiences and the present state of mind. Similarly, a transformation cannot be undertaken by the same person, because the second attempt to do this will be met by the already changed individual.

The *method of supply* also distinguishes transformations from experiences. While experiences are characterized by being revealed over time, transformations have to be *sustained*. For a transformation to be successful and to really take effect, elicitors must sustain them through time to genuinely change the aspirant. This also distinguishes the *sellers* of the two offerings, where experiences are represented by stagers and transformations by elicitors.

While the *buyers* of experiences are called guests, buyers of transformations aspire to become something or someone different and are therefore called aspirants. They seek guidance towards a specific purpose; therefore, the seller must be able to provide the intended effect. For the transformational process to commence or for a transformation to take place, it requires a change in the attitude, characteristics or other fundamental dimension of self of the aspirant, affecting the very being of the buyer.

Transformations can be distinguished from experiences also in their *factors of demand*. People buy experiences because they want their senses engaged and want to experience new and exciting sensations. Buyers of the fifth economic value are aspirants towards gaining new traits. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 252-255.)

Pine & Gilmore (2011) also raise the question of what makes an experience one that will bring about the necessary from-to transformation. They discuss that transformations build on experiences and that its through the power of a life-transforming experience that a person realizes their aspirations. Based on the realm, different experiences will trigger different urges and aspirations in people. From the realms requiring mostly passive participation, esthetic experiences will induce a sense of beauty and appreciation, while entertainment experiences may alter the way we see the world. Representatives of the realms requiring active participation will usually have a bigger effect on triggering transformation, with escapist experiences boosting personal skills and capacities and educational ones forcing us to rethink how we fit into the world and if there is space for our old-world views.

Transformation elicitors may use one, a few or all the realms of experience as the basis for the transformation. Depending on the case and transformation desired, elicitors can choose

which realm is ideal for their customer's needs. As with constructing wholesome experiences, here the goal is also to find the "sweet spot", comprised by elements from all four realms, resulting in the strongest life-transforming experiences.

Experiences are thus inseparable from transformations, as they set the stage for them. When it comes to transformations however, it is essential that the transformation achieved will be sustained through time. Single experiences do not yield transformation if they have no care incorporated. This distinguishes transformations as an economic offering from lesser experiences, representing a deeper sense of commitment to the well-being of the individual. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 263-270.)

Experiences are known to immerse, absorb and transform guests into participants in the event with possible long-term therapeutic effects. Transformations will in turn have multiple effects consisting of philosophical and ethical implications, turning the aspirant into a new version of themselves, proving the ultimate value of transformations over other economic offerings.

"There is no earthly value more concrete, more palpable, or more worthwhile than achieving an aspiration." (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 278.)

3.2.1 Trigger for transformation

"Experience" as a word originates from the Latin word *experientia*, and means "knowledge gained by repeated trials", and is also related to *experiri*, meaning "to try, test" (Getler 2006) In German, there are two separate words to express the dual conceptualisation of the word and distinguish between the different meanings of the experience: "Erlebnis" describes an isolated and immediate event that has meaning within the context it occurs in, while "Erfahrung" represents a continuous process, holds meaning beyond the boundaries of its original context and refers to the skills, understandings and wisdom a person accumulates. (Kolb 1984, in Gelter 2006, 195.)

Not all experiences trigger transformations, but meaningful experiences most often do. The chain process of experiences in the Boswijk et al. (2007) elaboration of Snel's model in Figure 8 below from a cognitive perspective introduce emotions and sensory perception in the meaning formation process.

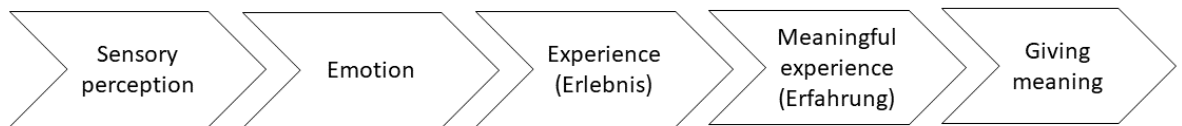


Figure 8. The chain process of experiencing after Boswijk et al. (2007 in Getler 2010, 50-51.)

Impressions through people's sensory perceptions arrive from both the outside world as well as their own body. These impressions generate emotions through which they process information, furthermore these emotions determine whether the individual will see this possibility of change as one worth taking and whether the individual is ready to take action or not. These above-mentioned emotions can manifest themselves in four different ways: expressive or motivated behaviour, feelings and finally, psychological change. (Boswijk et al. 2007, 22.)

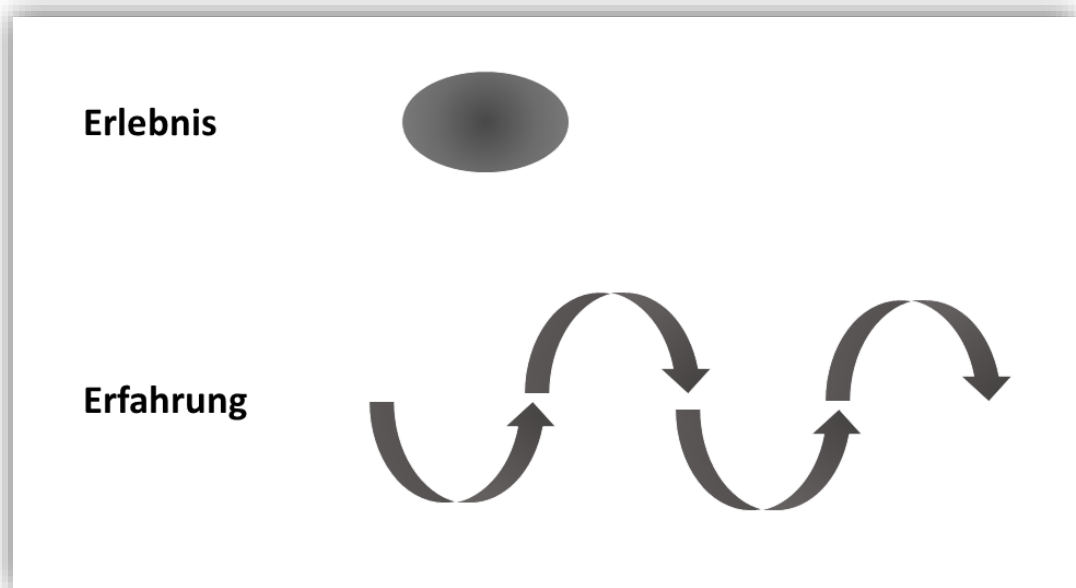


Figure 9. The difference between the isolated event of Erlebnis and the continuous process of Erfahrung (modified after Snel 2005, in Getler 2010, 50.)

When talking about experiences that trigger or lead to transformations one cannot ignore the fact that the process happens through transformational learning. Within this frame, the importance of understanding the dual conceptualisation of the word "experience" is demonstrated by depicting the process of making meaning.

As depicted in Figure 10 below, isolated single experiences, or “Erlebnis” will gradually turn into “Erfahrung”, which can in this case mean the end “product” of the transformation process due to its power of holding meaning beyond the original context. This will naturally happen through conscious and unconscious learning.

It’s Erlebnis, or isolated single experiences that move us towards Erfahrung, that builds and develops us as humans through conscious and unconscious learning. These two experiences, though different in nature are closely intertwined and it’s through Erlebnis events that people accumulate their skills and knowledge, which then integrates into people’s unconscious Erfahrung.

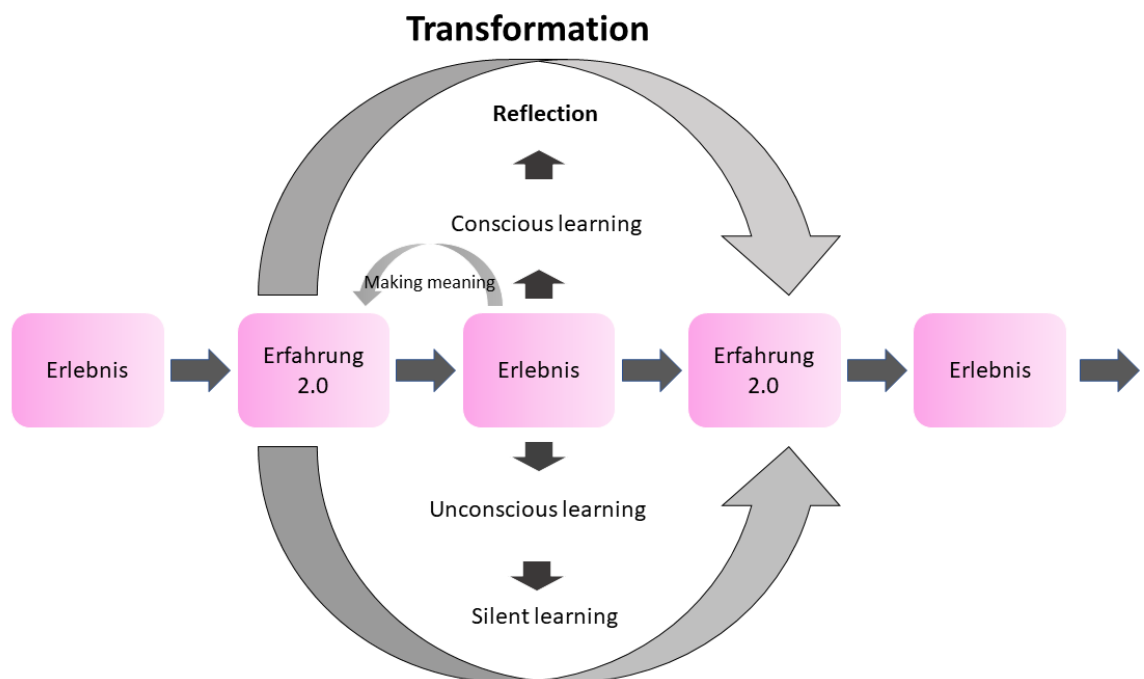


Figure 10. A conceptualisation of Transformational Learning as Lived Experience where Erfahrung and Erlebnis constitute a continuous iterative and interactive process of Lived Experiences (adapted from Kolb 1984 in Getler 2010, 52.)

This makes the unconscious learning aspects of the experience at least as important as the conscious ones when it comes to the value of the offered experience. Given the more meaningful nature and thus, transformative power of Erfahrung, it represents a much stronger experience causing an individual to change perspective regarding both their world view and inner world. As such, these are more difficult to stage, but offer a much bigger value and meaning to the individual. Erlebnis type, more superficial experiences are easier to stage and realize, but the future of successful experience economy offerings lies in Erfahrung. (Toffler 1970, 229-236.)

Transformations represent the fifth economic value, but haven't yet obtained conceptual meaning and are relatively uncharted territory when it comes to an economic context. Transformation requires much more than just staging an experience, it is meant to be guided and should result in a personal change. In trend with moving away from goods and services and aspiring for more valuable experiences, consumers of transformations are called aspirants, wishing to achieve a trait and become someone different as a result of a successful transformation.

An experience, no matter how tailored to an individual's needs it is, cannot be commoditized or standardized into a transformation. As a result of the transformational process, the aspirant will become "something" different, so achieving such a result requires a change in a fundamental personal dimension of the aspirant. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 52-55.)

Transformation takes place where one can engage with the unknown and unfamiliar people, places and their activities. Such encounters develop a sense of distance from normality, discomfort, feeling of uneasiness which cannot be alleviated with existing problem solving strategies. Given that the encounter with this "otherness" is well-designed, timed and appropriate it can cause a disruption to one's subjective world orientation and might just trigger the transformational process.

In these cases one's habits of mind, problem solving strategies and perspectives are challenged, thus resulting in a person's coping method and self-evaluation. In order for the transformational process to be triggered and commence, one has to be outside of one's comfort zone, facing feelings of unease and discomfort. At this point, a person questions their previous assumptions while trying to interpret and make sense of the new experience. Transformation occurs when one faces situations they haven't faced before and the encounter revolutionizes the way they see and experience things. It's set in places that change one's mindset by presenting the individual with an experience different to their habitual environment, providing a significant contrast to ordinary experiences. (Morgan 2010, 246-248.)

The need for more engaging and ideally transformative experiences can be well explained with the psychological theory of a "Hierarchy of Needs" by Maslow (1954), applied also within tourism, the model being adapted by Pearce (1988) into the "Travel Career Ladder" with its five "career steps" affecting tourist preferences. As a form of leisure, the same model can also be adapted to experience guests and transformation aspirants. The more they've experienced, the less tangible and more transformative experiences they will be looking for.

As displayed in Figure 11, in order to design a “Total Experience” and wholesome transformation, the Experience producer has to take into consideration not only the human need, but also the human dream dimensions. According to Jensen (1999) people need to be understood as the complex entities they are and the experience producer’s offering needs to be in line with the understanding of this. (Jensen 1999, 191.)

This model can also be used as a base for experience producers to see what level their customers are on and diagnose possible aspirations for personal transformation. This can be achieved by taking a closer look at the individual’s needs as well as at their dreams and goals for self-development and possible change, as such, this TEM concept can be a very useful tool when designing a transformational offering. When reached, the transformative goals must consist of emotional, behavioural and cognitive transformations towards a sustainable lifestyle and sustainable values. (Gelter 2010, 52-61.)

The need for transformation can be driven by multiple factors, but the principal one is usually the need and urge to learn, develop oneself and change the way one views the world. According to Mezirow’s (1978a) Transformational Learning Theory a transformation is a change in perspective, one that is personally emancipating, through which one is freed from previously life constraining and distorting feelings, values and beliefs. This theory is a scheme of learning, developing and changing for those seeking to make meaningful and life-transforming changes. (Mezirow 1978a, 17-24.)

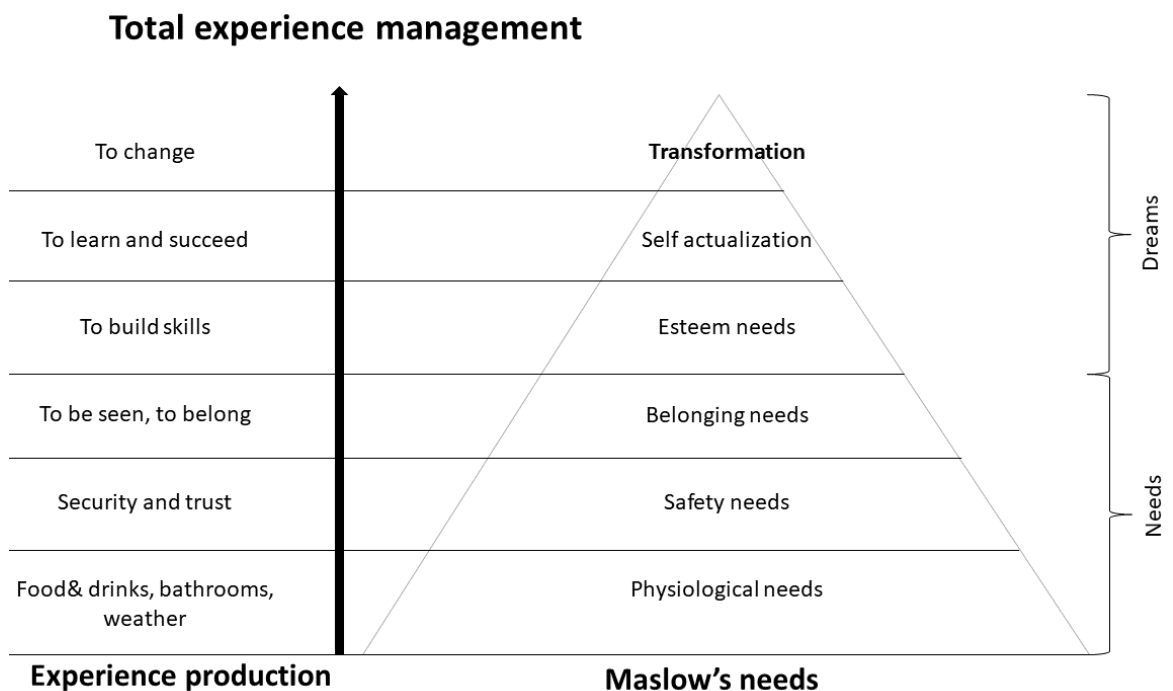


Figure 11. Integrating Maslow’s human needs into Experience Production (modified after Maslow 1954, in Getler 2010, 60.)

The entire process of transformative learning is triggered by a disorienting dilemma, internal or external, in the form of a life event, personal crisis or incident that is a catalyst for transformation. The person in this situation of disequilibrium tries to deal with the situation with their present problem-solving skills and strategies, suffers from a sense of disillusionment with their previous approaches, which then sets off the process of transformation. Coping with this dilemma demands a change in one's approach, beliefs and overall values. (Mezirow 1991, Taylor 1998.)

Weldon (2010) describes how seeing burlesque live for the first time can pose a disorienting dilemma:

“The first time I saw stripteasers in their sixties and seventies receive huge applause at the Exotic World ranch, it changed my life. If there is one thing sexy women are not supposed to do, it's age, and if they age, they're supposed to disappear, or at least cover up appropriately.” (Weldon 2010, 224.)

Facing such a disorienting dilemma results in the next steps of self-examination and critical assessment of assumptions. This phase arouses undesirable and unpleasant emotions as one realizes that previous and comfortable approaches cannot solve the present problem. Overcoming the feelings of discomfort is aided by the recognition that others have also gone through a similar process and this facilitates the start of the next phase: exploration and designing a course of action, followed by acquisition of knowledge.

During this phase the feeling of unease is still present, but the prospect of having found a course of action and knowing that one is not alone in this situation moves the process along. Having completed the process and exploring the options so far, the individual will now start engaging in new behavior supported by the previous steps. This commences the final stage of the transformation process. At this point, the individual will concentrate on developing their new competences and building self-confidence.

The transformational process is complete once the individual fully incorporates these new attitudes and behaviors into their life and assumes as well as employs the new transformed perspective. Once the transformation process is complete, it's irreversible. Although transformations begin at an individual level, relationships and connection with others are essential in the process as it all eventually comes down to building community and developing connections. “Personal meanings that we attribute to our experience are acquired and validated through human interaction”. (Mezirow 1994, XIV.)



Figure 12. Mezirow's 10 phases of Transformative Learning (adapted from Mezirow 1991, Taylor 1998)

Having completed a successful transformation process the outcome will be a change in an individual's values, world view and beliefs through which their experiences and perceptions are understood. Ideally, this will result in a new perspective that is more inclusive, open as well as emotionally capable of change. (Mezirow 2000, 7.)

As a result of this new perspective and having gone through the stages of the transformation process, individuals realize how and why their assumptions constrain the way they perceive the world, as well as the importance of being open to personal change.

According to Clark (1991), the outcomes of transformation are threefold. The psychological transformation implies changing the way one understanding oneself, the convictional one meaning revising one's belief system, while behavioral transformation involves changes to one's lifestyle. (Clark 1991, 19-20.)

3.2.2 Guiders of transformation

The economic offering of a business when it comes to transformations is the change in the individual resulting from what the offering business does. With a company guiding a transformation, the offering will not be the products it uses, the experiences it stages or services it provides, but the individual. That makes the customer the product. (Pine & Gilmore 2011, 255.)

Understanding the individual customer's needs and aspirations is the basis of a successful transformation. When it comes to burlesque, an aspiring performer may not even completely understand how the journey to the stage will change them as an individual, so the best the transformation guiders can do is to provide them with the required information and skills necessary to achieve their goal and guide them along the way. So, the transformation elicitor's best bet is to bring about the right situation under which the change can occur, "setting the stage" for it, so to speak. There are many steps along the journey to the stage and burlesque teachers coaching people to perform will stage experiences that will trigger the transformation process.

One might ask *what changes one aspires towards upon taking up such a tremendous task as constructing an own number and taking to the stage?*

According to Weldon (2010) the magic of burlesque lies in the fact that it represents real value to the women who take part in it without doing harm to the ones who don't. Shedding the burden of society's expectations results in individuals who are no longer angry and hopeless about looksism being a method of evaluating their self worth and controlling every aspect of their lives. This brings joy to the performers, which is then inflicted on the audiences, and the people who enjoy the incredible changes they experience. (Weldon 2010, 228-230.)

The Finnish burlesque scene has come a long way since the first Helsinki Burlesque Festival in 2008 which put the country on the neo-burlesque map. Nowadays there are innumerable ways one can immerse him or herself in this artform, as well as a huge palette of experienced artists who can guide one through the transformation, given that the end goal is performing on stage or embracing the burlesque lifestyle. As transformations need elicitors who guide the aspirants towards realizing their goals, in the case of burlesque these can be the studios offering theme related classes, group or private coaching, as well as a wholesome package on this artform.

It is not unheard of that an artist has gone through the transformation process all by him or herself, but usually the help and wisdom of those who have done this longer is needed, especially closer to going on stage. The burlesque scene is lively and vibrant, offering a variety of ways one can develop one's skills and achieve one's goal of transformation. The ever-increasing demand for transformation guiders is met with an abundant offer.

Bigger cities like Tampere and Turku have their own burlesque studios, which offer either one-on-one or group coaching leading to the stage. Coaching offers a valuable toolset for newcomers, including classes on burlesque history, stage presence, facial expressions, body language, burlesque dance moves, constructing one's costume, stage make-up and hair. It might also happen that new performers find another way to the stage, but most will attend coaching sessions to acquire the necessary skills and get important feedback on their development.

The Shangri-La School of Showgirls

Finland's first actual burlesque school was established in 2013 by TurrboCherry and Tinker Bell, both big names in the burlesque scene. The school was born as an answer to the increased demand for burlesque in all its forms. In 2010 there was a performing group called the Itty-Bitty Tease Cabaret including Tinker Bell, TurrboCherry, Vera De Vil and two changing members, who had a little pink basement space as a rehearsal studio in Alppila. This is where the first ever burlesque course in Finland was held during the same year. That was the beginning of the burlesque school, but it didn't go by that name and it was unlike the burlesque teaching done nowadays at the Shangri-La School of Showgirls. The ones who participated and "graduated" received an Itty-Bitty Tease Cabaret diploma; this included many now big names in the Finnish burlesque scene. That's how the idea to establish an official burlesque school took roots. The road to success wasn't that easy, since at that time the burlesque scene was next to non-existent in this small country and it seemed like a very high-risk investment.

The idea didn't let the founders rest and in 2011 they moved to Lauttasaari into the same building Shangri-La School of Showgirl's is nowadays, which they rented together with a pole dancing studio and a few solo burlesque artists. In 2011 the Itty-Bitty Tease Cabaret remained with only 2 members, creating The Ravishing Shangri-La Rubies duo.

In 2013 with the first performing group the school was established, and it was such a success that during next year a new group had to be established, marking the birth of The Shangrilettes. At that point the founders understood that a bigger space was needed to host this operation and luckily found that there's a bigger space just upstairs from their present space. The summer of 2015 was spent refurbishing the studio space.

On the 26th of August 2015, The Shangri-La School of Showgirls was officially opened for business, offering a wide variety of classes built around burlesque, where participants can choose whether they want to do it as a hobby or take to the stage. (Bachér 28 April 2020.)

The studio presently offers a wide range of services from weekly burlesque dance classes (beginner, intermediate and advanced levels), has 2 performing groups, holds workshops and coaching sessions for aspiring performers, intensive courses, as well as bachelorette parties. It's left to the customer to decide how much they want to immerse themselves into this world. (Studio Shangri-La 2015.)

4 Research methodology

The research methodology depends on the nature of the research question asked. If one wants to measure quantity and answer quantity questions, quantitative research is used as a method. The less one knows about a phenomenon, the more likely it is that qualitative research is the method that will provide us with understanding and a richly detailed picture of said phenomenon. (Kananen 2011, 35-36.)

Not much research has been done analysing burlesque as an experience and its effect on the audience. In order to explore how seeing burlesque live for the first time might be perceived as an experience or respectively a trigger for transformation, the use of qualitative research proves to be the best choice, because it provides us with the desired data.

4.1 Qualitative research

The aim of qualitative research is to cast a light on something new, explore a phenomenon that has not been explored before. In doing so, researchers put emphasis on understanding specific situations and individuals, not so much on finding averages. Research questions focus on understanding concepts that define how people experience and understand their world. (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 2-5.)

Qualitative research is ideally used when the need of understanding a new phenomenon arises, dwelling deep into what this new phenomenon is all about. It is called the “Mother” of all researches due to it answering the “what” questions, only after which qualitative research can be applied. Typically, this type of research starts from defining the research problem, followed by posing the research questions, and is ideally concluded by finding the answers to these questions using the research material. The research flow can be divided into sections of planning, data collection, analysis and interpretation. (Kananen 2011, 36-37.)

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) qualitative research is built up of a set of interpretive practices by a participating role of the observer, making the world visible. In this case the world is studied in its “natural settings”, and the attempt is to “make sense of it” as well as interpret the world through the meaning people bring to it. They also point out the two common research styles in qualitative research, which include capturing the individual’s point of view and acceptance of postmodern sensibilities. When trying to capture the individual’s perspective, qualitative investigators use detailed interviews and observation to try to get a closer glimpse of how the individual perceives the world. This technique is a widely used

one, but the authors argue whether researchers would actually be able to capture their actor's perspective. Accepting postmodern sensibilities requires the use of alternative methods including emotionality, personal responsibility and dialogues with subjects. (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, 10.)

According to Rubin & Rubin (2012) a high-quality research makes a complex reality understandable to a reader while trying not to oversimplify it. A good research provides nuanced portraits of cultures or events, reflecting the interviewee's accurate world views. (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 60.)

4.2 Case study

Case study is a form of qualitative descriptive research that intensely studies the individual, a small group, or phenomenon, drawing conclusions about that participant or group within that specific context. The focus of the researchers is on the exploration and description of said individual or group in that particular context rather than on the cause-effect relationships or generalizable truth. (The writing studio, Case studies, 2020)

Case studies focus on exploring the said phenomenon thoroughly and in detail, providing an abundance of information on the not yet well-known case. As it focuses on getting the best possible in-depth picture of a certain phenomenon, it can be a great base for further development research. (Ojasalo et. al 2009, 52.)

As a form as research, case study holds the advantage of blurring the boundaries between the individual/phenomenon and the context within which it's being studied. This form of research is relevant when wishing to gain rich understanding of the context of the research as well as the process being enacted, providing answers to questions like "why?", "how?" and "what?", hence case study is used in explanatory and exploratory research. (Saunders et. al 2012, 179.)

The six data collection methods for case studies are: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and artifacts. The researcher may use any of these methods, or any combination of them depending on their approach for the case study. The use of several sources of information is preferred, providing much more reliable and accurate results. (The writing studio, Case studies, 2020)

The base of a good case study is studying the literature on the subject, which at the same time also divulges research methods already used in exploring said phenomenon, helping

the researcher narrow down and polish their own research problem. Typically, the research question lives on and develops during the construction of the theoretical framework, so re-designing it and chiseling it as one goes along with the research process is quite common and desirable. (Ojasalo et. al 2009, 54).

4.3 Theme interview and observation as data collection methods

In order to find the answer for how burlesque works as a transformative experience conducting thematic in-depth interviews seemed to be the right decision. Using this technique, the interviewer asks a set of indirect questions, revealing the answer slowly, but getting more in-depth information by approaching the phenomenon from different angles.

Such interviews are conducted by diving into understanding the phenomenon thoroughly step-by-step. In the beginning, the theme starts to open up to the interviewer, possibly generating new/follow-up questions. In this scenario leaving room for interaction and reflection is crucial, dictated by the logic of questions slowly proceeding from general to specific. (Kananen 2011, 52-55.)

By using this method, the researcher can obtain data on the process of the phenomena of their interest. Categorized as “qualitative” or “narrative” research, the focus is pointed toward either the internal or external world of the individual, sometimes both, by reading the culture from individual experiences and thus understanding how it shapes the individual. The investigation will focus on how people make sense of an event or experience, trying to understand the individual holistically, as an experiencing and meaning-making person. The purpose of this research method is to understand people, their behaviours and perceptions more deeply and exclusively.

Subjectivity is key when applying narrative research, demanding that the interviewer knows how to disclose multi-layered individual meanings. Also responding to the name of “depth interviewing”, upon applying narrative research, the interviewer aims for a rich and nuanced sample of subjectivity divulging how the individual experienced a certain phenomenon. Further along the process, the interviewer will look for patterns and themes in an effort to shed light on the initial research question.

The interviewer holds a key role when it comes to how much the interviewee will divulge, all based on their feeling of being listened to and heard. There are multiple advantages of using this technique. When done right, the result can be a truly rich and comprehensive

sample of how the individual experienced a phenomenon, also including the themes and patterns mentioned above. (Josselson 2013, vii-viii.)

Qualitative interviewing is one of the key naturalistic research methods, where researchers can extend their emotional reach across multiple barriers, being able to reconstruct events they've never experienced. With this method and finding similar patterns in the collected descriptions, portraits of complicated processes can be created. Questions are organized in advance in a linked manner so as to obtain the information necessary to build a whole picture, the interviewer guiding the conversation and making sure in-depth information is obtained. (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 3-6.)

Josselson (2013) further underlines that the focus of narrative research is subjectivity. The purpose of studying other people lies in the urge to understand, not to measure or classify them. The aim is to achieve a deeper, more extensive understanding of people's experiences of a certain aspect of their lives. (Josselson 2013, viii.)

Given that human experience is complex and layered, it's important for the interviewer to understand that space needs to be given to divulge the stories behind the experiences of the stories the interviewees tell. Narrative research is designed to explore this complexity, aiming at discovering the linkages of the stories constructing the life and identity of the interviewee. (Josselson 2013, 9-10.)

According to Rubin & Rubin (2012), when designing a study to assure quality, a few steps have to be taken:

- In order to keep the results real and fresh, interviewees must be chosen on the base of having first-hand experience on the subject, their answers becoming evidence for the interviewer's conclusions.
- Balance must be assured by choosing interviewees with complementary experiences, as well as ones with different points of view.
- Thoroughness must be demonstrated by filling in the gaps with missing information, seeking contrary data and exploring alternative explanations.
- Credibility must be assured by choosing interviewees with deep knowledge of the subject, while building different checks for consistency and candour into the interview. To do this, the interviewer can ask for detailed examples of for every theme.
- To ensure accuracy interviews must be recorded and transcribed, ideally consulting with the interviewee afterwards to add anything the interviewee might have omitted or forgotten during the interview.

- Richness and nuance are obtained by examining themes and examples in detail, while exploring alternative perspectives and possible interpretations.

Using qualitative interviewing as a tool to collect data represents a fresh study due to the fact that it doesn't imitate what has already been studied, but provides a window for exploring new issues or shines a new light on issues that have been previously covered. It facilitates giving voice to those who have experience and in-depth knowledge on a certain subject, hence portraying real people, events and experiences. (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 60-70.)

Observation is a suitable data collection method if there is little information available on the phenomenon. The positive traits of this method include being able to observe this phenomenon in the authenticity of the situation. The more familiar the phenomenon is to the researcher, the faster the data collection will be. (Kananen 2011, 48-51.)

This method of data collection enables the researcher to find out how people behave and what happens in their natural environment. Observation is rarely used as the only data gathering method in a research, it is usually paired with interviews or questionnaires, backing up the data collected with these. As such, it can be used to complete interviews or use interviews to complete the data gathered through observation. Using said method also enables the researcher to observe events in their natural habitat, and through this give a real image of whether people truly behave the way they said they do. (Ojasalo et. al 2009, 103-104.)

Indirect structured observation as a data collection method was used when I observed 3 consecutive burlesque shows all produced by Rubies Club, focusing on how the experience was designed and constructed. As an active burlesque event goer, I was familiar with the structure of these shows, but never really paid attention to the patterns used. Observing these events provided me with an insight on the challenges involved in putting together such a complex entity and compelling experience.

4.4 Conducting the interviews

Semi-structured theme interviews were conducted to collect the data, as well as observation of a number of live shows to determine the construction of the experiences. Seeing that not much research has been done analysing burlesque shows as experiences or triggers for transformation, I figured interviewing active members of the community who have gone through the transformation process would provide me with a rich description of how this process happens, shedding light on the turning points.

The objective of the research is to first identify if a burlesque show is an experience or a trigger for transformation, furthermore, to determine the components of the experience that resonate with the viewer, becoming turning points on the way to becoming a performer. Since Finland is a country of a small population, the circles are very small and once one steps foot onto the burlesque scene, they quickly become familiar with the performers and show attendees.

Using interviews to obtain data means that those conducting the interviews have to carefully and wisely choose their interviewees in order to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data collected. Ideally, they obtain their knowledge first-hand from people who live and breathe the certain situation, making them the perfect source for a candid and real portrayal of the given phenomenon. (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, 60.)

The people interviewed for this research were chosen based on their devotion to the art-form, meaning that they would provide detailed and nuanced information based on their background, knowledge and experience in the burlesque field, thus representing the Finnish burlesque enthusiast and performer beautifully. Honouring the diversity burlesque builds on, I chose the interviewees representing the colourful nation that builds up this community as I considered it important to hear the stories of performers with different backgrounds, difference in years of experience and motives for performing. I conducted seven interviews and the proposed 30-40 minutes per interview was mostly too little time since we've come to a consensus with most on them that this topic could be discussed for hours on end.

The artists I've chosen to interview are ones I've met beforehand at shows, burlesque classes or we've shared the same stage. Setting up the interviews was relatively easy, as we've shared common moments in the past. The initial plan was to conduct these interviews face-to-face but given the COVID-19 situation and people being in lockdown, all interviews but one had to be conducted on Skype or Zoom. One interview was conducted in person respecting social distancing rules, naturally.

Some of the interviewees are also entrepreneurs in the burlesque field where contrary to common belief, the workload has not become lighter, on the contrary! They are now being forced to come up with new ways of keeping their businesses alive. The blessing in this curse was that these artists do most of this from home or their studios, so setting up the interviews was easier than in a normal situation where the logistics and practicalities would have made my life much more difficult.

The palette of interviewees ranges from artists who have performed only once to those who've managed to make a living out of it or have actually been a part of establishing the burlesque scene in Finland. This way I wanted to ensure that all angles and perspectives were explored, and we'd get a rich and detailed portrayal of the phenomenon.

When conducting interviews, the aim is to explore the wholeness of the person in relation to an aspect of his or her experience, in this case determined by the research question (Josselson 2013, 35). Upon planning the interview structure and questions I tried to outline the direction of the themes I would guide the conversation into as bounded by the research question but was open for interviewees expressing themselves the way they needed to.

Table 1. below gives an overview of the artist's place of residence, age group, years of being involved in the burlesque scene as a performer, as well as the date, length and channel used for conducting the interview.

Table 1. Conducted interviews

Performers and their place of residence	Age group / Years of burlesque experience	Date and channel of the interview	Length of the interview
Performer A	35-44 / 12 years	27.04 Zoom	00:41:11
Performer B	45-54 / 1 year	27.04 Skype	00:40:12
Performer C	35-44 / 10 years	29.04 Zoom	00:45:37
Performer D	35-44 / 12 years	28.04 Zoom	00:26:45
Performer E	25-34 / 4 years	29.04 Zoom	00:35:19
Performer F	25-34 / 2 years	30.04 Helsinki	00:33:11
Performer G	45-54 / 15 years	13.05 Zoom	01:32:02

I've sent the interviewees the interview request via e-mail. This was informative, it included information about my studies, a description of the thesis theme, the aim of the research and things I'm interested in hearing about, but I didn't divulge the precise themes or questions beforehand wanting to obtain sincere and nuanced answers. I vaguely informed them also about the length of the interviews and why I've chosen them as possible interviewees.

The interviews were conducted between 27 April – 14 May in Finnish, given that all these artists are domestic, Finnish felt like the more natural and comfortable choice. These recorded interviews were later transcribed for analysing. Transcription was done word to word, so as not to miss any details, also, since I wanted to make sure I remembered what I heard correctly, I strived to transcribe them on the same day.

In addition to the interviews I wanted to obtain a more detailed picture of how burlesque shows I usually attend are constructed, for this I used observation. This part of data gathering was conducted at three club shows produced by Rubies Klubit, all of through structured and indirect observation. Since I was familiar with the normal setup of their events, I knew what I had to observe, focusing on how the experience was designed and constructed. The shows I observed were Haamuklubi 01.11.2019, Under the Mistle Tease 14.12.2019 and Samettiklubi on 21.03.2020. I kept a research journal with notes of all the events, which along with the portrayal of my friend's first live burlesque experience helped me create the Experience Journey map in Figures 3 through 6. To complete the data gathered by using observation, I also interviewed one of the producers of the shows on how these events are constructed to yield wholesome and compelling experiences.

After having done the observations and transcribing the interview data, it was time for analysing. The raw data started to shape into the answer to the research question.

From all the six methods of analysing qualitative data described by Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2015): counting, graduation, thematizing, typologizing of contacts, observing the course of development and use of metaphors, it felt like thematizing would best fit this research. When using this method for analysis, the researcher seeks for similar features that arose from the data in several interviews. This also gives way to new interesting themes, as well as new angles arising in addition to the possibly thematized interview questions. It is up to the researcher interpretation to code these themes into the same category, as it's highly unusual that the interviewees would have used the same expressions in their answers. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2015, 173-180.)

According to Rubin & Rubin (2012) themes constitute a summary of causal explanations, statements or conclusions. They show the relationship between two or several concepts as well as explain why a certain thing happened, what it means or how the interviewee perceives the matter at hand. Upon looking for themes in transcribed interviews one should look out for statements containing "because", "therefore" and "that is why", or sentences that can be transcribed in that format, providing one with a theme. Examining the interviews with the goal of finding causes for the behaviour or events studied by the researcher can

also be translated into a theme addressing why people follow a similar pattern and why things happen in that particular way. (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 194.)

4.5 Reliability and validity

The concepts of reliability and validity were developed in natural sciences, hence its difficulty to apply in qualitative research, or social sciences in general. Here the object of the research is the individual or a group of them, humans knowingly not always acting in a systematic or rational way.

Reliability reflects the “consistency” and “repeatability” of one’s measures and the generalisability of one’s findings, describing it as: consistency or stability of a measure and a consideration of whether, if the measure is repeated, one would obtain the same result. (Koshy 2005, 106.)

When collecting data for qualitative research one needs to consider that the conclusions are based on the accuracy of what is collected and used as evidence. Interpretation of the same data is also subjective, affecting the validity of the data presented, so that needs to be taken into consideration as well. Reliability means that similar results should be able to be reproduced under a similar methodology by another researcher. I tried to ensure this by testing the interview questions for possibilities of misinterpretation before putting them to use. I think if another interviewer would have the background information and theoretical background, the interviews would yield similar results.

Validity reflects the internal consistency of one’s research and ways of establishing it include finding ‘various means of confirmation, such as arranging for a colleague to observe as well, arranging for audio or video recordings, and asking other participants for their versions. Triangulation, the process of obtaining several (normally three) points of view of one actor in a specific situation against other actors in the same situation is a perfect tool for establishing validity. (Koshy 2005, 105-106.)

The four criteria demonstrating the soundness of qualitative research according to Kananen (2011) are: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

- *Credibility* – from this perspective the purpose of the research is to describe the phenomena of interest from the participant’s eyes, them being the ones who can judge the credibility of the results.

- *Transferability* – is the degree to which the research results can be generalized and transferred to other contexts.
- *Dependability* – based on how replicable and repeatable the results of our research are and whether one would obtain the same results by observing the same thing twice.
- *Confirmability* – refers to the degree to which others could confirm the research results. (Kananen 2011, 68.)

The criteria for reliability and validity in qualitative research are assessability/ documentation; consistency of interpretation; reliability from the informant's point of view and saturation. (Kananen 2011, 69.)

In the case of qualitative research, circumstances are usually complex and dynamic, therefore any attempt to ensure the replicability of this research is not realistic. When discussing reliability and validity, accuracy and credibility have to also be taken into consideration. According to Rubin & Rubin (2012) qualitative interviewing produces results of high credibility, meaning that the conclusions are linked to solid evidence and are embedded in a context. Credibility as such has to be embedded into the research design and methods of analysis have to be reported.

Accuracy can be assured by the interviewer transcribing the interviews carefully and accurately, as well as by taking notes during the process. Ideally, the transcript is then reviewed together with the interviewee to assure all information gaps are filled. Ensuring this aspect is met involves creating the explanation and description of the research setting in such clarity that the interviewees can recognize themselves from the final piece. (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 64-65.) This aspect was ensured by transcribing the interviews word-to-word on the same day the interview took place. It resulted in a rich and nuanced text.

Demonstrating that one has talked to people who are knowledgeable about one's research question proves credibility in qualitative interviewing. Assuring that the interviewees will provide first-hand experience for the research is the interviewer's responsibility, otherwise the credibility of the research is compromised. This involves previous research on one's interviewees and their knowledge on the subject. However tempting it might be to burden the interviewee with the responsibility for a credible research outcome, it's the interviewer's responsibility to check facts and enrich their knowledge on the subject, so as to be able to check whether they are being told the truth and given all the details and nuances needed for the completion of the research. (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 67.)

In order to ensure high quality research outcomes adhering to the terms of the soundness of qualitative research, I have cherry-picked some of the pioneers of burlesque in the country, as well as people who have moderate to very little experience in performing on said stage. I picked the pioneers due to their knowledgeable and first-hand experience of attending and producing shows, as well as performing. It struck me as a surprise however, how much the newcomers also knew about the scene and history of this artform, which means that they've immersed themselves into this world. I also wanted to assure there was a balance in enthusiasm as well as subjectivity-objectivity towards the genre, meaning that those who have made a living out of performing and teaching burlesque might see it more as work and not necessarily remember why they went down this road in the first place. This theory was also proved wrong by the research results.

5 Transformation considerations of performers and their journey to the stage

Although burlesque as a concept has been around for centuries, due to its marginal and underground artform status not much research has been done from the perspective of it being an economic offering. Seeing that neo-burlesque has made its comeback and is pulling in more crowds than ever, I considered it important to examine what are the components building up such a compelling experience and if shows are consciously constructed in a way to trigger a transformation, or is it just the powerful nature of the artform that resonates with the audience and puts some of its members on the path to performing on stage?

According to the research aim and objective described in subchapter 1.1, these consist of exploring the fine line between a burlesque performance being an exquisitely designed and tailored experience and a trigger for transformation. The transformation theory here is supported by depicting the aspirant's journey from getting in touch with burlesque first, to them taking on the stage as a performer. This also includes the turning points having led the audience member to using this platform to express themselves artistically.

This chapter will present the considerations and musings of seven performers having attended many burlesque shows and gone through the transformation process themselves, some having performed a few times, some holding an astonishing 15 years of experience in the field. This will give us a good insight on how times and requirements for burlesque performers have changed throughout the years.

The themes that rose from the interviews divide this chapter into 5.1 describing how interviewees see burlesque experiences and underline why people are drawn to this artform. 5.2 will depict the aspirants' journey to the stage with 5.2.1. displaying the impressions left by the first live show, followed by the motives urging them to begin their journey towards performing in 5.2.2., the experience of their first performance described in 5.2.3, concluded by the post-performance feelings in 5.2.4. The transformational outcomes of the journey as well as the traits acquired will then be discussed in 5.3.

The tables embedded in the chapters will display the interview results with subjects/themes that have been mentioned by at least two of the interviewees.

5.1 The experience characteristics of a burlesque show

As described and demonstrated by Figure 2 in chapter 3.1, experiences are most compelling when the four dimensions of entertainment, esthetic, educational and escapist are blended into a “sweet spot”. Given that experiences are inherently personal, this differs from spectator to spectator. Personalising an experience of this scale is borderline impossible, but the burlesque show producers mentioned earlier in this work have succeeded in tackling this issue by developing a “mixture” that has a little something for everyone.

Table 2. Results for burlesque as an experience, the characteristics

Burlesque as an experience	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
★ Strong sense of community	★		★		★	★	★
△ Empowering			△		△	△	
◆ Escapist/Liberating		◆	◆	◆	◆		
○ Diverse	○	○			○		○
■ Wholesome	■	■	■	■	■	■	
▽ Immersive/Carnivalistic		▽	▽		▽	▽	

Upon asking the interviewees how they see burlesque shows as experiences and why they think people attend them, the answers providing the themes displayed in Table 2 above were quite unanimous. The biggest consensus was that it is a wholesome experience, and many praised the strong sense of community in both the audience and among performers alike:

There’s the general burlesque fan (can also be called a hardcore fan) who attends every single show, the reason being the infatuation with the artforms, as well as the strong sense of community. (Performer A)

As producers of burlesque events we wanted people to understand that there is no pressure, and everyone is welcome to join as they are. There is a sense of community and tolerance in these shows. (Performer G)

Some of the interviewees express the sense of community by describing how much more approachable and friendly they feel the fellow audience members are at burlesque shows than other cultural events:

The sense of comfort and community is amazing. It's also much easier to strike up a conversation with people you didn't know beforehand, because burlesque folks are usually all passionate about it and will engage in conversation much easier than for example theatre goers. (Performer C)

...also, it has a very nice way of annihilating boundaries between people, because of the very cosy family feel you have at these shows. As far as I experienced burlesque audiences are made up of very open-minded people, who are also very friendly. There's an unspoken agreement that everyone accepts and respects everyone. (Performer F)

Experiencing a sense of empowerment rises as a strong second theme, which is also a main trait and aim of burlesque, described in chapter 2.1. Watching people overcome their fears and breaking the boundaries and norms society has shackled them to is as empowering to the performer as it is to the audience:

It's all about empowerment. When you see someone being empowered on stage, it empowers you in the audience. It's an experience you don't really get anywhere else. It's a very strong feeling. (Performer E)

Burlesque also breaks some of society's rules, most importantly the concept of what a body should look like to be able to go on stage. There we can see all sorts of bodies and this empowerment is one of this artform's most powerful statements. (Performer C)

It was amazing to see women of different shapes and sizes embrace their bodies and bravely show them off to the world (even if they had body issues otherwise, you couldn't tell on stage) under their own conditions, not for the male gaze. (Performer B)

I remember being very puzzled about the first purely neo-burlesque number, it was so fascinating and entertaining! I remember the energy well, I felt very empowered just sitting there in the audience taking it all in. (Performer F)

The characteristic of empowerment explored from the performer's perspective underlines the unapologetic nature as well as the freedom and power of self-expression:

I'm inclined to please people and in a way performing burlesque has helped me gather the strength to say "I'm doing my thing on stage whether you like it or not, I display myself to the world and lay myself open to critique", because this act is something personal I've created. (Performer F)

Burlesque gave me a platform to explore my femininity and sexuality freely, I got to be the woman who is her true self, strong, empowered, sometimes also scary, but still feminine. (Performer G)

Normalizing bodies of all shapes and sizes wasn't always (and still isn't in many places) a given, so when we first saw that on stage it left a very big impression. The freedom of being able to do whatever on stage and seeing all the crazy stuff go on was also very empowering. (Performer A)

Analysing the interviews, it became obvious, that for these viewers, out of the 4 experience realms the escapist realm described in chapter 3.1 was a very powerful one. Most interviewees also mention the other realms: esthetic, educational and entertainment as very important and present ones in building up the compelling experience. Performers B, C, D and E have identified the reason for people attending burlesque shows being its escapist and liberating capacity and power of propelling the viewer into an entirely new world, one separate from their everyday lives:

...escapism might be another reason, it's like stepping into an entirely new world when arriving to such an evening, it's something different than one's everyday... (Performer C)

...it was more like escapism for me, because it was so new and exciting and it combined so many of the things I'm interested in, even though I had no intention of performing back then, the visual aspect of it was captivating. (Performer D)

...it's very artistic, propelling the viewer into another world. (Performer E)

Going to a show is like stepping out of the ordinary for a while, with music, dance, esthetics, craziness and characters. It's out of the ordinary, but it's a beautiful and such an encouraging environment! (Performer B)

The diversity of performers and acts at burlesque shows as discussed in chapter 2 is essential in honouring the aim of burlesque as a form of entertainment. It has always been one to question the norms and provide the audience with alternative perspectives on things considered normal. Displaying diversity on stage performs the important task of creating a

safe space for both performers and audience members alike to embrace and celebrate who they are as well as try out new roles:

The burlesque audience is very colourful. ...the freedom- in being able to be who you are at these events and also seeing whatever you can imagine on stage, the diversity on stage can also be very liberating for a lot of viewers. (Performer A)

I was amazed by how I saw things I never expected on stage and the fact that women who are not the basic barbie type can perform and it doesn't have to be dancing around seductively, but an act can be infused with humour, or a storyline.

I love how also the audience has an output for their diversity and creativity and you're accepted regardless of your looks. (Performer B)

Diversity and seeing bodies of different sizes and age taking over the stage is important, because burlesque has always been an artform challenging the norms of society. (Performer G)

As described in chapter 3, blending the realms of experience and creating functional "sweet spot" requires that the event is constructed by balancing out all aspects. Failure to do this may result in disparity of acts and may compromise the success of the experience entity:

...not a lot of classical burlesque was displayed that night. Most of the background info I had on burlesque was about the classical "version". I did know about neo-burlesque before, but this first night was a bit too much for me. (Performer E)

A lack of diversity in acts and performers can also strip some audience members of full enjoyment of the show or strip this artform of its fundamental aim not to adhere to society's expectations:

In southern European countries the scene had shrunk due to male producers taking over, parading numbers and artist that fit look criteria, ignoring what a true burlesque audience wants to see. Diversity and seeing bodies of different sizes and age taking over the stage is important, because burlesque has always been an artform challenging the norms of society. (Performer G)

Wholesomeness was a very clear theme when describing burlesque as an experience. Especially seasoned burlesque shows goers have certain expectations and demands of the experience built for them and want to experience the "whole package". Based on the answers, this means that most burlesque events the interviewees have seen have been

well designed ones encompassing elements that go beyond the mere display of performances on stage, engaging a variety of senses:

When it comes to wholesome experiences, I think burlesque evenings offer a more wholesome experience than for example theatre, opera or ballet, because people make a bigger effort and invest into dressing up for the occasion, some even make their own outfits and know that they can show them off in a safe space. There's also more to a burlesque evening than just the show, there's usually a photo booth, flea market, vendor stands and all kinds of raffles. (Performer C)

The audience has certain expectations on what they want to get out of a show night, a specific "feeling package". In addition to the show they also want to experience the community and other things, they come for the whole experience. (Performer A)

I think the most fascinating thing about a burlesque show is how wholesome it is. It's like entering a whole new world. It engages all the senses. (Performer F)

Burlesque is also seen as a deeply immersive experience through its spectacular and carnivalistic elements. These characteristics are interconnected with the escapist aspect and deepen the experience into an actively engaging one for the audience:

...as an experience it has these carnivalistic elements and you immerse yourself in this world by morphing into someone else for a while by putting on a costume or just "too much" make-up. (Performer C)

I think people also very much appreciate the artistic aspect of it all. There is no artform in my opinion that reaches the same level of spectacularity. (performer E)

I don't feel like any other artform manages to engage me on this many levels and I believe it is due to it being such a wonderfully immersive artform. (Performer F)

5.2 The journey to the stage

As any experience journey, this can also be mapped out by identifying the touchpoints and turning points that push the development of the events further. The experience journey of an audience member was depicted in subchapter 3.1.2. taking us through the emotional journey of the audience member seeing burlesque live for the first time. There are clear turning points along the way that are common for all the interviewees, and seeing burlesque live for the first time was what directly or indirectly triggered them to immerse themselves in this world and start their journey to the stage. Some had earlier knowledge on the subject

and knew what they were going to see, some were surprised, overwhelmed even. Here we can also notice a significant distinction between performers who were exposed to this art-form at the time when the scene was introduced to the country and the ones who've "jumped on the burlesque wagon" later.

5.2.1 Impressions of the first burlesque show

Based on the results of the interviews, there was a difference in the effect the first burlesque show had on the viewer depending the amount of research made on the subject and conscious decision to go see burlesque.

Table 3. The results for the impression on the first burlesque show

The first live encounter	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
★ Conscious decision of wanting to see burlesque	★		★	★		★	★
△ First time was the charm	△	△	△	△		△	△
◆ Viewer left with an instant urge to go on stage	◆	◆		◆			◆
▽ Feeling of "coming home"/belonging	▽	▽	▽			▽	▽
■ Experienced a powerful absorptive impression	■	■				■	

There is no real correlation between having made a conscious decision to go see their first show, as interviewees A, C, D, F & G did and the effect the first show had or length of the journey to the stage. While performer B "accidentally" ended up at a burlesque event, performer F saw only a few numbers incorporated into the entertainment program of a tattoo convention, not a whole show.

...we found ourselves in the audience of a burlesque show and I was blown away on the spot. I was amazed by how I saw things I never expected on stage and the fact that women who are not the basic barbie type can perform and it doesn't have to be dancing around seductively. (Performer B)

The first time I've seen burlesque live wasn't really a show, but a succession of a few performances at a tattoo convention. I remember the excitement when they announced the burlesque performances. (Performer F)

As described in chapter 2, the burlesque wave hit Finland and put it on the map in 2008 with the organizing of the first Helsinki Burlesque Festival, which meant that people who had to travel abroad to see burlesque now had an opportunity to see and experience it live on the domestic scene. Such was the case with performers A, C, D and G, they were already very well informed on the subject of burlesque and consciously sought out opportunities to see it performed live:

The first factual encounter was 2008 during the first HBF, as was for many other people who are now established burlesque artists. It was the first time I've seen burlesque live and it made a big impression. I knew about burlesque beforehand, but access to video and even photo material was very limited... (Performer A)

My first burlesque show was amazing, I was so bedazzled. The event was called "Afternoon Tease" and the venue was very nice and atmospheric, it was an afternoon show and we were drinking tea and sparkling wine and the stage was very close to the audience. It wasn't a big event, but that meant the experience was all the more intense and felt more intimate and personal. It was nice to have that as a first experience. It was such an amazing experience. (Performer D)

I had an artistic crisis back then feeling trapped in an artistic box, so I started filming video performances before I learned about burlesque, but when I stumbled upon it, I was intrigued and wanted to know more. I saw my first show in 2004 when we travelled to NY to see burlesque. Upon seeing burlesque for the first time I knew this would be the platform that will allow me to break out of the 2D world. (Performer G)

Except for performer E the first shows already made their mark on the performers, describing feelings of coming home, artistic accomplishment and intrigue, this refers to the results displayed in Table 3 as "First time was the charm".

That night left me in confusion, because there were a lot of "weird" acts, not a lot of classical burlesque was displayed that night. I did know about neo-burlesque before, but this first night was a bit too much for me. (Performer E)

Having enjoyed the experience of the first live show doesn't necessarily mean all performers knew that they wanted to step on stage someday. In the case of performers A, B, D and G the urge was instant, with others it took a few more shows to get there:

So, the first real contact was when I saw it live at the festival, as was for so many others, who are now “seasoned artists” said that “Yes, this is IT!” (Performer A)

Seeing burlesque for the first time marked the end of my artistic crisis and made me understand that I found a channel to merge my artistic “selves” in. I see it as my artistic salvation. (Performer G)

After seeing the first show I wasn't sure I wanted to ever perform, I did however feel a strong connection to it and was quite impressed. (Performer C)

It wasn't love at first sight for me, in the sense that the thought of performing hasn't even crossed my mind back then. With the little background information, I had on the genre I was quite “lucky”, because the first acts I saw were mostly neo-burlesque ones heavy with classical elements. I think it was important to “ease me into” it. I remember being very puzzled about the first purely neo-burlesque number, it was so fascinating and entertaining! (Performer F)

I didn't know much about burlesque before this, I always thought it was more like a type of dance, that's why everything took me by surprise at this show and left such a deep mark. That was my cue, I knew I had to get on stage and that this would be my thing! (Performer B)

The feelings of belonging and “coming home” also present prominent themes arising from the interviews. Performers tell about their first encounter with burlesque like life changing experiences in the sense that they've never felt as free to express themselves before, nor has any other artform given them the platform to accomplish themselves and develop skills and creativity the way burlesque does. Performing and putting acts together requires a lot of skill and creativity, that's why for people who have these traits seeing burlesque live for the first time and realizing that they can incorporate their skills into one artform might be perceived as “coming home”:

It really felt like coming home, I can express myself and create. (Performer B)

...I also feel that as a very creative person I couldn't have channelled all my creativity this constructively anywhere else. Which sometimes is a problem since I turn all my hobbies into work, then again, I really love what I do, so it really isn't a problem after all. (Performer D)

Having found an artform that encompasses everything I love felt like coming home, I instantly knew that I will enjoy constructing costumes and acts, even though I didn't know much about it back then. (Performer A)

There are just so many levels and such a wide variety of factors one can be hooked on and be engaged that one can evolve a lot with burlesque. (Performer C)

This also touches on the subject of transformation described in chapter 3.2 and the fact that a transformational process will not start unless the aspirant is ready to take on the journey. The presence of a disorienting dilemma is also desirable to commence the transformation process:

I think finding burlesque when I did, saved my identity as an artist and as a person. Having come across an artform that can include all I am artistically and personally felt like coming home. That's why most performers start performing as well. Being able to express yourself and put things you've been juggling in different hands in different spaces into an "artistic package" feels very unburdening. (Performer G)

I've had a very powerful psychic battle going on these past few years, because I had big plans of getting ahead career-wise as an event producer. I was thinking that I'd lose my professional credibility if I started performing burlesque and displayed my sexuality in this manner. I had to sit myself down and have serious a conversation about my values and visions. (Performer E)

According to the interview results, seeing burlesque live for the first time can be considered a trigger for transformation into a performer, and thus gaining new personality traits. Elaborated in chapter 3.2, a transformation takes place where one can engage with the unknown and unfamiliar people, places and their activities. Even though most interviewees had previous knowledge about burlesque, seeing it performed live was the first real touchpoint, setting the transformation process into motion. Encounters like these develop a sense of distance from normality and feeling of uneasiness. If the encounter with this "otherness" is well-designed, appropriate and the person is ready to begin the transformation process, it might trigger the transformational process.

5.2.2 Motives forming the desire to perform

As discussed in the previous subchapter and supported by the theoretical framework in chapter 3.2 transformations are made up of experiences and these two can therefore not be separated. Mirroring what resonated with the viewers most while watching burlesque

performed live, the interviews shine a light on what triggered these performers to take on the stage. Some of them acted upon finding one aspect they were captivated by that resonated with them, some experienced a much deeper connection, have respectively experienced artistic salvation through having found this artform. However diverse the motives behind wanting to perform might be, there's one common trait: each performer wants to share something very valuable and personal with the audience, be that skills learned and polished through hours of practice showcased in a beautiful choreography, a political message underlining climate crisis or a comedy number designed to entertain to the maximum.

What I noticed while analysing the results of the interviews was that the performers who have entered the burlesque scene later had much stronger ideas and motives before considering stepping on stage. This might also be caused by the fact that when burlesque started sweeping the Finnish nation 12 years ago, the demand was so high for new performances that the ones involved had to come up with ideas for new acts very quick. This may have left performers who started their journey back then with less time to muse on what their motives are.

Table 4. Results for motives behind performing

Motives for performing/trigger for transformation	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
★ Creating art	★			★			★
△ Combining skills	△	△	△	△	△	△	△
◆ Self-expression		◆	◆	◆		◆	◆
▽ (Personal) empowerment		▽	▽			▽	▽
■ Breaking the norms of society and exploring own femininity/sexuality	■	■	■		■		■
○ Sharing an important message		○				○	○

The motive of creating art came from performers A, D and G, all of them already being players in the arts field prior to this and having managed to build a career and a life around burlesque:

I believe that all roads lead to me doing burlesque for a living, if I wasn't doing this, I would be doing some other form of performance art. (Performer A)

This is the artform that can include all I am artistically and personally. (Performer G)

I think people also very much appreciate the artistic aspect of it all. There is no artform in my opinion that reaches the same level of spectacularity. (Performer E)

Combining skills and being able to put them all to use was a theme that arose in every interview. This is also in line with the psychology of an optimal experience described in subchapter 3.1.3 and proves that while constructing an act and all the accessories for it might be considered an exotelic experience with the focus on the finished product, it actually is largely autotelic, given that performers enjoy the process, challenges and development that come with the project, as well as the flow of creativity:

I've been sewing clothes and designing costumes since I was a child, I love doing choreographies, I love music, dancing, doing make-up and hair, styling and here I can combine my love for them all, with a dash of craziness, of course! (Performer B)

I enjoy the creative process of putting an act together. It's so complex, but so rewarding once you start seeing it come together. You really need to push yourself to come up with creative solutions, which means a constant demand for development of skills. I had no idea how to construct an outfit that would be optimally strippable, but I've learned to create one through a succession of trial and error. (Performer F)

I was always interested in striptease, but not enough to go down that path, that's when burlesque came into the picture and opened all those doors for me. I was also always interested in costuming. All the things I loved doing was suddenly wrapped in one package. As a very creative person I feel like I couldn't have channelled all my creativity this constructively anywhere else. (Performer D)

Being able to put one's skills to use, constantly develop them, thus overcoming challenges is perceived by performers as a hectic yet satisfying process, given that they enjoy taming the initial chaos in their heads once the idea for an act is born and the progress of slowly concretizing it.

Self-expression and empowerment are themes and characteristics known from subchapter 5.2.1 where burlesque was explored from an experience perspective. These can be interpreted as notions that resonated with these then aspiring performers and probably induced the transformation process. Breaking the norms society has set for who's allowed to go on stage is a central aim of burlesque and is supported by the research findings. Discovering new ways to explore femininity arose as a theme within a theme:

I was also uncomfortable with the very narrow options of showing femininity back then, since I was ever a “princess”, I always rather played the role of the (male) hero in games rather than the damsel in distress. Burlesque gave me a platform to explore my femininity and sexuality freely, I got to be the woman who is her true self, strong, empowered, sometimes also scary, but still feminine. (Performer G)

...I needed a channel to express myself and share myself with the world and this seemed like the perfect chance. Witnessing the first burlesque show I realized that it's not only about being cute, beautiful and seductive, but about the fact that there are many aspects through which you can display femininity. It was especially important for me, because I've always enjoyed feminine and aesthetically pleasing things, I love getting all dolled up, but I've never really let my femininity show to the outer world. I've always wanted to be a good dude, or really, just someone without gender, because I felt that I wouldn't be taken seriously if I'm powerfully feminine. Cuteness is something that has been an uncomfortable and disliked term for me, especially if it's about me. Cuteness to me means that you're not the sharpest tool in the shed and you use it to your advantage, maybe manipulate people into doing things for you. I associate childish and negative aspects to being cute, so it's a no from me. (Performer B)

...it also gives me a lot of energy to know that seeing my performance might trigger someone to gather their courage and express themselves using this artform, or even look at themselves in the mirror more mercifully and acceptingly. (Performer F)

Burlesque has brought amazing people into my life and a platform to accomplish myself in, but also the opportunity to produce burlesque events where you can introduce people to this artform and when teaching provide an opportunity for them to start believing in themselves. (Performer C)

Burlesque is a perfect platform for sharing important messages with the audience. Whether it's about courage, freedom of expressing one's femininity or empowering others to take control, every message gets through better when offered on a glitter platter.

The interview results are in alignment with the motives why most people want to take on the burlesque stage described in chapter 2.3, to get empowered-empower, break society's norms and use of own skills to create art that's personal and valuable.

5.2.3 The first performance

Most interviewees were fondly reminiscing on the construction of their first acts. For some, the debut was a success, for some a flop, but the consensus was strong: all experiences

are welcome due to them being very educational. This debut can be an equivalent of trying on roles, the 8th step in the transformative learning process before integrating the “me” into the world. It can also be considered an “Erfahrung” type experience (3.2), causing an individual to change perspective regarding both their world view and inner world. This constitutes an enormous step for most performing aspirants and represents the most complex experience within the transformation process. Within the context, this means that while the process of transformation has commenced, at this point the performer is still uncertain and strongly looking for their artist identity by trying on roles. In Table 5 below we can see the themes that arose discussing the beginning of their performer journey and grand debut.

Table 5. Results for how the first act was constructed and debuted

Performance in practice	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
■ Inspiration for the first number came easy	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
○ The journey to the stage was short	○		○	○	○		○
◆ First performance was successful	◆	◆	◆			◆	◆
△ Failure of first performance fuelled motivation				△	△		
★ New ideas+ the need to continue performing was strong	★	★		★	★		★
▽ Attended coaching/classes prior to performing		▽	▽		▽	▽	

The most common trait when starting the burlesque journey is the powerful urge to perform, supported by an idea that needs to make its way to the stage. All interviewed performers shared this urge, although judging from the results, no two journeys were alike. Some wanted to step on stage to share a message with the audience, while some took it a bit more “lightly” and understood that performing burlesque is also a process and skills are acquired with practising and experience.

This was the inspiration for my first act, which is a story about finding the power and rawness of your feminine side under all the cuteness. It was born from my unconscious in a way, or rather portrays my journey and growth as a woman. This encompasses also what I love about burlesque, because I’ve always felt that I come off a bit

too strong for a lot of people, I'm too visible, audible, and that's the magic of burlesque, that there is no such a thing as too much. (Performer B)

One of my very first acts was my pirate act where I got to display my femininity the way I experience it. The idea for the first act came from childhood actually. We had a school play where I played the part of the pirate captain and had an awesome costume. I got sick before the play and couldn't perform and that left me feeling sad. I'm happy I got to play it out as an adult! (Performer G)

We can observe some similarities between the debut acts of the performers having started around 2008 or before, in that they sometimes had to compromise grand ideas for the sake of producing new acts on a quick schedule:

My first number was a very basic femme fatale act with a darker twist, but what everyone else sees as my first number was "Cupcake cutie" act where I had cupcakes on a tray and was all cutesie, also it had the most annoying music! We still laugh about the monstrosity of it with my closer colleagues! Neither of those acts really had a storyline, they were quite basic. (Performer D)

Back in 2008 the debut acts were very different from what is required nowadays from people who want to go on stage. There was a high demand for burlesque performances and no base the audience could compare it to. (Performer A)

I altered a group number we had with our performing group seeing that I didn't know how to mix music or do choreography. I changed the outfit from the original a glittered horse head and my first fur coat and used them for my solo. It was an awful act, but I really wanted to gain experience. (Performer E)

The length of the journey from the audience to the stage also varied a lot among the interviewees. Performer G was long in the scene before her "official" burlesque debut in 2008 and doesn't even consider it important:

There wasn't much of a journey in my case from the audience to the stage, given that I was in it from the very beginning, there was not much of a journey there, it just happened. I also went to see burlesque knowing this might be my artistic salvation, so I never got to be the innocent bystander really. (Performer G)

Performers A, C and D made their debut when the new wave of burlesque was strongest, so upon having expressed their desire to perform, they were already booked to perform at events:

My journey from spectator to the stage was very quick, but so was the case with the whole first wave of artists. 2008 was the right moment to jump onto the wagon, because it was the right time and the demand was high for this kind of artform and entertainment, which means our first gigs were already booked before we've managed to do anything. People wanted burlesque everywhere and it was not out of the ordinary to have burlesque numbers built into concerts. (Performer A)

I was actually working as a pickup girl at the first Helsinki Burlesque Festival and had already gigs booked after, so at the point I saw my first burlesque show, I was already in that world, I was never really "an innocent bystander" as an audience member. I used to be a part of Tease Queens during 2009-2011, but my solo career launched straight after the first festival in 2008. (Performer D)

My journey started by helping out at burlesque shows. That's when I also had to create my first stage character. In addition to the pick-up duties I was also passing out flyers and posters. There was another show during July that year where I did the same pick-up job and in October 2010, I finally stepped on stage with my first solo number. (Performer C)

For some, it was a longer process and entailed the right timing and a leap of faith:

I guess we can say my journey of five years was a slow but sure one. I started attending burlesque workshops every now and then, because I wanted to learn the basic moves and get involved in the scene. When I signed up for coaching, I was still unsure whether I had it in me to strip on stage, but I was sure I wanted to try. (Performer F)

When applying for burlesque coaching in 2019, six years after having seen burlesque live for the first time I had no idea what the coaching was going to entail and didn't fully comprehend that it will lead to performing, but I knew I had to start from there. And performing was amazing! So, chronologically it was a very long process, but the first contact with burlesque was already very impressive. (Performer B)

Categorizing the performances divides our interviewees into successful and unsuccessful debuts. All, however required a great deal of courage and determination. Performers D and E are still very amused and nowadays are able to laugh about their first performances:

My first ever gig was catastrophic, it was during the same spring at the sauna party of an IT company an acquaintance of my mother in law's booked me for. I was a surprise performer and the lady who booked me was the only female present there. I performed, tripped and fell during the performance and when I left the "stage" there was an awkward silence and one person applauding very slowly. Nowadays I always laugh

about this story and the truth is, I could not have started my career off worse than that, but I thought it's all uphill from there. (Performer D)

I performed this the first time in January, 2016 at my friend's 30th birthday in the only bar of my village and it was awful for several reasons: I left my village when I first had the chance and people resented me for it, I didn't really like the people who were there that night, also, my friend never asked me to perform. That's how it all started; I was very much outside my comfort zone, but I needed experiences like this. (Performer E)

There were also some success stories, underlining the importance of the audience and the energy they emit and share with the performer:

It really felt like I've succeeded, despite being outside my comfort zone, but what made an unforgettable experience was the amount of positive feedback I got during (cheering) and after the performance. It was an amazing to have succeeded, but it was even better to hear that the audience enjoyed it so much. (Performer B)

It went so much better than expected! There were some tiny practical issues with the outfit, but all in all, I feel like I could not have asked for a better debut, I got so much energy from the audience! (Performer F)

These more or less successful debuts were all followed by new performances or will be followed once there's a chance to perform live again. Those having made their debut early had no choice but to keep building new acts to respond to the strong demand, while nowadays the scene is saturated and the demands are different for those wanting to succeed as a burlesque performer:

It was difficult back then to put together an act, because there was nowhere to get inspiration from, but in a way, it was also easy, because there was no competition. We got away with much less back then and we didn't have to put that much thought or money into an act in order to rise from the masses. Nowadays you really have to think about putting together an act that's innovative and has the wow factor. (Performer D)

For some of the performers an important step towards the stage was attending burlesque and burlesque dance classes and brushing up on their knowledge, truer of the ones who didn't "have to" start performing right away. The initial theory that in order to become a performer one always attends burlesque classes is thus repealed.

5.2.4 Post-performance impressions

Table 6. Results for post-performance impressions

Feelings after performing	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
▽ Rush/Euphoria after most performances	▽	▽	▽	▽	▽	▽	▽
■ Concentrates on practical details having gone well	■		■	■			■
○ Successful connection with the audience		○			○		○
★ Pride of having "delivered the message"		★				★	
△ Numbness and disconnection from own act	△						△
◆ Cannot disassemble the whole experience	◆		◆	◆	◆		◆

The first theme that arose from every interview is the positive feelings after a performance. Some were rather excited and reminiscing on the post-performance glow, while others stressed the importance of practicalities having gone well. There was a clear difference in objectivity towards their own act between the performers who are doing this for work and the ones who made their debut recently. Performers B and F are the newest on the scene and are most happy to have been able to get their message through to the audience:

It felt amazing after the performance, mostly because everything went well, I didn't fall off the stage or set the house on fire, ha-ha! The energy the audience gives you is amazing, but it also pushes you to want to give them more, so it's a perfect symbiosis between performer and audience. I am happy I got to make my statement and hope that people were left with a commencing thought process on the state of our climate. (Performer F)

...it did not feel scary, nor were any negative feelings related to it, it felt like victory, "I am here now and no matter what happens, I'm enjoying this to the fullest". I was at my most vulnerable at that moment, but it was so liberating! According to the feedback

I got form the audience after the performance, my message was understood. (Performer B)

The more professional and objective approach can be sensed from the more seasoned performers, which is normal, since they've done this for years and have performed in front of many different audiences, also ones not knowing how to react to what they're seeing. It is understandably more difficult to give all you have artistically to a crowd that doesn't react to what's happening on stage, but apparently most performers take it more as a challenge than a negative thing. It is, after all in their power to immerse or absorb the audience into the performance, described in 3.1.

It depends on the performance, the event and the audience. I cannot say it's always that amazing after performing, because I also do a lot of gigs for non-burlesque audiences at different events and the reception isn't always the best, so it's a lot of work trying to engage them. Sometimes you really need to remind yourself that you're on stage and you're doing your job in entertaining the audience. It's not always easy. These are, however, very good educational experiences, because they sculpt and develop you as a performer. All in all, it's always an awesome feeling to perform, but the levels of awesomeness one experiences are different. (Performer E)

I think that at the point when you stop being nervous about going on stage you should stop. If it becomes boring and monotonous then there's no point in it. I still get a little nervous when my name is called out on stage, but it's the good kind of nerves that give you a big boost and a rush of adrenaline. I feel that if I lose this, if I don't feel anything before going on stage I can just stop performing, because it means that I don't care about it anymore. After all these years, 90% of the time it's amazing to be on stage. I wouldn't continue performing if it wasn't fun for me. (Performer D)

As performing burlesque is a personal experience, the reactions and feelings vary from one performer to the other. Representing a complex entity, there many things that can go wrong on stage ranging from a defected costume part to feelings of disconnection from one's art and performance:

It always leaves me with a sense of having succeeded when all the practicalities go well. It does not, however compare to the feeling of being able to be in the moment and really share myself with the audience. There are a number of reasons why being in the moment is not always a given and sometimes is hard to achieve. I do feel that the audience picks up on that and I cannot immerse them into my art in that case. The real feeling of success comes from really being able to put myself out there and pull the audience in. (Performer G)

If you do it as work, at some point it does feel a bit tiring and you fake the smiles on stage and you get all sorts of thoughts in your head, which can make you feel disconnected from what you're doing and it's awful if that happens on stage. Then when you get off stage, you're not content with yourself and it's frustrating. There are times when this feeling of disconnection lasts for long, but the touch usually returns at some point and when an act goes very well it can be such an amazingly rewarding feeling! Back then it felt like one can always perform 110%, full of energy and feelings of reward, but a few years ago I had a professional low when it felt like no matter how I tried to design amazing acts it just couldn't be done. It was frustrating that it felt like I wasn't developing as an artist as much as I would have wanted to, but last year I had a breakthrough and got a new boost of energy. This made me realize again why I was doing it. It's ups and downs as it is with life. (Performer A)

Nowadays my thoughts revolve more around practical stuff and how for example a new act would work. I'm more nervous about that before a show than going on stage. Even though the initial euphoria has diminished over the years, after a performance I don't feel like taking the tassels or headdress off, I enjoy basking in the post-performance glow. (Performer C)

A theme that has been a constant presence throughout all the interviews was the importance of the interaction with the audience and their support. Burlesque goes beyond just entertaining the audience, as mentioned in chapter 2 and 3, it also incorporates the realms of esthetic, escapist, educational, making it a deeply engaging artform, all for the sake of the audience whose role is highly significant in the overall content and construction of the experience:

Burlesque audiences are smart and experienced, so we always try our best to offer the best and most diverse we can. They are also very supportive, but one must never take their cheering and applause for granted but should strive to prove they're worth the craze. (Performer A)

It's wonderful to have front seats in observing the process artists and audience members go through. It's beautiful to see people's happiness when they find their way home. It's like guiding an internal journey. (Performer G)

... the first time I saw burlesque I was also captivated by the audience, the reaction of the audience and the diversity of the people you saw there. I loved the feeling there; I love how also the audience has an output for their creativity and fantasies and projects its energy to the performers on stage. (Performer B)

5.3 Transformation outcomes

As described in chapter 3.2, at the end of the transformational process, the aspirant would have changed in a fundamental personal dimension, becoming something different. Given that the outcome is a new personal trait, transformations represent the most complex economic offering due to their effectuality.

Table 7. Results for the performers' transformational outcomes

Ways burlesque has changed performer's lives	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
★ Demand+desire for constant development of skills	★		★	★			★
△ Self-confidence and courage to take on new things		△	△	△	△	△	
■ Boost of creativity	■	■	■			■	
▽ Professional/personal accomplishment	▽	▽		▽			▽
◆ It was odd to imagine life without burlesque	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
○ Took the performer on an internal journey		○			○	○	○

Performing burlesque and putting one's acts and costumes together comes with demands of constant learning and skill development. These may be considered the smaller "Erlebnis" type experiences (3.2.1) leading to stronger meaningful ones on the road to transformation. Based on the themes that surfaced during the interviews, starting to perform burlesque has set an avalanche of changes in motion within the individuals, resulting in the fact that most of them could not imagine their lives without it. Performers A, D and G highlight the feelings of professional accomplishment having found this artform to express themselves in:

I believe that all roads lead to me doing burlesque for a living, if I wasn't doing this, I would be doing some other form of performance art, but I feel no other artform could have provided me with such a platform to express myself artistically and utilize my skillsets. (Performer A)

Burlesque is such a big part of my life that I would be a totally different person if I didn't do what I do. All the work I do is related to burlesque, also all my hobbies are

related to it. Also 70-80% of my friends are burlesque people. I feel that as a very creative person I couldn't have channelled all my creativity this constructively anywhere else. (Performer D)

As with any other artform or work, the intensity of being involved in the scene will reward the individual, but will also take its toll as Performer G states:

I think finding burlesque when I did, saved my identity as an artist and as a person. It has given me a lot, but also took a lot. I spent about 15 years of my life working with burlesque and after 2017 (the last Helsinki Burlesque Festival) I truly hated it. It took me a good few years to be able to enjoy it again. It has been a very intense journey. It has enriched my life significantly; I don't even want to think of what or who I'd be without it. (Performer G)

Performer E describes the beginning of her journey to the stage. She faced a disorienting dilemma (3.2) when wanting to accomplish herself as a burlesque artist posed the risk of possibly losing credibility as a professional in her former job. She understood that to achieve the desired outcome she needed to reflect on her values and reorganize her priorities:

Before starting to perform burlesque and displaying my sexuality through it I was afraid I might lose professional credibility. I had to sit myself down and have serious a conversation about my values and visions. I've had growing pains through this whole process. This process brought along changes in many aspects of my life: clothing, interior decoration, and basically everything. It has truly enriched my life. Through burlesque I also discovered different aspects of myself and was able to dive deep into things I'm really interested in. So, it's been a great blessing. (Performer E)

For some, setting off to conquer the burlesque world can be considered either a part or an enabler/ trigger of a bigger personal transformational journey:

Before taking part in this coaching I was clinically depressed, so it was amazing to dive into this glittery world, all the planning and styling and constructing the act also worked as therapy for me. I was stressed every now and then, but it was such a fun project to do and it efficiently forced me to focus on the process. In addition to this it has enriched my life more because it gave me more courage to be a woman, visibly a woman. (Performer B)

It feels like my identity has shaped into the direction I always wanted it to but I'm not sure that it would have happened without immersing myself in this world. I am very happy that things turned out the way they did, since I feel like my confidence is on a

whole new level, also my long-lost creativity just found another platform to blossom on. (Performer F)

The past 10 years have changed me, and I can't really tell if I'd be a different person without burlesque in my life. There are many levels and such a wide variety of factors one can be hooked on and be engaged that one can evolve a lot with burlesque. ...being able to share this message with the world is important for me, but that also means that as a person I had to fight my battles with myself and my insecurities so I can now "preach" to others. The fact of the matter is that my confidence was nowhere near what it is today, and I think I can thank burlesque for that. (Performer C)

In addition to the overall self-confidence and empowerment attained through performing burlesque, Performer B further deliberates how this self-confidence and the toolsets she obtained by performing burlesque has found its way to other areas of her life:

It has also revived my self-confidence I'd lost a while ago... It has given me courage in other areas of my life as well. For example, I started a job I had no idea about before, but I gathered my courage and powered through. So, burlesque has given me tools to also succeed in my work life by being able to use the courage and self-confidence I developed by doing burlesque broadly in my life. (Performer B)

The journey from spectator to entertainer as a transformational learning experience

As with mapping the experience journey, there were also common turning- or touchpoints identifiable along the transformational journey of the interviewees. For most of them seeing burlesque live for the first time was what triggered the process, either because they found that they could accomplish themselves artistically through it, were empowered by what they saw on stage and wanted to pay the empowerment forward or simply saw it as a comfortable channel for self-expression. This can be considered the first step of the transformation process, or disorienting dilemma in this context.

Given that people are being faced with society's very narrow beauty norms dictating what is acceptable to be shown on stage, for many viewers the first contact with neo-burlesque might present a strong impression. At this point, the viewers might question why they are experiencing feelings of discomfort watching someone not fitting society's standards of beauty taking on the stage. Self-examination, critical assessment and recognition follow in the transformational learning process, at this point the viewers being aware that their reac-

tion was based on what society dictates as acceptable for a woman to look like. This enlightenment leads them to further examine and question other pre-existing structures built into people's minds by society.

Understanding that burlesque rebels against these ideals, it represents the perfect platform for the exploration phase. This can mean attending burlesque classes to get an idea of what the genre is about, but according to the results, there is no significant connection between those attending classes and those wanting to perform. Planning the course of action in this case means considering going on stage and commences the process of building one's first own act. This includes the essential phase of acquiring knowledge on burlesque, its history and trailblazers.

In the case of the interviewees, choosing the theme for the first act was easy for two reasons: either they started performing when the burlesque wave hit the country and the demand for performers was high, standards for performances lower than nowadays, or they had a strong message they wanted to deliver, forged into an act. These two also don't necessarily exclude each other. Putting together the first act was an experience in itself that demanded both the acquisition and development of different skills. The provisional trying of roles was also present here, since the idea that seemed good in the beginning didn't necessarily work on stage. This can also be explored through failure of acts and "catastrophic" performances, a series of trial and error. Building of competence happened through the polishing of choreography and many hours of practice. As most performers state, a burlesque act is never ready, it can be polished and enhanced to infinity.

At the end of the progress we have the performer who by going through this process has managed to acquire skills and traits. Regardless of whether the journey to the stage was short or long, these individuals all went through a similar process, the most important semblance being that each of them had to be ready to change in order for the experience of the first show to trigger the transformation process.

Observations of the burlesque events

The observations performed at the shows yielded different results depending on the size of the event. Even though the producers were the same and the event structure similar, there was a difference in the overall feeling between the two club shows and the Christmas show, the latter a bigger production. The bigger production took new audience members and their engagement more into consideration than the club shows did. This can be explained by the fact that even though everyone is more than welcome to these events, club shows are smaller productions with an audience consisting mostly of seasoned burlesque goers and

ones maybe also actively involved in the scene, so these events feel more like gatherings for the local burlesque scene enthusiasts. Artistically, these are braver and more experimental, mirroring the demand of the well-informed audience for “challenging” entertainment. The events are always themed and composed of two or three sets with intervals encouraging the individuals to mingle with fellow audience members and visit the booths manned by small scale entrepreneurs selling burlesque related accessories from jewellery to pasties and bio-degradable glitter.

Performer-wise, diversity is not as great as at the bigger shows, after attending a few shows one will recognize the same performers taking on the stage club show after club show. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, since it's in line with the communal and familiar atmosphere created during these events. Typical of these clubs is also displaying a larger number of neo- than classical acts and can therefore be a bit more overwhelming for a first timer to attend one of these events rather than a bigger one better customized for a broader audience.

Season closing shows are of a larger scale and since the performing groups of the burlesque studio also perform along with the coaching graduates making their debut, the audience is more colourful, and the producers take that into consideration while building the experience. Here we see a greater variety of performances and a more richly built experience. There are raffles, audience participation and photo booth along with the standard burlesque-related accessory stands. An experience of this kind is more likely to trigger a first timer to want to immerse themselves in this world, since the event gravitates more towards the entertainment and esthetic realms, although it blends all four.

Conclusion

Exploring burlesque shows as economic offerings from the perspective of the ones offering them, we can observe the following of patterns and composition, as well as incorporating the elements of well-designed experiences constructed to please the audience. As good experience stagers should, producers of such events try to create wholesome engaging experiences by positioning themselves into the audience's shoes and taking into consideration what these would like to see. Upon succeeding to create an immersive experiencescape, the organizers will not only end up with a pleased audience, but create meaningful experiences that last beyond the space and time this event took place in. If the event was designed well, some audience members will have left the venue with a thought-, or possibly a transformation process underway.

Seeing burlesque live for the first time did not provide all interviewees with peak experiences or ones of epiphany, some lived it as an isolated experience which didn't carry that much weight for them. My initial theory that one's burlesque journey would almost always begin with seeing a show was proven wrong by the fact that not all interviewees felt that strongly about that first encounter. The event generated different feelings in the interviewees, depending on the background information they had on the genre, their decision of attending being informed or not, as well as what kind of acts they were exposed to the first time. However, the fact that most performers were left with a hunger for more proves that it had resonated with them on some level and they realized that they have stumbled upon something special. All performers highlighted the feeling of community and acceptance occupying a crucial role in generating feelings of belonging and "coming home".

The research objective of distinguishing whether seeing burlesque live can be considered an experience or a transformation trigger has proved problematic for a number of reasons. First of all, the line between where an experience ends and where a transformation begins is very fine as described in chapter 3.2, discussing how transformations build on experiences and how blending different realms can trigger the urge for transformation. Moreover, due to the personal nature of living such an experience, despite the efforts of the stager to construct a powerfully compelling transforming experience, if the individual is not ready for the transformation, the experience will stay on an isolated experience level without triggering a transformation. Finally, it is only through the power of a life-transforming experience that an individual realizes its aspirations, thus inducing the transformation process.

As an experience, the main characteristic that rose above all else from the interview results was wholesomeness. This means that the events they saw covered all four realms of an

experience by blending them, resulting in the famous “sweet spot”. Interviewees also stressed that since burlesque is such an inclusive artform, it is more than fine if an audience member just wants to enjoy the show more lightly and passively by focusing on the esthetic and entertainment aspects, at the same time presenting the more adventurous ones with a wonderful opportunity to immerse themselves more actively by concentrating on the educational and escapist aspects.

The factor that has tipped the scale into the direction of a burlesque show being more of a trigger or phase of transformation rather than an isolated experience was the fact that this first encounter -having made a big impression or not- presented the interviewees with a disorienting dilemma that they knew couldn't be fixed by using their old skillsets. This notion is elaborated in chapter 3 and represents the first step of transformational learning. For some it was the shock and feeling of liberation generated by seeing different bodies proudly displayed and celebrated in a safe environment the first time ever, for others it was sexuality revisited, femininity explored in non-conventional ways, the strong sense of community or sense of empowerment that triggered the need to transform.

The journey from the audience to the stage wouldn't necessarily have to entail a transformation process, but given that performing burlesque requires putting together one's own act in entirety including the construction of a costume and props, stripping in front of an audience and showcasing art that is very personal, exposing one's vulnerability demands certain traits most aspirants don't possess at the beginning of their journey.

The results of the research mirror the same, it was through a powerful experience they connected with that these individuals commenced their journey to the stage and thus towards transformation. Not all audience members will have an epiphany or end up on stage, but the results show that the ones who do mostly embark on the process towards becoming a performer after attending a burlesque show that left them with a deep impression and a feeling of coming home for whatever reason urged them to use burlesque as an artform to express themselves. Having a meaningful experience (Erfahrung) can thus be considered a trigger for the transformational process. This meaningful experience is the one the interviewees described as something that “clicked” and set the transformational process into motion. Given that all performers stated that they could not imagine their lives without burlesque anymore and how taking on this path has also been an internal journey means that they've gained skills and traits they've aspired to.

Mapping the transformation journey and highlighting its touchpoints produced an overview of how a burlesque performer is “made”, covering the common stops along the way, however, in order for it to build the desired traits, it has to be kept in mind that this is also an inherently personal process that varies from one performer to the other. Due to this process being personal, it was difficult to pinpoint who the guiders of the transformation could be. Putting this transformation into an economic offering perspective, chapter 3.2.2 presents burlesque teachers and coaches as the possible elicitors for the aspirants wishing to obtain certain traits within this context. According to the literature in the chapter mentioned above, an elicitor’s role would be to sustain the outcomes of the transformation throughout time, however this does not directly and actively happen from the elicitor’s part in burlesque, at least not yet. So far, it’s the performer’s motivation to polish one’s skills and passion for the genre that keeps them coming back to the burlesque studios and developing their artistry.

Burlesque as an artform will remain a marginal form of entertainment due to its rebellion against adhering to society’s set norms but will at the same time provide a haven and platform for self-expression for those fighting these norms. Although as an experience it’s designed to engage the senses by blending all four realms, as a versatile artform it can be enjoyed by diving into it through the realm chosen by the audience member. Some attend shows for the aesthetics or entertainment, some for education, while others enjoy the escapist aspect. Choosing one realms or all four, it’s up to the viewer. The effects of seeing a show like this is inherently personal and the experience will have different consequences based on the state of mind and inside world of the viewer.

When it comes to the ones producing burlesque experiences and wishing to elicit transformations in the scene, a lot has to be done still. Considering the supply of burlesque classes and events, the scene is saturated. They have become very accessible, which is great for the genre, but there’s an abundance of suppliers painting a misleading image of what the artform really is about and creating confusion in guests. The competition is fierce as with any industry. It’s no secret that many women have found their femininity, courage and confidence by diving into the world of burlesque, but the transformation into a confident person can sometimes also mean that burlesque has only provided them with some tools to deal with their previously started and ongoing internal process. It’s not necessarily always the full transformation process, sometimes it’s just part of it.

Producing burlesque events with the possibility of designing a life-transforming experience should be easy considering what the artform already brings to the table: strong sense of community, wholesomeness, diversity, empowerment and acceptance. I feel however, that with the most events I’ve attended, the producers haven’t really found the “sweet spot”

within the realms and the experience has therefore not always been balanced. I believe there's a true potential in building meaningful experiences that would resonate with more individuals on more levels, therefore holding the potential of inducing the transformation process, thus driving the aspirants more actively towards the use of services of burlesque teachers, coaches and studios provide.

Concluding this research still leaves us with questions: Do burlesque event producers make use of their power of experience stagers and how consciously are they trying to design a life-transforming experience that would be meaningful enough for the individual to realize their aspirations and thus start a transformation process? Do these experience stagers possess the toolkit and knowledge on how to build a compelling experience? Are entrepreneurs within the burlesque industry aware of the concept of guiding transformations and its potential? When it comes to producing an entity as complex as an event, is it possible to customize the experience to the point of possibly inducing a transformational process in one's audience? It would also be very interesting to know which realms different audience members sense most strongly at a burlesque show and how aware are they of their internal world reflecting a connection to that? These themes would all provide interesting topics for further research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interviews questions

Age and gender:

Place of residence:

Years of burlesque experience:

The journey to the stage

1. How and when was your first encounter with burlesque?
2. What was your first experience of a burlesque show like?
3. How did you construct your first own act and where did the idea come from?
4. Why did you become a burlesque performer?
5. Did you attend any burlesque classes/dance classes before going on stage?
6. Can you elaborate on your journey from the audience to the stage?

Burlesque as an experience/transformation

7. How do you see burlesque shows as experiences?
8. Why do you think people go to see burlesque?
9. How does it feel after a performance?

Transformation outcomes

10. Did burlesque enrich your life and if so, how?
11. Does it feel like it has changed something fundamental about you?

Appendix 2. Interview questions in Finnish

Ikä ja sukupuoli:

Paikkakunta:

Kokemusvuosia burleskitaiteilijana:

Matka katsomosta lavalle

1. Mikä oli ensikontaktisi burleskiin ja millainen se oli?
2. Millainen kokemus oli nähdä burleskia livenä ensimmäistä kertaa?
3. Miten rakensit ensimmäisen soolonumerosi ja mistä idea lähti?
4. Miksi ryhdyit burleskiesiintyjäksi?
5. Kävitkö burleskitunneilla tai tanssitunneilla ennen ensimmäistä esiintymistä?
6. Voisitko kertoa matkastasi katsojasta lavalla? ("burleskieleämänkaari")

Burleski elämyksenä/muutoksen laukaisijana

7. Miten näet burleskin elämyksenä?
8. Miksi luulet ihmisten käyvän katsomassa burleskiesityksiä?
9. Miltä tuntuu esiintymisen jälkeen?

Muutoksen tuloksia

10. Onko burleski rikastuttanut elämäsi ja jos on, miten?
11. Tuntuuko siltä, että se on muuttanut jotain perustavanlaatuaista sinussa?