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Belly Dancing: Modern Women Reclaiming an Ancient Ritual

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**INTRODUCTION**

The term "belly dancing" generates multiple reactions from modern Americans, ranging from disgust at a vulgar striptease to awe at an elegant art form. It has been marketed under a myriad of guises. The elements of that seem to discriminate most between the two extreme perceptions are the dance itself, the costuming, the advertising, and the place in which the dance is performed.

Those who practice the dance as an art form recognize its sensuality. According to Ozel (1976):

> [I]t's dignified sexuality - anyone can get into it without feeling tawdry. At this level, it's sensuality...we're talking about nuance and gesture and metaphor and a lot of other things that are light years away from the spectacle we lump into the category of bump and grind. Belly-dancing is exotic and erotic, it speaks of deep sexual knowledge...but it doesn't ever stoop to advertise it! (p. 26).

However, after its introduction into America during the late nineteenth century, the dance became a burlesque favorite.

Of course, strippers and exotics were quick to adopt the idea of the Seven Veils. Many of them became belly dancers overnight, enjoying the touch of art they injected into their performances, along with the extra benefit that a few dollars' worth of veils constituted an easily removable wardrobe (Serena and Wilson 1972, p. 16).

The location of the performance affects perceptions. A bar or nightclub may denote a somewhat sleazy performance. According to Morocco (Saretta, 1980),

> I love universities or lecture demos because the audience comes with a certain level of respect since you happen to be in a theater. I can do the same dance in a nightclub or in a theater, and I'll get a different reaction... (p.6).

She also indicated that the dance was respected in ethnic clubs.

> ... you would see the whole family from grandma to grandpa to babies in diapers... The women would usually get up and dance with the women, and men would get up and dance with the men (p. 5).

Belly dancing has a long and proud history, dating perhaps from the ancient religions of prehistoric times. Throughout many countries, it is performed in the privacy of the women's quarters. Many modern American women practice this art, for a variety of reasons. According to Mishkin and Schill (1973),

> Thousands of American women have started rolling their bellies and perfecting the snakelike undulations. They come for instruction for many reasons: to get back into shape after having a baby; to fulfill a secret alter-ego image; to express their total nature, including their sexuality, without losing any dignity or grace; to enhance their sex appeal;
to entertain a bored husband; or just to have fun (p. 19-20).

A resurgence of this art form appeared during the 1970s, and in many areas the dance is still gaining popularity. Marketing has played a significant role in defining this dance as either a celebration of women or an exploitation of women. However, the purpose of this study was to examine the meaning of this ancient ritual to some of the women who currently enjoy performing the dance as a high-involvement consumer behavior.

In an article entitled "Belly Dancing: Do You Know Where Grandma is Tonight?" Mahoney (1974), stated:

Once upon a time, belly dancers were looked upon as bad, vulgar sexy women who performed somewhat lewd dances . . . Today, however, belly dancing has become legit . . . [I]t is being taught widely in classes offered at many Y's, in adult education centers, and even in department stores" (p. 33).

What is the attraction of this ancient dance for modern women? This preliminary study is a combination of a literature review and interviews with seven women who have tried belly dancing (See Appendix A). Interviews were unstructured and informants were asked to tell the interviewer about belly dancing. How did they begin? Why do they continue? What is the attraction? Many questions arose that should provide ideas for future research.

BACKGROUND

The history of belly dancing has been reconstructed through examination of paintings from prehistoric through modern times, as well as writings of travelers. Gioseffi (c1980) maintained that early forms of belly dancing were fertility rites in matriarchal religions, perhaps as early as 25,000 B.C. Depictions of women in poses similar to the belly dance have been found among Egyptian, Greek, and Etruscan artifacts. While it is difficult to authenticate the early dances, it seems possible that the modern belly dance retains elements of the early fertility rites. More recently belly dancing has been associated with Middle East, Near East, and oriental cultures.

The specific movements of the dance mimic the process of giving birth. Morocco (1981), a professional belly dancer, reported that after a performance in New York, a Saudi Arab woman, Farab Firdoz, explained the meaning of the dance:

She told me that the "belly roll," . . . flutter and some parts of the floor sections were based on the movements of labor and childbirth and that thousands of years ago, they had been part of a religious ceremony, but . . . had become secular: either as an entertainment . . . or as a ritual/therapeutic . . . wherein all the women would gather around a woman in labor and do certain movements, encouraging her to do likewise, thus easing the birth . . . Having done these movements in various folk dances since childhood, their muscles were stronger and better prepared for the stresses of childbirth (p. 10).

In 1967, Morocco (1981) was invited to witness such a birth in a remote village in Morocco. The expectant mother was in a large tent, and no man was allowed within 100 yards.

The other women had formed a series of circles, three deep around her . . . All the women were singing softly and undulating their abdomens, then sharply pulled them in several times. The movement was much slower and stronger than what dances call the flutter . . . [After the birth of twin boys, they] kept up the singing and dancing till way past sundown. It was so moving that I couldn't help crying (p. 12).

The dancing was done by women for women, in this case with the specific goal of helping to ease a new life into the world.

Deaver (1978) reported attending an afternoon of belly dancing in Dharhan, Saudi Arabia.

Proper belly dancing takes place in private, enclosed, female space in the afternoon at parties made up exclusively of females. The women . . . remove their public coverings, the
abaya and veil, and display their latest costumes... Gold was worn in abundance, and the latest clothing was displayed... from traditional Saudi dresses encrusted with embroidery to leopard-skin "hot pants" with high heeled patent leather boots from Paris (p.16).

According to Deaver (1978), the women performed individually or in pairs, and critiqued one another's dancing.

By emphasizing her hips in the pelvic rotations, breasts in the shimmy, and by giving the audience come-hither looks... she is saying, "I am young, I am beautiful, I am sexually appealing. Therefore, I can keep my husband, I am secure." This message is reinforced by her display of wealth - gold in particular (p.16).

Women who dance at night or in the company of men are considered "deviant," perhaps even harlots.

In 1893, an Algerian village was reconstructed at the Chicago World's Fair (Gioseffi c1980), including a group of Syrian dancers.

As people flocked to the Midway Pleasure to watch the dancers rolling their exotic bellies, the Victorian females on the Fair's executive board were shocked and scandalized... Their wrath only had the effect of causing the Victorian male to flock all the more to the Midway Pleasure (p. 37).

Many believed that the star performer was billed as "Little Egypt," (Gioseffi c1980; Berger 1961; Sobel 1946), but Barzel (1964) claimed that no such person actually performed at the Chicago Fair. The "stomach dance" was performed, and very quickly burlesque dancers throughout the United States were billing themselves as the authentic "Little Egypt." The American version of the belly dance became known as the "hootchy-kootchy" (Sobel 1946). Performers on Broadway, in movies, and even the opera executed various renditions of the dance.

With the development of the American burlesque show in the '90's, managers made the Hootchy-Kootchy the come-on attraction, the just-before-closing act which the all-male audience welcomed with hoots, catcalls and applause (p.46).

Performances in the United States and France also had an impact on the dance in the Middle Eastern. Gioseffi (c1980) quoted Armen Ohanian, as translated by Rose Wilder Lane in 1923.

Thus in Cairo one evening I saw, with sick incredulous eyes, one of our most sacred dances degraded into a bestiality horrible and revolting. It is our poem of the mystery and pain of motherhood, which all true Asiatic men watch with reverence and humility, in the faraway corners of Asia where the destructive breath of the Occident has not yet penetrated... [The] spirit of the Occident had touched this holy dance, and it became the horrible "danse du ventre," [dance of the stomach] the "hootchie-koochie." To me, a nauseating revelation of unsuspected depths of human bestiality, to others it was - amusing. I heard the lean Europeans chuckling, I saw lascivious smiles upon even the lips of Asiatics, and I fled (p. 37).

According to Gioseffi (c1980), during the 1970s in the U.S., "belly dancing [became] a widely-practiced national pastime" (p. 17). Many of the available books, written during the 1970s and 1980s, describe specific dance steps, costume patterns, makeup, and even instructions on becoming a professional dancer (Ozel 1976; Mishkin and Schill 1973; Silhi c1974).

THE DANCE TODAY

Combining a literature review with informant interviews, provides insight into the attraction of the belly dance. According to Ozel (1976), "belly-dancing has gone respectable" (p. 10).

A serious, almost spiritual thing - that's belly dancing in a phrase. And not only the young think so. Across the country, women are taking up belly dancing to lose weight, tone up their muscles and make themselves more...
alluring to themselves, and to the men in their lives (p. 10).

Mishkin and Schill (1973) maintained belly dancing will

tone your muscles, improve your posture, develop more balance and grace in all your movements, increase your stamina, and perhaps decrease your girth and width. Belly dancing is one of the best all-around body improvers . . . (p. 20).

Jodette (Silhi c1974) indicated that while belly dancing is a good form of exercise, the entertainment value is also important. Gioseffi (c1980) stated that it is enjoyable.

When practiced as a natural art form, the dance not only consumes calories and develops stamina, balance, grace, and sensual feeling, but it is also a creative outlet (p. 17).

Physical Benefits
As noted above, improved fitness is often considered a major reason to become involved in belly-dance classes. Firmness and fitness were mentioned by the informants as more important than weight loss. Razan (WF 39) said belly dancing exercises many parts of the body: the belly, of course, but also hips, legs, and arms. "The elevation of the spirit associated with the dance just makes you in general . . . have more energy, burn things off," Ceyda (WF 37) summarized.

Selime (WF 43) discussed her return to dancing.

I took a belly dance class after my daughter was born. She was two, and I wanted to get in shape again, and I got into folk dancing . . . and started to learn Middle Eastern dancing. From there I just said, "Why not? This has been my lifelong dream. I am still a dancer in this body.

Jale (WF 72) has been recovering from a two-and-a-half month hospitalization as a result of surgery. Celile (WF 41) recently coaxed Jale into an impromptu performance that was videotaped for Jale’s doctor to verify how well she can move her body again.

Celile discussed the need to be aware of the space you, other dancers, and the audience each occupy. She noted she was acquiring a better sense of self-presence. Previously she found herself walking into doorways, but not anymore. "If you do it to a point where you’ve accomplished something, it builds self-esteem."

Ceyda is convinced of a connection between belly dancing, fitness, and fertility. She believes infertile women who learn the dance lose weight, lose fat around the ovaries, become more sexually active, and become pregnant. Gioseffi (c1980) reported,

I recall a voluptuous young woman . . . who was unable to conceive until, after two years of belly dancing, her tilted uterus righted itself. She . . . delivered naturally with the help of her strengthened muscle control (p. 82).

Filiz (WF 39) had no previous dance experience when she began her lessons, and she has taken belly dancing for only a short time. She is not yet finding the success the others have reported.

I think there is something that I am trying to prove to myself, and I just keep [asking] myself, "Will it get easier if I keep doing this for a while?" Because I [have] no natural talent. Nothing like that. No natural grace. I’m not a flexible person. I couldn’t touch my toes when I was fourteen, and I can’t touch them now.

The question here is whether this dance is better for some people than others. Did those reporting physical benefits have a natural talent before taking lessons? Do people such as Filiz improve or do they stop taking the lessons when it becomes too difficult? Is there a body type or personality type that responds best to this type of exercise?

Femininity and Fantasy
As women became increasingly active in business, they were urged to adopt power dressing, which
precluded any feminine attire. Molloy (1977) urged women to "Dress for Success."

Despite the rhetoric of the feminist movement, many women, including business women, continue to view themselves as sex objects. Sexuality is certainly an important part of our lives. But when sexuality is a factor in choosing business wear, it harms a woman's career (p. 21).

He recommended suits and tailored dresses designed to diminish the curves of a woman's body.

Jewell and Fiedorek (1983) also recommended more professional apparel. Fashion can allow a woman to play a role, but it is not acceptable for business.

[There is an] endless variety of fashion "looks" offered season in and season out to women. We can be anything we want to be with just a quick change of clothes: gypsy one minute, peasant the next, Victorian heroine the next, and queen of the jungle after the sun goes down... Just as men have been resistant to change, we've welcomed it, heralding it with collections, proclaiming it through designers... Until we became doctors, lawyers, architects, accountants, financial managers and corporate administrators. And now we haven't got a thing to wear. We have not yet established our own dress code as instantly identifiable as that of our male business associates (p. xiii-xiv).

At a time when success in the business world appeared to involve accepting the masculine idea of a business uniform, the dazzling costuming of the belly dancer became even more enticing to women.

Certainly much of the appeal of this dance is in the richness and beauty of the costuming. Kamile (WF 27) said she was attracted to belly dancing partly because of the clothes.

It looked like fun... Mostly I liked the clothes... [They have] lots of sparkles and bright, pretty colors, and beaucoup adornments, lots of pretty jewelry. Sometimes the costumes dance, like the veils that flair out when you turn.

Selime said costuming had always been important to her.

In kindergarten... I remember dressing in gypsy clothes all the time. I had this one pretty pink poofy blouse, that I'd draw down over my shoulders and wear a big red rose in my hair and all this rhinestone jewelry that my mother would allow me to wear, and I would just dance.

The informants usually select a traditional "cabaret" look with a bra and harem pants or a circular skirt with slits to reveal the legs. A shawl or veil may be removed during the dance. Another possibility is a beledi or long dress of shimmery material possibly teamed with harem pants and veils.

The individual dancer may have a signature costume. Razan loves purple and black and has many costumes in these colors. Jale selects black because "it's the sexy one... the black one always gets me." If she knows the individual for whom she is dancing, Celile will dress in his or her favorite color. The mood on the day of the performance may also affect the selection.

Even the practice sessions are glamorous. Filiz indicated that this was important to her.

[It] seems so feminine to me, and I don't know what else I could do that would really feel that way. We dance at the Ladies' Club. It's a health club... and these women are on the machines and the bikes in their bright-colored, very tight exercise clothes. I've never even owned clothes like that. They're sweating all over the place. We walk in, and we have skirts and sequins and bracelets, and we're going to sweat too, but we look a whole lot better doing it.

Because the costumes are very expensive, most of the dancers make their own. Filiz was making a costume that she hoped would be the first of many.
Everybody makes their own. There are people that sell them professionally, and the prices are so extreme because so much handwork is involved in the decoration but people sell second-hand costumes. At the supply shop recently I saw a second hand one that was $500.

Because she is sensitive about her weight, Filiz was making a costume that was less revealing than many.

I made gold harem pants. They're very pretty. Then a black and gold tunic over the top of it, cause I don't feel comfortable showing a lot of skin.

Filiz discussed the details of making of her costume, and she seemed to be enjoying its design and construction.

Each of the dancers also selects a name. While the names used here to disguise the informants are authentic Arab names, many of those chosen by dancers are not. One informant in this study selected the name of a "Jewish goddess." Another chose an American-Indian name. Ceyda's name, a word meaning "one who brings an uplifting experience," was selected by her students. The use of these names seems to add an element of fantasy, as well as authenticity, to the performance.

Reclaiming Sensuality
Anyone who has observed a talented belly dancer would have to admit that it is a sensuous dance. Kamile indicated that this was another benefit of this dance form.

Women can flaunt their sensuality in a positive way. It isn't degrading. It is a way of celebrating sensuality. It is sexy but positive and celebratory.

According to Gioseffi (c1980),

[Some] see it as a means of freeing an honest attitude toward their sexuality, a way of undoing some of the damage dealt the female image by Dr. Sigmund Freud and his approach to women as hysterical children (p. 81).

While the informants, in general, agreed that belly dancing is both sensual and provocative, they strongly objected to any indication that it was sleazy or vulgar. "A lot of people have the opinion... that a belly dancer is just like a stripper, and I want to strangle those people," was Razan's comment.

This dilemma is related to the long-running controversy over the characterization of belly dancing as a high form of ethnic art or as the hootchy-kootchy. Even the name is a basis of controversy. According to al Faruqi (1976/1977),

The dances... are usually labeled derogatorily in the West as the "belly Dance" or "dance du ventre." In the East such names are never used. They would be considered indecent and offensive. Instead, this dance is known as "Oriental dance" (raqs al sharqi) in Arabic (p. 45).

Morocco (1981) discussed the belly roll and added parenthetically, "I hate that word." Gioseffi (c1980) feels otherwise, but has titled her book, Earth Dancing.

Those who find easy offense at the term belly and squeamishly avoid it are perhaps demonstrating a Victorian attitude toward words... I do not find the word belly, a quite earthy word, offensive. Still, I have taken care to call the dance by its myriad names... and belly dancing is the very American term used to describe it (p. 16).

The informants expressed concern about maintaining the dignity of the dance form. Ceyda reported her experience at a university's international students' meeting. A young American girl ask to join her for the second set. Ceyda agreed, but the girl quickly crossed the line into vulgar and lewd dancing. Some American students approved, but Middle Eastern students were not amused. "It is an expression of femininity. It is not a heavy seduction. It's not an X-rated performance. It's a discipline."

On another occasion, Ceyda was dancing in front of a couple at a restaurant when the man started using expletives and abusive language. He said he
had just left another Greek restaurant to get away from such dancers. Although she claims not to know why he was offended, it seems likely he felt the dance was lewd.

Selime reported a recent change in her approach to belly dancing. When asked about her public performances, she said,

"Last time I was there, I really felt, "This is not me anymore," the dancing in the restaurants and in night clubs. I used to do a lot more night club work. I've gone beyond that in many ways. I still can do it, but it's not where I'm most comfortable."

Filiz reported that a friend of hers, an accomplished belly dancer, was offended by the practice of tipping.

She is so sensitive about things like that. She really is. She will take money from people when she's dancing in public. You know, they're waving these dollar bills, but she really hates it. She doesn't want people to think she's that kind of a person. But there's no tactful way not to take the money sometimes. But she doesn't like it.

Another controversy has arisen over the authenticity of the particular dances. Because the solo parts are intended to be improvised, it seems inevitable that the dances will change over time. Gioseffi (c1980) did not see this to be a problem.

"My Birth Dance of Earth is not meant to be an exact re-creation of an authentic Middle Eastern dance, of one kind or another. I like to think of it as a new American folk form as there are currently more belly dancers in America than in any other country in the world (p. 97)."

Filiz also reported that authenticity was not important to enjoyment of the art form.

[Her previous teacher] says, "Well, who's pretending?" We're just dancing. We're not passing ourselves off as Arab women or performers from Egypt or something. She says, "If they don't like it, they shouldn't come," and I think that's a more sensible attitude, because they're not pretending to be anything but what you see. And it's probably not terribly, terribly authentic... [My teacher] will say, "Well, this is an Egyptian step," or "This is a Persian step," so it's all mixed up here.

Personal Fulfillment

Within the New Age community, goddess worship has once again become popular. According to Linda Small in the preface to Gioseffi's book (c1980),

Daniela Gioseffi has set aside a place in her cozy Brooklyn Heights apartment for an altar to the Earth Goddess, filled with plants and various universal and personal symbols of womanhood (p. 12).

It appears that within the spiritual and cultural traditions of the Middle East she may be finding religious fulfillment.

In the homes of both Selime and Filiz were small shrines honoring goddesses, and they appear to see their dance partly as a religious celebration. Selime reported that her dancing is moving into a spiritual realm.

What I enjoy doing most in the performance aspect has more of the spiritual [aspect] to it... We're going to be doing a priestess dancing, [a] temple dancing class. Everyone is being encouraged to explore some dimension of their existence.

The women who danced in the troupe shared a closeness and a feeling of group harmony. Although Razan reported that each of the women is very different from the others, the dance has brought them together, and mutual support keeps them together. According to Ceyda, women have been very supportive overall. "It's a powerful thing... They were proud of me."

Most informants enjoyed dancing. Wood and Shay (1976) questioned the dance's ties to an early religion and to a birthing processes. While they did not offer a convincing argument for abandoning these beliefs, they stated
The pretence that it is an ancient fecundity ritual (or anything else) is unnecessary - its raison d’être is the pleasure of the dance (p. 25).

Because of Jale’s age (72), she does not normally perform in public. However, during talent night on a cruise ship, her boyfriend persuaded her to enter the contest. “[The ship] was swinging and swaying, and I swang and swayed, and it was really neat and [there] was nothing to it.”

While Filiz is struggling with the class, she seems to find enjoyment in dancing at parties.

More fun is going to a party where somebody puts on the right music... and women, never the guys, will just start dancing. Now that’s fun. That’s interactive and social and actually fun. Class isn’t fun.

Those who teach, also find fulfillment through their students. Ceyda feels that belly dancing can be enjoyed by all. "Every woman can feel beautiful... Femininity is alright, a little flesh is desired. You don't have to feel like you can’t do it because you have a few extra pounds on you."

Dance is used an example of a “flow” experience by Csikszentmihalyi (1990).

"Flow" is the way people describe their state of mind when consciousness is harmoniously ordered, and they want to pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake (p. 6).

This seems to describe Selime’s feeling about dance at its best.

What I [consider] is the magic it has, and you can't always predict it or will it or control it. It's one of those things that just happens. It is high magic, and it's like being in a forest, and these incredible, amazing things happen, and you're aware, you're keenly aware.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Many fascinating questions remain. The brevity of this article precluded a thorough discussion of belly dancing throughout the world. The examples presented from Morocco and Saudi Arabia are a small sample of the available literature. Dance styles, costuming, and social acceptance vary among Middle Eastern and African countries. While each area has had its own influence on dancing in the United States, American dancers have also had an impact in other countries as the dances and costumes evolve.

Americans were much better educated about theatrical effect when it came to costuming; in fact, they were better educated as to fashion in general. Our country produced better and more diverse fabrics and other materials with which to work. The Middle Easterners were always looking to the Americans to teach them a new way to cut or drape for a more elegant or exciting effect (Farrah 1984, p. 7).

This certainly is a rich area for further research.

The relation of belly dancing to other forms of dance also raises additional questions. Folk dances from other countries have many similarities with belly dancing, but modern dance and even the more formal ballet also share certain traits, including the difficulty in obtaining acceptance.

I know that turn-of-the-century ballerinas were called ballet girls and considered whores until Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham came along. Then it was, “my God, they're dancing with bare feet!” They so shocked the world that the interest they generated in the dance all of a sudden made ballet respectable (Saretta, 1980, p. 5).

The issue of costuming should also be studied. A costume may allow the dancer to become someone else or may express the individual personality of the dancer.

In choosing a costume the dancer must ask herself what she is trying to express. Since a costume exists in connection with the body of the person wearing it and reveals her personality, the choice of a costume should be highly personal and fit in accordance with one's body... [T]he costume in some subtle
manner becomes part of the dance, helping to clarify its meaning, intensify its mood, and increase the emotional response it evokes. This is the work of an artist (Saretta, 1982, pp. 10-11).

The fact that many belly dancers make their own costumes adds another dimension of creativity that would be interesting to study.

Although belly dancing is an extremely feminine dance, it is also performed by men. In ethnic clubs, men will often join in the group dancing after a performance.

If the outlander sits quietly in his corner until two or three A.M., he will be rewarded by seeing the Near Eastern audience, one by one, rise and dance with the performer. These men do not touch the female dancer, but only give vent to their own rhythm-obsession (La Meri 1961, p. 46).

The male performances are not effeminate, but they do seem to celebrate womanhood.

Either a female or a male dancer can imagine that they are giving birth, not only to some new life which will live outside themselves, but to themselves as they must give birth to their own identity through the actions of their lives (Gioseffi c1980, p. 100).

Said Al Amir is a male belly dancer in Germany (Gallett 1990).

Belly dance movements are lyrical, very feminine, and Said maintains that since women feel more profoundly than men, it is good for a man to move his body in this way in order to obtain another feeling for his body. There are now a lot of men dancing oriental dance in Germany, Said clams - "At least five!" (p. 7).

The addition of interviews of male belly dancers would add considerably to this research.

CONCLUSION

The Oriental dance, belly dance, or earth dance has been practiced for centuries, and it still serves to provide benefits for the women who perform it in whatever form in the present day. Physical, mental, and spiritual values were reported by the informants as positive aspects of the activity. Although controversy has arisen over its sexual content, the dance may serve a role in reclaiming a dignified sensuality for its practitioners. Most important, perhaps, is that it is fun, and it can be enjoyed by women of all ages, shapes, and sizes, and even by men.

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In order to understand the appeal of this ancient dance to the modern women, seven belly dancers were interviewed. "Stage names," taken from a list provided by Ozel (1976), have been used to disguise the informants and protect their privacy.

Celile (41 WF), a financial aid counselor, began taking belly-dancing classes in 1974. She had studied modern dance, jazz, and ballet before she discovered belly dancing, and both her mother and grandmother were dancers.

Ceyda (37 WF), studied ballet and tap as a child. Her parents were dancers.

Razan (39 WF), a sales representative, took her first class in 1979. As a child, she did folk dancing.

Jale (72 WF), began dancing at the age of about 60 to help overcome depression at the death of her husband. As a child, she wanted to do Hawaiian dancing.

Celile, Ceyda, and Razan are members of a troupe that dances professionally, and they all teach belly dancing. They and Jale were interviewed by a male graduate student in a small southwestern city close to a major metropolitan area.

Selime (about 43, WF), is a social worker who has a degree in women’s studies as well as in social work. She took ballet as a child and was always interested in Flamenco dancing. She dances at restaurants and bars and also teaches.

Filiz (39 WF), works as a health inspector and has a degree in biology. A member of a fundamentalist Christian family, she was not allowed to dance as a teenager. She does not wish to dance professionally but was preparing for her first public performance at an arts festival at the time of the interview.

Kamile (28 WF), is a musician. She performs with a band that plays for belly dancers, and she took a short series of belly-dance lessons, but cannot currently afford the lessons.
Selime, Filiz, and Kamile were interviewed by a middle-aged female in a medium-sized city in a western state. Interviews ranged from one-half hour to two hours. Three interviews were conducted by phone, and four were conducted in person. Six of the seven were recorded.