

## Fitness in Senegal: A new form of affirmation of female emancipation

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**ABSTRACT:** This study focuses on the practice of fitness among Senegalese women. It analyzes, according to their marital situation, the conditions or modalities of practice, the reasons for their investment as well as their profiles by identifying their socio-professional characteristics. The survey was carried out in Dakar and was carried out using a questionnaire survey. The results highlight their age, their level of education, their preferences in terms of clothing, concepts and their socio-economic situation. Added to this are the frequency, the practice spaces frequented, the representations they have of the male gaze as well as the positions they occupy during the sessions. The analysis reveals a logic of emancipation by freeing oneself from stereotypes and roles. traditional.

**KEYWORDS:** Fitness, female, affirmation, emancipation, Senegal.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Men and women are historically and differently represented in the field of sport [1]. There is a real imbalance in practice, in technical and administrative supervision, in competition officials or judges and in the media treatment of sport [2]. Even sports science courses are not immune to these horizontal and vertical inequalities based on gender (Ndongo, 2021). In France, 6 out of 10 secondary school teachers are women. However, in PSE, they are very much in the minority [3]. In Senegal, women represent less than 15% of PSE teachers, despite institutional policies aimed at feminizing the profession [4]. In certain political spheres, sport is included in the measures put in place thanks to its beneficial effects on health, which are unanimously recognized when practised regularly and in moderation. However, studies reveal positive developments in the representation of girls/women. Women's commitment to fitness can be seen not only in formal practices, but also, and above all, in fitness and leisure activities in Europe [5]. According to this author, "this observation can be found in many European countries. In Turkey, for example, the most popular leisure activities for women are aerobics, walking and fitness activities using specialized equipment (exercise bikes, treadmills, muscle-building machines). These results are slightly influenced by the age of the participants. Like young boys, young girls seem to have a slightly wider range of practices than their elders" [5, p 12]. Roussel and Griffet confirm the appeal of fitness to women. If this activity is successful and very fashionable, it owes it to the multiple functions (recreational health and aesthetics) that it is recognized for. One of the first surveys of fitness maintenance practices in France was carried out in 2017 by the Union sport et cycle [6]. The latter notes that the three main reasons for investing in fitness are "maintaining good health (96%), pleasure (87%), and physical appearance (86%)". What's more, 64% of fitness enthusiasts are women.

These observations made in France are shared in Senegal, and more specifically in Dakar, where sport is undergoing major changes, reinforced by the country's designation to host the Dakar 2026 Youth Olympic Games (YOG). Despite a number of socio-cultural resistance factors linked - explicitly or implicitly - to tradition, culture, religion and/or the constraints generated by professional obligations [4], women are not only becoming more and more numerous in the landscape of physical fitness practices, and particularly in fitness. But it also seems that their attitudes in terms of dress codes and their state of mind (awareness) are challenging the dominant norms observed in Senegalese society. In a country where over 90% of the population is Muslim, the practice of sport is generally perceived as a transgression of socio-cultural norms, but this type of practice by women is said to arouse a certain fascination. As the body is a social construct and, in so doing, a sign of distinction [7], its use in fitness activities may or may not be indicative or symbolic of a certain transformation of Senegalese society in Dakar. Indeed, fitness seems to be taken up by women of different ages, marital status and even professional profiles. Whatever the venue, the presence and enthusiasm of Senegalese women is clear. Their project cannot be isolated from a new form of expression of their freedom, their autonomy-independence or, quite simply, a self-affirmation through a reappropriation of their own bodies; in short, a desire for emancipation. Emancipation can be understood as "a multidimensional process of transformation, coming from the women themselves, and enabling them to become aware, individually and collectively, of the relations of domination that marginalize them and to develop their capacity to transform them" [8, p 10]. In other words, emancipation

reflects women's desire to free themselves from the constraints imposed on them by traditional and patriarchal social organization (dominated women, dependent on men, professionally inactive, etc.). In this study, the concept does not integrate its political, legal or sexual facets. Rather, the aim is to analyze the practice of fitness and try to show the indicators of professional, social and bodily emancipation among Senegalese women.

This is what this study seeks to understand in these female fitness enthusiasts, by questioning their socio-demographic characteristics, the reasons why they practice fitness and the relationships they have with their bodies, space and others. Relying mainly on the use of questionnaires as a data collection tool, this study attempts to analyze the age categories of women fitness enthusiasts. We also questioned their level of education and the professions they practise. In addition, we'll be looking at the conditions under which they practise fitness, their frequency, reasons for doing so, where they go and how much they spend. This study will look at the types of exercise they prefer, as well as the way they dress while exercising. The representations they have of the male gaze, their positioning during the session and the consequences they draw from this in terms of discomfort will be analyzed.

Since the study of these variables can also generate different realities depending on marital status, a cross-analysis will be highlighted in this perspective. Who are these women? What are their socio-professional profiles? What social significance do they give to fitness? What is their relationship with other fitness enthusiasts, their bodies and space? Do the answers to these questions attest to an identity-based and/or militant rationale for asserting their emancipation?

## **2 FITNESS: AN ACTIVITY AT THE HEART OF THE LOGIC OF DOMINATION-SUBMISSION**

"All physical and sporting activities, according to their forms and modes of exercise, therefore represent an analyzer of the uses of the body, whether it is a means or an end in itself, at the same time as we can spot the value with which these bodies are likely to be endowed..." [9, p 2]. Fitness is no exception to this sociological reality. History reveals the recent birth of this activity, which has its origins in aerobics [10]. The concept develops through the practice of physical activities based on activation of the cardiovascular system, with the aim of bringing fitness gains to its practitioners. Of course, the notion of fitness involves variations depending on whether the relationship to the body is functional or formal [11]. Indeed, being in shape may correspond to the development of athletic qualities (endurance, strength, etc.). Or refer to the body's morphology and therefore to its aesthetic dimension linked to the canons of beauty [12]. Shape in terms of femininity is culturally idealized. This ideal, or hegemonic femininity, takes precedence over other forms of femininity and contributes to the domination of women. However, it "finds itself in a relationship of dependence on "hegemonic masculinity" and the heterosexual system of thought, even subordination to men" [13, p 53]. In contrast to the competitive sector, where women's sport is considered less important and sportswomen less legitimate [14], fitness remains very popular with women in Europe [5].

In all circumstances, fitness remains an activity accessible to all individuals in general, and women are more likely to join structures offering fitness services where the principle of competition is excluded; improving health and maintaining physical fitness are the order of the day.

In Turkey, the most popular leisure activities for women according to Talleu [5], are aerobics, walking and fitness activities using specialized equipment (exercise bikes, treadmills, muscle-building machines). An Italian study shows that women are more likely to join fitness clubs, accounting for 61% of members. Various reasons are put forward to explain this trend: the type of service offered and the less competitive nature of the practice, the greater involvement of female customers and activities closer to women's interests (health preservation, cult of appearance, etc.) [15]. From an aesthetic point of view, fitness accentuates "feminine" appearances by slightly enhancing curvaceous muscles, unlike bodybuilding, which is occasionally practised by women [16]. In terms of its virtues, fitness is positioned as an activity with effects on all muscle groups [17]. As such, its beneficial effects are numerous. The practice of fitness cures and prevents disease. It can be used for rehabilitation, reathletization, getting back into shape or prevention. It becomes a source of health, helping to combat stress and anxiety, and improve the aging process [18]. With its specific four-step music [17], fitness improves physical condition and is a source of physical and mental well-being. Its accessibility makes it an ideal choice for activities to combat sedentary lifestyles.

"Apart from the most popular fitness techniques (body-sculpt, Abs Gluts, step, LIA, Hi-low...), which are characterized by exercises performed to fast-paced, rhythmic music, there are other classes that are still popular with the public. Gentle gymnastics and stretching offer a calmer, sometimes more relaxing approach [19]. In all these activities, women's sensitivity to their bodies is heightened when the exercises are gentle or involve less strenuous muscular and energy expenditure. In addition to these health benefits, studies carried out in France show that women's fitness activities are paradoxical. It can be a form of liberalization for women and/or a form of submission to hegemonic norms of femininity. According to Jartron and Durant [20], the media impose beauty standards on individuals, determine their attitudes as well as their practices, and force them to become part of "a complex identity construction process".

The situation described in France is similar to that observed in Senegal among young female athletes involved in traditional male sports and others considered "feminine". For the most part, these sportswomen are in the process of legitimizing a femininity that is typical of the norms, despite asserting a relative autonomy [21]. They pay particular attention to social representations that "assign the body a determined position within the general symbolism of society" [7, p 13].

### 3 COURSE OF THE STUDY

This study was carried out in the city of Dakar, due to the emergence of the practice of fitness and the existence of several practice areas popular with women. To collect the data, the survey is essentially based on the use of a 22-question questionnaire. These relate to socio-demographic variables (age, level of education, marital status and profession), practice (location, frequency, social significance, financial resources mobilized and available), preferred exercises and women's relationships/representations with others, their bodies and space. 230 questionnaires were distributed, but only 213 could be recovered and used in this study. The sampling method is simple random; in other words, every individual attending the practice spaces has the same chance of being selected. To achieve this, the survey relied on the collaboration and assistance of fitness club managers and fitness instructors, who played an important role in facilitating the administration of the questionnaires. As mentioned in the problem statement, processing was based on cross-sorting according to marital status. This enabled us to highlight general trends and differences in behavior according to status. The main results will therefore be presented in general terms, with cross-tabulations according to marital status.

### 4 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

This section presents and discusses the survey results. Firstly, the quantitative data deemed most relevant are presented in contingency tables for comment. Secondly, a general discussion of these results will be carried out to gain a better understanding of the emancipatory dimension of fitness practice among the women surveyed.

#### 4.1 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

*Table 1. Socio-demographic profiles of women surveyed*

Age ranges	Brides		Single		divorced		widows		Total	
18 to 29 years old	14	7%	75	35%	1	0%	0	0%	90	42%
30 to 39 years old	20	9%	38	18%	10	6%	0	0%	68	32%
40 to 49 years old	16	8%	8	4%	5	2%	0	0%	29	14%
50 to 59 years old	13	6%	0	0%	1	0%	1	0%	15	7%
60 and over	9	4%	0	0%	2	1%	0	0%	11	5%
Total	72	34%	121	57%	19	8%	1	0%	213	100%
<b>Diplomas</b>										
Out of school	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
ESLC <sup>1</sup>	3	1%	3	1%	0	0%	0	0%	6	3%
MSLC <sup>2</sup>	7	3%	9	4%	5	2%	0	0%	21	9%
Baccalaureate	16	8%	44	21%	6	4%	0	0%	66	31%
Bachelor	26	13%	32	15%	3	1%	0	0%	61	29%
Master	17	8%	31	15%	4	2%	1	0%	53	25%
PhD	3	1%	2	1%	1	0%	0	0%	6	3%
Total	72	34%	121	57%	19	9%	1	0%	213	100%
<b>Professions</b>										
Civil servants	42	20%	39	18%	12	6%	1	0%	94	44%
students	8	4%	60	28%	2	1%	0	0%	70	33%
housewives	11	5%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	11	5%
Retired women	3	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	3	1%
Entrepreneur	4	2%	15	7%	3	2%	0	0%	22	11%
Administrative agents in the private sector	4	2%	7	3%	2	1%	0	0%	13	6%
Total	72	34%	121	57%	19	9%	1	0%	213	100%

Analysis of this table shows that single women are the most active fitness enthusiasts, accounting for 57% of the total population surveyed. Their over-representation increases with age. Those aged 18 to 29 represent 35% of the total and 18% of the 30 to 49 age

<sup>1</sup> Elementary School Leaving Certificate

<sup>2</sup> Middle School Leaving Certificate

group. Married women are the second most frequent fitness enthusiasts. They make up 7% and 9% respectively of those aged 18-29 and 30-39. Not all women aged 50 and over surveyed are single. As age increases, women are less and less represented among singles, and from age 30 onwards among married or divorced women. This table, which shows the level of education and occupation of the women surveyed in relation to their marital status, shows that all fitness enthusiasts are educated. Single women are - horizontally and vertically - the most likely to hold a diploma. They account for 1% of holders of the Elementary Leaving Certificate (ESLC), 4% for the Middle School Leaving Certificate (MSLC), 21% for the baccalaureate, 15% for the Bachelor and Master's degrees and 1% for the doctorate, in "relative" equality with the number of married women who have defended a thesis. The latter correspond to the second most represented category of fitness practitioners. Married women with ESLC qualifications number 3, while those with Bachelor and Master's degrees account for 13% and 8% of graduates respectively; this represents, in the same dynamic, gaps of 2% and 7% compared with single women. Four divorced women have a Master's degree, and one has a doctorate. As far as their profession is concerned, the vast majority are civil servants (94), representing 44% of the survey population. These women working in the public sector are 20% married (42), 18% single (39), 6% divorced (12) and one widow. Female fitness enthusiasts are then students, accounting for 33% of the total population. The third most-represented occupational category is entrepreneurial women (11%), who are involved in personal projects such as business. Lastly, there are women working in the private sector, housewives and retired women, with proportions of 6%, 5% and 1% respectively.

**Table 2. Frequency and reasons for practising fitness**

Frequency	Brides		Single		Divorced		widows		Total	
1 time per week	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	0%
2 times a week	13	6%	8	4%	4	2%	0	0%	26	12%
3 times a week	46	22%	73	34%	8	4%	0	0%	125	59%
4 times a week	11	5%	23	11%	3	1%	1	0%	38	18%
5 times a week	2	1%	17	8%	4	2%	0	0%	23	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Reasons</b>										
To improve physical health	68	32%	99	46%	13	6%	0	0%	180	84%
To be more beautiful	32	15%	57	27%	10	5%	0	0%	99	47%
To meet new people	8	4%	46	22%	11	5%	0	0%	65	31%
To lose weight	42	20%	49	23%	10	5%	0	0%	101	47%
To develop the gluteal muscles	17	8%	83	42%	11	5%	0	0%	111	55%
Keeping in shape	22	10%	71	33%	11	5%	1	0%	105	49%
To rejuvenate	25	12%	31	15%	9	4%	0	0%	65	31%
To free one's self from stress	42	20%	71	33%	12	6%	1	0%	126	59%
To let off steam	21	10%	56	26%	7	3%	0	0%	80	39%
For fun	10	5%	54	25%	7	3%	0	0%	71	33%
For the trend	3	1%	22	10%	2	1%	0	0%	27	12%
Others to be specified	2	1%	5	2%	0	0%	0	0%	7	3%
<b>Couples formation</b>										
Yes	67	32%	115	54%	17	8%	1	0%	200	94%
No	5	2%	6	3%	2	1%	0	0%	13	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100%</b>

This table shows the frequency of fitness activities per week among the women surveyed. It shows that almost all of them exercise at least 2 times a week. Nearly one in three women (59%) engages in this activity three times a week. Next in line are those who exercise 4 times a week, with 18%. Women who exercise 2 and 3 times a week represent 12% and 11% of the survey population respectively.

With regard to marital status, the number of married women with a fitness frequency equivalent to 3 times a week corresponds to 64% of women in the same category. The same applies to 60% of single women and 42% of divorced women. These small differences can also be observed for those who practice 4 times a week. The proportion is around 15% for married women and 19% for single women.

When it comes to women's reasons for exercising, the table reveals that most women assign essentially utilitarian meanings to their investment in this activity. On the whole, they do it to improve their physical health and/or strengthen or maintain their femininity. Thus, 84% of women surveyed see fitness as a means of improving physical health. In the same vein, 59% of fitness enthusiasts (126%) want to relieve stress; 49% want to stay in shape and 47% want to lose weight. All these reasons are in line with health maintenance. They are significant regardless of marital status, in that the proportions of women stating these intentions range from a minimum of 47% to a maximum of 84%.

In addition, the utilitarian dimension of fitness is illustrated by practices aimed at strengthening and/or maintaining femininity. This activity represents an opportunity for women to look good. This quest for physical beauty is perceptible on three levels. Firstly, 47% or 99 of the women surveyed practice fitness to look good. Secondly, their commitment to physical beauty is also evident in the 55% who want to develop their buttocks. Finally, 31% of women surveyed practice fitness to stay young.

Apart from these utilitarian and dominant reasons - in the sense of being the majority or most frequent - put forward as the social meanings of the practice, fitness has a playful function for a proportion of women. In particular, 39% and 33% of women respectively practice "to let off steam" and/or "for fun". In other words, fitness is a leisure activity for these respondents.

Finally, the last reasons given correspond, on the one hand, to the desire of 31% of respondents to meet new people through fitness. These include 22% of single women, 5% of divorced women and 4% of married women. Fitness is thus a sociable space where social relationships are forged between different individuals. On the other hand, there is a tendency for people to indulge in this "very popular" activity, particularly among women. Some women are influenced by others; in other words, fitness is now fashionable. These women represent 12% of the total population surveyed.

However, the analysis of this table reveals some nuances with regard to marital status. In terms of ratio, for example, 94% of married women are in the process of improving their health, compared with 82% of single women. As for the intention to meet new people through fitness, only 11% of married women underlined this intention, as opposed to 38% of single women; a significant gap of 27%. What's more, 94% of those surveyed said that fitness centers are ideal places for forming a couple. In other words, the practice of fitness is a place of sociability that engenders romantic relationships; 93% of married women and 95% of single women stressed this.

In short, while the utilitarian aspect of fitness is shared by all women, whatever their marital status, the "sociability" and fun aspect is more evident among single women. Moreover,

**Table 3. Fitness practice areas and financial modalities**

<b>Practice locations</b>	<b>Brides</b>		<b>Single</b>		<b>divorced</b>		<b>Widows</b>		<b>Total</b>	
Fitness rooms	51	24%	60	28%	10	5%	1	0%	122	57%
Landscape public place	17	8%	38	18%	8	4%	0	0%	63	28%
Undeveloped public place	4	2%	23	11%	1	0%	0	0%	30	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Amounts paid</b>	<b>Brides</b>		<b>Single</b>		<b>divorced</b>		<b>Widows</b>		<b>Total</b>	
Less than 10001F	34	16%	62	29%	6	3%	0	0%	102	48%
10001 to 20000F	5	2%	15	7%	2	1%	0	0%	22	10%
20001 to 30000F	14	7%	16	8%	4	2%	0	0%	34	16%
30001 to 40000F	7	3%	1	0%	2	1%	0	0%	10	5%
40001 to 50000F	4	2%	2	1%	2	0%	0	0%	8	4%
50001 to 60000F	2	1%	5	2%	0	1%	0	0%	7	3%
60001 and more	2	1%	2	1%	1	0%	0	0%	5	2%
Free	4	2%	18	9%	2	1%	1	0%	25	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Payments methods</b>	<b>Brides</b>		<b>Single</b>		<b>divorced</b>		<b>Widows</b>		<b>Total</b>	
Session	8	4%	16	8%	0	0%	0	0%	24	11%
Week	2	1%	2	1%	0	0%	0	0%	04	2%
Mont	58	27%	83	39%	17	8%	0	0%	159	75%
Year	0	0%	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	0%
Free	4	2%	19	9%	2	1%	1	0%	25	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Possibility of paying a personal trainer</b>	<b>Brides</b>		<b>Single</b>		<b>divorced</b>		<b>Widows</b>		<b>Total</b>	
Yes	47	22%	47	22%	10	5%	0	0%	104	49%
No	25	12%	74	35%	9	4%	1	0%	109	51%
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100%</b>

This table shows that the vast majority of fitness activities take place in a structured or even safe environment. The analysis shows that over half of women (122 or 57%) practice fitness in gyms. This represents 24% of married women, 28% of single women, 5% of divorced women and the only widow in the study population. In terms of ratios, the differences are significant according to marital status, in that 71% of married women go to gyms as opposed to 46% of single women, a difference of 25 points. The number of women exercising in public spaces corresponds to 30%, including 8% of married women, 18% of single women and 4% of divorced women. Women exercising in undeveloped public spaces (e.g., available land in a neighborhood) account for 13%. In a proportional dynamic,

single women are more representative than married women in both developed and undeveloped public spaces. The former represent 18% and 11%, while the latter only 8% and 2% respectively.

In terms of amounts paid, 12% of the women surveyed take part in fitness activities free of charge. Of the 213 women surveyed, 188 (88%) have a paid activity. On the other hand, almost half of fitness enthusiasts (48%, or 102) pay less than 10,000 CFA francs. They are followed by those paying 20001 to 30000 CFA francs and 10001 to 20000 CFA francs. These two categories represent respectively 16% and 10% of the total. As the amount increases, the trend is downwards. Thus, 5% pay between 30001 and 40000 francs, 4% between 40001 and 50000 francs, 3% between 50001 and 60000 francs, and only 2% pay 60000 francs CFA or more.

There are different types of payment. Payment can be per session, weekly, monthly or annually. With this in mind, it's worth noting that three-quarters of fitness enthusiasts (159) pay monthly. In addition to the 75% of women who pay monthly, 11% pay for each session they take part in. Finally, the least-used payment method is weekly, with only 2% of women paying weekly. Nearly half of fitness enthusiasts (49%) have the resources to hire a personal trainer.

**Table 4. Preferred fitness activities**

Activity preference	Married		Singles		Divorced		widows		Total	
yes	55	26%	99	46%	15	7%	1	0%	170	79%
No	17	8%	22	11%	4	2%	0	0%	43	21%
Total	72	34%	121	57%	19	9%	1	0%	213	100%
<b>Favorite activities</b>										
Aerobics	43	20%	69	32%	11	5%	0	0%	123	57%
Body attack	22	10%	40	19%	10	5%	0	0%	72	34%
Body combat	15	7%	36	17%	8	4%	0	0%	59	28%
Body balance	4	2%	13	6%	2	1%	0	0%	19	9%
Body jam	4	2%	13	6%	2	1%	0	0%	19	9%
Stretching	9	4%	19	9%	5	2%	0	0%	33	15%
Gym Abdo	17	8%	45	21%	7	3%	1	0%	70	32%
Tae bo	2	1%	5	2%	4	2%	0	0%	11	5%
Spinning	20	9%	25	12%	11	5%	0	0%	56	26%
Step	26	12%	51	24%	9	4%	0	0%	86	40%

Analysis of this table shows that around 4 out of 5 women have activities (concepts) they prefer. Precisely 79%, or 170 out of 213, said they preferred certain activities, as opposed to 21%. This preferential tendency is generally shared among women, as it is expressed by 81% of single women, 76% of married women and 78% of divorced women.

However, the activity most preferred by women fitness enthusiasts is aerobics; 57% prefer this exercise. The second most preferred activity is step, which has both muscular and cardiovascular requirements. The third most-preferred activity is body attack, which is also cardiovascular in nature. These three physical exercises contribute to the strengthening of aerobic capacities as well as muscular and coordination ones. In line with the desire to assign a utilitarian dimension to their practice, the other most-preferred exercises correspond to "Gym-abdo", "Body combat" and "Spinning". These three concepts account for 32%, 28% and 26% respectively of fitness enthusiasts' preferences. The least preferred activities are stretching, body balance, body jam and tae bo. The first mentioned accounts for 15%, while the other three are each below 10% (9%, 9% and 5%).

In terms of marital status, the differences are considerable. Two examples can be given. Single women prefer aerobics (32%), while married women opt for aerobics (20%). That's a difference of 12%. The second example between these two categories of women relates to the body attack preferred by 19% of single women; by contrast, 10% of married women make the same choice, a difference of 9%. A homology can be made in accordance with the preference for "body combat" where a difference of 10 points is observed between married and single women, who are respectively 7% and 17% in this context.

Table 5. Positioning and relationship to male presence and gaze

The awkward presence of men	Married		Single		Divorced		Widows		Total	
Yes	23	11%	6	3%	1	0%	0	0%	30	14%
No	49	23%	115	54%	18	9%	1	0%	183	86%
Total	72	34%	121	57%	19	9%	1	0%	213	100%
<b>Male gaze effect</b>										
Motivating	7	3%	63	30%	8	4%	0	0%	78	37%
Akward	19	9%	5	2%	0	0%	0	0%	24	11%
You're indifferent	42	20%	47	22%	6	3%	1	0%	96	45%
Others to be specified	4	2%	6	3%	5	2%	0	0%	15	7%
Total	72	34%	121	57%	19	9%	1	0%	213	100%
<b>Preferred monitor position</b>										
Front	10	5%	79	37%	15	7%	0	0%	104	49%
environment	27	13%	30	14%	3	2%	1	0%	61	29%
Behind	31	14%	8	4%	0	0%	0	0%	39	18%
The sides	4	2%	4	2%	1	0%	0	0%	9	4%
Total	72	34%	121	57%	19	9%	1	0%	213	100%

The study also looked at some of the attitudes and behaviors of women fitness enthusiasts. The table above shows their preferred positions, how they relate to the presence of men and how men look at them. It shows that 86% of women feel no discomfort when engaging in this activity with men. This attitude is more evident among divorced and single women, in that more than 9 out of 10 (95%) affirm this, as opposed to married women, where only 68% feel the same way. This represents a gap of 27 points.

Alongside the presence of men, most women don't find the gaze men cast on them during sessions bothersome. On the contrary, 45% (96 women) expressed indifference and 37% (78 women) saw it as a source of motivation. Only 11% of the women surveyed felt embarrassed by the male gaze. In terms of marital status, there are notable differences in the way women relate to their bodies. Indeed, the proportion of women motivated by the male gaze is dominant among single women (52% of them), whereas this is only the case for 42% of divorced women and 10% of married women. In other words, the gap between single and married women is 42%. Married women, on the other hand, are the most indifferent to men, with 58% of them, as opposed to 39% of single women and 31% of divorced women.

As for the position they prefer during a fitness session, almost one in two women (1/2) position themselves in front. The 49% of women who position themselves in front are followed by those who prefer to be in the middle when the activity is taking place, i.e. 29% of respondents. Women fitness enthusiasts who position themselves behind and to the side account for 18% and 4% respectively. Analysis according to marital status shows that the vast majority of divorced women (79%) occupy the space in front of the activity. They are followed by single women, 65% of whom prefer to be in front. Married women are more represented in the middle of practice spaces, with 37% of them, as opposed to 25% of single women. To sum up, unmarried women are for the most part closer to the instructor at the front; this reflects a coherence (which one) between the women's marital status and the attitudes they develop towards the male presence and gaze.

Table 6. Relationship between sportswear and the male gaze

Oufits	Married		Single		Divorced		Widows		Total	
Jackets	48	24%	15	7%	7	3%	1	0%	71	33%
Pantyhose	20	9%	97	46%	12	6%	0	0%	129	61%
Short	1	0%	3	1%	0	0%	0	0%	4	2%
Bibs	3	1%	6	3%	0	0%	0	0%	9	4%
Total	72	34%	121	57%	19	9%	1	0%	213	100%
<b>Perception of dress in the male gaze</b>										
Attractive	61	29%	105	49%	16	8%	0	0%	182	86%
Not attractive	11	5%	16	8%	3	1%	1	0%	31	14%
Total	72	34%	121	57%	19	9%	1	0%	213	100%

This table enables us to analyze the sportswear worn by women fitness enthusiasts, as well as their perceptions of their sportswear in relation to the male gaze. Generally speaking, it shows that at least three out of five women (3/5), or 61% of the total population

surveyed, wear tights for this activity. They are followed by 71 others, or 33%, who wear a jacket when doing a fitness session. The minority tendency is to wear bibs and shorts, where women account for 2% and 4% respectively.

Specifically, significant differences can be observed in proportion to marital status. Married women are more likely to wear jackets; 48/72 or 67% of them do so, as opposed to 12% of single women. However, the opposite is true when it comes to wearing tights. 80% of single women (4/5) wear tights for sportswear, compared with just 28% of married women.

In the same vein, more than 4 out of 5 women think that their sportswear attracts men's attention. This applies to 29% of married women, 49% of single women and 8% of divorced women, i.e. a total of 86% of those surveyed. In terms of ratios, there is no significant difference. With the exception of widows, all other categories of women follow the same perceptive logic. 85% of married women, 87% of single women and 84% of divorced women find their clothes attractive.

## **4.2 GENERAL DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

This work helps us to understand that senior women are becoming less and less involved in fitness, despite the fact that they are exposing themselves to diseases for which physical activity would be an excellent means of prevention. The cultural context of women's sport and play among the elderly may have something to do with this. However, a critical study of the results shows that women who take part in fitness activities are different from submissive, dominated, male-dependent, uncultured women. The data show that, overall, women are well educated, active and autonomous, which characterizes their emancipation. In other words, they are intellectuals with a high level of education, as opposed to young women in competitive sports in general, and those with a male tradition in particular. Moreover, for the latter, the practice of sport represents an economic opportunity for social fulfillment [4 & 20],

The practice of fitness has an essentially health-related significance due to an awareness of one's body and the benefits of physical activity. Moreover, the increase in the number of senior citizens compared to Goudiaby's study [22] could be explained by this, in addition to a better dissemination and knowledge of the activity. Their cultural capital gives them a special relationship with their bodies, based on femininity in line with Western standards. Fitness also remains a fun activity, but above all a social space, just like the gym. Practice areas remain spaces of intersecting sociability [23], places where friendships and even romantic encounters are forged. This is perceptible in the greater involvement of married women in closed gyms, while single women are more present in open-air spaces. Women in a conjugal relationship are more likely to submit to religious and social norms restricting the display of the female body in the public space; the married woman's body should be a body to be hidden.

The emancipation and autonomy of women fitness enthusiasts is also reflected in their ability to hire a coach or pay for services. 49% expressed the possibility of taking on a personal trainer. This is an indicator of women's independence or empowerment, confirming at the same time the widespread enthusiasm they show for practicing a sporting activity within commercial structures and, more specifically, within fitness centers [5].

Women's appropriation of their bodies is also evolving, even if the data are moving away from body exposure, which could be perceived as a form of transgression (Ndongo, 2017, 2021). 61% of women surveyed wear tights or body-hugging bottoms, while 33% wear a jacket. However, there are differences according to marital status.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of single women opt for tights. Among married women, on the other hand, only about a third opt for pantyhose. There is thus a strong correlation between clothing style and marital status. The sacredness of the female body, which is a body to be hidden [24], is more prevalent among married women. These relationships to the body can also be analyzed in terms of the position occupied during the sessions. The fact that 49% of these women put themselves in front of the camera reveals the rarity of discomfort linked to the presence of men, even though 37% of these 49% are single.

What they have in common is that most of them think that their sportswear attracts men's attention. Generally speaking, the women surveyed do not find the presence of men bothersome. However, when it comes to the male gaze, the data is mixed. 30% of single women find men's gaze motivating, as opposed to 3% of married women. Otherwise, they are largely indifferent.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

Generally speaking, this study shows that women fitness enthusiasts are more likely to use gyms than open-air spaces, whether equipped or not. They are financially autonomous, with a large presence of civil servants and students in the practice areas. They all went to school and hold the elementary school leaving certificate (3%), the middle school leaving certificate (9%), the baccalaureate (31%), the bachelor's degree (31%), the master's degree (29%) and the doctorate (3%). These considerations are the first indicators of female emancipation observed among these fitness enthusiasts.

In addition, the reasons given by the majority of women fitness enthusiasts are to improve their health and maintain their physical femininity, and to lose weight.) These reasons are perfectly congruent with the activities preferred by most women (aerobics, body-fighting, body-attack, gym-abdo...). These activities, at the crossroads of health and femininity, improve physical fitness, strengthen the gluteal muscles and reduce abdominal fat.



The conclusions drawn from analysis of the data in terms of their relationship with marital status point to a general liberalization of the female body, and its appropriation by women. However, this is more pronounced among single women. The characteristic features of this affirmation of emancipation are the style of dress, the placement in practice areas, the scarcity of discomfort linked to the male gaze, which is also a source of motivation. Single, divorced or widowed women are more relaxed than their married counterparts in these crossroads of sociability, and the professionalism of the people involved (training, attitude, and ethics) could be the next step in the process.

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