

REVIEW

Later Life, Sex and Intimacy in the Majority World

Krystal Nandini Ghisyawan, Debra A. Harley, Shanon Shah and Paul Simpson, Policy Press, Bristol, UK, 2024, 244 pp., hbk £80.00, ISBN: 978-1447368410

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Later Life, Sex and Intimacy in the Majority World is the fourth book in the Sex and Intimacy in Later Life series published by Policy Press. The series is a valuable and thorough effort to address the relative lack of professional, public and academic attention to sex and intimacy in later life. The series aims to make a significant contribution to the development of studies on the intersections of age, sex, sexuality and intimacy, while also reaffirming older people as sexual agents.

The book foregrounds the voices of older adults from the Global South and East, as well as minority populations in the Global North, to critically challenge the perception of older people as asexual and to question the dominance of Western, predominantly White epistemologies in framing understandings of sex, sexuality and intimacy. In doing so, the book illuminates less-visible forms of relationships and disrupts hegemonic narratives surrounding sexuality. It positions ageing as a dynamic process – a continuum of ‘becomings’ throughout life – that transcends binary conceptualisations of sexuality and intimacy in later life. Furthermore, it maintains a strong theoretical, conceptual and empirical foundation, drawing on decolonial, poststructuralist, phenomenological and feminist theories as applied by scholars originating from, or connected to, the Global South and East.

This book is organised into 11 chapters, comprising an introduction and three thematic parts. Chapter 1, ‘Introduction to the volume: themes, issues and chapter synopses,’ authored by the editors, provides a foundation for the overarching themes and issues of the book. Part 1, ‘In/visibility and ambivalence,’ comprises three chapters that examine the invisibility of older adults as sexual beings in various contexts, considering multiple intersections. Chapter 2, ‘Under the Orhni: Intimacy and near-invisibility among older Indo-Trinidadian queer men,’ authored by Krystal Nandini Ghisyawan and Marcus Kissoon, explores the experiences and constraints related to sexuality and intimacy faced by this ‘near-invisible’ (p. 22) ethnic group throughout their lives.

Chapter 3, 'Older Kinnars, ageism and sexuality during the Covid-19 pandemic', by Anushkaa Arora, delves into the experiences of India's 'third-sex' community, examining the gendered, age-related, and sexual stigmatisation they endure, rooted in British colonialism. The final chapter in Part 1, Chapter 4, 'Doing complex intimacy in the lives of Chinese gay men in Hong Kong', by Barry Lee and Travis SK Kong, presents a qualitative study on the experiences of older Chinese men concerning sex and intimacy. This study highlights the ambivalence they face, positioned between Confucian traditionalism and the colonial legacies of British rule, which has shaped hetero- and homonormative expectations.

Part 2, 'Women questioning age/ing intergenerationally and intragenerationally', comprises three chapters. Chapter 5, 'Deep within the eye of the beheld: exploring hidden accounts of intimacy in the lives of older Indian women in urban Malaysia', written by Sally Anne Param, delves into the experiences of first- and second-generation migrant Indian women in Malaysia. It examines how patriarchal ideologies and socio-economic structures contribute to the normalisation of silence and the subordination of older women within this context. Chapter 6, 'From age of despair to window of opportunity? Reframing women's sexuality in later life in the Middle East and North Africa', by Shereen El Feki and Selma Hajri, provides a critical assessment of how menopause is approached in the Middle East and North Africa, reframing this stage of life from a period of despair to one of potential opportunity. Chapter 7, 'Lost voices of Partition: Carrying gender, nation, and femininity across the life course', by Nafhesa Ali, explores how socio-historical events, specifically the Partition, have influenced the lifecourse and sexual experiences of older South Asian women who migrated to the UK as children.

Part 3, 'Agency through fantasy, erotic tales, and pleasure', comprises three chapters. Chapter 8, 'Sexual fantasies and older, Indigenous Purépecha women: sociocultural constraints and possibilities', by Cuahtémoc Sanchez Vega, examines the constraints on sexual expression rooted in pre-Hispanic culture and Spanish colonialism. It explores how Purépecha women in northern Mexico exhibit sexual agency through the expression of their sexual fantasies. In Chapter 9, 'Indigenous elders as sexual agents: storytelling as a queer and decolonial practice in Canada', Madeline Burns argues that Indigenous elders serve as guardians of their communities' intimate and sexual histories, preserving them within a culture that values fluidity and gender diversity. Chapter 10, 'Sex, intimacy, and later life in Muslim contexts', by Shanon Shah, investigates how sex, intimacy and later life are portrayed across various Muslim cultural sources. Finally, Chapter 11, 'Reflections: themes and issues emerging from the volume', written by the book's editors, addresses the tensions between neocolonial and Indigenous influences on ageing sexualities and highlights the diverse experiences of ageing and sexuality in the Global South.

Later Life, Sex and Intimacy in the Majority World makes a valuable contribution to the field of ageing and sexuality by exploring later-life sexuality across varied cultural and societal contexts and challenging prevailing Western-centric perspectives. It emphasises the importance of engaging with cultures from the Global South and East (and minority communities in the Global North), dismantling stereotypes that portray these societies as sexually conservative or inferior. In doing so, the book moves beyond traditional narratives and provides insights into how ageing, sex and intimacy are

perceived and experienced across diverse cultural contexts, thereby enriching perspectives outside Western frameworks, and bringing visibility to often excluded groups. The volume deepens understanding by examining intersections of culture, historical context, migration, age, gender and sexual identity. Its incorporation of decolonial, feminist and poststructuralist theories is particularly effective and aligns well with the book's overarching aims. Despite the editors' efforts to create a culturally and contextually rich volume, however, future editions could broaden the scope by including additional ageing cultures that are absent from this book, such as those in South America, Sub-Saharan Africa or Polynesia. Expanding to these regions would further enhance the book's comprehensiveness and represent the diversity of the Global South more fully. Furthermore, regarding men's sexuality, it would be insightful to explore how heterosexual men in non-Western contexts experience ageing and sexuality, as the current chapters primarily focus on non-normative sexualities. Given contemporary critiques of traditional masculinity, exploring how ageing men in the majority world respond to these evolving dynamics would add valuable depth to the field.

This book offers invaluable insights for policy makers, researchers and students interested in expanding their understanding of ageing and sexuality beyond Western contexts, particularly for those seeking to develop culturally inclusive policies or research frameworks that account for the complex realities present in the Global South and East. By addressing intersectionality, cultural influences and the diverse, often underrepresented experiences of sexual expression in non-Western societies, this text provides a critical resource that broadens current discourse on sexuality in later life.

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