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Pole dancers seek to ditch stripper stigma

By **Natalie Jimenez** Topics **Viral Video**

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(CBS/Reuters) Dancers in the U.S. are putting a new spin on pole dancing by displaying aerial acrobatics and athleticism in a routine commonly associated with strip clubs.

Eleven women competed in the 2011 U.S. Pole Dancing Championship at a sold out theater in New York City.

Incorporating jazz, ballet and other dance forms, the competitors worked to legitimize the dance as a sport.

Wendy Traskos - the co-founder of the U.S. Pole Dancing Federation or USPDF - contends that pole dance is a form of expression for women and that ignorance is responsible for negative stereotypes.

"The definition of stripping is taking something off and these women are not doing that," Traskos explains. "They're coming out in their outfits and you do have to have your skin exposed in order to stick to the pole."

The USPDF 2010 champion Natasha Wang channeled the Black Swan from the 2010 blockbuster film, earning her a standing ovation from the crowd and the 2011 title.

"When I saw the movie, obviously it really spoke to me," said Wang, who does not have a professional dance background. "I'm very meticulous and almost driven to the point where I'm going crazy to try to make everything perfect, so I could just relate to it."

By day, Wang works in public relations. After gaining popularity in the pole dancing circuit, she was forced to disclose her involvement to her company. Wang says that she's lucky to have the support of her peers and colleagues.

The night's second place winner, Gabrielle Valliere, is a registered nurse.

"It's a nice partner to what I do in regards to health and wellness in my other life," Valliere explains. "But also when I first started pole dancing, I just wanted something totally different from what I had been doing when I was cheering for the NFL for a really long time and I found my niche in pole dancing."

Valliere was the only competitor from New York and she received a rush of support from fans following her win.

The USPDF - whose motto is "The sleek. The strong. The sexy." - was founded in 2008.

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