

do western sexual identities travel?

are our categories and assumptions about the meaning of sexuality, developed in the US/Western Europe, applicable to non-western settings?
or do they obscure our understanding of sexuality elsewhere?

can insights from other cultural settings be brought back to shed light on the possible limitations of our own assumptions about sexuality, gender, identity here in the US?

Anick Prieur's book offered our first pointer — men having sex with men doesn't have the same meaning in terms of identity, gender, sexuality in Mexico and in the US

Swarr and Nagar's article on experiences of women in same-sex relationships in India and South Africa — clearly argue that the vocabulary, assumptions developed in western academic contexts do *not* necessarily do justice to these women's experiences — speak to their concerns

according to Swarr and Nagar, what are limiting assumptions of western feminism, regarding lesbianism?

western feminism tends to view lesbianism first and foremost in terms of *desire* — in the “west” there's an increasing emphasis on external expression of inward feeling, as captured in “coming out” narratives — but in Third World contexts (or rural, working class contexts of US) this can be overshadowed by NEEDS — economic survival, social survival (including threat of violence)

western theorizing of sexuality has focused on the INDIVIDUAL — as unit of analysis valuing of autonomous individual authoring her own destiny (achievement) but in many parts of the world, local ideology cannot separate individual from FAMILY, CLAN, COMMUNITY — shared resources, shared status, shared survival strategies

this contributes to subjective experience of even something as “private” as sexuality

they write, “we seek to reconceptualize desire itself not as innate or inherent but as emerging in conjunction with processes such as development, neocolonialism, apartheid, and liberalization” (495)

from reading, can you explain what they mean by offering example, illustration of “how the politics of intimacy, sexuality, and access to resources intertwine in everyday lives”?

stories of Geeta and Manju in Chitrakoot, India; Cora and Phakamile in Soweto, SA

what “take home messages” did you get from this article?

- even poorest women in most patriarchal settings are not bereft of sexual agency — they too have emotional lives — not just prerogative of the privileged

- *complexity* of identity questions — not just “intersectionality” (gender / sexuality / race / class), not just carving identity into different slices of pie
- problem w/ identity politics: experience isn’t strictly based on who we are also our personalities, our family relationships, our luck in love – things that are never given demographic boxes

“extending intersectionality” means **reconceptualizing “difference” with reference to material and emotional specificities** — from struggles over rights (do women have full citizenship? is homosexuality legally recognized?) and resources (can women have exclusive access to money they earn?) to intimate relationships (family support? economic strings attached [jotas]? friendships, emotional support?) — sorts of relationships “people enter into with or without labels”

“sex for money” in Papua New Guinean Huli, Holly Wardlow

terminology: from *prostitution* to *sex work* to *sexual networking & survival sex* — what different meanings implied in these terms?

sex work emphasizes labor component (safe, legal, fairly paid)
income-generating *activity* rather than totalizing *identity*
reducing stigma

but *still* embedded moralization: if “work” then has to be acceptable, even perhaps virtuous (especially if supporting kids)

of course, even these caveats can’t be generalized

again: can’t assume that similar-looking practices (women and men having illicit, hidden, one-off sex after which man gives woman some money) mean the same things in different places

in Wardlow’s interpretation of Papua New Guinean Huli “passenger women”, economic factors — scarcity, poverty — alone cannot account for or fully explain commoditized sex

these women aren’t exchanging sex for money strictly out of economic necessity why, then?

resistance against restrictive feminine roles tied to reproduction
anger and revenge against male kin who do not behave

again, use of personal narratives to illustrate how identities are produced through combination of broader social forces and idiosyncratic personal factors

Ogai's story

2 of 18 were women whose fathers killed their mother or older sister; wanted to make themselves unmarriageable so fathers wouldn't profit from their bridewealth

HOW does the PNG case help us realize the cultural logics behind common interpretations of prostitution/sex work in the US — make it thinkable, even 'natural' what are assumptions of our cultural logic?

- 1) women = sexually desirable objects (men's desire is active force)
- 2) sex as a commodity — object of desire men willing to purchase, and from other side, act of sex = compensable labor ("oldest profession") in which men are purchasers public/private — sex for \$ ≠ intimate, emotional

why don't these cultural logics help make sense of PNG situation? not applicable?

ideology of desire

men are the objects of desire — cultivate beauty to attract women

women, not seen as naturally beautiful, must often resort to magic to attract men

what about the men? what *are* they paying for?

sometimes nontraditional sexual practices would never ask of wives

more, paying for 'modern' masculinity — *men* are resisting sexual taboos, based on procreative/kinship ethic

passenger women say that when a man offers \$ for sex, evidence that he's so consumed with desire that he's overcome his fear of women and their vaginas — out of gratefulness rather than contempt — which women read as their "vanquishing" of men

with these cross-cultural comparisons in mind, return to Q:

what's problematized around gender/sexuality in contemporary US? what are the questions asked of ourselves and of each other? assumptions within which current debates about gender/sexuality — from sexual identity, to transgender, to commoditized sex — are articulated?