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Femininity, Feminism and Recreational Pole Dancing (Routledge Research in Sport, Culture and Society)

Kerry Griffiths

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This book explores the phenomenon of pole dancing as an increasingly popular fitness and leisure activity for women. It moves beyond previous debates surrounding the empowering or degrading nature of pole dancing classes, and instead explores the complexities of these concepts and highlights that women participating in this practice cannot be seen as one dimensional.

Femininity, Feminism and Recreational Pole Dancing explores the construction, negotiation and presentation of a gendered and classed identity and self through participation in pole dancing, the meaning of pole dancing as a fitness practice for women, and the concepts of community and friendship as developed through classes. Using empirical research, the book uncovers the stories and experiences of the women who participate in these classes, and examines what the mainstreaming of this type of sexualised dance means for the women who practice it. Pole dancing is shown to be a practice in which female identities are negotiated, performed and enacted and this book positions pole dancing as an activity which both reinforces but also presents some challenge to ideas of feminism and femininity for the women that participate. Women's participation in pole dancing is described in a discourse of choice and control, yet this book argues that the decision to participate is somewhat constructed by the advertising of these classes as enabling women to create a particular desirable self, which is perpetuated throughout our culture as the ‘ideal’. Exploring the ways in which women attempt to manage impressions and present themselves as ‘respectable’, the book examines how women wish to dis-identify with both women who work as strippers and women who are feminist, seeing both identities as contradictory to the feminine image that they pursue. The book explores the capacity of these classes to offer women some feelings of agency but challenges the idea that participating in pole dancing can offer collective empowerment. The book ultimately argues that women’s participation can be viewed both in terms of their active engagement and enjoyment of these classes and in terms of the structures and pressures which continue to shape their lives.

This timely publication explores the complexity of the pole dancing phenomenon and highlights a range of questions surrounding this activity as a leisure form. It will be a valuable contribution to those interested in women’s and gender studies, cultural studies, feminism, sociology and leisure studies.

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