

maintains that to varying degrees some expectations remain. Although noting that postmodernist writers are likely to talk about the life course in terms of uncertainty and unpredictability, Hunt falls back on Giddens' notion of 'risk' to provide a common social ground. He writes that 'we may not necessarily pass through stringent and clearly marked out stages of the life course but make choices and negotiate risks...' (p31).

We do this, though, in a time of increasing uncertainties, one of which comes from the fragmentation of 'self' and the loss of meaning and identity inherent in contemporary Western society (p31). Nevertheless, in tracing the life course Hunt's book leaves the reader with a deep sense of what a human life is. The vast range of experiences and choices that one must negotiate in 'late- or postmodernity' engenders--as it has in previous times--a personal and historical narrative. I am a little surprised then that Hunt has not taken into account the notion of 'life history' in his otherwise extensive review. That being said, his book--as an introduction to the study of the life course and, due to its comprehensive coverage, to the field of sociology more generally--is highly recommended.

The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora by Gloria Wekker. Columbia University Press, New York, 2006. Pp. xvi + 353. Pb. ISBN 10 987654 321.

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The Politics of Passion by Gloria Wekker is an excellent anthropological study of the sexual culture in the Surinamese community. Wekker has managed to convey the complexities of the culture without burdening the text with undue lengthy recounts of field notes and she clearly states her position as a participant-observer. This text is a valuable addition to the discourse that concerns the Surinamese diaspora within the wider understandings of a West African diaspora. The sexual culture that has been constructed by women within a section of the working class community of Suriname is illustrated as one of conflict and simultaneously as one of great joy and harmony. The author has been conscious to avoid the use of labels used in Western and European societies, which are burdened with European meanings, to describe the same-sex relations between women in the study. The text has argued that there are no universal expressions and attitudes towards same-sex relationships and that the cultural development of these sexual habits has historical origins in West Africa exacerbated by slave trading and colonial structures imposed from the eighteenth through to the early twentieth centuries.

The Surinamese community has close ties with the Netherlands, its former colonial authority. It gained independence in 1975 (xi), however, there is an active migration between the two countries and in particular, an out migration to the Netherlands that has created Surinamese enclaves in Holland. This has been addressed in the study and portrays how Surinamese sexual habits are transported and in some ways adjusted within a European environment. The author is of Surinamese descent raised via the Netherlands and has lived in America for study and work. Her interest in Creole working-class culture was initiated by a study published in 1936 by Melville and Frances Herskovits, *Suriname Folk-lore*, which she claims “made me see connections with phenomena I perceived around me in Amsterdam” (xi). She has used the study to provide much of the impetus for her own work, challenging and analysing its claims and observations and connecting her findings to this and a number of other studies conducted on the African Diaspora.

The study is centred in the city of Paramaribo where Wekker established an informant network amongst the *mati* women. Wekker has claimed that much of the work on same-sex relationships has focused on Western European ideas that sexual preference is closely tied to a fixed identity and has therefore been interrogated within these constraints (118). The institution of *mati* work in Suriname is more fluid and women who engage in same-sex relationships are also active in cross-sex relationships at different times or simultaneously. The study “centrally addresses . . . issues of power” (67) and “acknowledges that power is negotiated both in cross-sex and same-sex relationships” (67). The author has employed an “historical route” (168) to explain the development of this parallel sex culture, pointing to slavery and Dutch colonial policy in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She has proposed that a combination of the dual marriage system and the manner in which rations and work were distributed on plantations has had a significant influence in developing an ideology that can be observed in *mati* culture.

The dual marriage system placed black slave women in a subjugated position to white men – they were generally one of a number of concubines to the same master. With the abolition of slavery, “unequal economic circumstances between Creole men and women were enacted in sexual spheres, where women made an equation between sex and money” (168). She has observed that women perceived men as only wanting sex. Feelings of manhood were derived from that status of “keeping” a number of women in addition to a steady relationship, mimicking the colonial order (168). The investment in an intimate relationship with a man was based on his

solvency: “the bottom line was without money, no sex” (168). The poor economic situation of Creole men and the development of gold mining and forest industries meant that men were absent for months at a time causing temporary and unreliable income patterns. Many women developed independence and autonomy and matrifocal households became predominant in working-class Suriname society. Wekker has suggested that some aspects of matrifocal households were carried from the West African regions where many slaves originated.

The *mati* work, as the Surinamese refer it to, have strict rules of etiquette that enforce the power structure of *mati* relationships. Generally, the older woman in the relationship is the dominant partner and it has been observed that they display many characteristics commonly associated with a dominant male role. Control over the subordinate partner has to be maintained to accrue status within the community. Women in these same-sex relationships support each other with food, clothes and gifts of jewellery. They help each other when one is sick and also with childcare. Some live together but generally they run separate households. They also have male partners who for different women spend varying lengths of time in relationships with a particular man or with a number of men at various times. The intimacy of their cross-sex liaisons is firmly based on the gifts he brings. Regular payments for those in more stable relationships occur and when these stop so do the visits.

Mati work is strongly affiliated with the *Winti* religion, providing a cosmology that is used to rationalise certain behaviours and provides a “multiplicity and malleability of the self” (103). Wekka found that the personal pronoun “I”, was used to identify approximately eleven different aspects of the self, and was used in the same way “irrespective of one’s gender” (103). She has stated that they can make statements about themselves in one of three ways in singular and/or plural terms; in male and/or female terms but does not supply the third aspect. However, she continues that this lexicon “indicates that gender is not conceived as strict and rigid, based on biological sex, but that it is a system of possibilities” (104). The deities of this religion are used to characterise behaviour. For example, Aisa the Mother Goddess of the earth represents those attributes typically associated with feminine qualities and Apuku represents the male aspects of personality. These deities are anthropomorphised and people become “possessed” by the gods and behaviours explained by using the personality of the god. An example of this can be seen in the dominant/subordinate relationship of *mati* couples where the “male” partner is said to have greater Apuku spirit. *Mati* work typically involves *Winti* activities and the parties held can be interpreted as a time to showcase partners and to shore up the status of the dominant partners.

The politics of passion are given a very public stage on which the power structures are strengthened and challenged. Partnerships may be formed or collapsed leading to violence or new love.

The lexicon of “I” together with anthropomorphised deity characteristics in Wekka’s view, indicates that sex gratification is primarily a behaviour rather than a mechanism by which the individual becomes identified as a sexual being in the sense of European ideas of lesbianism. Instead she has stated that it confirms the multiple ways people present themselves and their “identities” (84). This, in a sense, normalises the seemingly transient nature of sexual behaviour in Suriname. For one of the informants, it was observed that her “sexuality was based on a sense of agency and self-worth that made sexual fulfilment, and not the sex of the object of her desire, the most important factor”.

The Politics of Passion makes an important contribution to the understanding of the subaltern sexual self that has previously been portrayed in relation to dominant models of family units. Many studies have viewed matrifocal households in a negative way, showing a blindfold mentality that has until now hidden deeper understandings of how women have internalised behaviours. These behaviours have been historically, linguistically and economically influenced by their circumstances and the development of a *mati* ideology that has given them agency, autonomy and independence. The text achieves the goals set by the author. She gives a greater depth to the understanding of the way many Surinamese working-class women negotiate their position in society. The book could add a map to familiarise the reader with the geographical region of the study and its relationship to the Netherlands. So, too, in the later chapter about the Surinamese in the Netherlands a clearer definition of “North” and “South” would better contextualise some of the contrasting situations described to those unfamiliar with Dutch demographics. The subject of study covered by the text explores new ground in black diasporic studies and therefore is able to stand as forerunner of this type of inquiry.

Overall, Wekka has presented a very well constructed argument. She clearly states the intention of the text overall, and each chapter clearly defines its intention. Additionally, each chapter is completed with good concise conclusions that state what has been argued and what insights have been brought to light using observation and participation methodologies. The value of this study lies in its ability to uncover new aspects of the lives of Surinamese working-class women

providing a deeper understanding of the physical and spiritual aspects of sexual gratification in their relationships with other women.

BOOK NOTES:

Michel Dorais, *Rent Boys The World of Male Sex Workers*, (translated by Peter Feldstein) Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen University Press, 2005, pb, ix +110 pp, ISBN 0-7735-2903-9,

As the title suggests this book is a sociological study of the world of men, who work as street hustlers, strippers and escorts. Through a series of interviews with forty young men working in the sex industry Michel Dorais provides a vivid, in-depth and sensitive portrayal of the experiences of male prostitutes. From their responses Dorais divided male sex workers into four types according to self-esteem, control over their lives, relationship with clients and risk of HIV infection. Part-timers opted for sporadic sex work mainly to supplement their income or to pay off debts. Insiders were young men who grew up in or around the sex trade and viewed it as their primary social circle. Liberationists were young homosexuals who used prostitution as a way of living out fantasies, exploring new experiences and profiting from these discoveries. However most were Outcasts who conformed to popular conceptions of the Rent Boy. They lived in a situation of dire poverty where drug addiction and prostitution went hand-in-hand. Dorais's exposure of the differences among male sex workers provides valuable insights for clinical social workers and students interested in this field of study.

Wayne Martino & Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli, *Being Normal Is the Only Way to Be*, Kensington, University of NSW Press, 2005, pb, 194 pp, ISBN 0-86840-687-2

This book focuses on gender and power relationships in Australian high schools and the effect they have both on learning and school social cultures of masculinity and femininity. The authors surveyed 900 young people in private and public schools around Australia and asked them to express their opinions on a range of issues. These included school bullying, having a girl or boyfriend, looking good, school, teachers, social hierarchies in schools and the problem of staying 'cool' and not getting a 'reputation'. The responses were organised into chapters on boys and school, girls and school, being a boy, being a girl, boys harassing girls in school, and 'bully boys' and 'bitch Barbies'. Each chapter features extensive quotes from the surveys and concludes with professional development exercises designed to encourage teachers to reflect on their interactions with students and the adequacy of school policies. Essentially this is a book for teachers by the students who worked with Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, and can be used to stimulate lively discussions in teacher education classes. It is also a valuable resource for student welfare workers and school policy makers.

Pamela Abbott, Claire Wallace & Melissa Tyler, *An Introduction to Sociology: Feminist Perspectives*, London & New York, Routledge, 2005, (3rd edition) pb, xvii + 425 pp, ISBN 0-415-31259-0

Designed to be used as an introduction to sociology this book includes useful explanations of key sociological concepts, an exploration of ongoing debates in sociology and covers a range of theoretical approaches to sociological research. However, it differs from more conventional introductory texts through its critique of male centric social theories, which reinforce the view that men are naturally socially superior to women. The authors argue that feminist perspectives