

Tam Sangar and Yvette Taylor (eds.) 2013 Mapping Intimacies: Relations, Exchanges, Affects

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Reviewed by Paul Reynolds

Intimacy has become a fertile field of engagement over the last decade, as researchers have sought to explore the agent within intersections of family and personal relations and gendered, ethnic, disabled and sexual identities and differences in everyday life. Some of the more conceptual work has sought to explore intimacy as a zone of engagement or communication/performance and explore its temporal, spatial, contextual and conjunctural moments, whilst other work has focused upon the everyday experience of interpersonal relationships, interactions and practices, focusing on particular identities and communities. What intimacy offers as a conceptual space for exploration is the capacity to think critically about specified relations and interactions, conceiving them in their myriad forms and cultural contexts, recognising both symmetries and normalised forms and functions alongside dissonances and diversities. Intimacy can be stretched to take in transdisciplinary and transcultural insights that allow for thinking intimacy both within and without its historically and culturally dominant positions.

In this context, Sanger and Taylor's collection, with its promise of mapping intimacies, should be welcomed. It provides some compelling case studies that exhibit the richness of intimacy as a field of study. At the same time, it invariably suffers from two related weaknesses – one fairly typical of edited collections. That weakness is that the collection of essays, perhaps because it represents a range of different intimacies, becomes a sum of parts rather than a coherent whole. Whilst Sangar and Taylor's introduction provides a succinct summary of the fluid field of intimacy and introduces the chapters effectively, it does not really pull the collection into a coherent themed collection. Perhaps the very nature of the diversity of the cases precludes that – which gives rise to the question of whether intimacy is understood with communality by the sum of authors – but it is nevertheless a weakness. In short, the collection needed a greater sense of being curated.

It ties into the second weakness, which is that it provides some compelling cases that explore different intimacies, but it does not 'map' intimacies. Again, perhaps this is the very nature of the field itself, but there is an attempt to thematise in the intro-

duction around relations, exchanges and affects, and particularly their intersections in embodied exchanges, disordered relations and proximities. These three sections suggest a focus on characterising relational exchanges and encounters, understanding intimacies that recede into violence and violation and dealing with proximity and distance in intimate relations (though this latter is particularly lacking in specificity as it is not simply spatial). These are in themselves interesting possible mappings in providing a sketch of the field, but this discussion is limited to a page and a half of discussion prior to a narrative of chapter outlines. What is needed is a first chapter that may draw upon subsequent chapters illustratively to say why these particular examples are important to mapping intimacies, but provides a more conceptually developed and sophisticated discussion of 'mapping intimacies'. That could well have made the collection almost essential reading. This opportunity, however, is not taken up, and in a collection with rich empirical studies, that conceptual contextualisation would have been useful.

That is not to say that the cases themselves are not fascinating. The studies are rich in empirical value, are usefully not LGBT 'badged' but focused on gay men as many collections are, and bring together some prominent voices in their fields. There are twelve chapters equally spread across the three sections. They usefully provide examples of difference in identity, culture, lifestage and position. In what follows there will not be a commentary that does justice to every chapter, but some drawing out of particular chapters that had resonance – though of course resonance is a personal affectation – to capture the 'feel' of the collection.

In embodied exchanges, there are chapters on: the intersection of class and sexuality in lesbian relationships (Taylor); transnational relationships, focused on professional girlfriends in Cambodia (Hoefinger); lesbian love and sperm donors (Nordqvist); and female to female STI transmission (Rudolph). Taylor's exploration of class dynamics amongst lesbian relationships is a refreshing corrective to the assumption that sexual difference supersedes other forms of social and cultural difference or pathology (this theme comes up in a number of chapters). Both Taylor's analysis and her participants' understandings show a rich sense in which the struggle for sexual citizenship does not release non-heterosexuals from class inequalities, cultural divisions and their attendant capacity to enjoy civil and public lives. Sexual citizenship is not, in itself, liberating without connection to a wider political agenda. How these inequalities and differences are felt phenomenologically is a fascinating read. It is clear that as the politics of recognition remains a central battleground for sexual rights and justice, the politics of redistribution and of recognising the power of socio-economic and cultural differences and divides is equally important.

Hoefingers' discussion of 'professional girlfriends' is a valuable contribution to the literature intersecting sex work and dependent relationships, showing the need for nuanced analysis of how different parties construct intimacies from what are often regarded as one-dimensional economic dependencies based on a masquerade that distracts from the 'real nature' of the relationship. It is not an apologia for the vagaries of colonial sex tourism and sex work (itself a complex subject) to understand that the complexities of performing intimacy in these relationships has meaning for the performers. Hoefingers' account of the need to recognise agency in the way Cambodian 'girlfriends' construct relationships based on transaction provides an important

corrective to sometimes too hasty thinking of the powerlessness of the ‘girlfriend’, notwithstanding other inequalities.

The remaining two chapters, interesting in themselves, are somewhat self-limiting. Nordqvist offers a detailed analysis of one case from a wider study of lesbians and the constitution of the sperm donor relationship and offers one account of its breakdown. Interesting as the narrative is, it is limited in understanding the constitution of intimacy without comparator referents (though the wider study is referenced) and without the competing voices of those involved in the particular case – and the donor’s absence means we speculate from the recipients position (important as that construction is). Rudolph’s discussion of lesbian’s and STI’s shows potential in developing a framing for identity formation and contextual pathology using Hall and Butler, but is never quite able to exercise that within a discussion that settles upon identity formation and safe sex, with dental dams being the focus. It reads rather as if the author has a lot of interesting things to say but too short a space.

In the second section, (dis)ordering relations, there are chapters on women-only affective economies in Istanbul (Savci); older LGB intimacies and care (King and Cronin); lesbian relationships and partner abuse (Barnes) and older lesbians and domestic violence (Todd). Of these Savaci’s exploration of Turkish queer culture and relations in a woman-only club in Istanbul is perhaps the least focused, becoming far too absorbed in its subject matter. Whilst it tries to adopt Ahmed’s critical review of family and relations from *Happy Objects*, and seeks to make links between sexuality, class and neo-liberalism, but these never really become clear, if the case itself provides an engrossing read of a community resource in conflict.

The remaining three are considerably more authoritative. King and Cronin provide an overview of a growing area of new research in older people’s intimacies, and particular older LGB intimacies in care settings. Drawing from their research, they explore how assumptions of care providers and the intimate needs of older people require reconsideration in a society where age should not be a grounds for narrow conceptions of physical and emotional intimacies. partly a product of the 60’s generation reaching ages of retirement and the need for care, and partly dispelling ageist assumptions within the life cycle, King and Cronin point to the need for a radical rethink of how care interventions respect interpersonal intimacies, the implicit and until recently unchallenged heteronormativity of care and the way change requires a rethink of how we conceive of intimate relations amongst older people.

Barnes and Todd approach differently an emergent field in the study of older lesbians – domestic violence. Barnes provides a critical deconstruction of the gendered assumptions of the ‘egalitarian assumption’ of same sex relations (which dates back to Giddens (1992) naive assumptions about same sex relationships) by exploring lesbian relationships where gender is reproduced in power and abuse. Her analysis provides a fine grained critical discussion of how gendered qualities in lesbian relations are subject to both intersectional and power relationships which involve in the reconstruction of unequal roles and forms of abusive behaviour. Todd extends this into an outline of an urgent research agenda for researching domestic violence amongst older lesbians, providing a critical dissembling of the assumptions underpinning the ignoring of abuse and violence in older lesbian relationship. Again, these reflect both ageist and sexual pathologies and presumptions, and Todd is careful to

both challenge those and to explore how they become the norms – and so failures – of policy and non-governmental organisations that would respond to the problem. These two, with King and Cronin, provide cogent analysis, fieldwork evidence but also the sketches for important research agendas for future researchers.

The final section focusing on proximities has chapters on: trans partnerships (Sangar); polyamory (Barker, Heckert and Wilkinson); same-sex relational recognition in Portugal (Santos); migrant youth intimacies across spatial divides (Reynolds [no relation] and Zontini). All the essays, in different ways, continue to frame important areas for further research. Sangar provides a useful and careful discussion of the different pressures and factors that are critical to the development of what are a diverse array of trans intimacies. Trans provides quite different issues of difference in tackling intimacies and Sangar captures some of the different representations of and challenges to trans narratives of intimacy. Barker et al provide a broader sketch of the agenda for the study of polyamory, itself a term critically challenged for its constituent sense of plurality and love. The chapter provides an intelligent and sophisticated exploration of both the conceptual, political and lived experience of different relationships of 'love' than make for a more complex understanding of love and intimacy as overlapping zones of engagement. Santos provides a more narrowly conceived discussion of the development of a politics of recognition for non-heterosexuals, focused on LGB activism and the construction of their intimacies in Portugal. Santos plays with the notion of normalisation in charting both change and scepticism in a shift that has been general, particularly across Europe and north America, in the last quarter century. Finally, Reynolds and Zontini explore the issue of intimacies and migration that is currently so topical in how immigration legislation and policing disregards non-conventional intimate relationships (and some conventional relationships in its racism and xenophobia). Drawing from work on Caribbean and Italian migrant relationships, they raise issues related to transnational intimacies and diasporic set relationships, again, providing a 'taster' of a fertile field for more research.

The final section, in a sense, also underlines one of the weaknesses. Reynolds and Zontini look at familial relationships and migrant youth, Barker et al look at love and Santos very definitely looks at sexual intimacies. That is fine in itself, but if the text is to map intimacies, then there needs to be a mapping that recognises these different focuses and put them in some relation to each other. Otherwise, the text becomes what it is, which is a collection of disparate studies. That many of these are good studies, and cause readers to impatiently seek to search for more substantial works on many of the issues raised, is a strength. It is also an opportunity missed as this replicates the classic problem of the edited collection – an absence of overarching coherence.