

Posted on the Pilates Method Alliance Facebook page on September 18, 2015

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Dear Community - I wanted to let you know that I have sent a letter to the editor of NY Magazine, in response to the article on September 15, called The Pilatespocalypse, by Annie Lowry. Here is a link to that article:

<http://nymag.com/.../intelligen.../2015/09/pilatespocalypse.html>

And here, is my letter to the editor.

Dear Editor:

I was disappointed to read Annie Lowrey's article, The Pilatespocalypse, online on September 15. Given that she interprets people's casual opinions as facts, and makes general statements without references, I can see why she lacks an understanding of the Pilates field, and the distinction between Pilates and other exercise methodologies. The distinctions are marked and many. I hope to fill in some gaps for your readers, as this article creates a distorted impression of the Pilates Method.

Most importantly, the public should understand that the Pilates Method is an extremely sophisticated and versatile exercise modality. Pilates is a 'whole body health' system, with a strong focus on breath. In addition to aiding in strength, balance and flexibility, practicing Pilates increases lung capacity and circulation through deep breathing coordinated with movement. It improves posture and abdominal strength, as well as bone density and joint health. Pilates teaches control of the whole body, and promotes body awareness and deep restful sleep. This is just the smallest nutshell of what can be said about the benefits of practicing Pilates.

With all due respect, Pilates cannot be compared to "spinning, barre, boot camp, CrossFit, pole dancing, and a million other niches." The Pilates Method is a defined body of knowledge, encompassing specific exercises requiring controlled, intelligent, thoughtful movement, performed on a variety of specially designed apparatuses and on the mat. The Pilates Method has a Certification Program established by the Pilates Method Alliance, accredited by the NCCA (National Commission for Certifying Agencies), which serves as a performance standard for teachers. Pilates has its own professional association. These components of a profession are not found in the exercise programs mentioned above.

Sadly, this article is full of unsubstantiated assertions and personal opinions, such as "Pilates has not quite managed to benefit from the boutique-fitness boom that it is in part responsible for starting." and "Interest in the method seems to have peaked last decade." These are opinions, not facts, and it's certainly not what we at the PMA observe and experience. Lowrey also states that "Studios are struggling, and some are closing." This last statement is true of all business sectors at all times. The fact is, many Pilates studios are thriving, and have been thriving for decades.

It's important to note that Pure Barre and SoulCycle are brand names, not methodologies, and counting the numbers of studios they have opened, while not comparing those numbers to the number of Pilates studios opened (under a plethora of different brand names), is not an apt comparison of anything. modelFIT and Tracy Anderson are also brand names, not methods. They are not comparable to the Pilates Method.

As for the market reports and research that was referenced, I question who was surveyed and what was asked.

Further:

· The IBIS World market report entitled Pilates & Yoga Studios in the US, is very poorly researched, and demonstrates very little knowledge of the Pilates field. In it, "Pilates & Yoga Studios" are collapsed into one category of research, which is clearly nonsensical as they are completely different.

· Lowrey quotes an unnamed research analyst who makes a statement of opinion about there being a lack of investors interested in investing in Pilates studios. I think Club Pilates would beg to differ!

· Lowrey wrote that the American College of Sports Medicine's . . . "Yves Vanlandewijck of the University of Leuven (Belgium) wrote about Pilates, lumping it in with — gulp — Zumba." The PMA, alongside our friends and colleagues at the ACSM, are members of CREP (Coalition for the Registration of Exercise Professionals), and while the ACSM are experts in personal training and exercise physiology, they are not experts in Pilates, and idea that Pilates can be lumped in with Zumba is ludicrous and uninformed, from both the methodology and business model standpoints. Who knows if that quote is even accurate – it's not referenced.

· Lowrey writes that "fitness experts" say that men are not interested in Pilates, despite the excellent results they get with the method. I should point out that yoga was not popular with men as recently as the late 1980s, but it is more so now, though still heavily dominated by women. This evolves. Male participation in Pilates is growing and visible. Famous male Pilates advocates include LeBron James, Tiger Woods, Kris Humphries, Dwyane Wade and Antonio Brown (Google his YouTube video), to name just a few.

· Lowrey refers in her article to her "scientifically unsound survey of gym bunnies." Why are their comments included? They are simply not relevant in a thoughtful discussion about an important topic.

Lastly, ACSM's annual Worldwide Surveys have indeed reported a decrease in participation in Pilates mat classes in the health club environment in recent years. This is an environment and a market that continually demands new programming, new packaging, new stimulations. However generally speaking, there is a real difference between Pilates mat classes taught in health clubs by personal trainers or group exercise instructors who may teach many different types of programs (spinning, Zumba, step, etc.) and who may have done a short weekend Pilates course, and Pilates as it is taught by comprehensively trained teachers in the studio environment.

It is not surprising to me that Pilates in the health club environment has peaked and has declined slightly, but is growing in the studio environment where teachers are career professionals specializing in the Pilates Method. The quality of the client experience is often entirely different in those two contexts. Lowrey writes that the ACSM Worldwide Survey suggests that Pilates 'was' a fad, not a trend. It's actually neither. It's an established specialist exercise modality that is profoundly effective and appropriate for everything from post-rehabilitation, to general body conditioning, to training world-class elite athletes in the finest motor skills, and everything in between. Pilates benefits practitioners of all ages, and all fitness levels. The effects are transformative.

Such is the importance and sophistication of the Pilates Method, that PMA Certified Pilates Teachers Elizabeth Larkam (American), Jessie Lee (Danish), and Jojo Bowman (English), have all received the Medal of the Danish Society of Military Medicine in recognition of their efforts to improve the rehabilitation of wounded soldiers using the Pilates Method. Using Pilates to help veterans with bi-lateral amputations to re-establish core control and balance, and prepare for prosthetics and a new orientation to their gait thereby restoring function and participation in life, is something deserving of the utmost respect.

Many teachers of Pilates are working diligently to document the results they are producing with a large variety of clients, via research studies and case reports. A long list of these research reports can be found on the PMA website. They validate the sophistication and efficacy of this specialist modality. And we are just at the start of our efforts to create research in this very young field.

I hope that this provides some perspective on this powerful movement methodology. Pilates' applications to "whole body health" are being continually developed and expanded. The Pilates Method is here to stay.

Elizabeth Anderson
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