

Audio Documentary Script: “Spinning on Cairo’s Pole of Freeson”

Hanady Omran

Fall 2017

JRMC 4460: Audio Production

Professor Kim Fox

Pole practices are misunderstood all around the world. However, here in Egypt, since pole practices and pole studios are new to the community, they face more resistance than they would abroad. Pole fitness is unfortunately associated with stripping, a misconception that belittles pole fitness and the amount of effort trainees put into it. This audio documentary sheds light on what is pole fitness, how pole came to Egypt, and how girls in Egypt are breaking the stigma of pole practices being linked to stripping.

*SFX: Crowd Cheering Copyright Free - YouTube's free audio library*

She just perfected the Rainbow Marchenko!

*MUSIC FADE IN: Buddah – Kontekst No Copy Right Music*

The Rainbow Marchenko, The Kamakazi, The wild Falcon. These aren't just random words I've put together. They're pole tricks that take months and months of training to perfect. These moves all fall under the category of pole fitness which is using a vertical pole to enhance your fitness levels regarding strength training, flexibility, coordination and endurance by performing acrobatic tricks are similar to circus ones. Girls gravitate towards this sport because it makes him feel powerful and athletic while embracing their femininity and confidence. In fact so many women have been gravitating towards this fitness method, that pole studios are increasing rapidly all over Egypt. Pole practices were first introduced to Egypt in 2013, with Pole Fit studio opening up in Zamalek, Cairo. Now, and only four years after Pole Fit, about five more major pole studios, some with two branches or more, have opened up and they spread out all over Cairo to accommodate all girls. Pole dancers Maha and HEND told me a little about where they practice pole and why they go there.

*HEND YOUSSEF (HY): "I go to Pole Fit in Zamalek because it's the oldest and I think it's also the most popular?" (:08)*

*MAHA HESHAM (MH): "I go to Moshen junkies in Tagamoa'. It's very new but it's closer my house than F Square studio in Zamalek." (:08)*

There's also The Spin, which is the second studio to open in Cairo. It started off by having only Pole Fit as a competitor, but Noura Omran, owner of The Spin studio, says the sport has increased in popularity so much that she now has seven strong competitors in the market. But still Noura's beginnings with pole were humble.

*NOURA OMRAN (NO): "I started The Spin almost three years ago. At the beginning I actually thought this will not work and this is like something that I'm just doing for, like a hobby. And I had one of my friends like as a partner. Her house was empty and we thought let's get like two or three poles and let's start the studio. We thought at the beginning like no one would ever come to us and everyone will be shy and no one will accept the idea of like doing pole and stuff. But after a while, we found actually on our first month, we found over 70 girls coming to our studio. So we started thinking that this is like something serious and this is like a business that's going on." (:45)*

*NAT SOUND: Myself asking the security of the clubhouse where the studio is?*

Personally, going into the spin. I was fascinated by how such a tight space could hold so much energy. Located on the second floor of a villa in an upscale clubhouse the Spin's walls are painted in feminine and vibrant colors and quotes by the dancers were painted on the walls to remind the trainees to always stay strong and make their dreams come true. I was charged with positive energy and with loud music throughout my first class. And yes, afterwards I was bruised and sweaty, but I had gathered more than just research about the sport and the studio. I felt like I could achieve so much on a pole just by being in the presence of dancers with such high morale and constant encouragement. The spin is quite a successful studio since classes are always packed. But Noura just get into the business by buying pools and putting out ads. She's a certified trainer.

*NO: "Like, I traveled abroad a lot like to take certifications and come back here to Egypt to train the girls like how I was trained internationally. I took one in the UK but now I've done like even a better one. So in the UK it's a bit close to theoretical stuff more. But about two months or three months ago I've done one called elevated. It's a certification that keeps you certified to teach internationally." (:25)*

Pole studios also offer other classes besides pole fitness such as flexibility classes, necessary when performing advanced pole tricks, aerial hoop classes where girls learn acrobatic tricks on a large hoop hung from the ceiling, aerial silk classes, where girls learn tricks on large colorful pieces of fabric, also hung from the ceiling. Studios also offer pole dancing classes. The major difference between pole fitness and pole dancing is that pole dancing requires the trainees to wear high heels. The music played slower and the moves become smoother, more sensual. Pole fitness is usually done barefoot and with more upbeat music. Its tricks focus on the use of arm and core muscles. You see whether women use the pole to train barefoot or dance in high heels, they're taking matters into their own hands when it comes to their practices. They're encouraging the notion of feminism that is already on the rise in current times. Sociology professor Helen Rizzo explains the roots of feminism in Egypt and how girls are changing the norms using the concept.

*HELEN RIZZO (HR): "Under Nasser, all these kinds of social welfare things that he does was, part of that was to educate women and get them into the workforce. I mean I don't know if he was a feminist or but it was I think his larger project of trying to bring about a equality. But there were benefits to having more people educated in trying to get women into the workforce. and now that younger people want to be more politically active and it still seems to be a very hard place to break into in terms of formal politics. But it does seem like with women now getting more education, getting better access to health care and reproductive health care to enable them after they get married to still have careers, that I think younger women are starting to think, "Well, I don't have to do exactly like my mother and grandmother did." (:56)*

*MUSIC FADE OUT: Buddah – Kontekst No Copy Right Music*

*MUSIC FADE IN: Groovebeatz – Dramatic Chillout*

But unfortunately with change always comes resistance. Have you ever wondered why sports such as gymnastics and ballet, which use horizontal poles get so much respect and recognition but pole fitness and dancing, which also used poles but vertical ones instead, get only skepticism? The fact that vertical poles are associated with stripping is the problem.

*SALMA ANSWERSON (SA): "I didn't want to mention anything about poles 'cause I thought she would just associate it with dancing in your underwear and like stripping and why would you want to do something that strippers do?" (:21)*

That was Salma Anderson. She told her mom she did aerobics instead of practicing pole because she knew her mother would confuse it with stripping.

*SFX: Catcall Whistle - YouTube's free audio library*

What her mother and many other people don't understand is that the concept they're resisting is not actually pole fitness. It's stripping, which is a job where a woman performs a striptease in a nightclub as adult entertainment. When a woman is performing a striptease, her body movements are sensual. They highlight parts of her body that pole fitness tricks do not. A striptease sexualizes the dancer, something that is not even the intent of a pole fitness trainee.

*RANA ASSEM (RA): "I think what they really really care about is that I don't post anything on social media about it. Oh they don't want it to be public? Yeah exactly. They tell me don't post anything or just do it for yourself. It's all for yourself. You can take videos and keep them for yourself but don't share it." (:18)*

Pole dancer Rana Assem has progressed immensely since her start on the pole two years ago. She has her parents' encouragement but not their permission to post her achievements progress online because they don't want her image to be associated with a vertical pole. The misconception that any practices on the vertical pole lead to stripping are unfair and disregard the amount of rigorous effort the trainees put into pole fitness.

*MUSIC FADE OUT: Groovebeatz – Dramatic Chillout*

*MUSIC FADE IN: Buddah – Kontekst No Copy Right Music*

But girls in Egypt are resisting the stigma by insisting on frequenting their pools studios. This way they're fighting the negative connotation attached to pool by showing the opposing community that pole can be a feminizing and empowering way to exercise without clashing with a society's moral standards. Isn't it nice to see women embracing their strength and also their femininity by exercising on the metal pole as they please?

This audio documentary was produced by Hanady Omran for the Audio production course at the American University in Cairo, taught by Professor Kim Fox in the fall semester of 2017. Special thanks to American University in Cairo sociology department chair Dr. Helen Rizzo, Noura Omran, Salma Anderson, Rana Assem, Hend Yousef, and Maha Hesham. First piece of music is from Audio Library, No Copyright music on YouTube and the second piece is from GrooveBeatz channel on YouTube. Sound effects collected from YouTube's free audio library. Natural sounds were collected by me.

*MUSIC FADE OUT: Buddah – Kontekst No Copy Right Music*