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Chapter 12: Final Reflections: Themes on Sex and Intimacy in Later Life

Paul Simpson, Paul Reynolds and Trish Hafford-Letchfield

This volume was curated to launch the book series *Sex and Intimacy in Later Life* and aims to provide a coherent, critical overview of scholarship focused on the identitarian and intersectional experience of the age, sex and sexuality. As identified in the chapter introducing this collection, it forms part of a broader intellectual project that aims to put sex back into sexuality. With such considerations in mind, we wanted to produce a text that demonstrates that this emerging field of knowledge (covering a relatively neglected set of cross-cutting concerns) contains some vibrant scholarship and is starting to set an agenda for research. Our hope is that such an agenda can be articulated into policy and practice that, in time, could help validate, support and enrich the sexual and intimate lives of older people.

In effect, this volume has showcased a variety of work by emerging and established scholars based in Europe, Australia and the USA who are interested in later life sex and intimacy in various ways. As such, it has featured a mix of theoretical and theoretically-informed empirical work that has variously drawn on a wide vista of thought. This theoretical purview encompasses thinking mainly from social gerontology, structuralism, poststructuralism, anti-racism and various feminisms. Notably, the chapter by Debra Harley productively draws on feminism and anti-racist theory and would add to knowledge in social gerontology where accounts of the obstacles and opportunities for agency for older black women as quotidian sexual agents seem lacking. Generally, the contributions to this volume are very much part

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of an uncovering of the intersecting influences that help to make up later life sexuality as it enmeshes with other forms of difference. The character of a volume that foregrounds diversity in later life sexuality inevitably commits itself to an identitarian focus and, if more savvy, an intersectional one in various ways.

The main foci of this volume, (the recuperative and intersectional projects), rest on a threefold justification. First, it is important both to dispel stereotypes of ageing sexualities and to understand some of the complexities of older people's sexuality, sexual desires and pleasures. Second, understandings of the complexity of sexuality and intimacy in later life will be limited if not exclusionary if they simply mine the intersections between age and sex/sexuality without recognising the gender, racial/ethnic, disability and class-related (and other) identity characteristics that constitute the lived experiences of older people and how these influences impact on older people's sexual desires and pleasures. Third, we wanted to recognize that older sexual agents (who should be free to make informed choices with the contingencies and constraints that are present for others) work within particular cultures and environments. Hence, the mix of UK, European, US and Australian contributors give a flavour of the impact of diverse cultures and there is recognition of some of the specific environments that older people encounter such as care contexts. This is apparent in the chapter on sex and the oldest citizens (aged 75 and over) by Karen Rennie.

Whilst we would in no way claim that the volume presents a comprehensive survey of identities and intersections, we believe that the text does provide the reader with

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considerable insight, useful reviews of the state of current scholarship and extant and emergent questions to prompt further research. With such forward-looking considerations in mind, it would be a misnomer to regard the concluding remarks to this volume as an end-point or conclusion *tout court*. Any engagement with a text necessarily constitutes an open-ended exercise or dialogue and we wish to preserve this characteristic by providing some meditations on the themes and issues raised in the chapters. They reflect the influences of our different (and sometimes overlapping) disciplinary foci and different intellectual trajectories, which converge on the intersections of age and sex (and other influences).

To avoid a simple, pedestrian recap of the contents of individual chapters, this end-piece attempts a synthesis of overarching themes and issues that contributions point to, though, inevitably, we refer to individual authors where necessary. Subsequently, we move to discuss what this volume indicates about the state of scholarship in the emerging field and, finally, how this suggests an agenda for research and as a way of signposting to a forthcoming volume on desexualisation that will address some gaps in knowledge.

Overarching themes on sex and intimacy in later life

Reading across the ten substantive chapters that make up this volume on diversity in sex and intimacy in later life, several overarching themes become evident. These themes range from broader ontological issues that relate to how sex and intimacy are constituted, and include those that concern influences of complex webs of relations,

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of differentiation and socio-cultural positioning that in turn affect constraints on sexual and intimate self-expression. However, such concerns also have epistemological ramifications in terms of how differences and constraints are understood by differently located social actors. Indeed, how actors attach meaning to phenomena, (consciously or pre-consciously) becomes more relevant when we consider the countervailing forms of resistance to constraint and discourses that contribute to the desexualisation of older people – or what Simpson et al (2018) have termed ‘ageist erotophobia’. This concept was elaborated in the introduction to the volume and is at least implicit in all chapters within. Nevertheless, almost as much as we see constraint in this volume, we see intimations of creative agency that involve positive articulations of diversity and practices that transcend and offer critique of dominant societal expectations related to heteronormative and penetrative/genitocentric sex.

In addition to the theoretical issues just mentioned, there is a theme that concerns (theoretically-informed) policy and practice, which are necessary to undergird support for an ever-increasing social group. Ironically, older people living in more affluent ‘Western’ regions, which are considered ‘ageing societies’, often find their sexual needs, wishes and desires marginalized if not mocked, derided or denied. Yet, such forms of support are necessary if older people are to reclaim a more legitimate sexual citizenship on terms more convivial to them.

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The bases of later life sexuality/intimacy

Many chapters address issues that concern the bases of sex and intimacy in later life as a distinct set of accounts of experience. Drawing on a range of theories from those grounded in thinking about structural hierarchies to those more concerned with the operation of discourses (influences of narrative and language), various contributors have drawn attention to how sex and intimacy as practices and pleasures are formed at the confluence of a range of influences that variously span the social-cultural, psychological, socio-economic and political and biological. Indeed, some contributions are based on a notion that sex and intimacy are products of the dialectic between various structural-hierarchical and cultural-discursive influences.

The kind of insights just described are particularly visible in contributions by Harley, Hafford-Letchfield, and Simpson. Further, the chapters by David Lee and Josie Tetley and by Laura Scarrone Bonhomme all invoke biopsychosocial theory, which involves the interarticulations between three related forms/levels of experience (bodily and health-related issues, psychological and social influences) in shaping accounts of later life sexual practices. The chapter by Ela Pryzbylo, which draws on poststructuralist thinking, adopts a particularly original stance in one of its central arguments that ageing female sexuality, or rather the harmful desexualisation that older women experience, is bound up with a form of aesthetics, arising ageist, sexist and colonialist notions of beauty where the bodily changes of ageing are associated with disgust. Pryzbylo's critical project has also usefully distinguished between desexualization

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(where one is rendered sexless and unsexy) and a later life asexuality, which can involve a more agentic stance and include intimacy.

Whether one finds the above-mentioned ways of thinking convincing or not, such complex formulations, nonetheless, are indicative of the value of theories that recognize the multiform character of how sex and intimacy are produced in different ways in relation to diverse older people.

Influences of relationality and differentiation

We would also argue that essential to any understanding of sex and intimacy are the interlinked issues of relationality and social differentiation in later life. Indeed, ways of relating and differences reflect the diversity and forms of divisions portrayed in this volume. As Bourdieu (1984) observed, who says differentiation, says inequality and inequalities are both constitutive of and reflected in social networks.

The webs of relationships in which one is enmeshed with known and unknown others (even if an individual describes themselves as alone and isolated) can mediate opportunities to express desire or pleasure as well as to engage in sexual activity (Simpson, forthcoming 2021). Whilst relations with significant others or peers, known or unknown, do not always and automatically involve constraints on sexual expression, the emphasis in this volume is that, with regard to older people, more often than not, they involve multiple constraints. Older people's sexual relations tend to be

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more subject than those of younger adults to control and influence by significant others and by broader social prohibitions (resulting from ageist erotophobia), which older people themselves can absorb (Simpson et al 2018).

Constraint and repression of older people's sexuality are dominant themes throughout. Of course, later life itself is differentiated in terms of age and there is a difference between 50, 70 and 90 and so on. In this respect, Rennie's chapter draws attention to the particularities facing the 'older old' residents or those aged 75 and above in care environments. Rennie reminds us of the 'specialness of sex' for a group, whose members may also be preparing to face the end of life, where sexual and intimate experience may take on a particular intensity as feelings, sensations, pleasures can feel particularly vital.

The notion of constraint also takes on a particular intensity in the chapter by Harley. Here, the author identifies the multiple and contradictory sexual stereotypes of older black women – as invisible yet hypervisible in certain ways - as a distinctly historical project, stemming from colonial experiences that involved the enslavement of black peoples. This chapter also points up the historical mutability of stereotypes of black women from the sexless, older motherly 'Mammie' to the hypersexualized younger 'welfare queen', which have, along with the influence of religion, had considerable success in policing sexuality by encouraging muted or even non-expression of sex and intimacy among this social group. In such a context, it comes as no surprise to hear that older black women can come to discount themselves as sexual beings and therefore may be deterred from seeking help to achieve or extend pleasurable sexual

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and intimate lives. Similar themes are advanced in Pryzbylo's chapter focusing on women and asexuality in later life, which, variously recognizes how ageing femininity is shaped by the influences of ageism, sexism, heterosexism, racism and ableism. Indeed, age, gender, race, sexual identification and bodily capacity are central to regulatory narratives of 'successful ageing' that are modelled on and privilege older, able-bodied, white, (and middle-class) heterosexual people. By implication, successful ageing discourse can position older asexual individuals, and women in particular, as the antithesis of 'successful' ageing, though Pryzbylo amply shows how older women can resist such regulatory narratives.

Continuing the theme of constraint, chapters by Hafford-Letchfield and by Lee and Tetley indicate respectively how the sexualities of older heterosexual *so/lo* women and older heterosexual men are differently policed. The chapters by Megan Todd and by Peter Robinson (who draws on a small, but international, Anglophone sample) indicate how the more public expressions of youth-oriented lesbian and gay cultures, as particular spheres of existence, police the sexuality of older lesbian-identified women and older gay men respectively. The same principle could apply to the chapter by Laura Scarrone Bonhomme who addresses the constraints on trans individuals experiencing gender dysphoria. Each author just mentioned indicates that the policing of older individuals thought to represent non-normative forms of gender and sexuality serves to intensify their devaluation and results in a strong sense of marginalization if not exclusion from the sexual and intimate imaginary.

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With similar considerations in mind, Hafford-Letchfield highlights the silence around if not virtual invisibilization of the sexuality of older heterosexually-identified solo women given dominant expectations concerning ageing femininity. Both this chapter and that of Lee and Tetley draw attention to how older heterosexual men may find themselves more subject to the youth-coded, achievement-oriented discipline of and sense of failure that can attach to maintaining the ability to engage in penetrative sex to orgasm. The arrival of erection-promoting and maintaining pharma-technologies (such as Viagra) may have been a mixed blessing for older solo women (see Hafford-Letchfield) and older heterosexual men (Lee and Tetley). Pressure to embody youthful masculinity may now also be prolonged for older men (gay, bisexual queer or straight) and sex as a marital duty may be prolonged for older women desiring cuddling, intimacy, affection and companionship over genitocentric, penetrative sex.

Despite the shift towards greater tolerance of sexual difference (still a power asymmetry) in some European and Anglophone liberal democracies over the past 20 years or so, it is instructive to see the contributions by Todd on older lesbians and by Robinson on older gay men. The chapter by Todd illuminates the complex and multiple invisibilization of older lesbians both as identifiable subjects and as sexual beings, which applies even more to those who give accounts of sexual abuse. It seems that abuse is unthinkable to many women within UK lesbian cultures given gender parity, which seems to involve forgetting that lesbian-identified women embody other differences and thus occupy diverse and unequal social positionings.

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Further, Christopher Wells' chapter is significant for highlighting how monosexuality (the idea that one is either straight or gay) not only polices but erases older bisexual subjects, who themselves can come to internalize and rationalize their own silencing and invisibilization. Drawing on Foucauldian theorizing, Wells intimates how myths, stereotypes and mistaken assumptions about bisexuality follow subjects through the life course and act discursively in later life to render older bisexual subjects unthinkable and hard to authenticate.

The final substantive chapter by Simpson shows how social class can significantly influence who is more likely to enjoy sex in later life and to be able to claim valid sexual citizenship. Indeed, as this chapter argues, since the Enlightenment, the sexuality of the most socio-economically disadvantaged has been defined as an animalistic or infrahuman excess against which more affluent and 'cultivated' others have defined themselves. The chapter also intimates at how policing works along lines of social class and how middle-class actors (and more likely men) might be considered or be more able to assert themselves as legitimate, older sexual beings.

In sum, this volume (and the book series in which it is situated) aims to add to a significant body of work on intersectionality, which grew out of the concerns of black feminism in response to the silences and elisions within white, middle-class feminisms in the 1980s and early 1990s. The intersectional theory of Crenshaw (1991) articulated the confluence of gender, race and class in producing multiple disadvantage. The chapter by Harley is particularly apposite here. We hope to have extended this established intellectual project variously by considering the enmeshments of age

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(often the missing variable) with other influences that shape, but never fully determine, older people's sexual and intimate lives.

Later life as position from which to challenge social expectations

As intimated, identity influences, social structures and discourses can never fully determine what people think and do. We have also hinted at how relationships and forms of differentiation/identity do not just help constitute sex and intimacy but also inform how we *understand* sex and intimacy at any age.

Moreover, the chapters in this volume attest to bell hooks' thinking (1994) that the experience of disadvantaged social positioning can encourage critical insight into the operation of the social structures and discourses that secure oppression. For instance, the chapter by Harley addressed agency and the potential for social critique as a distinctly inter-subjective or collective enterprise between (older) black women who have learnt to reject the bodily discipline of dieting etc to embody a different aesthetic. Similarly, Pryzbylo argues that an agentic later life asexuality can disrupt ageist narratives of successful ageing that legitimate older people insofar as they emulate youth as well as associated pressures towards full and vigorous sex lives as an ageist form of validity. Further, the potential of bisexuality to destabilize the identity categories 'gay' and 'straight' is not lost in Wells' chapter on bisexual ageing. Although subject to constraints, the author reminds us that ageing bisexuality can occupy an uncomfortable yet productively contradictory space for agency to critique mononormative discourse in relation to (ageing) sexuality.

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The insights of Harley, Pryzbylo and Wells, albeit from different perspectives are broadly suggestive of the knowledge that can come with ageing. Such thinking is also represented, in a LGBT context, in the work of Heaphy (2007), which has referred to 'the resources of ageing', a concept and theme that is specifically taken up in Robinson's chapter. This reversal of the usual discourse is welcome because the value of ageing and its gains are often eclipsed by misery narratives of ageing and later life as loss, decline and slope towards abjection (Simpson, 2015). For Heaphy, the resources of ageing can serve as pre-requisite for acts of resistance to dominant discourses that undergird and normalize a sense of compulsory non-sexuality. Indeed, such resources represent not just general epistemic gains but also particular gains in political, emotional, cultural and social understanding i.e. of the norms governing particular realms of existence.

Moreover, Heaphy's theorizing makes clear that LGBT later life is simultaneously produced by factors suggesting constraint and autonomously deployed resources. There is no reason why this principle should not be extended to other groups of older people who might practice this in similar and distinct ways according to positioning and context. Implicit within such thinking is that sexual and other forms of autonomy in later life are contingent on the dialectic between structural and discursive constraints and the opportunities that actors can create for agency. That said, Heaphy (2007) is also clear that the resources of ageing that enable such creative agency are 'unevenly distributed' and along lines of established social inequalities e.g. the intersecting influences of gender, sexuality and class. Such a caveat is borne out particularly in

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the chapters by Harley, Hafford-Letchfield, Lee and Tetley, Robinson and by Simpson respectively.

However, it has been observed that the resources of ageing have relative independence from the more objective influences of class. They can also function in ways that compensate for differences of class and education to show how some older gay men can be defiant of specific and wider cultural expectations whilst delivering insightful critique of the constraints of (gay) ageism (Simpson, 2015). Such capacities, it seems, are not necessarily restricted to older gay men and we have already referred to the collectively derived forms of agency highlighted in Harley's chapter. Also, in this volume, Hafford-Letchfield observes how older heterosexual, 'solo' women question or even subvert approved forms of ageing femininity to engage in cybersex. Similarly, Lee and Tetley have observed how some older heterosexual men have questioned more hegemonic, youthfully-coded forms of masculinity as represented by genitocentric forms of sex to articulate preferences for other (perhaps more feminine-coded) forms of intimacy. Besides, the contributors just mentioned speak to the diversity of practice beyond heteronormative and penetrative sex and, along with Robinson (on older gay men), refer to how health or condition of the ageing body itself can limit opportunities for and enjoyment of sex and intimacy. Simultaneously, they invoke the creative adaptations, (pharmacological, technological, emotional and psychological) that individuals deploy in response to a felt 'loss' of capacity.

The idea of ageing as enabling the development of understanding also applies to the Chapter by Rennie on the older old in care settings. Indeed, the author has observed

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a rich vein of thinking within social gerontological scholarship, which details how older people develop narratives of sexual continuity in the face of dominant expectations concerning later life sexlessness. Such a status can be linked to assumptions about health, especially as it relates to dementia, and how the oldest citizens are thought of. Rennie points out that certain aspects of care environment design and furnishing actually prohibit sex and intimacy (single beds and single seating). In effect, such work has drawn attention to how older people have learnt, through experience of loss to question genitocentric sex involving penile erection and have resignified what sex consists of, which can result in broader sexual repertoires that can invoke mutual understanding and relational longevity. Such thinking obliges us to recognize the discursive character of erectile dysfunction whilst questioning whether it automatically represents a loss for older people.

Finally in this section, age and non-normative gender when combined might also encourage advancement of critical studies of age, gender and sexuality and in quite different and unique ways. Trans and non-binary expressions of gender do not just unsettle the rigidity of a bifurcated schema of gender with origins in eighteenth century Enlightenment rationality and science (McIntosh, 1981), they also disrupt our very notion of normative time as strictly linear as well as its regulatory effects. The chapter by Scarrone Bonhomme illuminates how middle-aged and older trans individuals often recount experiencing the liberating effects of a 'second adolescence' when adapting to living within their 'new' and chosen gender.

The need for policy and practice to support older people's sexuality

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Although the theme of policy and practice will be addressed more specifically in the next volume in the book series on desexualisation, there are some important recommendations in this one that concern support for older people who choose to continue sex lives. Of particular note here, is thinking in the chapter by Pryzbylo who offers a challenge to residential care environments that design out and virtually prohibit by neglect the sexual and intimate needs of older people to rethink their assumptions, prejudices, policies and practices. The author indicates a need for a paradigm shift in the care industry from viewing older people as needing to be preserved from harm to thinking of them as the loci of rich and diverse forms of subjectivity and bearers of rights to sexual and intimate and asexual experience.

A similar theme is taken up by Rennie who maintains that the sexual and intimate needs of those in care (or receiving care at home) affected by a dementia, the oldest citizens and those nearing the end of life should not be discounted. With this guiding principle in mind, the chapter recommends that care practitioners examine their values and beliefs about the sexuality and intimacy needs and wishes of the oldest individuals receiving care. In more practical terms, Rennie recommends that care planning should be more truly holistic to cover sex and intimacy in line differentiated and personalized support, led by the wishes and feelings of the older individual.

Also, implicit within the Scarrone Bonhomme chapter is much information of use to counsellors and other clinical professionals supporting trans individuals. Similarly, several other contributors, such as Hafford-Letchfield and Lee and Tetley point up the

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need to provide emotional and psychological support to older heterosexual women and men respectively, which should also involve peer-run services as well as advice and support related to physical health, including age-inclusive sexual and emotional health services. Of course, mental and physical health are not entirely unconnected. It has been observed that mental health difficulties can be just as consequential if immobilizing of older people's sexual and intimate lives than physical ill-health or loss of capacity. (See Hafford-Letchfield in this volume).

The kinds of provision and practice just described could help address stereotypes of inevitable or compulsory non-sexuality and stigma, which, according to Hafford-Letchfield, can prevent older women in particular from seeking help to maintain a pleasurable sexual/intimate life. One can easily imagine, though, how such a principle would apply to older men who need a good listening to but who have endured a lifetime of messages, which convey that proper masculinity rests on emotional self-control. Such thinking has likely involved pressure to deny or keep in check 'feminine' emotions that acknowledge vulnerability and thus would risk compromising masculine status (Seidler 2013).

The state of research in the field and whither a progressive approach to ageing, sex and sexuality in research and policy?

The series was inspired by the resolution that there is a paucity of research on older people's sexual and intimate lives. Certainly, a cursory look at the development of sexuality studies suggests that this wide and august body of work has not really given

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substantial focus to older people whether in terms of sexual identifications or as sexual agents/beings. See, for example, the relative paucity of references to older people in major edited collection such as Herdt and Howe (2007), Hall et al (2012), and Fischer and Seidman (2016). The focus on sexuality as a subject, itself previously neglected, and particularly sexual identities given their recent (late Twentieth Century) legitimization, is understandable. The correspondence of sexual to gendered and later ethnically- and disability-related structures of prejudice, pathology, oppression and pathways to emancipation has encouraged explorations of these various intersections. Again, we recognize that age has been less visible as a variable, partly reflecting a mainstream prejudice towards focus on the legal, social and cultural issues in relation to younger people sex and sexuality. Leaving aside the irony of reproducing prejudices within critical studies, the omission of considerations of later life has seriously restricted possibilities for viewing older people as sexual agents.

Further, there has been proportionally far less research on older people's sexual health needs, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases amongst older people and the patterns of older people's desires in comparison with youth and young adults. Even when later life has been addressed in sexuality studies (i.e. largely in lesbian and gay studies), it features rarely in the more visible LGBT community spaces. Consider the case of older gay men in Manchester who have developed an 'alternative Pride' to the official one because of claims about exclusion from the latter, which is understood as a youth-oriented festival. Ironically, this alternative Manchester Pride occurs in the seaside town of Blackpool, Northwest England) about 55 miles from Manchester.

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What is evident in these chapters is that there is a paucity (comparable to other sociological identity-focused studies) of empirical studies that address the intersections of age and sex/sexuality. Only recently has this begun to change. That said, both the chapters and some of the literatures they invoke speak to that research being conceptually sophisticated and theoretically-informed. Christopher Wells' exploration of older bisexual lives employs a Foucauldian framing to theorise the 'bitopic' writing out of bisexuality by mononormative sexual discourse, and then reminds us that this is overlaid by the presumption that older people are less or non-sexual. Megan Todd on older lesbians, Peter Robinson on sexually active older gay men and Debra Harley on older US black women all speak to an amplification of what Trish Hafford-Letchfield and Josie Tetley and David Lee describe as the limiting effects of age on presumptions around sex and sexuality. Such effects underline why, as series editors, we sought to curate a collection on desexualisation of older people as the next volume in order to understand better the constraints on their sexual and intimate self-expression.

Finally, in this section, we consider the research and policy agendas the volume indicates for a more progressive approach to ageing, sex and sexuality? The keen reader will already have intuited a plethora of possibilities within the chapters whether in terms of recommendations or absences i.e. issues that we have not (so far) been able to address but would recognize as important.

Perhaps most evident are issues that concern healthcare policy and practice and the need for education of practitioners (as per the Lee and Tetley and the Rennie chapters

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in particular). The chapter by Todd calls attention to invisibility of lesbian domestic violence and we plan to invite further work on invisibility of older, and particularly 'femme' lesbians as sexual subjects. Very much to the fore in practically all chapters was a need to understand better the agentic capacities for resexualizing the older self. This process might also be linked to class, which, according to Simpson in this volume, is under-researched with respect to ageing sexuality. In respect of the issues just mentioned, we might think of uncovering the specific means by which and under what conditions different social actors can challenge if not resist discourses that would otherwise desexualize them.

In terms of absences from this volume, a productive research and policy agenda could address *discretely* and centrally the obstacles to sexual and intimate citizenship faced by older disabled people, those affected by a dementia and the oldest old or fourth age whose identities have been described as rendered abject (Gilleard and Higgs, 2014). We are glad to say that such issues will be explored in more detail in the next volume on desexualisation.

A broadening out from accounts of experiences of later life sex and intimacy in Western contexts, like Harley's chapter, is likely to reckon with the historical forces of imperialism and colonialism that have misunderstood and helped secure the lesser value and oppression on 'non-Western' others. Indeed, we intend that planned volumes in HIV, sex and later life and accounts of later life sex in global regions obscured by the Western hegemonic gaze might help destabilize established meanings of age, ageing and what constitutes sexual and intimate activity. Likely to

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include postcolonial and social anthropological lenses, such work could also trouble simple binaries of East/West, North/South and the sexually progressive and regressive labels that have become attached respectively to the West and East and particularly the Muslim other (Butler, 2008; Puar 2018).

Thinking about diversity and respect also brings us to consider our very engagement with older people as scholars (and some of us as older scholars). It will then be vital to consider in future volumes innovative methods of working *with* older people and their significant others and in ways that include strategically planned co-produced research (Willis et al 2018). Such approaches should help ensure that we minimize inequalities of voice and representation or acknowledge and negotiate productively the shifting relations of power in empirical work. In addition this kind of move could ensure that we end up doing the kind of research on sex and intimacy that older people would like, that captures the complexities of experience and helps claims to sexual status on their terms. As Plummer (1995) might argue, the time has come to tell particular stories about sex and intimacy in later life. We consider that if a poll of those aged 50 and over were to be taken today concerning sex and intimacy, most older people would, rightfully, feel offended if they were excluded. Sadly, in Britain, the next NATSAL survey of Britain's sexual attitudes is to stop at age 59. Arguably, the most important question (and very much answered in this volume) should be, what is at stake if we neglect the sexual and intimate needs of older people? We think the short answer is that older people need and are worthy of much better than this!

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