

Selections from the Chapter

“Pleasure as an Access Point”

Slides for advocates or artists

By J Leigh Oshiro

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Pleasure as an Access Point is a chapter I wrote for the anthology book *Body Autonomy: Decolonizing Sex Work and Drug Use*, compiled by Justice Rivera.

*****Body Autonomy: Decolonizing Sex Work and Drug Use* to be released spring 2024.**

The following slides explore two topics from the first part of the chapter (going beyond harm reduction and pleasure stigma). There are prompt questions after each concept is introduced.

It is my hope and intention to support advocates or artists who would like to use these concepts from the chapter *Pleasure as an Access Point* in their own work. This is just a starting point, but it could look like:

- teach-ins, workshops, presentations
- online or in-person exercises
- group discussions or research (focus groups, interviews, etc.)
- inspiration for art projects

Or anything else that brings you pleasure.

From Harm Reduction to Pleasure Expansion

- I have come to realize that the principles of harm reduction, found pervasively in my advocacy work, are no longer enough to sustain my personal life. It's not that I don't use harm reduction principles..... I do! But harm reduction is just the foundation. I am interested in building a house of pleasure on a foundation of harm reduction.
- Let's look at a few harm reduction principles and see how their concepts can work from within an emotional and/or spiritual framework.

Harm Reduction Principle #1

- Harm reduction “accepts, for better or worse, that licit and illicit drug use is part of our world and chooses to work to minimize its harmful effects rather than simply ignore or condemn them.”
- ”I’ve heard this in harm reduction circles expressed as: “We accept people as they are, but we don’t leave them there.”
- Expanding this into an emotional/spiritual place leaves me with a feeling of accepting myself and the world as they are, but not leaving us there. That means accepting my brain and body—its abilities or limitations—and working to give it nourishment in order to maintain what it has come to be or to encourage further healing.
- That is what I would give to others, so why shouldn’t I have access to the same compassion?

Harm Reduction Principle #2

- Harm reduction also understands drug use “as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that encompasses a continuum of behaviors from severe use to total abstinence, and acknowledges that some ways of using drugs are clearly safer than others.”
- Part of my trauma history taught that life is about black-and-white thinking. There is “good” and “bad” and the “best” way to live is to stay away from the dark side. This binary thinking locked me in a jail cell of internalized transphobia, ableism, late-stage capitalism, and white supremacy.
- These days, I understand life concepts to exist more on a spectrum, with harm reduction as a baseline. But is the goal of life to “reduce harm”?

Prompts for Harm Reduction Principles

Facilitators:

This could be a good place to ask questions to a group, such as:

- “How do you agree or disagree with these concepts?”
- “Is harm reduction more or less than these points are talking about?”
- “Do ya’ll see how harm reduction principles show up outside of drug use and sex work?”
- If so, how do you reduce harm in your life? As an advocate? As a sex worker?

Art Makers:

- How do these concepts of harm reduction show up in your artwork?
- Is making art itself a form of harm reduction in navigating particular thoughts and feelings?

Pleasure Stigma

- “**pleasure**” is a feeling of happiness, satisfaction, or enjoyment and “**stigma**” is a mark of disgrace or a set of negative, unfair, or untrue beliefs that are thrust upon us or that we put upon ourselves
- pleasure stigma is all around us
- For people whose race, class, and gender are marginalized (read “stigmatized”), their external displays of pleasure can hyper-marginalize them in their daily lives. If you are a Black, trans, and femme person who likes to wear clothes that show off your personal pleasure in your body or even wave with happiness to someone you know, that display of pleasure can get you arrested or profiled as a sex worker.
- happiness, joy, sexual gratification, and physiological satisfaction are some of the ways my pleasure manifests

Prompts for Pleasure Stigma

Facilitators:

This could be a good place to ask questions to a group, such as:

- “What is your definition of pleasure?”
- “What is your definition of stigma?”
- “Are there ways that you judge or stigmatize yourself for wanting certain things or engaging in certain behaviors?”
- “Does even the concept of “pleasure” bring up thoughts of white privilege, or ableism?” How about pop culture trends like toxic positivity on social media?”
- Are you afraid to engage in pleasurable things like dressing how you like or being affectionate with someone publicly for fear of stigma, being profiled, or harmed?

Art Makers:

- How does pleasure show up in your art? How about stigma?
- Do you have aversions to connecting with or expressing your pleasure in art?
- Is making art more of a purging of emotions or thoughts, rather than an expression of pleasure? Do you like it that way?

Closing

This is just a sample of two concepts (harm reduction and pleasure stigma) and how they could be useful for advocates to spark conversations or artists to make art.

Thank you for diving in with me.

May your access points be of your own making.

I tend to like endings with possibilities...

What are yours?

J Leigh Oshiro



At the intersection of people, policy, research, and creativity is where you will find survivor and longtime sex worker J Leigh Oshiro. As a multi-racial non-binary person who has lived with disabilities, poverty, food/housing instability and violence, they have brought this experience to their research and advocacy. Whether co-authoring academic papers, conducting interviews or focus groups, community organizing, lobbying or making documentaries, J Leigh is passionate about addressing LGBTQIA+ issues, sex work, race, gender-based violence, human trafficking, casual sex, disability, and the creativity of the human spirit. Serving at organizations like The Ishtar Collective, GLITS, SOAR Institute., and New York Transgender Advocacy Group has been their career since 2016. They were an advisor for the Museum of the City of New York's Transgender Activism Exhibit and received the 2019 Marsha P. Johnson Community Leader Award from New York Transgender Advocacy Group, where they served as the president of the NY State Gender Diversity Coalition from 2019 - 2022.