

Later Life, Sex, and Intimacy in the Majority World, edited by Krystal Nandini Ghisyawan, Debra A. Harley, Shanon Shah, and Paul Simpson. Bristol: Policy Press, 2024. Pp. 244. \$120 (hardback); \$41.99 (eBook).

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Later Life, Sex, and Intimacy in the Majority World, edited by Krystal Nandini Ghisyawan, Debra A. Harley, Shanon Shah, and Paul Simpson, is the fourth volume in the ambitious internationally focused series *Sex and Intimacy in Later Life* (Policy Press). This pioneering series is the first of its kind to create a platform to “explore, interrogate and enlighten upon the sensual” and, more importantly, the “intimate lives of older people” (xv). In the series editors’ introduction, Paul Reynolds, Paul Simpson, and Trish Hafford-Letchfield contend that there has been a significant oversight in public, professional, and academic/intellectual spaces regarding the matters of sex and intimacy in later life. The series addresses this gap by fostering critical inquiry into the domain, thus exploring the dynamics among age, sex, sexuality, and intimacy. In line with the series’ goals, this volume addresses how older adults are portrayed in terms of sexuality and aims to “recognize and reject the pathologies and prejudices that have infused this intersection” (xv) of age, sex, sexuality, and intimacy, giving rise to ageist erotophobia that actively denies older adults their right to be seen as sexual agents. In this light, this volume is a timely intervention in the emergent fields of aging and sexuality studies.

The volume sets out to fundamentally shift the geographical and epistemological focus of the series. Compared to the preceding titles, which largely draw on scholarship rooted in the Global North, this volume centers

epistemologies, experiences, and framings from the Global South and East, as well as from migrant and indigenous communities in the Global North. In doing so, it expands the current understanding of aging sexualities beyond the Western imaginaries, addressing a significant gap. Consequently, the editors call into question how existing studies regarding aging sexualities that have emerged largely from Western/Northern academics problematize aging as a period of decrepitude and innately asexual by forging frameworks and voices from cultures and minoritized communities that “‘think’ or ‘do’ sex and intimacy in later life differently” (2).

The volume is structured into three main parts, each consisting of three core chapters, and one extra chapter on “Reflections: Themes and Issues Emerging from the Volume”, integrated into the final part. Part I: “In/visibility and Ambivalence” emerges as one of the three major themes of the volume. This part directly addresses what the volume identifies as its most pressing issue, namely the ongoing “invisibility of older individuals as (il)legitimate sexual beings” (6). Anushka Aurora’s chapter “Older *kinnars*, Ageism and Sexuality during the Covid-19 Outbreak” is a fierce exploration of how far older *kinnars* (individuals identified in India as the ‘third sex’) are obliged to be invisible both within their community and the state, with no official legislation safeguarding their dignity, rights, or existence. At another level, the significant elements of ambivalence and themes of necessary secrecy and circumspection permeate chapters focusing on Chinese gay men and Indo-Trinidadian queer men. Two chapters, “Doing Complex Intimacy in the Later Life of Chinese Gay Men in Hong Kong”, and “Under the Orhni: Intimacy and Near-Invisibility among Older Indo-Trinidadian Queer Men”, authored by Barry Lee and Travis S.K.

Kong, and by Krystal Nandini Ghisyawan and Marcus Kissoon, respectively, highlight the importance placed on filial piety and how this deeply embedded cultural value shapes a common yet culturally distinct role in performing intimacy, visibility, and identity in later life. Moreover, these chapters divulge how sworn brotherhood and queer communities transpired, with the former serving as a culturally acceptable guise for intimacy among Chinese gay men and the latter as a space that reifies authenticity, intimacy, and a gateway to potential dating pools.

The second part engages with the theme of “Women Questioning Age/ing Intergenerationally and Intragenerationally”. Set amidst deeply ingrained patriarchal and socio-economic-cultural constraints, the chapters present empirical research focusing on older women’s experience of sex and intimacy across diverse contexts, including older Indian diasporic women in Malaysia, women across the Middle East and North Africa, and older South Asian migrant women settled in the UK. By applying both Marxist-feminist theory and Muted Group theory, Sally Anne Param’s chapter “Deep within the Eye of the Beheld: Exploring Hidden Accounts of Intimacy in the Lives of Older Indian Women in Urban Malaysia” explores the taboo subject of sex and intimacy among older Indian women in urban Malaysia. Param’s approach to understanding the subject offers new insight by employing an intergenerational dialogical approach that captures the quiet(ed) voices of the older generation. Similarly, Shereen El Felki and Selma Hajri, in “From Age of Despair to Window of Opportunity? Reframing Women’s Sexuality in Later Life in the Middle East and North Africa”, attempt to reframe women’s sexuality and reclaim its true potential by offering new narratives on the long-neglected topic

of menopause from the Middle East and North Africa. The authors provide a twenty-first-century perspective on how menopause is perceived and managed in MENA, through a review of the academic literature and selected clinical experience, and foster a biopsychosocial approach to understand it. The third chapter in this section, “Lost Voices of Partition: Carrying Gender, Nation and Femininity across the Life Course”, is notable for its focus on reviving the lost voices of women during Partition—a topic that is hardly acknowledged in contemporary social science literature. With the intention of scrutinizing the sexualization of older South Asian migrant women, Nafhesa Ali not only elucidates how women in later life subvert the ways in which their gender has been sexualized but also creates a nexus between age studies and partition studies.

The last three core chapters of this volume are part of “Agency through Fantasy, Erotic Tales, and Pleasure”. This section explores the ways in which women from indigenous and marginalized groups assert their sexual identities through imaginative acts, cultural narratives, and the reclaiming of historical texts. In their chapter on sexual fantasies and older, Indigenous Purépecha women in Mexico, Cuahtemoc Sanchez Vega highlights the sexual fantasies that showcase the value of older women’s sexual knowledge, asserting their potential for sexual agency and suggesting a new ethics of pleasure. Madeline Burns’ chapter, “Indigenous Elders as Sexual Agents through Storytelling as a Queer and Decolonial Practice in ‘Canada’” offers an analysis grounded in decolonial epistemology that rejects imposed Western and colonial frameworks and privileges indigenous worldviews. By defining sexual agency and relationality in non-anthropocentric terms, Burns focuses on the exploration of eco-erotic

histories and elucidates how elders subvert and resist settler colonialism and heteronormativity through storytelling. The third chapter in this section effectively destabilizes Orientalist and Eurocentric views on sex, intimacy, and older life in Muslim contexts. Shanon Shah examines nuanced historical and Islamic foundational narratives, primarily concentrating on the sexual and intimate life of the Prophet Muhammad, alongside two Islamic sex manuals. The analysis of these texts also shows that the acceptance of sexual expression has varied across different historical periods and Muslim contexts. The concluding chapter, “Reflections: Themes and Issues Emerging from the Volume”, authored by the editors, synthesizes the cross-cutting themes, prominently invisibility, silence, and respectability politics, illustrating how non-disclosure of sexual identity and desires is a strategic measure employed by older adults to protect family honor. The chapter also reflects on both the importance and the absence of intergenerational women and queer role models in building communities to resist the muting of subjectivities.

In conclusion, *Later Life, Sex, and Intimacy in the Majority World* is a valuable resource for scholars in age and sexuality studies. By providing a rich, polyvocal account of the sexual lives of individuals from diverse cultural and geographical arenas in the global south and East, as well as minority communities in the Global North, this volume successfully debunks the many stereotypes that create ageist erotophobia and calls out the Western tendency to homogenize and pathologize aging, sex, and intimacy in later life. Drawing on decolonial, postcolonial, and feminist frameworks, the authors spark curiosity and carefully pave the way for more researchers to study aging sexualities beyond the Western framework. In this way, the volume opens clear avenues for further research—

such as comparative studies of aging sexualities across the Global South and East, analyses of how colonial and neocolonial legacies shape intimate lives, and a deeper examination of intersectional experiences in later life. That being said, the volume is a detailed account of research that carves the space for older adults as active sexual agents within global sexual citizenship, thereby narrowing the gap toward achieving epistemological justice.