



Michalina Wisłocka's *The Art of Loving* and the Legacy of Polish Sexology

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Published online: 9 January 2020
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Abstract

This article discusses the development of Polish sexology as well as the challenges of sex education in Poland in general and the implications of Michalina Wisłocka's work within the field of adult sex education in particular, both from a historical perspective and against the background of sociopolitical circumstances and the backlash in the sexual politics of today's Poland. Michalina Wisłocka (1921–2005) is the author of *Sztuka kochania* [The Art of Loving] from 1978—the most widely read Polish handbook on sex, sexuality and eroticism. Although there has not been a sexual revolution in Poland, the success of the book may be considered revolutionary as it had an enormous impact on sexual awareness among the Poles at least for two decades after its publication. Nowadays, the book is considered groundbreaking as regards its normalizing effect on the language of sex, despite the omnipresence of gender role stereotypes. Even so, the revival of Wisłocka that has been seen in Poland in recent years is quite remarkable because the book appears traditional and largely outdated from today's perspective. In the context of the postsocialist retraditionalization of sexual politics in Poland, however, the revived interest in Wisłocka seems less ambiguous since it can be perceived both as a sign of backlash and a sign of renewed demand for sexual knowledge and education.

Keywords Michalina Wisłocka · Socialist sexology · Polish sexology · Sex education · Sexological handbooks

Introduction

More than 40 years have passed since the most popular Polish guide to sexual life, Michalina Wisłocka's *Sztuka kochania* [The Art of Loving], was published in 1978. However, Wisłocka's life and work have been brought to light again in recent years.

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Since the publication of the first biography of Michalina Wisłocka in 2014—*Sztuka kochania gorszycielki* [The Art of Loving of a Scandalous Woman] by Violetta Ozminkowski—a reedited version of Wisłocka's *ars amandi* appeared in 2016, followed by the publication of Wisłocka's autobiography in 2017. Subsequently, Ozminkowski's biography inspired a movie adaptation, *The Art of Loving: The Story of Michalina Wisłocka*, directed by Maria Sadowska (2017). By just two weeks after its premiere, this had been seen by over a million people, thanks in part to effective media marketing. The 2016 reedition of the once popular *The Art of Loving* was discussed in the press, often in the historical context of the development of the so-called "Polish school of sexology."¹ The newly emerged media interest resulted in several interviews with well-known sexologists.² Wisłocka's work was promoted as still valid and up-to-date. However, some of the rereadings of the book proved otherwise, claiming that the book was considerably outdated, promoted conventional gender roles, and should be treated as a document of the era in which it was written.³ In fact, the idea of love and marital life endorsed by Wisłocka in her book appeared rather ordinary compared to the extremely out of ordinary particulars of the author's private life and marriage revealed in Maria Sadowska's film.

Today's revival of Wisłocka's work could, expectedly, be perceived as symptomatic in the context of what Polish and international scholars interpret as the post-1989 backlash and politics of restoration.⁴ The return to traditional gender roles and patterns implied radical political measures (the introduction of the restrictive abortion law in 1993, followed by further restrictions of women's reproductive rights) aimed at preserving traditional Catholic family values. However, since the 2015 elections were won by the national conservative political party Law and Justice, anti-feminist, anti-gender and anti-equality discourses became mainstream in Poland and the "politics of gender restoration" have taken a new turn, resulting in the so-called "war on gender ideology", "biopolitical war against women,"⁵ anti-abortion legislative proposals aimed at a total ban on abortion, campaigns against LGBTQ rights and—only recently—in legislation criminalizing sexual education for minors. In light of current political developments, Wisłocka's timeworn book on sex and sexuality may actually be at risk of being banned as too radical and outspoken.

Wisłocka's *The Art of Love* was written in the 1960s–70s, i.e. during the period of state socialism in Poland. The development of sexology under state socialism in Poland was marked by many tensions, contradictions and ambiguities because

¹ The "Polish school of sexology" concept was created by Agnieszka Kościńska—an expert on the development of sexology and sexual education in Poland in the 20th century (see e.g. Kościńska 2017).

² Prof. Zbigniew Izdebski and Prof. Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz, former colleagues of Wisłocka, gave interviews on topics such as the history of Polish sexology (Aksamit 2017a, b).

³ See e.g. Wróbel's review of the new edition of the book (2017).

⁴ Apart from international scholarship concerning postsocialist changes in regard to gender equality, women's reproductive rights, and sexuality (see e.g. Gal and Kligman 2000, Glass and Fodor 2007, Gradska and Morell 2018), Polish scholars who have studied the post-1989 political situation in Poland include Agnieszka Graff, Magdalena Fuszara, Wanda Nowicka, and Magdalena Grabowska.

⁵ See Ulrike Guerot and Michael Hunklinger (eds.), *Old and New Cleavages in Polish Society*, Krems: Danube University Krems, 2019, pp. 85–87.

the discipline trespassed into an area that was culturally and socially prohibited and controlled by the Church. On one hand, sexual life had been a hidden area of human experience, regarded as something shameful and impure because it was related to carnality and the lower regions of the mortal body—i.e. the sphere of the profane. On the other hand, procreation—the act of creating and giving life—belonged to the sphere of the sacred, and as such guarded by moral and social codes, and the Church. As a part of a socialist modernization project in postwar Eastern European societies, this area of human life was subjected to gradual secularization—with different results. The Socialist period was consequently the time when Catholic sexual morality and the efforts of Polish sexologists proved hardly compatible.

The aim of this article is to explore the incongruities and contradictions between a culture-specific perspective on sexual life, social practice and the achievements of domestic and foreign sexology as they emerge in Wislocka's text. The article also investigates the beginnings of Polish sexology and the dynamics of its subsequent development with the aim of shedding light on the discipline as a specific field of theory and practices (both educational and therapeutic) resulting in one of its milestones: Michalina Wislocka's *The Art of Loving*.

Drawing on previous research, especially the studies conducted by the anthropologist Agnieszka Kościańska (2014b) and the historian Małgorzata Fidelis (2010), the article starts with a historical background and the view on sexuality during the period of state socialism. The succeeding section consists of a short overview of the Kraków-based pioneers of Polish sexology, namely the anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski, the sex therapist Stanisław Kurkiewicz, and intellectual and activist Tadeusz Boy Țeleński as well as the legacy of the Society for Conscious Motherhood and women's rights activism of the interwar period.

The role of Professor Kazimierz Imieliński as the founder of Polish institutionalized sexology in the 1970s is discussed in the following section. Thanks to Imieliński and his predecessors, Polish sexology developed a social constructionist perspective on sexuality with a view on sexuality as always socially and culturally embedded, contrary to traditional biomedical perspectives (developed in the United States after World War II) that tend to consider sexuality universal and immutable.

The article owes a lot to the work of the abovementioned Agnieszka Kościańska—one of the leading researchers on development within the field of sexology in Poland—who have explored many aspects of Polish sexual science, its setbacks and achievements as well as its development and backslides (2014a, b, c, 2016, 2017). Furthermore, the work of Czech sociologist Kateřina Lišková, *Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style: Communist Czechoslovakia and the Science of Desire, 1945–1989* from 2018, offers a comparative overview of the development of sexual science in the Central European countries (Hungary, Poland and East Germany) and similarly interesting insights into, in a way, analogical development in Czechoslovakian sexology. While sexual science has been widely studied in the West, there are not so many extensive studies on its development in state-socialist countries—Kościańska's and Lišková's works are successful attempts to fill the gap. In this context, Wislocka's work *The Art of Loving*, has usually been studied as a part of a bigger development.

Thus, the main part of the article consists of analysis of the latest, updated reedition of Wisłocka's *The Art of Loving* from 2016 that was supplemented with additional chapters and up-to-date expert commentary. The focus is on the cultural implications of the social/cultural constructivist method that left an impression on the structure of her popular scientific narrative. It seems that Wisłocka's preoccupation with the cultural and social contexts, while progressive in its recognitions of e.g. the implications of economic hardships on sexual life, also opens up for a rather conservative discourse on gender subordination. In this discourse, it is always the woman who has to be the more compliant, submissive and empathetic one, while at the same time being morally superior to the man. In that sense, some of Wisłocka's observations may seem not only obsolete but also controversial from today's perspective, offering a blend of sexological knowledge and conservative notions of gender and binary gender roles as the only way to achieve satisfactory sex, which were specific to discussions of sexuality of that time, not only in Poland but also in other state-socialist countries (Lišková, 46–47). However, Wisłocka may also be regarded as essentialist, closer in her thought and arguments to difference feminism rather than feminism of today.

Family Laws and the View on Sexuality Under State Socialism

The general attitude towards sex and sexuality during the period of state socialism was ambivalent and characterized by double standards that marked Polish society of that time. Despite the formal separation of church and state (as it was formulated in the new Constitution of 1952), both actors existed “in a cooperative dynamic of *antagonistic interdependencies*” (Mishtal, 135). The main reason for this might be the strength and endurance of the Church and its unwavering position in Polish society due to the age-long influence over the upbringing of the young, its role as keeper of Polish identity, culture and traditional Christian moral values, as well as its social influence through its sacraments, charities, custodianship of records, etc.⁶ Moreover, in the late 1970s the Church strengthened its position as not only an adversary of the state (by supporting the anti-communist opposition and offering a refuge from an intrusive state-socialist politics), but also a moral authority. Eventually, towards the end of the 1980s, the Church's view on gender, sexual morality and sexual and reproductive rights had to be taken into consideration by both communist authorities and the opposition as the Church had grown steadily stronger as a political actor.

⁶ Tellingly, during the postwar period 1945–1950 the newly established Polish communist government took rather cautious and moderate legislative actions toward Church. The Church recovered the right to its properties taken over by the Nazis, the war-damaged Church buildings were rebuilt at public cost, its organization was re-established and soon the clergy resumed their religious activities and were even permitted to continue religious instruction in public schools (Cieplak 1969, 17). At the same time, measures aimed at secularizing marriage and other areas of social life were taken and the situation for the Church got worse during the period of Stalinization, resulting in the subsequent arrests of the priests, including Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński 1950–53 (Cieplak, 19–21).

The communist authorities' position on sex was quite conservative due to the moral standards prevalent in the overwhelmingly traditional Catholic Polish society. Paradoxically, in the period of De-Stalinization (following the death of Stalin in 1953), which meant liberalization on many different levels, including liberalization of the anti-abortion law, "the party state officials' pronouncements linked women's identity more to motherhood than to production or political activity" (Fidelis, 171). On the one hand, under the Polish Code of Family Law of 1950 one of the main objectives of the socialist state was to guarantee "the stability of the family and marriage", which were no longer "based on property relations but rather on feelings and friendship" (Fidelis, 176). The premise of socialist family laws was to be morally superior to the bourgeois decadence and loosening of sexual morals in the capitalist West. On the other hand, even though the socialist legislation was quite progressive as regards women's rights, family policies and development of the social welfare system, people's attitudes were conservative as regards gender relations within the private sphere. In other words, women in socialist society were—at least in theory—granted more freedom and equal rights, but at the same time the Stalinist (and Catholic) conservative model with a focus on the importance of family and marriage prevailed.

In light of the above, Michalina Wisłocka's work *The Art of Loving* (1978) appears to be a product of its time as it reflects the conflict between a new socialist vision of family life and secular, modern marriage and the traditional Catholic view on gender roles and marriage. In practice, the merging of the communist ideology and Catholic tradition proved extremely challenging e.g. for the development of a comprehensive and effective sex education in public schools.⁷ Interestingly, sexological research on e.g. transsexualism seemed to develop independently of the party ideology and sex reassignment surgeries were carried on in Poland as early as the 1970s and the 1980s and—in addition to that—they were state funded (Kościańska 2014b, 928).

⁷ Sexuality education in Polish schools was established by law in 1969, although it was not officially declared an obligatory subject—instead it was obligatory as an educational goal. Initially, the subject "Przysposobienie do życia w rodzinie socjalistycznej" [Preparation for life in a socialist family] was introduced in the 8th grade (for 15-year-olds) but the education was limited to a basic explanation of anatomical and biological aspects of human reproduction as well as general information with an emphasis on family life (Woźniak 2015, 127; Kozakiewicz 1985). Nowadays, the subject is called WDŻWR "Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie" [Family Life Education] with a start in the fifth grade (12-year-olds). Its core curriculum has been based on maintaining sexual abstinence, preferably until marriage, according to a cultural scenario regulated by the present-day sexual politics in Poland, often with a reference to moral reasoning. Since 2015, this scenario has leaned towards the Catholic moral ethics even more—it has not only supported traditional gender role families as the most important part of social life, but also omitted the discussion of LGBTQ identities, disapproved of abortion, criticized in vitro fertilization, contraception and masturbation. Since the inclusive, up-to-date sex education system is insufficient in Polish schools, third-sector volunteer groups such as Ponton Group and the Łódź-based SPUNK Foundation, activists and celebrities come up with different ideas to help educate teenagers about sex.

The Pioneers of Sexology in Poland

From the beginning, the development of sexual science in Poland owed a lot to joint efforts and ideas of not only scientists, but also versatile intellectuals and inventors, medical doctors and activists. The first Polish sexuality studies of sexual life were based on surveys carried out among over five hundred male students at the University of Warsaw in the late 19th and early 20th century.⁸ During the same period, the foundation of modern sexual science was laid by individuals such as Bronisław Malinowski (1884–1942), the famous Polish anthropologist who studied the sexual life of the inhabitants of the islands of Papua New Guinea,⁹ and a Cracovian physician named Stanisław Teofil Kurkiewicz (1867–1921), who should be regarded as the true pioneer of early Polish sexology and sex therapy.¹⁰

While Malinowski's *The Sexual Life of Savages* (1929) is considered a classic in the field of anthropology and its influence on early European sexology is indisputable, Kurkiewicz has long been an anonymous figure.¹¹ The recent studies try to reevaluate his contributions to the development of early Polish sexual science, including sex therapy, and his attempt to create the language of sexology in particular (Depko 2005; Jarosz 2017; Tomkowska 2017). Polish intellectual, gynecologist and a profeminist activist Tadeusz Boy Țeleński (1874–1941) is, on the other hand, a pioneer in the progressive sexological tradition of promoting conscious motherhood, gender equality and access to contraception, and decriminalization of abortion and homosexuality in Poland (Țeleński 1958, 1959, 1984). In the interwar period, Boy Țeleński teamed with his friend, writer and columnist Irena Krzywicka (1899–1994), to battle social problems related to unplanned parenthood in Warsaw. In 1931, they were among the founders of the first Polish institution promoting conscious motherhood and birth control, namely *Poradnia Świadomego Macierzyństwa* [The Clinic of Conscious Motherhood] in Warsaw.

In postwar Poland, the work of the clinic was continued by *Towarzystwo Świadomego Macierzyństwa* [Society for Conscious Motherhood], which was established in 1957 (during the De-Stalinization period) and later developed into an officially subsidized network of nationwide clinics (Mishtal 2009, 137–138). Among its founders were Michalina Wisłocka (who at the time worked as a gynecologist),

⁸ The study comprised several surveys conducted in 1898, 1904 and 1934 and focused on students' (aged 17–27) premarital relations and sexual partners. The study itself was characterized by moral hypocrisy because women's experiences were not at all addressed in the study (Weseli 1999; Sobczak 2015).

⁹ Bronisław Malinowski's work not only influenced Polish sexual science but also had an impact on German pioneers of sexology: the communist psychoanalyst and author of *The Sexual Revolution* (1936) Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957), and the sexual rights activist and founder of Institute of Sexual Research Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935).

¹⁰ In 1902, Kurkiewicz introduced the term "seksuologia" [sexology] into Polish language (Kurkiewicz 1905). He also made the first attempt to establish sexology as a separate branch of science in the interwar period (Depko 2005, 26–32).

¹¹ Kurkiewicz's work in the field of sexology was not completely unobserved as one of the pioneers of German sexology, Magnus Hirschfeld, mentions Kurkiewicz's work when discussing different theories on masturbation (Hirschfeld 1921).

a well-known writer named Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina and a medical doctor named Jadwiga Beaupré.¹² The latter became the head of the newly opened office (Fidelis 2010, 195). The *Society for Conscious Motherhood* has existed and operated under different names in Warsaw and several other Polish cities since 1957. Currently, the organization functions as an NGO under the name *Towarzystwo Rozwoju Rodziny* [Society for Family Development].¹³ The aim of the organization from the beginning has been to promote sex education among young adults, to provide aid and advice to individuals and couples in crisis situations, as well as to provide care and counseling in sexual health and family planning. All the famous sexologists of the socialist period and of today, including Mikołaj Kozakiewicz, Kazimierz Imieliński, Michalina Wisłocka and Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz, have been connected to or active in the organization and contributed with their expertise, counseling, and writing information brochures in order to improve general awareness of the benefits of family planning.

The Golden Age of Sexology in Poland

During the postwar period, an important development took place in the 1970s and the 1980s as regards theory and methodology within the area of Polish sexual science. This was mainly thanks to Kazimierz Imieliński (1929–2010), who came to be acknowledged as the founding father of the Polish postwar school of sexology after he had established the first sexology departments at the medical university (*Collegium Medicum*) in Krakow in 1973, and later at the Centre of Postgraduate Medical Education in Warsaw in 1981. Imieliński was also the first to receive the title of sexologist in 1962.

In the 1960s and the 1970s, he authored numerous books about sexuality and sex therapy. His *Życie seksualne. Psychohigiena. [Sexual Life: Psycho-hygiene]* from 1965 may be considered one of the first Polish textbooks in sexology (Kościańska 2014b, 926–927).¹⁴ Moreover, he initiated an intellectual and scientific exchange with other socialist countries, in particular Czechoslovakia where the field of sexology was growing particularly rapidly (Kościańska 2014c, 73; Lišková 2018). Together with another sexologist, Stanisław Dulko, Imieliński dealt with the problem of transsexualism in Poland and authored several publications on this subject—including a book *Apokalipsa płci* [The Apocalypse of Gender] from 1989 that

¹² In 1956, Jadwiga Beaupré (1902–1984) founded a labor ward in Nowa Huta, where she started the first childbirth classes in Poland. She was also the author of a handbook for pregnant women *Macierzyństwo* [Motherhood] (1967) and other handbooks about sex and birth control.

¹³ In 1959, the organization was admitted to the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). See trr.warszawa.pl (Accessed 2019-11-14).

¹⁴ The book addressed such topics as sexuality among youths; guidelines for parents on how to talk to children about sexuality; masturbation, sexual techniques; sexuality of men and women; reasons for sexual conflicts; contraception; sexuality in the context of various illnesses, work overload, alcohol abuse, etc. It was translated into Russian (1972) and Czech (1983).

comprises anthropologically oriented analysis of interviews with transsexual persons as well as their letters, diaries, autobiographies.

As a sexologist, Imieliński was strongly influenced by his supervisors and mentors, Prof. Tadeusz Bilikiewicz and Prof. Kazimierz Dąbrowski (who were not only medical doctors and psychiatrists but also philosophers and intellectuals) and by the German school of sexology, which Imieliński became acquainted with during his visit to Germany in the 1950s. Imieliński developed a humanist view of sexology as he treated it as a part of the knowledge of the human being.

It is believed that sexology is a highly narrow specialization. This is a huge misconception. Needless to say, that is closely related to medical disciplines such as psychiatry, neurology, urology... *But please note links of sexology to disciplines which are not part of natural sciences:* to pedagogy, law, psychology, and even someone could insist – to theology. (Quoted in Kościańska 2014b, 926; emphasis added)

In his works, Imieliński created his own definition of sexology as an interdisciplinary field within medical science and explored sexuality as a multidimensional phenomenon rooted in different kinds of relationships, culture, economy, and society at large. Thus, the model of sex therapy that he proposed was biocultural, taking multiple aspects into consideration: physiological, psychological, relational and cultural. This methodological approach was fundamentally different than the biomedical model applied in the studies of sexuality in the United States since the publication of William Masters and Virginia Johnson's *Human Sexual Response* (1966). In Poland, no one ever conducted Masters and Johnson-style laboratory research—Polish sexological studies were, and still are, based mainly on case studies and interviews with patients as well as letters sent to sex counselors (Kościańska 2014b).

In her article “Beyond Viagra: Sex Therapy in Poland”, Agnieszka Kościańska, describes some major distinctions between Polish and American sexology. One of these was access to state funding, which was quite generous in Poland and other socialist countries at that time, thereby granting freedom in research and enabling international scientific collaborations (obviously, mainly within the Eastern bloc). At the same time, researchers in the US were most often dependent on pharmaceutical companies as a source of funding. The groundbreaking Masters and Johnson's research was based on the results of laboratory observations and focused on physiology which, as Kościańska argues, was a way to legitimize controversial research (2014b, 923). They stressed the sexual similarities between men and women, although their study showed that women's sexual experiences differ (e.g. women could experience multiple orgasms and, moreover, clitoral orgasms). Moreover, the researchers “did not take into account any non-physiological circumstances, such as psychological functioning and sociocultural settings (for instance power relations in relationships), or any subjective experiences”, which would undoubtedly reveal different aspects of women's sexuality (923). Although Masters and Johnson suggested behavioral treatment of sexual dysfunction, their study of the anatomy

and physiology of sexual response became a springboard to developing a clinical approach to the treatment of sexual problems and sexual dysfunction (including erectile dysfunction), which was effectively used by pharmaceutical industry. In a way, it paved the way for the invention of sexual drugs, such as Viagra.¹⁵

Owing to the given political and economic context, socialist sexual science was not tied to the market and thus remained holistic until the advent of a market economy in the 1990s. However, according to Kościańska, Polish sexology has proved to be resilient against the influence of the medical industry even after 1989: “There is a general consensus between the physicians and psychologists that the activity of the pharmaceutical industry in the field of sex therapy is too extensive and invasive” (931–932). Nowadays in Poland, training for future sexologists is still multidisciplinary and consists of elements of psychology and frequent references to humanities and social sciences (932).

Wisłocka's *The Art of Loving*

In the 1970s and the 1980s, the success of her *The Art of Loving* was unprecedented. The book was reedited several times, sold millions of copies (including pirated reprints) and translated into Russian, Czech, Bulgarian, Romanian, Chinese and English (Wisłocka 2016, 16). Its success may be the reason why people assume that it was the first book on sex and sexuality in Poland, when in fact there had already been several sexological books for adults and young adults in existence prior to its publication in 1978 and shortly thereafter.¹⁶ One might also get the impression that Polish sexology was born in the 1970s. However, the development of the discipline would not have been possible had the engagement and knowledge of the interwar-period professionals not laid the groundwork already, although its accomplishments have remained on the fringe of Polish awareness until now.

If Kazimierz Imieliński is thought of as the Father of Polish sexology, then Wisłocka deserves to be called the Mother of Polish sexuality education. Michalina Wisłocka never actually obtained a specialization in sexology—at the time she received her doctor of medicine degree in 1969, sexology had not yet been established as a specialization. Wisłocka was a practicing gynecologist, cytologist and an ardent advocate of sexual education, which became the main incentive for her work.

She finished her medical studies in 1952 and became a gynecologist specializing in the treatment of infertility and contraceptive methods. Prior to the publication of *The Art of Loving*, she had published several informative books and brochures

¹⁵ In contrast to Masters and Johnson, in her writings Wisłocka took into consideration various forms of non-physiological obstacles that a couple has to overcome (such as shortage of space in an overcrowded dwelling) or other kinds of obstacles causing sexual dysfunction, such as exhaustion as a result of a double workload that women experienced due to the gender politics of socialism.

¹⁶ In particular, these include Dr. Mikołaj Kozakiewicz's publications, such as *Małżeństwo niemal doskonale* [Almost Perfect Marriage] and *O miłości prawie wszystko* [Almost Everything about Love] for young adults—both published in Warszawa 1973. Later, in 1983, Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz published his famous book *Seks Partnerski* [Sex on Equal Terms].

on the methods of contraception for the abovementioned *Towarzystwo Świadomego Macierzyństwa* [Society of Conscious Motherhood] (Wisłocka 1959, 1966). As a gynecologist, she traveled around the country and advised women on how to avoid unwanted pregnancies. She was skeptical about contraceptive pills and recommended “natural” methods of contraception and cervical cups instead. In the “Introduction” to *The Art of Loving*, she explained that she had finished the work on the book already in 1974, after 15 years of medical practice that included conversations with female patients and responding to letters sent to the *Society of Conscious Motherhood* where, as mentioned before, she worked as a counselor and answered questions that readers sent to the editorial office of the monthly publication *Zdrowie* [Health].

In the introductory section of *The Art of Loving*, the author tells the story of its publication. The finished manuscript of the book was submitted for publication in 1974, but the communist censorship deemed the book offensive because of its explicit contents—particularly the visual images—and confiscated it. In the communist Poland of the 1970s, when access to any material concerned with sex was considerably limited, sexological books like *The Art of Loving* were not only the main source of discourse on sexuality, but also functioned as a substitute for the prohibited pornography and erotic images (Nijakowski 2010, 211–212). Hence, the authorities’ reluctance to publish Wisłocka’s book. The manuscript had been kept “behind bars” for four years before it was finally published by Iskry in Warszawa in 1978. Before that, however, the instructive pictures of sexual positions were made four times smaller than their original size, and an image of a couple in wedding clothing appeared on the front cover of the book (Wisłocka 2016, 15–16; Ozminowski 2014, 240). Promotion of the book as a handbook for married couples was crucial. After all, “the aim of socialism was not only to grant women equal rights but also to benefit them by strengthening the family” (Fidelis 2010, 176). Consequentially, when Michalina Wisłocka finally published her *The Art of Loving*, the West had already gone through the sexual revolution of the 1960s and the second wave of feminism following it.

On the back cover of the recent 2016 reedition of *The Art of Loving*, the book is promoted as a “handbook for couples [...] that, despite the passage of time, is still remarkably up-to-date”. At the same time, in his introduction, the well-known sexologist, Prof. Izdebski, places Wisłocka’s work within a historical context, admitting that, from today’s perspective, Wisłocka represented a conservative point of view, particularly in regard to gender roles (Izdebski 2016, 8). (Juxtaposed, these two statements seem as a peculiar commentary to the current political development and to growing negative attitudes towards sex and sexuality.) Wisłocka’s emphasis on the difference between feminine women and masculine men and male vs female sexual experience, as the reader finds out, consistently and persistently permeates her narrative throughout the book.

The original ten chapters of *The Art of Loving* are written in the first person narrative and the author adopts a conversational style, which serves to engage the reader

in a personal and intimate conversation that includes telling personal anecdotes and stories from individuals' own experiences, citing fragments of letters sent to her by her patients, referring to well-known literary classics and quoting poems.¹⁷ Her language is modern and almost free from weighty, specialist terminology. She employs this way of writing in the chapters on love, eroticism and sensuality in particular. At the same time, a more formal tone dominates in the chapters explaining biological mechanisms of sexuality, and the author refers frequently to the international sexological research, such as the Kinsey Reports or Masters and Johnson (however, with no reference to Eastern European cooperation). The sexological terminology that she uses is not artificially constructed (the linguistic purism of her predecessor, Dr. Stanisław Kurkiewicz proved unsuccessful, Kurkiewicz 1913), but consists of the already well-established and standardized terms that appear in the areas of biology, psychology, sociology, medicine and anthropology.¹⁸ At the same time, Wisłocka manages to introduce a number of new terms into the Polish vocabulary of sexuality, including the English words “necking” and “petting” (Wisłocka 2016, 67).

In the 1970s, despite the development within the field of sexology and the requirement of sexuality education at schools, the lack of elementary knowledge about sex and contraception among Poles in general was, obviously, still acute because Wisłocka devotes a whole introductory section to explaining the natural method of contraception for teenage girls (Chapter II, “Miłość młodzieńcza” [Adolescent Love], 57–64), and all of Chapter VIII to different methods of contraception for adults (287–325). For young women, she recommends a method called basal body temperature monitoring. In fact, she suggests that teenage girls should learn it with the help from the mothers as soon as they start to menstruate, i.e. from the age of 12 or 13 (57).¹⁹ In the chapter on different methods of contraception, Wisłocka mentions modern hormonal methods such as the oral contraceptive pill²⁰ and intrauterine device, however, she is not in favor of either (307–319). The methods that she finds suitable, effective and recommendable, even in regard to unexperienced

¹⁷ Among the quoted classics are *Kamasutra* and Fromm, Stendhal, Balzac, Nafzawi as well as Coventry Patmore, and Margaret Mitchell; and Polish Kochanowski, Sienkiewicz, Morsztyn, Boy Żeleński and Fredro.

¹⁸ In the chapter on the sense of hearing, Wisłocka addresses the problem of the deficiency of Polish erotic language, especially among the young Poles, and mentions earlier more or less successful attempts to create a vocabulary of sex, referring to old Polish erotica written by such classic Polish writers as Mikołaj Rej, Jan Kochanowski, Aleksander Fredro and Andrzej Morsztyn, however, without any mention of Kurkiewicz (Wisłocka, 99–104).

¹⁹ Nowadays, these methods may be used with the help of various fertility or birth control apps for smartphones, such as Natural Cycles, the ineffectiveness of which has recently been debated on social media and in various newspapers, e.g. The Guardian (<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/jul/21/colossally-naive-backlash-birth-control-app>) (Accessed 2019-11-14).

²⁰ In Poland, oral contraceptives were imported mostly from abroad (and mostly from the Western countries) and tested for the first time in the 1960 s. However, their distribution at that time was restricted to only a few gynecology centers and the aforementioned *Society of Conscious Motherhood*. The first Polish oral contraceptive pill, called *Femigen*, appeared on the local market in 1968–1969 (Ignaciuk 2018, 137–138).

couples, are “coitus interruptus”, the abovementioned temperature method and, alternatively, the so-called mechanical methods (nowadays referred to as “barrier methods”) such as condoms and cervical caps (293–306).²¹

Reflections on abortion are gathered in the section entitled “Najgorsze rozwiązanie” [The Worst Solution] in the same chapter. Wisłocka’s position on this issue is quite clear: she is definitely against it, not only because it may result in infections and various physical complications, but it may also make women infertile, despite the fact that the author describes the conditions at modern hospitals and modern healthcare as satisfactory (290). She also emphasizes that husbands should leave the decision about abortion to their wives (289).

From today’s perspective, the chapter that is most dated and even quite offensive to contemporary women readers is undoubtedly Chapter II (in particular the section “Odrębność świata uczuciowego i zmysłowego dziewcząt i chłopców” [Disparity of the Emotional and Sensual World of Girls and Boys], where the author explains that pubertal boys are looking for new sensations and that their sexual development considerably exceeds their emotional growth, while it is the reverse for girls. The most controversial, however, are her thoughts about rape, which she considers an aberrant form of “discharging sexual tension” (48).

Watching film reports on collective rapes, I was wondering if, in many cases, the victims of individual or collective rape are not as guilty of the situation as the rapists, and only as an ultimate outcome—the more injured. (...) In the field of sexuality, progress and equal rights for girls and boys have considerably surpassed the knowledge of imperturbable natural laws governing physical and mental bodily changes of young people and, in consequence, left girls in a way more vulnerable and exposed to sexual aggression. On the other hand, the ordinary recklessness of girls exposes boys, by means of sexual arousal that is particularly intense during this age, to compromising shame, court sentences and, at times, derailment from the path of healthy development already in their early years.²² (My translation, 49)

²¹ The author’s insistence on “natural” methods of contraception might be considered in the context of the Western feminist thought of roughly the same period, e.g. Maria Mies’ *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (1986), which foregrounded women’s use of natural methods of contraception in contrast to their contemporary dependence on hormonal pills usually prescribed by (male) medical professionals. Mies connects the natural methods to the feminist myth of women’s autonomy before the rise of modern capitalism. “Recent feminist research has revealed that, before the witch hunt, women in Europe had much better knowledge of their bodies and of contraceptives than we have today.” (Mies, 54–55).

²² “Oglądając sprawozdania filmowe dotyczące zbiorowych gwałtów, zastanawiałam się, czy w wielu wypadkach ofiary gwałtu indywidualnego lub zbiorowego nie są tak samo winne zaistniałej sytuacji, jak gwałciciele, a w ostatecznym efekcie tylko bardziej pokrzywdzone? (...) W dziedzinie seksu postęp i zrównanie praw dziewcząt i chłopców wyprzedziły znacznie wiedzę o niewzruszonych prawach rządzących przemianami fizycznymi i psychicznymi w organizmie młodzieży i pozostawiły dziewczęta w jakimś sensie bezbronne, narażone na agresję seksualną. Chłopców natomiast, poniesionych napięciami seksualnymi, bardzo gwałtownymi w tym wieku, zwykła lekkomyślność dziewcząt naraża na kompromitację, kary sądowe i niejednokrotnie wykołowanie się z drogi prawidłowego rozwoju już w latach młodzieńczych.”

The author's argument in the above translated quotation develops in two directions: towards victim blaming and a particular view of equal rights and progress in society as something threatening the traditional and "natural order of things". Notably, this fragment has remained unchanged since the book's first release in the 1970s. Does this mean that the editors have found this view of rape and rape victims still valid? Arguably, this view is still present in the discussions of various kinds of violence against women, objectification and sexualization of women in media.

The subsequent Chapter III "Zmysły" [Senses] is devoted to the exploration of the cultural dimensions of sexuality, focusing on the role of imagination and fantasies during the phase of establishing sexual attraction. Wisłocka goes through a long list of certain physical features, appearances and characteristics that potential or actual male partners find particularly attractive and appealing in women (e.g. shaved armpits, graceful movements, fine make-up, smiling, sobbing etc.). All this is interwoven into an overarching story of "true feminine" and "true masculine" roles.

A tempting, flirtatious, mysterious, joyful, sad, or casual smile contains countless possibilities. One can observe that joyful and laughing women are always accompanied by a group of interested men, and sad women remain lonely. (...) There is a general rule—crying looks good on blondes with childlike facial features and large eyes, when the tears flowing down the cheeks make the tip of the nose slightly pink. (...) Brunettes tend to get red eyelids and red spots on the face while crying. I would not recommend crying to women who react in this way because the sight of them will not delight or beguile a man—on the contrary, it will make him want to escape this in every way unpleasant situation.²³ (My translation, 87)

In Chapter VI discussing orgasms, the author questions Masters and Johnson's claim that woman experience only clitoral orgasm (231), which could be read as her contribution to the ongoing debate about vaginal vs clitoral orgasm of that time. In fact, her insistence on describing methods for women to achieve vaginal orgasm in a way shows that she valued a specific form of sex, namely penetration, which is preferable in marriage for reproductive reasons. After all, according to Wisłocka, only marriage could provide an essential frame for "healthy sex" (Kościańska 2014b, 929). At the same time, it has to be emphasized that Wisłocka does not actually claim anywhere in the book that sex should always lead to conception. On the contrary, the author emphasizes the meaning and significance of pleasure and, more so, pleasure on equal terms, although the ways to achieve pleasure may differ for women and men. In order to question Masters and Johnsons' assertions that there is no other

²³ "Uśmiech kuszący, zalotny, tajemniczy, radosny, smutny czy zdawkowy kryje nieprzeliczone możliwości. Można zauważyć w towarzystwie, że kobiety radosne i roześmiane zawsze otacza grono zainteresowanych mężczyzn, a smutne pozostają samotne. (...) Istnieje ogólna zasada - płacz zdobi blondynki o dziecinnych rysach twarzy i dużych oczach, jeśli łzy spływające na policzki powodują co najwyżej lekkie zaróżowienie końca nosa. (...) Brunetki mają skłonność do czerwienia powiek i występowania czerwonych plam na twarzy w czasie płaczu. Kobietom tak reagującym nie radzę płakać, ponieważ widok ich nie zachwyci ani nie rozbroi mężczyzny, a raczej wzbudzi chęć ucieczki z sytuacji ze wszech miar nieprzyjemnej."

but clitoral orgasm and, probably, to support her own argument about the existence of vaginal orgasm, Wisłocka gives a controversial example, namely female genital mutilation. Her approach to female circumcision as an anthropologic curiosity would certainly require more explanation than her text offers. Describing the reasons for the procedure (which in Europe, she admits, is treated as “barbaric”), Wisłocka quotes an ethnographer of the Bantu tribe:

This treatment gives Muslim and Negro women, who are naturally endowed with a strong sexual arousal, the chance to experience orgasm harmoniously and simultaneously with their partner.²⁴ (My translation, 231)

Wisłocka’s discussion of vaginal orgasm as the mature form of climax for women reveals a certain understanding of a “healthy” sexual relationship that, in spite of the author’s willingness to provide a progressive view on sexuality, tends to meet the views on sex and marriage promoted by patriarchal institutions such as the Catholic Church. And, although it is unclear whether the author had access to Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theories of women, her views on young women’s sexuality are much in line with his arguments in “Female Sexuality” (1931), in particular as regards masturbation and clitoral orgasm, which she considers typical of an immature stage in the development of young women.

On the whole, Wisłocka’s book describes all stages of love and female and male sexuality—from childhood, through adolescence to marital love—where the author discusses relationships between mother and child, girl and boy, woman and man in terms that are very far from a feminist perspective and that are not only based on gender stereotypes but also reinforce them. For instance, the author suggests that for a satisfactory sex life woman should operate mostly in the domestic space and should allow men to “conquer” them. Sex on equal terms—a key to sexual satisfaction according to her—is defined as a relation between feminine women and masculine men. On one hand Wisłocka considers sexuality and eroticism to be one of the most important elements of a healthy relationship, while on the other she respects social conventions and norms of the time when sex was supposed to be practiced only within heterosexual marriage. It is not without reason that in English translation by Waldemar Podolak *Sztuka kochania* was entitled *A Practical Guide to Marital Bliss* (1987). Nevertheless, in the context of the 1970s even the statement “there are no frigid women, only understimulated ones” could have been considered as revolutionary for Polish women as the discovery of clitoral orgasm was for American women. In other words, one could say that Wisłocka (like other famous Polish sexologists) was too straightforward in her thinking and—most importantly—verbalizing sexuality in socialist Poland, but too conservative to be the patron of modern sexology influenced by Western gender theories. Consequently, although the reedited version of the book has got an additional, new Chapter XI on contraceptive methods, written by recognized gynecologists Prof. Mirosław Wielgoś and Dr. Beata Wróbel, it is doubtful whether young people today, in the Internet era, would

²⁴ “Zabieg ten daje kobietom muzułmańskim i murzyńskim, obdarzonym z natury dużą pobudliwością seksualną, szansę przeżywania orgazmu harmonijnie i równocześnie z partnerem.”

consider looking for guidance and instructions there. Besides, Wielgoś and Wróbel discard Wisłocka's advice on natural methods of contraception as noneffective, emphasizing the fact that nowadays such methods are not considered to be contraceptive at all ("Natural for a woman is only conception. There is no such thing as 'natural contraception'." My translation, 375). And, some of the fragments of the book would need a considerable revising or at least a critical commentary—in particular as regards the chapters on the different gender characteristics and different gender roles ascribed to girls and boys, women and men.

For a contemporary reader, the reedited version of *The Art of Loving*—a source of sexual knowledge for several generation of Poles—possesses certain historical and, for some, rather sentimental value. Today's revival of Wisłocka's life and work could perhaps be explained as a public interest in the real person behind the well-known sex educator. Hence, the success of the biography about her written by Violetta Ozminkowski and its movie adaptation directed by Maria Sadowska. Both the biography and the movie focus on Wisłocka's personal and family life and demonstrate that, despite the idealistic view on love and marriage, Wisłocka's marital life was anything but blissful. At the same time, we learn that her personal life was surprisingly nonconventional.²⁵ In the light of this failed nonconventionality, Wisłocka's conservatism is anything but surprising.

Conclusion

As to Wisłocka's role in Polish sexology, we should refer to her as an educator (the Poles have already given her a nickname "Pani od seksu" [colloq. "the teacher of sex"]) and a popularizer of sexual knowledge. Most importantly, she achieved what other sexologists before her tried but not really succeeded to accomplish,²⁶ namely she managed to write about sexuality in a way that even teenagers could grasp and understand.

The analysis of *The Art of Loving* shows in what sense Wisłocka belongs to the tradition of Polish sexology that developed mainly as an interdisciplinary, culture-oriented discipline in contrast to the biomedical perspective. Similar to Imieliński's method, Wisłocka's approach is anthropological and biocultural. Instead of looking for the physiological and biological explanations to human sexual behaviors, she attempts to describe how culture affects biological and sexual capacities and

²⁵ Her story is told through several decades: the postwar 1940 s, the Stalinist 1950 s, and the Polish People's Republic of the 1970 s, revolving around the polyamorous relationship and its subsequent dissolution through a classical triangle drama between Michalina, her husband Stanisław, and her best friend Wanda. The drama also involves two children: Krystyna, the daughter of Michalina and her husband, and Krzysztof, the son of Wanda and Stanisław. We follow Michalina in her struggle to get her book published, dealing with the Polish communist censorship. Later, when her marriage ends, we follow Michalina's love affair with Jurek, who awakens her sexually.

²⁶ Before Wisłocka, handbooks about sex were published by the aforementioned Imieliński or Kozakiewicz. Others, like e.g. Tadeusz Bilikiewicz, write about sexuality from a medical perspective.

limitations, paying attention to different aspects of human sexual experience involving interactions with other individuals in a given social context.

In her book, Wisłocka combined her own observations made through her gynecological practice as well as new medical and scientific findings regarding sexuality with literature and philosophy. As a sexologist, she followed the path of her Polish predecessors and, even when she referred to American sexologists and in particular to Masters and Johnson's research, she contextualized her conclusions and stressed that "physiology cannot explain everything".²⁷ However harmful the gender stereotypes she relied on appear today, Wisłocka was coming from a progressive sexological tradition of promoting women's rights, sexual rights, conscious motherhood, access to contraception and abortion (even though Wisłocka's attitude towards abortion was quite conservative). The effort she made in order to publish the book, in spite of the reluctance of the authorities and book censorship, demonstrates her determination in a country where communist ideology merged in a peculiar way with Catholic tradition, and where sex reassignment surgeries were allowed and state funded, but comprehensive sex education was not.

The revival of Wisłocka's work seems to be symptomatic of the sociopolitical situation in Poland today. The post-socialist retraditionalization in terms of gender relations that has been taking place since 1989, which so far has resulted in numerous restrictions on women's rights, including restrictive abortion legislation (and attempts at further restrictions of the law towards a total abortion ban), limited access to contraceptives and the conscience clause; the restrictions of sexual minorities' rights, the war on "gender ideology", ignoring of sexual education, etc. are the obvious signs of backlash. However, despite the changes in political situation, Polish sexology endures (nowadays deprived of state funding) and explores formerly non-existent topics such as homosexuality and queer sexualities, while the *Polish Sexological Society* (led by Prof. Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz) continues its educational mission through sex therapy, counseling and educational work.

However, the status quo of Polish sexology and sexual education is endangered. After the parliamentary elections on October 13, 2019, the Parliament received a new law proposal to criminalize "the promotion of underage sexual activity", drafted by a civic initiative named "Stop Pedophilia." The bill, which was a response to the demands of introducing sex education into Polish schools in accordance with WHO standards, gained the support of the ruling party. The new legislation would basically remove sex education from Polish schools make sex education illegal as "the promotion of underage sexual activity." In effect, sex educators, teachers, authors, and organizations providing information on reproductive health and sexuality could face a three-year prison sentence. On their website, the Polish Sexological Society announced their position against the new legislation.²⁸

²⁷ We can see a similar approach in the works of Prof. Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz (b. 1943)—Imieliński's former student and Wisłocka's younger colleague—who is nowadays one of the most reclaimed sexologists and is still professionally active.

²⁸ The Polish text of the announcement: <http://pts-seksuologia.pl/sites/strona/114/stanowisko-p-t-s-w-sprawie-projektu-ustawy-o-zmianie-ustawy-z-dnia-6-czerwca-1997r-kodeks-karny-zawartej-w-druku-sejmowym-nr-3751-penalizujacej-dzialania-z-zakresu-edukacji-seksualnej> (Accessed 2019-11-14).

Acknowledgements Open access funding provided by Stockholm University.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

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