

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Sarah Smith Rainey, *Love, Sex, and Disability: The Pleasures of Care*. Disability in Society. Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2011, 197 pp. \$US 49.95 hardcover (978-1-58826-777-1)

In Sarah Smith Rainey's *Love, Sex, and Disability: The Pleasures of Care*, she invites readers to reimagine notions of intimacy, care-work, and the body. Her text is a study of how dominant (and often problematic) narratives of care and intimacy of disabled/nondisabled couples are circulated in social discourse and the counter-narratives that these couples offer. Using popular culture representations, autobiographical reflections, and the analysis of focus group discussions, Rainey explores the intersections of care and intimacy for partnered relationships where one person is disabled (in the case of this work — physically disabled) and the other (seemingly) nondisabled. Her strategy here is clear: she endeavours to confront stereotypes of victimization and valorization where care and disability intersect in order to disrupt the limited (and often heteronormative) understandings of intimacy and the “able-bodiedness of love.”

Relying heavily on the social model of disability and feminist disability studies approach to the body, Rainey takes a critical stance against the medicalization of bodies and the prioritizing of normative sexual relationships. The book is divided into two major sections — the first focuses on major popular culture representations and beliefs found predominantly in film and television shows about disabled/nondisabled intimate relationships, while the second contests those mainstream assumptions using self-representations via written autobiographies, autobiographical documentaries, and the narratives that emerged from couples who participated in focus groups. While the variety of literatures that Rainey uses may emerge for some as frantic at times, this variety not only reinforces her argument(s) that representations of disabled and nondisabled bodies in intimate relationships are stereotypical and oppressive, it also allows various access points for a wide audience of readers/interests. A critical argument of this work is how disabled/nondisabled couples are branded in popular representations by notions of “care as burden” that not only valorizes the “care-giver” but also desexualizes the relationship entirely. Rainey uses autobiographical reflections as a response to these prob-

lematic representations in order to disrupt some of the taken-for-granted binary assumptions about care-giving and care-receiving.

Prioritizing the voices of both disabled and nondisabled partners is a crucial contribution of this text, as it gives theoretical priority and space to those who are often erased in seemingly objective social research. The most compelling aspects of Rainey's text emerge from the complexity of the narratives from the disabled/nondisabled couples. Rainey's reflections upon the myriad of experiences that these couples have with intimacy and care demonstrate her profound respect for their embodied experiences and the ways in which their experiences resist conforming to the narrow expressions of victim/hero narratives that often circulate regarding disabled/nondisabled couples. A major tenet of this book is to demonstrate that such couples are in no way limited by notions of care-giving and care-receiving. Through analysis of the focus groups, the discussions that emerge centre on the flexibility of gender roles, the sexual pleasures of care, pride, and the reimaginings of what these concepts can (and perhaps should) mean in relation to how we can understand love and care. These moments of subversion point to the need to recognize the "reciprocity and mutuality of care relationships" as a starting point for how to explore the variety of ways that care, love, sex, and intimacy can be understood.

The intersectionality of identities — particularly in terms of racialized bodies and queer sexualities — are not as represented in this study as are concepts of gender. Rainey does acknowledge this as a limitation of her sample and as an area where this work could go in the future. She argues that heteronormativity infuses understandings of "proper sexuality" and gendered expressions of care, which would enable a queer analysis of these relations to flourish; the couples in Rainey's study are so often are confined by heteronormative discourse and yet, in practice, they counteract much of what is seen as "normal" intimacy and care-dynamics. The methodological appendices to this text are excellent. The detailed explanations regarding the focus group methodology and rationale provides an excellent resource for qualitative researchers and is a significant contribution to the critical disability studies literature, as well as qualitative research in general. Rainey employs accessible language and detailed explanations of many of the theoretical concepts that she uses and so this book can be valuable to a wide range of scholars, and to those outside the academy who want to engage more fully with notions of care, dis/ability, and intimacy.

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