

**SWINGING AROUND THE POLE:  
SEXUALITY, FITNESS, AND STRIPPER STIGMA IN EROTIC DANCING CLASSES**

by

ORALIA GÓMEZ-RAMÍREZ

BA, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2002  
BA, Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2005

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Anthropology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August 2007

© Oralia Gómez-Ramírez, 2007

## ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I examine issues relating to pole dancing classes as performed in Vancouver, Canada. Pole dancing classes are programs inspired by erotic dancing, offered largely in fitness studios that have appeared during the past five years. Based on interviews with two instructors and eight students of pole dancing, participant-observations, and archival data, I address three themes that emerged during my field research. First, I describe the erotic fitness scene in the city. Second, I consider the different reasons women give for pole dancing. Here, I address the existing tensions between erotic pole dancing and pole fitness. And third, I document women's experiences and negotiations of the stripper stigma attached to the classes. I found that despite challenging prevalent sexual mores and gendered racial scripts, and developing a strong sense of admiration for strippers, in their efforts to deal with stigma pole dancing students re-inscribe established norms about female sexualities, inaccurate assumptions about professional erotic dancers, and widely held negative perceptions about sex industry workers.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
<b>I. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
A Story from the Field: Pole Dancing Competition.....	1
The Research.....	4
The Research Process.....	4
The Participants.....	6
The Researcher.....	7
<b>II. Theoretical Background.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Sex Research: Social Constructionist and Feminist Perspectives.....	8
Sex Work and Erotic Dancing.....	9
The Fitness World: Women and Exercise.....	13
<b>III. Findings and Discussion.....</b>	<b>15</b>
What Are Pole Dancing Classes? The Erotic Fitness Scene in Vancouver.....	15
Reasons to Pole Dance: Erotic Pole Dancing and Pole Fitness.....	20
Back to the Field: End of Session Pole Dancing Performance.....	25
Challenging Prevalent Sexual Mores and Gendered Racial Scripts.....	27
Managing Stripper Stigma.....	31
Stripper Fear and Secrecy.....	33
“Sexy”, Not “Slutty”.....	34
Class Distinctions.....	36
Charity, Nudity and Labour.....	38
Sport Pole Dancing.....	41
<b>IV. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>46</b>

This thesis is dedicated to my mother,  
Silvia Ramírez Campos

And to the memory of Amanda Araba Ocran  
—an inspiring woman who challenged systemic racism and sexism

## Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the intellectual support I have received from the supervisors of this thesis: Dr. Becki Ross and Dr. Patrick Moore, who provided me with attentive, careful reading of my work, valuable comments and stimulating feedback, patient editing help of several drafts of this paper, and continuous guidance throughout the research process. I thank Dr. Jennifer Kramer for reading and providing useful suggestions that helped improve the final version of this paper. I also want to express gratitude to Dr. Alexia Bloch, who gently guided me during my first year as a graduate student. I am indebted to her for her academic supervision and for her advice on choosing pole dancing classes as a thesis topic. I also want to express thanks to Dr. Feona Attwood and Dr. Samantha Holland, who let me read their work on pole dancing classes at early stages in their writing. Alan Wiebe and Katherine White provided me with practical assistance during the research process. Chelsea Bolan in particular went beyond all friendly support and patiently edited early drafts of the present work.

The completion of this academic period was only possible because I counted on the caring support and company of colleagues and friends. Marie-Eve Carrier-Moisán became one of my most appreciated anthropologist interlocutors, as well as my roommate, confidant, and best friend. Kim Dertien provided me with her companionship to make both the research process and thesis writing less solitary, and with her friendship to make my life more exciting and fun. Rachelle Delaney, Chelsea Bolan, and Mana Dembo, members of our fabulous world-themed Dinner Club, delighted me with some of their best recipes and cooking skills, and also provided me with an infinite number of laughs that helped me continue with the arduous and often busy schedule of academic life.

My long time friends Erika Mendoza Varela, Mónica Tahuilán Anguiano, Erandi Ruiz Caudillo, Marcela Salgado Gómez, Luz Verónica Reyes Cruz, Gabriel Cervantes Alejandro, Carlos Ortega, and Joel Ortiz Arroyo have also offered me their support despite the distance. I thank them all for always reminding me that when the time has come for me to go back home, I will still be part of their lives, even though I may have changed a lot during the process.

The love of my family has been important for me during these past two years as well. My mother Silvia Ramírez Campos, my father Sergio Orlando Gómez Méndez, and my brother Leopoldo Gómez Ramírez are extremely proud of me and I would like to say that *los quiero mucho, los respeto y les agradezco todo lo que me han dado*. My deepest gratitude goes to my beloved partner Julien Henon. I thank him for walking by my side during this journey. My favourite Olga Orozco's poem says that *para hacer un talismán se necesita un corazón; nada más que un indefenso corazón enamorado*. My talisman carries the spell of keeping us together for a long time! *Je t'aime très fort!*

Last, but not least, I am deeply grateful to the pole dancing students and instructors whose enthusiasm and willingness to participate in my study have made this research possible. They not only generously gave me their time, but answered to all of my questions with patience and good humour. I thank them greatly for sharing their insightful personal understandings of pole dancing. All flaws in this work remain my responsibility.

## **I. Introduction**

### **A Story from the Field: Pole Dancing Competition**

March 29, 2007: It is almost 9 pm in Vancouver, Canada. It is an unusually warm and dry night in a city best known for its rain. Emerging from a limousine, fourteen women make their way inside the Caprice, one of the downtown night clubs on Granville Street. They wear elegant gowns that expose their shoulders sparkled with bright, colourful glitter. Their lips are shiny. As they walk in, the crowd excitedly cheers, "Good luck!" Each of them has a different look, but they all seem equally excited. Friends and family members, both men and women, stand in line to enter the club. They are bubbling with anticipation. Gradually, everybody goes in.

The place is dark but I see some familiar faces, as well as some others I have never seen before. "Hellos" are exchanged here and there. The nightclub tables scattered across the floor start to fill up. At the centre stands a four metre square platform, one metre high. But just as this is not a usual night in the city, this is not an ordinary platform. The stage that captures our attention has a silver freestanding pole in the centre, and the fourteen women are here to contend for the national title of "Miss Pole Dance."

The competition is about to start. Some of us are still looking for a good spot to observe while sipping our drinks. The host Jane Gingera, the winner of the Miss Vancouver beauty pageant 2006, steps on the stage and introduces the competitors one by one. The audience learns what they like most about the city, whether their friends are supporting them from the audience, and what they like most about pole dancing. Swinging around the pole is what they all enjoy the most about pole dancing. And with that in mind they get ready to show us some of their best spins.

The lights illuminate the pole. Sky opens the show, appearing on stage first. After her police-inspired routine comes Sarah, who resembles an angel with her acrobatics at the top of the pole. Between acts a man steps on the stage to wipe the pole clean for better grip. Trillium and

Jodi dance to the music while demonstrating their pole twirls. Justice's turn comes next. She goes on stage and puts together an incredibly athletic routine on and around the pole, thrilling the audience with pirouettes and acrobatic pole tricks. Angela and Carmen, followed by Karen, keep the enthusiasm alive with charming dances and superb pole routines. The audience, composed of Asians, Latinos, Blacks, and Whites twenty and older, watch each competitor with amazement while longing for the next. Crystal's sassy and athletic pole moves and inverted positions receive great support from the audience. Everybody cheers the contestants on. Most of the competitors wear full cup bras and short-shorts that allow them to grip the pole, but Megan chooses to go up and down the pole wearing close-fitting workout wear. Christine amazes us with arched-back and inverted pole positions and strength. Sydney strips away her maritime captain's hat while Sheri decides to take on the image of an innocent little girl wearing glasses and two pony tails. Most of the pole dancers come from Greater Vancouver or southern British Columbia, but some are from more distant locations such as Medicine Hat and Toronto. Yvonne's turn comes last. Dancing to the beat of a hip hop song she enthrals the audience with her agile energy. The applause is deafening.

There are three judges: Brandy Soriander, the owner of a locally well-known high-end strip club; professional bodybuilder Yolanda Hughes; and Sarah Bartok, a Vancouver pop radio station announcer. While the judges deliberate on the winner, a group of six young women wearing burlesque-type corsets and black fishnets performs a choreographed dance using chairs as props. Some faces look familiar. A few months ago some of them were strangers to cabaret-, burlesque-, and striptease-inspired scenes. But tonight they are dancing to the music, jumping on and moving around the chairs, performing provocative and sexually suggestive body movements that resemble the now famous, all-female burlesque ensemble: the Pussycat Dolls. But the show has not finished yet. Soon after, Reiko and Pantera, the winner and second runner up respectively

of the first Miss Pole Dance World held in Amsterdam in 2005, electrify the audience with their acrobatic, sensual pole tricks.

By this time, the jury members have made their decision. Carmen is first runner up and receives the award for “Best Pole Tricks.” Megan and Justice are waiting for the big final result. The audience screams: “Justice! Justice!” Everybody can feel the excitement and agitation. “Justice! Justice! Justice!” The host reads out loud: Megan is named second runner up and all of us clap and jump in happiness. Justice has won! We can see her visibly affected. Tears fall down her face, but we know she is happy, like we are. During the next year she will be the first “Miss Pole Dance Canada” and will represent the country at the World Pole Dance Championship later this year.

The fact that the national pole dancing competition was held in the heart of downtown Vancouver is not surprising. The sensual and erotic contours of the city have consistently contributed to its reputation “as home to the hottest nightclubs north of San Francisco” (Chuck Davis 1997, quoted in Ross 2000: 231). Today’s visible presence of well-established neo-burlesque troupes, massage parlours, escort services, striptease entertainment, local porn production, and a vibrant gay and lesbian community (Richmond 2006) is rooted in the city’s earlier history. Originally First Nations territory, the place now known as Vancouver became a strategic Pacific maritime port in the late 19th century (Creese and Peterson 1996). Both the arrival of the railway, and from the early 20th century, the growing presence of resource-based economy workers, including loggers, fishermen, miners, and mill workers, played a significant role in the configuration of the exotic nightlife and entertainment industry (Newnham 2005) that developed and solidified in the post-war years (Ross and Greenwell 2005). By the 1950s internationally acclaimed personalities such as Gypsy Rose Lee and Josephine Baker performed in the city (Ross 2000). Classical burlesque paved the way for subsequent transformations in the striptease industry that started to take place by the mid-1970s. The advent of professional full

nude striptease transformed the performances, leading to the introduction of table, couch, and lap dances, private booths, and poles on stage (Ross and Greenwell 2005). Burlesque, with all of its theatrical paraphernalia, and striptease became different ventures. But in either form, in Vancouver, the striptease culture has only continued to thrive. The peculiarity of the pole dancing competition I described rests on the fact that it speaks to the emergence of another form of erotic dance, inspired in the strip industry and recently brought into the fitness world: the mainstreaming of pole dancing classes.

### **The Research**

In this thesis, I examine the social significance of Vancouver pole dancing classes. Drawing on interviews with women who either instruct or study pole dancing, and on participant-observation, I explore the tensions these classes create and the ways the women I spoke to negotiate them. The novelty and the peculiarity of these classes distances them from both erotic dancing training and alternative fitness offerings such as aerobics, yoga, or pilates. Because of this, I describe the pole dancing classes' culture while analyzing two of the most significant issues that became visible during the process of my research. First, I examine the tensions between erotic and fitness pole dancing. Then, I look at the tensions students face when negotiating the social stigma associated with pole dancing classes.

**The Research Process:** I conducted research for this thesis during a fourteen-month period starting in February 2006 and ending in April 2007. My interest in this topic developed when I first took a pole dancing class. Due to the attraction that the classes generated for me both as a feminist and as an anthropologist, I decided to pursue research on this topic. After obtaining approval from the University of British Columbia's Behavioral Research Ethics Board, I designed recruitment posters, letters of invitation for potential participants and instructors, and consent forms. I began promoting my research in September 2006 by contacting pole dancing instructors teaching classes in the city. Because pole dancing classes are offered on the UBC

Campus, among other places, I first contacted the instructor in charge of those classes. At the same time I contacted the instructor from the studio where I had previously taken classes. My research was, for the most part, well-received. Instructors from three different studios responded positively and facilitated my research in many ways. They either informed some of their best students about my research, agreed to be interviewed themselves, or posted my recruitment poster on their notice boards. After students heard about my research, some of them contacted me for interviews. Over time I was able to speak to ten women about their involvement in pole dancing classes. Towards the end of my study the response became so overwhelming that I had to inform some interested prospective participants that I was not going to be interviewing any longer.

During the process of carrying out interviews, I was also invited to take part in a field trip to a local strip club, to attend a performance prepared by pole dance students from one studio, to observe a pole performance demonstration by one instructor at another studio, and to watch a nation-wide pole dancing competition. I did not have to go far to conduct research for this paper. All of these events occurred within the greater Vancouver area and they speak to the growing popularity of pole dancing classes and the instant success and acceptance they have had among many women.

While conducting my research I attended sixteen pole dancing classes in total, each lasting from one to one and a half hours. I took them in two different studios and the owners/instructors and administrative staff of these studios knew I was pursuing research in pole dancing classes and whenever possible facilitated my study. Indeed, I was encouraged by the owners of two studios to experience pole dancing as a way to develop a more educated perspective for my research paper.

Lastly, my field research was complemented with archival research. I examined newspaper articles published between February 2002 and April 2007 initially featuring

'striptease cardio classes' and then 'pole dancing classes' as they evolved in the Canadian context. These articles appeared in periodical publications such as the *Asian Pacific Post*, the *Georgia Straight*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Metro*, the *Province*, the *Tyee*, and the *Vancouver Sun*. The first signs in Canadian newspapers of erotic dancing classes taking place in fitness studios date back to year 2002 (see Haynes 2002; Kelly 2002). Newspaper archival research provided my work with the background elements to understand the most recent history of pole dancing classes, the marketing strategies of the classes, as well as the overlapping and distinct features of the erotic dancing and fitness industries. I turn my attention now to the participants of my study and to a brief note on issues of my positionality as a researcher.

**The Participants:** For the purpose of this thesis I conducted formal interviews with ten women, all of whom were learning and/or instructing pole dancing. Our tape-recorded conversations took place between October 2006 and April 2007 and were later transcribed. They included questions about their personal experiences with pole dancing classes, the way they became acquainted with pole dancing, the motivations that led the women to take or teach these classes, their knowledge about different studios in town, their families', friends', and partners' ideas about pole dancing, their opinions about strippers, and the extent to which they have participated in pole dancing-related activities, such as field trips or public performances.

The participants in my study ranged in age from 22 to 48 years old. They were students and/or instructors in one of the three established pole dancing studios in Vancouver. Because classes offered at the university form part of one of the existing studios, students taking classes at UBC were also interviewed. Out of the ten participants, two were instructors (Cynthia and Jessica) and eight were students of pole dancing (Amy, Carol, Helen, Laura, Lisa, Lynda, Patricia, and Ruth). One of the instructors had professional erotic dancing experience, whereas the other instructor I interviewed did not. Of the eight pole dancing students, three had become more involved in pole dancing and were in the process of becoming instructors or had become

involved in the administration of their respective studios. The occupations of the students varied. There were one undergraduate and two graduate students, one police officer, one administrative assistant, one vehicle licensing assistant, one customer service representative, and one research technician. All of the women I interviewed made reasonably comfortable livings, except one, who made just enough money to get by. The ten participants in my study identified themselves as heterosexual. In terms of their racial/ethnic background, six identified themselves as white or Caucasian, three identified as Chinese-Canadian, and one as Filipina-Canadian. In an effort to preserve the confidentiality of the women I spoke with, their names have been replaced with pseudonyms throughout my thesis.

**The Researcher:** Feminist scholars have generated deeper understandings of how a researcher's positionality affects all aspects of the research process (McCorkel and Myers 2003). One of the insights they have developed is that a researcher's position in the field is socially situated, and thus mediated by issues of power. As a result, identifying a researcher's location and the context in which knowledge is produced are crucial elements for both acknowledging power differentials and decentering research privilege. Accordingly, I draw attention to these issues and render my position visible as a socially embodied individual and researcher. My standpoint is that of an able-bodied 28-year old, lower class, heterosexual Latina, and a politically-identified woman of colour. I am a feminist. My interest in the social study of sexualities indeed arises from my background as a feminist activist in the Latin American context—a socioeconomic, political, and feminist context substantially different to that existing in Canada and the United States. Moreover, I have written this work on pole dancing classes from the privileged position of a graduate student in a prestigious Canadian academic institution, while at the same time I remain peripheral to some of the prerogatives enjoyed by national students and native English speakers. These positions inform my work. I am located both at the centre and at the margin of privileged arrangements. It is from these simultaneous, though

continually shifting positions that I understand myself, others, and the world. It is beyond the scope of this paper to reflect on how this positioning has played out in particular ways during my research. But it is my intention to contribute to the ongoing anti-sexist, anti-racist, and anti-classist research project that has its roots in the works of scholars like Gloria Anzaldúa, Chandra Mohanty, Angela Davis, Aída Hurtado, and Patricia Hill Collins. Adhering to their ideas, I seek to decenter research privilege and open space for critical dialogue by making visible my positionality.

## **II. Theoretical Background**

### **Sex Research: Social Constructionist and Feminist Perspectives**

This thesis is situated within social constructionist and feminist studies of sexualities. The study of sexualities has grown exponentially over the past two decades and can be credited to, among other seminar works, Michel Foucault's (1980) *The History of Sexuality*. One of the central contributions of this book consists in documenting the historical appearance of a discourse around sexuality during the Victorian period. Despite the popular belief that western societies had been sexually repressed up until the decade of the 1970s, Foucault argues that in western societies, sexuality in fact has long been extensively discussed. In this way, scientific discourses on sexuality have not only had the effect of perpetuating concerns and anxieties about sexuality since the 17th century, but also have bolstered the multiplication of discourses about sex. As Foucault explains: "Rather than the uniform concern to hide sex, rather than a general prudishness of language, what distinguishes these last three centuries is the variety, the wide dispersion of devices that were invented to speak about [sex]" (34). Foucault's work opened up the productive study of sex and sexuality from an historical perspective. Known as the social constructionist perspective, the main premise of this stance consists of conceiving sexuality as a product of social and historical forces that changes accordingly in time and space (Gagnon and Parker 1995; Harding 1998; Vance 2005; Weeks 1986).

In addition, the social constructionist approach to the study of sexuality is further illuminated by the contributions of black feminists (Collins 1990, 2005) and postcolonial theorists (Mohanty 1988, 2002). These scholars recognize that gender—a previous focal point of feminist interest (Di Leonardo 1991; Visweswaran 1997)—does not take a prior universal pre-eminence over other social axes such as sexuality, race, and class. In other words, sexuality, gender, race, and class are interlocking systems of power, mutually constituting one another. The social study of sexuality recognizes that sexualities are mediated by issues of class, gender, and race, and sets out to explore these intersections under the premise that there are class-bound sexualities, gender-specific sexualities, and racialized sexualities (Gamson and Moon 2004; Weeks 1986). My analysis of pole dancing classes is grounded in black feminist thought and social constructionist studies of sexuality. It seeks to contribute to the understanding of the intersections of sexuality, gender, race, and class in contemporary Canadian society.

### **Sex Work and Erotic Dancing**

The academic literature on sex work is vast. A key insight of these studies is the idea that inaccurate representations about both sex work and sex workers create “structural vulnerability” (Benoit and Shaver 2006: 243) for the people working in the sex industry. Hallgrimsdottir, Phillips, and Benoit (2006), for instance, have shown how media contributes to producing and reproducing representations of sex workers that differ from empirical reality and from the accounts of the sex workers themselves. Relying on preconceived notions about sex workers, these narratives render sex workers as moral pollutants, sources of disease, criminals, addicts, and individuals incapable of making safe and reasonable choices. Similarly, Merri Lisa Johnson discusses how “virtually every media representation of strippers” (2006: 159) uses narratives of violence, danger, degradation, and death; portrays erotic dancers as “immoral,” “sleazy,” and “dirty”; and promotes the idea that they do not deserve safe work environments.

Given the proliferation of these narratives, many feminist scholars have forcibly argued against these misrepresentations of sex workers, examining assumptions behind popular ideas about sex work (Brock 1998; Doezama 1998; Kempadoo 1998; Rubin 1984), questioning the set of hazardous practices and expectations derived from those assumptions (Brock 1998; Bruckert 2002; Lewis 2000), and opening space for sex workers themselves to tell their own accounts as participants in this realm of work (Frank 2006; Hartley 1997; Johnson 1998, 2006; Queen 1997; Weldon 2006).

The literature on strip club work in particular that follows this line of thought has looked at this sector of the sex industry in myriad ways (Sloan and Wahab 2000). Works have analyzed the history of striptease and female erotic entertainment (Ross 2000, 2003, 2006; Ross and Greenwell 2005); the legal and moral dimensions of erotic dancing regulation (Lewis 2000); the socio-economic specifics of the strip trade and women's participation in it (Bruckert 2002; Lerum 2004; Lewis 1998); the multiple reasons why women enter the stripping industry (Sloan and Wahab 2004; Sweet and Tewksbury 2000); the interactions and negotiations between dancers and customers (Egan 2006a; Frank 1998, 2002; Lewis 2006; Ronai and Ellis 1989); the presence of and opposition to control inside strip clubs (Egan 2004, 2006b; Montemuro 2001); same-sex desire in the sex industry (Barton 2001); the intricate relationships between gender, desire, and power (Barton 2002; Egan 2003; Liepe-Levinson 2002; Frank 1998, 2002; Trautner 2005); and the lives of strip dancers and their everyday negotiations with the stigma attached to this profession (Barton 2006; Bott 2006; Hallgrimsdottir et al 2006).

For the purposes of this thesis I focus primarily on two sets of ideas that arise from the reading of these works: first, I explore the notion of sexual regulation and, by extension, the proliferation of sexual moralities (Rubin 1984); second, drawing on insights concerning the social and moral creation of hazardous working conditions for sex workers, I take on the analysis of social stigma attached to anything related to sex work.

Gayle Rubin's (1984) foundational examination of the assumptions behind the social regulation of female sexualities draws on the Foucauldian distinction between what is conceived to be sexually licit and sexually illicit. Rubin employs this existing social distinction to render visible the ways in which female sexualities are organized into systems of power that encourage certain sexual practices and identities while suppressing others. The controlling image of the Madonna/Whore dichotomy in the west emerges, organizes, and disciplines sexuality in this context (Weeks 1986). Thus, women who depart from the heterosexual, married, monogamous, private, and non-commercial sexual scripts are considered deviant and degenerate. Widespread discourse on sexual morality, in this sense, maintains a strong distinction between "good" and "bad" women, according to their respective sexual circumspection or departure from the historically conceived ideal (Rubin 1984; Vance 1984).

The literature on sex work has acknowledged these complex social, moral, and often legal regulatory discourses and practices. Scholars such as Brock (1998) have brought to light that it is against this backdrop of sexual regulation that sex work occurs. The superimposition of this moral divide between "female respectability" and "female deviance" (Ross 1997: 595) has the consequence of permeating all spheres of sex work with stigma, including prostitution, erotic dancing, and pornography, to name but a few. It is because of this that sex industry work is stigma-laden work. As a consequence, female (and male) sex workers suffer from perceptions that they breach the "decency covenant" (Ross 2007), social condemnation, and violence.

The ways in which the "whore stigma" plays out for strip workers have been discussed in the literature (Barton 2006; Bruckert 2002; Frank 2006; Hallgrimsdottir et al 2006; Johnson 2006; Sloan and Wahab 2000). In order to fight against pervasive tropes of deviance and respectability (Egan 2006a; Ross 2006), to keep a positive sense of themselves (Bott 2006), and to cope with "stripper bashing" (Johnson 2006), sex workers put a set of strategies to work. Bernadette Barton (2006) and Chris Bruckert (2002) have identified the following: hiding the

work from people; selectively informing friends and family about the profession; referring to their time as dancers as a “stripper phase”; developing a dancing persona; and “othering” fellow dancers, imagining themselves in relation to “straw-strippers” (dancers who are believed to be involved in prostitution, and drugs), or assuming moral superiority over other workers.

In this study, I also draw on Becki Ross’s research on the history of Vancouver’s striptease past from 1945 to 1980. Ross has examined the ever-changing trends in erotic entertainment (2003); the labour and unsuccessful union efforts of erotic dancers (Ross 2000, 2006); the racial dimensions of an industry organized along class and spatial lines (Ross and Greenwell 2005); and more recently, the striking parallels between elite female athletes’ and erotic dancers’ embodied femininities, and the fact that only female athletes are positively recognized (Ross 2007). Vancouver’s erotic dancing past has recently given rise to pole dancing classes. Striptease performers in the past faced the moral and legal ambivalence of a contradictory society that both admired them for their performances and looked down on their job at the same time. Ross has shown that striptease artists creatively resisted and accommodated those contradictions at the same time. Many of these contradictions are still at play in contemporary stripping and consequently in pole dancing classes. Drawing on Ross’s (2003) idea that the past is a window into the anxieties of the present, I show in my thesis that because pole dancing has not quite successfully erased its striptease past, the contradictions exposed in previous studies persist.

As I have conducted my thesis research numerous journalists have written descriptions of pole dancing classes (see Anonymous 2006; Gram 2004; Holloway 2006; Johnson 2004; Moore 2005; Racco 2006; Rossi 2007). However, no published academic work has addressed pole dancing classes in the contemporary context. This is not to say that there are no works in

progress.<sup>1</sup> Samantha Holland and Feona Attwood (in press; n.d.), for instance, are analyzing the mainstreaming of pole dancing classes, what the classes mean for the women who practice them, and some of the larger implications these classes have on contemporary discussions around sex and feminism. My own original research is ethnographically based in the pole dancing scene in Vancouver providing a detailed description of pole dancing classes, the motivations of women to take them, and the negotiations entailed.

### **The Fitness World: Women and Exercise**

The relationships between the fitness world and women's sexualities comprise another area relevant to my work. Studies focusing upon the ever-changing fitness industry have largely focused upon the relationship between gender and exercise (MacNeill 1998, 1999; Maguire 2001, 2002; Markula 1995, 2003). As the study of women and sport has become more sophisticated and influenced by the well-established sociological study of sport, some studies have also paid attention to issues of gender and class (Donnelly and Harvey 1999; Maguire 2001), as well as race, sexuality, and sport (Smith and Hattery 2006). Like research on sexualities, studies of the sporting world draw on sociological and feminist theoretical perspectives. Exploring Foucauldian notions of biopower, technologies of the self, and disciplining practices, these scholars have engaged in the sociocultural study of women's place in sport and exercise (Jette 2006; Maguire 2002; Markula 2001, 2004). Building upon notions of gender disciplining through exercising discourses, other analyses focus upon the ways in which health promotion, reduction of health care costs (Donnelly and Harvey 1999), and the popularization of middle class feminine bodily norms take place in women's lives (MacNeill 1998; Maguire 2001, 2002; Markula 2004).

---

<sup>1</sup> I am aware of another graduate student currently working on the same topic: Nicola Potopsingh, a Queen's University graduate student, who is in the process of completing her MA thesis and has presented some of her work at academic meetings such as the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport Conference. Because her research is currently in preparation, I was not able to review her contributions to the study of pole dancing classes in this literature review.

Methodologically, studies of the fitness industry have largely been based on textual analysis of videos and magazines. They have examined discourses put forward by popular workout videotapes (Kagan and Morse 1988; MacNeill 1998), fitness magazines and exercise manuals (Jette 2006; Maguire 2002; Markula 2001), and exercising awareness campaigns (MacNeill 1999). In doing so, they have achieved important insights into the intersections of exercise and gender. However, ethnographic approaches to the study of women's participation in sport and exercise have gained more prominence recently. The collection of articles, *Athletic Intruders* (2003), edited by anthropologists Anne Bolin and Jane Granskog, breaks ground in this regard. The emerging field of sports ethnography has looked at women's participation in sports like softball, bodybuilding, basketball, rugby, basketball, among others. But because the emergence of pole dancing classes is recent, virtually no research has looked at them as a fitness activity from an ethnographic perspective. My research seeks to fill that gap. Of the ethnographic studies of women in sports, Pirkko Markula's (1995, 2003) work on aerobics is particularly pertinent to my study. Looking at the ways in which women perceive and experience aerobics classes, Markula advances the idea that aerobics crystallize postmodern contradictions regarding the aerobicizing of female bodies. In other words, she finds that despite the questioning of the contradictory ideals intrinsic to the fitness industry—that female bodies should be “firm but shapely, fit but sexy, strong but thin” (Markula 1995: 424)—female aerobicizers neither completely reject those images, nor expect them to change (Markula 2003). In my study I have identified parallel sets of ideals in tension: pole dancers want to achieve fitness, sexiness, sensuality, and workout benefits all at once.

Also relevant to my study is the insight into the development and consolidation of the fitness industry for what it allows us to observe about the position of pole dancing classes within this business. Quintessentially a leisure field, paraphrasing Jennifer Maguire (2002: 449), fitness studies show that the industry is indeed complex. In North America, women's participation in

aerobic fitness and dancing programs dates back to the 1970s and early 1980s (Donnelly and Harvey 1999; Maguire 2001; MacNeill 1999). It can be credited to a combination of factors such as the impact of feminism and the end of legal restrictions that previously prevented women from participating in physical activities (Bolin and Granskog 2003; Maguire 2001). Broader socioeconomic shifts such as the continuous implementation of self-responsibility health and fitness approaches (MacNeill 1999) as well as the proliferation of celebrity fitness videos, most importantly Jane Fonda's workout video series (Kagan and Morse 1988; MacNeill 1998), played a significant role in the steady and successful growth of the fitness industry. Likewise, the increasing medicalization of sport and exercise has given rise to the proliferation of fitness publishing (Maguire 2002), either in the form of magazines, exercise manuals, or instructional DVDs. The expansion of the middle class, their leisure and lifestyle consumption, as well as fitness consumers' concerns of health and weight loss (Maguire 2001; MacNeill 1998) continue to make this a very profitable business. It is as part of these trends, in addition to the intensification of the marketing of sex and passion as fashionable goods (Attwood 2005), that pole dancing classes have emerged. To the dual concerns of health and appearance (Maguire 2001) encompassed and profitably utilized by the fitness industry, we can now add one more dimension: the concerns with sex. Cardio striptease and lap dancing are becoming just as popular as yoga and pilates as fitness options among some groups. My ethnographic study illuminates the innovative intersection between the sex and fitness industries at pole dancing classes by drawing on well developed theories of fitness and sexuality.

### **III. Findings and Discussion**

#### **What Are Pole Dancing Classes? The Erotic Fitness Scene in Vancouver**

Pole dancing classes are erotic dancing-inspired programs offered largely in fitness studios. The purpose of the classes is to teach women how to move in socially-constructed sensual and erotic ways, while providing them with an alternative to regular fitness programs.

There are two visible features that make these classes distinct from the commercial erotic dancing and fitness industries. First, the classes are geared toward amateur pole dancers. And second, the main workout tool in the classes is the pole—a long piece of chrome, steel, or brass that usually runs from floor to ceiling.

The first studio in Vancouver devoted primarily to teaching pole dancing to the wider public opened in 2004. At present there are three established pole dancing studios in the city—all are located in the generally more affluent west side of town. Administered by the Alma Mater Society in partnership with a local company, pole dancing classes are also offered on the UBC campus. At least one pole dancing sub-company dedicated exclusively to organizing pole dance parties and manufacturing, selling and/or importing poles is located nearby in Surrey. Pole dancing classes held in other established fitness facilities, pole dancing-focused studios, independent garage or mobile private studios, and at local strip clubs are also offered in other cities and municipalities of British Columbia including Aldergrove, Burnaby, Kamloops, Kelowna, Langley, Nanaimo, North Vancouver, Port Alberni, Richmond, Sooke, Squamish, Surrey, and Victoria.

Erotic dancers, commonly known in the Canadian context as exotic dancers, are the main source of inspiration for the classes. Since professional female strippers often use poles as props for their dancing routines on the strip club stage—erotic dancers began using the pole in the mid-to-late 1970s (Ross and Greenwell 2005)—pole dancing classes consequently involve a number of acrobatic tricks, spins, and inverted positions on and around the pole, and also on the floor. Students typically wear yoga garments or conventional sports gear such as sweatpants, shorts, tank tops, t-shirts, and runners. But just like the professionals, upper level pole dancing students also incorporate the use of other workout and performance props such as chairs, balls, stilettos, platform boots, blankets, boas, garters, and cowboy hats. In addition to pole dancing classes, studios usually have other class offerings: stretching, belly dance, hip hop, and boot camps

among them. Inspired by professional strippers, pole dancing classes in fitness studios also offer striptease and lap dancing classes.

The structure of the classes follows in some ways conventional fitness class design: there is an initial warm up, an aerobic section, and a cool down phase. The warm up and cool down phases include preparation and relaxation exercises such as neck, shoulder, and feet rolls, hip circles and body stretching, following traditional fitness class content. The divergent features of these classes come in during the aerobic or core section of the class, activities designed to teach students a number of pole moves and floor positions per session that are usually part of a larger dance routine. Thus, erotic dancing classes encompass three elements: the pole, the floor, and the dance. Ensuring learning of separate moves, either on the pole or on the floor, is a central component of the class. But assembling them together into a choreographed dance sequence is also considered important. In some classes, at the end of each session students present the learned routine to fellow classmates.

Most times, students get to practice on an individual pole. Studios in Vancouver have eight to ten permanent or removable tension poles, and their layout is similar to other fitness facilities in that they have wooden floors and mirrors all around. Most of the classes are taught by individual instructors, but if there are many students, classes can be also co-facilitated by two instructors. Depending on the studios, there are as many as eight levels of pole instruction, progressively introducing students to more complicated moves and greater level of precision.

Class designers use their creativity to name and create new moves. Some of them have also been borrowed from books such as Sheila Kelley's *The S Factor: Strip Workouts for Every Woman* (2003). Most of the names resemble the "action" of the "moves" and can vary from studio to studio. Some of them are: "the fireman spin"—off the ground, spinning around the pole; "the backslide"—back to the pole, sliding down to the floor; "the shy pose"—back to the pole in a chair-like pose, slowly opening and closing the legs; "the pony"—on the knees, doing a

bouncing effect as if riding a pony; “the sexy V bend”—bend forward, checking out the audience through one’s legs; “the goddess pose”—on the floor, propped on one elbow, legs crossed over; “the stripper walk”—moving hips and shoulders, dragging feet along the floor; “the body wave”—face to the pole, moving upper and bottom part of the body as if depicting waves; “the spank”—slapping one’s butt with the hand; “the crawl”—crawling on the floor, simulating a cat; “the tease”—touching or showing parts of one’s body; “the pole hold”—lifting one’s body in line with the pole; or an advanced move like “the corkscrew”—wrapping the pole with torso, spinning down the pole. Students and instructors learn and perform the moves with background music that includes popular pop hits like “Don’t Cha,” “Sweet Escape,” “Pump It,” “Bootylicious,” “My Humps,” “Beep,” “Toxic,” “Independent Woman,” or classic soundtrack themes from striptease feature movies such as “You Sexy Thing” and “You Can Leave Your Hat On” from *Full Monty*, or “What a Feeling” from *Flashdance*, among others.

Students in pole dancing classes in Vancouver come from diverse racial backgrounds. A great proportion of them are White-Canadians, followed by Asian-Canadians. During my field research I also heard of a few Latina, Black, and First Nations students but I seldom came across them. According to studio owners, the majority of the students attending classes are between their early-20s and their mid-40s. Pole dancing instructors, in turn, also follow by and large the same age pattern; but with some exceptions the racial background was visibly white.

Pole dancing instruction in established studios ranges in price from \$100 to \$200 dollars—roughly 13 to 25 hours of work at the minimum provincial wage of \$8 dollars per hour. This pricing covers four to six classes, usually once a week, with a duration of one to one hour-and-a-half each. At UBC prices are between \$60 to \$70 dollars per term. Studios also offer memberships to students. These range from approximately \$125 to \$240 dollars a month for a six-month commitment. Students with memberships get access to all scheduled classes, including cardio, boot camps, stretching, hip hop, and belly dance in addition to pole instruction.

Striptease and lap dancing workshops as well as private instruction are also available upon request, ranging in price from \$65 to \$100 dollars an hour. Pole dancing stag parties go from \$175 to \$195 dollars per hour if hosted at studios, and from \$250 to \$400 dollars if hosted at private homes. It is also possible to order and buy poles at the studios. Prices vary according to material, diameter, and additional features such as height, polish, or colour. Freestanding poles with stage, for instance, cost over \$650 dollars not including tax and shipping. Portable poles that come in cases are approximately \$550 dollars, while regular tension brass, chrome, or steel poles range between \$390 and \$475 dollars.

Two more elements form part of the culture of pole dancing classes: field trips and outside classroom performances. For one thing, amateur pole dancing class design is clearly informed by the labour professional strip workers carry out. Usually a group of instructors and students go on field trips to local strip clubs with the purpose of gathering information or simply conducting observations in the actual erotic dancing setting. While some students visit strip clubs for the first time in their lives as part of one of these field trip groups, some others attend strip clubs as part of their entertainment on a more frequent basis. The atmosphere of the fieldtrips is usually one of bonding. Pole dancing students view the dancers' skills with interest and often admiration while partying with other pole dancing students for an enjoyable "ladies night out."

End of session performances and exhibitions in different venues other than the pole dancing classroom have become another way to popularize the classes. Pole dancing demonstrations take place in sex expos and beauty trade fairs, providing an opportunity for people from the larger community to observe and get acquainted with the classes. On occasion, students from advanced classes create final presentations for their pole dancing class. Students will demonstrate their skills on the pole and their mastery of dancing and choreography with other props such as chairs. Friends, partners, and a handful of family members usually make up the enthusiastic and supportive audience in these events.

## **Reasons to Pole Dance: Erotic Pole Dancing and Pole Fitness**

Though pole dancing is undoubtedly inspired and shaped by the erotic dancing industry, the classes are not designed to train women to become workers in the striptease industry. Some current and former sex industry workers certainly teach, take classes, or own studios, and some amateur students have become professional dancers. Yet, the bulk of the students are lay women who simply feel titillated by the prospect of learning to work the pole and emulating the strip trade world. Pole dancing marketing contributes to this approach. Advertising guarantees a fitness alternative for women building physical strength, developing flexibility, toning muscles, getting in shape, in addition to increasing self-esteem, feeling invigorated, having great fun, and getting rid of inhibitions. Students of pole dancing are not only promised that they will get a full body workout, lose weight and restructure their bodies, but also that they will develop a number of characteristics associated with professionals such as confidence, sexiness, and sexual power (Keller 2006; Racco 2006; Roy and Ledoux 2007). A growing number of publications such as *The Art of Pole Dancing: a Spin-by-Spin Guide* (Peekaboo Pole Dancing 2006) and *The Complete Idiots Guide to Exotic and Pole Dancing Illustrated* (Reardon 2007); the proliferation of numerous pole dancing-related forums, blogs, directories, and videos available online on sites like *You Tube*; as well as an increasing number of instructional DVDs, including *Pole Work* (2002), *Poletricks 101: The Ultimate Training Video for Exotic Pole Dancing* (2004), *Pole Dancing for Real Women – Beginner* (2005), and *Salsa Pole!* (2006) have contributed to the popularity of the classes (Holloway 2006; Keller 2006; Racco 2006; Wiebe and Collins 2007).

The interviews with the two pole dancing instructors and owners of studios in Vancouver allowed me to see their own strategies to produce and sell pole dancing classes. Former erotic dancer Cynthia, for example, conceives of and promotes pole dancing as a form of exercise. Although titillating, the goal of the classes at her studio is to help women keep in shape, mold their bodies, and learn to be sexy without fear of physical harm. Jessica, as an instructor with no

professional stripping background, also strives to provide a fitness option to women with minimal risk of injury. For her, women who pole dance have the possibility to learn sexy dancing, and thus to feel good about themselves in a non-threatening environment.

Given the modern pole dancing scenario and its market strategies, how do students themselves conceive of pole dancing? What draws them to take the classes? I found that when choosing to sign up for pole dancing classes, women's reasons for pole dancing oscillated between "erotic pole dancing" and "pole fitness," and this tension was consistent throughout the interviews. These two sides of the spectrum, however, were not mutually exclusive in the experiences of the participants in my study. The women I spoke with have expectations of feeling confident and free, dancing, as well as getting a good workout.

Firstly, the titillating and sensual aspects of the classes factored in when students decided to pole dance. Thus, students wanted to acquire some of the sexual and sensual expectations associated with pole dancing classes:

[Pole dancing] gives you access to your sensual side and it gives you an outlet to be more comfortable with that and to develop that side, something where you can build self-esteem with it (Ruth).

Also important were building confidence, feeling comfortable with their bodies and themselves, and consequently gaining a daily sense of empowerment:

I think secretly it's a confidence builder, to know that you can do these things that maybe people find very exotic. I think just having this secret confidence really helps you doing day-to-day things (Helen).

I took pole dancing for myself. It helps to be comfortable with myself and with my body. I think that it builds confidence. I think that helps a woman, in that way (Amy).

Basically the studio's vision is to reach out and basically provide an opportunity for other women to get in touch with their own selves. That is exactly the same reasoning why I started taking pole dancing (Lynda).

Out of all the girls I know that take pole dancing classes, it makes them feel good about themselves, so it empowers them in a different way and makes them feel sexy. It makes them feel good... Most women go there to take it because they want to feel good about themselves. In the end they might go there thinking that it's just for fitness and stuff. But in the end they feel really good about themselves (Laura).

Helen mentioned to me that the sensation of pole dancing is “like the monkey bars, it feels like just swinging and being free.” Breaking through rigid expectations is also among the reasons for enrolling in pole dancing classes:

I was essentially coming out of my inhibitions and embracing the pole dancing instruction and what it was doing for me (Lynda).

The fitness component as a motivation for taking pole dancing classes, on the other hand, also came up in the interviews. Students were interested in getting some exercise, losing weight and toning their bodies:

So those classes I think are very effective if someone wants to really tone up... get more strength and sculpt their body (Patricia).

I was going to a gym and it's funny because I didn't get any results from my arms because, from *Oxygen* magazine it says that, to be able to build that muscle and define it, you have to go two or three days a week or something. And for a decent workout it had to be half an hour. I couldn't imagine half an hour of standing in front of a mirror, curling your arm upwards with a stupid metal thing. I don't know if I have a really short attention span or something but I think swinging around a pole is a lot more interesting than standing in front of a mirror watching yourself do one motion for half an hour, even if it is in different positions (Carol).

Seeking to achieve a different number of desired values make these classes what I call Wonder Woman-like workouts in the sense that they promise beauty, strength, independence, confidence, and empowerment. Thus, overlapping interests in sensual, dance, and fitness elements also appeared in the interviews. Similar to the aerobics students studied by Markula (1995, 2003), who wanted fitness, sexiness, strength, and slenderness, many pole dancing students did not want to compromise fitness for sexiness, nor did they want sensuality without workout benefits:

It's a confidence builder, good exercise, good for self-esteem. You build a sensual side and then you've got this good social atmosphere with it (Ruth).

[In] some of the commercials that I've seen, it's advertised as related to sexuality and becoming sexier and that sort of thing. Then, there's other classes that focus on exercise, more like exercise-based. So there was a bunch of us that went to it and the class was clearly split. There was some people there that were dressed really hoochie and then there was people like me who just [wore] *Lululemons* and a tee-shirt kind of deal. It was kind of split who was getting what out of it. So my roommate and I went and [the instructor] presented things, she did a bit of both. She's got big exaggerated movements and...it's presented in a really sexual sort of way, I guess. But she also makes an emphasis on “Make sure you flex this. Make sure, you know, this is tight,

your legs are..." whatever. So she was really good about also focusing on the exercise and people that were there to get more out of it as opposed to just looking hot on a pole (Lisa).

I find that the women that come into the studio that see me either in passing or during the classes that I am present in, they do see, they notice my physique. My physique has improved since I've taken pole dancing, it's noticeable to other women, especially in the context of pole dancing. The question they ask is, "How long have you been pole dancing? You are really really well fit, you are well toned, is that from pole dancing?" I would say, part of it is, yes. I involved myself with a lot of activities and I have in the past, but essentially pole dancing has defined my physique. But primarily I'm doing the pole dancing and continue the pole dancing due to the artistic expression that's bringing out in me, the more confident and the experienced I get with what I'm being taught, allows me to start to experiment and receiving more of my own creative aspects. So it's a combination of learning more, more new exciting moves and to also release my creative energy; also at the same time to improve upon my grace and agility as a dancer (Lynda).

Course planning reflects these multiple interests and caters to all of them by developing class combinations that include erotic, sexy moves, dance choreographies, and the highly technical mastering of the pole work like "exotic dancing," "pole flow," and "pole erotica."

One additional consideration when enrolling in pole dancing was exploring how a specific fitness facility would meet those overlapping expectations. Because some studios are founded by erotic dancers, whereas others are created by fitness instructors, knowing the background of instructors also factored in:

It was just kind of putting it out there that the classes were available. It wasn't like advertisement or anything but it was showing that, "Oh, well, there's a new form of fitness and it's pole dancing." And, it was interesting. They went a little bit to the back story of [pole dancing classes], which was good because then it shows that these are not stripper classes. These classes were started by real women (Carol).

I don't like the other studios, because the other studios are founded around and taught by people who have never pole danced in their lives. They're only doing it to make money. They're only doing it because they saw this new trend coming up. They learned by coming to [strip clubs] and watching. This is how they learned. They even say, "Oh, well, we got DVDs; we went to [strip clubs] and then just practiced and studied on our own." So, they literally just learned and practiced for a few months and opened their studio. They have no idea what they are doing. But, on the same note they don't teach to the level that I do. They teach it for fun only, very, very little fitness, because they don't have the ability to teach it at a high level (Cynthia).

These distinctions proved important when measuring the quality of experience, the level of skill students could attain, and the sense of security or risk associated with the instructors.

While some students preferred instructors who did not have erotic dancing background or "real

women”—a phrase derived from pole dancing marketing strategies— others anticipated higher level of pole training if their instructors were strippers:

Every studio has their ups and downs and some people might prefer the other studios... depending on what their preference is. But my idea is I would rather learn it from ex-strippers because they know what they're doing... A lot of the other pole dancing studios they are fitness instructors. So they never had any experience pole dancing, which is all right but [our instructor] has been dancing for over 12, 13 years now. She knows what she's doing and she knows what you have to do to correct your move or what can make you do better (Laura).

[The founders of the studio] weren't strippers and they just wanted a different way to work out. And they were amazed at what the girls could do and they developed it on their own. It was so cool to see how a perfectly average woman can start off something like this. I would think that going into a studio where, you know that it was a former dancer, if you know that it's former dancers teaching you, I think it's a little intimidating (Carol).

Contrary to the students in the study conducted by Holland and Attwood (in press; n.d.), who took the classes for the pole dancing and not the exercise component, in my study both erotic dancing and fitness were at play when taking pole dancing classes. Whereas some students highlight more the former than the latter, both elements often overlap and participants mentioned both in their experiences and expectations. Imagining the fitness facility and what students expect they will get from choosing among the different options also figured into their motivations to pole dance.

One additional dimension of the analysis arises from the fact that all of the instructors and students who participated in this study self-identified as heterosexual. Pole dancing students saw the pole dancing facility as space where they could attain heterosexy female bodies but surrounded by friendly women and without fear of male judgment. The experience of pole dancing as fun activity and of the studio as a welcoming, by and large, women's only space suggest a disruption to the heterosexual logic embedded in the most common perceptions about pole dancing and stripping (see Barton 2001). My research findings indicate that the pole dancing studio enables some students a resisting space, where they feel at ease with other women and where the gaze is indeed a female gaze. Likewise, pole dancing instructors sought to provide their students with a place where they could avoid a potentially unforgiving heterosexual male

gaze. However, it would be interesting to analyze how the narrative of a queer amateur pole dancer may trouble heteronormativity (Adams 1994; Koenig 2002). Even though my own thesis does not permit me to make any argument on this issue, this aspect of pole dancing definitely deserves further examination.

At this point I will turn my attention to another set of issues that arose from my field research: the negotiations involved when these women decide to pole dance and some of the challenges they have to overcome to do so, but first I will recount another story from the field.

### **Back to the Field: End of Session Pole Dancing Performance**

The opening episode of this thesis is not isolated. Other pole dancing events, such as public performances and shows, have developed alongside the “Miss Pole Dance” competition. The second field narrative I will present is about one of them.

April 2007: The Vancouver Canucks made it to the playoffs of the National Hockey League. Since no feature entertainers were dancing that night, the strip club’s sign “Go Canucks Go!” supported the local hockey team. The game played on the big television screen next to the stage where a group of eleven women set out to perform. That night the pole performers were not house dancers, but a group of students from a pole dancing studio who prepared a show for their friends, partners, and fellow classmates to demonstrate some of the dancing skills and pole tricks learned in class. This show was also to raise money for a local non-profit organization that provides makeovers for marginalized peoples living in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside.

The program for the night resembled in many ways both burlesque and feature-striptease scenes as they stand today. Borrowing elements long used by their erotic dancing counterparts, these amateur performers dressed up in scant lingerie, corsets, fishnets, tassels, g-strings, garters, and stiletto boots. The performers were Asian- and White-Canadian students, their ages ranging from early twenties to mid thirties. Women with different body shapes gradually appeared on stage performing and dancing to some electrotango and djembe beats, as well as to popular songs

like “I’m Too Sexy,” “Ghost Busters,” and “Bad Boys.” Their gimmicks included police raids, in which dancers got busted by police officers, and sexual metamorphosis, in which school teachers developed into pleasure-friendly sexual subjects. Choreographed dances with acrobatic and flexibility tricks were performed on chairs; there were cowboy and gypsy performances with elaborate costumes, and striptease numbers in which performers stripped off their coats to reveal dominatrix gear or sensual full-cup bras and panties.

Between-act pole cleanings took an amusing turn. Dressed in yukata-looking bathrobes, cleaning lady-, tourist-, nurse-, nun-, student-, and police-themed attires, the students played peekaboo behind the stage pole while wiping it down for the next dancer. Props such as boas, hats, feathers, umbrellas, lamps, and drums complemented their performance routines. Following the Canadian professional erotic dance convention, the pole dancing students used blankets during their floor moves and at the end of each act collected money left on the floor by people sitting close to the stage.

Fundamentally different from the strip club’s house dancers who often contend for attention with the sports game on the television screen, the amateur pole dancers’ audience that night was very animated and encouraged the performers on stage. Friends and partners vigorously cheered the dancers on: “Oh, my god! She’s so hot! I wanna be a stripper!” The pole dancing students showed off their costumes to their friends and had their pictures taken. At the end of the show, the students’ instructor and host for the night appeared on stage with a cake in hand and wished “Pappy Penthouse” happy birthday. The front door’s sign not only reminded us that the local hockey game was playing, but that this strip club was “Celebrating 60 years!”

This event speaks to the increasing participation of women in pole dancing classes who are not professionally involved in the stripping industry as well as to the occurrence of public performances in, among other places, strip trade establishments. Founded in 1947, the site of this

second field story was “the longest-standing striptease venue in Canada” (Ross 2000: 232), The Penthouse Cabaret.

In the next sections I will discuss some of the novel and paradoxical sociocultural dimensions brought about by pole dancing classes. I examine in particular how students of pole dancing have pushed and redefined some of the existing sexual, gender, and racial boundaries for women by refusing to comply with restrictive scripts, going to socially proscribed venues such as the Penthouse strip club, and performing on stage with taboo phallic props such as the pole. I also explore the ways in which pole dancing students, in their effort to cope with the “stripper stigma,” re-inscribe at the same time some of the social norms concerning female sexualities, inaccurate assumptions about professional erotic dancers, and widely held negative perceptions about sex industry workers at large.

### **Challenging Prevalent Sexual Mores and Gendered Racial Scripts**

I begin this section by addressing the renegotiation of allowed sexual, gender, and racial boundaries. I contend that pole dancing students oppose and accommodate restrictive notions of female respectability that work under the dubious premise that women fall into two categories: the “good” and the “bad” girls. Otherwise known in scholarly literature as the Madonna/Whore divide, this idea presupposes that female virtue is contingent on, among other things, chastity, compulsory heterosexuality, monogamy, and marriage (Rubin 1984; Vance 1984). Michel Foucault (1980) has conceived these disciplining discourses and practices as historically framed distinctions regulating what is sexually licit and illicit. Keeping in mind the ways in which these gendered norms and sexual prisons continue to inform women’s sexualities is pertinent to the analysis of pole dancing classes. Although women’s sexuality was assumed, until recently, to be properly expressed in limited ways in public, recent studies have shown that society is becoming more accepting of sexually expressive women and that some norms related to their “appropriate” sexual expressions and practices have begun to lose some of their power (Attwood 2005;

Caughey and French 2001; Montemuro 2003). One of the pole dancers in my study, for example, articulated this fundamental change in the following way:

[Pole dancing] definitely has helped me build confidence in my, you know, in sexuality, in that kind of way. To be able to do the moves in front of people and to feel okay and to feel accepted instead of feeling, like, “Oh, am I doing something wrong? Am I being too focused on being sexy?” (Amy).

Additionally, up until very recently, strip clubs were considered socially—and at times legally—prohibited avenues for women (Bruckert 2002; Hanna 1998). Cynthia, a former erotic dancer, who is now a pole dancing instructor observed:

[The opening of local high-end strip clubs towards the turn of the 21st century] made it more acceptable for women to come and watch, because... it was designed to be more of what they call a show lounge. So it's kind of that loungy feeling that was more casual. They actually even had and have a dance floor—a civilian dance floor along with the stage for the exotic dancers. So, it made it more acceptable for women to come and watch, and I think that's when women came and saw the athleticism [of erotic dancers].

In this regard, pole dancing students challenge prevalent sexual mores and blur the lines of the Madonna/Whore dichotomy's lines. What is more, these women also disrupt gendered racial scripts that shape widespread views in the public domain (see Collins 2005). By enrolling in classes featuring the erotic contours of pole dancing, the participants in my study call into question racialized sexual images such as Asian lotus blossoms, geishas, and dragon ladies (Bannerji 1993; Shah 1997) or white promiscuous women (Espiritu 2001). Misrepresentations of both unrestrained white and passive Asian women form part of the dominant racial sexual imagery (Clarke 1998; Creese and Peterson 1996; Stoler 1991). Asian- and White-Canadian pole dancers challenge both oversexed and undersexed gendered racial scripts not only because they realize the artificial boundaries of those sexual regulations, but also because their lives and experiences prove to be more complex than rigid, disciplining categories. The narratives of this study's participants, both instructors and students, point to this direction:

If a man hears that you're a pole dancing instructor or you're taking pole dancing classes, the first thing he asks is, “Are you a stripper?” They just cannot separate the two in their brain. Unfortunately, they don't want to separate it, but it's starting to... But it's going to be a slow transition, for sure (Jessica).

It turned out to be one of my friends who asked me to do it and she's really kind of a quiet, unassuming person. So I think I was surprised that she asked, but her and her sister were going to be starting the class and then asked if I wanted to come along, and it sounded like a good idea. So I ended up coming out, just sounded like a really interesting thing to try out... She was a graduate student at the time and a Chinese girl and she's very proper, fairly reserved most of the time. And then she just comes out and it's just, like, "We should take a pole dancing class." And I'm like, "All right, sure thing." But it seemed like something where I'm surprised it wasn't the other way around (Ruth).

Part of the challenge to the Madonna/Whore binary also consists of modifying unfavourable opinions about strippers. One significant finding I encountered in my study is that in the process of studying the skills of the professionals and visiting strip clubs, the pole dancing students I interviewed develop a growing sense of respect for erotic dance workers. Helen, for instance, told me, "I think taking these classes actually makes you respect them." Other participants experienced a similar transformation, in which they developed a more nuanced view about their professional counterparts:

Let me see, the first time I ever went to a strip club was with, God, who was I with? Some co-workers... and this was two years ago when I started working at the restaurant. And I saw this one woman doing the helicopter which was the coolest thing I had ever seen. I didn't even know you could do that stuff... When I saw that I was just, like, "Wow, that's really cool. I wonder how they do that!" (Carol).

Well, now after taking pole dancing classes, I think they're very skilled. I have a lot of respect for them, for what they have to do. I think it takes a lot of hard work to be sexy on a pole. But before, I thought of them as more, you know, low class or... kind of like a cry of desperation. But now my perspective's totally changed. It's like they have a skill that a lot of people don't. I see them as more, like, you know, skilled professionals instead of just, "Oh, anyone can do that!" (Amy).

I think they're incredibly talented. It's kind of hard to lump them all in one big box, right. I mean, everybody's got their own motivations for doing what they do and I mean, some of the women out there are just trying to feed their kids, you know, and it's a choice. And I think that's good, you know, that's there's more choices than there is less choices. It would not be a choice that I would ever personally make. It's just not something that appeals to me. My sexuality's very private so I would never display it in that way. But that's not to say that other women shouldn't or can't. It's just a personal choice so I probably felt a lot less respect for them before I started pole dancing and seeing what they do. Now that I see what they do, I have a lot of respect for them; your perspective changes (Jessica).

That students and instructors with no erotic dancing experience admire strippers complicates the assumption that erotic dancing, unlike other professions, does not require

qualifications, skills, or training, and that potentially anyone could do their job. Both Laura and Amy rightly pointed out that it looks easier than it is:

I went in there not knowing what I'm going to expect. And it was fun and I was a little nervous because I didn't want to look stupid or anything. But before going in, I already had a friend who's taken classes before, telling me that for the first two or three classes, I'm going to feel kind of stupid and not sexy at all. So I kind of had an idea of what I'm getting myself into. So it was okay. I was very excited, though. Because, yeah, it was fun because you think when you're looking at the strippers do those moves, you're just, like, "Ahh, whatever!" And then when you're actually on the pole doing them, it's amazing what they can do! (Laura).

The first time was a little difficult because it looked easy, especially when you think of strippers doing this kind of thing. You don't think of them as skilled professionals. You think of them as, just dance... I don't know how to put it. More like low-class dancers, you know, they're not elegant. It's not something that the society idolizes. So I've always thought, "How hard can it be?" And the first time when I got there, I was surprised because it was very difficult. I was so sore after that first class because you kind of... use different kinds of muscles especially in pole dancing. I was very used to using my legs because I did tap. And so I wasn't used to using my upper body for dance. And you've got to be coordinated, at the same time be sexy and the first class you're not going to be sexy. I was not even close to being sexy. So it was kind of difficult. It was a struggle. But it was definitely a fun experience because nobody was sexy and so it's more like a fun experience, laughing it off, you know, like, that kind of fun. It wasn't like we are all there taking it super seriously. It's like if you fall, I mean, especially when I had a friend, we'd laugh it off. That was fun. But it was very different from what I expected pole dancing to be. I just thought you swing around the pole. How hard can it be? But it was very difficult (Amy).

The anthropological and sociological literature on sexuality has addressed some of the common misconceptions about sex workers (Doezema 1998; Hallgrimsdottir et al 2006; Hartley 1997; Kempadoo 1998; Nagle 1997; Queen 1997; Rubin 1984). These works have provided insights into the complex underlying premises behind these notions and forcibly argued against the manifest consequences these views have on the lives of sex workers, such as fear of legal repercussions, fear of being cast as social deviants, and fear of violence (Brock 1998).

Likewise, other studies have addressed the specific workings of these negative connotations as they affect female strip trade workers within the sex industry (Barton 2006; Bruckert 2002; Frank 2006; Johnson 2006; Sweet and Tewksbury 2000). While their understandings serve to illuminate the wounding consequences these representations have in the production and reproduction of stripper bashing (Johnson 2006) and hazardous sex working conditions, my findings advance this discussion further. By uncovering the pole dancing

students' growing sense of respect towards strippers, my study sheds light on an overlooked angle of the complex politics of female sexuality. Furthermore, my findings about the relationship between strip club attendance, in the form of pole dancing students' field trips, and rising respect for female strippers point to a virtually unexplored anthropological field of research: the practices of female patrons in strip clubs largely geared toward men. For instance, Jessica, a pole dancing instructor with no experience in erotic dancing, indicated:

There's such a respect for what it is they do, absolutely. Our girls would be cheering the loudest when they go to the strip club. It'll be our girls who pull money out and tip the girls. I mean, usually the strippers come and sit down at our table. We get a chance to meet a lot of them, which is fantastic.

While several works have paid attention to the interactions of male patrons with female strippers (see Egan 2006a; Frank 1998, 2002; Liepe-Levinson 2002), few of them have systematically addressed the interactions between female patrons and male dancers (Margolis and Arnold 1993; Montemuro et al 2003; Smith 2002) and briefly sketched out the presence of female consumers in female dancing clubs (Hanna 1998). Jessica's statement speaks to a new aspect of the emergence of pole dancing classes that merits future exploration. From my research, I found that pole dancing students exhibited a sense of respect towards professional dancers; however, I also discovered contradictions in the lives of pole dancing students due to the persistent "stripper stigma."

### **Managing Stripper Stigma**

As I have pointed out, social science scholars have examined the workings and implications of the "whore stigma" inflicted on sex industry workers (Hallgrimsdottir et al 2006; Queen 1997). Erotic dancing research, in particular, has shown that stripping is a stigma-laden profession (Johnson 2006) and that strippers develop different coping strategies. In my analysis of pole dancing I employ these insights on sex work stigma and explore why and how pole dancers—due to the origin of pole dancing classes—suffer from "stripper stigma." Like their professional counterparts, amateur pole dancers employ different strategies to deal with stigma

that include: pole dancing secrecy; distinguishing between being “sexy” and “slutty”; redrawing class lines of respectability; fully-clothed pole dancing for charity; and seeking to locate pole dancing within the realm of sports. Another key issue that emerges from my research is that in their efforts to manage stripper stigma, pole dancing students reproduce some of the existing restrictive social rules. I found that the mainstreaming of striptease culture in the form of pole dancing classes comes with contradictions: often pole dancers remain critical of public nudity, professional erotic dancing, and commercial sex work. In what follows I briefly address how the research participants deal with stigma.

Stigma, as Erving Goffman (1963) has explained, refers to the situation of the individuals who are denied full social acceptance because they depart negatively from current bodily, moral, or cultural expectations. Speaking to one of the participants in my study about how she chose who to invite to the end of session performance, I deepened my understanding about the whore/stripper stigma attached to pole dancing students:

I know they are friends that won't judge me, 'cause there's others who go, “Oh, you pole dance; you little slut!” and I go, “No! It's not like that!” (Carol).

Although on their way to the mainstream, pole dancing classes are still not completely accepted. As a result, pole dancing students endure social stigma—a by product of their challenge to prevalent sexual mores and gendered racial scripts. However, it is important to note that fortunately none of the pole dancers I spoke with faces the actual threat of going missing and been murdered from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, as over 70 other poor and First Nations sex workers facing the legacies of colonialism have, resulting in the current trial against Robert Pickton for the murders of 26 of them (Jiwani and Young 2006; Moores 2006). Yet, Cynthia, a former stripper, commented:

I heard stories about the girls being slightly stereotyped. As a woman if she's taking the pole dancing class it shows that perhaps she's sensual, she's seen more as a sensual being, where for some reason we're very suppressed here and we are taught to suppress that sensuality, right? Especially when they are doctors and lawyers, you are not supposed to be sensual. It's considered unprofessional. For those same people to identify themselves as being a sensual

being is sometimes frowned upon. So, in other words they are still themselves facing stereotypes, even though they are not taking their clothes off.

**Stripper Fear and Secrecy:** Stigma attached to amateur pole dancers expresses itself in numerous ways. For one thing, students of these classes confront their families' and friends' fears that because they pole dance they are potentially prone to becoming professional strippers. When Carol informed her mother she had signed up for pole dancing classes, for example, she uneasily asked: "Are you sure you're not going to become a stripper?" Other students have come across the same fear:

I tell my aunt, I told her on the phone, "I'm going to do a pole dance class," and she was just kind of, "Why? Do you want to be a stripper?" (Amy).

[My dad] is not as supportive as my mom just because, I guess, he's a very traditional man even though he's very liberal on his views. Like, he won't stop me from doing whatever it is that I want to do. But I guess because of the stigma with pole dancing, he doesn't want me to go too far into it because he thinks that there might be a possibility of me becoming a stripper. So that's his only worry. But besides that, he's okay with it (Laura).

It's not stripper class. You're not going to learn how to be a stripper. You're going to learn how to do this sort of exotic dancing. But it doesn't equate (Ruth).

Keeping pole dancing secret and selectively choosing whom they tell are strategies students use to confront these moral regulations:

They think pole dancing, stripper; as in pole, an erect pole, strip club. They make these associations instantly, because of the way that exotic dancing evolved over the last several decades to include a pole as exotic dancing prop. So that thought, that evolution of striptease and exotic dancing to incorporate a pole is ingrained in society's stereotypes, and it's upon that they draw these comparisons: pole dance-stripping-prostitution, etcetera. I understand that when you mention this to people... they snicker because they make those associations. Because I myself foresee those potential reactions, I'm pretty tight to whom I tell (Lynda).

I think generally speaking I'm not very open with my personal life at work. And my friend as well, actually, specifically didn't want people to know. So I couldn't tell anyone anyway... I think she was very embarrassed about it (Helen).

I also observed that some pole dancing students secretly longed to become strippers, but due to existing moral and sometimes legal restrictions they refrained from it. Lynda, for instance, explained to me that becoming an erotic dancer could jeopardize her current employment:

To tell you honestly... that was part of the reasoning why I wanted to start pole dancing: it's because I never dismissed the idea of being an exotic dancer. I never dismissed it. I never said I

would not do that. I just know that if I did decide to go that route I would lose... I would be dismissed from the police force... I can't switch over... I would be an extreme conflict of interest. It would be clear conduct violation. Essentially as a member of the national police force, there's an expectation of professionalism not only on the job, but off the job. Something like that would definitely be considered misconduct.

One of the instructors I spoke with, also observed the secret desire to become a stripper among her students:

You know how many women out of the blue would tell me, "I've always wanted to be a stripper." You fantasize about being a stripper, that sensuality about being that sexually powerful, that you can be in the middle of the room and be the object of every man's desire (Cynthia).

By and large pole dancing in the lives of the women I spoke to seems to be taboo, "something kind of exotic, like secret, because you can't really tell everybody that you do it," as Helen put it. The issue of secrecy took on specific ethnic/racial forms in light of the broader racial dynamics at work in Vancouver. Secrecy was shared to some extent by both Asian- and White-Canadians in my study. What seems to differ are the ways in which this secrecy was interpreted. Whereas Asian-Canadian pole dancers often referred to issues of ethnic and family pride, White-Canadian students did not make use of explicit ethnic/racial explanations. Hence, while engaging in pole dancing put the asianness of Asian-Canadian students at stake, these classes did not threaten the whiteness of White-Canadian students. Generally both groups expected Asian-Canadian pole dancing students to embody the racialized gendered expectation of oriental female chastity and passivity extensively examined in the literature (Creese and Peterson 1996; Espiritu 2001; Pyke and Johnson 2003). On the other hand, the fact that White-Canadian students were not ethnically called into question reinforced the gendered racial expectations that pole dancing was a white women's realm, and thus the controlling image that these women are sexually promiscuous subjects (Espiritu 2001).

**"Sexy", Not "Slutty":** Another form in which students cope with the stripper stigma consists in emphasizing the more acceptable sexy aspect of pole dancing while downplaying its palpable sexual side—what one of the participants conceived as "the slutty sort of side of pole

dancing” (Lisa). For the students, sexiness was often equated with confidence. Sluttiness, in contrast, referred to both sexual promiscuity and bodily movements that in this society insinuate sexual arousal:

Sexy, for me, I think is confidence, smart. It’s not something that you can get wearing clothes. Like, it’s not on the outside. I really think sexy is from the inside. It’s really different from being slutty or skanky. I mean, sexy is really, really confident. I don’t know. I think confident is sexy. I think that’s my description of sexy, and very feminine, curvy and breasts and butt, but in an appropriate way (Amy).

[The instructor] kept saying “Be graceful, be graceful.” It was like, it’s kind of not graceful, it’s kind of slutty. It’s just like you have to be slutty... but she kept saying “graceful” (Lisa).

Furthermore, underlying these distinctions between sexiness and sluttiness lay a wider differentiation between stripping and “whoring” (Nagle 1997) as separate spheres of sex work. In other words, whereas stage confidence and dancing skills attributed to erotic dancers generated admiration from pole dancing students, notions of female sexual immorality continue to frame women’s experiences with pole dancing and thus, the whore and stripper stigma remain for that reason relatively untouched (Bruckert 2002, Barton 2006). Stigmatized people often, as Goffman’s (1963) theory on stigma explains, tend to hold the same social and moral beliefs as the people who stigmatize them. In my study, even in the most stripper-friendly perspectives, the notion of being “slutty” remains unchanged:

I think that women should be able to work in areas where people aren’t just going to give them crap about it. If they want to be a stripper, I don’t think anyone else should have the right to call them a slut unless their action shows that they are. But just because they’re doing their job... they shouldn’t just be looked at as sluts, because they’re strippers (Laura).

In this sense, I argue that in the process of confronting “stripper stigma,” the “whore stigma” has been re-inscribed. Here, it is convenient to elaborate on the distinct and overlapping features between the whore and the stripper stigmas to make my argument clearer. Both of them are premised on the overreaching Madonna/Whore complex, which requires women to follow strict gender and sexual scripts that help them to achieve female purity and morality such as heterosexual monogamy, and marriage (Rubin 1984). The central mechanism of this complex

consists in regulating female sexualities by polarizing their behaviour into two mutually exclusive categories, the Madonna and the Whore (Bruckert 2002; Pheterson 1990). Due to the widely held assumptions about their “immorality” and “dirtyness”—but in reality because of their challenge to prevalent sexual mores—sex industry workers are classified as whores. The “whore stigma”, as Gail Pheterson defines it, is “a social and legal branding of women who are suspected of being or acting like prostitutes” (1900: 397). It carries assumptions about the sex workers’ alleged immorality and in this sense affects all women working in distinct areas of sex work such as prostitution and erotic dancing. What makes the stripper and whore stigmas distinct, however, is that women working in the sex industry do not experience discrediting effects in the same way. While women working in the strip trade are accused of public nudity and exhibitionism, women working in prostitution face social condemnation mainly for engaging in commercial sex. Some studies have shown that in fact erotic dancers make use of these fine but clear distinctions between professions to claim moral superiority over prostitutes (see Bruckert 2002; Johnson 2006). Along the same lines, by distancing themselves from “tainted” sex workers, pole dancing students in my study reinforced injurious perceptions of prostitutes. In the scholarly literature both whore and stripper stigmas are often inadvertently conflated. One exception is Barton’s (2006) analysis of tactics employed to minimize specifically what she calls “stripper stigma.” What my study shows instead is that even though they share common features and negatively impact the lives of sex workers, a challenge to one does not necessarily imply a reevaluation of the other.

**Class Distinctions:** A class distinction was also evident in the way students interpreted the sexy-slutty binary. Pole dancing students’ reconfigurations of prevalent sexual mores were also delineated along socioeconomic lines. For instance, the students often distinguished between different types of strip clubs, different kinds of strippers, and different levels of erotic dancers’ pole dancing skills. Dancers working in low class strip clubs were more often equated

with prostitution and drug use than dancers working in middle and upper class clubs, who were more prone to be admired for their artistic and acrobatic abilities as dancers:

There's very different clubs... there's really, really, slimy, grimy ones and then there's the higher, what you could say are higher clubs. I mean, overall I think it's sad. I mean... I've been to one female strip club. I saw this girl on stage and it broke my heart when I saw her doing it. I thought it was just awful, and I just felt like I wanted to cover her up because it just was so ugh! I've never been to the higher-end ones... But, it depends on the club, I would say (Lisa).

As long as they don't get involved into drugs, to me it is a form of art, actually. It really is. It requires discipline. It requires strength and... to me, it's okay as long as the club is decent, and as long as they themselves keep their balance and don't get themselves into drugs and into trouble and treated it as a profession; treated as a sort of acrobatics, it's fine (Patricia).

A further class-based distinction was drawn by highlighting the art, performance, and acrobatics needed for professional pole dancing while downplaying the job:

It was interesting [going to the field trip]. I think it was kind of fun going once you actually know something about pole dancing you can kind of almost critique what's going on and be, "Oh, wow, that's a good move," and "Oh, I wish I knew how to do that one." Sometimes it'd be, like, "Oh, I can do that better," whatever. But it was interesting kind of coming especially because I was taking a floor class and a pole class so you kind of got to appreciate all the aspects of it (Ruth).

Here I pretty much go [to strip clubs], maybe once a month. But I sort of follow some dancers actually. I look who is dancing. Because you don't care to just see whoever, because there is actually a difference, when the dancer is really good the music is automatically better and the costumes [too] (Patricia).

In the same way, this stigma-fighting distinction is crucial when discussing amateur pole dancing:

You keep things interesting. It's not just, like shaking your ass in front of somebody. It's well, for one thing ours is very kind of burlesqueish. Like it's still very cheeky, very sexy, sassy, but it's about performance (Carol).

In this sense, the respect pole dancing students develop for strippers is once more fraught with contradictions. Widely held misconceptions regard sex workers as unskilled and only entering the sex industry because they do not have professional training. However, because erotic dancing, in particular feature dancing, entails having economic resources in order to invest in training and the creation of attractive shows (Weldon 2006), some of the class-specific issues of pole dancing are exposed. Pole dancing students look up to dancers who can afford to put on

themed shows with elaborate costumes and acrobatic demonstrations. References to skillfully choreographed shows, the performance's craft and artistic characteristics of the dances that students first study at strip clubs and then rehearse at the studio render visible their own class positioning within current hierarchies of privilege.

**Charity, Nudity and Labour:** Performing for charity purposes and eschewing full nudity were two more ways students and instructors neutralized stigmatized perceptions about pole dancing. While pushing the boundaries conceived as sexually licit, they also maintain uneasiness with public nudity and look down on erotic dancing as a job.

On one hand, I found that many pole dancers often feel the need to defend their incursion into this novel erotic dancing realm. As a result, public pole dancing performances are often organized as charity events. On the other hand, there is a certain uneasiness with public nudity among many pole dancers. Laura, perplexed about this contradiction between emulating strippers in class while distancing themselves from them, commented:

They think it's degrading that women are taking off their clothes, even though when you're pole dancing you're not taking your clothes off in class. Or they think it's stupid. They think it's slutty or something. I don't know. It's just the stigma that's associated with it.

Nonetheless, the nudity taboo does not only rest on pole dancers' discomfort with it, but on the fact that the studios face the threat of legal regulations that contribute to the shaping of these views as well:

There's no nudity or anything like that. I can tell you if there were clothes coming off, we'd probably run into trouble. If there was any kind of a sexual trade of any sort, we'd be running into trouble, but there's none of that. I mean, we literally teach girls to dance. We teach them to lap dance. We teach them to pole dance. And if we had something that was inappropriate going on, I'm sure that would create a problem for us. But we're just a fitness facility that teaches sexy dancing. It would be no different than going to a club and dancing sexy; you'd never get arrested for it (Jessica).

Nude dancing is an integral component of the erotic dancer's job. One of the spin-offs from the previously mentioned perspectives on public nudity is that pole dancing students end up looking down on dancers who strip naked for a living. Thus, in order to make pole dancing

socially acceptable, students disapprove of nude entertainment. To manage the stripper stigma, pole dancing students differentiated themselves to a lesser or to a larger degree from the 'pros'. I have shown how amateur pole dancers admire the skill and physical strength required for performing pole moves. However, they persist in frowning upon strip dancing labour. Thus, while pole dancing students defy restrictive regulations placed upon female sexuality as well as improve their perceptions of strippers, they also hold onto existing negative perceptions about primary aspects of sex industry work, nudity, and commercial sexual services:

I do have to admit that I have a lot more respect for some strippers because once again, there are some who really love their craft and they really want to hone it and they're more to do with engaging their audience. And it's not just, "Look at me. I'm pretty. I have fake breasts. Now pay me money." I've seen that. And for one thing, even the guys think it's not entertaining. And, that I don't have so much respect for because you're just taking the easy way. Taking these classes, we really appreciate how much physical labour is being put into it. And plus you have to give that energy, and a really good dancer will own the stage and has stage presence and interacts with the audience and is able to switch things around, and does everything really with precision and grace. So those girls I have more respect for especially if they're having fun on stage. But... occasionally we'll come across a girl that's just like, "I so don't want to be here. I'm just going to take this off and give it a shake and give me my money." That's not working at all. Like, real, real dancers, they're not strippers; they're exotic dancers. And, they work for it (Carol).

At the same time, "pole-dance-a-thons" have borrowed the idea of charity "strip-a-thons" from striptease workers. By the 1980s, Vancouver-based strippers had introduced nude dancing fundraisers (Ross 2006) that continue to be carried out today. Since 2004, local strippers have held an annual erotic dancing benefit performance, under the slogan, "We get naked for charity," which supports breast cancer research (O'Connor 2006). Pole dancers, also, set out to establish a pole dancing Guinness world record in September 2006. Successful in gathering pole dancing groups from around the world, including groups from Kamloops, Nanaimo, and Vancouver, the Guinness event raised money that went to provincial charities (Litt, 2006; Poirier 2006a, 2006b). More recently, students created pole trick dancing troupes that organize events in which proceeds go to nearby women's centres (Anonymous 2007a, 2007b).

Although the Madonna/Whore regulatory divide is still in force, both strippers and pole dancers receive its impact in differently graded ways. For example, despite the origin of the pole in the striptease business, pole dancers have not faced the same contempt their strip counterparts have, as no local organizations have refused to accept their donations (McMartin 2004; O'Connor 2006). I contend that nudity and labour are two of the elements at stake when comparing pole dancing and professional stripping. With an emphasis on pole tricks, pole dancing students unwittingly help deepen the distance between strippers and students. And yet, pole work continues to be considered as problematic because, as Johnson (1998) asserts, it renders visible anxieties about public nudity and exposes the extent to which female sexualities continue to be colonized.

Drawing on Bruckert's (2002) and Barton's (2006) theorizations about "straw-strippers" and "othering" as strategies for coping with stigma, I also find that pole dancers observe themselves and their practice of pole dancing in relation to certain artistic characteristics attributed to feature erotic dancers. In this way, students are able to embrace and embody skills they admire, while at the same time separating their practice of pole dancing from straw dancers (those who do not live up to their expectations of performance craft) and whores (the "sluts" and "skanks"). These distancing mechanisms were adopted by all of the students in my study, though some of them were clearly more invested in "safely segregating themselves from the pollution and lack of self-respect attached to the sex worker" (Johnson 2006: 167) than others. The strategies are the result of the stigma attached to strippers, pole dancing classes, and by extension to them as pole dancing students. These distinctions arising from my research findings contribute further to the idea that in the case of pole dancing it proves productive to distinguish between the stripper and the whore stigma. Though interrelated, and both resulting from the overarching Madonna/Whore regulatory device, my interview transcripts show that a challenge to the former does not necessarily entail a change in the latter. Lila Abu-Lughod's seminal article "The

Romance of Resistance” rightly points out: “If the systems of power are multiple, then resisting at one level may catch people up at other levels” (1990: 53). In other words, if the interlocking systems of power are tightly implicated, the possibility for women to challenge deep-rooted sexual moralities proves to be still rife with limitations.

### **Sport Pole Dancing**

One final element I came across during my field research is the dissociation between fitness and sensual pole dancing. I outlined this tension when I argued that the reasons women pole dance oscillate between those two realms. This tension draws the students to the classes as they represent Wonder Woman-like workouts that promise achievement of hegemonic feminine ideals (slim toned bodies) and freedom from racialized sexual constraints (sexiness, confidence). I claimed that these elements are not by any means exclusive and that pole dancers neither want to compromise fitness for sexiness nor sensuality for workout. Even so, the fracture between fitness and sexuality in the production and consumption of pole dancing classes has recently widened.

Instructors and students simultaneously experience and forge the culture of pole dancing. Because of the stigma associated with pole dancing, but also due to the constant dialogue with larger marketing strategies aimed at taking the classes into the mainstream and making them more popular, pole dancing students and instructors rework the classes in sporting terms. For one thing, the terms employed by instructors to describe the classes are increasingly borrowed from those of the fitness and aerobics world. Pole dancing is described as both a low- and high-impact fitness routine, in which strength training (pole work), stretching (floor moves), and cardio (dance) are included. Accordingly, pole dancing instructors speak about developing lower- and upper-body strength, core stabilization, avoiding injury, breaking down the “moves” into teaching components, creating new “moves,” and developing higher pole levels. The pole as a dancing prop with phallic connotations is forged into a fitness tool and a piece of workout

equipment. Instructors of pole dancing are also increasingly required to obtain fitness certifications from the British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA)—a change seen as positive by pole dancing instructors irrespective of their experience as erotic dancers:

People would get injured. It'll be like yoga. Everybody is claiming to be yoga instructors, and the BCRPA would finally put some regulations on it (Cynthia).

[In our studio] we have certified instructors. Now some of them say that they have certified instructors but I've had those students or those instructors actually come to me for a job and found out there really was no certification in those studios. It's quite a lengthy programme and it's quite thorough. We talk about anatomy; we talk about breathing; we talk about engaging the muscles; we go through improper forms, proper forms, how to correct... It's a lot of material (Jessica).

Some pole dancing schools are offering registered workshops in pole and cardio striptease instruction worth credits towards the provincial fitness certificate. And for the first time later this year, the BCRPA fitness conference will include a session on these new subfields in the ever-changing fitness industry (BCRPA 2007). The dissociation between pole dancing as an athletic activity and a sensual practice is clearly in the works. The recent creation of an International Federation with the purpose of establishing standards of pole dancing contributes further to this separation.

Even though the location within the fitness realm seems to be the direction pole dancing classes is taking, the content and form of the classes still draws heavily upon what occurs in strip clubs. Jessica, for example, explained how they develop the courses offered at her studio based on field research and testing out the “moves”:

[The instructors]'ll go to the strip clubs and they'll just watch and they'll write down the move. Or sometimes they'll go to competitions and they'll watch. And sometimes there's things on the Internet that gives them information as well. So we do get our moves from a number of sources. But I would say the clubs are one of the best places where we get them. Then we bring those moves together. We'll have an instructors' meeting and we'll say, “Okay, what do you think is appropriate for the next level? What wouldn't be too much of a challenge but still keeps it interesting?” And then we'll develop another level.

Paradoxically, a spin-off from this move into the sporting world seems to be the disenfranchisement of erotic dancers from their own working skills. The two instructors I

interviewed commented that women with professional experience but no fitness credentials are increasingly unable to find employment at established pole dancing facilities. In this sense, the recent innovations in the pole dancing business have had the consequence of discrediting erotic dancers' working skills, regardless of whether studios are managed by former strippers or not.

The ongoing tension between sensuality and athleticism at the international and provincial level is also bolstered by students' notions at local studios. Many of them perceive instructors with no sex industry experience as less threatening and more welcoming of other women. Feeling uncomfortable around erotic dancers at the studio is another contradictory result of pole dancing classes, considering the fact that students truly enjoy seeing them perform at strip clubs, sometimes closely following their favourite features. Dancers such as Portia, Kylie Summers, Honey Tyler, and Gizelle Hennessy proudly travel in the path of dancers of the post-war years: Big Fanny Annie, Nena Marlene, Chesty Morgan, and Choo Choo Williams, among others (Ross 2000, 2006; Ross and Greenwell 2005).

The transition of pole dancing into the sporting realm comes with pitfalls. Students under 19 years of age, the age of majority, are not admitted into pole dancing studios in British Columbia. Clearly, the image of pole dancing is still connected to its origin at strip clubs and thus not considered appropriate for minors. In addition, the underlying regulatory principle governs which sexualities are "respectable," "good," and "true," (Foucault 1980; Johnson 2006; Rubin 1984) and which are not. These tensions between "respectable" and "dubious" forms of pole dancing have become more visible with the introduction of pole dancing competitions. In the scene depicted in the introductory narrative of this thesis, the winners were, not surprisingly, the dancers who were able to perform the most elastic and acrobatic tricks, and not the performers with sassy sensual dancing elements in their routines, who generally scored lower. Competitors were explicitly warned against stripping, insinuating sexual arousal, wearing g-strings, enacting masturbation on stage, and engaging in pornography during their reign.

Accentuating fully-clothed pole tricks while downplaying sexually suggestive strip moves advances the distinction between sensual pole dancing and pole fitness, and in the process between strippers and pole dancers. In closing, Becki Ross' (2007) concept of a "decency covenant" is pertinent to illuminate the striking similarities in which some women's performing bodies continue to be more socially accepted, more decent, and moral than others. That was the case between elite female athletes and striptease artists during Vancouver's post-war years, and unfortunately this continues to be the case between pole dancers and strippers today.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In this thesis I have critically examined the experiences of ten women and their practice of pole dancing in the city of Vancouver, British Columbia. I have provided a brief ethnographic account of pole dancing classes; examined the interviewed women's reasons for pole dancing; and documented students' experiences and negotiations of the stigma still associated with the classes.

I found that, when examining the motives of women, a consistent tension appeared in the interviews: the tension between erotic pole dancing and pole fitness. Pole dancing students in this study did not want to compromise fitness for sexiness, or focus on sensuality without workout benefits. I claimed that these students have pushed and redefined existing restrictive sexual, gendered, and racial scripts by enrolling in a class that allows them to explore their sensuality, eroticism, and sexuality. I observed that pole dancing students often develop a strong sense of respect for professional strippers.

I also found that due to the origin of pole dancing in the strip clubs, students of pole dancing face some of the effects of the broader stripper stigma. Consequently, pole dancers employ different strategies to confront stigma, including pole dancing secrecy; distinguishing between being "sexy" and "slutty"; redrawing class lines of respectability; fully-clothed pole dancing for charity; and seeking to locate pole dancing strictly within the realm of sports. I

noticed that an improved perception about erotic dancers did not necessarily entail a transformation in widely-held assumptions about other workers in the sex industry at large. In other words, my study shows that while students confront the stripper stigma, the whore stigma remains uncontested.

In short, I found that pole dancing students pushed some of the purported boundaries of female sexual respectability. At the same time, some of those social norms have also been reconfigured in that process. According to my case study on pole dancing classes, resilient legacies concerning female sexualities' such as the public nudity taboo and the lack of value for commercial sex workers still stand regardless of the mainstreaming of twirls around the pole.

## References

- Abu-Lughod, Lila (1990) The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women. *American Ethnologist* 17(1): 41-55.
- Adams, Mary Louise (1994) Thoughts On Heterosexism, Queerness and Outlaws. *In: Resist: Essays Against a Homophobic Culture*, edited by Mona Oikawa, Dionne Falconer and Ann Decter. Pp. 36-43. Toronto: Women's Press.
- Anonymous (2006) How to Feel Sexy While Burning Fat: Studio Offers a Fun Alternative to Gym or Fitness Centre. *Province*, October 10: A27.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2007a) 3 Things to Do this Week. *Now*, March 21: 9.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2007b) Pole Dancing Helps Women. *Langley Advance*, March 23: 26.
- Attwood, Feona (2005) Fashion and Passion: Marketing Sex to Women. *Sexualities* 8(4): 392-406.
- Bannerji, Himani (1993) Popular Images of South Asian Women. *In: Returning the Gaze: Essays on Racism, Feminism and Politics*, edited by Himani Bannerji. Pp. 176-186. Canada: Sister Vision Press.
- Barton, Bernadette (2001) Queer Desire in the Sex Industry. *Sexuality & Culture* 5(4): 3-27.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2002) Dancing on the Mobius Strip: Challenging the Sex War Paradigm. *Gender & Society* 16(5): 585-602.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2006) *Stripped: Inside the Lives of Exotic Dancers*. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Benoit and Shaver (2006) Critical Issues and New Directions in Sex Work Research. *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 43(3): 243-252.
- Bolin, Anne and Jane Granskog (2003) Reflexive Ethnography, Women, and Sporting Activities. *In: Athletic Intruders: Ethnographic Research on Women, Culture, and Exercise*, edited by Anne Bolin and Jane Granskog. Pp. 7-25. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Bott, Esther (2006) Pole Position: Migrant British Women Producing 'Selves' Through Lap Dancing Work. *Feminist Review* 83: 23-41.
- British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association (2007) BCRPA Fitness, Strength and Conditioning Conference. Registration Brochure available online at [http://www.bcrpa.bc.ca/fitness\\_program/events/fitness\\_conference/2007.htm](http://www.bcrpa.bc.ca/fitness_program/events/fitness_conference/2007.htm)
- Brock, Deborah R. (1998) Sex Regulation and Sex Work. *In: Making Work, Making Trouble: Prostitution as a Social Problem*. Pp. 3-24. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Bruckert, Chris (2002) Taking It Off, Putting It On: Women in the Strip Trade. Toronto: Women's Press.
- Caughey, Martha and Christina French (2001) Women's Sex-Toy Parties: Technology, Orgasm, and Commodification. *Sexuality & Culture* 5(3): 77-96.
- Clarke, George Elliott (1998) White Like Canada. *Transition* 73: 98-109.
- Collins, Patricia Hill (1990) *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2005) *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge.
- Creese, Gillian and Laurie Peterson (1996) Making the News, Racializing Chinese Canadians. *Studies in Political Economy* 51: 117-145.
- Di Leonardo, Micaela (1991) Introduction. Gender, Culture and Political Economy: Feminist Anthropology in Historical Perspective. *In: Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era*, edited by Micaela Di Leonardo. Pp. 1-48. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Doezema, Jo (1998) Forced to Choose: Beyond the Voluntary vs. Forced Prostitution Dichotomy. *In: Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*, edited by Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema. Pp. 34-50. NY: Routledge.
- Donnelly, Peter and Jean Harvey (1999) Class and Gender: Intersections in Sport and Physical Activity. *In: Sport and Gender in Canada*, edited by Philip White and Kevin Young. Pp.40-64. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

- Egan, R. Danielle (2003) I'll be Your Fantasy Girl if You'll Be My Money Man: Desire, Fantasy and Power in an Exotic Dance Club. *Journal of the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 8(1): 109-20.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2004) Eyeing the Scene: The Uses and (Re)Uses of Surveillance Cameras in an Exotic Dance Club. *Critical Sociology* 30(2): 299-320.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2006a) Dancing for Dollars and Paying for Love: The Relationships between Exotic Dancers and Their Regulars. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2006b) Resistance under the Black Light: Exploring the Use of Music in Two Exotic Dance Clubs. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35(2): 201-219.
- Espiritu, Yen Le (2001) "We Won't Sleep Around Like White Girls Do": Family, Culture, and Gender in Filipina American Lives. *Signs* 26(2): 415-440.
- Foucault, Michel (1980) [1976] *The History of Sexuality*. Vol.1. New York: Vintage Books.
- Frank, Katherine (1998) The Production of Identity and the Negotiation of Intimacy in a Gentleman's Club. *Sexualities* 1(2): 175-201.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2002) *G-Strings and Sympathy: Strip Club Regulars and Male Desire*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2006) Keeping Her Off the Pole? Creating Sexual Value in a Capitalist Society. *In: Flesh for Fantasy: Producing and Consuming Exotic Dance*, edited by R. Danielle Egan, Katherine Frank, and Merri Lisa Johnson. Pp. 203-211. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press.
- Gagnon, John and Richard Parker (1995) Introduction: Conceiving Sexuality. *In: Conceiving Sexuality: Approaches to Sex Research in a Postmodern World*. Pp. 3-16. New York and London: Routledge.
- Gamson, Joshua and Dawne Moon (2004) The Sociology of Sexualities: Queer and Beyond. *Annual Review of Sociology* 30: 47-64.
- Goffman, Erving (1963) *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Gram, Karen (2004) Sexy Moves for a Fit Form. *Vancouver Sun*, November 15: C1.
- Hanna, Judith Lynne (1998) Undressing the First Amendment and Corsetting the Striptease Dancer. *The Drama Review* 42(2): 38-69.
- Hallgrimsdottir, Helga Kristin, Rachel Phillips and Cecilia Benoit (2006) Fallen Women and Rescued Girls: Social Stigma and Media Narratives of the Sex Industry in Victoria, B.C., from 1980 to 2005. *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 43(3): 265-280.
- Harding, Jennifer (1998) Investigating Sex – Essentialism and Constructionism. *In: Sex Acts: Practices of Femininity and Masculinity*. Pp. 8-22. London: Sage Publications.
- Hartley, Nina (1997) In the Flesh: A Porn Star's Journey. *In: Whores and Other Feminists*, edited by Jill Nagle, pp. 57-65.. New York & London: Routledge.
- Haynes, Carrie (2002) Strip-Sweat an Adult Game: Dress Up, Strip Down and Burn about 400 Calories. *Province*, March 3: A40.
- Holland, Samantha and Feona Attwood (In press; N.d.) Keeping Fit in Six Inch Heels: The Mainstreaming of Pole Dancing. *In: Mainstreaming Sex: The Sexualisation of Culture*. I.B.Tauris.
- Holloway, Andy (2006) Pole to Pole: the Business of Pole Dancing. *Canadian Business*, May 22 – June 4.
- Jette, Shannon (2006) Fit for Two? A Critical Discourse Analysis of *Oxygen* Fitness Magazine. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 23(4): 331-351.
- Jiwani, Yasmin and Mary Lynn Young (2006) Missing and Murder Women: Reproducing Marginality in News Discourse. *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31(4): 895-917.
- Johnson, Gail (2004) Pole-Dancing Classes Strip Away Inhibitions. *The Georgia Straight*, August 26.
- Johnson, Merri Lisa (1998) Pole Work: Autoethnography of a Strip Club. *Sexuality & Culture* 2:149-157.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2006) Stripper Bashing: An Autovideography of Violence Against Strippers. *In: Flesh for Fantasy: Producing and Consuming Exotic Dance*, edited by R. Danielle Egan, Katherine Frank, and Merri Lisa Johnson. Pp. 159-188. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press.
- Kagan, Elizabeth and Margaret Morse (1988) The Body Electronic: Aerobic Exercise on Video: Women's Search for Empowerment and Self-Transformation. *The Drama Review* 32(4): 164-180.
- Keller, Jessalynn (2006) Pole Dancing Is the Hot Class at UBC: Or is That "Pole Fitness"? *The Tyee*, January 13.
- Kelley, Sheila (2003) *The S Factor: Strip Workouts for Every Woman*. New York: Workman Publishing Company.

- Kelly, Caitlin (2002) Cardio Striptease: Rediscover your Inner Tart and Tone Your Butt, Too. Calgary Herald, February 28: F1.
- Kempadoo, Kamala (1998) Introduction: Globalizing Sex Workers' Rights. *In: Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*, edited by Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema. Pp. 1-28. NY: Routledge.
- Koening, Sheila "Dragon Fly" (2002) Walk Like a Man: Enactments and Embodiments of Masculinity and the Potential for Multiple Genders. *Journal of Homosexuality* 43(3-4): 145-159.
- Lerum, Keri (2004) Defining the Emotional Contours of Exotic Dance. *Sexuality & Culture* 8(1): 44-52.
- Lewis, Jacqueline (1998) Learning to Strip: The Socialization Experiences of Exotic Dancers. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality* 7(1): 51-66.
- \_\_\_\_ (2000) Controlling Lap Dancing: Law, Morality, and Sex Work. *In: Sex for Sale: Prostitution, Pornography, and the Sex Industry*, edited by Ronald Weitzer. Pp. 203-216. New York: Routledge.
- \_\_\_\_ (2006) "I'll Scratch Your Back If You'll Scratch Mine": The Role of Reciprocity, Power and Autonomy in the Strip Club. *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 43(3): 297-311.
- Liepe-Levinson, Katherine (2002) Strip Show: Performances of Gender and Desire. London and New York: Routledge.
- Litt, Catherine (2006) A Pole Lot of Fun: Group Hopes to Spin its Way into Record Books. Kamloops Daily News, August 23: A1, FRO.
- MacNeill, Margaret (1998) Sex, Lies, and Videotape: The Political and Cultural Economies of Celebrity Fitness Videos. *In: Sport and Postmodern Times*, edited by Genevière Rail. Pp. 163-184. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- \_\_\_\_ (1999) Social Marketing, Gender, and the Science of Fitness: A Case-Study of Participation Campaigns. *In: Sport and Gender in Canada*, edited by Philip White and Kevin Young. Pp. 215-231. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Maguire, Jennifer Smith (2001) Fit and Flexible: The Fitness Industry, Personal Trainers and Emotional Service Labor. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 18(4): 379-402.
- \_\_\_\_ (2002) Body Lessons: Fitness Publishing and the Cultural Production of the Fitness Consumer. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 37(3-4): 449-464.
- Margolis, Maxine L. and Marigene Arnold (1993) Turning the Tables? Male Strippers and the Gender Hierarchy in America. *In: Sex and Gender Hierarchies*, edited by Barbara Diane Miller, pp. 334-50. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press.
- Markula, Pirkko (1995) Firm but Shapely, Fit but Sexy, Strong but Thin: The Postmodern Aerobicizing Female Bodies. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 12(4): 424-453.
- \_\_\_\_ (2001) Beyond the Perfect Body: Women's Body Image Distorsion in Fitness Magazine Discourse. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 25(2): 158-179.
- \_\_\_\_ (2003) Postmodern Aerobics: Contradiction and Resistance. *In: Anne Bolin and Jane Granskog (eds.), Athletic Intruders: Ethnographic Research on Women, Culture, and Exercise*. Pp. 53-78. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- \_\_\_\_ (2004) "Tuning into One's Self": Foucault's Technologies of the Self and Mindful Fitness. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 21(3): 302-321.
- McMartin, Pete (2004) When Charity Comes with a G-String. *Vancouver Sun*, December 11: B1, B10.
- McCorkel, Jill A. and Kristen Myers (2003) What Difference Does Difference Make? Position and Privilege in the Field. *Qualitative Sociology* 26(2): 199-231.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade (1988) [1984] Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse. *Feminist Review* 30: 61-88.
- \_\_\_\_ (2002) "Under Western Eyes" Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28(2): 499-535.
- Montemuro, Beth (2001) Strippers and Screammers: The Emergence of Social Control in a Noninstitutionalized Institution. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 30(3): 275-304.
- \_\_\_\_ (2003) Sex Symbols: The Bachelorette Party as Window to Change in Women's Sexual Expression. *Sexuality & Culture* 7(2): 3-29.
- Montemuro, Beth, Colleen Bloom, and Kelly Madell (2003) Ladies Night Out: A Typology of Women Patrons of a Male Strip Club. *Deviant Behavior* 24: 333-352.

- Moore, Kerry (2005) *Grab Life by The Pole: New Workout for Those Who Want Exotic Dancer's Body*. Province, May 4: C12.
- Moores, Pat (2006) (Re)Covering the Missing Women: News Media Reporting on Vancouver's 'Disappeared'. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Department of Sociology, University of British Columbia.
- Nagle, Jill (1997) Introduction. *In: Whores and Other Feminists*, edited by Jill Nagle, pp. 1-15. New York & London: Routledge.
- Newnham, Jodi (2005) An Overview of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside for UBC Learning Exchange Trek Program Participants. Vancouver: UBC Learning Exchange.
- O'Connor, Elaine (2006) Exotic Dancers Raise Money for the Cure. *The Province*, Vancouver, B.C., February 19.
- Peekaboo Pole Dancing Ltd. (2006) *The Art of Pole Dancing: A Spin-by-Spin Guide*. New York: Sterling.
- Pheterson, Gail (1990) The Category "Prostitute" in Scientific Inquiry. *Journal of Sex Research* 27(3): 397-407.
- Poletricks 101: The Ultimate Training Video for Exotic Pole Dancing (2004) Instructional DVD. PoleTricks Inc. 43 min.
- Pole Dancing for Real Women – Beginner (2005) Instructional DVD. A Pole Lot of Fun. 30 min.
- Pole Work (2002) Instructional DVD. Revolver Entertainment. 42 min.
- Poirier, Genevieve (2006a) Pole Dancers Hope to Break World Record. *Harbour City Star*, Sept. 9: A6.
- \_\_\_\_ (2006b) Pole Dancers Raise \$600 for Tour de Rock. *Harbour City Star*, September 16: A7.
- Pyke, Karen D. and Denise L. Johnson (2003) Asian American Women and Racialized Femininities: "Doing" Gender across Cultural Worlds. *Gender & Society* 17(1): 33-53.
- Queen, Carol (1997) Sex Radical Politics, Sex-Positive Feminist Thought, and Whore Stigma. *In: Whores and Other Feminists*, edited by Jill Nagle, pp. 125-135. New York & London: Routledge.
- Racco, Marilisa (2006) Good Girls Do. *Globe and Mail*, April 8: L2.
- Reardon, Wendy (2007) *The Complete Idiots Guide to Exotic and Pole Dancing Illustrated*. Boston, MA: Alpha Books.
- Richmond, Vanessa (2006) Burlesque Keeps Gathering Steam. *Globe and Mail*, February 3: R5.
- Ronai, Carol Rambo and Carolyn Ellis (1989) Turn-Ons for Money: Interactional Strategies of the Table Dancer. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18(3): 271-298.
- Ross, Becki (1997) Destinting the (Tattooed) Delinquent Body: Moral Regulatory Practices at Street Haven. *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7(4): 561-595.
- \_\_\_\_ (2000) Bumping and Grinding On the Line: Making Nudity Pay. *Labour/Le Travail* 46: 221-250.
- \_\_\_\_ (2003) Striptease on the Line: Investigating Trends in Female Erotic Entertainment. *In: Making Normal: Social Regulation in Canada*, Deborah Brock (editor). Pp. 146-178. Toronto: Thomson Nelson.
- \_\_\_\_ (2006) "Troublemakers" in Tassels and G-Strings: Striptease Dancers and the Union Question in Vancouver, 1965-1980. *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 43(3): 329-344.
- \_\_\_\_ (2007) Entertaining Femininities: The Embodied Exhibitions of Striptease and Sport, 1950-1975. *In: Physical Culture, Power, and the Body*, Jennifer Hargreaves and Patricia Vertinsky (editors). Pp.121-141. New York: Routledge.
- Ross, Becki and Kim Greenwell (2005) Spectacular Striptease: Performing the Sexual and Racial Other in Vancouver 1945-1975. *Journal of Women's History* 17(1): 137-164.
- Rossi, Cheryl (2007) Fitness Buffs Compete for Top Pole Position. *Vancouver Courier*, March 16: 21.
- Roy, Madeleine and Mireille Ledoux (2007) *Danse Poteau*. Report by Madeleine Roy and Mireille Ledoux. *Enjeux*, Radio-Canada.Ca. Duration: 21min20sec.
- Rubin, Gayle (1984) Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality. *In: Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, edited by Carol S. Vance. Boston: Routledge.
- Salsa Pole! (2006) Instructional DVD. A Pole Lot of Fun Enterprises Inc. 30 min.
- Shah, Sonia (1997) Introduction: Slaying the Dragon Lady: Toward an Asian American Feminism. *In: Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire*, edited by Sonia Shah. Pp. xii-xxi. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Smith, Clarissa (2002) Shiny Chests and Heaving G-Strings: A Night Out with the Chippendales. *Sexualities* 5(1): 67-89.

- Smith, Earl and Angela Hattery (2006) Hey Stud: Race, Sex, and Sports. *Sexuality & Culture* 10(2): 3-32.
- Sloan, Lacey and Stéphanie Wahab (2000) Feminist Voices on Sex Work: Implications for Social Work. *Affilia* 15(4): 457-479.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2004) Four Categories of Women Who Work as Topless Dancers. *Sexuality & Culture* 8(1):18-43.
- Stoler, Ann Laura (1991) Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race, and Morality in Colonial Asia. *In: Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era*, Micaela di Leonardo, editor. Pp. 51-101. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sweet, Nova and Richard Tewksbury (2000) "What's a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?": Pathways to a Career in Stripping. *Sociological Spectrum* 20(3): 325-343.
- Trautner, Mary Nell (2005) Doing Gender, Doing Class: The Performance of Sexuality in Erotic Dance Clubs. *Gender & Society* 19(6): 771-778.
- Vance, Carole S. (1984) Pleasure and Danger: Towards a Politics of Sexuality. *In: Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, Carole S. Vance, ed. Pp. 1-27. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2005) [1991] Anthropology Rediscovered Sexuality: A Theoretical Comment. *In: Same-Sex Cultures and Sexualities: An Anthropological Reader*, edited by Jennifer Robertson. Pp. 15-32. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Visweswaran, Kamala (1997) Histories of Feminist Ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26: 591-621.
- Weldon, Jo (2006) Whipped Cream, Fire Eating, and the Other Delights of Feature Dancing. *In: Flesh for Fantasy: Producing and Consuming Exotic Dance*, edited by R. Danielle Egan, Katherine Frank, and Merri Lisa Johnson. Pp. 85-94. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press.
- Weeks, Jeffrey (1986) The Language of Sex and The Invention of Sexuality. *In: Sexuality*. Pp. 10-43. London, Tavistock.
- Wiebe, Alan and Jennifer Collins (2007) AMS Minischool Registration Statistics for 2006/2007 Courses. Unpublished document compiled by Alan Wiebe and Jennifer Collins, Alma Mater Society, University of British Columbia.