



## Citizenship and pleasure: a study on harm reduction assemblages in Poland

Justyna Struzik

To cite this article: Justyna Struzik (2021) Citizenship and pleasure: a study on harm reduction assemblages in Poland, *Critical Public Health*, 31:1, 30-42, DOI: [10.1080/09581596.2020.1849562](https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2020.1849562)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2020.1849562>



© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 23 Nov 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1270



View related articles [↗](#)




View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

# Citizenship and pleasure: a study on harm reduction assemblages in Poland

Justyna Struzik 

Institute of Sociology, Faculty of Philosophy, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland

## ABSTRACT

In 2013 and 2019 harm reduction projects were at the centre of attacks and smear campaigns coming from both the media and authorities in Poland. These programs were criticized for their alleged promotion of activities that were perceived as socially controversial (for example, sex work, drug use, and sex between men) and that went beyond a normative vision of 'good citizenship'. Drawing on public discussions provoked by the attacks on harm reduction projects, and embedding them in the history of HIV/AIDS activism in post-transition Poland, the article explores the ways in which pleasure is, or might be, embraced within the notion of citizenship – a citizenship that is understood in terms of subjects' rights and responsibilities. Based on extended fieldwork, including qualitative interviews with activists, experts, and people living with HIV, this article examines different strategies of enacting and navigating harm reduction activism in Poland by various actors. The article demonstrates that punitive political environments produce three strategies for responding to, framing, and managing pleasure. Hyperbolization and silencing are the two dominant strategies pursued by public institutions, the media, and politicians. The third strategy, skillful maneuvering, appears as a way of overcoming this opposition on the part of harm reduction activists.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 3 May 2020  
Accepted 14 October 2020

## KEYWORDS

Citizenship; pleasure; LGBTQ;  
harm reduction; Poland

## Introduction

In late 2019, I met with a Polish harm reduction activist in Warsaw. During our conversation, she recalled her amazement, as a person who uses drugs, when she first realized that drug users were entitled to rights. Her experience of learning about the possibility of self-organizing by people who use drugs was, in her words, 'like LSD'. It opened up new opportunities and futurities, but also helped to frame her subjectivity through the notion of rights.

It all started in 2006, when Stijn Goosens [the head of the International Network of People Who Use Drugs, INPUD] was invited to Kraków by Monar.<sup>1</sup> I went there for a meeting together with my friend and we learned from him that drug users can organize themselves. It was unbelievable; it was like LSD, like opening my eyes. Users of illegal substances can legally organize themselves and demand their rights? We have rights? (Author's translation)

Her recollection of this event was presented not only through the lens of a cognitive change, and of learning new things, but also in terms of feelings of 'drugged pleasure' (Dennis & Farrugia, 2017), joy, and happiness. The way in which she narrated this experience therefore made me wonder to what extent pleasure can be thought of as a part of citizenship.

At the same time, I was exploring the public debates that had taken place in Poland in recent years concerning the use of a harm reduction approach as a method of working with key

**CONTACT** Justyna Struzik  [justyna.struzik@uj.edu.pl](mailto:justyna.struzik@uj.edu.pl)

populations. In 2013 and 2019, various harm reduction projects targeting, among others, men who have sex with men, and people who use drugs, were at the centre of attacks and smear campaigns coming from both the media and representatives of the authorities in Poland. These programs were criticized for their alleged promotion of activities that were perceived as socially controversial and that go beyond a normative vision of 'good citizenship' (Seidman, 2003). While most HIV prevention campaigns addressed to the general public in Poland had not ever received much media attention (cf. Kościańska, 2017; Owczarzak, 2007), promoting safer sex and safer drug use in a pleasurable context, and using the non-stigmatizing language of the community – although consistent with the recommendations of public health institutions – was recognized by some as a danger to a heteronormative, moralized, social order (Keinz, 2011; Kościańska, 2017). These controversies also inspired me to think about the cultural imaginaries of pleasure emerging in political debates on rights, sexuality, health, crime, and citizenship. In what circumstances are sexual and drug-related pleasures recognized as a danger? How and to what extent do public policies see and engage with drugged pleasures? When and how does pleasure become in/visible? Following researchers who oppose neglecting and omitting pleasure in scientific and policy-oriented discussions relating to psychoactive substances (see e.g., Dennis, 2019; Dennis & Farrugia, 2017; Keane, 2017; Race, 2017), I therefore decided to further investigate the contexts in which pleasure emerges, and to scrutinize different ways of framing, navigating, or denying, a variety of pleasurable experiences.

Drawing on these controversies around harm-reduction projects, and embedding them in the history of HIV/AIDS 'policy worlds' (Shore & Wright, 2011) in post-transition Poland, I will explore the ways in which the category of pleasure is, or might be, folded into the notion of citizenship, understood in terms of subjects' rights and responsibilities (Duff, 2004; Race, 2008; Riley et al., 2010). Based on extended fieldwork, including qualitative interviews with activists, experts, and people living with HIV, the paper examines how various enactments of citizenship and everyday HIV/AIDS politics pertain to the category of pleasure. Although the literature on 'pleasure citizenship' is relatively limited, pleasure itself has been often included in various studies on sexual and intimate forms of citizenship (Evans, 1993; Richardson, 1998; Richardson & Turner, 2001; Weeks, 1998) as well as on claim-making and struggles for recognition in the context of (illicit) drug use and harm reduction (Dennis, 2019; Dennis & Farrugia, 2017; O'Malley & Valverde, 2004; Race, 2008, 2009, 2017). These reflections will serve as a background for investigating how, through different citizenship practices, activists, policy makers, politicians and other important actors in the field in Poland, 'navigate the complex terrain of pleasure' (Race, 2008, p. 422), in harm reduction assemblages, especially in the realm of emergent controversies in public discourses concerning services addressed to men who have sex with men and use drugs. It is important to mention that although my focus in this article is on harm reduction programs and associated controversies, I define harm reduction itself broadly, as an assemblage of actors, events, objects, networks that interact and create attachments between each other (Dennis, 2019). This paper widens the discussion on how pleasure is understood, framed, constructed, and negotiated in the realm of systemic discrimination and exclusion of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered and queer) people and the criminalization of drug use in Poland. It also contributes to further development of the notion of 'pleasure citizenship' and its intersections with biological, intimate, and sexual forms of citizenship.

## Conceptualizing citizenship and pleasure

Extensive sociological and anthropological research has documented how cultural imaginaries of drugs, drug use, addiction, and people who use drugs are mobilized in various political discourses, and how these mobilizations reproduce complex relationships between states and citizens (Carroll, 2019; Fraser & Seear, 2011; Levy, 2018; Malinowska-Sempruch, 2016). For example, in her Ukraine-based ethnography on the 'addiction imaginary', Jennifer J. Carroll demonstrates how the notion of 'narkomania' (a common term in Ukrainian, Russian, and Polish that is used in both everyday and policy contexts to describe a variety of phenomena related to drug use) produces certain images of

people who use drugs as addicted, devoid of agency, and as harmful both to themselves and to society and the nation. Such a construct of drug dependency is also intertwined with the establishment of basic requirements that users must meet to join treatment programs (such as substitution therapy) (cf. Fraser & Seear, 2011). Following Nikolas Rose's (2007) definition of medical citizenship, which is based on an assumption that citizenship means being active, Carroll points out that the categories of will and engagement are important dimensions of biomedical citizenship. To become participants of harm reduction programs, drug users need to find and express their 'conscious desire' to change their current situation, and must also promise to be adherent patients. Harm reduction regimes in this context tend to focus on minimizing 'harms' related to drug use and produce a vision of desirable patients as adherent, disciplined, and manageable. At the same time, these harm reduction regimes and drug-related policies often elide pleasure from their agenda (Dennis & Farrugia, 2017; O'Malley & Valverde, 2004).

This claim that harm reduction projects – by focusing on the rationality, agency in minimizing harms, and self-governance of people who use drugs – do not embrace the pleasures associated with drug use has also been documented in many other studies (Moore, 2008; O'Malley & Valverde, 2004; Race, 2017). David Moore claims that:

Harm reduction policy and practice constructs a particular form of drug-using subject – a health-conscious citizen capable of rational decision-making, self-determination, self-regulation and risk management in order to minimise drug-related harm (Race, 2008, p. 355).

These neoliberal frameworks producing drug user subjectivities can also be experienced as empowering to people who use drugs and, in this sense, could be viewed as a positive development in thinking about drugs more broadly (Moore & Fraser, 2006). Such a logic enables one to 'dislodge previous understandings of drug users as irrational' (Moore, 2008, p. 356) and embraces them as citizens, and might help people who use drugs to make use of services in a more effective way. But, importantly, as Moore suggests (Moore, 2008) it also may result in the development of depoliticized visions of drug use and situations drug users are in, and 'displace from view attributes that do not sit comfortably with this version of the subject – pleasure, desire, emotion' (p. 356).

However, there are other perspectives that approach the relationship between harm reduction and pleasure from a different angle (Duff, 2004; Race, 2008). Race (2008), for example, notes that while sexuality studies focusing on HIV/AIDS activism and politics have long embraced the category of pleasure and built complex conceptual frameworks upon it, the notion of pleasure in relation to harm reduction and drug use is still largely unexplored. He points out that the rich literature on how *sexual* citizenship acknowledges, distributes, manages, and reproduces pleasure simultaneously underlines the fact that *other* forms of citizenship (including biomedical citizenship) are usually not linked directly with feelings of happiness and enjoyment, or the embodiment of pleasure. This is similar to Fay Dennis's reflections (Dennis, 2019) on conceptualizations of addiction, in which the notion of addiction is constructed in current public health policies in opposition to and as separate from pleasure. Moreover, Dennis shows how various conceptualizations, implemented through a variety of policy measures, maintain and strengthen the belief that lack of pleasure is somehow the essence of addiction: 'pleasure is seen to be addictive, but addiction cannot be pleasurable' (p. 58). However, she argues, following the thought of Deleuze & Guattari and Latour, we can question such separations between addiction and pleasure, and claim that the antithetical relation ascribed to these categories reveals something quite the opposite: 'pleasure as always in tension, caught up in social, discursive and material flows' (Dennis, 2019, p. 111). Thus, the separation between addiction and pleasure, often taken for granted, obfuscates the instability and fragility of such a binary logic.

Against this background, it is arguable that, similar to the notion of safer sex, harm reduction related to drug use can also be perceived and acted upon as a pleasurable strategy in order to overcome the moralizing discourses that have arisen around drug use and HIV. Drawing on Foucault's (1990) work on bodies and pleasure, and Becker's (1982) exploration of marijuana usage, Race (2008) demonstrates that in the context of harm reduction, 'pleasure is not the antithesis

of self-regulation and safety, but the medium through which certain shared protocols of safety take shape' (p. 421). Moving away from the notion of desire, Race, by following Foucault's notion of an ethics of pleasure, proposes that pleasure can be understood as a form of care. Harm reduction in such an understanding might therefore be conceptualized as a provider of 'life-saving education and care *against or despite* grander ideological prescriptions about how a moral citizen should behave in relation to drugs or sex' (p. 418) [italics in original]. This does not necessarily mean that care happens outside the order of power relations, knowledge and discursive regimes, but rather that it might work without a regulatory, normative ideal (Foucault, 1990). Thus, harm reduction is viewed as a practice that, by delivering care services, goes beyond a moralized vision of citizenship.

Various scholars have shown how pleasure is intertwined with the notion of identity, sexual and gender expression, or a sense of belonging to a community. The pleasure emerging from social mobilization has been identified as a motivator for participating in collective action (Jasper, 1998). Studies have shown that understandings of sexual citizenship may range from engagements in a political struggle for the recognition of non-heteronormative identities and sexual practices to critical insights that push further a discussion on limitations of who a sexual citizen might be (Bell & Binnie, 2000; Duggan, 2002).

Empirically speaking, pleasure has not only been present in a variety of different liberation movements (including queer or feminist projects) but has also often been employed by grassroots initiatives in social campaigns and actions pertaining to sexual and reproductive health. The category of pleasure has been used many times in HIV prevention campaigns that have addressed the gay community under the slogan 'safer sex'. Through visual and other textual representations of the body, proximity, intimacy, and joy, activists have tried to convey the message that safer sex can equal pleasure and does not have to mean giving it up altogether. In this way, pleasure has been included in the catalogue of HIV prevention approaches. To a certain extent, pleasure has also been introduced in broader sex education initiatives for other groups. In Poland too, since the late 1980s, grassroots gay initiatives (for example, those related to the magazines *Filo* and *Inaczej*, and later to the first gay and lesbian organizations) have been producing HIV prevention messages using the strategy of laughter, pleasure, humour, and corporeality (Szcześniak, 2016; Szulc, 2018). It is worth noting, however, that these strategies have not necessarily been adopted in the development of nationwide campaigns undertaken by government institutions, which have tended instead to promote a conservative vision of sexuality based on family values, abstinence, and faithfulness (Kościańska, 2017; Owczarzak, 2007).

The conceptual map I have outlined in this section shows that pleasure is often erased from the discussion on health, rights, and citizenship. Additionally, while public health and social policies tend to elide pleasurable practices and focus on rational (Bunton & Coveney, 2011), adherent and self-governed subjects, harm reduction from below reveals how, through mutual care, pleasure can become an important medium of safety, friendship and enjoyment (Pini, 2001; Riley et al., 2010). However, approaches towards harm reduction and safer sex that embrace the category of pleasure also need to be situated in a broader political, economic, and cultural context. Building on this conceptual framing, I will now investigate how pleasure is enacted, framed, and negotiated in the rather punitive political environment of Poland, characterized by the criminalization of drug possession, homophobic public discourses, and a lack of recognition of LGBTQ rights.

## Methods

Extensive research on Polish HIV/AIDS policies and their entanglements with drug policies and harm reduction programs has been conducted since 2016 as part of the European HIV/AIDS Policies: Activism, Citizenship and Health (EUROPACH) project. The Polish sub-study aimed to reconstruct the histories of policies, activism, and various other forms of engagements in the HIV/AIDS field, with special attention given to emerging 'policy worlds' (Shore & Wright, 2011) in Poland's post-transition period (i.e. the 1990s). The study included 22 oral history and expert interviews with people living

with HIV, policy makers, representatives of non-government organizations (NGOs) and other professionals working in the area of HIV/AIDS. Twelve women and 10 men took part in the interviews; 14 of them have been engaged in policy-making since the first decade of the HIV epidemic. The eldest research participant was 73 years old, the youngest 30. The interviews were conducted and transcribed in Polish, with one exception, where a research participant felt more comfortable talking about his activist experience in English. The research involved archival research (conducted in the LGBTQ Archive run by the Lambda Warsaw Association, the Q Foundation Archive in Warsaw, the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine Archive and the Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw – AAN), policy analysis, and participant observation during public events, protests and conferences concerning HIV/AIDS, drugs and harm reduction. The latter method allowed me to see and understand different processes and mechanisms present in HIV/AIDS ‘policy worlds’ in the making.

This paper examines two case studies presenting events from 2013 and 2019, reconstructed through activists’ narrations and media coverage. I chose these controversies as sites of investigation following narratives collected during the fieldwork. The first event from 2013 was often retrospectively mentioned by HIV activists to illustrate the limitations of HIV/AIDS policies, the ‘local climate’ for activism and the need to manoeuvre within moralized visions of prevention in Poland. The second event from 2019 took place when the interview phase of my HIV-focused research had already ended; however, due to several similarities I noticed between discussions from 2013 and 2019, I decided to include this controversy in my study as well. The context of these two debates is also important. The authoritarian turn in the Law and Order (PiS) government, systemic homophobia and human rights violations are recently being increasingly highlighted in Poland, and the controversy from 2019 can be seen as part of a whole series of events against LGBTQ communities, women’s rights, the rights of refugees and migrants etc. The events from 2013 took place when the ruling party, Civic Platform (PO), was more liberal and open. Choosing these events as sites for an exploration of how pleasure is enacted in harm reduction assemblages does not mean that these controversies and the activities they referred to addressed pleasure explicitly. It means, rather, that we can look at these events through the prism of pleasure and explore how various actors enact and make use of it. Since my research was focused on policy worlds, policy-level developments, processes, networks and experiences, pleasure is analyzed in the article as mediated, negotiated and enacted by and within them.

## Events

In 2013, eight NGOs from different Polish cities, working in the field of HIV/AIDS and harm reduction, received financial support from a government agency – the National AIDS Centre (Krajowe Centrum ds AIDS), based on an open call for projects – to develop a social marketing campaign targeting men who have sex with men who (occasionally) use drugs. Throughout the years, HIV prevention campaigns organized by the agency have addressed the general population and were criticized for not targeting the most vulnerable. The ‘Sex in my city’ campaign, although prepared and implemented by NGOs and not the agency itself, was to break this pattern. The action, which was intended to be run primarily online, aimed to promote harm reduction principles using a friendly, pleasurable approach. Although it reproduced the vision of its recipients as rational and self-managed (cf. Moore, 2008), it also embraced urban gay scenes by referring to joy, pleasure and sexual encounters.

Soon after the campaign was launched, however, popular daily newspapers published articles which negatively reviewed the campaign and accused its organizers of promoting pornography. These commentators and journalists claimed that public funds were being used to promote criminalized practices. As the campaign also showed men how to use psychoactive substances more safely, the critics alleged that it was encouraging people to use drugs. In one of the articles, entitled, ‘The state educates gays’, (Ferfercki, 2013) drug use, mobilized in political discourse, helped

to reveal the cultural imaginary of citizenship in which the ideal citizen is produced as sober, straight, self-controlled and rational. The author of the article observed: 'Vulgar descriptions of anal sex and instructions of how to use drugs – these are elements of the campaign against AIDS funded by taxpayers' money' (Author's translation) (Carroll, 2019; Owczarzak, 2007). This journalist, among others, claimed that public money was being spent not on those who needed it, but on populations that should instead be criminalized (namely gay men and drug users). In the article he cited selected statements used on the campaign website that described the experiences of men having sex with men and using drugs: First, I call my dealer. I order different things, depending on my mood. Weed, always with ecstasy, acid, amps ... Once I am p\*\*\*\*\* off, I'll buy some coke too. His shoes ... turned me on so much, the smell. I could lick his feet endlessly. (Author's translation) (Ferfercki, 2013)

In response to this media critique, the ministerial agency, following a demand from the Ministry of Health, decided to withdraw its financial support for the campaign and to terminate the contract with its organizers, thereby provoking debates within the activist community. As one research participant mentioned, support was pulled when the agency adopted the narrative that 'this content [of the campaign] is very unfortunate, immoral, promoting drug use' (Author's translation). The agency's decision was received with surprise among activists, especially as harm reduction not only appeared in the call for projects they applied to, but was also present in governmental public health strategies (even if it was not central to them). In response to these accusations, Lambda-Warsaw, one of the co-organizers of the campaign, published an official statement in which they criticized the decision regarding the withdrawal of funding, and defended the approach employed in the campaign. They stated:

The activities and content of the website [www.sekswmoimmiescie.pl](http://www.sekswmoimmiescie.pl) are based on the philosophy of harm reduction. This is the scope of public health policy that aims to limit the harmful effects resulting from people's behaviour. Harm reduction is a way of thinking about social realities, which indicates that certain phenomena – whether you want it or not – exist. People drink alcohol, take drugs, engage in risky sexual behaviour. For many people, abstinence may be a desirable state, but it is often unattainable or unsatisfactory. In our opinion, it is necessary to create an offer of help and prevention for a group of people who behave in a risky way and suffer damage resulting from their lifestyle. This gives them access to such support and knowledge as they expect and as they are able to accept at the present moment in their lives. (Author's translation) [source: own archive]

This statement was supported by different organisations working in the field of HIV/AIDS, LGBTQ rights, drug use etc., and academics, researchers and journalists. One of the research participants mentioned that immediately after the campaign, at a meeting of actors working in the field of HIV/AIDS, she spoke publicly in defense of the campaign's organizers and demanded an in-depth discussion about what had happened. However, as she herself admitted, apart from some 'shy' support signals, these events did not entail any further discussion that could influence the shape of HIV prevention. This controversy demonstrates how sex (but also drug use) has been politicized in the post-transition period through discussions about what is normal and abnormal, what is moral and immoral, and what is local and foreign (Keinz, 2011). In this participant's opinion, this politicization also demonstrates the influence of the Catholic Church (understood in her statement, among others, as the presence of a priest in governmental structures dealing with HIV, and more broadly – in terms of the influence of the Church on public discourse).

Similar to the events from 2013, in 2019 a member of the Polish Parliament (who was also the Deputy Minister of Justice), published a report entitled, 'Where does the money of Warsaw residents go?' (Gdzie trafiają pieniądze warszawiaków? [Where does the money of Warsaw residents go?], 2019)<sup>2</sup> in which he accused several Warsaw-based NGOs and informal initiatives of using public and municipal funds to 'promote LGBT+ ideology' and to express an 'affirmation of using psychoactive substance or risky sexual behaviours'. The report presented data that had already been published on the websites of harm reduction organizations and the municipality. So, although it was framed as the result of a wide-ranging investigation, in fact the report was based on data that were already in the public domain and widely known. It focused on visual materials produced by

activists and professionals to promote safer sex, the prevention of HIV and sexually transmissible infections, and harm reduction among selected key populations. By concentrating on these materials, the report hyperbolized pleasure as the only element around which the practices and experiences of target populations were focused. Through exaggerating pleasure, the document presented harm reduction activities as weakly connected with public health principles and focused on promoting 'ideologies' that were allegedly harmful to society. The report concluded that the city of Warsaw, although it supports 'social programs that do not cause significant social controversies, such as, for example, counteracting addictions, fighting HIV/AIDS', also finances 'the implementation of LGBT movements' postulates' and activities 'affirming the use of psychoactive substances' as well as 'pro-abortion movements' (Gdzie trafiają pieniądze warszawiaków? [Where does the money of Warsaw residents go?], 2019, pp. 3–4, 123–124).

Harm reduction activists also responded to the report. The Coalition of December 1 (Koalicja 1 Grudnia), comprised of several non-governmental organisations working in the field of HIV/AIDS, along with the Commission for Social Dialogue on Counteracting Drug Addiction and HIV/AIDS at the Warsaw City Hall, wrote a letter in which they defended harm reduction principles and actions addressed specifically to key populations.<sup>3</sup>

These events and discussions, however, are not new in the Polish political context. The anthropologist, Owczarzak (2007), has documented similar discussions about citizenship, sexuality and HIV in Poland. Focusing on a 'scandal' that emerged around a free HIV prevention workshop held in 2005 by Lambda-Kraków for high school students, Owczarzak demonstrates the tensions and ideas that circulate around who is considered to be the 'proper Polish citizen' (Owczarzak, 2007, p. 229). She argues that the discussions provoked by the workshop – that directly addressed pleasure, safer sex, condom use, and HIV – reveal how citizenship, in relation to sexuality, is constructed and acted upon in post-socialist Poland. These discussions involved a number of different actors including the president of the city, the National AIDS Centre, Polish conservative political parties, NGOs, and students. According to Owczarzak, the transition to democracy brought about a notion of citizenship that was 'predicated on specific conceptions of proper sexuality, which includes rational decision making, risk calculation and management, and controlled sexuality' (Owczarzak, 2007).

## Navigating pleasure in harm reduction assemblages

Before I move further with the analysis of how these events mobilized pleasure, I briefly contextualize harm reduction policy worlds in Poland. Harm reduction assemblages in Poland are co-constructed by the emergence and development of LGBTQ politics and drug-related policies and activism. In Poland, social constructions of drug use, people who use drugs, addiction, and relevant forms of support and treatment, are strongly intertwined with the emergence of the HIV epidemic and related responses. At the beginning of the HIV epidemic in Poland, people who used drugs were one of the most affected communities. Drug use has since often been conflated with HIV/AIDS in public discourses (Malinowska-Sempruch, 2014). This conflation has also been visible at the level of policy development with the introduction of drug-policy measures being justified by the epidemiological situation in the country.

The legal and social landscape regarding drug use was radically reconstructed by changes to drug laws in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and also by the broader political transition occurring in Poland at that time. During the transition period (i.e. the 1990s), new social problems either emerged or became visible. At that time, LGBTQ communities and HIV/AIDS organizations started to form, and the issue of drug use appeared in public discourse more and more often. At the beginning of the epidemic the services available to people who use drugs were dominated by Monar – an NGO established in the 1980s and promoting an abstinence-based approach – and some church-related organizations, and were mostly comprised of residential treatment programs. The model of drug dependency treatment since the 1980s has predominantly been based on the drug-free approach, which in practice has meant detoxification, participation in a two-year program of residential



treatment, strict rules of behaviours, and engaging ex-drug users as therapists (Jabłoński & Puławska-Popielarz, 2012; Maresz, 2012). The assumption was that treatment should be painful, and there was very little room for any discussion on users' agency and pleasure.

Drug policy in Poland, based on very restrictive regulations, came into existence in the early 2000s, along with new illicit drugs, including new psychoactive substances. As Malinowska-Sempruch (2014, 2016) has demonstrated, the new regulations had a significant impact on social constructions of people who use drugs – drug use was no longer perceived as a medical problem, but rather as a criminal issue. The removal of people who use drugs from public spaces by criminalizing personal possession, and through gentrification processes in the largest Polish cities, also negatively influenced the visibility of people who inject drugs as subjects of public policies, and made organizing harm reduction actions more difficult (Sempruch-Malinowska & Zygadło, 2012).

In such a political climate, the development of harm reduction programs occurred rather slowly and on a small scale (Jabłoński & Puławska-Popielarz, 2012; Sempruch-Malinowska & Zygadło, 2012). These programs, which were gradually introduced in the largest Polish cities from the mid-1990s, were based on a complex approach to drug use, which Race (2008) refers to as 'the refusal to make public care conditional on adherence to moralized norms around abstinence' (p. 418). The programs were established by civil society organizations, with support from international governance bodies, and attracted significant resistance, especially in the context of criminalization (Coffin, 2002; Malinowska-Sempruch, 2014). The public perception of those who use drugs, and of the methods employed in the field, marginalizes harm reduction within approaches to drug policy in the Polish context (EMCDDA, 2014). Thus, harm reduction is hampered not only by the criminalization of drug possession in Poland, but also by social constructions of drug use itself. Although the first needle and syringe programs, as well as substitution therapy, were introduced in the late 1980s and early 1990s, their scale and accessibility have still failed to meet the needs of people who use drugs (Bartnik & Kwiatkowska, 2015).

In addition to the dominance of the abstinence-only approach, strategies of self-organizing and practices of citizenship undertaken within the framework of harm reduction were also impacted by the limited rights of the LGBTQ community as well as the homophobic attitudes and discourses that took shape in Poland (Struzik, 2019). Alongside the development of HIV/AIDS and drug policies, social mobilization regarding sexual expression, the rights of LGBTQ people, and safer-sex activism was also emerging.

As early as the 1980s, the first grassroots initiatives were promoting the idea of safer sex among gay men (Szcześniak, 2016; Szulc, 2018). In the 1990s, these initiatives were replaced by NGOs who were responding not only to HIV but were also struggling for recognition of the community. Recent events (e.g., calling for LGBT-free zones, introducing 'LGBT ideology' to the political debate) demonstrate a visible shift in the current political landscape, in which homophobia is more and more often mobilized to antagonize society. The rights of both LGBTQ people and people who use drugs are still not recognized by Polish law today. While LGBTQ communities managed to make their struggle visible in public discourse by self-organizing and mobilizing, the voices of people who use drugs are still mediated by various NGOs (including both harm reduction and drug-free initiatives).

In looking at how the category of pleasure has been enacted and navigated in harm reduction assemblages in Poland by following the events described above as well as narratives of HIV/AIDS activists and policy-makers pertaining to everyday politics, in my fieldwork I identified three essential strategies: hyperbolization, silencing and manoeuvring. These strategies could be assigned to different actors co-constructing harm reduction assemblages: media and politicians, policy makers and public institutions, activists and organizations. Firstly, as mentioned above, media and public discussions around drug use and non-heteronormative sexuality tend to hyperbolize and frame pleasure as a negative force that destroys the social and moral fabric of the country. Such a framing was produced by politicians and media in both 2013 and 2019. The exaggeration of pleasure can be conceptualized as creating a vision of harm reduction activities in which pleasurable acts are accepted, allowed and promoted, instead of being criminalized and punished. In this case, non-normative pleasure is positioned as being incommensurate with a rational, morally acceptable, and traditional vision of

citizenship. Opponents of the harm reduction approach perceive prevention and support programs targeting key populations as deepening the problem of 'addiction' and reinforcing harmful ideologies regarding sexuality. In such a narrative, there is much attention given to the 'harms' to society and the social order, and little focus on harms and injustices experienced by key populations. Similarly, Carroll (2019), discussing various ways of constructing 'Otherness' in Ukraine, wrote:

[p]arallels are readily apparent between 'addiction imaginaries' and this 'gendered imaginary', which explains away those who do not conform to heteronormative standards of gendered identity as individuals who 'refuse' to conform out of some kind of obstinacy or, worse, because they are inexplicable monsters who put the rest of society at risk.(p. 187)

The public debates that have taken place regarding harm reduction projects targeting men who have sex with men and also use drugs confirm that there is a strong parallel between the construction of drug use and that of non-heteronormative sexual practices, with both positioned as being on the harmful margins of society. One of the research participants working in the field of HIV prevention among men having sex with men and using drugs argued that risky practices and behaviors are often connected by policy-makers with the notion of punishment, which should be considered as a way of controlling demonized pleasure. He stated:

[...] There is this moral thread that [...]when we show the youth a condom, they're gonna want to have sex all the time, if we show them drugs, they're gonna want to eat them, they're gonna want to take them, if we give them PrEP, then they're gonna go unpunished, they're gonna have a lot of sex. This is also a construction, and it appears also in many statements of the MSM community itself, that it is undertaking sexual contacts without any consequences, that as if a sexual, homosexual contact, then it should carry some consequences for these people. For me it is associated with the punishment that they should suffer as a result. (Author's translation)

The perception of risky behaviors through the prism of punishment also reflects the belief, rooted in drug-related policies, that any form of treatment must be painful. Secondly, alongside the exaggerated meanings assigned to pleasure described above, public institutions responsible for health and drug policy invisibilize and silence the right to experience pleasure in risky practices. The symbolic gesture of withdrawing financial support by the National AIDS Centre for the Sex in the City campaign could be seen as a silencing tactic. According to one of the research participants, public institutions responsible for public health tend to express: 'such a denial, or not accepting the fact that people use drugs and have sex. I mean, wishing that everyone would stop using and not, I don't know, not have unprotected sex' (Author's translation). By denying that any pleasure should be able to be derived from such activities, these discourses and institutions instead reinforce the deeply rooted thinking about drug use in Poland's abstinence-only approach. Furthermore, institutions managing HIV and drug policies primarily adopt a biomedical logic in their activities, which emphasizes notions of adherence, responsibility, and rationality. Thus, these public institutions apply strategies to make pleasure invisible or irrelevant in public health programs. Furthermore, it seems that in Poland, as Keinz (2011) has shown, pleasure (including sexual pleasure) is treated as an issue of public morality. Therefore, institutions usually employ strategies that avoid talking about the practices of key populations in relation to pleasure in an open manner.

Thirdly, in response to the narratives and actions that hyperbolize or silence pleasure in relation to drug use and sexual practices and frame pleasure in negative terms, HIV/AIDS and harm reduction organizations point to principles of public health as their point of reference. As we saw in the statement published by Lambda-Warsaw in 2013, non-governmental organizations deploy the principle of harm reduction in objective and neutral terms within public health policy in order to justify their actions. Thus, these organizations do not directly include sexual and drug use related pleasures in these discussions. Even if they include these categories at the level of everyday activities, they do not follow this approach in public debates. Such a tactic becomes a strategy of survival, but also an attempt to legitimize their actions, which are constantly being undermined and accused of crossing the borders of 'proper' citizenship. As one study participant described:

While preparing a promotional material for the project, you have to get the approval of this office, which deals with social policy, and the final result is that in these leaflets, which are produced, words like 'penis', they do not appear at all, because for them it is like a political threat. (Author's translation)

To understand why harm reduction activists include pleasure in prevention campaigns and daily activities, but not necessarily in public debates concerning drug use and non-normative sexualities, we need to look more closely at the third strategy – manoeuvring everyday activism in a punitive, conservative political context. The difference between silencing and manoeuvring was clarified by one interviewee, who claimed that while public institutions do not want to address the needs of key populations explicitly (due to fear that it will provoke further discussions), they transfer this responsibility to NGOs. Harm reduction activists are expected to engage in such actions, but not become too visible. Research participants pointed out that the 'Sex in my city' campaign was perceived as controversial by journalists, and then politicians and policy-makers, due to the fact it employed the 'language of the community', and not medicalized vocabularies. Seen as a way of going beyond biomedical logic, the campaign embraced pleasure as an important element of both sexual and drug-related practices. Inspired by earlier grassroots prevention campaigns promoting safer sex that had been introduced by community-based initiatives rather than governmental bodies, the campaign openly included pleasurable practices as a medium to help reach marginalized populations. However, activists claimed that addressing non-normative sexual practices and drug use in a non-punitive way requires careful and constant negotiations and manoeuvring, as these practices are still perceived in public discourse as dangerous to 'proper Polish citizens'. The debates around campaigns show how both 'encouraging gay people to use condoms' and promoting the safer use of psychoactive substances are considered a public morality issue in the Polish context. They also reveal the specificity of preventive measures in the domestic context, where safer sex – or more broadly, openly talking about sex, sexual pleasure and drug use – remains, as one of the respondents described it, 'an insurmountable thing'. However, these debates also show that people who work in prevention, and promote the use of condoms, do it 'on their own'. The lack of support from public institutions does not cause the suspension of activities, but rather forces the search for alternative tactics and solutions (Carroll, 2019). As one research participant explained:

Well, and as a consequence, the effect of this is that at the government level, within the framework of public policies, such actions, i.e. aimed at groups that have the greatest needs in terms of education and prevention, are not undertaken at all, i.e. this can be done, but can be done on the initiative of a non-governmental organization. (Author's translation)

As we have seen, there are three different ways of navigating pleasure in the context of harm reduction. Hyperbolization and silencing are the two dominant strategies coming from public institutions, the media, and politicians. Skillful manoeuvring appears as a way of overcoming this opposition on the part of harm reduction activists. These three strategies of framing and acting upon pleasure related to drug use and non-heteronormative sexuality reveal the complexity of the relationships between different social actors struggling for their own definition of citizenship. They also show how complex 'policy worlds' are produced in the context of criminalization and a conservative and punitive approach to drug use and sexuality.

## Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to investigate how the notion of pleasure is related to various understandings of citizenship. I wanted to explore whether citizenship can be pleasurable – in other words, to what extent citizenship, as a concept and as a practice, can be thought of as a phenomenon embracing pleasure. The two cases studies of public debates from Poland show how the category of pleasure is intertwined with discussions about what counts as a good citizen.

I demonstrated that punitive political environments (expressed for example, recently in the COVID-19 related amendment to the country's Criminal Code which increased sentencing in cases of HIV exposure

up to 8 years) produce various strategies for responding to, framing, and managing pleasure in the context of harm reduction activism and drug policies. The notion of pleasure is thus hyperbolized in public debates, in which some politicians, policymakers and journalists frame it as a manifestation of ideologies that are harmful to society and moral order. This strategy undermines harm reduction activities and draws a clear line around what counts as good citizenship. At the same time, public institutions responsible for HIV/AIDS and drug policies are often silent about pleasure as they focus on reproducing imaginaries of people who use drugs as rational, self-controlled, and manageable patients. Pleasure is thus invisibilized in discussions about rights, responsibilities, and entitlements.

Using their experience of working under the framework of a safer-sex approach, activists have included the notion of pleasure in harm reduction activities as one of the tools to reach their potential audience, that is, men who have sex with men and also use drugs. It seems, however, that due to both homophobia and the punitive political environment, they often must negotiate the explicit use of pleasure in the materials they produce. Identifying and theorizing this ability to manoeuvre within this field of different power relations and various moral orders is crucial to understanding how harm reduction activists navigate pleasure in their daily citizenship practices.

## Notes

1. A local branch of Monar that has been an influential non-governmental organisation. The organisation established in 1981 by Marek Kotański, who was working in the field of drug use and promoting a drug-free approach.
2. See e.g., <https://polanddaily.com/567-kaleta-report> [Retrieved on: 20.04.2020]
3. [http://jump93.pl/aktualnosc-95-stanowisko\\_ngo\\_w\\_sprawie\\_raportu\\_kalety\\_3.html](http://jump93.pl/aktualnosc-95-stanowisko_ngo_w_sprawie_raportu_kalety_3.html) [Retrieved on: 20.07.2020]

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of the research participants who agreed to meet with me and discuss HIV/AIDS policy worlds in Poland. I also want to express my gratitude to colleagues from the EUROPACH project for supporting my research and ideas. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers, and the editors of this article: Dean Murphy, Aditi Surie von Czechowski.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

This work was supported by the Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA) [HERA.15.093] under the Program Uses of the Past (2016-2019).

## ORCID

Justyna Struzik  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3381-6180>

## References

- Bartnik, M., & Kwiatkowska, A. (2015). *Iniekcijni użytkownicy substancji psychoaktywnych* [Injecting users of psychoactive substances]. Fundacja Redukcji Szkód.
- Becker, H. S. (1982). Becoming a marijuana user. In G. Rose (Ed.), *Deciphering sociological research* (pp. 170–179). Macmillan Education UK. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-16771-5\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-16771-5_11)
- Bell, D., & Binnie, J. (2000). *The sexual citizen: Queer politics and beyond*. Blackwell Publishers.
- Bunton, R., & Coveney, J. (2011). Drugs' pleasures. *Critical Public Health*, 21(1), 9–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2010.530644>
- Carroll, J. J. (2019). *Narkomania: Drugs, HIV, and citizenship in Ukraine*. Cornell University Press.

- Coffin, P. O. (2002). Marketing harm reduction: A historical narrative of the international harm reduction development program. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 13(3), 213–224. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0955-3959\(02\)00078-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0955-3959(02)00078-6)
- Dennis, F. (2019). *Injecting bodies in more-than-human worlds: Mediating drug-body-world relations* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Dennis, F., & Farrugia, A. (2017). Materialising drugged pleasures: Practice, politics, care. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 49, 86–91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2017.10.001>
- Duff, C. (2004). Drug use as a 'practice of the self': Is there any place for an 'ethics of moderation' in contemporary drug policy? *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 15(5–6), 385–393. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2004.06.010>
- Duggan, L. (2002). The new homonormativity: The sexual politics of neoliberalism. In R. Castronovo & D. D. Nelson (Eds.), *Materializing democracy: Toward a revitalized cultural politics* (pp. 175–194). Duke University Press.
- European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. (2014). *Drug policy profile: Poland (EMCDDA Papers)*. Publications Office of the European Union. [http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/attachements.cfm/att\\_227226\\_EN\\_TDAU14003ENN.pdf](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/attachements.cfm/att_227226_EN_TDAU14003ENN.pdf)
- Evans, D. (1993). *Sexual citizenship: The material construction of sexualities*. Routledge.
- Ferfercki, W. (2013). *Państwo edukuje gejów* [The state educates gays]. <https://www.rp.pl/arttykul/1065439-Panstwo-edukuje-gejow.html>
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality*. Vintage Books.
- Fraser, S., & Seear, K. (2011). *Making disease, making citizens the politics of hepatitis C*. Ashgate.
- Gdzie trafiają pieniądze warszawiaków? [Where does the money of Warsaw residents go?] (2019). <https://s.tvp.pl/repository/attachment/3/0/d/30d6e2e36d741de6a9edda7dd43d30de1575880401632.pdf>
- Jabłoński, P., & Puławska-Popielarz, K. (2012). Zarys historii rozwoju terapii uzależnień od substancji psychoaktywnych innych niż alkohol w Polsce [Outline of the history of the development of therapy for addiction to psychoactive substances other than alcohol in Poland]. In P. Jabłoński, B. Bukowska, & J. C. Czała (Eds.), *Uzależnienie od narkotyków: Podręcznik dla terapeutów* [Drug addiction: A handbook for therapists] (pp. 15–24). Krajowe Biuro do Spraw Przeciwdziałania Narkomanii.
- Jasper, J. M. (1998). The emotions of protest: Affective and reactive emotions in and around social movements. *Sociological Forum*, 13(3), 397–424. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022175308081>
- Keane, H. (2017). Drugged pleasures: Commentary. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 49, 168–170. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2017.10.002>
- Keinz, A. (2011). European desires and national bedrooms? Negotiating "normalcy" in postsocialist Poland. *Central European History*, 44(1), 92–117. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938910001196>
- Kościańska, A. (2017). *Zobaczyć łosia: Historia polskiej edukacji seksualnej od pierwszej lekcji do internetu* [See the moose: The history of Polish sex education from the first lesson to the internet]. Wydawnictwo Czarne.
- Levy, J. (2018). *The war on people who use drugs: The harms of Sweden's aim for a drug-free society*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Malinowska-Sempruch, K. (2014). *HIV among drug users in Poland: The paradoxes of an epidemic* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Columbia University.
- Malinowska-Sempruch, K. (2016). Shaping drug policy in Poland. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 31, 32–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2016.02.018>
- Maresz, M. (2012). *Przemoc w terapii* [Therapy violence]. [http://jump93.pl/portal/download/file\\_id/112/pid/30.html](http://jump93.pl/portal/download/file_id/112/pid/30.html)
- Moore, D. (2008). Erasing pleasure from public discourse on illicit drugs: On the creation and reproduction of an absence. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 19(5), 353–358. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2007.07.004>
- Moore, D., & Fraser, S. (2006). Putting at risk what we know: Reflecting on the drug-using subject in harm reduction and its political implications. *Social Science & Medicine*, 62(12), 3035–3047. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2005.11.067>
- O'Malley, P., & Valverde, M. (2004). Pleasure, freedom and drugs: The uses of pleasure in liberal governance of drug and alcohol consumption. *Sociology*, 38(1), 25–42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038504039359>
- Owczarzak, J. T. (2007). *Mapping HIV Prevention in Poland: Contested Citizenship and the Struggles for Health after Socialism* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Kentucky Doctoral Dissertations. [http://uknowledge.uky.edu/gradschool\\_diss/515](http://uknowledge.uky.edu/gradschool_diss/515)
- Pini, M. (2001). *Club cultures and female subjectivity: The move from home to house*. Palgrave.
- Race, K. (2008). The use of pleasure in harm reduction: Perspectives from the history of sexuality. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 19(5), 417–423. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2007.08.008>
- Race, K. (2009). *Pleasure consuming medicine: The queer politics of drugs*. Duke University Press.
- Race, K. (2017). Thinking with pleasure: Experimenting with drugs and drug research. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 49, 144–149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2017.07.019>
- Richardson, D. (1998). Sexuality and citizenship. *Sociology*, 32(1), 83–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038598032001006>
- Richardson, E. H., & Turner, B. S. (2001). Sexual, intimate or reproductive citizenship? *Citizenship Studies*, 5(3), 329–338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621020120085289>
- Riley, S., More, Y., & Griffin, C. (2010). The 'pleasure citizen': Analyzing partying as a form of social and political participation. *YOUNG*, 18(1), 33–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/110330880901800104>

- Rose, N. S. (2007). *Politics of life itself: Biomedicine, power, and subjectivity in the twenty-first century*. Princeton University Press.
- Seidman, S. (2003). *Beyond the Closet: The transformation of gay and lesbian life (Reprint edition)*. Routledge.
- Sempruch-Malinowska, K., & Zygadło, M. (2012). Redukcja szkód związanych z przyjmowaniem środków psychoaktywnych [Drug use related harm-reduction]. In P. Jabłoński, B. Bukowska, & J. C. Czabała (Eds.), *Uzależnienie od narkotyków: Podręcznik dla terapeutów* [Drug addiction: A handbook for therapists] (pp. 253–264). Krajowe Biuro do Spraw Przeciwdziałania Narkomanii.
- Shore, C., & Wright, S. (2011). Conceptualising policy: Technologies of governance and the politics of visibility. In C. Shore, S. Wright, & D. Però (Eds.), *Policy worlds: Anthropology and the analysis of contemporary power* (pp. 1–26). Berghahn Books.
- Struził, J. (2019). *Solidarność queerowa: Mobilizacja, ramy i działania ruchów queerowych w Polsce* [Queer solidarity: Mobilization, frames and actions of queer movements in Poland]. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- Szcześniak, M. (2016). *Normy widzialności: Tożsamość w czasach transformacji* [Visibility norms: Identity in times of transformation]. Fundacja Bęc Zmiana.
- Szulc, L. (2018). *Transnational homosexuals in communist Poland: Cross-border flows in gay and lesbian magazines*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Weeks, J. (1998). The Sexual Citizen. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 15(3–4), 35–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276498015003003>