



John D'Emilio, Estelle B. Freedman. *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. Third edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. xix + 476 pp. \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-226-92380-2; \$25.00 (e-book), ISBN 978-0-226-92381-9.

Reviewed by Chris Herbert (Columbia Basin College)

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Commissioned by Charles V. Reed (Elizabeth City State University)

Anything Goes? Charting and Explaining Changes in American Sexuality

Originally published in 1988, *Intimate Matters* had an immediate impact on the burgeoning field of sexuality studies in the United States. Attempting nothing less than a comprehensive history of sexuality from the colonial period through the 1970s, John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman argued that the dominant meaning of sexuality shifted from its primary association with reproduction within families to a primary association with emotional intimacy and physical pleasure for individuals (p. xiv). To chart this transition, D'Emilio and Freedman paid close attention to changes in sexual meanings, sexual regulation, and sexual politics in extraordinary detail over a period of four hundred years.

Over the course of mapping the contested and fragmented transformation of American sexuality, some key themes emerge in D'Emilio and Freedman's work. The first is the crucial role that generational conflict played in facilitating change. Rare indeed are the instances where major shifts in sexuality are not also reflective of intergenerational tensions. Second, the white middle class emerges as a key site for the production and dissemination of sexual meaning and practice. With outsized access to, and control of, government, the legal system, and the media, members of this class were able to disproportionately shape public discussion on sexual matters. Third, these sexual meanings and practices were contested: by dissidents within the middle class, by working class and immigrant communities, and by

the African American population, among others. Fourth, economic developments had particular influence in stimulating change in sexual meaning, regulation, and politics. The advent of the market revolution, industrialization, and especially urbanization, along with the gradual acceptance of commodified sexuality and sexualized images, created consistent cultural pressures against which older understandings of proper sexuality had a great deal of difficulty resisting.

One of the areas where the original portion of *Intimate Matters* is lacking is in the way it tends to treat sexuality in America as sealed off from world developments. Though occasionally the influence of trends in Europe is acknowledged, the growth of the United States as an imperial power and the sexualized tropes and images that that process both spawned and reinforced are completely ignored, while the importance of transnational flows of meaning, materials, and experiences is downplayed.

This third edition appears on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the original, and the authors have taken a somewhat unusual approach in updating the volume. Instead of incorporating the intervening twenty-five years of scholarship as substantial revisions to the original text, they have left the original text intact and have added two new chapters that extend the narrative from the end of the 1970s up to 2012. The authors have also added a seven-page afterword which summarizes some of the main findings of literature on sexuality in America since

the original edition was published. To clearly distinguish between the old and new material, the book retains the original font for the original material while using a more modern font for the new additions.

Because of this structure, it means that the original text is now twenty-five years out of date and beginning to show its age. The afterword attempts to address some of the more glaring lacunae in the original text, most notably, its reliance on an understanding of race as a black-white binary which obscures the complexities of race in the United States. Regions, especially the West, have come in for far greater attention since the original edition was published, and the authors point to a growing body of scholarship that indicates significant regional variations in the understanding and treatment of sexuality in the United States. The authors also acknowledge that their original text, reflecting the state of knowledge at the time, dramatically underrepresented same-sex relationships and their meaning at the dawn of the twentieth century. All in all, the afterword does a good job of identifying and seeking to address new developments. Unfortunately, a seven-page afterword can only scratch the surface of the new findings and leaves readers, especially nonspecialists, to struggle to draw connections from the original text to the new scholarship on their own.

Ironically, given the specialties of DâEmilio and Freedman, the final two chapters are some of the weakest in the book. This weakness is particularly evident in how each chapter treats the gay rights movement. This is partly unavoidable. In the two years since publication, a series of legal and political victories, combined with a huge shift in public opinion regarding marriage equality, seems to be dramatically altering the national discussion over homosexuality in the United States. As a result, the authors' somewhat pessimistic analysis of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and other issues are rapidly becoming dated. But while the authors can hardly be faulted for events that happened after the book went to press, these chapters have other weaknesses.

One area where the entire book, but especially the new chapters, is curiously silent is in regard to the proliferation of sexual subcultures. Other than a brief discussion of swinging in the 1970s, sexual subcultures are almost completely ignored or subsumed within a

larger heterosexual/homosexual binary. Bears, twinks, femmes, bois, bdsm practitioners, hotwives, genderbenders, open relationships, and other subcultures are absent from this work, and their relationship to dominant forms of sexuality unexplored. From the perspective of scholars interested in empire, this is a shame, because as Anne McClintok demonstrated in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995), sexual subcultures can be deeply intertwined with imperial projects.

On a theoretical level, *Intimate Matters* assigns considerable importance to the role of economic developments in effecting changes in sexuality and yet those economics tend to be rather uncritically accepted. This is particularly evident in the final chapter which deals with the rise of the gay rights movement in the 1990s and which acknowledges the role that growing public representations of queer characters and storylines on television and in film played in facilitating a wider cultural shift. DâEmilio and Freedman do not examine the economics of niche marketing and the way that these storylines were mainly targeted toward a young, hip, and heterosexual market. Likewise, that the marriage equality movement in particular, but also the wider gay rights movement in general, has tended to benefit white middle-class gay men, leaving the concerns of women, queer people of color, bisexuals, and others out, is also not discussed.

Ultimately, while nonspecialists seeking an overview of sexuality in America will be well served by the scope and in-depth analysis of *Intimate Matters*, specialists will probably find the gaps in analysis and spotty nature of the final two chapters dissatisfying. Nevertheless, despite its weakness, there is no work with a comparable scope. Additionally, DâEmilio and Freedman's central thesis describing both the nature and causes of a long-term shift in sexuality remains as compelling and convincing today as it was twenty-five years ago. Though dated and far from perfect, *Intimate Matters* should be required reading for any students of American history and serves as a good starting place for any scholars seeking to understand the role of sexuality in the United States. Though it does not speak directly to the issue of empire, it lays a groundwork of understanding that would be extremely useful for scholars of empire seeking to understand the sexual dimension of American imperialism.

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