

Torbjörn Bildtgård and Peter Öberg (2017).  
*Intimacy and Ageing: New Relationships in  
Later Life*. Bristol: Policy Press, 212 pp. ISBN  
978 1 4473 2649 6 (hardback)

REVIEWED by DORA JANDRIC\*

In their book *Intimacy and Ageing: New Relationships in Later Life*, Torbjörn Bildtgård and Peter Öberg explore late-life intimate relationships in cross-gender couples, drawing on various international research to show how older people perceive and engage in new relationships in later life. The book is divided into twelve chapters and presents mixed methods throughout, combining quantitative and qualitative data to provide deeper insight into intimacy in later life. The authors divide the book into several thematic units, with the chapters in each unit following the key theme, such as change in structure in late-life repartnering, application of these changes to individual lives and the consequences of these changes. This review will summarise the key points in each chapter, emphasising the contributions this book makes to the area of ageing studies and beyond, and it will offer some potential limitations of it as well.

Chapter one introduces some key ideas that will be discussed later on in the book, such as intimacy, the concept of pure relationships and the shift from a culture of marriage to a culture of divorce. It does so through

\* Dora Jandric, School of Social and Political Science, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland

an example of a relationship initialised later in life, after both partners were either divorced or widowed. This chapter also offers an outline of the entire book, summarising the subsequent chapters. Following this introductory chapter are ten chapters that include theoretical and empirical data based on various research from different Western countries, although the case studies presented are drawn from Swedish qualitative and quantitative studies. The final chapter summarises the key points made throughout the book and reflects on the previous chapters.

Chapter two, *Intimacy and ageing in late modernity*, gives a theoretical background to the book by introducing various cultural and institutional changes to the notion of intimacy in contemporary Western societies. The chapter argues that despite most of the Western world's move towards late modernity, relationships in later life will depend on specific cultural and country contexts, as well as on the individual's life course and ageing experience. Chapter three, *The changing landscape of intimacy in later life*, draws on three sets of empirical data, both qualitative and quantitative, and uses the theoretical ideas emerging from Chapter two to show how longevity and the healthy life course affect late-life relationships. The theme of change in late-life repartnering structure is concluded with Chapter four, *From marriage to alternative union forms*, which emphasises the importance of cohort, historical period and life phase for the unions older people choose. For example, the deinstitutionalisation of marriage in recent years has led to a number of new forms of late-life relationships, such as cohabitation or living apart together (LAT), moving away from the norm of marriage.

Chapter five, *A life of relationships*, links the historical transformation of intimacy to late-life relationships using eight examples that represent cohabiting, single, married and LAT individuals. Through their stories, the chapter illustrates how important previous relationships, the way in which they dissolved (widowhood or divorce), and gendered experiences in these relationships are in late-life repartnering. Chapter six, *Attitudes towards new romantic relationships*, asks the questions: "Attitudes to what?" (marriage, dating, LAT, etc.) and "The attitudes of whom?" (men, women, divorcees, singles), in hope to offer a more detailed account of older people's thoughts on new relationships in later life. Using data from the 2012 Swedish survey, the authors create a comprehensive image of a

variety of older people's attitudes towards new late-life relationships, discovering, for example, that living apart together is a preferred union for older people entering in new relationships. Chapter seven, *Initiation and development of new romantic relationships*, completes the second thematic unit that explores how the changes of late modernity apply to individual lives by using four case studies that illustrate the importance of negotiation in late-life relationships. The issues that are most commonly negotiated are same for all types of unions and include autonomy, loyalty towards the former partner, finances and inheritance.

Chapter eight, *A new partner as a resource for social support*, and Chapter nine, *Consequences for social network and support structures*, focus on social support and social networks in later life, and how a new partner might fill those roles. There are three types of support a new partner can offer: companionate support, emotional support and practical support, and once a new relationship is initiated, these roles are often taken away from children and other family members. In terms of consequences for existing social networks, adult children are mostly supportive of their parents' new relationships and, in some cases, even help them set up online dating profiles to make meeting a potential partner easier. Chapter ten, *Sex in an ideology of love*, explores the importance of sex in later life relationships and raises awareness about sexuality in older age. Based on qualitative interviews, the authors conclude that older people are not interested in repartnering if there is no sex involved, thereby dispelling the myth of an asexual older age. Chapter eleven, *Time as a structuring condition for new intimate relationships in later life*, explores the notion of time in late-life relationships, showing how the paradox of having a lot of free time but little time left plays an important role in the formation of new late-life relationships. These relationships are often given different meaning because of the time left in the world for both partners and are more focused on pleasure and enjoyment than on prescribed social norms. Finally, Chapter twelve, *Discussion*, offers a summary of the key ideas, giving a comprehensive overview of the topics and the main thematic issues explored in the book.

*Intimacy and Ageing* is an important book for anyone working with older people, either in theory or in practice, but it also makes an excellent read for wider audiences, as its straightforward style of writing makes it easy

to follow and understand. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods adds a depth to the empirical side of the book, and the cases used present good examples of different repartnering experiences. However, the number of cases presented in the book could have been bigger to add some diversity of experiences, as most of the conclusions were based on three or four cases. The final chapter could have provided a deeper discussion and suggested future research paths for exploring intimacy and ageing, instead of offering a summary of the chapters. Overall, this book is a great contribution to the area of ageing studies as it recognises the limitations of research done so far and tries to fill the gaps in our knowledge of late-life relationships.