

POLE
DANCING
AS
RESISTANCE:

POLE DANCE, SEX WORK AND LIBERATION



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- Sex worker–led organisations
- Reading, podcasts & research
- Legal information
- Pole history sources
- Support networks & community links

INTRODUCTION

A gentle welcome into the session with an invitation to participate in whatever way feels right. The grounding sequence includes:

- **Breathwork:** Inhale for 4, exhale for 6. Softening the shoulders and jaw, observing the breath without changing it.
- **Gentle Movement:** Options include chest expansions, head and spine circles, or gentle swaying (seated, standing, or lying down). Movement is guided by curiosity, not performance.
- **Visualisation:** Imagining a strong tree trunk through the centre of the body, roots extending into the ground to create steadiness, safety, and inner strength.

Participants return to the room with a deep breath, gentle movement, and an invitation to begin the workshop.



FRAMING STATEMENT

Pole is more than fitness — it is resistance against shame, capitalism, and systems that profit from our disconnection.

THE RADICAL HISTORY OF POLE

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FACTS

- Modern pole dance originates in strip clubs, with sex workers — particularly Black strippers — creating the movement vocabulary used in pole studios today.
- Mallakhamb is often referenced in mainstream narratives, but it is not the origin of modern pole; it shares only visual similarities.
- In the 1980s, the first known pole studio opened in Vancouver to train strip-club dancers.
- As pole entered mainstream fitness, its history was whitewashed to appeal to middle-class respectability, leading to the rise of the term pole fitness.
- When studios distance themselves from sex work, it increases stigma, policing, and harm for sex workers. Erasure removes community, safety, and rightful credit.

TWO

HOW TO SUPPORT

- Say sex worker and stripper without euphemisms.
- Credit sex workers as originators of pole.
- Support sex worker—led organisations.
- Use language that honours pole's roots.
- Teach and acknowledge the history in class settings.

THREE

REFLECTION PROMPT

When history is sanitised, who gains power — and who loses safety?

CAPITALISM, THE BODY & DISCONNECTION

Exploring how systems benefit when we feel disconnected from our bodies:

- Capitalism profits from exhaustion and numbness.
- Patriarchy thrives on body shame and shrinking ourselves.
- Racism, transphobia & ableism determine which bodies are valued and which are erased or punished.
- The beauty/wellness industries make billions by convincing us our bodies need fixing.



ONE

STATISTICS

Mainstream fitness often excludes marginalised people:

- Only 6% of UK fitness instructors are people of colour.
- 40% of LGBTQIA+ people avoid gyms due to anticipated discrimination.
- 70% of disabled people say fitness spaces don't meet their needs.

TWO

POLE AS DISRUPTION

Inclusive pole spaces challenge these hierarchies by celebrating autonomy, consent, body diversity, and pleasure-focused movement.

THREE

REFLECTION PROMPTS

- What messages were you taught about your body?
- Who benefits from your shame?
- What might resistance feel like in your body?

POLE AS RESISTANCE & LIBERATION

Resistance: pushing back against systems or narratives that restrict us.

Liberation: reclaiming autonomy, voice, and embodied freedom.



- Pole invites us to:
- Take up space
 - Be witnessed
 - Move powerfully and unapologetically
- Movement becomes a reclamation — especially for people recovering from trauma, living with chronic illness, or navigating shame.



CHRONIC ILLNESS & COMMUNITY CARE

- POLE TEACHES PRESENCE, SELF-ACCEPTANCE, AND LISTENING TO FLUCTUATING CAPACITY.
- COMMUNITY SUPPORT (SHARING WINS, TIPS, FRUSTRATIONS) STRENGTHENS MENTAL WELLBEING AND REDUCES ISOLATION.

NEURODIVERGENT INCLUSION

- POLE SPACES CAN ADAPT LIGHTING, SOUND, PACE, AND INSTRUCTIONS.
- MOVEMENT BECOMES SENSORY-FOCUSED, GROUNDING, AND CURIOSITY-DRIVEN.

SEX WORK AS LIBERATION

SEX WORK OFFERS AUTONOMY, FLEXIBLE LABOUR, AND NARRATIVE CONTROL. IT ALLOWS PEOPLE TO DEFINE THEIR BOUNDARIES, VALUE, AND RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR BODIES — ON THEIR OWN TERMS.



MOVEMENT ACTIVITY

Optional, gentle exploration of "resistance through movement."

Standing — With feet hip width apart, gently make slow circles with hands or hips. Reverse the movement or sway side to side.

Sitting or Standing — Sway side to side, lead with the chest.

Laying down — Bring feet up towards hips, swaying legs side to side. You can also include arms by bringing them over your head.

Prompts:

- How does this feel?
- Are any emotions coming up?
- What does freedom feel like in your body?

Reflection:

How does movement create resistance, liberation, or healing for you?



CONCLUSION



A BIG THANK YOU FOR SHOWING UP FOR YOUR BODY TODAY — I HOPE IT FEELS HEARD, SUPPORTED, AND WELCOMED.

Final Breathwork:

Hand placed anywhere on the body, three deep breaths to close.

Resources:

- PDSM (@pdsmuk)
- Gemma Rose (@gemmarosepole)
- Blackstage Pole (@blxckstage)
- Ethical Stripper (@ethicalstripper)
- Filthy Friday (@pdfilthyfriday)
- SWARM (@sexworkhive)
- English Collective of Prostitutes (@ecp_org)
- National Ugly Mugs (@nationaluglymugs)
- Sexquisite (@sexquisite.events)