

SEX IS NOT A NATURAL ACT AND OTHER ESSAYS

Leonore Tiefer
Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004

REVIEWED BY MELANIE BERES

Almost 30 years after the sexual revolution, it is popularly believed that we live in a time of sexual enlightenment and freedom, a time of openness and dialogue that is unprecedented in recent history. While it is possible to reflect on many positive changes to the culture of sexuality (the availability of contraception for example), Leonore Tiefer challenges her readers to think about the social structures that continue to restrict sexual freedom, especially women's sexual freedom.

Sex is Not a Natural Act is the second edition of a compilation of insightful essays that challenge dominant constructions of sexuality in the United States. This collection is made up of invited lectures, conference presentations, newspaper columns and other works that Tiefer has written over the last few years. Included in this edition are many of the provocative essays that appeared in the first edition, with a generous helping of new essays focusing on major changes in the popular culture of sexuality, especially the public and medical response to the release of Viagra™.

Part One of the text provides the foundation and introduces Tiefer's approach to sexuality. This part is fundamental to understanding her way of thinking and is mostly unchanged from the first edition. In this part Tiefer explains her theoretical perspective on sexuality, and clearly describes her social constructionist approach, using general vernacular palatable to a wide audience.

Part Two focuses on popular culture issues relevant to sexuality and includes a smattering of comical and timely newspaper columns. In one particularly interesting chapter ("The McDonaldization of Sex") Tiefer argues that sex, like fast food, has become efficient, predictable, and controlled. Another chapter, on kissing, outlines ways in which kissing is de-sexualized in popular culture, and identifies the social consequences of this de-sexualization.

In Part Three, Tiefer links her feminist and activist politics with the field of sexology and highlights the manufacture of sexual dysfunction. In particular, she points out how the classification of sexual dysfunction has little to do with the concerns that women have about their own sexual lives. Tiefer elaborates on this in Part Four, by taking a closer look at the latest developments in the field of sexology as it relates to sexual dysfunction. In particular she examines how the introduction of Viagra has impacted expectations of what is considered "normal" sex.

Part Five builds on the previous four parts, and in a sense is the climax of the book (no pun intended). In this part Tiefer develops arguments related to the recent manufacture of female sexual dysfunction. She discusses Viagra's impact on women's sexuality, including the developing concern over finding a "pink Viagra" for women. These last essays are as intriguing as the ones in previous chapters; however, parts of the essays become repetitive. This is largely due to the way the book was put together, as a compilation of essays originally written for other purposes. Thus, each essay stands alone and provides the necessary background information to understand the argument thoroughly. This makes for some moments of *déjà vu* while reading the book, although this feature also makes these essays ideal for use as supplemental reading in a sexuality class.

For Canadian readers, one drawback to the book is that Tiefer dis-

cusses issues of sexuality as they relate to American culture and society. For example, she discusses the political climate around sex education and the American federal government approach to it. She also discusses the impact of the American medical system, including Health Management Organizations (HMOs) and other types of insurance companies, on the types of treatment options accessible to couples with concerns about their sex life. These cultural infrastructures are different in Canada, and thus these issues do not play out in the same way as they do in the United States. While these essays are still interesting and engaging, I was left contemplating how similar social structures impact the construction of sexuality "north of the border."

Overall, *Sex is Not a Natural Act and Other Essays* provides a major contribution to the understanding of sexuality. Tiefer's writing style is enjoyable and witty; she uses humour to engage and to disarm while clearly and concisely making her point. It is an ideal book for academics looking for a feminist analysis of the popular culture of sexuality, and is also a worthwhile teaching tool.

FEMINIST POLITICS, ACTIVISM AND VISION: LOCAL AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Luciana Ricciutelli, Angela Miles and Margaret H. McFadden, Eds.
Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education Inc.; London and New York: Zed Books Ltd., 2004

REVIEWED BY JENNIFER SUMNER

The history of women, like the history of many other subordinated