

Jeffrey Weeks: *Sexuality. Second Edition.* London: Routledge, 2002.

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1 For this new edition of his classic *Sexuality*, British historical sociologist Jeffrey Weeks updated and rewrote every chapter in order to include new issues that have emerged in the past twenty years (such as newer debates on gay marriage) - a period within which sexuality has turned into a mainstream topic. But Weeks also points out that his views have not changed since the first edition was published in 1986. The main point of his book remains the same: It is an argument against the idea of "sexuality" as something only "natural." The book facilitates access to complex theories. Weeks provides a good overview over different ways of conceptualizing sexuality within social sciences; one of his main purposes is to denaturalize sexuality: "Yet it is the task of sociology and the other social sciences to 'deconstruct' naturalism, and to determine how actions are given their meaning and significance via social interaction" (VII).

2 Weeks explains how and why so-called "essentialist" concepts of sexuality are too simplistic. Drawing on a range of theoretical approaches - from Freud to Foucault, from Rubin to Dyer - the book shows how sexuality is socially constructed and produced only within social relations. For Weeks, no natural meaning is inherent to sexuality. Rather, sexuality gains meaning through social interaction; therefore, no fixed meaning can be attached to sexuality, or to how people perceive "their own" sexuality. The author argues that sexuality is not determined by one social totality like capitalism or patriarchy. Quoting different examples, he explains how sexuality is interwoven with discourses of gender, class, race, and other social categories. Weeks points out that these categories cannot really be separated from each other and that none of these categories determine what sexuality is, e.g. that sexuality is not determined by "gender."

3 Using Foucault's theory of power, Weeks discusses how sexuality can be conceptualized as something that does not exist outside of "relations of power" and of society and gains significance only through these relations. Foucault argued that power is a relation and therefore cannot be possessed. His main argument is that power does not work by repression only, but also as a mode of production. By quoting some discussions on contemporary social and political issues - the AIDS crisis for instance - he provides examples of how this social construction of sexuality works within relations of power, how sexuality is regulated and produced, how sexuality is to be perceived as political.

4 Weeks also offers a historicist view and tries to explain how changes in our way of

thinking (about sexuality) challenge the way it is lived. Again drawing on Foucault, he argues that what we now call sexual identity (defining oneself along a homo/hetero axis) has existed only since the 19th century. While before people were "sexually defined" by their "good" or "bad" acts, they have since become individuals with a sexual character.

5 Chapter 2 is the most important one. Here, Weeks provides a short overview of the "history of sexuality." He then explains how sexuality is socially constructed, e.g. within kinship and family systems, economic and social organization, and how it is socially regulated and politically intervened into. While elaborating on sexuality and power, he introduces Foucault's theory of power and explains how it can be applied to the complex relations between race, class, and gender. Chapter 5 gives crucial insights into Weeks's point of view. Here, he poses the question as to what consequences a non-essentialist conception of sexuality has for (sexual) politics. He positions the topic within a breakdown of tradition, liberalization, and capitalism, and discusses the absolutist and the libertarian position towards sexuality.