

Reviews

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W. P. Bouman and P. J. Kleinplatz (eds), *Sexuality & Ageing*, Routledge, Abingdon, UK, 2015, 185 pp., hbk £95.00, ISBN 13: 978 1138932630.

This book is a special issue that has been transposed into an edited collection. The special issue came out in the *Journal of Sexual and Relationship Therapy* in January 2015, and the edited collection in book format in August 2015. The edited collection is precisely the same as the special issue. The book comprises an introduction followed by 12 chapters. The introduction appears to be the verbatim editorial from the special issue which makes no reference to it now being an edited collection in book form. It is short – only two and half pages – and makes no references to the chapters which follow. It offers no theoretical or conceptual framework to link them and as a result they sit alongside one another as a series of unconnected papers.

Chapter One, ‘Older Women and Sexuality – Are We Still Just Talking Lube?’ by Lyba Spring, addresses sexual health issues affecting older women. The bulk of the chapter makes some very sensible points about heterosexually transmitted diseases. The penultimate paragraphs shift the focus somewhat surprisingly to cursory reference to capacity to consent and risk of abuse. The final paragraph contains six ungrammatical and clearly under-informed lines about lesbians and trans women (‘go back for the closet’; ‘What she had chosen not to undergo genital reconstructive surgery?’; ‘There are little caregivers who do not know about one’s body’). They seem to have nothing to do with the rest of the chapter, leaving a strong sense of equality and diversity tokenism and poor copyediting. Chapter Two is entitled ‘Are Sociodemographic Characteristics, Education and Training, and Attitudes Toward Older Adults’ Sexuality Predictive of Willingness to Assess Sexual Health in a Sample of US Psychologists?’ Written by Margaret Flaget-Greener, Cesar A. Gonzalez and Eric Sprinkle, it describes empirical research which suggests that psychologists trained in understanding ageing sexual health issues are more likely to engage helpfully with older adults who are experiencing them. Chapter Three, ‘Sexuality of the Ageing Female – The Underlying Physiology’, written by R. J. Levin, focuses on the menopause. It offers a very detailed physiological account of what the menopause entails and describes uncritically a list produced by other authors of ten evolutionary explanations for the menopause. When discussing the implications for sexual activity, heterosexuality is assumed. There is little or no reference to the psycho-social effects of the menopause, apart from a very odd comment at the end of the paper, that one of the benefits of the menopause

is that 'often, especially in the Western world, an extensive holiday travel itinerary can be undertaken'. Chapter Four, 'Relationships and Sexual Expression in Later Life: A Biopsychosocial Perspective' is written by John DeLamater and Erica Koepsel. This is, perhaps unsurprisingly, the strongest chapter in the collection by far. It provides an extremely competent review of the medical and bio/psycho-social literature on sexuality, sexual health and ageing. Indeed, it seemed odd for this chapter not to be the first in the collection, as it would have served to foreground and contextualise all of the others.

Chapter Five, 'The Influence of Health Over Time on Psychological Distress Among Older Couples: The Moderating Role of Marital Functioning', is written by Laurence Villeneuve and colleagues. It describes empirical research which highlighted the significance of marital functioning for psychological wellbeing among older couples. The study did not include same-sex couples, even though same-sex marriage has been legal in Canada (where the research was conducted) since 2005. Chapter Six, 'Individual and Relational Contributors to Optimal Sexual Experiences in Older Men and Women', is an interesting chapter written by A. Dana Ménard and colleagues. It explores what factors contribute to older couples in long-term relationships continuing to have 'great sex' together, based on a phenomenological study with heterosexual, bisexual and gay older adults aged between 60 and 82 (mean age 65.6). The authors suggest that maturity, mutual empathy and trust, and some degree of willingness to experiment and take risks play a key part in sexual satisfaction in later-life long-term relationships. Chapter Seven, 'The Association of an Open Relationship Orientation with Health and Happiness in a Sample of Older US Adults', is written by James R. Fleckenstein and Derrell W. Cox II. It reports on a study which compared two US surveys of older adults, reporting that 'participation (or interest in participation), in consensual non-exclusive sexual relationship styles can be rewarding and contribute to personal health and happiness, as much as or more than monogamous marriages' (p. 94). They mobilise the concept of 'gerotranscendence' which is 'a theoretical and ethical framework for predicting adults' openness to the possibility of sexual non-exclusivity and greater satisfaction from sexuality, even as they age'. The study itself has shortcomings in recruitment and selection, notably proactive recruitment of those committed to non-monogamy. The data are analysed quantitatively, with pages of dense statistics. Despite the meaning-orientated theoretical base, there is no meaning-orientated qualitative analysis, and a lack of critical rigour. Chapter Eight, 'Sex, Desire and Pleasure: Considering the Experiences of Older Australian Women', is written by Bianca Fileborn and colleagues, and reports on a study with 43 partnered women aged between 55 and 81, 42 of whom identified as heterosexual and one as bisexual. Herein lies the problem: this is a heterosexist analysis of ageing sexualities, uncritical of heteronormative constructions of sexuality and 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich 1980). This is particularly problematic given the

growing recognition of sexual fluidity among (older) women, which is acknowledged by the editors themselves in their introduction (p. 3). As such, this is a very partial and over-simplified analysis of a far more complex and nuanced issue.

Chapter Nine, 'Social Connection, Relationships and Older Lesbian and Gay People', by Catherine Barrett and colleagues, is an interesting paper describing small-scale qualitative research (in Australia) which shows how historical socio-political contexts can inform the ageing experience of older lesbians and gay men. In particular, they highlight the significance of friendships for those who have been rejected by their families, and the importance of service providers being aware of these issues. They make several valid points, and it is good to see these issues being raised in this collection. Chapter Ten, 'To Date or Not to Date, That is the Question: Older Single Gay Men's Concerns About Dating', written by Yiu Tung Suen, reports on a study of 25 older gay men in the United Kingdom. Suen highlights the tensions for older gay men in relation to dating, which include commitment/independence, conforming with/resisting couple normativities and sexual fulfilment/sexual freedom. He argues that (psycho)therapists need to be aware of these issues when working with gay men. This is an interesting and thought-provoking piece. Chapter Eleven, 'Old and Desirable: Older Women's Accounts of Ageing Bodies in Intimate Relationships', written by Rachel Thorpe and colleagues, explores embodied ageing, drawing upon 20 semi-structured interviews with women aged 55–72, 19 of whom were in heterosexual relationships. The literature review has some striking omissions, notably the work of Sara Arber (2006), Kathleen Slevin (2006, 2010) and Julia Twigg (2004). Although written engagingly and well, it is not clear how this new research adds to what is already known about older women and embodied ageing, and there is a lack of critical engagement with heterosexuality. Chapter Twelve, 'Midlife Menopause: Male Partners Talking', is written by Lih-Mei Liao, Sarah Lunn and Martyn Baker. It is based on interviews with eight men, with the aim of understanding how men understand (and can potentially support) their women partners during menopause. The paper lacks sufficiently detailed analysis and discussion following reporting of the findings, which identified the themes of 'female transformation', 'shared process' and 'sex taboo'. It would, perhaps, have been more fruitful to have interviewed both partners rather than just the men, in order to understand the complex dynamics involved in couples where the woman is undergoing the menopause.

All in all, 12 interesting chapters, of varying quality, many with a strong medicalised emphasis, which could have been more tightly edited and better held together within an overarching narrative and unifying conceptual framework. A thought-provoking special issue no doubt, but perhaps not one so strong that it also warranted an edited collection.

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Wenn Lawson, *Older Adults and Autism Spectrum Conditions: An Introduction and Guide*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2015, 208 pp., pbk £14.99, ISBN 13: 978 1 84905 961 9.

Many people are aware of, or know a child with autism; fewer people know or know of an adult with autism. Yet research suggests there are as many adults with autism today as there are children with autism. Adults with autism remain an unrecognised and under-resourced segment of the expansive ageing population. In this context, Wenn Lawson's book, *Older Adults with Autism Spectrum Conditions: An Introduction and Guide*, is both timely and relevant. It provides a vital, practical framework to increase understanding and awareness of the unique experiences of individuals ageing with autism. As an introduction and guide, Lawson sets out to identify potential differences and difficulties older people with autism may experience, and provide valuable, informational options of support strategies for professionals and carers. The text is punctuated by subjective accounts that highlight the implications, challenges and changes over time, both for the individual and within the social environment.

The structure of the book is well balanced and informative, with each chapter concluding with a review and key points. Moreover, Lawson's writing style goes beyond simple communication to make an effective impact for a wide audience, including professionals, carers, family members and adults ageing with autism. The content of the book covers differences that an older adult with autism may have; differences in communication ability, support needs, personality, learning styles and co-occurring mental health issues. It also covers preparing and planning for transitions and later life. Additionally, it presents insights, practical