

CLASSES LET WOMEN EXERCISE WITH ATTITUDE

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By Amy Bertraind
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ST. LOUIS — Teri Hatcher is doing it. So is Carmen Electra. But your accountant, your doctor and even — gasp! — your mom?

We're talking about classes in which everyday women release their inner vixen by learning moves inspired by ... well ... strippers.

Pole dancing, cardio stripping and variations in between have been popular on the coasts for several years now, but the classes are just now making their way to the rest of the country.

When Sheila Kelley appeared on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" in 2003 to promote her "S-Factor" book on the subject, viewers nationwide got to see what all the fuss was about.

"I think when people saw it on 'Oprah' they said, 'Oprah's doing it, so it must be OK,'" says Angela Farrar, who teaches the cardio strip fit class at the Fitness Studio in the Lifestyle Center in Clayton, Mo.

Suzie Peiffer launched a pole dancing class about six months ago.

"I like to tell people it's not dirty," Peiffer says. "Nothing comes off. It's exercise; it's fitness. It's fun, and it can tone the body from head to toe. And it boosts your self-esteem so you feel so much better about yourself as a woman. There's a real empowerment there. And what's wrong with that?"

Peiffer's class meets three times a week in a studio next to her home in St. Charles, Mo. She has two poles on which the women take turns trying out their moves.

"We have all ages and all sizes that come here," she says. "It's a really diverse group."

Fitness Studio co-founder Stacie Mullen brought the class to St. Louis in March after looking at the latest trends in fitness.

"Women want one of two things when looking for a workout. One is an affordable personal trainer; the other is the excitement of a new workout, and that's what we offer here," Mullen says.

Both women say they are adding classes to meet demand.

The class at the Fitness Studio meets twice a week in a dimly lighted room in the lower level of the Lifestyle Center. A disco ball and stripper poles in the middle of the room help add to the atmosphere, as do songs such as "Don't Cha" by the Pussycat Dolls and "Pour Some Sugar on Me" by Def Leppard.

Farrar, a certified fitness trainer, says she encourages women to let their hair down and wear high heels as they dance.

"They are optional, but they make you feel sexier," she says.

“Half of this is heel management,” jokes Kathy Geise, 43, coming out of a tough session. “My quads are killing me. I’m shaking. But it’s all about the heels.”

The workout

Besides giving women a chance to feel sexy and self-confident, the workout itself is the main draw for many of them.

“Every girl wants to dance and have fun and be sexy, but this is a great workout, too,” said Farrar, 35. When I’m finished I’m completely drenched in sweat. ... I think there’s a misconception that this is a fluff workout, but we work hard.”

Peiffer says the arms get a great workout in her classes. “I’m 125 pounds,” says the 49-year-old mother of four. “So every time I lift myself on the pole, I’m lifting 125 pounds.”

In Farrar’s class, the women seem to catch on to the routines quickly. After working through some new moves and reviewing old ones, the women do workouts with a chair or with the poles in the room.

The routines cover an amazing amount of deep squats and bending from the waist, not to mention hip rolls and sexy poses.

“The husbands love it,” says Peiffer. “I’ve never known a husband to object to letting their wife come to this class.”

Motivations

“It’s just so much fun,” says Amy Purtle, 32, who hasn’t missed a class of Farrar’s since it started. “It’s helped me be in touch with my self-image. I’m more comfortable with myself now.”

Geise, a medical sales rep, agrees with Purtle. “It’s all about embracing the feminine, embracing your goddess energy.”

Like Purtle and Geise, many come to the class to get a workout and to bolster their self-image. Others come for a variety of different reasons.

“I love to dance,” says Naomi Green, 41, a corporate paralegal and mom to two daughters. “Men love it, and sure, I’ll go home tonight and show my husband these new moves.”

For Dora Owens, 44, a computer programmer, the motivation is continued weight loss. “I’ve been losing weight running, but I’m tired of running, so I thought this could add spice to my workout.”

Spice is just what she’s getting.

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