

# GOOD SEX LIBERATES

Why sexual rights and erotic justice should get into bed with pleasure

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## **Abstract**

From disease prevention, fear and risk-based approaches to sex-positive and pleasure-based approaches to sex, health and equity – this chapter provides a rollercoaster ride along the pathways that led to greater acknowledgement of the liberatory nature of good sex. Using a personal narrative and the story of their passion project, The Pleasure Project, the authors lay out the arguments for how and why pleasure is essential for a world where sexual liberation prioritises pleasure, consent and that sexual rights are fulfilled, and erotic justice upheld. Learning from the experiences of sex workers, sex educators and artists, the writings of intersectional feminists and decolonisation experts, and building allies with porn film makers, Anne and Arushi build up towards a manifesto for an erotically just world, where getting in touch with what we want from our sex lives might unearth much broader visions of liberation.

## **Fantasies that expand our vision of the erotic**

I'm in a quiet corner in this bookstore in Hauz Khas village. I am slightly tipsy and aroused by the erotic images showing on a projector screen. I glance at a man in the corner. He smiles at me. I smile back. I start to touch myself. I can tell he is aroused. He starts to touch himself. We stare at each other, engrossed in our mutual masturbation. Suddenly we notice the room is silent. We have an audience. I decide to stop. I got shy.

your salt touched breasts - oh how I would love every glistening fishy scale before you had to leave heading for dry land again

threesome with a man doused in maple syrup and a woman wrapped in newspaper.

You BLUE tree, wet dark and mossy carpet! So moist, cool, you thick trunk! and millions of your blue blue flowers, falling, anointing my nakedness.

These fantasies come from a large bank of fantasies collected through open mic events conducted by The Pleasure Project in Delhi and Goa, India in the early 2000s. We encouraged people to read their favourite sexual fantasy from literature and then asked them to write down their own fantasy for posting into an anonymous open source ‘Fantasy Bank’ from which we could pick and read aloud. We stepped forward and read our own erotic safer sex fantasies and answered questions about sexy safer sex including how to make condom use more ‘erotic’. What we learned from creating this ‘Fantasy Bank’ was how varied, imaginative and magnificent people’s erotic minds were, and how we collectively travelled from the traditional to the fantastic. We saw at these events that collective erotic interests and expansive desires included different definitions of lust - from lust for nature, to the eroticism of eating, to loving the way light falls on trees, to the wonderful sexiness of making love to a ‘merperson’. These fantasies provide us with an expansionist vision of pleasure, sex and eroticism - a vision that we will aim to explain and unpack in this chapter and one that informed our future thinking on pleasure and sexual health.

In our work, we are constantly asking people what sex is, what they think eroticism includes, and what pleasure means to them (Figure 47.1). We have found that the answers to these questions are as varied as any person’s imagination can be. We believe that asking these questions gives people the space to imagine how they want to feel and act, and that getting in touch with what we want from our sex (and love) lives might unearth much broader visions of liberation, the kind that move beyond the individual to recognise collective visions of change. By doing so we can open up aspirations for safer pleasure in a wider range of relationships, or for people not traditionally expected to experience pleasure – women, or people living with disabilities, for example – and thus, we can expand sexual rights and political freedoms. In creating safer sex spaces through the exchange of fantasies, we move from traditional, biomedical definitions of not exchanging bodily fluids, to encompass mental safety, making the choices you want, feeling joy in your divergent sexual identity and feeling good about being horny.



*Figure 47.1* A Postcard used by The Pleasure Project at a range of public health conferences and workshops to encourage sharing of pleasurable experiences.

Asking the question of what gives you pleasure is a radical political act more so for those who have been made to feel, or denied that they should have that pleasure.

As Audre Lorde (1984) said: ‘For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. Once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, we can then observe which of our various life endeavours bring us closest to that fullness.’

### **Getting intimate with us**

Together, we bring a combined experience of 50 years of working on HIV and AIDS, sexual and reproductive health, and rights (SRHR), sexuality, gender and human rights. Anne has been an internal condom promotor, a donor of sexual health interventions, and a school sex educator. She has conducted participatory community research with young women at risk of unintended pregnancy, and has worked and lived in the United Kingdom, South Africa, Sri Lanka and India. She has a professional background in public health and became passionate

about prevention through her experience of seeing how fast and devastatingly the HIV epidemic grew, and subsequently worked on Ebola and COVID-19 prevention. She has had the privilege of growing up in a country (the UK) where contraception is available in health centres but has experienced the continued stigma and judgements young people face in accessing it, especially young working-class women. Her experience doing sex education made her re-evaluate her own experiences and alerted her to the importance of a positive framing of sexuality, and how well-being can be more of a central hope and vision for societies.

Arushi has worked on adolescent and young people's sexuality, gender equality and human rights, processing her own understanding of sexuality, patriarchy, and feminism through her work and personal life. As an urban, educated, Indian woman, Arushi recognised her own privilege and ability to take and act on her decisions regarding her own body, sexuality and relationships. These are competences that are not afforded to, or are a hard-won battle for, many of her compatriots.

We met in Delhi in 2006, two lonely erotic justice guerrilla girls, with a joint sense of annoyance and discomfort at how sexual health was being promoted, and the narratives around it that did not capitalise on eroticism or centre gender equity, or promote a more expansive view of sexuality, rights and pleasures. We brought together two quite different life experiences, but many common views, and a sense of urgency of being outsiders in the world we inhabited professionally. Joining in partnership gave us the courage and resilience to stay the course, calling out this silence and stigma, when we were told that pleasure was frivolous and had no place in sexual health conferences, or in sex education, or indeed in women's rights discussions. Being a partnership in a world where leadership or disruptive innovation or movement building is usually seen in a traditionally hierarchical model, has been important in building our confidence and dealing with dismissal by others. But it has also been practical, as we both balanced other paid employment to enable our voluntary work on pleasure.

### **Starting out: Sexual debut and overcoming the awkwardness**

Anne founded The Pleasure Project in 2004 out of our sense of frustration at the reticence to name sexual acts, sexual organs and address people's *real* sex lives at global AIDS conferences and policy fora. There were exceptions - largely by men who have sex with men

and sex worker organisations - but overall, the sex was sanitised and silenced out of SEXual health. The two of us campaigned and generated evidence on pleasure, without funding for many years, before recognition of the importance of pleasure and eroticism in public health began to trickle in. It was only when some radical and edgy donors, such as The Case for Her, saw the potential for pleasure that The Pleasure Project finally got funded to transform the public health world and build stronger bridges with the sex industry.

We started on this pleasure journey with a more limited focus on eroticising safer sex, knowing that condom promotion initiatives could learn a huge amount from how sex toys - or indeed toothpaste, cars and other goods – are promoted by how they can make you look and feel good. We wanted to overcome a deficit in the collective imagination. In the worlds of health, development and human rights, the dominant bio-medical narrative suggests that sex and relationships lead to only negative outcomes. We were moved to argue for an expanded vision of safer sex and the role that pleasure plays in our lives. We wanted too to celebrate and honour pleasure and joy as central to our lives, more acutely felt for those of us with marginalised sexual identities and/or who feel the forces of patriarchy and poverty diminishing them.

We have seen and felt the silencing of pleasure in international development and public health as an active erasure of a critical component of sexuality: one that hurts those with marginalised sexualities most; one that makes sexuality education less effective and causes harm, shame, and death; and one that holds existing historical and colonial power structures in place. The current normative model of sexual health is based on the prevention of ill-health, and fear and deficit-based approaches of ‘death, danger and disease’, rather than the more holistic model of well-being that can be found in the World Health Organization’s (WHO) current working definition of sexual health, which calls for a positive and respectful approach to sexuality,<sup>1</sup> or our own more radical definition of pleasure based sexual health.

A pleasure-based approach is one that celebrates sex, sexuality and the joy and wellbeing that can be derived from these, and creates a vision of good sex built on sexual rights. It focuses on sensory, mental, physical and sensual pleasure to enable individuals to understand, consent to, and gain control over their own bodies and multi-faceted desires. Well-being, safety, pleasure, desire and joy are the objectives of a programme with a pleasure-based approach. This approach measures

empowerment, agency, and self-efficacy by whether or not an individual is enabled to know what they want, can ask for it, and request this of others, in relation to their sexuality, desires and pleasure. (Singh and Philpott 2019)

### **Seeking pleasure: Where are our pleasures and desires in sexual health?**

Our research has shown that pleasure gets more mentions in international HIV conference abstracts in terms of ‘pleasure has a price’ than pleasure as a benefit, despite being a key motivator and aim for sex, sexuality, and relationships (Figure 47.2). In fact, there is now clear evidence that pleasure inclusive interventions improve condom use and promote sexual health (Zaneva et al. 2022).



*Figure 47.2* Analysis by The Pleasure Project of abstracts at international AIDS conferences from 2004 to 2020 (see Philpott et al. 2021).

A wider imagining of pleasure and eroticism would enable us to view human sexuality as interconnected and diverse. It would enable a healthcare provider or health educator to describe an ideal sexual situation or relationship, or ask about their clients' best sexual experiences, to draw out and honour their sexual history and scripts, and use this to help the client arrive at a resolution of their concerns.

We write this chapter drawing on our work and individual experiences with our own sexuality and relationships, as well as the growing evidence on pleasure, not only for condom promotion and sexual rights, but also to offer a positive vision of health that can expand our mindsets to embrace a more in-touch, liberatory notion of humanness. In doing so, we draw

on evidence that has been generated by numerous practitioners and academics in the sexual health and feminism fields, including by The Pleasure Project.

### **Collective imagination and creative safer sex eroticisation, or how to create an erotic collective**

The birth of The Pleasure Project can be closely linked to the internal condom workshops Anne facilitated in her role with the sole organisation then promoting and manufacturing this new condom in 2002-2003. In one of these workshops, Anne was showing an internal condom to sex workers in Sri Lanka, where she lived at the time, and they worked together on how to introduce them to clients. As Anne spoke about their erotic potential, the group's joint creativity soared. 'We can tell them it is big because they are big,' 'The noise is only loud when the sex is good,' 'We will lift our sarees and let them insert it as a treat,' 'The inner ring will rub our clitorises and we will show we are turned on'. Women went away with samples and came back the next day saying how successful this was - they were able to charge more for sex with internal condoms, promoting them as sex toys and a gateway to pleasure. Anne learned that those with the lived experience of regular negotiation of safer sex know how to heighten the experience with creativity, poise and humour. Valuing and honouring these perspectives within the traditional power bases of public health will result in great things and our desire to eroticise safer sex was borne through those experiences of promoting this first new technology to prevent HIV since the external condom.

This work led to our continued belief that knowledge and skills from the daily lives of communities on the 'frontline' of the (then) new global HIV epidemic - sex workers, men who have sex with men - should be given the credibility they deserved. Other examples Anne later came across and promoted in a newsletter called 'The Female Condom and Pleasure' in 2003 included the Society for Women and AIDS in Africa's promotion of the internal condom together with erotic *bine-bine*<sup>2</sup> beads to meld the sexiness of the knocking noise with the rustle of the polyurethane. More great examples followed, including work to support feminist and ethical porn performers in 2005 to include condoms in their work, to 'show by doing' and to demonstrate how to use lube to put on a condom and keep a hard-on; and blogs with bondage domination submission masochism (BDSM) lovers talking sexy about safer choices as part of their community standard of kinky consensual sexual encounters.

## **Finding those we love: the global mapping of pleasure and its practices**

Through this work with communities of practice whose work is highly undervalued in medical and health circles due to hierarchies of power and education, we were able to show how stigma and prudishness are ineffective, unimaginative and dangerous. The Pleasure Project created a Global Map of Pleasure of best practices on integrating pleasure (growing from 15 examples in 2005 to over 100 in 2023) into sexual health, sex work, erotic media, condom promotion, erotic blogs and more. We broadened our view of who constitutes a ‘pleasure expert’ as we wanted to help this ‘pleasure family’ gather support, strength and learning from each other in a non-hierarchical way.

We also sought wisdom and connection from the many who came before us and whose work took place in parallel to us. They included Audre Lorde (1984), Phil Harvey, Jocelyn Elders, Adrienne Maree Brown (2019) and Annie Sprinkle, to name but a few. We were delighted when Anne was asked to become a member of the World Association for Sexual Health (WAS) Sexual Pleasure Taskforce (2018-21) to create and support the ratification of the Global Sexual Pleasure Declaration (WAS 2021) (see also Chapter 36 by Eli Coleman and Jessie V. Ford elsewhere in this volume).

The Declaration called for recognition of the importance of pleasure for individuals, people of different identities, and communities in order to experience consensual pleasures in the ways they want and need, without shame or guilt. It proved to be a major milestone in enhancing the credibility of sexual pleasure, as it was the first time an international body had honoured the importance of pleasure, building on work undertaken as part of the earlier WAS 2014 Sexual Rights Declaration. Supporting evidence prepared for the Pleasure Declaration included papers on gender and pleasure, trauma-informed pleasure-based sexual health, and evidence that safe sex can be not only pleasurable but good for your health (Ford et al. 2021).

These events coincided with our long-held ambition to provide definitive credible international evidence that pleasure inclusive sexual health interventions could improve sexual and reproductive health. After a detailed systematic review of over 15 years of scientific research on the links between pleasure and SRHR outcomes, together with the World Health Organization we were able to conclude that, ‘taking all the available evidence into account, we recommend that agencies responsible for sexual and reproductive health consider incorporating sexual pleasure considerations within their programming’ (Zaneva et



al. 2022, p. 1). Our meta-analysis of a subset of studies further showed that pleasure inclusive sexual health interventions, as compared to the usual standards of care (fear and disease based), had a significant and positive further impact on condom use.

As the importance of sexual pleasure grew, we recognised the need to create a greater number of pleasure champions and experts to expand thought leadership and contextual advocacy. We called out to appoint a series of ‘Pleasure Fellows’ and were overwhelmed by applications, largely from Africa, South Asia and Latin America. We identified 12 fellow pleasure enthusiasts from Chile to The Philippines, who themselves had come to recognise how ‘flipping the narrative’ broadens pleasure and creates connections between different identities.

The third pillar used to expand our pleasure practice was to create the Pleasure Principles<sup>3</sup>, seven inspirational, fun and practical steps to implement pleasure based sexual health<sup>4</sup> for practitioners. We felt that these were needed to enable the ultimate goal of more pleasurable safer sex in the world. We saw more and more how ‘flipping the narrative to pleasure’ also created connections between diverse identities, communities and individuals, triggering increased conversation, nuance and wisdom among people who had also come to see pleasure as we saw it - a connecting factor between people, their environment and the world.

### **Raising collective consciousness to orgasm: Poor women have orgasms too**

But what about poor women - they have so many other jobs to do, like fetch water, feed the kids and tend the goats, you should not be putting an additional burden on them of pleasure. (Conference participant at AIDS 2010)

We have encountered some critique of our approach to pleasure over the years and continue to do so. Our narratives of pleasure and the eroticising of condoms seemed to be rub up against the narratives of some of the international development or health care organisations intent on ‘saving’ others, at the cost of mutual flourishing. Their criticisms of our approach reflected other types of power (e.g. dismissal of women’s pleasure by the patriarchy) and privilege (e.g. the policing poor women’s pleasure). This critique also reinforced the idea that the availability of pleasure should be available determined by class (higher), ability, sexuality (heterosexual), marital status (married), age (younger), and gender (men), and was a ‘luxury’ for all others.

The trauma-based ‘agency-less’ identities created by the international development industry, have produced a lack of focus on pleasure and joy, or erotic justice. They include the ‘empowerment’ programmes that only focus on showing adolescent women how to say no, and never what they want in relationships, or which focus only on an STI diagnosis, or the negative consequences of sex and not the pleasure that is possible for the person despite it. Paradoxically, this pleasure-based stigma also meant those working in the industry of sex and pleasure, such as sex workers or porn film actors, were not ‘allowed’ to feel pleasure at work. Instead, sex-negative activists reinforced narratives of ‘reproductive tragedy’ focused on what needed to stop (e.g. maternal illness and death), rather than on the need for good reproductive health, pleasure and justice. This pleasure hierarchy - and its resonance with Gayle Rubin’s (2006) *Charmed Circle of Sexual Privilege*, whereby it is more legitimate for heterosexually married couples to experience pleasure than single women, queer people and sex workers - was one in which pleasure was only available to those whose basic needs had been met, or who were in relationships legitimised by social norms, or were not experiencing violence.

These contradictions stimulated us to think more broadly how international development made it easy for one funder, employee or activist to dismiss another person’s wish for sexual pleasure. This did not sit well with our own belief that sexual pleasure should be available to those who choose to have it and our intersectional feminism. We were clearly challenging norms that failed to recognise women’s agency in respect of sensuality, sexuality, pre-colonial history and alternative narratives of pleasure. We found ourselves on dangerous ground by suggesting that pleasure extends beyond orgasm and penetration; and that safer sex also means agency, imagination, creativity and respect.

The comments, dismissal and querying we faced at numerous global feminist and sexual health conferences between our launch in 2004 to the present day echoed what others were saying, and we found refuge in the words of many African and other Black feminists, such as Sylvia Tamale (2006), who had long spoken about this diminished and incorrect view of heritages of pleasure. Carol Vance’s work offered a beacon of hope, as she had long highlighted the tension in female sexuality as a ‘domain of restriction, repression, and danger as well as a domain of exploration, pleasure, and agency’ (Vance 1984, p. 1). Our assertion was that playing with yourself not only costs nothing while still bringing you joy, but also

that it was one of the few things that were literally in the hands of women or other people whose sexuality was seen as marginal.

We began to see a thread of similarity between pleasure practices and articulations of sensuality across different cultures and times, that were silenced, shamed or dismissed as unimportant. More recent decolonising development perspectives have enabled us to articulate how a concern for erotic justice can enable us to reclaim narratives of sexuality, eroticism, desire and joy as legitimate, credible, empowering and shared. Informed by such a perspective, our work with the International Planned Parenthood Federation's Africa Regional office on the Treasure Your Pleasure campaign (2022) aimed to encourage young people on the continent to feel comfortable, safe, and excited to learn about sex, consent and safety through social media campaigning. It has also included efforts to understand love-making through a spiritual lens, creating a connection between mutually desirous individuals opening them 'to full liberation, a willing vulnerability and an ecstatic release' (Nyar Kano 2022).

Over the years, we have moved from our earlier activism to promote pleasure as a route to greater condom use or safer sex, to knowing it can also be a portal to collective consciousness raising as to what brings us joy, well-being, a sense of peace and how to make our bodies feel good. We have always felt that pleasure could be the ultimate indicator of gender empowerment and equity – through a focus on what makes us happy and how to express what we want. Describing what gives us pleasure can connect us to others. It helps build our 'pleasure muscles', the bits of us that have been forcibly disconnected - by shaming, exhaustion, overwork, rigid gender roles, harassment, violence – enabling us to remember how good it can feel to be in our bodies. Building this bridge from sexy safer sex promotion to a broader vision of gender equity and flourishing has enabled us to develop bigger visions of our own liberation. We realised that there was a more inclusive spectrum of sensuality and eroticism that could start with stopping to admire the way the light falls on a damp leaf, and end with articulating exactly how we want our clitoris to be stroked, while in the meantime starting to build an assertiveness that is not about setting up a bank account in our own name (important as that may be) but is deeply rooted in the recognition of our capacity for deep and lasting joy. Such a perspective has been advanced, among others, by the EcoSexual Movement (Sprinkle and Stevens 2023) and its concern to show how loving our planet can be sexy (see also Chapter 28 by Ewelina Jarosz in this volume).

## **Erotic Justice – does it pay well?**

Up until 2019, we received no consistent funding and relied largely on our own voluntary time, which had been the case since the birth of The Pleasure Project. We had to do other work to allow us to be pleasure activists, and collectively managed to attend global conferences, using determined and sometimes stubborn guerrilla girl tactics of cheap printing, fly posting toilets and positive provocation using conference scholarships. It took brash creativity and enduring passion to achieve our goals.

This made funding and resourcing decisions very real for us - and pleasure stigma very clear as our funding requests were repeatedly turned down between 2006 and 2019. We started to think more about who has the legitimacy to make resource decisions that enable pleasurable sex - such as for health services, or contraception or sex and relationships education. We continue to question this. We suspect funding arrangements have influenced a portrayal of women who live and love in poverty as the victims of men's desire to elicit justifications for an intervention. These geo-political and historical structural determinants mean that we question our own internal narratives which leads us to question our pleasures and desires, and even how we view our own bodies, if we have experienced violence, 'othering', or shaming due to feminine, queer, trans or diverse ethno-racial identities.

However, we did receive some small and instrumental project funding from two early pleasure adopters – DKT International and the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex. Funding from the Pathways of Women's Empowerment Programme through IDS enabled us to write a literature review 'Everything you ever wanted to know about pleasurable safer sex but were afraid to ask' (Knerr and Philpott 2008) and led to us publishing a chapter (Philpott and Ferris 2013) about watching safer sex porn as a potential form of harm reduction. These were important steps on the pleasure journey for us and built our confidence to continue to fight for maligned pleasures.

## Pleasurable chronicles for the greater good: Bridging our pleasure gaps



Figure 47.3 Posters from 'The Great Wall of Vagina' a community art exhibition, Eat Me Restaurant, Bangkok, 2004.

Beyond our activism in the spheres of public health and HIV prevention, we have flexed our pleasure imaginations to blur the boundaries between public health, sensual creativity and the sex industry to reduce silo-ing of public health from lived experience and creativity. We wanted to create advocacy that gave people joy, gave us joy, and created a stir and a giggle. We had a hunch that bridging gaps between biomedical education and community art might make advocacy more appealing.

We first did this by creating a community art project entitled The Great Wall of Vagina during the 2004 International AIDS Conference, but off site at the queer-owned 'Eat Me' Restaurant in Bangkok (Figure 47.3). The project grew out of an exercise on how to use internal/vaginal condoms and provided a space for people to unleash their creativity and spotlight female pleasure. Contributors were asked to draw their own vaginas, their vision of a vagina or a vagina they knew well. We were asking people to draw vulvas, but we used the term vagina as common parlance to mean the genitalia that people assigned female at birth are born with. Our reasoning for doing so was that women's desire is frequently overlooked;

we live in a world where penises are privileged and more visible than vulvas; where the words for women's genitalia are often used as cuss words. Things have changed since that time, but then the art exhibition was greeted with a giggle, a sly glance and a shy picking up of the pencil or paints.

At another such exhibition in Delhi in 2010, Arushi was talking to a group of girls about drawing vaginas, while a man attending a different conference nearby looked on. He came over and asked why Arushi was encouraging people to draw vaginas (Figure 47.4). She explained that the Great Wall of Vagina was aimed at demystifying the silence around female genitals, sexual activity and desire, and opening up a conversation about pleasure that was not only privileging men, but also promoting the internal, or female, condom with a better understanding of where and how they fit. She then asked him if he would like to draw a vagina. His response was, 'No, no, no, no, I'm a neurologist!' and walked away - as though the brain was not the greatest instrument of pleasure, as though drawing a clitoris might erase his memory of what a brain looked like, and as though the illustrated juices of a vagina might short-circuit his dopamine pathways.

We often employed such expressions and celebrations of communal yet silenced knowledge with public health professionals, intending to shock them out of comfortable definitions of bio-medical phenomena such as 'insertive probes and receptive cavities' (read penis and vagina). We wanted to question the reduction of human sexual experience to statistics describing the number of people using condoms or modern contraceptives or engaging in 'risky' behaviours. At international HIV and family planning conferences, we put up posters asking how many people play with themselves that night, and exhorting people to think about pleasure when they were done with family planning (Figure 47.5).



*Figure 47.5* Conference poster we created for the International AIDS Conference in 2010, and the International Conference on Family Planning in 2016.

These advocacy tactics generated conversation and debate - which was what we wanted - and (grudging) recognition of the fact that the public health community had forgotten real, messy, fun sex, pleasure and bodies.

We found solace in a small group of ethical and feminist porn performers who were using their expertise to show how to have safer sex in creative and practical ways, and how safety involved much more than latex, but included mental health, the queering of sexual identities, and worker protection. The 2009 Berlin Porn Film Festival showed Anne that air-sex<sup>5</sup> is a much under-rated method of safer sex and what was possible in honouring polymorphous pleasures. She watched porn films that were tinglingly erotic, but often totally safe. She remembers one that showed only a bottle of milk poured from an open (quite inviting) fridge across a woman's own body. And how that was sexy.

Porn has become sex education globally, and most young people see more explicit sex in one Google search than their grandparents would ever have seen at their age. We see building

bridges between sex education and porn expertise as a key element of our mission. We have always wanted to wake up the public health community (Knerr and Philpott 2006) to the risks posed by the monopolisation and exploitative practices of the big online porn multinational companies. Feminist porn film producers, such as Sex School Hub, are creating a space and dialogue demonstrating how pleasure is central to the practise of safe sexuality, and the liberatory effects of centring well-being and pleasure. Our work has been diverse: we have supported ethical porn film makers in their exploration of inclusion of safer sex and made films for use in a large, randomised controlled trial in the UK supported by the Medical Research Council, to understand how sexually explicit films may reduce sexually transmitted infections (Newby et al. 2018).

### **Finishing off: Connecting erotic well-being to sexual pleasure, fulfilling life, joy and freedom**

Where has this left us for now on our journey from erotic safer sex activists to creators of sexy evidence, to educational erotica creators, to persuasive pleasure principles policy makers?

We know that erotic justice is about flourishing for all, and the questioning of entitlement, power and hierarchies. It includes constructions of desire that are not dictated *only* by those in power. Instead, it seeks a recognition of desire as based on epistemic justice,<sup>6</sup> whereby knowledge is not held by a few but by a wide range of diverse peoples. It seeks to support constructions of desire that are not located in a sense of breaking taboos, but in enabling safety, respect and dignity (Naraharisetty 2022), with no assumptions about gender identities, sexual orientations, or sexual activities or wants, and which celebrates consent by allowing wider imaginations of sensuality.

To achieve erotic justice, we need to focus on inequities within communities and the sharing of power socially and collectively, not just individual liberation. We seek pleasure that is for everyone, not just orgasms for certain people. Pleasure is not about selling wellness products or toys. Sexuality and eroticism are not separate from the socio-cultural, political and legal universes, but are interlinked and interdependent.

We, the public health, prevention, international development, porn, and the pleasure industries have a unique moment to get there - we are emerging from the COVID-19



pandemic, still hurting from the HIV pandemic, post-Internet and pre-climate crisis. There are opportunities here to radically re- imagine a more inclusive vision of identities, the planet and related pleasures as being connected to, and raised to one-ness with, each other (Figure 47.6).



Figure 47.6 Our vision of Pleasure Land. Credit: Ipsita Devi. Copyright The Pleasure Project 2022.

We continue to aim towards a positive vision of a world in which people and communities' consensual desires are celebrated, accepted, and welcomed as part of being human and desiring one another. Where there are no inequities of sexual well-being, or recognition and adjustment for existing inequities, this allows for free and consensual expression of desire and love according to personal boundaries and discussion of these evolving boundaries. We recognise that human life is messy and complex, and it is hard to imagine a world completely free of power and inequalities, but we believe it is important to aim for and imagine a world of erotic justice, in which being polymorphous and polyamorous, and so many other aspects of being a human with capacities for multiple pleasures, would be celebrated, accepted and 'normalised'.

We have developed the following pleasure manifesto for this chapter and the Handbook, to inspire you with our vision of erotic justice. Interestingly, at the same time as we were writing this article, another pleasure champion – the Agents of Ishq – have published a manifesto on the Political Power of Pleasure (Vohra and Srinivasan 2023). Great pleasure minds think alike.

### **Our erotic justice (wo)manifesto**

#### **Means**

- having an open and fearless understanding of our multiple capacities for joy
- loving and living erotically by arriving at a knowledge of knowing what we want (and therefore do not want), and acknowledging that this can change with time and context
- connecting to and recognising feelings and sensations that give us joy (and don't)
- expressing our desires without shame if/while they do no harm to others and the planet
- talking about sexual pleasure as we currently talk about the pleasures of food - with all that love, care, tastes and joy - and collective recognition of that joy and hunger
- feeling joy in our connections of pleasure beyond 'sex' or the bedroom, by letting the power of the erotic move through your life in other ways rather than being defined or bound by the feeling in your genitals to reconnect to our sense of sensuality, we might view a bright flowering bush with total joy, or get a rush in our senses at the smell of baking
- feeling excited to discover sex that you have never heard or read about - those unscripted desires and the power of creativity in our sexualities if we move beyond the prescribed roles
- enjoying the creativity of being with another person(s) / bodies and discovering their joys and sharing unscripted versions of pleasure that you discover for yourselves
- relishing the joy we can create for others - and looking that directly in the eye and face and body
- reclaiming our understanding of joy, desire and pleasure as connecting us to the planet and our surroundings, that doesn't require us to buy anything or have to exchange our labour for that pleasure
- speaking out the possibilities of pleasure for all, that challenges notions / ideas / practices that diminish / silence individuals who are unable to speak out yet

- sharing endeavours not only valued by systems in power, but also such as creating a collective open source pleasure knowledge bank, or a bank of ever expanding shared fantasies
- using pleasure to reduce stigma and shame as well as connect people through recognising our diversities
- stopping fearing the yes within us and see it in others
- opening our aspirations for our own pleasure and joy, and then walk alongside others to see what can be universally available to us in all our pleasures.

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<sup>1</sup> The current working definition of sexual health by WHO can be found here [https://www.who.int/teams/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-research-\(srh\)/areas-of-work/sexual-health](https://www.who.int/teams/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-research-(srh)/areas-of-work/sexual-health)

<sup>2</sup> Sensual belly or hip beads that can shine or make a noise.

<sup>3</sup>The Pleasure Principles are available here: <https://thepleasureproject.org/>. By endorsing the Pleasure Principles and taking the steps to make their sexual health interventions more effective, more honest and appealing for their sex lives, the sexual health community is changing the way we arrive at sexual and erotic justice. We know good safe sex saves lives. It also enhances them

<sup>4</sup> Our definition of pleasure based sexual health and other resources, definitions, erotic condom demonstrations, campaign materials, publications, evidence, and articles referenced in this article can be found at <https://thepleasureproject.org/>.

<sup>5</sup> Much like playing an air-guitar, air-sex is a form of movement that is an imaginary simulation of sexual activity.

<sup>6</sup> The notion that ‘knowledge’ is not the domain of one kind of (dominant or powerful) person or institution and that the knowledge held by diverse (and/or marginalised) individuals, communities or types of institutions is valid and valuable.