



Historicising Gender and Sexuality

Edited by Kevin P. [redacted] and M. Spear

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Historicising Gender and Sexuality

EDITED BY
KEVIN P. MURPHY
AND
JENNIFER M. SPEAR



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Historicising Gender and Sexuality

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Introduction

Kevin P. Murphy and Jennifer M. Spear

In her influential 1984 essay, 'Thinking Sex: Notes Toward a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', Gayle Rubin asserted that 'although sex and gender are related, they are not the same thing, and they form the basis of two distinct arenas of social practice'. Building on this insight, and challenging the tendency of feminist theory to treat sexuality as derivative of gender, Rubin declared it 'essential to separate gender and sexuality analytically to reflect more accurately their separate social existence'.¹

Over the past two decades, historians writing across period and region have taken up Rubin's call to produce delineated analyses of 'sexuality' and 'gender'. Yet, these efforts have produced anything but a stable or coherent sense of how 'sexuality' and 'gender' have functioned throughout human history. Indeed, many scholars – especially those focusing on the pre-modern and non-western worlds – have productively questioned the conceptualisation of and distinction between these categories, some demonstrating that sexual desire and practices have intersected with gendered identities and norms in complicated, sometimes inextricable, ways.² Likewise, scholarship on the history of homosexuality in the modern west has shown that identity categories such as 'homosexual' and 'lesbian' have been defined not only in relation to sexual object choice and sexual role, but also in relation to gender performance.³

The scholarship in this book takes up anew the question of the intersections between gender and sexuality. Many of the authors conclude that the constructions, practices and experiences of gender and sexuality are far more entangled and mutually constitutive than the formulation in 'Thinking Sex' intimates. Yet we would argue that it was precisely Rubin's call to refuse to subordinate sexuality under the rubric of gender that has enabled the explorations that these chapters engage in. Covering a wide range of contexts – from sixteenth-century New Spain to late twentieth-century Miami, Chinese sexology to American nudist magazines, free women of colour in the British Caribbean to Egyptian reformers – these chapters demonstrate the particularities not just of specific formulations of gender and sexuality in different historical contexts, but also of the very nature of the relationship between the categories themselves.

The volume begins with three chapters set in the colonial Americas that highlight the productivity of rethinking these issues in contexts that were profoundly shaped by cross-cultural encounters, which often highlighted the very contingency of conceptions of gender and sexuality and also led to their transformation.⁴ Pete Sigal's contribution is an examination of Cihuacoatl and other Nahua deities who combined masculine and feminine attributes, demonstrating the historical and cultural specificity of

configurations of gender and sexuality. In pre-conquest Nahua culture, Cihuacoatl was simultaneously 'a feared deity, a defeated woman, and a cross-dressed man'. Spanish priests were confused by this 'jumble of attributes, skins that could be taken off or placed on at will', and sought to make sense of Cihuacoatl by reducing her to what they considered her essential self: 'only the feared goddess'. Unable to comprehend a deity who combined masculine and feminine attributes, who could both kill and heal, the priests' binary concepts of male and female, death and curing, overwhelmed the complex multiplicities of deities like Cihuacoatl, stripping them of contradictory attributes into simplistically coded figures comprehensible within a European Catholic worldview.

Priests are not the only ones to have been challenged by Cihuacoatl's combination of masculine and feminine attributes. Scholars have struggled to make sense of her place in pre-conquest Nahua society (seen as organised around a strict gender division and hierarchy). It was not just the boundary between male and female that Cihuacoatl blurred; she also traversed the boundaries between the human and the divine, the secular and the religious, the chaste and the sexual. Yet the transgressions that Cihuacoatl and other Nahua deities were capable of, as well as those of the humans operating within a ritual sphere, were not acceptable practices of everyday life but were restricted to the divine and ritual realms. Rather than seeking Cihuacoatl's 'true sex', Sigal uses Cihuacoatl's 'jumble of attributes' to rethink Rubin's emphasis on the need to treat gender and sexuality as analytically distinct categories requiring their own tools of analysis. Sigal demonstrates that it is impossible to treat these as conceptually distinct categories for non-western peoples (and by extension pre-modern ones) without imposing western conceptions of sexuality and gender upon them.

Nahua 'categories of the intimate' (a rubric that Sigal contends better encapsulates their cultural conceptions than 'sexual') grouped together a wide range of activities – from vaginal and anal intercourse to burning maize – that we might not see as related and certainly not all as sexual or erotic. What linked these activities in the Nahua worldview was their relationship to fertility, a vital concern for these agriculturalists. Just as Rubin rejected the incorporation of 'sexuality' as a subset of 'gender', Sigal asks us to think carefully about presuming that fertility rituals and reproductive sex are necessarily a subset of 'sexual' categories. The Nahua, he argues, posited the reverse: they 'envisioned sexual relations as elements of a larger set of ritual practices designed to promote fertility: of gods, humans, animals and the earth'.

If fertility is the context for making sense of Nahua sexual practices, the next two chapters, by Marisa J. Fuentes and Brooke N. Newman, argue that sex in the Anglophone Caribbean in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries cannot be understood apart from the racialised and gender power formations of colonial slave societies. Fuentes analyses the life and 'troubled archive' of Rachael Pringle Polgreen, 'a woman of colour, a former slave turned slave-owner' and owner of a brothel in the Barbadian capital of Bridgetown, while Newman centres on the articulation of a white Creole identity, its denigration by metropolitan observers, and the role of 'intimacy across the colour line' in both. For both Fuentes and Newman, Anglophone Caribbean slave societies cannot be explicated without attention to the ways in which both gender and sexuality were mobilised to define subjectivity, enable or constrain opportunity and legitimate colonial power regimes. For black women, whether enslaved, free or freed, their subjectivity as women was in great part defined by their sexual availability

to white men whose masculinity was partially defined by their considerable sexual freedom and, in the sanctimonious opinion of metropolitan observers, their 'voracious appetite' for women of colour. These contributions demonstrate how colonial identities and the relations of power that defined colonial societies were constructed along the 'entangled axes of gender, sexuality and race'.

Given such power relations, enslaved and formerly enslaved women like Rachael Pringle Polgreen rarely make it into the archives and, when they do, it is most often as the object of the white male colonial gaze. In these respects, Polgreen was unusual. In addition to journalistic, editorial and fictional depictions of her life, she also left a will and newspaper advertisements, probably composed (if not actually penned) by herself, as well as documentation of her property ownership in an inventoried estate and tax records. As one of the few women of colour whose presence is discernable in the colonial archives, Polgreen has often stood in for the experience of enslaved and formerly enslaved women in Caribbean history. Yet it is precisely the same exceptionalism that renders her so visible to historians as a relatively wealthy, slave-owning, brothel-managing, former slave that leads Fuentes rightly to caution us against understanding her as representative of women of colour in slave societies, let alone those who spent their entire lives in slavery. Even so, as Fuentes's reading of Thomas Rowlandson's caricature of Polgreen reveals, Polgreen was, like all those women of colour, subjected to a colonial gaze that was simultaneously raced, gendered and sexualised.

As Newman demonstrates, it was not just enslaved and formerly enslaved women of African descent who were objects of this gaze. British observers of white Caribbean society were equally attentive to the racialised, gendered and sexualised differences they saw between themselves and their colonial counterparts. In particular, 'cross-racial unions, lineages and inheritance practices' as well as the admittedly rare inclusion of free people of African descent into the legal category of 'whiteness' were read by metropolitan observers as evidence of sexual excesses and 'physical and moral degeneration' from a metropolitan ideal of Britishness. In texts such as John Singleton's 1767 poem, *A General Description of the West Indian Islands*, white colonial men were depicted as 'overcome by dangerous passions' while their infidelities were blamed on their 'impetuous' and 'jealous' white wives. Newman profitably explores the contradictions between metropolitan and colonial gender norms through the private diary of Jonathan Troup, a Scottish physician who resided in Dominica between 1789 and 1791. Although Troup participated in the 'explicitly debauched, creolised version of British manhood' that included sexual access to women of colour, he ultimately committed himself 'to the stability and superiority of his own identity as a white metropolitan Briton'.

As these two contributions illustrate, at the heart of the particular racial and gendered relations that sustained Caribbean slave societies was white masculine access to the bodies of women of colour. The agency of those women has been a vexed question in the historiography of slave societies, one that both Fuentes and Newman tackle, although they reach different conclusions. For Newman, the possibility that some women of colour could wrest some advantages from such a disadvantaged position is embodied in the story of Susanna Augier, who successfully mobilised her relationships with white men – her father and two white consorts – to gain freedom, property and eventually legally inscribed whiteness for herself and her children. Newman carefully stresses how rare such incidents were, but these stories do reveal how such prospects

were premised on the very social order that so disadvantaged women and subjected them to sexual exploitation in the first place. Fuentes is much more cautious in rendering actions like Augier's as expressions of agency and counsels us against seeing enslaved or free(d) women's agency in their sexual acquiescence to white men's sexual demands. Not only does such an interpretation downplay if not ignore the power dynamics that left enslaved black women wholly vulnerable in a racialised, patriarchal, slave society, it is also particularly difficult to reconcile the sense of heroic agency and resistance to slavery that has often been attributed to Polgreen with the narrative of her life since her wealth and security came from 'buying into a system of slavery', one that depended upon these 'hierarchies based on race and gender' and one that in Polgreen's case was based on the sexual exploitation of other black women.

These first chapters also highlight the interaction between systems of gender and sexuality that often took place in colonial or imperial contexts, as well as the reception and contestation of western concepts of gender and sexuality throughout the world. While Newman's Troup ultimately rejected a creolised British masculinity in favour of its metropolitan counterpart, Sigal's priests struggled, and eventually failed, to impose their European sexual mores onto a Nahua system that revolved around poles of moderation and excess rather than sin and salvation. Such metropolitan or western ideas were not always imposed from the outside, nor (as Sigal argues) were they always successful. The next chapter, by Leon Antonio Rocha, the first of two focused on modern China, examines the transnational flow of ideas about gender and sexuality in the twentieth century. Rocha reminds us that it is equally important to pay attention to the historical specificities and contestation of cultural exchange within modern regimes of globalisation. He asserts that we should never assume 'that people in the Third World merely copied, parroted, were "interpellated" by or inflicted with the discourse of the colonising Other'. Instead, he argues, 'globalisation [was] always already accompanied by localisation and indigenisation'.

Rocha's contribution provides just this kind of nuanced analysis of the globalisation of sexual knowledge through a tightly focused etymological analysis of *xing*, a character that meant 'human nature' in Classical Chinese but, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, came to denote both sex *and* human nature. This transformation was brought about by cosmopolitan Chinese intellectuals of the May Fourth New Culture period (c. 1915–37), who consumed and translated the work of European, American and Japanese sexologists and sex education reformers, including the American birth control reformer Margaret Sanger and the German physician and homosexual rights advocate Magnus Hirschfeld. Rocha argues that radical Chinese intellectuals embraced the western notion of 'sex as fundamental property of humanity', a modern ideological development analysed by Foucault, as part of a broader project of Chinese nation-building in a period of massive upheaval. According to Rocha, '[s]ex became a panacea to China's weakness and degeneracy, and a revolution of the relationships between men and women, the reformulation of love and desire, the adoption of eugenics and birth control practices, were perceived as ways to enable the Chinese nation to "catch up" with the west and to become ready to participate in a global modernity'.

Howard Chiang also analyses the profound transformative impact of western sexual science in modern China. His chapter examines the careers of two influential figures who shaped the field of Republican Chinese sexology, Zhang Jingsheng and Pan Guangdan, with the goal of illuminating 'the broader epistemic context in which

the concept of homosexuality emerged as a meaningful point of referencing human difference and cultural identity in twentieth-century China'. Chiang argues that the engagement of Chinese intellectuals with western sexual scientific knowledge points to a broader transformation in the conceptualisation of 'personhood, subjectivity and identity'. Breaking with other historians, Chiang shows that homosexuality circulated in modern Chinese discourse not only as a signifier of social disorder, but as the marker of a new mode of subjectivity. He notes that although same-sex desire was discussed and regulated in imperial China, before the twentieth century 'the question of sexual identity did not even fall within the possible parameters of Chinese thinking'. Moreover, by closely examining the ways in which Zhang and Pan laid claim to sexuality as a legitimate field of empirical inquiry and debate, Chiang identifies the development of a modern epistemological regime, 'a public of truth, in which the authority of truth could be contested, translated across culture and reinforced through new organisational efforts'.

Like Rocha, Chiang examines the ways in which this new form of sexual science became embedded within discourses of Chinese nationalism. By the mid-1930s, Chinese sexual experts, influenced by psychological models that pathologised same-sex desire, interpreted the prevalence of male homosexuality as evidence of national backwardness and therefore invoked the prevention of homosexuality as a pressing policy concern. Same-sex desire was now reconceived as antithetical to heterosexual relations, and some experts asserted that homosexuality could be cured through heterosexual marriage. Chiang calls attention to the gendered dimensions of these developments, demonstrating that women's maintenance of sexual hygiene played an important part in discouraging male homosexuality. He cites as an example Zhang's assertion that '[a]s long as women took good care of their vaginas and used them properly for sex... the "perverted", "malodorous", "meaningless" and "inhumane" behaviour of anal intercourse among men could be ultimately eliminated'.

While Chiang's analysis focuses on the work of sexological experts, he also demonstrates that claims to expertise depended on a broader incitement to discourse, manifested in the collection of sexual narratives solicited from public audiences. Zhang, who issued a 'call for stories' that provided the material for his influential 1926 publication *Sex Histories*, also edited the popular magazine *New Culture*, which published the responses of Chinese urbanites to controversial articles on sexuality-related subjects and in which Zhang – who earned the moniker 'Dr Sex' – dispensed expertise to readers who shared their experiences and concerns. Wilson Chacko Jacob's contribution focuses on a similar history of the collaborative production of knowledge about sexuality and gender in modern Egypt. He offers a close reading of *Physical Culture*, a Cairo-based publication whose run extended from 1929 until the early 1950s. Jacob describes *Physical Culture* as 'an artefact of colonial modernity' that 'contributed to the vibrant public culture of the interwar period a forum in which the fantasy of the modern sovereign subject could be expressed in myriad ways that most frequently centred on a proper conception of sex and masculinity'. While readers' letters reflect a wide range of sexual concerns and practices, the primary educative function of the publication was to 'demonstrate the harms of sexual activity outside the legitimate bonds of marriage'. Expertise was marshalled to demonstrate the dangers of masturbation and venereal disease to the normative masculine body and a universalised model of heterosexuality, but Jacob shows that the production of 'an ostensibly seamless

normative sphere of heterosocial and heterosexual life' developed gradually and unevenly through a process of 'creative adaptation'. Jacob suggests that this process ultimately involved rendering deviant and marginal figures like the khawal, cross-dressing male performers who had traditionally appeared at Egyptian wedding parties.

The contribution by Hanan Kholoussy examines a very different response to the same problem highlighted by Jacob. As Egypt moved towards independence from British colonialism, some Egyptian nationalists blamed their subjugation on 'the weak and sick bodies of Egyptian men'. While Jacob's protagonists, the publishers and readers of *Physical Culture* magazine, relied upon self-regulation and the 'cultivat[on] of properly disciplined subjects', Kholoussy's reformers relied upon regulating male sexuality, so that husbands would not infect their wives and by extension their families. Both these solutions, however, were centred on constructing a normative, healthy and heterosexual male body.

Kholoussy's chapter, as well as the subsequent contribution by Sandra Eder, examine how gender and sexuality were inscribed on the body through constructions of what is healthy and normative, or diseased and in need of treatment. In their efforts to create a modern, post-colonial state, Egyptian reformers granted women the right to divorce husbands with venereal or other incurable diseases, thus medicalising marriage in the pursuit of 'creating a nationalist, nuclear, physically fit and "modern" family'. While such a pro-family strategy was part and parcel of a global eugenics project at the turn of the twentieth century, Kholoussy argues that Egyptian uses of these strategies relied upon local inspiration for their legitimacy, especially since granting women a right to divorce was itself a challenge to Islamic patriarchy. Reformers pointed to a twelfth-century religious text which decreed that women could divorce husbands who suffered from maladies such as insanity, leprosy and 'disease of the sex organ', thus 'ingeniously borrow[ing] and combin[ing] principles from . . . Islamic law in an eclectic and unprecedented manner'.

Kholoussy also shows how the Egyptian semi-colonial state both echoed and was distinct from its British colonial predecessor, especially in its interest in regulating male as well as female sexuality. Between 1882 and 1922, in their efforts 'to protect the health of their military troops', British authorities focused their interventions on Egyptian prostitutes, subjecting them to registration requirements and weekly health inspections, while exempting their own soldiers from any regulations or inspections. Egyptian authorities, however, both before and after British occupation, demonstrated a willingness to expand the scope of their public health campaigns to monitor male and female heterosexuality. While the concern of the Ottoman Egyptian state was the production of 'industrious, physically fit bodies that would both increase agricultural production and strengthen military prowess', the semi-colonial state of the 1910s and 1920s focused its attention on the encouragement of healthy families, which in turn would produce healthy citizens.

The production of healthy citizens through medicalisation is also a central concern of Sandra Eder's contribution on the treatment of children with congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH) at the Harriet Lane Home for Invalid Children at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland in the mid-twentieth century. Caused by disorders in the adrenal glands, CAH often results in children experiencing premature signs of puberty: girls might have ambiguous, and boys 'precocious', genitalia. In diagnosing children with CAH, physicians and psychiatrists often emphasised sexual traits

such as these as well as sexual behaviours. But the treatments they developed, while not ignoring the body, emphasised efforts to impose a gender identity that contained ambiguously sexed bodies and which were in great part about ensuring future heterosexual desires and practices. This was a disease whose identification depended upon the particularities of a sexed body, and whose treatment relied upon the cultivation of a normative gender role towards which the body's sex would be reshaped, all in the service of creating normatively gendered and sexualised citizens.

The diagnosis and treatment of CAH at Johns Hopkins is but one phase in the medicalisation of gender and sexuality in the modern west. Yet, as Eder's reading of these patient case records shows, it was one in which medical professionals were not always the most authoritative voices. As they struggled to assign a matching sex and gender to bodies that blurred the boundaries between male and female, man and woman, physicians could lose out to parents' insistence that their children's sex confirm the gender that they, the parents, had already determined and assigned. Her attention to the production of knowledge in the context of clinical practice – one that involved interactions among medical professionals, parents and children themselves – leads Eder to conclude that the contentious and protracted efforts to assign a 'true' or 'best' sex often resulted in the view that it was 'easier to fix ambiguous bodies than rigid gender roles' in the service of creating 'clearly gendered men and women', who were, in the eyes of their doctors, 'psychologically well-adjusted and functional' and who 'could "live a normal life"'.

Gender and sexuality are also revealed to be entangled and mutually constituted in the final section of this book, which comprises three chapters that focus on political and social activism in the twentieth century. Brian Hoffman's contribution examines the mid-century campaign by nudist movement leaders to challenge the 'modern obscenity regime' in the US. This campaign was spearheaded by the International Nudist Conference (INC), founded in 1933, which sought to position the nude body as healthy, natural and respectable, and asserted that the social experience of nakedness led to the promotion of more 'wholesome' relations between the sexes. INC's efforts to disseminate its beliefs through the publication of a monthly magazine, *Sunshine and Health* (*S&H*), which contained images of 'naked men, women and children of all body shapes and sizes', fell foul of federal obscenity law. In the series of legal challenges it mounted with the assistance of the American Civil Liberties Union in the 1940s and 1950s, INC chose not to attack obscenity law at its root, but rather to define its publication, and by extension the nudist movement, as distinct from and superior to commercialised representations of sexuality. To this end, Hoffman argues, INC promulgated a brand of sexual liberalism he defines as heteronormative. Although some consumers certainly found *S&H* to be an outlet for homoerotic fantasy, the magazine (with some exceptions) situated the respectable nude body within the context of the heterosexual reproductive family.

Hoffman's chapter demonstrates that the heteronormative ethos of the American nudist movement was produced through legal contestation between nudist movement activists, their legal representatives and the judiciary. This ethos was structured by categories of race and gender. For example, INC activists, the majority of whom were white, claimed that censorship of *S&H* amounted to anti-white discrimination, given that *National Geographic* and similar publications presented images of nude non-white bodies without legal censure. Hoffman shows that while nudist activists espoused racial

liberalism, advocating 'integrated' nudist camps for example, some judges continued to insist on the legality of representing the 'primitive' non-white nude body as an appropriate anthropological subject. American judges also articulated distinctions among white gendered bodies, asserting that women's bodies that conformed to conventions of European female beauty might be read as respectable, whereas those that strayed from these conventions were to be considered obscene. Judges also made distinctions between the representation of men's and women's bodies, proving obstinately resistant to publishing images of male genitalia, for example. These gendered conventions regarding representations of the nude body have proven remarkably persistent (in material not marked as pornographic).

The historical production of heteronormativity also functions as an important theme in Jocelyn Olcott's contribution, which examines sexual politics at the 1975 United Nations International Women's Year (IWY) Conference in Mexico City, a 'watershed moment in transnational feminism'. Olcott's revelatory chapter focuses on the controversial discussions of sexual issues – namely prostitution, lesbianism and population control – at the conference and at the associated tribune attended by representatives of non-governmental organisations from throughout the world. Olcott argues that many Latin American participants – notably the Ecuadorean labour activist Domitila Barrios de Chungara – viewed the focus on sexual rights as a preoccupation of western feminists unconcerned with the materialist and anti-imperialist priorities of women from the global south. As Olcott notes, Barrios de Chungara and others who shared her views saw the concern with sexual rights as challenging traditional family structures and ideals, and responded with a 'definitive reassertion of gender complementarity and conventional heteronormative nuclear families'. The Mexican press also espoused this position; columnists asserted that North American radical lesbians and prostitutes' rights proponents pushed their agendas to the detriment of those advocating legitimate women's issues.

Yet, Olcott cautions the reader to reject a characterisation of these conflicts – espoused in many contemporary and retrospective accounts by participants and observers – as representing a clear-cut division between the sexual liberation agendas of western feminists who sought to challenge gender essentialism, and the economic and anti-colonialist imperatives of Marxist feminists who insisted on traditional norms of gender complementarity. To this end, she makes two important arguments. First, she shows that empowered North American feminists, notably Betty Friedan, the iconic leader of the National Organisation for Women, also proved resistant to the incursion of sexual causes at the IWY conference. As Olcott points out, Friedan, who saw herself as 'a broker and a model for feminists around the world', believed that these issues distracted from the important women's causes, such as equality in education and employment, that she prioritised. Indeed, Olcott's analytic focus on sexuality and sexual rights reveals that Friedan and Barrios de Chungara were in no way the antithetical figures that they have been imagined to be: 'Both expressed open homophobia and little patience with prostitutes' rights campaigns; both insisted that men and women collaborate rather than work against one another; and both blamed transnational corporations for women's continued oppression'.

Second, Olcott shows that, if Friedan and Barrios de Chungara 'stood in for the dominant official themes of equality and development' that animated the IWY conference, some non-western activists aggressively challenged such attempts to

exclude sexuality and sexual rights from 'core' women's issues. She illuminates this second major argument by analysing the performance of Mexican theatre director Nancy Cárdenas, who led a participant-initiated forum on lesbianism, which featured 'Mexico's first lesbian manifesto, naming sexual recognition as a critical form of social liberation, tantamount to struggles against imperialism, apartheid and racism'. Olcott describes Cárdenas and other non-western lesbian feminists as embodying a form of 'cosmopolitan lesbianism' that countered nationalist maternalism and resisted 'assumptions of a zero-sum rivalry between sexual rights and human rights'. Olcott, in turn, cautions us not to map this oppositional structure onto our historical narratives of international feminist activism. Even if, as she suggests, 'a homophobic posture and antagonism toward sexual rights' continues in more recent iterations of anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist politics, she cautions us to pay attention to the political foundations of attempts to extract sexuality from women's rights and human rights causes, rather than to see this distinction as resulting from 'traditionalism, provincialism, or the conservative influence of the Catholic Church or the Communist Party – or even to a visceral or subconscious repugnance'.

The final contribution to this volume, Susana Peña's 'Gender and Sexuality in Latina/o Miami: Documenting Latina Transsexual Activists', also emphasises the importance of historical specificity in analysing the relationship between gender and sexuality within activist movements. In this insightful and careful chapter, Peña grapples with a thorny question faced by historians more broadly: what are the implications of imposing contemporary analytical categories on historical actors in the past? This question has proven particularly challenging to historians studying the relationship between non-normative gender and sexuality, given the hegemony of western conceptions of homosexuality that fuse together in complicated ways a range of attributes and behaviours including gender performance, sexual object choice and sexual role. As Pete Sigal elucidates in the first chapter in this book, this problem is especially vexatious for scholars who do not focus on the modern western world, given vast differences in the organisation of gender and sexuality across time and place.

Peña confronts this question in a chapter that 'explores the borderlands between the concept of "homosexual" and "transgender" with a particular focus on Latina/o communities in Miami, Florida' in the late twentieth century. Citing scholars Susan Stryker and David Valentine, Peña notes that 'transgender' is a relatively recent invention, gaining widespread usage only in the 1990s. While 'transgender' has often been invoked as a capacious and flexible category in the intervening years, its usage as a 'collective category of identity', according to Valentine, has been defined as 'explicitly and fundamentally different in origin and being from homosexual identification'. Responding to a critique of her previous work that focused on Cuban American gay male cultures in Miami after the Mariel Boatlift of 1980, Peña argues that to define the gender transgressive Cuban migrants as 'transgender' – a category that did not exist at the time – obscures the complexities of the interrelationship of gender and sexuality, even if some of the individuals involved have since come to define themselves as such. Indeed, Peña argues that many Marielitas (Cubans who arrived on the Mariel Boatlift) understood – and continue to understand – expressions of gender nonconformity as playing 'a central role in structuring homosexual/queer self-identifications'.