

BOOK REVIEW

Sexualizing Cancer: HPV and the Politics of Cancer Prevention *by Laura Mamo*

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The human papilloma virus (HPV) is a sexually transmitted infectious agent, certain strains of which induce benign genital warts while others are implicated in causing cancer, most prominently cervical cancer. *Sexualizing Cancer* examines the pathways by which HPV vaccines and HPV screening tests entered medical practice in recent years.

Laura Mamo, professor in the Health Equity Institute at San Francisco State University and an expert in studies of gender and sexuality in medicine, follows the emergence of this new paradigm in cancer prevention by analysing press articles and pharmaceutical marketing, attending medical conferences and clinics, and conducting interviews with leading experts and activist groups.

In successive chapters, the author covers the complexities of vaccine campaigns to protect girls against cervical cancer, then boys to prevent genital warts and other kinds of cancer, and later those at high-risk of developing HPV-associated anal and oropharyngeal cancers. The picture that emerges is one of shifting associations: sex, gender and sexuality are variously suppressed, rendered invisible, or brought into the light, ultimately shaping the politics of prevention.

The business model of stratified biomedicalisation, that is the early adoption of high-price products accompanied by aggressive marketing to resource-rich consumers, results in uneven and inequitable access driven by racial, economic and environmental disparities. Stereotypes of gender and sexuality influence discussion and planning around sexually transmitted diseases and consequently how different communities are protected, monitored and treated.

Subsequent chapters consider the implications of HPV testing, including the potential replacement of the conventional Pap test that effectively reduced mortality from cervical cancer in high-resource countries, and at-home HPV test-kits targeted at individuals already likely to be receiving high-quality healthcare that fail to address the real needs of public health in marginalised communities and low-income nations.

The opening and closing chapters situate this fascinating history in the context of prior academic literature on technological innovation in medicine. Here, certain concepts and jargon may not be familiar to some readers but this should not detract from what is a deeply researched, well written and solidly referenced work that carries important messages for anyone interested in infectious disease, cancer prevention and public health.

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