

PLAYING WITH FIRE

Our species' attraction to fire dates back thousands of years when humans first witnessed lightning striking the earth. They learned how to harness this natural power and realized its duality – it had the potential to destroy and was used hatefully in wars, but its charm and beauty also held the power to bring people together in harmony and celebration. Our natural gravitation toward fire led to experimentation with it, and the ancient art of fire spinning was born [1].

Fire spinning is a group of performance arts that involve the manipulation of objects on fire. The objects typically have one or more wicks which are soaked in fuel and ignited. During performances, these objects are spun around until the flames burn out. Some objects that can be used are fire hoops (hula hoops with 5 or 6 wicks attached to rods that extend from the hoop) or poi (a pair of arm-length chains with handles on one end and bundles of wick on the other) [2]. Fire spinning is a dangerous activity and should only be practiced by those who take the sport seriously and are aware of the safety precautions that must be taken. Onlookers should always keep a safe distance from the performer, no one should ever spin fire alone, and tight fitting clothes made of natural fibers should be worn [3].

Playing with fire is primarily object play because it involves the player's direct manipulation of their inflamed object which is driven by curiosity in the fire itself and the desire to control it. It involves serious hand-eye coordination and good perception of space and depth.

The aspect of movement is also vital when playing with fire, making it equally as much locomotor/rotational play. The manipulation of the object is only achieved through harmonious movement of the body and the fire. They spin around, bend, stretch, and use their arms and legs to create different patterns in their movements and achieve different visual effects with the flames.

There is an aspect of social play involved because it is always done in a group setting, and the community of fire spinners, both online and in the real world, is extensive. During gatherings they watch and learn from each other, and often perform simultaneously, which creates a beautiful symphony of bodies and flames. The events at which fire spinners gather are just as important in the fire spinning culture as the spinning itself. They often gather at music and art festivals or other celebratory ceremonies such as on nights of the full moon.

Some benefits of spinning fire are wrist and arm strength, flexibility, improved coordination, respect and admiration from others [4], which improves self-esteem and may increase likelihood of reproduction. Watching someone spin fire can be a very sensual experience and increase attraction from potential mates.



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Work Cited

1. Engle, Travis, "Light it Up with Bio-Luminescence," Accessed 18-Sept-2012. <http://www.sandpoint.com/lifestyle/fall06/bioluminesce.asp>

Gave a history of human fascination with fire and the origins of playing with fire.

2. Woosley, Nick, "Fire Safety & Spinning Info," Accessed 18-Sept-2012. <http://westcoastjuggling.net/blog/fire-spinning-information>

Gives the straightforward definition of fire spinning/ fire dancing, or the art of playing with fire, and information on the equipment needed to spin fire.

3. Home of Poi Ltd, New Zealand, "Fire Safety," Accessed 18-Sept-2012. <http://www.homeofpoi.com/articles/FireSafety.php>

Gives information on the risks of fire spinning and safety precautions that must be taken.

4. Home of Poi Ltd, New Zealand, "What Is Poi?" Accessed 18-Sept-2012. <http://www.homeofpoi.com/>

Gives insight to the benefits of spinning fire.

Photos

All photos taken from the facebook pages of my friends Hannah Ross (fire hooper) and Jimi Alves (poi spinner).