

sexual violence

let's start with article by Lori Heise, who is writing about the pervasiveness of sexual violence against women and children, "gender-based violence"

first, she argues for the *importance* of statistical research, making visible such incidences and it is endemic — especially wife abuse/partner abuse (also incest, child sexual abuse)

b/w 1-5 to 1-7 women in US will be subject to "complete" rape in lifetime — obviously begging Q of definition — but still!

repercussions for family planning/contraceptive promotion
HIV-AIDS prevention

when condoms are targeted at women, often assumed their "choice" to insist men use them, BUT...

Greece and elsewhere, condoms — old technology — associated w/ prostitution and extramarital affairs: to insist on a man using them w/in marriage is read as either questioning his fidelity or acknowledging woman's infidelity (why else need for safe sex in marriage?) — often leads to violence, but even the perception of *threat* of violence has kept women from raising issue w/husbands. [more later]

that said, Heise acknowledges *hazards* of exposing the reality of violence, the pervasiveness of gender-based sexual violence — what are these? (p. 423)

- 1) promoting image of victimization of women; all sex bad, no pleasure (esp. for women)
woman as passive
- 2) feeds essentializing stereotypes men=aggressive

if universal, then biologically based = "natural" = "good" or, at least, "inevitable" (more on that later)

Q: her strategy in response?

the anthropological veto (Peggy Sanday)

but are there flaws with this strategy?

flaw: anthro veto (LIKE universalist claims) assumes that sexual violence is something that could be located in any society — that is, it's not culture bound (after all, isn't it all over the place?)

Q: are there alternative arguments? what might be a better response to the hazards?

ask: *are* these characterizations of violence actually the same thing everywhere?

1st, think about the question, **why does violence (in general) occur?**

myriad of reasons — revenge, fear, hatred, misunderstanding, marking difference, conquest, political ends, material gain

why does **sexual violence** occur?

it's striking how many theories focus on a *single* cause, assume universality of occurrence and meaning

ex: it's a natural outcome of male sexuality [active, aggressive] (e.g., *A Natural History of Rape: The Biological Basis of Sexual Coersion* = men rape when the costs are low and they can get away with it b/c it's a byproduct of evolutionary biology and reproductive success)

note: so much of technology, social “progress” is directed at modifying, controlling nature, it's interesting that nature seems suddenly “uncontrollable” when it comes to socially contentious issues

flip side:

constructivist argument:

it's a political outcome of socially constructed male sexuality (men rape because they are taught they are naturally aggressive, it bolsters their masculinity)

thus Heise: “it is partly men's insecurity about their masculinity that promotes abusive behavior towards women”

feminist activist mantra: **rape isn't about sex, it's about power**

what do you make of this position, Heise's analysis generally? criticisms?

overgeneralizations may undermine political-moral efforts to eradicate violence

a better way to think about the pervasiveness of sexual violence might be to look at

HISTORY and cultural context

militarized mass rape

“gender-based” violence is also often race/ethnicity-based or religion-based

rape, as di Leonardo points out, is rarely if ever *just* an act between a man (generically speaking) and a woman (generically speaking) — but b/w white man and black woman, or Serb man and Croat woman — specificity is important

reducing rape to something boils down to man v. woman has hampered theorizing

sexual violence (including thinking sexual abuse of males)

rape in/after American slavery

what did you make of **Di Leonardo's** essay?

can't analyze away our subjective experience

“knowledge does not necessarily command emotion”

fear is shaped by cultural forces — myths, stereotypes — we don't always have analytical command over — or at least not until after the fact of initial flood of adrenaline

conversely, “individual experiences shouldn't change well-thought-out-opinions” — at least not *necessarily* — like Foucault refusing to theorize from his personal belief about the source of homosexual desire in individuals

pitfalls of “**identity politics,**” appropriateness of “speaking from experience”

how should we move back and forth between social science analysis and personal experience? when is one relevant to the other? (pedagogical challenge)

importance of attending to personal experience

importance of not eliding personal experience and social analysis