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Perception of Pole Dance, Stigma and Body Image

A Case of Norway and Poland

Masteroppgave i Nordic Master in Dance Studies

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Kunnskap for en bedre verden

Abstract

Pole dancing has become a popular trend in recent years, owing to its centuries-old techniques and Western cultural influence. It is performed at various levels of competition by casual students, gym goers, and athletes. Pole dancing has evolved from an erotic form of dance to a popular hobby in the modern world. The first world championship was held in 2005, as it became more of a globally accepted sporting activity. Pole dance promoters and fitness competition organizers have been working to change people's perceptions and stereotypes about pole dancing since the mid-2000s. Pole fitness in its nonsexual form has been advocated for as an acrobatic gymnastics sport, which can be empowering for dancers. This study follows the evolution of pole dance from its origins in strip clubs to its current popular incarnation as a powerful activity and sport enjoyed by many. The study also focuses on how ideological quandaries surrounding issues such as empowerment, stereotypes, control, and intercultural perceptions are managed in various settings. The study's implications will be discussed in relation to redefining and reiterating the evolution of pole dance in the modern world, stigma and body image with a particular focus on Norway and Poland. The data for this thesis was gathered through online qualitative surveys which were then analyzed and interpreted. Pole dancing helps women develop self-acceptance and respect for their bodies, which is important in a society where physical beauty for women is frequently overemphasized and gender roles and stereotypes are common. The findings of the study indicated that engaging in creative leisure activities had a substantial influence on the participants' subjective well-being, resulting in positive psychological alterations and changes in perspective.

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INTRODUCTION

Pole dancing has become a popular trend in recent years, owing to its centuries-old techniques and Western cultural influence. It is performed at various levels of competition by casual students, gym goers, and athletes. Pole dance is a type of performing arts that combines acrobatics, dance, and gymnastics on a vertical pole. Pole dancing necessitates significant muscular strength and suppleness, with torso and core strength being essential for success. Furthermore, it necessitates synchronization, as well as elegance and polished technique, which is developed through rigorous training and proper instruction. Pole dancing is thus a type of exercise that can be used as both an anaerobic and aerobic workout.¹

Pole dancing has evolved from an erotic form of dance to a popular hobby in the modern world. The first world championship was held in 2005, as it became more of a globally accepted sporting activity.² The first international pole championships were based on completing a difficult pole circuit while performing a series of trick moves. Since then, it has evolved into an activity that spreads and takes shape through a wide range of activities. Ever since, the pole dance scene has grown dramatically, with advanced forms such as freestyle, synchronized, and acrobatic pole dance emerging. Thousands of artists, performers, choreographers, and studios have sprouted up, attracting people of all ages and genders. Hundreds of studios have opened in over fifty countries in the last decade, attracting multitude of diverse population.³ The pole dance scene has now evolved into a much larger and complex vortex of pole dancing forms, intricacy, and speed as a result of this growing electrifying demand. Pole dancers can now communicate with other polers all over the world via online social networking platforms.

Pole dance promoters and fitness competition organizers have been working to change people's perceptions and stereotypes about pole dancing since the mid-2000s.⁴ Pole fitness in its nonsexual form has been advocated for as an acrobatic gymnastics sport, which can be

¹ Donaghue, Kurz, & Whitehead. "Spinning the pole", 444.

² Dimler, McFadden, & McHugh. "'I Kinda Feel Like Wonder Woman", 341.

³ Barton, *Stripped: Inside the lives of exotic dancers*, 1.

⁴ Nicholas et al. "Pole dancing for fitness", 2704.

empowering for dancers. This study follows the evolution of pole dance from its origins in strip clubs to its current popular incarnation as a powerful activity and sport enjoyed by many. The study also focuses on how ideological quandaries surrounding issues such as empowerment, stereotypes, control, and intercultural perceptions are managed in various settings. The study's implications will be discussed in relation to redefining and reiterating the evolution of pole dance in the modern world, with a particular focus on Norway and Poland.

History of Pole Dance

Traditional pole dancing has two distinct origins: Chinese pole and Indian pole. Chinese pole dates to the 12th century, when Chinese circus performers used a 9-meter-high pole to perform acrobatic tricks.⁵ Pole Mallakhamb literally translates to "pole wrestlers" and was originally a form of wrestling training.⁶ To avoid friction, an Indian pole was coated in oil. Wrestlers have traditionally worn swimwear or yoga wear to help them grip the pole.⁷ This style of pole dancing is distinguished by more fluid, acrobatic movements. Pole dancing was invented in the United States during the Great Depression of the 1920s.⁸ "Hoochie coochie" dances would be performed by traveling circus shows.⁹ The dances featured women sliding seductively up and down the pole that held up the circus tents. This section provides a comprehensive history of pole dancing and how it evolved into a form of fitness.

Mallakhamb is a traditional Indian sport that originated in Maratha Pradesh and is based on gymnastics and poses performed on a vertical wooden pole or rope. Mallakhamb, which translates to "pole gymnastics," refers to the ancient practice of strength training with a pole.¹⁰ It gained popularity in the 12th century and was documented by Balambhatta Dada Deodhar, an

⁵ Jensen & Thing. "Performing gender in recreational pole dancing", 256.

⁶ Burt. "Mallakhamb", 35.

⁷ Locke. "Recreational pole dance", 4.

⁸ Locke. "Recreational pole dance", 4.

⁹ Sayers. "Exotic, Erotic: The Etymology of Hootchy-kootchy." 177.

¹⁰ Burt. "Mallakhamb", 35.

instructor for Peshwa bajirao (the Maratha Empire's Prime Minister) during the 18th century.¹¹ Mallakhamb translates to "pole wrestler" and was originally intended to train wrestlers. Mallakhamb was primarily a male-dominated exercise that was introduced to help wrestlers develop and maintain concentration, speed, and flexibility.¹² Competitive training was done on a smooth wooden pole with a narrow top and a thick bottom. The performers became pole-flip specialists after running and tossing straight onto the pole during the performance. Mallakhamb is extremely physical and demanding. Extreme agility, coordination, concentration, speed, and reflexes are required, as well as the ability to wear minimal clothing and remain agile. Dancers are frequently required to perform without shoes in order to maintain better footing on the pole.

Chinese pole is a spectacular gymnastic skill that dates to the 12th century. It was typically performed by circus professionals using 3-9m tall poles laced with rubber material, resulting in significant friction between the performer and the pole.¹³ Unlike Indian pole, which featured acrobats with a variety of skills on lower poles, Chinese pole primarily featured aerial performers who required significant strength to perform high in the air.¹⁴ To protect themselves from the intense friction, professional circuses normally wore full-body costumes.¹⁵ Despite the full-body costumes, the friction often resulted in burns on the performers' shoulders. Nonetheless, the burns became their identity, which others used to identify and respect the pole dancers. Pole dancers today still perform feats like those performed by earlier pole dancers. Tricks like the flag, which involves hanging straight out towards the midline of the pole while straightening out at a 90-degree angle using arm strength, and other flips and turns are used to impress audiences and gain respect.¹⁶ Pole dancing is also strikingly like modern pole dancing. Both use the pole for lifting and support, both have large elements of local and multi-city competitions, and both have the same plots and themes of seductive dance. The primary

¹¹ Sharma and Choubey. "Sport Of Mallakhamb", 4.

¹² Boucher-Khan. "Choreographing the Line", 6.

¹³ Tyler. "The Way of the Pole." 45.

¹⁴ Locke, "Recreational pole dance", 4.

¹⁵ Tyler. "The Way of the Pole", 46.

¹⁶ Jensen and Thing. "Performing gender in recreational pole dancing", 256.

distinction between Chinese pole dance and contemporary pole dance is the attire worn. However, over time, this distinction has become more complex. Historical events can be used to explain factors like the size and shape of the poles.

The exotic dance has its origins in Sumerian mythology, when Inanna, the Goddess of Love, danced and removed an item of jewelry and clothing as she passed through the gates on her way to meet her lover.¹⁷ The striptease was thought to have been invented by the Goddess of Love. This style of dancing has influenced other exotic dance genres such as ancient Middle Eastern belly dance, Parisian Moulin Rouge burlesque, and Latin-inspired dances such as tango and rumba.¹⁸ Pole dancing was first associated with a group of dancers during America's depression in the 1920s.¹⁹ Belle Jangles performed the world's first recorded exotic dance routine at Mugwump, an Oregon strip joint, in 1968.²⁰ This spread to Canada in 1980, and then to the rest of the world beginning in 1994.²¹ That same year, the first pole-dancing classes were held in Canada.

Pole dancing has evolved into its own distinct form in modern Western cultures. It was inspired by popular Middle Ages imagery and ideas.²² It became popular in Victorian England as a result of publications such as *The Dancing Masters*.²³ Pole dancing spread throughout Europe after the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, but it had the greatest impact in America.²⁴ Following the establishment of the first pole dancing school, countries all over the world embraced the new craze, opening pole fitness classes, studios, and schools. This contemporary pole dance style combines traditional techniques from around the world, such as circus skills from China, spirited acrobatics from India, and appealing western dance styles. The

¹⁷ Block. "Striptease.", 1117.

¹⁸ Grahn. "Ecology of the Erotic in a Myth of Inanna." 63

¹⁹ Locke, "Recreational pole dance", 6.

²⁰ Locke, "Recreational pole dance", 6.

²¹ Locke, "Recreational pole dance", 6.

²² Whitehead and Kurz. "Empowerment and the pole.", 225.

²³ Tydeman. "*The theatre in the Middle Ages*"

²⁴ Tydeman. "*The theatre in the Middle Ages*"

contemporary pole dance relies on the strength, fitness, endurance, and flexibility of the performers.

Different Types of Pole Dance: Pole Sport, Artistic Pole, and Exotic Pole

Pole dancers employ a wide range of techniques. Some dancers use flashy and intricate moves, while others flow gracefully across the floor. Although personal style is more than just a type of pole dance, several styles associated with gymnastics are the most common in society. Pole Sport is the most closely associated with athletics and is typically practiced by those who are physically stronger and have greater endurance. Exotic Pole incorporates sensual elements as well as musicality, whereas Artistic Pole incorporates movement from other disciplines such as ballet or modern dance.

Pole sport is a type of pole dance that emphasizes acrobatic tricks and figures. The International Pole Sports Federation (IPSF) governs it as a sport.²⁵ Unlike other static pole styles, spinning poles add elegance to the performance. Pole dances that are fitness-based typically have shorter dance segments with 20 seconds of downtime per routine for rest or recovery.²⁶ Choreographies emphasize physical strength, drills, and technique difficulty so that dancers have limited time off the pole to recover their energy.

The artistic pole primarily focuses on music and movement; thus, performers must be creative in order to plan a story and develop a character. The emphasis in this type of pole dancing is on the dancing and the performers' expressions, rather than the acrobatics.²⁷ The artistic pole is a difficult discipline that combines elements of pole sport and pole exotic. It necessitates flexibility and a wide range of movements such as contemporary dance, ballet, and jazz.

²⁵ Fennell, "Pole studios as spaces between the adult entertainment, art, fitness and sporting fields. " 1958

²⁶ Fennell, 1958.

²⁷ Fennell, 1959.

The most sensual genre is pole exotic. The dancer may wear revealing clothing (as high leg cut bottoms, no G-strings), knee protectors, and high heels.²⁸ Exotic pole dancing choreographies are not rigid, with a focus on the performer's flexibility. Strip shows are frequently confused with pole exotic. It is, however, a sensual approach to pole dancing. Clothing in exotic pole dance, like in other pole styles, is kept to a minimum to ensure a firm grip between the body and the pole. In contrast to the sport pole, which is limited to 20 seconds of floor work, the choreographies involve much of the floor work.²⁹ Exotic pole is a combination of acrobatic elements, graceful floor flow, and natural splits. It is normally performed in platform heels, also known as stripper heels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Present Study

Although pole dancing is gaining popularity, there is still a scarcity of academic literature on the subject. Most of the existing research focuses on pole dancing performed by strippers in strip clubs, whereas literature addressing recreational pole dancing has three main thematic areas of enquiry: investigating why women are drawn to pole dancing, debating whether the practice is empowering or oppressive, and examining the differences between recreational pole dancing and its stripper counterpart. There is a noticeable absence of feminist theory in the academic studies of pole in *Vertical Exploration: Journal of Pole and Aerial Movement Studies*, a peer-reviewed journal authored and reviewed by members of the pole community. This suggests that the pole community does not necessarily consider itself to be part of the feminism movement. The literature produced by those who are not members of the pole community differs greatly from that produced by those who are members of the community. The pole community frequently engages in feminism discussions, whereas those outside the community are less interested in the subject.³⁰ This presents an intriguing challenge, because the definition and perception of feminism differ significantly between the two groups.

²⁸ Dale. "The future of pole dance." 382.

²⁹ Fennell, "Pole studios as spaces between the adult entertainment, art, fitness and sporting fields." 1958.

³⁰ Donaghue et al. "Spinning the pole", 443.

Since the first publication on the subject, there has been extensive research into why pole classes are appealing to women and why they prefer them to other forms of fitness. Researchers have frequently cited the influence of post feminism and third wave feminism on western culture, which emphasizes empowerment through sexual expression, as a reason for this preference over the years.³¹ This has resulted in the normalization of "raunch culture," as described by Ariel Levy (2005),³² "stripper chic," as described by Alison Fensterstock (2006),³³ and "porno-chic," as described by Brian McNair (2002)³⁴, as the driving force behind the rise of recreational pole as a fitness and leisure activity. Several studies (Allen 2011; Donaghue, Kurz, and Whitehead 2011; Griffith 2016; Hamilton 2009; Holland 2010; Holland and Attwood 2009; Pellizzer, Tiggemann, and Clark 2016; Whitehead and Kurz 2009) have investigated why women gravitate towards the pole classes and discovered a variety of explanations. The world of strippers is filled with a variety of interests. Several articles, including Holland (2010),³⁵ and Donaghue, Kurz, and Whitehead (2011)³⁶, focus on the body and fitness. Celebrities also engage in pole dancing, as evidenced by media coverage, as discussed in Holland and Attwood 2009. Furthermore, some scholars, such as Bahri (2012), investigate the concept of the "other" in relation to the depiction of strippers.³⁷

Kally Whitehead and Tim Kurz summarized the main arguments about whether recreational pole dancing is empowering or oppressive for women in their 2009 article "'Empowerment' and the Pole: A Discursive Investigation of the Re-invention of Pole Dancing as a Recreational Activity."³⁸ The process was referred to as "reclaiming" the activity from the objectifying context of the strip club to a recreational activity for women. Thus, it can be argued

³¹ Just and Muhr, "Holding on to both ends of a pole."12.

³² Levy, "Raunch Culture.", 45.

³³ Fensterstock, "Stripper chic.", 190.

³⁴ McNair, "*Striptease culture*", 6.

³⁵ Holland, Samantha. "*Pole dancing, empowerment and embodiment.*", 3.

³⁶ Donaghue et al. "Spinning the pole", 443.

³⁷ Bahri, Jacenta. "Fun, fitness, fantasy" 4.

³⁸Whitehead, and Kurz. "Empowerment' and the pole." 229.

that by relocating pole dancing to a female-only environment free of male gaze, recreational studios are creating a space for women to challenge traditional notions of female sexuality as passive and subservient to men. Some argue, however, that pole dancing is demeaning and disempowering to women, and that its association with patriarchal institutions makes it problematic in any context from a feminist standpoint. Pole dancing may also promote specific gender and sexuality constructions that do not inherently disrupt power dynamics in society.³⁹ It is worth noting that the empowerment versus oppression debate applies to recreational pole and stripping, as well as other forms of dance performed primarily by women, such as belly dancing and burlesque.⁴⁰ Apart from the obvious elements of a vertical pole and dance, the main feature shared by stripping and pole dancing is the presence of a woman with sexual agency. Thus, a person's position in the empowerment/oppression debate is determined by their attitudes towards women, femininity, female sexuality, and sexual agency, all of which are influenced by a variety of sociocultural factors. Surprisingly, the impact of sociocultural elements on recreational pole research is largely ignored by existing literature, and authors' awareness of cultural biases varies. Nonetheless, the current literature connects the discourse on the empowerment or oppression of women who participate in recreational pole to a broader discussion on the subject.

Despite the prevalence of sexual imagery such as strippers and strip clubs in popular culture and media, there is still a negative perception of strip clubs, stripping, and sex workers that extends to the recreational pole industry. To differentiate itself from strip clubs, the pole industry frequently emphasizes athletic ability, a predominantly female environment, and the fact that clothing explicitly is not required. Various researchers have extensively researched and documented this. According to Felien, there is a bias in pole advertising towards the fitness aspect.⁴¹ According to the International Pole Fitness Association, the history of pole dance includes a variety of dance forms involving poles or similar structures, such as Maypole dancing, Chinese pole, and Mallakhamb. This portrayal, however, places an undue emphasis on the athletic and sporty aspects of pole dancing while underplaying the significance of exotic dance.

³⁹ Whitehead, and Kurz. "Empowerment' and the pole." 9.

⁴⁰ Regehr, "The rise of recreational burlesque.", 138.

⁴¹ Felien, "Looking for the Links.", 14.

It's worth noting that the "official history" was written by a pole fitness organization primarily concerned with the fitness aspect of pole.

Pole Dance Evolution

Pole dancing first appeared in North American strip clubs in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It had spread across Europe, Asia, North and South America, Australia, and New Zealand by the twenty-first century.⁴² It grew in popularity after Hollywood celebrities such as Madonna, Angelina Jolie, and Kate Moss began pole dancing in 2004, resulting in extensive coverage on daytime TV shows and women's magazines.⁴³ Pole dancing became a popular form of exercise as a result, resulting in an increase in the number of studios run by former exotic dancers turned instructors. In her book 'Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture,' Ariel Levy wonders why straight women are interested in watching or participating in pole dancing.⁴⁴ Levy believes that by engaging in this practice, women are objectifying themselves.⁴⁵ Samantha Holland, in her book 'Pole Dancing, Empowerment, and Embodiment,' disputes Levy's claim that pole dancing is solely for sexual arousal and examines the discourse of female empowerment within the pole dancing community.⁴⁶ Holland conducted a thorough investigation that included fieldwork interviews in the United Kingdom, North America, and Australia, as well as participant-observation of pole fitness classes in the United Kingdom.⁴⁷ According to the findings, pole fitness not only has physical benefits but also boosts self-confidence and self-esteem, making it a viable form of empowerment for many individual pole dancers.⁴⁸ It should be noted that the concept of women's empowerment through pole dancing is not uniformly defined and may not be promoted through this discourse. Furthermore, pole dance studios, like

⁴² Dale, "The future of pole dance.", 383.

⁴³ Dale, "The future of pole dance.", 383.

⁴⁴ Levy, "Raunch Culture." 7-45.

⁴⁵ Levy, "Raunch Culture." 9.

⁴⁶ Holland, "Pole dancing, empowerment and embodiment."

⁴⁷ Holland, 128.

⁴⁸ Holland, "Pole dancing, empowerment and embodiment.", 134.

the international pole dance community, have taken a different approach, redefining pole dance as a fitness activity.

Pole Dance Perception in Poland and Norway

The Catholic Church a Major Influencer on Pole Dance in Poland

At first glance, Poland appears to be one of the world's most religiously homogeneous countries, with 99% of Polish children baptized into the Roman Catholic Church.⁴⁹ Furthermore, approximately 93% of all marriages in Poland are preceded by a church wedding.⁵⁰ When asked about their religion, 90% to 98% of the population claims to be Roman Catholic.⁵¹ The Catholic Church in Poland wields social and political power, and its adherents regard it as a defender of Polish heritage and culture.⁵² After Malta and San Marino, Poland has the second highest proportion of Roman Catholic citizens in Europe. This figure is higher than the proportion of Roman Catholics in Italy, Spain, and Ireland. In these three countries, the Roman Catholic Church has also been the sole established religion.⁵³

The perception of dance in religion is influenced by mental and physical perspectives, particularly those concerning sexuality and emotion. Pole dance is an example of art that uses the body and evokes sensual associations, whereas other arts use the body as a fixture to form visual objects or sounds. The beliefs and practices of Muslims, Christians, and Hindus demonstrate vastly different perspectives on dance, particularly pole dance and religion.⁵⁴ Christianity has a love-hate relationship with the body, as well as an acceptance of a mind-body contrast. According to the Catholic church, a good dance for a young woman or woman should be distinguished by modest attire that exposes no body parts other than the head, lower arms, lower

⁴⁹ Porter-Szucs. "*Faith and fatherland: Catholicism, modernity, and Poland.*", 3.

⁵⁰ Pędzwiatr, "The Catholic Church in Poland on Muslims and Islam.", 461.

⁵¹ Pędzwiatr, 461.

⁵² Zuba, "The political strategies of the Catholic Church in Poland.", 116

⁵³ Porter-Szucs. "*Faith and fatherland: Catholicism, modernity and Poland.*", 6.

⁵⁴ LaMothe, "A History of Theory and Method in the Study of Religion and Dance.", 10.

legs, and hands.⁵⁵ There should be no tight or transparent clothing that exposes the body shape. Furthermore, the positions should be appropriate. This means no close grips where the bodies touch, no faces touching, no female heads leaning on male shoulders, and no finger interlocking. The catholic church goes on to say that dance movements should be decent, with no waist vibration, sensual twisting, jumps, or lifting of legs that expose the body, no fast curling and bending that allows the skirt to fly outwards, no challenging protrusion of breasts, no provocative positions of the derrieres, and no languorous abandonment of the arms.

The Catholic Church has very specific guidelines regarding dance. Most of these guidelines focus on dressing and choreography. In light of this, pole dancing is considered impure by church doctrine. While there are various types of pole dancing, all of them are distinguished by leg lifting, jumps, waist movement, and other choreographies that are contrary to Catholic church doctrine. The Catholic Church does not forbid dancing, but certain types of dancing may be considered sinful if they are performed in inappropriate contexts or for improper reasons.⁵⁶ Pole dancing, for example, entails using a pole to perform a variety of moves such as lifts, spins, and routines. Although pole dancing can be done in a discreet and modest manner, it is frequently associated with stripping and is considered controversial by some. Twerking and stripper-style dancing at bachelorette parties can potentially lead to immoral sexual activity among single young women who watch and participate in these dances, in addition to promoting female empowerment. Both dance styles involve sexually provocative movements to pop music, which can trigger impure thoughts and lead to actual sins such as fornication, adultery, and masturbation.

Pole dancing is viewed differently in different cultures. Because of its association with strip clubs and exotic dancing, it is commonly perceived as a form of sexual entertainment in Western countries, and the media frequently portrays it as a means of sexual gratification.⁵⁷ Pole dancing, on the other hand, is regarded as a form of art in eastern cultures and is frequently used

⁵⁵ LaMothe, 13.

⁵⁶ Coleman, "Worship God in dance.", 36.

⁵⁷ Boucher-Khan, "Choreographing the Line.", 16.

as a traditional dance or exercise. Gender stereotypes play an important role in the sexualization of pole dancing, with men frequently portrayed as dominant figures and women as objects of desire. Pole dancing is sometimes seen to appease male gazes rather than a practice that empowers women.

Christianity and Pole Dance

Pole dancing, in contrast to Poland, has been a longstanding tradition in Norway. One of the known pole activities is associated with Pentecost (Whitsun).⁵⁸ Religion just like in Poland plays a major role in shaping societal activities such as dance. Nordic countries and rest of Western Europe has embraced dancing with the Whitsun festival being the earliest example dance that involved dancing around a pole.⁵⁹ To obtain an understanding of an activity like pole dancing, it is necessary to understand the history that permitted the formation of Christian dance fitness in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This trend is linked to a dominant narrative in the society that promotes the construction of a "healthy" physique. This image of a healthy body has become synonymous with physical fitness and growth, and dancing, particularly when viewed through a gendered lens, has given a platform for women to engage in fitness and wellness discourses.

Western Europe has seen the commercialization of religious culture, along with the increasing popularity of dancing as an exercise routine, has resulted in the birth of several current Christian dance fitness.⁶⁰ Devoted Fitness marketing efforts openly identify their goal as a blend of worship and training, emphasizing the notion of dancing to achieve physical and spiritual well-being.⁶¹ These dancing fitness classes, which can be found all throughout the country, aim to assist women get in shape for their religion.

⁵⁸ Teodorescu, "The Pentecost in Romanian contemporary society." 149.

⁵⁹ Teodorescu, "The Pentecost in Romanian contemporary society." 149.

⁶⁰ Broo et al., "Diversification, Mainstreaming, Commercialization and Domestication—New Religious Movements and Trends in Finland." 141.

⁶¹ Saumaa, "Dance therapeutics: Movement as a path toward healing." 238.

There is a rising presence of social channels sales catering to a savvy audience in the fitness industry. These platforms feature skilled aerobics instructors that expertly mix diverse types of exercise such as Zumba, hip-hop, yoga, and dance while advocating a link between physical health and religious devotion.⁶² These moves, in particular, are aimed at a specific segment of the Christian market, appealing to individuals who have accepted the moral obligation of maintaining a physically good physique.⁶³ The films efficiently promote fun movements, correctly attired teachers, and music with clean lyrics.

Religious researcher R. Marie Griffith gives a historical and contemporary assessment of the culture of devotional fitness in her book. This culture has had a considerable impact in shaping society conceptions of the body, both religious and secular.⁶⁴ Griffith contends that Protestantism's ubiquitous influence was critical in shaping the ideal of the perfect body.⁶⁵ Furthermore, she characterizes modern devotional diet culture as the inclusion of meaningful connections with divine figures such as God or Jesus, as well as the conviction that physical health of the human body has a direct and indirect influence on these interactions. Pole Dancing for Jesus is conceptually similar to Griffith's discussion of Christian diet culture.⁶⁶ Three primary themes emerge from the accounts of women who participate in pole dancing, emphasizing the conviction in reaching a faultless body as a viable technique of exercise. The primary goal of these themes is to detach pole dancing from its association with the sex business and instead show it as part of the desire of a physically fit Christian body. Pole fitness dancers, both secular and Christian, frequently define their activity as "fun," which allows them to downplay the severity generally associated with pole dancing as a vocation.⁶⁷ Furthermore, they emphasize the parallels between pole dancing and other types of dance fitness, portraying it as just another type of training. They hope to diminish the frenzy around its sexualized roots by associating it with

⁶² Saumaa, 238.

⁶³ Saumaa, 238.

⁶⁴ Griffith, R., "*Born again bodies.*"

⁶⁵ Griffith, R., "*Born again bodies.*"

⁶⁶ Griffith, R., "*Born again bodies.*"

⁶⁷ Griffith, R., "*Born again bodies.*"

more normal, less contentious forms. Pole dancers and studio owners stress the historical origins of pole dancing in order to broaden its relevance beyond the sex market, tying it to numerous athletic techniques practiced by men in many countries. Furthermore, they claim that the existence of a largely same-sex workplace helps to reduce the male gaze, de-emphasizing the sexual component. As pole dancing gets integrated into the larger narrative of the Christian fitness industry's war against excess body fat, these tactics match with Griffith's vision of aiming for an ideal physique.⁶⁸ Pole dancers, even Christian pole dancers, frequently use a strategy called as tactical disavowal to disassociate themselves from pole fitness's sexual overtones. Instead, they pitch it as a fun workout routine.⁶⁹

Pole Fitness has recently emerged as a major trend across Poland and rest of Europe fitness industry, with increasing popularity observed in amateur dancers and fitness enthusiasts. There are similarities and overlaps in the skills and physical requirements both in Poland and Western Europe. However, Poland being a religious country with the catholic church playing a major role in determining the engagement of people in dance, Poland still lags compared to Western Europe countries such as Germany and Sweden. Nevertheless, pole dancing is rapidly becoming a more integral part of the fitness domain and is attracting a significant number of enthusiasts who are slowly overcoming the stereotypical perceptions of pole dance and embracing it as a fitness and sporting activity.

Stigma Around Pole Dance

Even though more fitness studios are offering pole dancing, there is still a significant stigma. Pole dancing is commonly associated with strippers and exotic dancing.⁷⁰ It is widely assumed that in order to be a pole dancer, one must first be a stripper who abuses her body in order to make quick money from men. Pole dancing is a sport that demands and develops total-body strength and fitness.

⁶⁸ Griffith, R., "*Born again bodies.*"

⁶⁹ Griffith, R., "*Born again bodies.*"

⁷⁰ Nicholas et al. "It's our little secret", 105.

Pole dancing has grown in popularity as a recreational and competitive sport since the early 2000s. Despite pole dancing becoming widely recognized as a fitness exercise, dancers are still visibly labeled prostitutes and strippers, indicating that pole dancers face a stigma and prejudice.⁷¹ Unfortunately, the stereotypical pole dancer is viewed as a young and attractive promiscuous woman who makes a living from her act. Even though pole dancing has been around for a long time, it still suffers from the original setup. Pole dancing still carries a negative stigma, and it is frequently perceived as exotic and sexual in mainstream culture.⁷² Pole fitness, on the other hand, has been attempting to distance itself from its pole dancing roots in order to rebrand the sport. According to Walter (2010), there have been contrasting sexual arguments about the liberating qualities of pole dancing.⁷³ However, pole dancing is still regarded as a sure path to prostitution. Pole dancing emerged as a popular pastime in strip joints. Donaghue, Kurz, and Whitehead (2011), posits that "despite its widespread reinvention as a fitness activity for women, it is still strongly associated with, and indeed trades on, its exotic, erotic, and sexual connotations."⁷⁴

As previously stated, modern pole dance is frequently associated with stripping. Strippers ran the first pole dance schools and classes. However, the purpose of these classes was not to train people to be strippers; rather, they were designed to provide an exciting and full-body workout. Walter (2010) interviews a former stripper in his book "Living dolls" about her experience. The stripper was asked to stand next to a pole and remove her clothes on her audition day; no dance or pole dance experience was required.⁷⁵ This illustrates the difference between what working girls do in strip clubs and what a pole performer does; one is expected to be sensual, while the other is expected to put in a lot of work and practice in pole dancing. However, as the strip club industry boomed in England, many girls enrolled in pole dancing

⁷¹ Kim and Sun-Yong "I'm a poler, and proud of it", 199.

⁷² Fennell. "Pole sports: considering stigma." 98.

⁷³ Walter. "*Living dolls*", 53.

⁷⁴ Donaghue, Kurz, and Whitehead, "Spinning the pole", 444.

⁷⁵ Walter. "*Living dolls*", 53.

classes to improve their skills as strippers, thereby increasing their earnings.⁷⁶ Strippers and burlesque dancers take ballet or jazz classes to improve their skills as strippers, and some have turned to pole dancing to supplement their income.

Due to the presence of a pole in both dances, pole dance is frequently confused with strip dance or "dirty" dance. Miley Cyrus, for example, stepped on a rolling ice cream card and sang while holding on to a pole during her teen awards performance.⁷⁷ Miley's performance sparked debate in the media about young girls and the pole. She, on the other hand, claimed the pole was for balance. She did not perform any tricks or dance around the pole as in the pole dance. She was, however, heavily criticized by the media and accused of sexualizing her young audience.⁷⁸ While the audience had no complaints about her performance, the media outcry reflects people's perception of the pole. Although no promiscuous dance moves were performed around the pole, the presence of a pole that many people mistake for a stripping pole made her performance inappropriate.

Pole dancing, according to Pellizzer et al. (2016), is a "new fitness trend that involves sexualized dance movements done on and around a pole."⁷⁹ Dance has had an image problem for a long time. Ballet was once one of several dance styles considered sexual and for the "male gaze" and as a sexual spectacle, but attitudes have shifted, and ballet is now regarded as sophisticated, with a much wider audience.⁸⁰ Pole dancing as a dance style is now considered sexual, just as ballet was once considered sexual. Pole dancing is perceived differently depending on the context. Pole dance in the context of a strip club is a performance intended to pique the audience's sexual interest. Pole dancing recreationally in a pole dance studio removes the intention to arouse a viewer because there is no intention to arouse and no viewer. It has been argued that recreational pole dancing is a performative act in a way that other forms of exercise,

⁷⁶ Walter. "*Living dolls*", 53.

⁷⁷ Lamb et al., "Pole-arized' discourse", 164

⁷⁸ Lamb et al., "Pole-arized' discourse", 164

⁷⁹ Pellizzer et al., "Enjoyment of sexualization and positive body image", 35.

⁸⁰ Whitehead & Kurtz, "Empowerment and the pole", 226.

such as lifting weights at a gym, are not.⁸¹ One counter-argument is that pole consists of physically demanding exercises in which polers frequently lift their body weight. Even though the authors argue that such exercise is performative, pole dancing could be considered. Every type of dance is demanding, requires repeated training, and is considered a physically demanding type of exercise that takes place in a dance studio rather than a fitness center. While some have described recreational pole dancing as a sexually objectifying activity (similar to exotic dance), others argue that it is an embodying and empowering activity (similar to street and modern dance).⁸²

Nowatzki and Morry presented 20 items/activities to a sample of US female participants in their study, 10 of which were considered by the authors to be self-sexualizing activities.⁸³ Pole dancing was one of them. Participating in a pole-dancing class, as noted by Pellizzer, Tiggemann, and Clark, is an example of self-sexualizing behavior, on par with strip aerobics exercise class and participating in a wet T-shirt contest.⁸⁴ Pole dancing, on the other hand, is not a self-sexualizing act; it is a type of activity that allows people to gain self-identity and define their sexuality. Pole dancing is a form of self-expression. According to Nicholas et al., empowerment in pole dancing entails a strong sense of sisterhood and freedom from judgment, which makes the gendered nature activity necessary for individual exploration of one's sexuality and sensuality.⁸⁵ Pole dancing, according to Holland, is "improving women's lives by offering increased fitness, confidence, friendship, and 'fun'".⁸⁶ Holland went on to say that as dancers become aware of the public's perception of pole dancing and pole classes, they strive to change that perception.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Whitehead & Kurtz. 227.

⁸² Pellizzer et al., "Enjoyment of sexualization and positive body image", 35.

⁸³ Nowatzki and Morry, "Women's intentions regarding, and acceptance of, self-sexualizing behavior", 106.

⁸⁴ Pellizzer et al., "Enjoyment of sexualization and positive body image", 37.

⁸⁵ Nicholas et al. "It's our little secret", 107.

⁸⁶ Holland, "Pole dancing, empowerment and embodiment.", 130.

⁸⁷ Holland, 130.

Is there an Objectification of Children in Dance?

Although pole dancing is becoming more popular as a recreational and competitive activity, it is still commonly associated with exotic pole dancing. Unfortunately, this has led to a sexualized perception of the sport, causing many people to view it as inappropriate or even bad. But why has pole dancing become sexualized? One reason is that many people confuse it with stripping, which also involves the use of poles as props. Due to the greater popularity of stripping, pole dancing is often judged unfairly. The depiction of pole dancing in media, along with its history and commonly taught techniques, has contributed to the dance being hypersexualized. Even though pole dancing can be enjoyed as a form of exercise, it is often perceived as inappropriate because it is commonly associated with women erotically dancing on poles to attract men. The conception of pole fitness emerged from pole dancing in strip clubs, where women can be objectified sexually by men, regardless of whether they choose to be there or not. Women and girls are subjected to leering and groping by men who see them as means of satisfying their sexual desires.⁸⁸ In addition, they are often trafficked into the sex industry, including strip clubs, and other related areas. It is important to acknowledge that the history and context of the sex trade cannot be separated from pole fitness.

Pole dancing is attracting dancers from all ages. With the contentious issue of separating pole fitness from erotic pole dance still standing, young participants fall victims of sexualization.⁸⁹ Over the years, the media have played a role in the increasing sexualization of young girls. Popular culture and celebrities styling and hypersexual performances have significantly affected girls and their introduction to premature sexuality under the influence of their role models and idols. Celebrity discourse provides a practical resource in which girls make sense. Girls make sense of celebrities and popular culture more widely influenced by their own standing in dialogs of girlhood.⁹⁰ Sexualized content is popular and has adverse effects on the kids participating. Sexualization happens in various ways in society; however, the media have an

⁸⁸ Schultz, "*The Sexualization of Girls in Dance Competitions.*" 7.

⁸⁹ Lamb, et al., "'Pole-arized' discourse.", 163.

⁹⁰ Lamb, et al., "'Pole-arized' discourse.", 163.

overarching impact. Without conversation about sex and sexuality, children's idea of healthy sexual attitudes is formed from their interaction with the media and other activities such as music and dance, which are often negative.

Children learn about sexuality in the media, thus presenting an alarming potential for unhealthy views about sexuality. In addition, dance is becoming more sexualized, as seen in the music videos. This is changing the norm regarding the attributes of dance. Young girls are looking up to celebrities from the attires to the dance moves and the overall characteristic of dance. When children are exposed to stimuli, such as sexual objectification of women, it shows that regardless of whether they understand the lyrics and their meanings or the meaning of each dance move, they receive a message that has adverse effects on their interpretation of how they should behave.⁹¹

Dance, particularly pole dance has become hypersexualized with the dancer's value placed on their sexual behavior or appeal. Besides, they are held to a norm equating physical allure with being sexy. Dances are becoming sexually objectified and are being made for the sexual use of the audience.⁹² Dance choreography is done using imposed movement patterns such as lip-licking, booty pops, finger sucking or licking, groin or breast stroking, pointing, or patting toward genitalia or breasts, obscene gestures, seductive props and looks and suggestive grinding.⁹³ All this choreography is seen in music videos on popular media. Unhealthy sexuality has become normalized even in kids' dance. With exposure to popular culture, children begin imitating the moves, and as they are taught in dance studios, they become a trend. The trend has been hijacked in dance as a treasured form of art. Objectified movements are not the art of the dance and do not promote creativity or artistry, but with the acceptance of the hypersexualized dance moves in popular culture, it is becoming a normal form of dance art. Nevertheless, the hypersexualization of dance damages the art of dance throughout the dance culture.⁹⁴ The

⁹¹ Lamb, et al., "Pole-arized' discourse.", 165.

⁹² Lamb, et al., "Pole-arized' discourse.", 165.

⁹³ Lamb, et al., "Pole-arized' discourse.", 166

⁹⁴ Sandlos, "Shimmy, Shake or Shudder?"

adorning of kids in adult costumes, sexualized choreography and music is harmful not only to the art of dance but also to the children. Healthy dance promotes creativity, communication, problem-solving, emotional maturity, social awareness, and improved self-esteem.

Sexualized dance routines for young children, especially girls, are known to the dance competition area; it is becoming more common. This raises an issue of concern about sexual explicitness and age appropriateness in dance. Children are adorned in risqué costumes and garish makeup that are not age-appropriate. Dance teachers have been exposed to MTV over the years and see it trendy to mimic MTV's styles.⁹⁵ This has influenced the choreography and costuming selected for their young dancers forgetting that they are not adult professionals performing on MTV. In April 2010, five young dancers performed Beyoncé's single ladies at the world of dance urban dance competition in Pomona, California, sparking a heated controversy. The dancers were aged between 7-9 years. Their dance costume raised more questions on the appropriateness of costumes in terms of age; they wore black-laced red satin bras and hot pants while performing intricate twirls, gyrating, and swaying to moves that seemed to be illegal. The dance routine video "7-Year-Old Girls Going Hard on Single Ladies" received about 2 million views in less than a month, along with a torrent of comments from dance enthusiasts and viewers who expressed anger at the choreography and the costumes for the young dancers.⁹⁶ However, although many viewers are opposed to the sexualization of dance routines executed by young children, particularly girls, some people support these routines viewing them as entertaining and not damaging or offensive. Some argue that people take out of context the routine of some dance. This raises the question, what then is sexualized dance? Is it dependent on how people interpret the context?

Popular culture has shaped the craft of dance. Children may choose to sing and dance to sexualized music even when evocative routines are not created for them. Sexualization of culture is growing steadily, permeating the contemporary culture. Pop music videos are full of sexual content, and performances are becoming increasingly sexually explicit. For instance, the

⁹⁵ Lamb, et al., "'Pole-arized' discourse.", 167.

⁹⁶ Lamb, et al., "'Pole-arized' discourse.", 167.

incorporation of twerking and pole dancing, for example, Miley Cyrus pole dancing in "Can't be tamed" adorned in explicit attire and Rihanna twerking on a throne in "pour it up" all show the pop music as a conduit of the expression of gendered sexualized porno-chic. Cyrus' hypersexualized performance affects young girls.⁹⁷ Cyrus has been positioned as an icon of objectionable and over-sexualized femininity. Celebrity discourses offer a resource for girls' sense-making. However, individual positioning affects how they make meaning in popular culture.

Despite its association with strip clubs, contemporary pole dancing has more in common with Chinese pole than is commonly assumed. However, it was strippers who first began teaching pole dancing and established the first pole dancing schools. The practice dates to the 1990s, when Fawnia, a Canadian exotic dancer, began teaching other women while working at a strip club.⁹⁸ Originally, these classes were only available to other exotic dancers looking to improve their skills. However, in 1995, the classes were made available to any woman who wanted to learn an exotic pole dance. Fawnia moved her pole classes from strip joints to her own dance studio in 2001, and she was the first to create an instructional video. The same year, Sheila Kelley opened the S-Factor studio in Los Angeles, which received widespread media attention. Kelley is credited with coining the phrase "pole fitness."⁹⁹

The first pole competition was held in 1991 at an adult entertainment venue in the United States called DeJa Vu. It was distinct from modern-day competitions organized by pole federations in that the emphasis was on exotic and erotic performances rather than the incorporation of challenging moves that are now a hallmark of modern competitions.¹⁰⁰ While the only thing they had in common was the presence of the pole, their measurements were even different from modern standards. The first competition was held outside of strip clubs in 2005/2006, albeit without any official scoring system or regulations in place. Following the

⁹⁷ Lamb, et al., "'Pole-ized' discourse.", 166.

⁹⁸ Meepos, "The Purgatory of Pole Dancing.", 213.

⁹⁹ Meepos, "The Purgatory of Pole Dancing.", 213.

¹⁰⁰ Meepos, "The Purgatory of Pole Dancing.", 213.

initial competition, Cirque du Soleil expressed interest in pole artists and incorporated them into their repeat performances, greatly contributing to pole dance's recognition as an artistic sport in the circus world.

When the Pole Sport Federation (IPSF) Championship debuted in 2012, the pole dancing championship took on a new look. A Code of Points was established to govern the competition, outlining various aspects of the contest such as appearance, judging criteria, compulsory moves, prohibited moves, and contestant attire on and off stage¹⁰¹. Competitors must adhere to strict regulations regarding the amount of skin they are permitted to expose on stage, with even the centimeter of skin allowed being specified. Furthermore, when competing, all competitors must wear the appropriate track suits. Failure to do so will result in point deductions and, in extreme cases, disqualification. The IPSF federations championship features national qualifiers, the number of which is increasing year after year. The World Championship was attended by representatives from 36 different countries in 2017.¹⁰² Pole dance is being heavily promoted as a purely athletic endeavor by this federation. Any explicit or suggestive moves, as well as attire that does not comply with regulations or resembles that of an exotic dancer, are prohibited. Dancers are also required to perform barefoot, with only trainers permitted off stage. This emphasis on athletic performance has contributed to the perception of pole dance as a demanding and legitimate sport.

The IPSF is not the only organization in charge of pole sport. While the IPSF enforces strict rules and scoring criteria, not all POSA's federations and championships do. Furthermore, POSA is not recognized by any sport's governing bodies.¹⁰³ POSA claims that national federations have aided the development of the sport by hosting international divisions for athletes from countries without a national federation. POSA has collaborated with numerous organizations on various continents to create competitions and promote inclusion among all pole

¹⁰¹ Fennell, "Pole studios as spaces between the adult entertainment, art, fitness and sporting fields.", 1958.

¹⁰² Fennel, 1959.

¹⁰³ Sachs-Krook, "*Sport, Art, and Seductive Beauty US Pole Competitions and the Politics of Performance.*"

groups around the world.¹⁰⁴ The goal is to elevate pole sport to the same level as other recognized sports and disciplines, but it should be noted that it is not yet officially recognized as a sport. As a result, no organization or group can claim to be the "Government Body" of the sport until it has been fully recognized. However, IPSF disagrees, claiming that only one federation recognized by GAISF and WADA can govern a sport, and that IPSF is the federation in charge of pole sport.

Explicit sexual content in a Pole Art competition, according to the rules, includes clear and obvious sexual gestures such as touching the genitals or twerking. The Head Judge, on the other hand, must carefully analyze and distinguish between erotic gestures and choreographic expressions. There are no specific codes, mandatory elements, or difficulties for each category, but there are criteria that divide categories and distinguish different styles. Finally, performative art, dance, and sensuality should be allowed to take center stage in accordance with individual expression. In the Classique division of the US Pole Sports Federation, a routine should be well-balanced with equal use of the poles, featuring flexibility tricks, strength tricks, spins, and dynamic movements. The emphasis is on showcasing the sensual side of pole with graceful strength and flexibility, while also emphasizing expression capacity, stage presence, fluidity of transitions, floor work, costume, music, and choreography consistency. While any type of shoes and clothing are permitted, full nudity is not. The venue does not encourage overt displays of sexuality. Instead, it highlights the allure of pole dancing and movement, which necessitates flexibility, strength, graceful movements, and a sophisticated presence on stage to engage the audience.

METHODOLOGY

Having current knowledge about recreational pole dancing and using pole dancers' lived experiences to challenge pole dancing assumptions is an important part of establishing local understandings in research. It is critical to ask broad questions to identify the topics that are most important to the participants before delving deeper into those topics. The purpose of this study is

¹⁰⁴ Sachs-Krook, "*Sport, Art, and Seductive Beauty US Pole Competitions and the Politics of Performance.*"

to describe society's perception of recreational pole dancing, with a focus on dancers' experiences in the studio (public or private) and in their social lives. To accomplish this, I will conduct qualitative research using online survey method.

The method was selected for a multitude of reasons. First, it is an effective research method for investigating complex, process-oriented, or innovative concepts.¹⁰⁵ Pole fitness is a new academic discipline, and no studies on pole dance perception have been conducted in Poland. As a result, it appeared appropriate to employ online survey to analyze people's perception and provide insight into this new field of study. Second, online survey allows undertaking an in-depth investigation of persons in order to provide a comprehensive knowledge of their viewpoints.¹⁰⁶ The investigative approach to understanding persons' opinions of pole dance is not only attempting to know the person's perspective but also critically assessing their understanding of pole dance. Individuals are considered cognitive, affective, linguistic, and physical creatures and their words appropriately represent their ideas and emotions about their being. Due to the scarcity of studies on pole dance perception in Poland and Norway, online survey provides an appropriate framework for investigating this topic. An online survey approach can provide a better understanding of diverse viewpoints. Given this, it was thought appropriate to employ this approach in the current study, which sought to comprehend and evaluate pole dance. In this regard, the method was chosen over other qualitative approaches because it allows for extensive response which is paramount in the analysis of data and understanding of different perspectives.

A person's explanation of their understanding of a phenomenon, which is commonly regarded as subjective data, should be considered empirical data. According to this viewpoint, thematic analysis of these viewpoints would be classified as empirical research rather than phenomenology. This ensures that the concepts being studied are correctly understood and avoids any misunderstandings in the research. When conducting research, everyone will naturally have preconceptions that cannot be ignored. It is critical to emphasize the importance of scholars

¹⁰⁵ Evans and Mathur. "The value of online surveys.", 199.

¹⁰⁶ Evans and Mathur, 199.

prioritizing novel data acquired during research over preconceptions and acknowledging how such preconceptions may be influencing the study. When performing an online survey to a subject, it is critical to recognize that the participant's prior knowledge and experiences can influence their interpretation.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, it is important to consider individuals experiences and how they articulate.

People have varying levels of consciousness that influence their behavior in different situations and contexts. My goal in practicing self-reflection is to reveal my own biases, levels of awareness, emotions, and the methods I used to interpret the responses from the survey. To maintain reflexivity, Bott emphasizes the importance of researchers consistently locating and relocating themselves within their work while maintaining a dialogue with participants, research practices, and methodologies.¹⁰⁸ The role of researchers in self-reflection is to take responsibility for their identities by learning about how they are connected to others in society. In order to do so, the researcher must openly identify themselves in their work, allowing readers to scrutinize them. Researchers will be perceived as real people with their own desires and interests if they reveal personal information and experiences, rather than anonymous authorities.

Research Approach

The data for this thesis was gathered through online qualitative surveys which were then analyzed and interpreted. This section describes the research process in detail, including the decisions made, the methods used, and any challenges encountered during fieldwork. For my research, I conducted online surveys targeting both English and Polish speakers.

The qualitative survey approach was utilized to collect data on the perception of the participants on pole dance. The depth of the approach used resulted in a large amount of data being gathered. In accordance with Morse's ideas, the current study focused on data quality rather than quantity.¹⁰⁹ Random sampling was used to for the participants because it is crucial that the participants fit inside a heterogenous sample that allows the researcher to use a research

¹⁰⁷ Sparkes and Smith. "Judging the quality of qualitative inquiry." 492.

¹⁰⁸ Bott, "Favorites and others.". 160.

¹⁰⁹ Morse, "Determining sample size.", 4.

topic that is meaningful and relevant to all participants. It was critical for all thesis participants to understand pole dance.

Qualitative Online Survey

The survey is a popular instrument in social research, with mixed-method variants collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. However, in the whole process of data gathering and analysis, the full potential of the gathered qualitative data is frequently neglected. The fully qualitative survey is a less prevalent method that not only collects qualitative data but also prioritizes qualitative research values and procedures. Qualitative surveys, as the major method, seek to capitalize on the potential of qualitative data to acquire a more in-depth and nuanced knowledge of societal issues.

Over the last ten years, there has been a massive increase in internet usage and computer-mediated communication. Whereas creating and carrying out an online survey used to be a time-consuming process that required expertise in web authoring programs, HTML code, and scripting programs, there are now software packages and services dedicated to creating online surveys that make the research process much faster and easier.¹¹⁰ However, some researchers from diverse professions may be unfamiliar with the advantages and disadvantages of doing online survey research. Online survey research has various advantages, including the ability to reach persons in remote regions, overcome challenges in contacting specific participants, and provide an automated data collection procedure that saves time and effort.¹¹¹ However, this method has certain downsides, including uncertainty about the reliability and accuracy of the information gathered, potential sample biases, and questions about the correct design, implementation, and evaluation of the online survey.

Rationale for Using Online Survey

Online surveys have the distinct advantage of allowing researchers to reach out to groups and individuals who would otherwise be difficult to contact. The internet allows people to join

¹¹⁰ Vasantha and Harinarayana. "Online survey tools."

¹¹¹ Vasantha and Harinarayana. "Online survey tools."

virtual communities and groups that do not exist in real life, such as those that debate specialist themes like cyberstalking, virtual dating, or online stock trading. These topics are rarely discussed in large groups during face-to-face meetings, making traditional data collection difficult. Researchers can use virtual communities to connect with people who share common interests, attitudes, views, and values about a certain subject, problem, or activity. For example, SeniorNet, an internet-based community, provides researchers with access to a huge concentration of elderly computer users.¹¹² This strategy is more effective than standard survey research, especially when aiming to reach many older people with similar demographics who are also interested in computers.

When conducting qualitative surveys, researchers develop a collection of open-ended questions centered on a specific topic and ask them to all participants in a predetermined order. Participants are requested to type down their comments in their own words rather than selecting from pre-determined selections. Researchers can acquire significant insights into participants' subjective experiences, stories, behaviors, attitudes, and viewpoints via fully qualitative surveys. This type of rich and complicated data is useful for qualitative researchers since it may be utilized to investigate sense-making processes.¹¹³ In terms of the researcher's priorities, qualitative surveys are beneficial in capturing the important aspects to the participants while utilizing their own language and terminology. According to Frith, these advantages are typically associated with qualitative research.¹¹⁴

Despite being regarded as a valuable research approach, qualitative surveys are frequently ignored or overlooked due to a scarcity of literature on the subject.¹¹⁵ Krosnick (2018) provide evidence for this. The scarcity of methodologically focused literature on qualitative surveys is most certainly one factor contributing to their underutilization. In research, qualitative surveys are commonly overlooked and misinterpreted. There is a widespread belief that surveys

¹¹² Vasantha and Harinarayana. "Online survey tools."

¹¹³ Clarke and Braun, "Successful qualitative research.", 1-400.

¹¹⁴ Frith, "Focusing on sex.", 277.

¹¹⁵ Krosnick, "Improving question design to maximize reliability and validity.", 95.

lack flexibility and depth, and that interviewing is required to get high-quality data. Despite evidence that qualitative surveys can be valuable research tools, this notion might stymie their utilization. Although surveys are frequently used in quantitative and mixed-methods research, they may not appear to be appropriate for small-scale and localized samples, which are frequently at the heart of qualitative social research.

Advantages of Qualitative Survey in Research

One key benefit of doing online qualitative surveys is the flexibility they allow in answering a wide range of research questions that social researchers are interested in. These surveys enable researchers to collect a wide range of information, including people's opinions, experiences, material practices, and meaning-making practices.¹¹⁶ Aside from the broad range of research questions they can answer, online qualitative surveys provide various advantages to both researchers and participants, which might be conceptual or practical in nature. Qualitative surveys are unusual in that they collect data while also providing a wide perspective of the issue of interest. They provide a 'wide-angle lens' on the subject, allowing for the capture of a variety of perspectives and experiences.¹¹⁷ They can be especially valuable when exploring under-explored or unfamiliar places where a variety of perspectives is required. This strategy is also useful for vast, diverse, or unknown populations, as well as when opinions from different groups within a community are needed.

Different groups of people have different perspectives on pole dancing. The fact that not everyone accepts pole dancing explains the participants' diverse experiences. The study sought to explain why this group of participants held opposing views. If the participants had similar backgrounds or perspectives, they would have had a similar perception of pole dancing. However, pole dancing incites heated debates throughout society, including among feminists. This is likely to remain a contentious issue in the future. It is impossible to eliminate a hierarchical dynamic between researcher and the participant. During this fluid process, power dynamics are constantly shifting. To obtain the most accurate research results, the researcher

¹¹⁶ Clarke and Braun, "Successful qualitative research.", 1-400.

¹¹⁷ Clarke and Braun, "Successful qualitative research.", 1-400.

must consider and acknowledge their own subjective experiences, as well as how they may influence the research process. Subjectivity is defined by Weedon et al. as an individual's conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions, their perception of themselves, and their understanding of their relationship to the world.¹¹⁸ These discussions have influenced and impacted the author's interpretation of their findings.

Online qualitative surveys, according to Gareth et al. provide a cost-effective and simple approach to reach out to large, geographically scattered groups, which is typically impossible for those performing unfunded, time-limited, or student research.¹¹⁹ This design allows social scientists to collect data from a larger and more diversified sample than is customary in smaller-scale investigations. The goal of qualitative researchers is to get better insights into the topic matter by hearing from different people, not to achieve statistical representativeness or make simplistic generalizability claims. A variety of perspectives and viewpoints are essential for assuring the accuracy and reliability of knowledge. It also has an impact on the type of knowledge we use to guide our actions, because the context in which the knowledge is learned dictates its applicability, similar to how the pond one fishes in influences the fish caught. Furthermore, preserving diversity in research is critical for fostering social justice and inclusiveness. According to Braun & Clarke (2013) and Terry & Braun (2017), online qualitative surveys are a great tool for accessing information beyond the conventional sources in a simple and accessible manner. Qualitative surveys have various advantages, including the ability to include participants in a variety of methods. One big disadvantage is that they demand participants to have a specific level of literacy, which may prevent people with weak literacy abilities from participating. However, ensuring participants that precise spelling and grammar are not required can help to alleviate this problem. Furthermore, due to the widely recognized "digital divide," digital distribution techniques may mistakenly exclude some of society's most disadvantaged populations; these considerations should be considered while constructing the survey (Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2019).

¹¹⁸ Weedon et al., "Theories of language and subjectivity.", 187.

¹¹⁹ Gareth et al., "Thematic analysis.", 22.

Compared to interview data, qualitative surveys might provide more thorough and nuanced data that is more concentrated and topical. These surveys are especially useful for allowing people to express their views and ideas on topics that they might be uncomfortable addressing in person. Surveys, as opposed to interviews or laboratory experiments, have been proven to be more appealing to people as a means of engaging in research projects. Online surveys, in example, provide an essential conduit for people who might not otherwise have access to traditional qualitative research methodologies.¹²⁰ This channel provides individuals with additional anonymity and privacy, as well as the ability to contribute thoughts and viewpoints from any location. Survey anonymity can provide major benefits, especially when face-to-face data collecting is prone to social desirability bias.

Qualitative researchers try to emphasize participants' needs and concerns while also challenging the power relations that exist between the researcher and the subjects. Qualitative surveys can provide individuals more influence over their research involvement in participant-oriented research. Online qualitative surveys provide a simple and flexible approach to research by eliminating the need for participants to travel or host researchers, making them less burdensome than face-to-face approaches. This is especially crucial for persons who have health or caregiving duties that necessitate extra flexibility. Online qualitative surveys have practical benefits for both researchers and participants, making it a simple and easy-to-use technique of data collecting. Researchers reduce their own safety hazards by removing the necessity for direct interaction. Furthermore, participants can complete the surveys at their leisure, without having to commit significant resources or time. As a result, researchers have more time to dedicate to extensive analysis, which is especially important in time-constrained projects.

Data Collection: The Online Survey Process

Qualitative surveys are a dependable technique for obtaining fixed data that may be collected rapidly but necessitate careful attention to the correctness of every part of the survey and its separate components. Pretesting, or piloting, is thus an important stage in the qualitative

¹²⁰ Braun et al., "The online survey as a qualitative research tool.", 647.

survey process. However, there are a number of other factors that must be considered before proceeding to this stage.

Question Design

The wording of questions is crucial while conducting survey research in order to obtain accurate and meaningful results. A fixed survey design does not allow questions to evolve during data collection, nor does it allow for individual replies to be examined or explained. Typically, topic-based and demographic questions are included in qualitative surveys. When conducting qualitative surveys, researchers develop a collection of open-ended questions centered on a specific topic and ask them to all participants in a predetermined order.¹²¹ Participants are requested to type down their comments in their own words rather than selecting from pre-determined selections. Researchers can acquire significant insights into participants' subjective experiences, stories, behaviors, attitudes, and viewpoints via fully qualitative surveys. This type of rich and complicated data is useful for qualitative researchers since it may be utilized to investigate sense-making processes.¹²² In terms of the researcher's priorities, qualitative surveys are beneficial in capturing the important aspects to the participants while utilizing their own language and terminology. According to Frith (2000), these advantages are typically associated with qualitative research.

Despite being regarded as a valuable research approach, qualitative surveys are frequently ignored or overlooked due to a scarcity of literature on the subject. The scarcity of methodologically focused literature on qualitative surveys is most certainly one factor contributing to their underutilization. In research, qualitative surveys are commonly overlooked and misinterpreted. There is a widespread belief that surveys lack flexibility and depth, and that interviewing is required to get high-quality data. Despite evidence that qualitative surveys can be valuable research tools, this notion might stymie their utilization. Although surveys are frequently used in quantitative and mixed-methods research, they may not appear to be

¹²¹ Braun et al., "The online survey as a qualitative research tool.", 647.

¹²² Clarke and Braun, "Successful qualitative research.", 1-400.

appropriate for small-scale and localized samples, which are frequently at the heart of qualitative social research.

Demographic Question

When conducting online qualitative surveys, it is critical to consider how demographic information is gathered. While typical closed-response click-box questions are frequently utilized, many qualitative researchers prefer to center participants' voices rather than rely on popular demographic categories. It is usual practice to add an "other - please specify" option to balance these concerns. While fixed options make summarizing demographic data easier and more apparent, flexibility is required to ensure that all opinions are heard. Using open-ended questions, on the other hand, gives individuals a stronger sense of agency in constructing their own identity. According to our findings, open alternatives provide more relevant and full replies in circumstances of special relevance or debated identities. Regardless of the approach employed, terminology is an important issue to consider when designing demographic questions. This can be complicated, but it is necessary to avoid assuming the meanings that participants may assign to crucial concepts and terms.¹²³

The main Question

The way questions are phrased (and how participants understand them) is critical in surveys. To be effective, qualitative questions should be open-ended, brief, and articulated clearly and unambiguously. To ensure that all people with various experiences and perspectives feel included and to allow for the widest variety of viable replies, it is critical to avoid making assumptions. This statement applies to all general fields and is delivered in a neutral, educated tone. The study made use of a guide for conducting research survey. The guide was made up of well-organized questions that did not force any preconceptions on the participants. The guide's major goal was to allow participants to bring up any significant topic related to their experiences without any predefined assumptions. As a result, if the participants had something meaningful to say about pole dancing, they would be given the opportunity to do it.

¹²³ Treharne, "Questioning sex/gender and sexuality." 132.

In this study, a series of questions were presented in English and Polish as the study targeted participants from Norway and Poland. The questions were phrased in a manner that allowed the participants to either answer with Yes or No, or give a detailed answer about how they feel about pole dance. The open-ended nature of the questions allowed for extensive collection of data critical in deriving the themes presented for the study. One of the questions was about the age of the participants which was paramount in defining the sample population. The survey started with easy questions to ensure participants understand the subject. the questions evolved with more intricate questions targeting the attitude and perception of the participants towards pole dance. The questions for the study were as follows:

1. How old are you?
2. When you hear about pole dance, what is your first association with the terminology?
3. Do you consider pole dance as an official sport discipline?
4. Do you consider all forms of pole dance as an art form or an official sport discipline?
5. What do you associate pole dance with? Is it an aspiring Olympic sport or entertainment form in strip clubs?
6. Do you think pole dance is inevitably connected to stripping, exotic dance and sex workers?
7. What do you think about exotic pole dance (pole dance executed while wearing very high stilettos)?
8. Do you think an artistic pole dance performance consisting fully or partially of pole dance should be clearly marked the same was as explicit content in media is marked?
9. Do you think pole dance should be an Olympic discipline?
10. Have you ever tried pole dance? If yes, did your perception of pole dance change after you began training?
11. Does Participating in Pole dance Affect Self-Image?

12. Is pole dance empowering?

13. Do you think that pole dance is against your religious views?

The sample Size

It is critical to consider potential participants' knowledge and ease with various channels of communication, as well as their access to them, while conducting online qualitative surveys. People who are comfortable speaking online and participate in social media networks are more likely to feel at ease taking online surveys and offering helpful feedback. However, it is critical to consider people who may be accidentally excluded from taking online surveys. While qualitative surveys might encourage inclusivity, some components and participants may be mistakenly excluded from the study's scope.

Choosing the right sample size for qualitative surveys is a difficult issue. The sample size for qualitative investigations is often greater, ranging from 20-49 persons to well over one hundred, according to Braun and Clarke's standards for student projects.¹²⁴ Several factors influence sample size, including the breadth and subject matter of the study, the research question, the features and diversity of the population, and the level of motivation of the participants. Furthermore, the depth and detail of individual participants' responses are important considerations when deciding on a sample size for qualitative surveys. As noted by Malterud et al., anticipating all factors is not always practicable. In such circumstances, it is critical to prioritize the richness of the dataset and its ability to answer the questions over obtaining a precise figure.¹²⁵

Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative survey data is extensive, ranging from simple descriptions to more analytical and even conversational interpretations (e.g., Terry & Braun, 2016). However, qualitative survey data analysis is frequently provided in the form of thematically organized

¹²⁴ Clarke and Braun. "Successful qualitative research.", 1-400.

¹²⁵ Malterud et al., "Sample size in qualitative interview studies: guided by information power.", 1757.

patterns that arise from the full dataset. Exciting extracts from the participants' comments highlight these trends.

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Pole dancing as a recreational activity can be a valuable artistic outlet that improves the lives of those who participate by fostering social connections, improving physical well-being, increasing self-assurance, and eliciting positive emotions such as pleasure and contentment. The study yielded several themes that revealed various aspects of pole dancing. One of the themes was creativity and body image, specifically how society perceives pole dancing. Scholars have investigated the relationship between body image and mental well-being, with a particular focus on how individuals and society evaluate the size, shape, and weight of dancers. However, Nicholas discovered that pole dancing has the ability to improve body acceptance and respect.¹²⁶ The flow state created by creative involvement, which diminishes self-consciousness and improves self-concept, is credited with this favorable effect.

Results From the Questionary

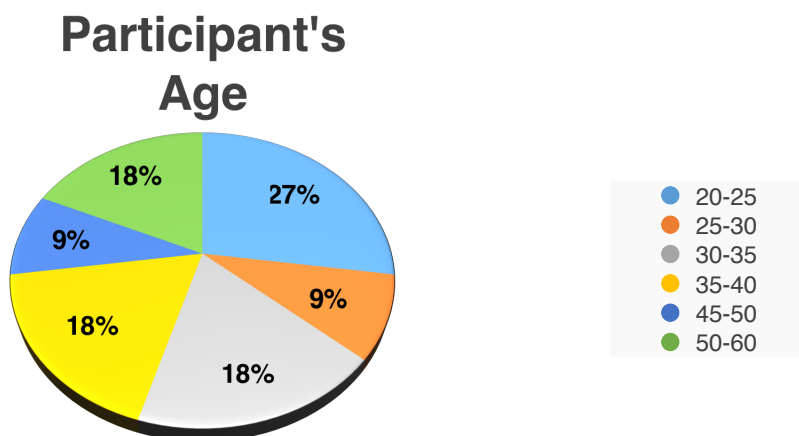
The study sought to understand the perception of society towards pole dancing. In a study that involved online qualitative survey with open ended questions, several themes were highlighted. The survey saw a total of 39 participants from Norway and Poland took part in the study. Poland had 28 participants with the remaining 11 being from Norway. The response for the questionnaires were diverse forming the base for this analysis. The questionnaires were anonymous; therefore, the only personal detail of the participants was the age which was critical in understanding the society's perception of pole dance across different ages. The following section analyses the results in two steps, the first is the results from Norway and the second part will look at the responses from Poland.

¹²⁶ Nicholas, "The psychological, physiological, and injury-related characteristics of pole dancing as a recreational activity."

Perception Of Pole Dance in Norway

How old are you?

One of the questions was regarding the age. The participants fell between the ages of 20 to 65 years. Three participants fell between the ages of 20-25 years, one participant between the ages of 25-30 years, two between the ages of 30-35 years, two between 35-40 years, one participant between 45-50 years and two participants were between the ages of 50-60 years. The age distribution was especially paramount for this study as it would tell how people across different age groups understand and perceive pole dance. Their response was critical in understanding how pole dance evolved with age. For instance, the older generation (50-60 years old) still holder the belief that although pole dance is becoming more of a sport, it still is inevitably connected to exotic dance, stripping and sex work. The following chart shows the age distribution among participants.



Understanding of Pole Dance

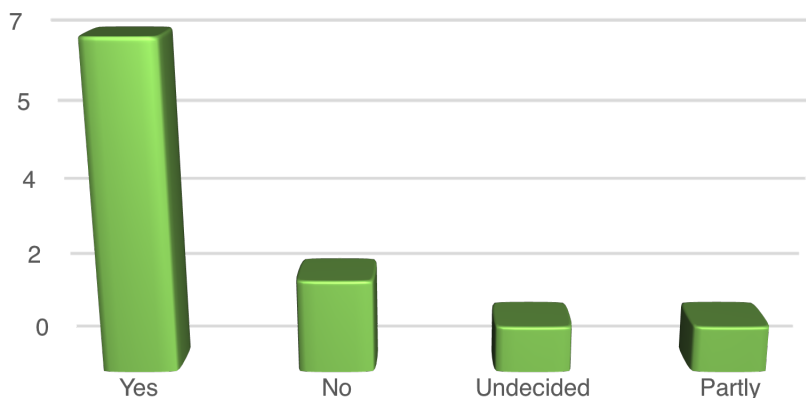
Pole dancing is an activity that gained prominence in strip clubs. Although it has spread widely across the globe and has been reinvented as a fitness and recreational activity, many people still strongly associate it with its previous, erotic, exotic and sexual connotations. Thus, the participants were asked, “when you hear pole dance, what is your first association with the terminology?” While examining how the participants perceive pole dance, it was evident that most people still hold the belief that pole dance is an erotic dance performed in strip clubs. One

of the participants associate pole dance to a form of dancing as seen in schedules in dance schools and on google search. Another associate pole to beauty. The highest percentage of participants associate pole dance to “a go-go bar”, “dancing around a pole”, “dance in motion on pylon”, “sensual, sexual dance with minimal clothes, flashing lights, strip club and bars, and sex workers”, “high heels”, and “exotic dancing”. Nevertheless, another number of participants associate pole dance to “an art and sport requiring strength”, “exercise”, and “a good work out”.. This response was critical for the study as it brought response that determined the direction of the study. With the people having a proper understanding of pole dancing regardless of their belief and association, it was easy to carry on with the rest of the questions for the study.

Is Pole Dance an Official Sport Discipline?

The study sought to seek the participants’ opinion regarding pole dance as an official sport discipline. The following was the response; six participants responded with a “yes”, two participants with a “no”, one of the participants was undecided and answered with both “yes and no” and another participant responded with “partly” with further explanation that “when it comes to exotic pole dance, some teachers don’t employ the sport elements in their sequences at all, so it depends on the person teaching about pole dance and the exact style”.

Is Pole Dance a Sport Discipline?



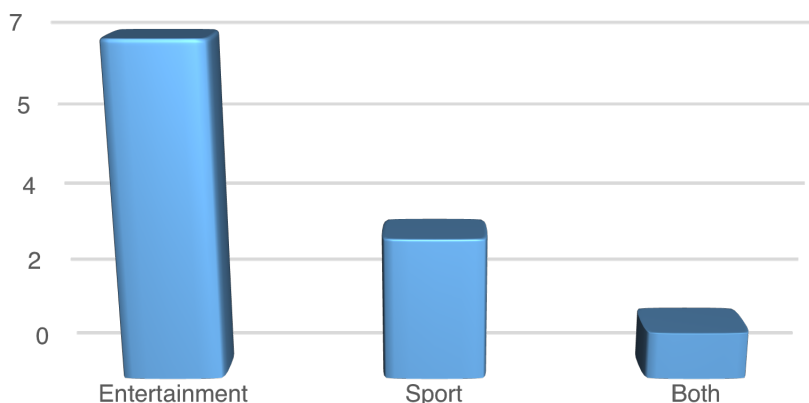
Are All Forms of Pole Dance an Art Form or Official Sport Discipline?

There are different forms of pole dancing. Each of these forms employ different artistic styles, different levels of technical difficulty, choreography and execution. With each form differing from one another, the question is, do the different forms of pole dance fall under the art form or an official sport discipline. The study sought the participants' opinion on this and gathered the following responses; one of the participants argued that pole dance does not fall on official sport discipline because contrary to sports and competitions that are more about tricks and not art, pole dance is an artistic performance. The response was "I have seen artistic performances, but competitions look to be mostly not artistic and more about tricks". Another respondent argued that pole dance can fall in either category as an art form or a sport based on the execution: "It's an art or a sport only if properly executed. When done lousy, it is not, in my opinion." One participant feels that pole does not fall in either of the two disciplines, they said, "I haven't thought of those." One participant believes that pole dance is purely an art form. Five participants responded with "yes" to the question and two responded with "no". The "yes" was taken to mean that pole dance falls in both categories as an art form and a sport. The "no" meant that it does not fall in either category.

Is Pole Dance an Aspiring Olympic Sport or Entertainment Form in Strip Clubs?

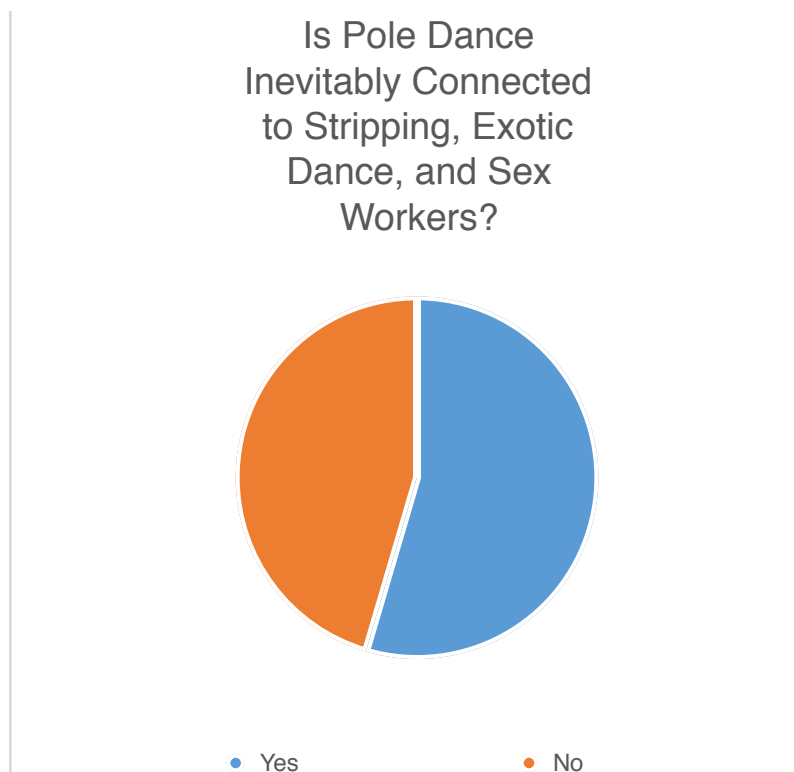
Although pole dance is making major strides towards becoming an official Olympic sport, it is still facing mixed reactions despite being an international official sport. Thus, study question "what do you associate pole dance with? Aspiring Olympic sport or entertainment form in strip clubs?" received diverse answers. To some of the respondents, pole dance is an Olympic sport and to others it is simply a form of entertainment. However, one of the respondents thinks that pole dance is dependent on the condition it is performed, their response was "I mainly associate it to strip clubs, but good practitioners bring it to a different level." The chart below shows the response regarding what pole dance is. Seven of the participants associate it with entertainment in strip clubs, three participants think it is an aspiring Olympic sport and gymnastic, and one believe that pole dance falls into both categories as a form of strip club entertainment and an aspiring Olympic sport.

What Is Pole Dance?



Is Pole Dance Inevitably Connected to Stripping, Exotic Dance and Sex Workers?

The study posted the question in the survey seeking to understand society's perception of pole in connection to stripping, exotic dance and sex workers and gathered the following response. One of the participants argued that to some people it is connected, however, it has been around for a long time with the taboo surrounding pole dance breaking and therefore it is now considered a dance form. Another respondent said that it is connected to stripping, exotic dance and sex workers, but the perception can change. The respondent further explained that "bachata was basically a dance for hugging and picking up, but acrobatic bachata (and in general higher levels of bachata) put it in a different light. The perception of pole dance is largely shaped by what the people see in movies and media as one of the participants highlighted: "Yes!! Movie's shows that pole dance is only performed at strip clubs." Answering the question, one participant said, "Well, it is. But it's my firm belief that each person who teaches PD makes it look different, and so it depends on the person's understanding of pole dancing." Another one believes although not as much as before, it is still connected. From the response, it is evident that most people still perceive pole dance as a form of dance connected to exotic dance, stripping and sex work. The following chart summarizes the findings.



What Do You Think About Exotic Pole Dance?

There are different types of pole dance. However, the exotic pole dance, that executed while wearing very high stilettos and minimal dressing is what most people perceive of pole dance. To gain an understanding of the public understanding of exotic pole dance, a question regarding their thoughts on exotic pole dance was included for the online survey. There were diverse responses for the question as it was open for participants' answers and explanations. The first participant said that exotic pole dance is "on the edge to stripping". Three participants think that pole dance is nice. According to one of them, exotic pole dance is beautiful art only when it is done by a professional. Similarly, another respondent argued that pole dance when properly done can be very nice, however, when lousily done, it become pathetic. They further argued that "wearing stilettos sounds good, but first the technique needs to be good." Another participant responded with "same as the first question", thus borrowing from their answer from the first question, exotic pole dance to them is simply pole dance which is "Sexual, sensual, not a lot of clothes, flashing light, club, bar, tips, drink, and, sexual worker." Exotic pole dance as its name insinuates is about exotic body movements and choreography. According to one participant, it is

“sexy” and to another “it is wonderful, I love it.” Although pole dance is different from other forms of dances, some people believe that it is simply a dance like any other. According to one of the participant’s exotic pole dances is “not different from other forms of dance in heels.”

Dancing in high stilettos requires high level of professionalism as one of the participants argues, they said “it sounds like the recipe for a broken ankle.” The last two responses were a bit ambiguous, one responded that exotic dance serves a mission, they said they did not understand the question. The other responded with “there goes my money” which in this case was used to mean stripping. The diverse responses for this question show that people have different understanding of exotic pole dance, to some, it is a nice form of entertainment, to others there is no difference in the different types of pole dance, and to others it is a sexual and sensual form of dance.

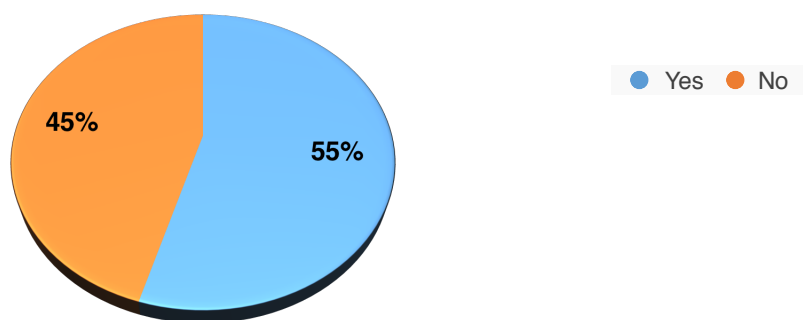
Media Portrayal of Pole Dance

The media place a key role in shaping the perception of society towards pole dance. Many people have known or interacted with pole dance through films and other media content. As previously noted, one participant said they know about pole dance as seen in movies where it is only seen being performed in strip clubs. This then brings the question on whether artistic dance performance that comprise of pole dance is the same as the explicit content shown in the media passing it as pole dancing. The question that the research posted to the participants was: “Do you think that an artistic dance performance consisting fully or partially of pole dance should be clearly marked, same way as explicit content in media is marked?”

To answer the survey question, most of the participant answered with either yes or no, although some went ahead and gave a little explanation of their answer. Four out of the eleven participants responded with “yes” which means that to them the media portrayal of pole dance as explicit content is what embodies pole dance and any artistic performance that incorporate pole dancing either partially or fully. The remaining seven participants answered with a “no”. One participant argued that it is not explicit as portrayed by the media “unless it is actually explicit, as opposed to just dance involving a pole.” Another participant said that to be marked as explicit depends mainly on the clothing and it lack all together. Another argued that pole dance is just a

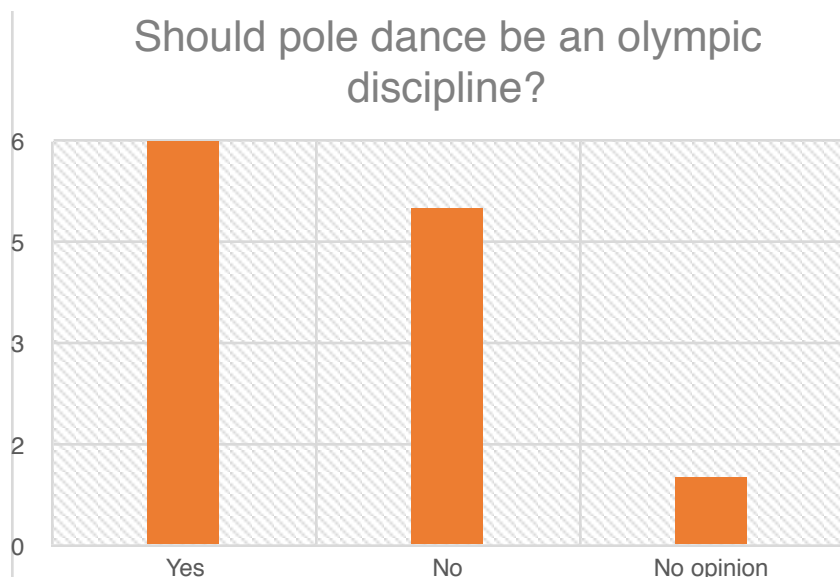
dance style, same as contemporary dance or break dance. The following chart is a summary of the results from the survey.

Should artistic dance be marked as explicit content in the media?



Do You Think Pole Dance Should Be an Olympic Discipline?

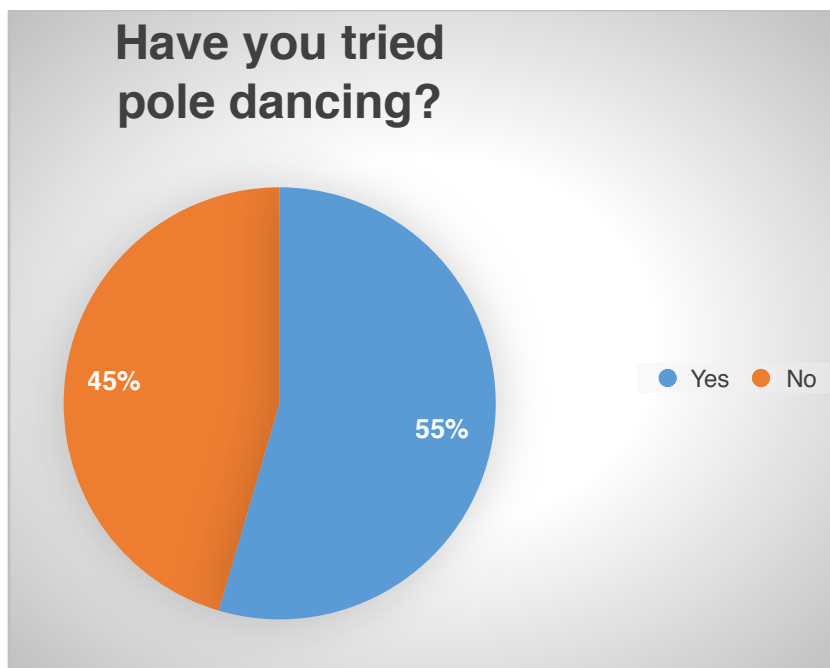
The IPSF has been working extra hard towards the shaping of pole dancing as a competitive and an internationally recognized sport. The federation develops rules and regulations for promoting pole sports as an athletic pursuit like other sports. Consequently, pole dance has become a competitive sport globally. However, it is still fighting for a spot in the Olympics. The inclusion of pole dancing in the Olympics is seen as a major achievement not only to the pole federation but also to the pole dancing fraternity. Nevertheless, the stride towards becoming an official Olympic sport is far as people hold different opinions regarding its inclusion as an Olympic game. The research sought for people's opinion regarding pole dance as an Olympic sport and gathered the following responses. Eight participants responded with a yes, supporting pole dance as an Olympic sport. However, one of the participants said that it should be an Olympic sport but not for women only. Two participants answered with "no" with one of them saying that it has too much art. One participant said they had no opinion.



Participating In Pole Dancing and Its Effect on The Perception of Pole Dance

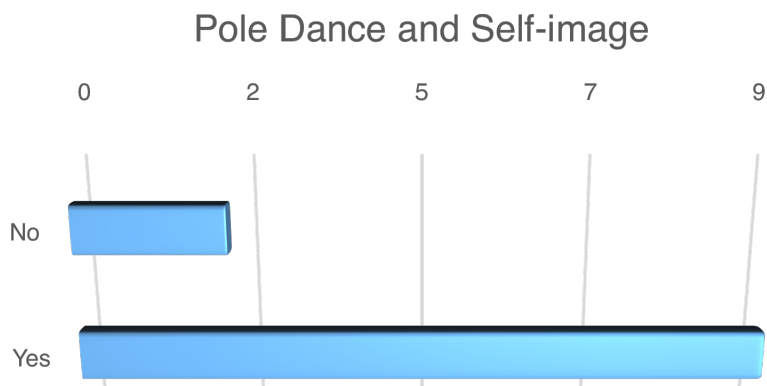
Pole dancing allow participants to showcase their skill while raising awareness on body positivity and fighting stigma towards pole dancing. As more people become aware of the artistic and physical benefits of pole dancing, the more accepting they become towards it and those who participate in it. The combination of strength, artistry and flexibility makes pole dance a spectacle worth watching and rooting for as a potential Olympic sport. The participants were asked whether they have tried pole dancing and if their participation in it changed their perception towards it. From the survey, most participants had tried their hand in pole dancing and their perception changed for the best towards pole dance and those who take part in it. One of the participants said that upon trying pole dancing, their perception changed and pole dancing environment was very friendly and pole dancing a very good workout. Another participant became more open minded about pole dance choreographies and styles. One participant said they tried pole dancing but due to their arm trauma, they could not continue or perform the many exercises in pole dance choreography. However, they understood the need for good health and strength that all pole dancers must have whenever undertaking the pole classes or when performing. Another pole dancer said they have been participating in pole dance for half a year and although it seemed easy before they started, it became hard as holding all the body weight require a lot of strength. Although many of the participants have tried pole dancing which has

consequently changed their perception, another group of participants had not tried pole dancing. One of the participants said he had not tried pole dancing because he is a man, however, he thinks that his wife would like to try and would love it. Another participant said they have not tried because it seems very hard and require a lot of core strength. From the question six of the participants have tried pole dancing and five have not. For those who have tried, they all concur that pole dance is an extreme sport that requires a healthy and strong body. The results are summarized in the chart below.



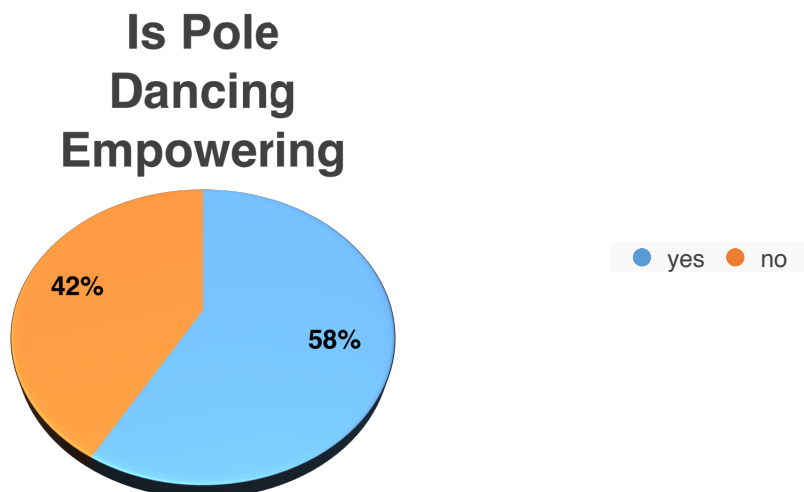
Does Participating in Pole dance Affect Self-Image?

In a society that overemphasizes on physical appearances, participating in pole dance requires a high self-esteem and acceptance of one's body. Pole dance is a demanding activity which entails exposure of a large percentage of skin. Therefore, the question remains, is there an interrelationship between pole dance and self-image? Most participant believe there is a connection between pole dance and body image. Nine of the participants responded with a "yes" indicating that pole dance affect self-image. They said that upon participating in a pole dance class, one gains self-esteem, and acceptance of the body image. Two participants said that it does not affect self-image, instead it can do more harm to the participant by lowering their self-acceptance especially in situations where they are unable to keep up with the training.



Is pole dancing empowering?

Pole dancing has helped women all over rediscover themselves. Pole dance provides a safe space for the women to be vulnerable and open about their experiences. Women have long sought opportunities to explore their bodies and discover new ways to live in the world. Outside of the male gaze, it represents embracing one's sexuality and healing in a variety of ways. Participation in sports has the potential to empower, the survey asked, “Is pole dance empowering?” and received the following results. Seven participants believe it is empowering for people who practice it either as a recreational or sporting activity. One of the participants argued that it is empowering as it allows the women and young girls participating to embrace their bodies. Another one said that it allows for exploration of sexuality which boosts self-esteem. Five participants responded with “no” arguing that it is not empowering. One argued that it can only be empowering when done correctly, but if it is done as an entertainment for in men’s club, it becomes disempowering to the dancers. The results are summarized below.



Pole Dance and Religious Views

Religion have played a major role in shaping society's perception on pole dance. Some religious teachings are against pole dancing as it goes against the church doctrine. For instance, the catholic church doctrine prohibits any kind of dancing that involves whining of waist, revealing attires and sensual moves. Although contemporary religion is becoming more accepting of pole dance with some studios teaching pole dance dupped "pole dancing for Jesus", some still believe that it is against their religious beliefs. Therefore, to understand the role of religion on shaping the perception of society on pole dance, the following question was asked: "do you think pole dance is against your religious views?" the following was the responses. Most of the participants said that pole dance is not against their religious views. One participant said that religion should focus on other things. All eleven participants concurred that pole dance has no effect on religion as they are two different entities. Pole dance just like any other sporting activities does not go against the religious views.

Perception of Pole Dance in Poland

An online survey was conducted targeting Polish speakers. The questions were set in Polish which was to ensure the participants were Polish speakers and therefore a representative of the Polish population. Although the study was not done in Poland, and the participants were from different parts of the world, they were originally from Poland and had migrated to other countries. Therefore, the results from the online survey were treated as a representation of Poland

as a whole. The questions and answers were in Polish but were translated to English for the purpose of analysis and discussion in this research. A total of 28 participants took part in the survey and produced the data as analyzed in the section below.

How Old Are You?

The study targeted a diverse population. The age of the participants was crucial as it helped to analyze the perception of pole among different generations. Therefore, the participants were asked to write their ages. The age distribution was as follows:

| Age gap | Number of people |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| 20-25 | 3 |
| 25-30 | 6 |
| 30-35 | 3 |
| 35-40 | 8 |
| 40-45 | 4 |
| 45-50 | 1 |
| 50-60 | 3 |

Association with the Terminology “Pole Dance”

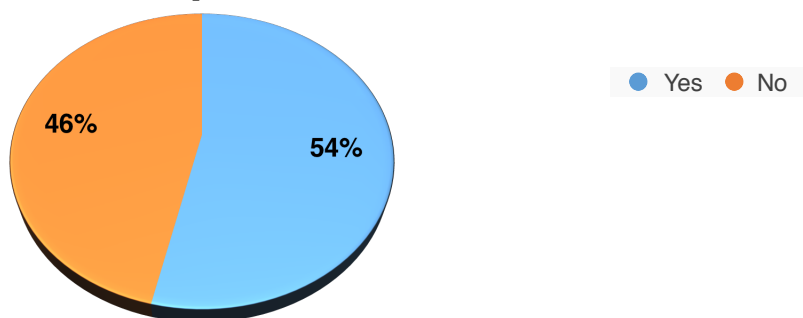
The first question was “when you hear pole dance, what is your first association with the terminology”. The question was meant to analyze the understanding of pole dance among the participants. As the name suggests, many participants associate pole dance with dancing on the pole. Ten of the participants responded with “dance on a pole”. Three participants believe that pole dance is a sport. Two participants responded with “sex, erotica activity performed by highly trained sexy women.” Two participants believe that pole dance is a dance performed by

prostitutes on a pole in go-go clubs. Another two participants associate pole dance with night clubs. One participant described pole dance as delicate and graceful dance while another said that pole dance is a difficult activity that require strong muscles. Pole dance has been associated to acrobatics with one participant saying that when they hear about pole dance, they think about acrobatics performs on a pole, another one said pole dance is simply gymnastics. People have diverging perception of pole dance. Although many participants perceive pole dance as a dance on the pole, two participants believe that pole dance is a fall and degradation, embarrassment and insult to women.

Is Pole Dance an Official Sport Discipline?

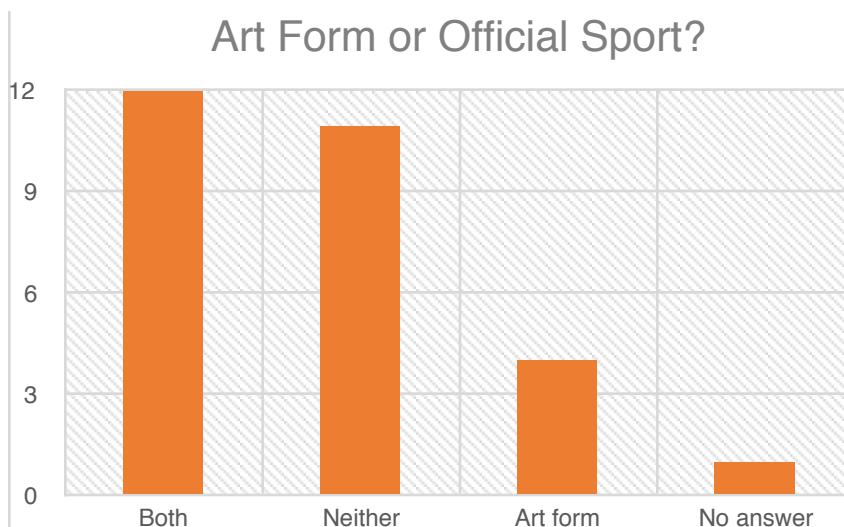
Pole dance has evolved to an internationally recognized sport and a fitness activity. The pole sport federation has been on the forefront to ensure that the sport gains popularity and becomes internationally recognized as a sporting activity. This has seen it gain international recognition and competition across different nations. However, the issue of whether it should be an official sport discipline still raises questions in society. In a survey question seeking to understand people's opinion regarding pole dance as an official sport discipline, many participants were in support while others feel it is yet to become an official sport discipline. One of the participants responded with "since when being a whore is a sport?" this shows that some people still associate pole dance with the exotic and erotic pole dancing and not as a sport. Another participant argued that a dozen of years ago, it would not have been a sport, but now, it is an official sport, indicating the great evolution of pole dance. One participant in support of pole dance as an official sport said that it is a combination of acrobatics and dance figures, therefore fits to be an official sport discipline. The chart below is a representation of the survey results on the above question.

Is Pole Dance an Official Sport Discipline?



Are All Forms of Pole Dance Art Forms or Official Sport Discipline?

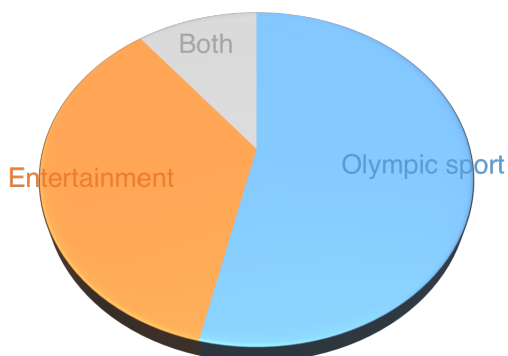
There are different forms of pole dance categorized depending on their different characteristics such as technicality, difficulty, dressing, and choreography. Each of these forms of pole dance are performed by different players. The study question “do you consider all forms of pole dance as art forms or official sport discipline?” received the following response. Twelve of the participants responded with yes while eleven responded with no. Four participants responded with “art form” and one participant did not respond and instead left a blank space. The question was whether all forms of pole dance should be considered as either an art form or a sport discipline. From the responses of yes and no, it seems like the participants did not understand the question. Therefore, the response “yes” will be used for this study to mean that all forms fall under both categories as an art and as an official sport discipline. The “no” response will be used to mean that they fall in neither art form or sport discipline. The following chart details the responses.



Pole Dance: An Aspiring Olympic Sport or Entertainment Form in Strip Club?

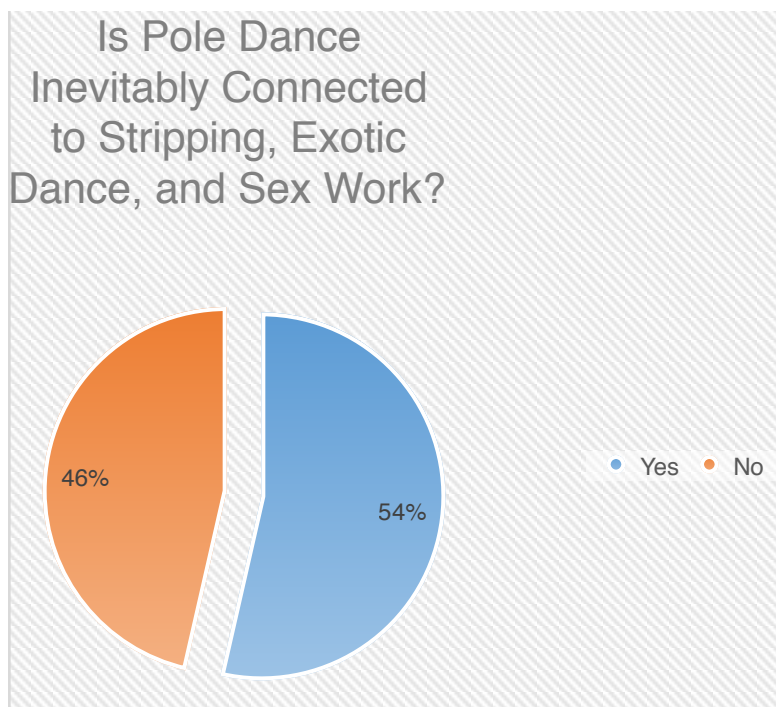
Pole dancers through the pole federation has been rallying for pole dance to be considered an Olympic sport. After being granted the observer status in 2017 by the GAISF, the International Pole Sports Federation (IPSF) seems to have made major progress in ensuring pole dance becomes an Olympic sport. However, the media and other scholars such as Weaving (2020) argue that pole dancing should not be included in Olympic games. The argument revolves around sexism and hypersexualization culture previously established in the Olympics. To understand the viewpoint of society on the matter, the study set the research question; “What do you associate pole dance with? Aspiring Olympic sport or entertainment form in strip clubs?” and gathered the following data. Fifteen of the participants believe that pole dance is best fit as an aspiring Olympic sport, ten participants think it is a form of entertainment and three participants associate pole dance with both an aspiring Olympic sport and a form of entertainment. While some of the participant think that pole dance is a form of entertainment, some believe it is not necessarily an entertainment for the strip clubs. Most associate it more with acrobatics than with striptease. Nevertheless, some participant think that pole dance is simply a “striptease and whorehood”. Another participant said that pole dance is a “form of entertainment in strip clubs and fall of female and male roles.” The chart below summarizes these results.

Olympic Sport Or Entertainment?



Is Pole Dance Inevitably Connected to Stripping, Exotic Dance and Sex Workers?

Pole dance has been associated with erotic and exotic dance, striptease and sex workers. However, the perception has been changing with the evolution of pole dance to a fitness and leisure activity. In addition, pole dance has become an internationally recognized sport with pole dancers participating in many international competitions. Nevertheless, some people still associate pole dance with its ancient background as an entertainment form in gentlemen's clubs. This research sought to understand the society's perception of pole dance in the modern world. There were some varying answers to the question. Some participants believe that pole dance is inevitably connected to stripping, exotic dance and sex workers, but this point of view is changing. Another participant argued that the association of pole dance to stripping, exotic dance and sex work is a stereotype propelled by a lack of education and understanding of what entails pole dance. One participant responded with a yes and explained that the reason of this association is because "society fetishizes female body in all form of sports; an example from the last Olympic games and the shorts scandal." From the study, it is evident that although pole dance is evolving to a sport, most people still associate it with eroticism. Fifteen participants responded with a "yes" while thirteen participants responded with "no". This shows that most people believe that pole dance is inevitably connected to exotic dance, stripping, and sex work, a perception that is hurting the effort of pole dance to become a recognized Olympic sport. The results are summarized in the chart below.



Exotic Pole Dance

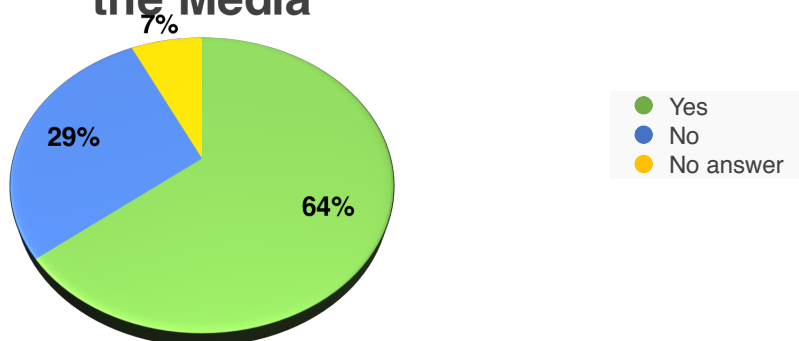
There are different forms of pole dance. However, most people think that the exotic pole dance is the only form of pole dancing. Exotic pole dance is among the ancient form of pole dance and is usually performed while wearing high heels or stilettos and revealing attires. People have different view on exotic pole dance. The question “what do you think about exotic pole dance?” received different answers. Two participants think that it is sexy and beautiful. Another participant thinks that it is “a dance of a whore who will do everything to sell herself.” One participant argued that it is a form of art, same as any other show in the theatre. Exotic dance is impressive according to some of the participants. Four participants said they do not have an opinion regarding this form of dance. Two participants said it is a sexy form of an art that only belongs and should be performed in strip clubs. According to one participant, exotic pole dance is an attractive form of dance. Another participant is impressed for women who manage to execute pole dance in high heels. Some participants had negative opinion regarding exotic pole dance, one said that is a desperation and another said it is an embarrassment and a loss of strength and strong position of women. One participant said that exotic pole dance is certainly not a sport concurring with another participant who argued that exotic pole dance is an “oddity

resulting from the fact that “normal” pole dance became boring for the customers.” Another participant said that it is “excess of form over substance.” Two participants do not like pole dance. The varying response to the open question indicates how society perceive exotic pole dance and pole dancing in general.

Media and Pole Dance

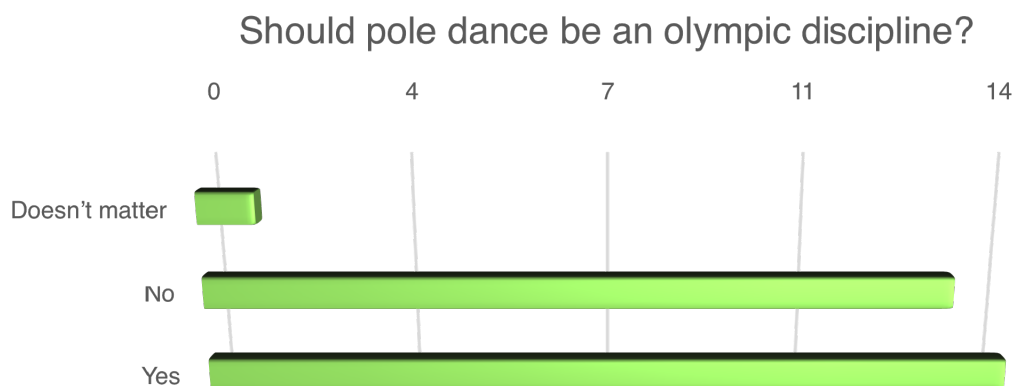
The media plays a crucial role in shaping society’s perception of pole dance. To understand the interplay of media and pole dancing, the following survey question was posted, “Do you think that an artistic dance performance consisting fully or partially of pole dance should be clearly marked, same way as explicit content in media is marked?” Most of the participants feels that it should not be marked as explicit content. Some argued that artistic pole dance does not contain nudity. Another participant said it should only be marked as explicit if it was created for adult viewers. Artistic pole is different from other pole dance such as the exotic pole dance, therefore participants argue that it should not be marked because as its name suggest, it is simply an artistic spectacle. Eighteen participants responded with a “no” arguing that despite the media portraying pole dance as an explicit content, artistic pole dance should not be marked as so. Two participants did not answer the question. Eight participants responded with “yes” meaning they support the idea that artistic pole should be marked as explicit content in the media. One of the argued that it should only be created for adult viewers. Another one said that it should be marked as explicit but it all depends with whether the show is artistic or erotic. One participant said that it does not matter the kind of pole dance, all should be marked as explicit. A participant in support of censoring pole dance said that it is an embarrassment and therefore should be marked as one. Nevertheless, from the results, it is evident that most participants do not view artistic pole dance as explicit content worth being marked as so. The chart below is a summary of the results to the above survey question.

Should Artistic Pole Be Marked as Explicit Content in the Media



Pole Dance as An Olympic Sport

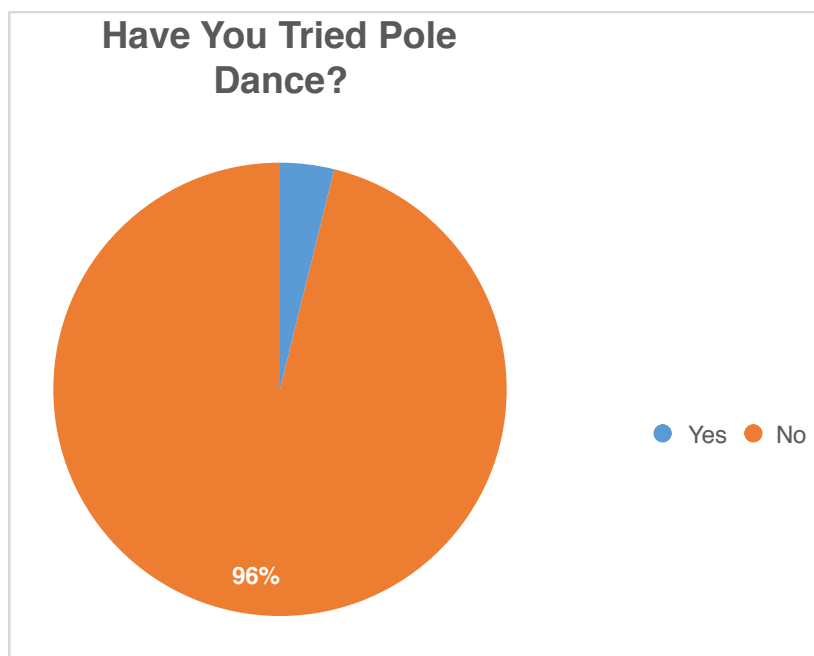
One of the major achievements of any sporting activity is its recognition and inclusion in Olympics as an official Olympic game. Participating in Olympics games has been among the leading desires of the pole dancing community. With its recognition as an international sport, the move towards becoming an Olympic discipline seems closer. The International Pole sport federation (IPSF) has been championing for this recognition. However, society still hold varying viewpoint regarding inclusion of pole dance in the Olympics. To assess how deeply this perception is in society, a survey question was presented for the online survey. The question “Do you think pole dance should be an Olympic discipline?” received a close tally. Fourteen participants are in support of the inclusion of pole dance in the Olympics while thirteen participants feels that it should not be an Olympic discipline. One participant responded with “it doesn’t matter, once ballet was considered as a parade of strumpets.” The response to this question shows how almost half the Polish society are against pole being an Olympic sport, while the other half feels that it fits as an Olympic sport. The results are presented in the chart below.



Participating In Pole Dance and Its Effect on The Perception of Pole Dance

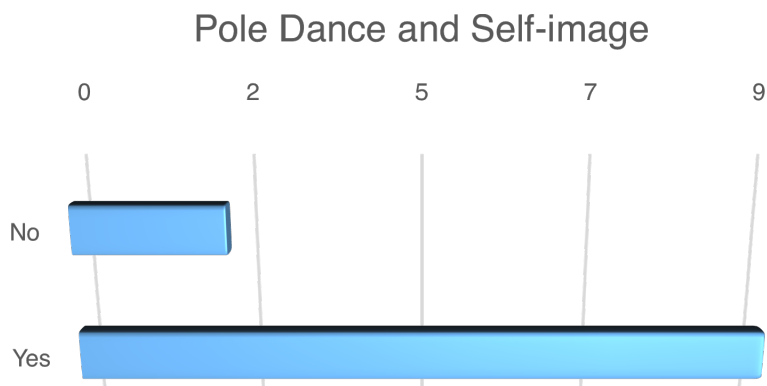
Pole dance contrary to many people's belief is one of the toughest sporting activities. It requires a lot of torso strength, flexibility and above all good health. But to many poles dance is spinning around the pole in sexy costumes, high heels and in seductive moves. This is not what pole dance entails, it is a regulated sport with code of points, articulated choreography, and extensive exercise and practice. It is believed that experience is the best teacher and that the perception of people towards a given phenomenon is largely influenced by the interaction or lack of interaction with it. Therefore, to establish how participating in pole dance influences the perception of people towards it, the study asked the following survey question, "Have you ever tried pole dance? If yes, did your perception regarding pole dance change after you began training?". Twenty-one participants said they have never participated in pole dance. One of the participants said that they have never participated in any pole dance training but their friends were going for pole classes. Seven participants responded with a yes, meaning they have either once or in several occasions attended a pole dance class. One of the participants said they have attended a pole dance class and they loved the sport. They are however too lazy to continue with the intense and demanding pole training sessions. Another participant who has tried pole dance said that they never expected pole dance to be a heavy sport as it was. One participant argued that having tried pole dance, they experienced how heavy and demanding it was, but it was not fit to be a sport discipline. The viewpoint of people changed as they interact with pole dance, one of the participants said that upon trying pole dance, their perception towards it changed for the better. Two participants said that after trying pole dance, they now know how physically

demanding it is as a sport that require high level of strength, technique and flexibility. The chart below is a presentation of these results.



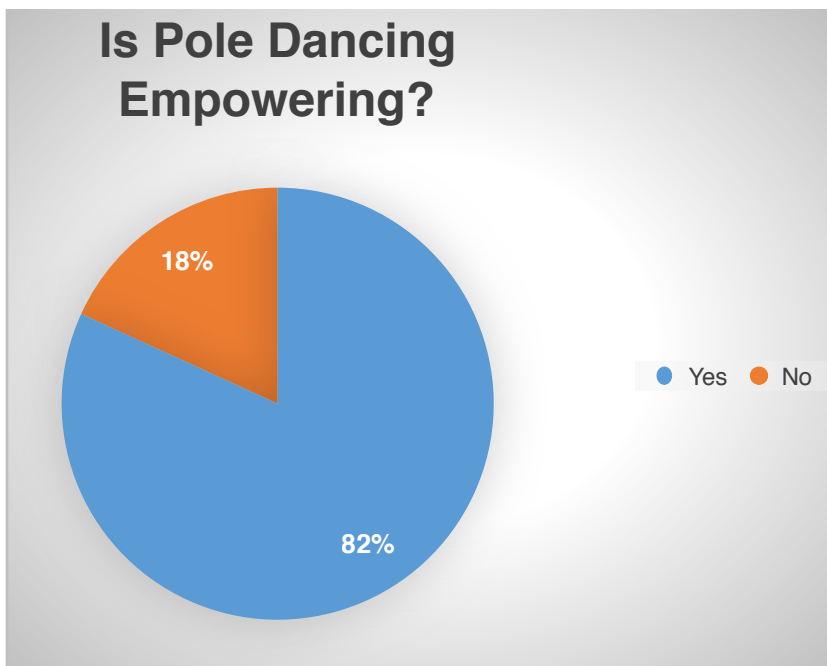
Does Participating in Pole Dance Affect Self-Image?

Pole dance is one of the physical activities that has been associated with physical appearance. Initially it was seen as a routine for women with specific body type that would attract the male audiences. However, this perception is changing as pole dance is becoming exclusively differentiated with striptease. To understand the impact of pole dance on self-image, the above question was asked. The following was the response. Twenty-two participants believe that it affects body image for the better. Seven of the participants had participated in pole dance and they can ascertain that it did affect how they viewed their bodies. One participant said that for a person to participate in pole dance, it means they have high self-esteem and acceptance of their body. Six participants believe that participating in pole dance does not affect self-image.



Is Pole Dance Empowering?

Pole dance is deemed as both empowering and disempowering to women. The perception is fueled by the direct and indirect interaction with pole dance. Therefore, to determine how society perceives pole dance in regard to empowerment, a survey question was thrown to the Polish participants and gathered the following responses. Eighteen participants believed that it is empowering to the dancers while ten participants said it is not empowering. One of the responses from those who believe it is empowering was that, “when a woman or young girl is spinning on the pole, they only think about themselves and the artistry they display.” Another one said, it is empowering as “it is one of the few sports that emphasizes on body image and esteem.” Those that see it as disempowering argued that it can affect self-esteem especially for dancers who do not fit, the society’s ideal of perfect body. The following chart summarized the results.



Where Are You From?

The online survey targeted Polish population. However, it acknowledged that people have immigrated to other areas across the world. Thus, the survey asked the participant of their origin and current location. Although the current residence of the participants had no significant effect on the study, it was critical in determining whether the interaction of Polish people with other societies have influenced their perception of pole dance. This was in line with the question of whether the geographical location, and societal traditions play a role in shaping people's viewpoint. The participants were originally from Poland, therefore they fit the study population targeting polish people. The following were the response. All the participants were from Poland. Seventeen of the participants were residing in Norway, ten participants were in Poland and one participant was in the USA at the time of this study.

How Many Years Have You Lived Abroad?

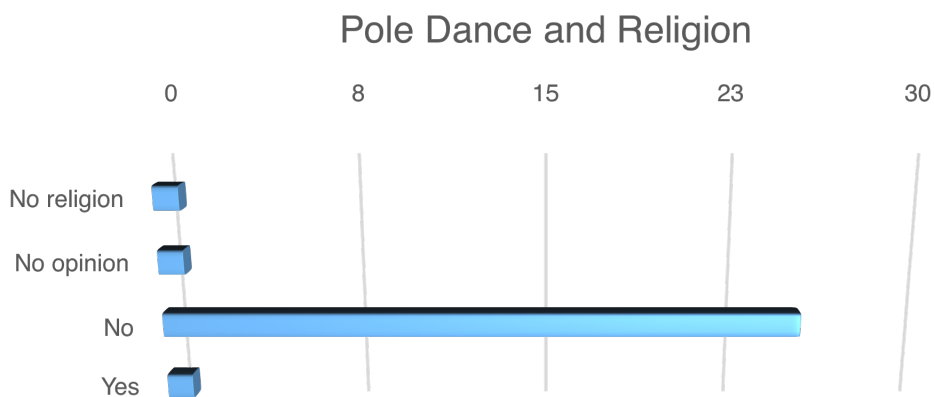
Most of the participants as seen from the previous survey question are living abroad. Seventeen out of twenty-eight participants are in Norway while one is in the US. Therefore, the research sought to deduce how many years they have lived abroad. The results are summarized in the table below.

| Location | Years |
|-----------------|------------------|
| USA | Less than 1 year |
| Norway | 10 |
| Norway | 12 |
| Norway | 4 |
| Norway | 5 |
| Norway | 14 |
| Norway | 2 |
| Norway | 10 |
| Norway | 3 |
| Norway | 17 |
| Norway | 10 |
| Norway | 14 |
| Norway | 7 |
| Norway | 8 |
| Norway | 10 |
| Norway | 16 |
| Norway | 14 |
| Norway | 7 |

Pole Dance and Religion

Religion is one of the strongest pillars in polish society. The catholic church has over the years influenced the viewpoints of the people regarding different societal issues such as politics, traditions, and in this case dance. But how does dance influence religious views? A question was asked “do you think pole dance is against your religious views?” There were varying responses but most of the participants said that pole dance has no effect on their religious views. Twenty-five participants said that pole does not affect their religious views. One participant said that

religion has nothing to do with pole dance. One participant responded with “yes” arguing that, “everything is connected with selling body, sex work, and whorehood.” Another participant responded with, “religion is mental slavery, I am against religion.” One participant left the question blank which in this survey is treated as “no opinion”. Below is a chart summarizing the results.



DISCUSSION

Pole dancing has seen a boom in popularity since its modernization in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Many people have been looking for information and expertise about this type of art. Various opinion pieces and research on the sociological, psychological, and cultural aspects of pole dancing have been published throughout the years, albeit at a slow pace. In this regard, the current study sought to establish the understanding of the participants on pole dance. What do people know about pole does and what do they associate with? It was evident that most people still hold the belief that pole dance is an erotic dance performed in strip clubs. From the above response, it is evident that people have diverging understanding of pole dancing. However, the older participants still associate pole dance to exotic and erotic dance while the younger participants are embracing pole dance as a form of art and an exercise that requires a massive level of body strength.

Over the years, pole dancers have pushed for pole dance to be included in Olympic sports. The issues have stirred debates across different people. Many questions the authenticity of pole dance as a sport with people question whether it will fall under gymnastics or its own category. Nevertheless, pole dancing stands on its own as a provisionally recognized sport after the Global Association of International Sports Federation (GAISF) granted the pole sport governing federation the observer status in 2017. The observer status is the first step an international sport federation must achieve before becoming a full member of the GAISF, which serves to boost a sport before joining the Olympics. With pole dancing making major strides towards becoming an official Olympic sport, some people still view it as simply an entertainment form. In Norway, most people view it as an entertainment form in strip clubs. On the contrary, people in Poland view pole dance as both an official sport and an entertainment art form.

Pole dancers have been pushing for the recognition of pole dance as an official sport discipline. Many argue that pole dance like any other sport requires high level of discipline, strength, choreography, and attitude. Pole dancing requires the artist to effortlessly twist their body into inversions, artful arcs, and gymnastic poses while taking athleticism on the ground and at the same time trying to remain suspended on the side of the pole. Pole is a multidimensional

activity which is partly dance, partly gymnastic and all strength. According to the study's finding, people from Norway and Poland perceive pole dance as an official sport discipline. Some however argued that it depends on the person teaching about pole dance and the exact style. Those in support of pole dance as an official sport said that it is a combination of acrobatics and dance figures, therefore fits to be an official sport discipline.

Pole dance has its origin in strip clubs. However, there are different types of pole dancing each of which have different characteristics from dressing, choreography, and difficulty. More people are embracing pole dancing as a recreational activity and sport, but the question of whether pole dance is inevitably connected to stripping, exotic dance sex workers remain. The response varied, however, the biggest percentage of participants in Norway believe that they are not connected. Some argue that it has been around for a long time with the taboo surrounding pole dance breaking and therefore it is now considered a dance form. Polish society on the other hand believe that pole dance is inevitably connected to exotic dance, stripping, and sex work, a perception that is hurting the effort of pole dance to become a recognized Olympic sport.

Perception Of Pole Dance and Body Image

One theme that was prominent from the study is society's emphasis of gender role and stereotypes of physical beauty. From the study, most participant associate pole dancing with women with "sexy" bodies. According to the study, participating in pole dance as a leisure or sporting led to personal growth, increased connectivity, and beneficial psychological consequences. The findings of the current study indicated that engaging in pole dance had a substantial influence on the participants' subjective well-being, resulting in positive psychological alterations and changes in perspective. Furthermore, pole dancing has been demonstrated to boost personal growth as individuals overcome challenges and hurdles, strengthening their resolve and resilience. Nicholas et al.'s study concur with the finding of this study that mastering new pole dancing methods and moves can give rewarding challenges that support continuous involvement with the practice.¹²⁷ According to the current study, the diversity and difficulty level of pole dancing motions create intrinsic drive and a state of concentrated

¹²⁷ Nicholas et al., "Pole dancing for fitness.", 2706.

awareness, also known as "flow" by Csikszentmihalyi.¹²⁸ Csikszentmihalyi discovered that flow experiences frequently lead to increased confidence, creativity, and a sense of success.¹²⁹ According to the findings of this study, pole dancing not only increases positive self-concept, body appreciation, and social connections, but it also builds a strong mind-body connection, which contributes to improved self-perception, body acceptance, and everyday pleasure in women. The findings also complement prior study findings that pole dancing protects against societal pressures, prejudices, and beauty standards that impact cultural perspectives of body image. Furthermore, pole dancing resulted in good body image as well as sentiments of trust and camaraderie. The current study's findings confirm past study by Nicholas et al., on the good benefits of pole dancing on body composition, muscular mass, and weight reduction.¹³⁰ Surprisingly, the findings also indicate that pole dancing as a recreational activity has the potential to function as an intervention that turns the focus from physical appearance to self-acceptance. Individuals who embrace noncontingent and functional parts of their body image tend to have more positive body satisfaction, which recognizes the traits and possibilities of the body as a whole. Furthermore, encouraging good body image through activities and campaigns may have cross-cultural implications for women's worries about their body shape and look.

Pole dancing, for example, has been shown to improve women's self-care, self-esteem, self-concept, and social interactions. Pole dancing may be a successful intervention in community programs for women on a global scale by creating a feeling of achievement, developing trust and solidarity, and improving body image. Pole dancing was an important part of the research participants' life, providing possibilities for creative self-discovery and personal improvement. As a result, pole dancing can help pole dancers build and sustain significant social interactions by instilling boldness, vigor, and tenacity while also boosting confidence. Researchers have previously highlighted the importance of intrinsic motivation, physiological and psychological advantages, and social support in pole dancing. According to the current findings, self-expression through pole dancing acts as a kind of empowerment, leading to

¹²⁸ Csikszentmihalyi, "Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention." 4.

¹²⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, "Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention." 4.

¹³⁰ Nicholas et al., "Pole dancing for fitness.", 2711.

favorable physical and psychological benefits. Furthermore, this form of self-expression spills over into other parts of people's lives, resulting in increased social contact. The findings suggest that participating in pole dancing as a leisure activity improves general self-perception through mind-body awareness and adds to greater life happiness. Although studies have been conducted to investigate the effects of physical activity on body image and mental health, as well as the benefits of serious leisure pursuits such as pole dancing on personal growth and achievement there is currently a lack of evidence indicating a link between body functionality, self-appreciation, and flow experiences.¹³¹ Because pole dancing is primarily associated with female participation, an analytical framework for identifying and establishing tools for self-care and empowerment that are inclusive of different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds is required.

Society plays an integral role in how people perceive different phenomenon. In the current study that targeted participants from Norway and Poland with a focus on their perception of pole dance, stigma, and effects on body image, it is evident of how pole dance as a recreational and sporting activity is viewed. Participants from Norway had different understanding of pole dance. Pole dancing has been making major progress towards its recognition as an Olympic sport. however, owing to its roots in striptease, pole dancing still raises debates of its authenticity as a sport. participants are nevertheless warming up to the idea of pole dance being different from striptease and other forms of erotic dances. The inevitable connection of pole dance erotic and exotic dance is slowly fading. From the above results, people are appreciating the effort put in pole dance whether as an erotic activity or as a sport.

Dimler et al. conducted a study on body image and creativity in pole dancing, providing unique insights into personal development and growth opportunities available for women through feedback, achievement, independence, autonomy, community building, and empowerment.¹³² However, the study has several limitations that must be considered. For starters, because pole dancing is primarily a female recreational activity, men were excluded from the study. Second, due to the limited sample size and cultural dynamics of the study's

¹³¹ Kim and Kwon, "I'm a poler, and proud of it." 199.

¹³² Dimler et al., "I kinda feel like wonder woman.", 340.

participants, the perspectives and experiences of the greater worldwide pole dance community may not be adequately reflected. To get a thorough knowledge of pole dancing as a creative effort, future study should explore this phenomenon from a multicultural standpoint, taking into consideration the participation of men and women from varied socioeconomic backgrounds. This study expands on prior studies that emphasized the multiple benefits of pole dancing, such as its potential as an Olympic sport activity for women in multinational cultures. Further research into the positive outcomes reported by respondents could help address concerns about body image among women of different cultures, as well as further our understanding of the direct impact of such programs on participants.

The findings of the study contribute to the current literature on positive body image by providing a comprehensive evaluation of a specific circumstance in which women feel good about their physical appearance. According to Dimler et al., participants reported many characteristics of positive body image, such as body acceptance, confidence, and body admiration.¹³³ The study's emphasis on pole fitness as a background for good body image emphasizes the potential benefits of finding and incorporating such crucial experiences into programs promoting positive body image. This study sheds new light on the numerous elements that have led to the current understanding of positive body image. Body appreciation is one such characteristic, which is a critical component of good body image and is often assessed using empirical measurements. Current assessments of positive body image, however, do not take into consideration the role of physical functions. According to the study embracing the body's possibilities is a vital part of good body image. As a result, future assessments of body appreciation or positive body image in general should think about include questions about body functioning.

Pole exercise participants claimed that it helped them build a positive attitude of their bodies as they overcome various physical and emotional challenges. This is consistent with Castonguay et al.'s definition of body pride.¹³⁴ Authentic bodily pride, like authentic pride as

¹³³ Dimler et al., "I kinda feel like wonder woman.", 340.

¹³⁴ Castonguay et al., "Body-related pride in young adults.", 336.

defined by Tracy and Robins¹³⁵, stems from a sense of personal development and success, according to their research. Participants in this study showed pride in their bodies as a result of their observed physical ability. Furthermore, they stated that the pride they felt motivated them to continue participating in pole exercise. The findings are consistent with the findings of Castonguay et al. who discovered that authentic body pride is connected with accomplishment and drive.¹³⁶ Castonguay et al. also mentioned that body pride is common during sports and exercise, which is also true for pole fitness.¹³⁷ Incorporating personal achievement-focused exercises such as pole fitness into treatments aiming at boosting positive body image may thus be effective in building true body pride.

Pole fitness, according to study participants, not only helps them embrace their sexuality but also allows them to feel more comfortable expressing it, despite cultural stigmas surrounding women's sexuality. This is consistent with the findings of Pellizzer et al. who found that pole dancers who enjoy sexualization have a good body image and a strong feeling of their body.¹³⁸ Physical activities that foster a deep connection with one's body, such as belly dance and burlesque dancing, have been found in studies to reduce self-objectification and improve positive body image. It has also been stated that feeling sexy, rather than only appearing attractive or being assessed by others, is an important component of pole dancing. The experiences of study participants give a thorough grasp of how physical activities such as pole fitness might develop positive body image through embodiment. Engaging in pole exercise or sexualized activities, according to Evans et al. may reinforce conventional gender stereotypes about femininity and sexuality.¹³⁹ They contend that modern perceptions regarding femininity have evolved toward a more active, sexually aware woman rather than a passive one. Despite these disagreements, the study implies that self-sexualization in pole exercise might result in favorable benefits for

¹³⁵ Tracy and Robins, "The psychological structure of pride." 506.

¹³⁶ Castonguay et al., "Body-related pride in young adults.", 336.

¹³⁷ Castonguay et al., "Body-related pride in young adults.", 336.

¹³⁸ Pellizzer et al., "Enjoyment of sexualisation and positive body image in recreational pole dancers and university students." 36.

¹³⁹ Evans et al., "Technologies of sexiness." 119.

women. Pole fitness provides a viable environment for women to question conventional conventions about female sexuality without sexualizing or objectifying it. According to study on belly dancers, women may discover their own sense of sexiness by "being in" the dance rather than complying to external expectations or acting for the benefit of others.¹⁴⁰ According to Regehr, sexuality is a complicated problem that requires attention to provide women with access to sexual exploration, health, and autonomy.¹⁴¹ Pole exercise can give women with secure and private spaces for personal sexual exploration away from possible spectators' gaze.¹⁴²

The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies on self-esteem and self-worth contingencies. Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall assessment of their self-worth, whereas contingencies of self-worth are a subset of self-esteem that focuses on the concept of what one must do or be in order to feel valued. Individuals with high self-esteem, as opposed to superficial criteria such as looks or external reinforcement, prefer to focus on fundamental and intrinsic aspects of themselves, as well as generally unconditional external inputs. Individuals who took part in this research study described how including pole exercise into their routine increased their self-confidence and self-worth, regardless of what others thought. This conclusion is especially noteworthy in the context of body image, as it indicates that women who derive their self-worth from their looks are more vulnerable to emotions of body shame and physical appearance monitoring. Changes in the amount to which self-worth is linked to physical attractiveness are suggested as remedies. According to the study, pole fitness might be one such scenario for achieving these benefits.

According to the study's findings, pole contests can serve as a social outlet for adult activities, depending on the actions of participants. With the inclusion of polers' competitive experiences, this study adds a new dimension to earlier pole studies. Earlier studies suggested the presence of these competitions in relation to the pole's growing emphasis on fitness and sports. The study noted that pole competition can be an avenue for educating society about pole

¹⁴⁰ Tiggemann, "The status of media effects on body image research." 131.

¹⁴¹ Regehr, "The rise of recreational burlesque." 144.

¹⁴² Regehr, "The rise of recreational burlesque." 144.

dancing. Even among non-competing polers, the study emphasizes the significance of audience engagement and admiration for other performers. Watching a pole competition is a one-of-a-kind experience that distinguishes it from other types of studio performances and underscores the need for more study in this area.

Pole Dance and Empowerment

Even though pole dance has been associated with reinforcing exploitative ideals of the female body and sexuality, many scholars saw pole dance as a form of empowerment. In a study by Anstock et al., pole dance alters women's perceptions of their bodies, giving them more autonomy.¹⁴³ Pole dancing teaches women how to use their bodies, resulting in a fundamental sense of identity. Pole dance classes provide individuals with the opportunity to define their bodies through a comprehensive workout based on controlled acts of body movement and choreographies. As a result of the workout, the women not only change their bodies but also change themselves. The study's findings show that physical recreations of the body actively alter individuals' personalities and identities.

Pole dance classes, according to Bahri, are a type of feminized gendered leisure that empowers women through cultural sexualization.¹⁴⁴ According to Dimler, Mcfadden, and McHugh, pole dance classes accept women of all body types. Pole fitness studios have floor-to-ceiling mirrors on the walls.¹⁴⁵ Women are thus given the opportunity to explore and observe their bodies in this context. It also demonstrates the variety of body sizes and shapes: observation and exposure promote body acceptance. The survey respondents admitted to feeling a sense of accomplishment after mastering new physically demanding figures and having a better self-image.¹⁴⁶ The accepting environment of pole dance classes, combined with the opportunity to actively participate in the art alongside women of all shapes and sizes, has a significant impact on their body acceptance.

¹⁴³ Anstock et al., "Anthropole-ogy", 38.

¹⁴⁴ Bahri, "Fun, fitness, fantasy", 1.

¹⁴⁵ Dimler et al., "I Kinda Feel Like Wonder Woman", 344.

¹⁴⁶ Dimler et al. 336.

Pole dancing has evolved from an act associated with strip clubs to one that promotes aerobic exercises. It is constructing new female sexuality and is portrayed as a powerful tool for empowerment. Pole dance classes for recreation are comparable to an intense aerobic workout.¹⁴⁷ Female empowerment, according to Just and Muhr, is achieved by reclaiming female sexuality and transforming female sexualization from a submissive object of male gratification.¹⁴⁸ It is a strong choice of women to achieve self-image as significant sexual objects on their own. According to Just and Muhr, pole dance empowers women to reclaim, engage, and be proud of their active female sexuality.¹⁴⁹ Empowerment comes from repositioning pole dancing as a professional rather than a strip position. According to the article, pole dancing is a form of exercise rather than sexual empowerment.¹⁵⁰

Is Pole Dance Non-Empowering?

Most pole dance culture's activities are anti-feminist in nature. According to Weaving, while participation in sports has the potential to empower women and young girls, it should not necessitate wearing revealing clothing such as push-up bras, G-strings, and high heels while doing so.¹⁵¹ This is not an idealized view of sports and should not be supported. Pole sports and artistic pole attire, on the other hand, are strictly regulated, with performers expected to wear outfits that completely cover their bottoms. The amount of skin that should be exposed is strictly regulated. Weaving contends that pole dancing emphasizes sexualization against a backdrop of sexualized fitness, providing context for the appropriateness of viewing pole dance as physical fitness and sport.¹⁵² Pole dance fitness entails imitating erotic dance moves as well as athletic poses that cannot be described as empowering. Weaving argues that pole dancing should not be

¹⁴⁷ Nicholas et al., "Pole dancing for fitness", 2704.

¹⁴⁸ Just & Muhr. "Holding on to both ends of a pole", 7.

¹⁴⁹ Just & Muhr. 8.

¹⁵⁰ Just & Muhr. 8.

¹⁵¹ Weaving, "Sliding up and down a golden glory pole", 526.

¹⁵² Weaving, "Sliding up and down a golden glory pole", 526.

included in Olympic games because it would perpetuate the Olympic games' previously established culture of hypersexualization and sexism.¹⁵³

Pole Dance Across the Ages: Comparison of Views Across Different Age Groups

Pole dancing has evolved from its origins as a men-only sport to its current popular status as a female exotic dance. With influences from centuries-old techniques and the Western world's rise, this art form has quickly become a major trend. From casual students to professional athletes, many individuals practice pole dancing. Currently, there is a push to recognize it as a competitive sport. Pole dancing was first linked to a troupe of performers called the Hoochi Coochi dancers, who performed during the American Great Depression in the 1920s.¹⁵⁴ These dancers used suggestive movements and hip gyrations to entertain audiences within the traveling fairs, while dancing around the pole that supported the tent. In 1968, Belle Jangles performed the earliest recorded exotic pole dance routine at the Mugwump Strip Joint in Oregon, US. Pole dancing became popular in Canada in the 1980s, and in 1994, Fawnia Dietrich started the first pole dancing school in the world, offering classes to non-performers.¹⁵⁵ This led to the creation of instructional videos that took pole dancing to a new level.

The current study has established that the perception of pole dance over the years have been influenced by the characteristics of the dance. From the study, younger participants (20-45 years) acknowledge pole dance as a recreational and sporting activity like any other. Older participants still associate pole dance with exotic dance where performances in pole dance consisted of female dancers engaging in seductive movements while sliding up and down poles that supported the circus tents. This portrayed pole dance as a means of satisfying the sexual curiosity and desires of men, which contributed to its immense popularity. Strip clubs emerged in the 1950s and quickly adopted this concept, leading to the birth of the term "stripper." In the 1980s, strippers began incorporating floor work, choreography, and pole work that surpassed the

¹⁵³ Weaving. 529.

¹⁵⁴ Campbell, "Go White girl.", 497.

¹⁵⁵ Freedom, On. "On Freedom."

mere bumping and grinding on a brass bar.¹⁵⁶ By 1990, strip clubs had gained widespread recognition as a global phenomenon. At a certain point in time, only strippers would perform pole dancing, but there were a few strippers who aimed to connect the dancer community with the general public. Fawnia Monday, a Canadian dancer, was among the first pioneers to bridge this gap.¹⁵⁷ During the 1990s, she and other dancers established studios and produced instructional videos and DVDs regarding pole dancing, introducing the concept of a home pole worldwide. By 2005, pole dancing competitions such as Miss Pole UK and Australia started to become prevalent.¹⁵⁸

Since the emergence of social media in the 2000s, pole dancers from all over the world have been using it to showcase their moves, share instructions and experiences. This has helped in creating awareness about different styles of pole dancing.¹⁵⁹ The modern world witnessed the rapid adoption of this craze with pole dance and pole fitness classes being started in the US, Australia, Europe, and Asia. Furthermore, new studios and academies sprung up, and various competitions began to take place all over the world.¹⁶⁰ In addition, the study found that younger generations associate pole dance with sporting activities that demands extreme body strength and discipline. The contemporary rendition of pole dancing combines traditional circus techniques from Chinese performers, dynamic acrobatic moves from Indians, and captivating dance styles from the Western world, emphasizing fitness, strength, flexibility, and endurance.¹⁶¹ Despite the persistent stigma that perceives pole dancing only as a form of stripping, this role is gradually gaining acceptance as a legitimate sport and art form, and various professional and amateur competitions are taking place throughout the year globally. Furthermore, acrobatic pole dancing has been adopted and recognized as a form of art.

¹⁵⁶ Smith-Seetachitt, "Pole Cats!."

¹⁵⁷ Smith-Seetachitt, "Pole Cats!."

¹⁵⁸ Smith-Seetachitt, "Pole Cats!."

¹⁵⁹ Locke, "Recreational pole dance."

¹⁶⁰ Locke, "Recreational pole dance."

¹⁶¹ Locke, "Recreational pole dance."

However, it is still a contentious issue to assert that pole dancing originated solely from strip clubs, despite acknowledging its connection to ancient practices inspiring some of its modern styles. Undoubtedly, the strip club culture played a significant role in introducing pole dancing into mainstream society since it enabled ordinary individuals to witness and experience the activity. Without this opportunity or exposure, modern-day pole dancing wouldn't have held its current status in our society. Though some prefer to disassociate from the activity's origins due to its sexual connotations, it is still an integral aspect of its history. As pole dancing gains popularity in both sports and artistic circles, more and more young people are participating in it. While promoting pole dancing as a family-friendly and accessible activity can benefit the pole dancing community, it is important not to forget the hard work and contributions of strippers who helped create and popularize this art form. The #notastripper movement highlights the importance of recognizing pole dancing's history and origins, which stem from the 1990s stripper community.

The International Pole Sport Federations (IPFS) And Its Role on Modern Pole Dance

Pole sports, which involve athletes using metal poles to perform acrobatic and artistic movements and tricks set to music, became popular as a fitness activity in the 1990s and 2000s. Katie Coates and Tim Trautman founded the IPSF in 2009 to promote pole as a sport, believing that pole dance competitions lacked standardization and fair play, leading to its fragmented development. The IPSF's governance is overseen by an executive committee.¹⁶² The IPSF has established several guidelines and policies that govern pole sports, such as a system for evaluating performance, protocols for ensuring health and safety standards, and sports official certification. National federations work with the IPSF to implement these standards in their respective pole sports competitions.¹⁶³ Other organizations are working to create a more organized and structured plan that is supported by the IPSF, with the inclusion of national pole sports federations from Africa, Asia, and other continents.

¹⁶² Fennell, "Pole sports: considering stigma." 99.

¹⁶³ Fennell, "Pole sports: considering stigma." 99.

Although there were diverging views regarding pole dance becoming an Olympic sport, the study established that it has the potential of being an Olympic sport. Participants from both Poland and Norway feel that pole dance demands strict choreography, body strength, and techniques and therefore is fit to get that recognition. The pole dance federation as well as pole dancers has been working towards pole dance becoming an Olympic sport. This dream seems to near actualization as pole dance has since been recognized as an official sport across the world. The IPSF launched the World Pole Championships in 2012, an annual competition for male, female, and youth athletes that drew 229 athletes from 36 countries in 2017.¹⁶⁴ Interested viewers could watch the championships live on Solid Sport's livestream, a partner of IPSF that supports event promotion and viewership. IPSF has met with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to discuss the possibility of including pole sports as an Olympic sport. Their efforts in this area have drawn widespread media attention to pole sports, the IPSF, and its founders.

The Global Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF) granted the International Pole Sports Federation (IPSF) observer status in 2017¹⁶⁵. Despite this recognition, the media has expressed concerns about the legitimacy of pole dancing as a professional sport, particularly for young athletes. The IPSF has also received attention for its efforts to standardize the sport by organizing athletic championships for athletes of all ages, from children to masters. Some pole dancers are concerned that increased professionalization through the IPSF will result in a shift in emphasis towards athleticism and standardized trick-heavy routines, potentially overshadowing other aspects of the art form.¹⁶⁶ However, some pole dancers believe it could help the sport gain widespread global recognition, resulting in increased financial support and backing for national federations as well as increased participation from younger people. Certain IPSF principles aim to distinguish pole sports from gymnastics. In accordance with the organization's policies, IPSF entered into a tripartite agreement with GAISF and FIG (the

¹⁶⁴ Fennell, "Pole sports: considering stigma." 97.

¹⁶⁵ Weaving, "Sliding up and down a golden glory pole."527.

¹⁶⁶ Weaving, "Sliding up and down a golden glory pole."527.

Federation of International Gymnastics) outlining the terms under which FIG would support IPSF's admission into GAISF.¹⁶⁷

Pole Dance and Stigma

Although pole dancing appears to be a glamorous and enjoyable hobby, it is also plagued by real-world difficulties such as stigma and community disputes. Pole's link with strip clubs and sex work contributes to the stigma, making it difficult for some people to accept it as a respectable form of exercise and enjoyment. However, there is a distinction to be made between recreational pole dancing and its strip club equivalent. While the origins of pole dancing may be traced back to strip clubs, many polers now focus on perfecting pole techniques safely and correctly rather than stripping. It's also worth mentioning that not all polers are strippers, and vice versa. Individuals who are interested in pole dancing but lack self-taught abilities frequently enroll in courses at a facility to master the technique as well as the optional performance of removing clothing. Those who love pole dancing as a leisure pastime, regardless of their learning technique, are not compensated to remove their clothing. However, there may be some overlap between recreational and professional pole dancing, since strippers may attend pole dance lessons as professional training to exhibit their abilities at work. Attending courses at a professional pole dancing facility may also reduce the risk of injury and improve the execution of movements and tricks. Strippers are people who work in the sex business and are subjected to the same stigma as other sex workers. Although recreational pole dancing has no direct relation to sex work, it is sometimes misunderstood as such due to the historical link between pole dancing and stripping. Recreational pole dancing, on the other hand, does not qualify as sex work due to the cash transaction involved.

The Pole for a Purpose event held at The Straz Art Center is a perfect illustration of how pole dancing's bad reputation in mainstream culture persists. Many people who are unfamiliar with pole dancing assume that all studios and events are like traditional strip joints. The Straz

¹⁶⁷ Weaving, "Sliding up and down a golden glory pole."527.

Center for the Arts is well-known for presenting major theater performances such as *Wicked*, *The Sound of Music*, and *Cats*. Hosting a pole dancing event in such a premium setting call into question the traditional concept of where pole dancing should take place. Furthermore, because stripping is connected with generating money and pole dancing is associated with stripping, the advent of charities focusing on pole dancing, such as Pole for a Purpose, is helping to reduce the negative view of this art form. These humanitarian activities are not only common, but they also serve a good purpose. However, some of these charity events involve the exotic style of pole dancing, and other artists utilize the stage to express their sexuality via dance motions. Large pole events, especially those aiming at collecting revenue for charity purposes, are challenging and refuting prevalent myths and preconceptions. These activities are intended to show that people should not be embarrassed of embracing their sexuality and being proud of their physical appearance, regardless of form, size, or race. Polers from many backgrounds get together to demonstrate their talents and artistic expression by freely demonstrating sensual athleticism and positively violating societal boundaries.

For some, the stigma associated with pole dancing may be an alluring element. According to the optional distinctiveness hypothesis, people have a strong desire to belong to a certain group that has a shared interest, which strengthens their sense of inclusion and separateness from other groups. The desire to be a part of the marginalized pole dancing community is balanced against the rejection of the wider group that considers pole dancing to be undesirable. As a result, the attractiveness of this non-mainstream activity originates in part from its stigma and related marginalization.¹⁶⁸ Thus, being rejected by the group of individuals who dismiss pole dancing simply adds to the allure of being a part of the pole dancing community, since it provides a smaller and more exclusive club to which to join. This sense of exclusivity fosters a "us versus the world" mindset, increasing the relationships between members of the pole dancing community as they band together to combat the negative stereotypes and critiques heaped on them by the broader group. This, in turn, strengthens the kinship and ties made by a common

¹⁶⁸ Nicholas et al., "Pole dancing for fitness." 2708.

passion of pole dancing and belonging to a specialized group, boosting the importance attributed to the concept of a "pole family."

Body Perception

Body image is a complex construct comprised of perception, cognition, affect, and action. It is the dynamic and ever-changing mental awareness of one's physical shape, size, and form, which is impacted by both internal and external circumstances. Previous research by Alleva and Tylka, has shown that experiences involving physical embodiment and interaction can increase body functionality and participation in joyful, creative, and meaningful leisure and physical activities.¹⁶⁹ Body functioning, according to Alleva and Tylka, is a multidimensional concept that covers all elements of the body's capacities.¹⁷⁰ Body functioning includes physical, sensory, inventive, functional, communication, and maintenance capacities. When these capacities combine, it results in a sense of self-appreciation and physical contentment. The current study found that pole dancers may nurture a good body image, lessen negative emotional states, and diminish emotions of self-objectification by prioritizing functioning above beauty. Furthermore, engaging in leisure physical activities can lead to a state of awareness known as 'flow.' Flow can boost mood, stimulate personal growth, and support healthy lifestyles via self-expression. This highlights the significance of concentrating on functioning in order to achieve a comprehensive feeling of bodily pleasure and appreciation. Engaging in leisure activities that result in feeling flow has a positive influence on personal well-being, mood, and personal growth, implying that participating in leisure pursuits not only fosters self-acceptance but may also help to general health and wellbeing.

Despite its negative connotation and supposed link with sexuality and exotic dance, pole dancing has grown in popularity as a form of fitness and leisure activity across the world. Notably, it has also evolved as an international competitive sport. The current study has confirmed this. Pole dancing has grown in popularity as a leisure physical exercise globally since the early 2000s, owing to media coverage pushing it as a fitness practice. From the findings of

¹⁶⁹ Alleva and Tylka, "Body functionality.", 159.

¹⁷⁰ Alleva and Tylka, "Body functionality.", 150.

the study, most people are warming up to pole dancing and embracing it not only as a recreational activity but also as a potential Olympic sport.¹⁷¹ Pole dancing is a strenuous cardiorespiratory workout that completely engages players. Recreational pole dancing may enhance self-confidence by delivering emotions of personal success, happiness, and autonomy, as well as physical fitness advantages. Furthermore, it has been linked to increases in physical health, psychological well-being, identity adoption, and stigma reduction. Pole dance courses have been shown in studies to improve self-image, body composition, lean muscle mass and strength, and enjoyment of one's body via skill development.¹⁷²

Pole dancing as a pastime not only improves physical health through moderate cardiorespiratory endurance exercise, but it also nurtures artistic inspiration. Through the shared, creative experience, this leisure activity improves good body image and psychological well-being, as well as fostering a feeling of community and boosting social connection. Pole dancing has the capacity to foster important social interactions while also allowing individuals to establish a distinctive identity in a supportive atmosphere that fosters personal growth and gives life purpose and meaning. The study has established that pole dancing is becoming more popular in Norway, Poland, and throughout the world as a fun and creative type of physical fitness, and it has established a unique culture that promotes social connections, boosts self-confidence, and encourages personal growth. The construction of a supportive atmosphere that supports connectivity and individual growth, according to Dimler et al., is a crucial component that drives people to continue practicing pole dancing.¹⁷³ Similarly, Nicholas et al. discovered that pole dancing is preferred over traditional forms of exercise by participants because it fosters self-acceptance, lowers stress, and enhances social interactions.¹⁷⁴ According to Menzel and Levine's research, engaging in leisure physical activities can improve body image.¹⁷⁵ This is because participating in leisure and physical activities may improve an individual's self-concept and lead

¹⁷¹ Donaghue et al., "Spinning the pole." 449.

¹⁷² Dimler et al., "I kinda feel like wonder woman." 350.

¹⁷³ Dimler et al., "I kinda feel like wonder woman." 350.

¹⁷⁴ Nicholas et al., "Pole dancing for fitness." 2708.

¹⁷⁵ Menzel and Levine, "Embodying experiences and the promotion of positive body image."

to a greater understanding of one's own body, leading in an overall sense of well-being. The link between cultural variables, creative physical involvement, body image, and well-being, on the other hand, is not well recognized. Previous research has investigated the impact of belly dance on body image and leisure activities in a traditional Eastern community.¹⁷⁶

Although the beneficial impacts of pole dancing have been explored, leisure-based physical exercise, such as pole dancing, and its capacity to inspire creativity in some cultures have not been properly studied. According to the findings of this study, pole dancing has the potential to promote body acceptance, self-expression, and creativity. Furthermore, the idea of flow may assist explain the great delight and beneficial effect experienced during profoundly involved and creative activities such as pole dancing. When people are completely immersed in creative pursuits, they experience a condition called "flow" that produces intense moments of living. These experiences improve their current state of being and help them avoid negative self-perceptions and notions. This study has shown how pole dancers' perspectives of body image and well-being through recreational pole dancing might help to the establishment of culturally responsive healthcare services for women.

Pole Dancing and The Sex Work Stigma

According to Lee and Persson, the sex business includes a variety of jobs such as sex work, lap dancing, exotic dance, stripping, pole dancing, and webcam modeling.¹⁷⁷ According to the dirty work study literature, including the works of Ashforth and Kreiner, sex labor is frequently considered as disreputable owing to perceived physical, social, and moral contamination.¹⁷⁸ The study established that most pole dance is inevitably connected to strip clubs, eroticism and sex work. The negative connotations connected with sex work, as well as the practices of labeling and discriminating against it, stem from gendered stereotypes about femininity, traditional family values, and acceptable sexual conduct. According to Krüsi et al.,

¹⁷⁶ Chang and Bairner, "Beautiful and good woman." 1328.

¹⁷⁷ Lee and Persson, "Human trafficking and regulating prostitution.", 8.

¹⁷⁸ Ashforth and Kreiner, "Dirty work and dirtier work: Differences in countering physical, social, and moral stigma.", 93.

the media divides sex into two categories: "good" and "bad." "Good" sex is described as "private, safe, and pure," whereas forms of sexualized labor such as exotic dancing are portrayed as "unsafe, dangerous, dirty, sinful, commercial, and public".¹⁷⁹ The disparaging words "whores," "dirty," and "diseased" that are frequently used to characterize sex employment demonstrate the unfavorable image of it.¹⁸⁰ It is also depicted through clichés of filth, public disturbance, and simplistic ideas centered on exaggerated feminine sexuality. This misleading portrayal of sex workers and their associates disadvantages them in both corporate and societal situations.

According to the current study, it is evident that pole dancing has progressively acquired appeal as a recreational leisure activity, a means of health, and a new prospective economic opportunity that is not affiliated with the sex industry, in accordance to Donaghue et al.¹⁸¹ Organizations and pole dancers have portrayed it as "art," "entertainment," or "fitness," which have been called "empowering."¹⁸² However, the study established that despite its rising appeal as a sport and pleasure, pole dancing is still widely stigmatized because to its link with sex industry. Pole dancing's status as a respectable pastime and industry is still being debated. Some claim that it is hard to detach pole dancing from its sexual and exotic beginnings. Others in the leisure and fitness business are looking for strategies to control the impression of their job as sexualized while appealing to a broader audience. This predicament pushes women to negotiate the difficult junction of strong femininity and tainted sexualization. Traditionally, leisure time was defined as time spent doing activities unrelated to labor, business, or education. Serious leisure, on the other hand, is when someone pursues a leisure activity that they like and builds a social identity around it. Serious leisure refers to people who have a deep attachment to and a serious attitude toward certain leisure activities, even though these activities are not their career or work.

Despite the advantages and happiness that may be gained by participating in serious leisure activities, some sorts of such activities are frequently accompanied with unfavorable

¹⁷⁹ Krüsi et al., "They won't change it back in their heads that we're trash.", 1142.

¹⁸⁰ Krüsi et al., "They won't change it back in their heads that we're trash.", 1142.

¹⁸¹ Donaghue et al., "Spinning the pole.", 445.

¹⁸² Just and Muhr, "Holding on to both ends of a pole.", 14.

preconceptions and criticism from those who do not partake. Participants in pole dance may endure stigmatizing comments. Pole dancers employ numerous techniques to combat this stigma, including distinguishing themselves from strip culture, keeping their participation hidden, and educating individuals who are unfamiliar with pole dancing. Pole dancing has also been stigmatized as a result of its relationship with striptease, with Donaghue et al. emphasizing its beginnings as a vulgar sexual practice done in gentlemen's clubs.¹⁸³ Other non-traditional and contentious pastimes, such as lingerie football and roller derby have encountered similar stigmatization as pole dance.

Pole dancing has grown in popularity as a fitness routine for ladies all around the world. It helps to enhance body strength and flexibility, according to Donaghue et al.¹⁸⁴ Pole dancing, according to Holland has experienced fast rise in popularity in recent decades and is more than simply a dance or performance; it stresses the development of abilities involved in athletics and art and is referred to as pole fitness.¹⁸⁵ According to Pellizzer et al., recreational pole dance participants express their individuality and acquire physical abilities while establishing good body views.¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, Griffiths claims that pole dancing gives women a sense of empowerment.¹⁸⁷ Although pole dancing has been associated with sexual connotations and is sometimes characterized as a kind of adult entertainment, it has evolved into a different discipline that includes fitness and sports. The pole dancing community chooses to call it pole fitness, pole sport, or pole art. As a result, the International Pole Sport Federation has been granted provisional recognition in order to acquire acceptance as a traditional sport. The IPSF and the IPDFA sponsor yearly tournaments such as The World Pole Sports Championships and The International Pole Championship to encourage and honor competitive pole athletes.

¹⁸³ Donaghue et al., "Spinning the pole.", 446.

¹⁸⁴ Donaghue et al., "Spinning the pole.", 448.

¹⁸⁵ Holland

¹⁸⁶ Pellizzer et al., "Enjoyment of sexualisation and positive body image in recreational pole dancers and university students.", 37.

¹⁸⁷ Griffiths, "*Femininity, feminism and recreational pole dancing.*".

Despite its rising popularity as a form of physical fitness and creative movement, pole dancing is still associated with the exploitation of women for male pleasure. This marginalizes and criticizes individuals who engage in it, maintaining the myth that it is affiliated with the sex business. Pole dancers, on the other hand, say that it improves physical fitness and creative expression. The issue surrounding pole dancing has not slowed its global appeal, but women who take it seriously continue to suffer stigma, albeit with a different mindset than Western literature portrays. These stigmatizing beliefs may be affected by the portrayal of pole dance in the Western media, which has established a restricted perception of it in society.

Pole and Religious Views

Dancing has long been a cornerstone of many religious systems around the world, and it is frequently associated with the mysteries of human life. It is characterized by a blend of bodily movements, ideas, and emotions. When considered broadly, dance may be defined as a deliberate and culturally structured series of nonverbal body motions that are purposely rhythmic and performed in a certain time and location.¹⁸⁸ Dance, unlike daily motions, has aesthetic and intrinsic values that place a premium on appropriateness and skill. According to historical and anthropological studies, dance serves a variety of objectives that change throughout time and are frequently incomprehensible in words. Dancing is used to express religious ideas, to build or reenact social standards, to worship or honor, to summon supernatural forces, to produce changes, to symbolize divinity, to care for oneself, and to offer amusement.¹⁸⁹ Different people have different ideas on what defines orthodox or real dance. Individuals learn about supernatural dancing traditions through a variety of methods, including initiation, observation, and copying.

Dance has a high importance in religious practice because of its capacity to activate many sensations and emotions while delivering symbolic ideas, resulting in a highly engaging experience. According to the current study, dance may influence both individual inner experiences and wider societal behaviors due to its unique capacity to represent abstract notions

¹⁸⁸ LaMothe, "A History of Theory and Method in the Study of Religion and Dance." 1-116.

¹⁸⁹ LaMothe, "A History of Theory and Method in the Study of Religion and Dance." 1-116.

in the human form.¹⁹⁰ However, the success of pole dance in building a worldview and influencing human views is ultimately determined by the participants' faith and beliefs, which include both performers and viewers. Pole dance is a powerful medium that stimulates our senses and perception in a variety of ways, including the visual aspect of observing performers in motion, the sound of physical movements, the smell of exertion, the kinesthetic or empathic sensation, and the tactile experience of contact with others or the environment. Factors such as who is performing, what they are doing, where and when they are doing it, why they are doing it, and with whom they are doing it impact the perception and importance of dance. These factors have the potential to convey messages about gender roles, socioeconomic rank, ethnicity, and other social characteristics.¹⁹¹ Dance's creativity extends beyond the dance form itself, evoking cognitive allusions akin to poetry.

Multiple components, each expressing a distinct notion, can be used to transmit the meaning, including metaphor, metonym, concretization, stylization, icon, and actualization. Dancers, for example, might communicate one notion through another expression that has similarities, but metonym relates the dance to a greater context. Meanwhile, concretization gives a mimetic depiction, stylization portrays arbitrary religious motions or movements, and icon represents a dancer who performs some of the deity's traits and is thought or treated as that god.¹⁹² Finally, actualization depicts some parts of the dancer's real existence. Dance expresses a wide range of meanings. It can include non-dance activities that are incorporated into the dance event, the human body in unique movements, the entire dance performance, specific segments of the performance that unfold like a story, specific movements or styles that reflect religious beliefs, and the fusion of dance with other modes of communication such as music. Furthermore, some dancers may exude mystical or otherworldly energy. While the history of religious dancing is difficult to trace, rock art gives evidence of its ancient roots, and many societies have their own tales and legends regarding its meaning.

¹⁹⁰ LaMothe, "A History of Theory and Method in the Study of Religion and Dance." 1-116.

¹⁹¹ LaMothe, "A History of Theory and Method in the Study of Religion and Dance." 1-116.

¹⁹² LaMothe, "A History of Theory and Method in the Study of Religion and Dance." 1-116.

Christianity, which controlled the international economy as a result of the imperialistic domination of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European industrial nations, had a huge effect on dance across the world.¹⁹³ Non-European dances entwined with indigenous faiths were viewed by Europeans as representations of barbarian heathenism and hence opposed to the "true faith," and as a result, they frequently strove to exterminate them, even when such dances shared themes and roots with European folk dances. It is worth mentioning that not all communities view the dichotomy of the sacred and secular, ceremonial and fun, spiritual and sexual as other societies or industrial societies do, where specialization and separation are characteristics.

Pole dancing has a complicated and contentious meaning in Polish society, which is primarily influenced by Catholicism. While excitedly absorbing Western culture and rejecting traditional gender conventions, the country is simultaneously developing its own popular culture. Although earlier study did not place a strong emphasis on cultural issues, more research is needed to investigate the link between pole dancing and male and female involvement in Poland. Female pole dancers, unlike certain male-dominated sports, may not confront explicit pressures to adhere to traditional ideals of masculinity or femininity, but they must reject pressure and negotiate their participation in the same ways that boxers, climbers, and rugby players do. Furthermore, pole dancing is a physical exercise that exposes a substantial area of the body. It has the capacity to influence a person's gender identity, including body image and sexuality. Future study might look at the cultural and societal components of gender roles, images, and femininity as they relate to pole dancing.

The study established that certain taboos exist in Christianity about dance. These include pelvic or chest movement, attire, and music choices, all of which are mentioned as reasons why dance is forbidden in church. Dance's sensuous aspect, especially moves like twisting or pole dancing, may be enigmatic and touch into the spiritual world, making it difficult to grasp and hence prohibited.¹⁹⁴ It is conceivable, however, to move the pelvis and chest in a non-sensual manner that is appropriate in certain dancing environments for different goals.

¹⁹³ LaMothe, "A History of Theory and Method in the Study of Religion and Dance." 1-116.

¹⁹⁴ LaMothe, "A History of Theory and Method in the Study of Religion and Dance." 1-116.

It is evident from the study that the dress and gear associated with pole dancing is one of the elements leading to the persistence of the stigma around this art form. Pole clothes must expose more flesh since polers practically adhere to the pole with their skin in order to do stunts.¹⁹⁵ Most pole attire resembles a stylish sports bra with bikini bottoms that have additional fabric in the crotch region to avoid "slippage." "Slippage" refers to the slipping of private parts out of clothing while dancing. Most women's clothing, such as bikini bottoms and bodysuits, provide insufficient coverage in the private region, so some people have started businesses to make clothing that looks like the desired clothing (bikinis, lingerie, bodysuits, and so on), but is specifically designed to prevent slippage. Pole dancing clothes may be designed to seem like a dancer's outfit in order to create a mood and boost confidence in educated persons.¹⁹⁶ This sort of gear also provides acceptance and encouragement for other pole dancers to wear apparel that exposes more flesh. Individuals may choose to wear more exposing attire, such as ornamental bras and underwear that cover the breasts and crotch. The basic objective for such attire remains the same: to improve the atmosphere for dancing and executing stunts during pole dance sessions. Individuals pick clothes that corresponds to their chosen pole dance style for the day. Clothing, as Weston and Lenette pointed out, may have a substantial psychological and social impact on a person, much as rituals, work practices, and dancing have cultural importance within distinct gender and self-identity notions.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, pole dancers frequently dress in more modest apparel than is commonly assumed.

Although church is one of the cornerstones in society, people are shunning the taboos regarding dance as seen from the study. The catholic church holds three main doctrines pertaining to dance; clothing, choreography and sensuality. Interestingly, participants from both Norway and Poland argue that the church and particularly religion have nothing to do with dance and in this case pole dance. Because of the long history of opposition of church to pole dance, it was surprising to discover that most of the participants believed that people should practice pole dance either individually or corporately without the influence of the church. Consequently,

¹⁹⁵ Weston and Lenette, "Performing freedom.", 122.

¹⁹⁶ Weston and Lenette, "Performing freedom.", 123.

¹⁹⁷ Weston and Lenette, "Performing freedom.", 123.

participants believe that participating in pole dance does not affect their religious views. Despite the society movement towards acceptance of pole dance as a form of recreation and sporting activity, the taboos that existed regarding pole dance are still prevalent. The main issue that raises concern in pole dance is sexuality, clothing that reveals the shape of the body and movement of certain body parts. While the bible discusses the importance of modesty, sexuality is discussed in the book of Songs of Solomon. Besides, David in Psalms 139:14-15 acknowledges the beauty of the body. This brings the question of the context of dressing and sexuality.

CONCLUSION

Pole dancing has become an important part of people's free time and may be classified as a serious leisure activity. Individuals who participate in leisure activities outside of their professional employment are developing and expressing unique talents and information that can be turned into a career. According to Stebbins, a leading researcher on the subject, six factors contribute to the sense of "doing serious leisure": overcoming challenges, demonstrating commitment, developing specialized skills, gaining long-term benefits, creating distinct cultures, and identifying unique involvement in the activity.¹⁹⁸ Female pole dancers devote both time and money to attending certification classes in order to learn advanced techniques and skills to enhance their pole dancing ability. Participation in such classes drives them into competitive pole dancing and prepares them to compete in national and international competitions. Regardless of their employment, the effort shown by these individuals demonstrates their delight in being referred to be "pole dancers", "pole athletes", or "polers". Participating in these high-level workshops and contests distinguishes them from novices and supports the concept of serious leisure, which aids in the development of a "unstigmatized" self-identity.

According to the findings, participating in a female-oriented, non-traditional activity generates a distinct social space for participants that encourages identity creation inside the group rather than society conceptions. However, among the broader public, this behavior is frequently disparaging and ridiculed. Despite this, pole players regard it as a sport and have formed a strong community around it. While this study investigates the experiences of European

¹⁹⁸ Stebbins, "A. *Serious leisure*."

women and how they deal with the stigma associated with pole engagement, it does not dive into the resistance or problems associated with social participation. By creating a strong sense of personal identity and steadfast devotion to the activity, the participants were able to transcend the stigma associated with pole dancing. The participants changed the meaning of pole dancing via their interpretations of pole, demonstrating that it is much more than what Western media and culture depicts it to be.

Furthermore, pole fitness practitioners who are questioned about their clothes during practice and performances face unfavorable views and social evaluations. Pole fitness practitioners are upfront about their participation and do not hide it. They are at ease speaking and expressing their interest in pole exercise and are not concerned with justifying or negotiating their practice with others. Goffman's theater-based theory of impression management is pertinent to the politics of secrecy, which distinguishes between public and private space for performers. Similarly, to the participants in Dimler et al's., study on pole dancers, European women who participate in pole fitness receive encouragement and inspiration from the pole community throughout their training sessions.¹⁹⁹ The pole studio offers students with a warm and friendly environment in which they may freely explore and improve their pole dancing talents. The pole studio's pleasant social environment encourages women to take pole exercise seriously and become devoted members of the pole community, which helps them overcome the stigma associated with pole dancing. This is seen by the awards and medals they get in contests, which indicate their devotion and hard work.

The rampant pole attacks derive from the mistaken idea that its sole purpose is to appeal to the masculine gaze. However, this is a misunderstanding, even though it's easy to see why it's usually seen that way. Pole dancing is sometimes viewed as undesirable and comparable to prostitution or stripping by society, rather than acknowledging its roots in ancient sports such as Mallakhamb and Chinese pole. Many of the maneuvers employed in modern pole dancing today are derived from traditional sports that are far from promiscuity.' The popularity of pole dancing in American strip clubs has led to the idea that it is solely linked with paid sexual entertainment.

¹⁹⁹ Dimler et al., "I kinda feel like wonder woman."345.

Modern pole dance, on the other hand, has progressed past this caricature. Furthermore, male pole dancers are typically perceived as performing for the enjoyment of women, even though pole dancing is considered a masculine fitness gimmick. This stigma stems from misogyny. Despite its history, some people believe pole dancing hinders feminism. To begin, the patriarchal idea that all women who pole dance behave in a sexual or provocative manner, regardless of their dress, presentation, or surroundings, is wrong. This concept is sometimes used to defend the notion that pole dancing is solely for guys. This viewpoint, however, ignores the sport's skillful and aesthetic element. As a result of the link with femininity and sexuality, masculine and non-binary persons are less likely to love pole dancing.

Those who assume that clothing is only patriarchal when women wear provocatively are mistaken. Even if a woman is dressed in leggings and a t-shirt rather than shorts and a crop top, her body might be objectified and sexualized depending on its shape and motions. This begs the question of whether the woman's physique or her clothes are to blame. Finally, we must aim towards a culture in which the female body is not perceived as a sexual object and its display is considered as awe-inspiring rather than sexually provocative. Topless, erotic, and strip dancers have been viewed as aberrant jobs in many Western nations. However, because there are no occupations associated to strip clubs or performances in front of an audience, Korean women's participation in pole dancing is not obviously linked to sexual dance or striptease. Rather, the stigma connected with pole dancing for Korean participants stems from the exposed attire and injuries that frequently accompany this sport. Despite suggestions that pole dancing originated in Western countries' strip clubs, there is no "stripper stigma" for participants to deal with.

What is the practical solution, notwithstanding all the scholarly debate? It would be a big triumph against patriarchy if we stopped stigmatizing pole and instead accepted it as a genuine form of expression. It is a deliberate decision to blame women for the stigma of the pole, rather than the institutional limitations and cultural conventions that impose it. Society's opinion of pole is heavily impacted by its link with sex work; but, when presented in this manner, pole can be a sensuous and fun art form. Pole styles are naturally versatile, ranging from expressive and

dramatic to high-energy and explosive. This was highlighted in CU Pole Society's recent "A Night at the Movies" event.

Pole dancing, rather than being linked with sensuality, has been reinvented as a sport and art form. Despite the bruising and friction burns that are prevalent with the technique, it demonstrates the human body's amazing powers while serving a non-sexual function. Participation in pole dancing lessons promotes a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment by introducing participants to a caring and inclusive environment that appreciates both strength and vulnerability.

Pole dancing is more than just a kind of entertainment for others. Its relevance stems from its place in the debate around female sexuality and emancipation. Historically, the pole has represented numerous elements of women's existence, such as economic position, sexual aggressiveness and objectification, and ethical standing. Pole dancing has evolved in contemporary times as a method for women to reclaim control over their sexuality and embrace their bodies. Pole dancing has become a form of protest against the long-standing objectification and exploitation of women's bodies. Women may reclaim the pole as a symbol of authority, self-assurance, and personal progress by reclaiming it. This sort of dancing enables individuals to transcend the negative connotations and prejudices connected with their bodies, allowing them to display themselves with confidence, beauty, and self-love.

This study sheds fresh light on some of the elements that have led to our current understanding of positive body image. While body appreciation is an important component of good body image, its evaluation through quantifiable techniques currently places too much emphasis on body functions. The outcomes of the study stress the significance of recognizing the body's potential as a key component of good body image. As a result, in the future, any evaluations of body appreciation or other assessments of positive body image should include questions on bodily functionality. Pole fitness participants reported acquiring a sense of body pride as a result of conquering both physical and mental hurdles. This is consistent with the ideas of body pride outlined by Castonguay et al. with real body pride being promoted by personal

development and successes, as conception of authentic pride.²⁰⁰ As a result, to create true body pleasure, it may be useful for body image enhancement programs to include activities that focus on personal success, such as pole fitness.

Future Study

To research the sociocultural impacts of the discrepancy between present and ideal body shapes and sizes, it is necessary to investigate the link between objectification theory and the mental well-being of recreational pole dancers. Examining the influence of sexualization delight on the gap between desired beauty and real body image might give significant insights into how self-objectification can harm women's well-being. Furthermore, future study should try to identify the psychological aspects driving recreational pole dancing involvement and how such factors vary along the trip. Although qualitative evidence suggests that pole dancing might assist improve body image, only experimental research can support these claims. To acquire a more thorough grasp of objectification theory, it is critical to examine its applicability across a broader population, taking into account elements such as gender, sexuality, and other traits. Another pertinent subject is how recreational male pole dancers build their gender identity and sexuality, given the gap between conventional and current notions of masculinity exhibited in men who engage in female-dominated activities. Considering how men view their masculinity in this environment might help throw further light on the implications of objectification theory, especially the negative impacts of the male gaze. It would be interesting to investigate the link between dose-dependency and its advantages in regard to embodiment and the processes that underpin it. Recent research suggests that regular and sustained participation in recreational pole dancing is required for the preservation of state changes that occur in embodiment and associated processes. Investigating the requisite involvement time required to see the advantages of embodiment in recreational pole dancing might thus be instructive.

²⁰⁰ Castonguay et al., "Body-related pride in young adults.", 341.

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