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Book review: Kirsty Liddiard, *The Intimate Lives of Disabled People*

In *The Intimate Lives of Disabled People*, Kirsty Liddiard engages in the vital work of 'storying' disabled people's intimate lives and providing a broader analysis of the social and political implications of living sexual lives as disabled people in neoliberal times. Through a feminist disability studies approach, the collection of stories is situated not only in a heteronormative-ableist discourse, but also within British conservative and right-wing austerity politics that have impacted negatively upon disabled people's lives. The book is an important addition to disability, gender and queer studies, illuminating the intersectional dimensions of sexual experiences in a dis/ability framework.

The Intimate Lives of Disabled People begins with a discussion of 'the ways in which disabled people are denied access to their sexual lives, selves and bodies' (p. 1). The concept of 'intimate citizenship' and its three components (control, access and choice) is useful in framing the material, social and political processes of living disabled sexual lives, but it is unclear how the use of 'intimate citizenship' differs from other concepts such as 'sexual citizenship'. Questions of 'sexual normalcy' are explored via crip and queer critiques of heteronormativity and dis/ableism, and by centring 'lived experience as the location from which to begin theorizing disabled people's intimate and erotic lives' (p. 7). A majority of the 26 informants were White British, cisgender and heterosexual, and identified as having physical and/or sensory impairments.

Liddiard provides a great deal of empirical data about the ways in which access to intimate citizenship is impeded by lacking sex education and sexual socialization in adolescence and young adulthood, by invasiveness and lack of privacy when relying on others' assistance in daily life and by the continuous denial of sexual and gendered subjectivity in various spaces. Some of the male informants used sex workers to gain sexual skills, experience intimacy and perform masculinity. Liddiard reflects on the implications of disabled women's voices being absent from such discussions and the need for further research into the gendered nature of 'sexual needs' in a heteronormative discourse.

The book also details informants' experiences of 'love' relationships from a psycho-emotional perspective, drawing on (and enriching) disabled feminist

scholars' work on how disablism includes not only physical inaccessibility but also psycho-emotional oppression. For example, informants recount how being in intimate relationships, and even abusive ones, contributes to them being 'normalized' as gendered and sexual subjects – understandable aspirations following low sexual self-esteem and self-worth in a society that does not value disabled bodies. Liddiard suggests, less convincingly, that these processes can be understood in terms of 'sex work', inspired by theories of 'emotional work'. However, she does not elaborate on the implications of re-framing emotional work to intimate relationships, and commercial sex work as non-commercial, making it confusing in relation to the previous discussion about some male informants buying sex.

One of the merits of Liddiard's research is its participatory and accessible approach. Liddiard reflects upon her situatedness in the research as a disabled woman and how her positioning in the disability community allowed access to disabled people and their sexual stories. Indeed, several of the informants openly stated that they would not have taken part, or revealed as much, had she not been disabled. The use of a research advisory board with members from the disability community further strengthened the grounding in disability experience and understanding of its heterogeneity. Furthermore, Liddiard's use of multiple formats and methods allowed people with different access needs to participate in ways that suited them best. She also offers important reflections on being a woman interviewing (heterosexual) men about their intimate lives, as well as on the general hardship of listening to emotionally disheartening or even abusive sexual stories. This is a vital addition to methodological and ethical literature relevant to both disability and sexuality research specifically, and to participatory and/or feminist approaches more generally.

Another important contribution to sexological and sex/uality studies can be found in the discussion of the bodily and related physical realities of disability experience in the erotic sphere. Not only does it make visible the conditions and experiences that are specific to disabled embodiment, but most importantly, how they are in fact deeply imbued in 'heteronormative sexuality and its prescriptive rules' (p. 98), which most people are affected by. These findings offer important insights for the usefulness of ableism as a concept to interrogate human sexuality in wide-ranging contexts.

In the concluding chapter, the findings are analyzed from the newly developed 'DisHuman' lens, which aims to 'unpack and trouble dominant notions of what it means to be human' (p. 174) by centring disability experience. Although the doctoral research that the book is based on was carried out between 2008 and 2011, the politics have not changed substantially – Liddiard argues that they have indeed worsened. The book remains a timely intervention in discussions of 'sexual ableism' and the need to challenge taken-for-granted understandings in both disability and sexuality studies.