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## Violence, Sexuality, and Women's Lives 7

Lori L. Heise

MY FEMINIST PROJECT OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS HAS BEEN TO inter-ject the reality of violence against women into the dominant discourse on AIDS, women's health, and international family planning. My overall aim has been two-fold: to improve public health policy by making it more reflective of the reality of women's lives, and to marshal some of the resources and technical know-how of the international health community to assist women's organizations fighting gender violence in the developing world.<sup>1</sup>

To date, the failure of the global health community to recognize gender-based abuse has put both important public health objectives and individual women at risk. By ignoring the pervasiveness of violence within relationships, for example, the current global AIDS strategy (which is based heavily on condom promotion) dooms itself to failure. The research shows that many women are afraid to even broach the subject of condom use for fear of male reprisal (Elias and Heise 1993; Gupta and Weiss, in this volume). As Anke Ehrhardt, co-director of the HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies, observes, "We have not only ignored the fact that women do not control condom use, but we have rushed headlong into prevention efforts aimed at getting women to insist on condom use without taking into account that they may risk severe repercussions, such as violence and other serious threats to their economic and social support" (Ehrhardt 1991).

This is but one example of the potential costs of failing to explore the intersection of violence, sexuality, gender, and public health. In this chapter, I lay out what is known about violence and sexuality, especially with respect to its implications for women's sexual and reproductive lives. More importantly, I discuss several risks I see present in the feminist project of introducing ideas about violence and sexuality into the professional world of public health. Focusing the "bio-medical gaze" on violence risks reinforcing

negative images of woman as "victim," an impression that can undermine women's own sense of self-efficacy and can justify continued inattention to women's needs. (For example, when faced with women's initial difficulty in "negotiating" condom use, some AIDS experts recommended shifting the entire focus of condom promotion and training to men, instead of exploring ways to strengthen women's ability to protect themselves.) Increased attention to the pervasiveness of violence, especially sexual violence, also risks fueling popular notions of sexuality as biologically driven and of male sexuality as "inherently predatory"—both notions experiencing a resurgence in popular culture. As I will show, however, the cross cultural record does not support a vision of male sexuality as inherently aggressive. To the extent that male sexual behavior is aggressive in certain cultures, it is because sexuality expresses power relations based on gender.

#### A MULTIPLICITY OF DISCOURSES

Sexuality and gender have become the subjects of sociological and biomedical inquiry only within the last century or so. Within this short history, several distinct discourses have laid claim to the domain of human sexual experience. The first, "sexology," emerged as a discipline in the late nineteenth century. Typified by Havelock Ellis, Alfred Kinsey, and Masters and Johnson, sexology has been most concerned with sexual function, dysfunction, and the physiology of the sexual response. To its credit, sexology views women as agents of their own sexual lives, and takes as given women's right to sexual pleasure (see Table One).

Many feminists have criticized sexology; however, for neglecting the "dangerous" side of sex for women: abuse, unwanted pregnancy, STDs, humiliation, rape. As feminist Lenore Tiefer points out, "Sexology's nomenclature of sexual disorders does not describe what makes women unhappy about sex in the real world, but narrows and limits the vision of sexual problems to failures of genital performance" (Tiefer 1992). According to Tiefer, sexology looks at sexuality from the position of male privilege, where the sexual narrative has to do with erotica, intercourse, arousal, pleasure, erection, orgasm. "All well and good," she notes, "but hardly the stuff at the center of many women's sexual experience" (Tiefer 1992:4).

Feminists also fault sexology for failing to confront and work against gender-based power differentials. Significantly, none of the breakthrough studies that first documented the pervasiveness of nonconsensual sex, illegal abortion, and STDs in women came from mainstream sex research. Sexology has resisted challenging male power over female sexuality—in the form of coercive sex, male-defined religious doctrine, or lack of contraceptive research—because it fears "politicizing" what it sees as a basically neutral,

"scientific" subject. According to feminists, however, sexologists—like all professionals—can either *support* institutional norms which ignore women's reality, or they can *subvert* those norms. As Tiefer maintains: "Any attempt to be neutral, to be 'objective' is to support the status quo" (Tiefer 1992:5).

A second more recent discourse on sexuality emerges from the "population control" and international health establishment. International health's interest in sex focuses almost exclusively on behaviors that have implications for demographics and/or for disease. A review of over 2,100 articles from five of the top family planning and health journals, for example, reveals that between 1980 and 1992, sexuality and male-female power dynamics are mentioned only within three narrow contexts: how women's attitudes about sexuality influence contraception use and effectiveness (forty-one articles); how adolescent sexual activity and contraception use are related to teen pregnancy (twenty-four articles); and how "high risk" sexual behaviors are related to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS (eleven articles) (Dixon-Mueller 1992). The preoccupation in public health has been with sexual danger and with counting disembodied acts (e.g., the number of instances of unprotected penetrative intercourse in the last month) not with meaning, context, or pleasure. In this discourse, women are frequently seen as means to an end—as "targets" for demographic initiatives or as reproductive vessels—rather than as individuals with independent needs and a right to sexual self-determination and pleasure (Dixon-Mueller 1993).

A third prominent discourse, which I shall call "anti-pornography feminism," is best represented by women such as Andrea Dworkin, Catherine Mackinnon, Kathleen Barry, and Evelina Dagnone. These women have dominated one side of what has come to be known in feminist circles as the "sex wars"—basically an internal debate over the "appropriate" boundaries (from a feminist perspective) of human sexual behavior. At issue are such themes as pornography, sadomasochism, prostitution, and how society should respond to these phenomena (Valverde 1987; Cole 1989). The anti-pornography feminists argue for intervention and insist that women will never achieve equality as long as their sexuality is commercialized, and as long as domination and economic exploitation are conflated with sexual pleasure. The "sex radical" critique on the other hand, sees long term danger in any effort to censor sexual behavior between consenting adults, arguing that such efforts can too easily be used against sexual minorities and women (Vance 1984).

While my work shares a common motivation with the anti-pornography feminists, there are strains in their thought that I find troubling. I commend this paradigm for its focus on gender-based power inequities and for its activist stance, but it tends to be profoundly pessimistic, and easily degenerates into portraying women solely as victims. In their zeal to highlight the dangers

Table One: Sex Research Paradigms

Sexology	Population Control/ Public Health	Anti-Violence Feminism	Integrated Feminist Approach
Acknowledges PLEASURE but focuses on genital performance	Focuses on DANGER (STDs; unwanted pregnancy; "high risk sex")	Focuses on DANGER (Rape, child sexual abuse; pornography)	Acknowledges DANGER but Claims Women's Right to Sexual PLEASURE
Ignores Gender Power Imbalances	Attempts to Override Imbalances through Technology	Fights Against Gender-Based Power Inequities	Fights Against Gender-based Power Inequities
Focuses on Behavior and Physiology	Focuses on Behavior and Technology	Focuses on Context and Meaning (although tends toward negative)	Focuses on Context and Meaning but recognizes pragmatic realities
Women Seen as Agents	Women Seen as a Means to an End (e.g. to achieve demographic targets)	Women Seen as Victims (or potential victims)	Women Seen as Agents Operating within Restricted Options
Adherents See themselves as Scientists	Adherents See themselves as Practitioners	Adherents See themselves as Activists	Adherents See themselves as Activists and Practitioners
Risks Trivializing Women's Reality by Ignoring "Danger" part of Sex for Women	Ignores Gender-based Power Relations to the Detriment of Program Success	Fuels Essentialist Notions of Male Sexuality as Inherently "Predatory," Reinforces Image of Women as Victims.	Seeks Strategies that Empower Women and Promote Long Term Social Change while Meeting Women's Immediate Needs.

of sex, anti-pornography feminists have also tended to overlook sex's pleasures. In a radically "sex negative" culture, overcompensation—even in the face of a culture largely indifferent to women's victimization—carries certain dangers. It also contributes to the popular "demonization" of men and of male sexuality. It is the importation of these pitfalls that I fear in my effort to introduce the reality of violence into the family planning and international health field. To the uninitiated, the very pervasiveness of violence can be so

overwhelming as to justify dismissing the situation as impossible to change.

Understandably, such concerns have been used to question efforts to integrate violence into the public health mainstream. Rather than tolerate naive and gender-blindness in the health and development field, however, I think anti-violence activism must seek to transform public health discourse and research, encouraging a greater emphasis on social context, meaning, power differentials, and gender. It is with this vision that I offer a new paradigm for sex research and practice within public health, combining the strengths of the three other models. Table One includes a brief summary of the existing sex paradigms as well as a suggested model for a new approach. This new option—which I call the "integrated feminist approach"—is most closely approximated today by the feminist women's health movement (e.g., groups such as the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, authors of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, and the *Colectivo Feminista Sexualidade e Saúde* in São Paulo Brazil).

While this chart admittedly oversimplifies three complex and pluralistic fields of inquiry, it nonetheless allows a quick (and I hope useful) comparison of some of the existing stakeholders in women's sexuality. It also summarizes the integrated approach to sexuality that I strive for in my own work. The following section explores what we currently know about violence and coercion as it relates to women's sexual and reproductive health. In the last section of this chapter, I offer an interpretation of this data and explore my concerns about the anti-pornography discourse in greater detail.

THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON WOMEN'S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE LIVES

Regrettably, we know very little in social science about how violence or fear of violence operates in women's lives. Only recently have researchers begun to document the pervasiveness of gender-based abuse and virtually no attempt has been made to investigate how violence affects women's sexuality. There are important questions in need of exploration: What is the role of coercion in sexual initiation? How do force and fear affect women's experience of sexual pleasure? How does violence affect women's reproductive health? The following section summarizes the information available on each of these questions. Of necessity, much of the analysis remains speculative.

The Prevalence of Violence Against Women.

The most endemic form of violence against women is wife abuse, or more accurately, abuse of women by intimate male partners. Table Two summarizes twenty studies from a wide variety of countries that document that *one-quarter to over half* of women in many countries of the world report having been physically abused by a present or former partner. Although some of these studies

Table Two: Prevalence of Wife Abuse, Selected Countries

Country	Sample Size	Sample Type	Findings	Comments
Barbados (Handwerker 1991)	264 women and 243 men aged 20–45	Island-wide national probability sample	30% of women battered as adults	Women and men report 50% of their mothers beaten
Antigua (Handwerker 1993)	97 women aged 20–45	Random subset of national probability sample	30% of women battered as adults	Women and men report that 50% of mothers beaten
Kenya (Raike 1990)	733 women from Kisii District	District wide cluster sam- ple	42% "beaten regularly"	Taken from contraceptive prevalence survey
Papua, New Guinea (Toft 1987)	Rural 736 men; 715 women <i>Urban Low</i> <i>Income</i> 368 men; 298 women <i>Urban Elite</i> 178 men; 99 women	Rural survey in 19 villages in all regions and provinces Urban survey with oversam- ple of elites	67% rural women beat- en. 56% urban low in- come women beaten. 62% urban elite women beaten	Almost per- fect agree- ment between percent of women who claim to have been beaten and percent of men who ad- mit to abuse
Sri Lanka (Sonali 1990)	200 mixed ethnic, low income women from Colombo	Convenience sample from low income neighborhood	60% have been beaten	51% said hus- bands used weapons
India (Mahajan 1990)	109 men and 109 women from village in Jallundur District, Punjab	50% sample of all scheduled (lower) caste households and 50% of non-scheduled (higher) caste houses	75% of lower caste men ad- mit to beat- ing their wives; 22% of higher caste men admit to beatings	75% of scheduled caste wives report being beaten "fre- quently"
Malaysia (WAO 1993)	713 women and 508 males over 15 years old	National ran- dom probabili- ty sample of Peninsular Malaysia	39% of women have been "physi- cally beaten" by a partner in the last year	Note: This is an annual figure. 15% of adults consider wife beating accept- able (22% of Males)
Colombia (Profamilia 1992)	3,272 urban women 2,118 rural women	National probability sample	20% physically abused; 33% psychologically abused; 10% raped by hus- band	Part of Colombia's DHS survey

Country	Sample Size	Sample Type	Findings	Comments
Costa Rica (Chacon et al. 1990)	1,388 women	Convenience sample of women at- tending child welfare clinic	50% report being physi- cally abused	Sponsored by UNICEF/PA HO
Costa Rica (1990)	1,312 women aged 15 to 49 years	Random probability sample of ur- ban women	51% report being beaten up to several times per year; 35% report being hit reg- ularly	
Mexico (Jalisco) (Ramirez and Vazquez 1993)	1,163 rural women; 427 urban women in the state of Jalisco	Random household survey of women on DIF register	56.7% of ur- ban women and 44.2% of rural women	Experienced some form of "interpersonal violence"
Mexico (Valdez Santi- ago and Cox 1990)	342 women from Neza- huacoyotl	Random probability sample of women from city adjacent to Mexico City	33% had lived in a "violent relationship"	
Ecuador (CEPLAES 1992)	200 low in- come women	Convenience sample of Quito barrio	60% had been "beat- en" by a partner	Of those beat- en, 37% were assaulted with a frequency between once a month and every day
Chile (Larrain 1993)	1,000 women in Santiago ages 22 to 55 years involved in a relation- ship of 2 years or more	Stratified random prob- ability sample with a maximum sampling error of 3%	60% abused by a male inti- mate; 26.2% physically abused (more severe than pushes, slaps, or having an object thrown at you)	70% of those abused are abused more than once a year
Norway (Schei and Bakketeig 1989)	150 women aged 20 to 49 years in Trondheim	Random sample selected from census data	25% had been physically or sexually abused by a male partner	Definition does not in- clude less severe forms of violence, like pushing, slapping, or showing

Country	Sample Size	Sample Type	Findings	Comments
New Zealand (Mullen et al. 1988)	2,000 women sent question- naire; stratified random sample of 349 women selected for interview	Random probability sample selected from electoral rolls of five contiguous parliamentary constituencies	20.1% report being "hit and physically abused" by a male partner; 58% of these women (>10% of sample) were battered more than 3 times	
United States (Straus and Gelles 1986)	2,143 married or co-habitat- ing couples	National ran- dom probabili- ty sample	28% report at least one episode of physical vio- lence	
United States (Grant, Preda & Martin 1991)	6,000 women state-wide from Texas	State-wide random prob- ability sample	39% have been abused by male part- ner after age 18; 31% have been physical- ly abused	>12% have been sexually abused by male partner after age 18
United States (Teske and Parker 1983)	3,000 rural women in Texas	Random probability sample of communities with 50,000 people or less	40.2% have been abused after age 18; 31% have been physical- ly abused	22% abused within the last 12 months

are based on convenience samples, the majority are based on probability samples with a large number of respondents (e.g., Mexico, United States, Colombia, Kenya).<sup>2</sup>

Statistics around the world also suggest that rape is a common reality in the lives of women and girls. Six population-based surveys from the United States, for example, suggest that between one in five and one in seven U.S. women will be the victim of a completed rape in her lifetime (Kilpatrick, Edmund and Seymour 1992).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, there are well-designed studies of rape among college-aged women from New Zealand (Gavey 1991), Canada (DeKeseredy and Kelly 1992), the United States (Koss, Gidycz and Wisniewski 1987), and the United Kingdom (Beatrice 1992) that reveal remarkably similar rates of completed rape across countries, when using similar survey instruments (based on Koss and Oros 1982).<sup>4</sup> A study among adult women (many of them college students) in Seoul, Korea, yielded slightly lower rates of completed rape, but an equally high rate of attempts (Shim 1992) (see Table Three).

Table Three: Prevalence of Rape Among College-Aged Women

Country	Authors	Sample	Definition of Rape <sup>a</sup>	Completed Rape	Completed & Attempts
Canada	DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993	National probability sample of 1,835 women at 95 colleges and universities	Anal, oral or vaginal intercourse by force or threat of force	8.1% (by dating partners since high school)	23.3% (rape or sexual assault by anyone ever)
New Zealand	Gavey 1991	347 women psychology students	Anal, vaginal intercourse by force or threat or because a man gave alcohol or drugs	14.1%	25.3%
United Kingdom	Beatrice 1992	1,574 women at six universities	Vaginal intercourse by force or because a man gave alcohol or drugs	11.3%	19.3%
United States	Koss et al. 1987	3,187 women at 32 colleges & universities	SES # 8,9,10	15.4%	27.5%
United States	Moore, Nord and Peterson 1989	Nationally representative sample of 18 to 22 years old	Forced to have sex against your will, or were raped?	12.7% of whites; 8% of blacks (before age 21)	
Seoul Korea	Shim 1992	2,270 adult women (quota sample)	SES # 9,10	7.7%	21.8%

a) Estimates of rape and attempted rape are based on the legal definition of rape in the country concerned and are derived from different combinations of the following questions taken from the Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss and Oros, 1984):

- 4) Has a man attempted sexual intercourse (getting on top or you, attempting to insert his penis) when you didn't want to by threatening or using some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) but intercourse did not occur?
- 8) Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because a man gave you alcohol or drugs?
- 9) Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you?
- 10) Have you engaged in sex acts (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than a penis) when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you?

Not surprisingly, given the extremely sensitive nature of the subject, reliable data on child sexual abuse are even more scarce. Nonetheless, the few studies that do exist—along with ample indirect evidence—suggest that sexual abuse of children and adolescents is a widespread phenomenon. In the United States, for example, population-based studies indicate that twenty-seven to sixty-two percent of women recall at least one incident of sexual abuse before the age of eighteen (Peters, Wyatt and Finkelhor 1986).<sup>5</sup> An anonymous, island-wide, probability survey of Barbados revealed that one woman in three and one to two men per one hundred reported behavior constituting childhood or adolescent sexual abuse (Handwerker 1991). And in Canada, a government commission estimated that one in four female children and one in ten male children are sexually assaulted prior to the age of seventeen years (Canadian Government 1984).

Elsewhere, indirect evidence suggests cause for concern. Two studies from Nigeria, for example, document that a large percentage of female patients at STD clinics are young children. A 1988 study in Zaria, Nigeria found that sixteen percent of female patients seeking treatment for STDs were children under the age of five and another six percent were children between the ages of six and fifteen (Kisekka and Oesanya 1988). An older study in Ibadan found that twenty-two percent of female patients attending one STD clinic were children under the age of ten (Sogbetun et al. 1977). Likewise, a study conducted in the Maternity Hospital of Lima, Peru revealed that ninety percent of the young mothers aged twelve to sixteen had been raped by their father, stepfather or another close relative.<sup>6</sup>

A final indication of the prevalence of sexual abuse comes from the observations of children themselves. In 1991, when the Nicaraguan NGO, CISAS held a national conference for the children involved in their "Child to Child" program (a project that trains youngsters aged eight to fifteen to be better child care providers for their siblings), participants identified "sexual abuse" as the number one health priority facing young people in their country.

#### *Experience of Sexual Pleasure*

When coercion enters the sexual arena, it invariably affects women's experience of sex. While we know something about the impact of rape or sexual abuse on women's sexual functioning, little is known about how subtle or overt coercion within consensual unions affects women's sexual lives. Research indicates that from fifty to sixty percent of women who are raped experience severe sexual problems, including fear of sex, problems with arousal, and decreased sexual functioning (Burman 1988; Becker et al. 1982). But what of forced sex within relationships, or of the role of coercion in women's sexual initiation? Both are topics deserving much greater exploration.

Little information is available, for example, on the degree to which young women feel coerced into their first sexual experience. In one study, forty percent of girls aged eleven to fifteen in Jamaica reported the reason for their first intercourse as "forced" (Allen 1982). A qualitative study of sexual initiation among adolescent girls in the United States—aptly entitled "Putting a Big Thing into a Little Hole"—indicates that many girls recall their first intercourse negatively (Thompson 1990).<sup>7</sup> Many girls mention pain, fear, disappointment, and a sense of not being in control of the situation. While most do not frame their experience as "coercive," few in this group were prepared for or actively wanted the sex to happen. As author Sharon Thompson observes: "Often they did not agree to sex. They gave in, they gave up, they gave out" (Thompson 1990:358).

Also at issue is how young girls experience first intercourse when forced into arranged marriages at a very young age. While the rate of child marriage is declining, a significant portion of girls are still married off at a very young age, often to unknown men many years their senior (see Table Four). Evidence from a qualitative study of sexual initiation among child brides in Iran confirms that early intercourse, even when culturally supported, can be very traumatic for young girls. Anthropologist Mary Hegland interviewed exiled Iranian women living in the United States about sexual initiation in Iran (Hegland n.d.). Many gave graphic details of forced defloration of young girls, most whom were totally ignorant of sex (often a young girl was held down by relatives while the man forced himself on her). While the women said the term "rape" would never be applied to this experience in Iran, they freely used terms like "rape" and "torture" to describe the experience, after being exposed to this language in the United States. This new language merely gave voice to feelings they already had.

**Table Four:** Percentage of Women Aged 20 to 24 Today Who Were Married Before the Age of Fifteen, Selected Countries

Country	Percent	Year of Report
Uganda	17.8	1989/90
Nigeria	26.7	1990
Mali	26.7	1987
Cameroon	21.3	1991
Liberia	16.6	1986
Guatemala	12.6	1987
Dominican Republic	9.0	1991
Mexico	6.2	1987
Trinidad/Tobago	6.0	1987
Egypt*	15.0	1988
Indonesia	10.0	1991
Pakistan	11.4	1990/91

\* Before the age of 16

SOURCE: Selected Demographic and Health Surveys.

Given the prevalence of violence in women's lives, there is a remarkable lack of information on how it affects women's sexuality. Only one study, published recently in the *Journal of Family Violence*, explicitly looks at the effects of violence on women's experience of sex (Apt and Harbert 1993). Compared to nonabused women in distressed marriages, women living in violent relationships had significantly lower (i.e., more negative) responses on nine scales designed to measure sexual satisfaction, intimacy, arousal, and attitudes toward sex. Nonetheless, they had significantly more intercourse.

This high rate of intercourse is not surprising given the frequency of coerced sex within physically abusive relationships. Whereas fourteen percent of all U.S. wives report being physically forced to have sex against their will, the prevalence of coercive intercourse among battered women is at least forty percent (Campbell and Alford 1989). In Bolivia and Puerto Rico, fifty-eight percent of battered wives report being sexually assaulted by their partner, and in Colombia, the reported rate is forty-six percent (Iis International 1988; Profamilia 1992). Given the percentage of women around the world who live with physically abusive partners, it is likely that sexual coercion within consensual unions is quite common.

There is also a remarkable gap in our knowledge about the meaning and experience of sex among women who live in non-violent relationships. Even here, the experience of sex for women is often humiliating and degrading—one they tolerate rather than enjoy. Commenting on how their husbands treated them sexually, the Iranian women interviewed above used such phrases as “I’m not a toilet,” “I’m not just a hole,” “It’s like swallowing nasty medicine” (Hegland n.d.). In focus group discussions with Mexican women about men, sex, and marriage, many women likewise expressed deep resentment about how men treated them in sexual relationships (Folch-Lyon, Macorra, and Schearer 1981). Women in particular mentioned:

- Physical abuse by husbands to coerce the wife’s sexual compliance;
- Widespread male infidelity;
- Men’s authoritarian attitude toward their wives;
- Threats of abandonment if wives failed to meet their husband’s sexual demands or his demand for more children; and
- An abiding sense of depersonalization, humiliation, and physical dissatisfaction during sex.

Perhaps more than anything, the Spanish phrase women commonly use for sex captures their sentiment: “*el me usa*” (he uses me). Such comments raise the question of the nature of “consent” within the patriarchal institution of marriage. Would women consent to such treatment if they had the economic resources to survive independently and the social permission to seek sexual gratification elsewhere?

#### *Ability to Control Fertility*

The family planning literature documents that, for many women, fear of male reprisal greatly limits their ability to use contraception (Dixon-Mueller 1992). Men in many cultures react negatively to birth control because they think it signals a woman’s intentions to be unfaithful. (Their logic is that protection against pregnancy allows a woman to be promiscuous). Where children are a sign of male virility, a woman’s attempt to use birth control may also be interpreted as an affront to her partner’s masculinity. While male approval is not always the deciding factor, studies from countries as diverse as Mexico, South Africa, and Bangladesh have found that partner approval is the single greatest predictor of women’s contraceptive use.<sup>8</sup> When partners disapprove, women either forgo contraception or they resort to family planning methods they can use without their partner’s knowledge.

The unspoken reality behind this subterfuge is that women can be beaten or otherwise abused if they do not comply with men’s sexual and childbearing demands. In a recent interview, Hope Mwesigye of FIDA-Uganda, a non-profit legal aid organization for women in Kampala, recounted the story of a young married mother who was running from a husband who regularly beat her. Despite earning a decent wage, the woman’s husband refused to maintain her and their two children. To avoid bringing more children into the world whom she could not feed, the woman began using birth control without her husband’s consent. The beatings began when she failed to bring forth more children; they became more brutal when he learned of her contraceptive use (Banwell 1990).

In other countries, legal provisions requiring spousal permission before dispensing birth control can actually put women at increased risk of violence. According to Pamela Oryango of Family Planning International Assistance, women in Kenya have been known to forge their partner’s signature rather than open themselves to violence or abandonment by requesting permission to use family planning services (Banwell 1990). Nor are Kenyan women alone in their fear of such consequences. Researchers conducting focus groups on sexuality in Mexico and Peru found that women held similar concerns—fear of violence, desertion, or accusations of infidelity—if they brought up birth control (Folch-Lyon, Macorra, and Schearer 1981; Fort 1989). Not surprisingly, when family planning clinics in Ethiopia removed their requirement for spousal consent, clinic use rose twenty-six percent in just a few months (Cook and Maine 1987).

Not all women who fear violence in this context are necessarily at risk of actual abuse. In fact, some recent studies suggest that many men may be more open to family planning than most women suspect (Gallen 1986). Communication in marriage can be so limited, however, that spouses often

do not know their partner's views on family planning. Women thus assume that their husbands' attitude will mirror the cultural norm, which frequently says that men want large families and distrust women who use birth control. The discrepancy between women's perceptions and reality also speaks to the ability of violence to induce fear by example.

#### *Risk of Acquiring STDs*

Not surprisingly, male violence also impedes women's ability to protect themselves from HIV and other STDs. Violence can increase a woman's risk either through nonconsensual sex or by limiting her willingness and/or ability to enforce condom use. In many cultures, suggesting condom use is even more threatening than raising birth control in general, because condoms are widely associated with promiscuity, prostitution, and disease. By bringing up condom use, women either insinuate their own infidelity or implicitly challenge a male partner's right to conduct outside relationships. Either way, a request for condoms may trigger a violent response (Elias and Heise 1993; Worth 1991).

Indeed, an AIDS prevention strategy based solely on "negotiating" condom use assumes an equity of power between men and women that simply does not exist in many relationships. Even within consensual unions, women often lack control over the dynamics of their sexual lives. A study of home-based industrial workers in Mexico, for example, found that wives' bargaining power in marriage was lowest with regard to decisions about if and when to have sexual intercourse (Benencia and Roldan 1987). Studies of natural family planning in the Philippines, Peru, and Sri Lanka (Liskin 1981) and sexual attitudes among women in Guatemala (DataPro and Asociación Guatemalteco para la Prevención y Control de SIDA 1991) also mention forced sex in marriage, especially when the men arrive home drunk.

Childhood sexual abuse also appears to generate responses that put individuals at increased risk of STDs, including AIDS. Several studies, for example, link a history of sexual abuse with a high risk of entering prostitution (Finkelhor 1987; James and Meyerding 1977). Researchers from Brown University found that men and women who had been raped or forced to have sex in either childhood or adolescence were four times more likely than non-abused individuals to have worked in prostitution (Zierler 1991). They were also twice as likely to have multiple partners in any single year and to engage in casual sex with partners they did not know. Women survivors of childhood sexual assault were twice as likely to be heavy consumers of alcohol and nearly three times more likely to become pregnant before the age of eighteen. These behaviors did not translate directly into higher rates of HIV

among women, but men who experienced childhood sexual abuse were twice as likely to be HIV positive as men who did not.

Impacts of sexual abuse on sexual risk-taking have also been documented in a developing country—on the island of Barbados. Based on a probability survey of 407 men and women, anthropologist Penn Handwerker has shown that sexual abuse is the single most important determinant of high risk sexual activity during adolescence for both Barbadian men and women (Handwerker 1991). After controlling for a wide-range of socio-economic and home-environment variables (e.g., absent father), sexual abuse remains strongly linked to both the number of partners adolescents have and to their age at first intercourse. Further analysis shows that direct effects of childhood sexual abuse on partner change remain significant into the respondent's mid-thirties. For men, physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse in childhood is also highly correlated with lack of condom use in adulthood, after controlling for many other variables.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Pregnancy Complication and Birth Outcomes*

While pregnancy should be a time when the health and well-being of women is especially protected, surveys suggest that pregnant women are prime targets for abuse. Results from a large, prospective study of battery during pregnancy among low income women in Houston and Baltimore in the United States, for example, indicate that one out of *every six* pregnant women was battered during her present pregnancy (McFarlane 1992). The study, sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control, followed a stratified cohort of 691 White, African-American and Hispanic women for three years in Houston and Baltimore. Sixty percent of the abused women in this study reported two or more episodes of violence, and they were three times as likely as non-abused women to begin prenatal care in the third trimester. Other studies indicate that women battered during pregnancy run twice the risk of miscarriage and four times the risk of having a low birth weight baby compared with women who are not beaten (Stark et al. 1981; Bullock and McFarlane 1989). Birth weight is a powerful predictor of a child's survival prospects in the first year of life.

Battering during pregnancy is likely to have an even greater impact on Third World mothers who are already malnourished and overworked. A survey of 342 randomly-sampled women in Mexico City revealed that twenty percent of those battered reported blows to the stomach during pregnancy (Valdez Santiago and Shrader Cox 1992). In another study of eighty battered women who sought judicial intervention against their partner in San Jose, Costa Rica, forty-nine percent report being beaten during pregnancy. Of these, 7.5 percent reported miscarriages due to the abuse (Ugalde 1988).



A prospective study of 161 women living in Santiago, Chile, likewise revealed that those women living in areas of high social and political violence had a significantly increased risk of pregnancy complications compared to women living in lower violence neighborhoods. After adjusting for potential confounders (income, education, marital status, underweight, cigarette smoking, dissatisfaction with neighborhood, life events, alienation, uncertainty and depression), researchers found that high levels of sociopolitical violence were associated with an approximately fivefold increase in risk of pregnancy complications (such as pre-eclampsia, premature labor, threat of miscarriage, gestational hypertension, etc.) (Zapata et al. 1992). If the stress and trauma of living in a violent neighborhood can induce complications, it is reasonable to assume that living in the private hell of an abusive relationship could as well.

#### SOME THOUGHTS ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE FINDINGS

After reading the above review, it is hard not to share the profound pessimism about men and about male sexuality that runs throughout much of the anti-pornography literature. It is important to consider, however, the appropriate message to be taken from these data. Unfortunately, the conclusion some have drawn is that women are essentially powerless and that men must be aggressive by nature. Generally there is indignation at male abuse, but it is often accompanied by a sense that the problem runs too deep to be addressed. Whether justified by biological arguments (evolution has endowed men with an aggressive sexual nature) or socio-cultural determinism (patriarchy is everywhere and not easily changed), these beliefs can rationalize inaction.

Ironically, the very research and ideas that can be used to justify inaction often come from individuals who probably would not support the use of their data in this way. I, for example, oppose the view that male sexuality is inherently aggressive or that women are essentially victims. Most of my anti-violence colleagues would likely agree, although few have made a point of arguing against the interpretation of their work in this way. Given the appeal of "essentialist" notions of sex and gender in popular culture (and the political implications of such arguments), it is my belief, however, that anyone who promotes new ideas in mainstream discourse has a responsibility not only for what they meant to say, but for how their words can be construed and used. It is out of this sense of responsibility that I offer the following interpretation of the data on sexuality and violence that I present above.

First, despite the powerful ability of violence to exact obedience and exert control, women are not totally powerless. In fact, women have proven incredibly capable of exerting agency even within the most constrained

social conditions. Extremely poor women in India, for example, have been known to exert control over their sexual lives by declaring extended religious fasts, a socially sanctioned activity (imbued with taboos against sexual relations) that even violent men are reluctant to violate (Savara, personal communication). Likewise, research has shown that far from being passive, battered women often adopt complex coping and management strategies that serve to lessen the impact of the violence on themselves and their children (Browne 1987; Bowker 1983; Okun 1986). Even some prostitutes interpret their decision to turn tricks as an empowered choice—a way to make money for sexual services exacted from other women through marriage (Delacoste and Alexander 1987). This is not to say that women do not deserve broader choices than these examples imply. Such acts do represent, however, a creativity and resourcefulness in the face of powerful social forces that is important to acknowledge and affirm at all times. Failure to recognize the possibility of agency within patriarchal structures fuels fatalism and can undermine women's sense of self, with disempowering results.

In her speech "Does Sexuality Have a History?" for example, feminist attorney, Catherine MacKinnon advances a very deterministic and fatalistic picture of women and sexuality. Taking issue with the prevailing view of academic historians that sexuality is basically socially constructed and highly plastic, MacKinnon (1991) writes:

I would hypothesize that while ideologies about sex and sexuality may ebb and flow . . . the actual practices of sex may look relatively flat. . . . Underneath all of these hills and valleys, these ebbs and flows, there is this bedrock, this tide that has not changed much, namely male supremacy and the subordination of women. . . . For this feminists have been called abistorical. Oh, dear. We have disrespected the profundity and fascination of all the different ways in which men fuck us in order to emphasize that however they do it, they do it. And they do it to us. (MacKinnon 1991:6)

In a later edition of the *Michigan Quarterly*, the same journal which reprinted the original speech, author Suzanne Rhodenbaugh (1991) accuses MacKinnon of committing a "new violence" by denying women the agency to define their own sexuality. In her reply essay, "MacKinnon, May I Speak?" Rodenbaugh writes:

MacKinnon, with probably good intention to empower women, seems to me in her essay another voice reducing us, one saying we are creatures mainly acted upon. This feels greatly over-simplified, and finally untrue. It feels further, like new injustice. For if my "history of sexuality" includes such facts as my having been raped, having been beaten by a husband, having gone through a pregnancy against my will, and all else that has happened to my body and my sexual attention that I did not seek but was subjected to . . . then presumably as a sexual creature I'm little more than victim, and am predominantly passive. (Rhodenbaugh 1991:442)

Mackinnon likewise implies that male sexual behavior is hegemonically abusive (. . . however they do it, they do it. And they do it to us). But Rhodenbaugh refuses to cede her agency, saying: "I'm just one individual woman, but I'm not of a mind to exchange the name 'invisible' for the name 'victim.' Neither name will hold me" (Rhodenbaugh 1991:422).

Indeed, Rhodenbaugh's comments captures the essence of the dilemma faced by anti-violence activists: in exposing the reality of violence, we risk gaining visibility at the price of promoting the image of woman as victim and the notion of sex as all danger and no pleasure. One way to avoid this pitfall is to always counterbalance the pessimism engendered by the tenacity of patriarchy with examples of women's creative attempts at resistance within existing constraints. Another is to constantly imbue the antiviolence discourse with reminders of why feminists fight sexual violence in the first place. As author Naomi Wolf points out, "Feminists agitate against rape not just because it is a form of violence—but because it is a form of violence that uniquely steals from the survivor her sexual spontaneity and delight. . . . The right to say no must exist for the right to say yes to have any meaning" (Wolf 1992). Regrettably, this recognition is all too often lost in feminist discussions of sexual violence.

A second pitfall of anti-violence work is the danger of fueling popular notions of sexual essentialism by drawing attention to the pervasiveness of gender violence. Essentialist explanations for social phenomenon are generally dangerous because they provide a powerful justification for the status quo. If what exists is biologically based, then it is "natural" and by extension, "good" (or at least not open to change). Essentialist interpretations have a long history, beginning with scientists such as Freud and Konrad Lorenz who saw aggression and sexuality as "drives" or "instincts" that needed periodic release or they were likely to "discharge" in destructive ways. This "hydraulic" image of sexuality is one that still holds much popular appeal. Indeed, the notion that men "need" frequent sex with many partners is a myth used in many cultures (including my own) to justify and condone sexual behavior by men that can be exploitive and hurtful to women.

While most psychologists now reject the drive theory, it still captures the imagination of many in the general public. The meteoric rise of author/academic Camille Paglia attests to the enduring appeal that such essentialist notions command. Although Paglia, a latter-day Freudian, would likely object to being characterized as a biological determinist, her writings and public statements smack of determinism and her analysis of sexual violence draws exclusively from biology, psychology and ethics rather than from an analysis of power or gender role socialization. In *Sex, Art and American Culture*, for example, Paglia writes:

Aggression and eroticism are deeply intertwined. Hunt, pursuit, and capture are biologically programmed into male sexuality. . . . I see in the simple, swaggering masculinity of the jock and in the noisy posturing of the heavy-metal guitarist certain fundamental, unchangeable truths about sex. . . . We must remedy social injustice wherever we can. But there are some things we cannot change. There are sexual differences based in biology. Academic feminism is lost in a fog of social constructionism. (Paglia 1992:50-53)

A careful reading of Paglia's text reveals that she does believe that the male "tendency toward brutishness" can be overridden through socialization (in some cases, at least), but it is easy to see how her purposefully provocative statements about male sexuality could be construed to support popular notions that "boys will be boys." Given the potential of such rationalizations to promote behavior harmful to women, Paglia has a responsibility not only for her beliefs but for how her words are likely to be heard. Once she steps out of academia and onto the TV talk-show circuit, Paglia has an increased duty to guard against the misuse of her ideas by paying careful attention to language and by countering likely misinterpretations of her ideas.

Likewise, feminists who uncover the pervasiveness of violence should not leave the impression that aggression is an immutable part of male sexuality. With understandable frustration, some in the health and development field have reacted to the violence data with the question: What is it about male sexuality that makes men that way? I think, however, that this is the wrong question. Rather we should be asking: What is it about the construction of masculinity in different cultures that promotes aggressive sexual behavior by men? And, what is it about the construction of femininity and the structure of economic and social power relations in societies that permits this behavior to continue?

The reason that it is wrong to frame the question in terms of "maleness" (which is normally interpreted to have biological roots), is because the cross-cultural record does not support the view that male violence against women is universal. Three separate cross-cultural studies confirm that there are at least a handful of societies where rape and/or wife abuse does not exist (or did not exist in the recent past). In her study of 156 tribal societies, for example, feminist anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday classified forty-seven percent of the cultures she studied as essentially "rape free" (i.e., rape was totally absent or extremely rare) (Sanday 1981). Even if one cedes that some of the societies designated "rape free" probably represent inadequacies in the ethnographic record rather than truly non-violent societies, the number of examples cited (and the descriptions of life in these societies) suggests that there are (or have been) at least some cultures not plagued by gender-based abuse.

Likewise, two other studies of wife abuse cross-culturally (Levinson 1989; Counts, Brown and Campbell 1992) unearth additional examples of cultures

where gender-based violence is absent or exceedingly rare. In his ethnographic review of ninety peasant and small scale societies, Levinson (1989) identified sixteen that could be described as "essentially free or untroubled by family violence." Among the Central Thai, for example, domestic violence was extremely rare according to detailed ethnographies collected in the 1960s. Central Thai families were remarkable for the absence of any meaningful division of labor by sex: men were as likely as women to carry out household duties including childcare, and women as likely as men to plow or manage the family business. Divorce was common, people preferring to separate rather than live with discord. Community norms disdained aggression; other non-violent means of conflict resolution were plentiful and preferred (Phillips 1966).

The existence of such cultures—even if few in number—stands as proof that violence against women is not an inevitable outgrowth of male biology, male sexuality, or male hormones. It is "male conditioning," not the "condition of being male," that appears to be the problem. Although what it means to be "male" varies among different cultures and within different segments of the same culture, the importance of the masculine mystique appears to be a common element in many, but not all, societies. In his book *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity*, anthropologist David Gilmore notes that across many cultures "there is a constantly recurring notion that real manhood is different from simple anatomical maleness, that it is not a neutral condition that comes about spontaneously through biological maturation but rather is a precarious or artificial state that boys must win against powerful odds" (Gilmore 1990:11). Gilmore observes that this notion exists among both peasants and sophisticated urban peoples, and among both warrior peoples and those who have never killed in anger. He argues further that "manhood" represents an "achieved status" different from parallel notions of womanhood. "As a social icon," he writes, "femininity . . . usually involves questions of body ornament or sexual allure, or other essentially cosmetic behaviors that enhance, rather than create, an inherent quality of character. An authentic femininity rarely involves tests or proofs of action. . . ." (Gilmore 1990:11).

Although I would disagree with Gilmore's last statement (in many cultures a woman must bear a child before she is considered fully human, much less a mature, adult woman), his observations about the elusive quality of manhood are nonetheless important for our analysis of sexually aggressive behavior in men. It is my belief, shared by other theorists (such as Lancaster 1992; Stoltenberg 1989; and Olsson 1984) that it is partly men's insecurity about their masculinity that promotes abusive behavior toward women. The fear that accompanies this insecurity derives in part from a gendered system

that assigns power and status to that which is male and denigrates or subordinates that which is female. Men in many cultures wage daily battle to prove to themselves and others that they qualify for inclusion in the esteemed category "male." To be "not male," is to be reduced to the status of woman, or worse, to be "queer" (see below).

Since gender is socially constructed, it must be actualized through action and sensation—by doing things that repeatedly affirm that one is really male or really female while avoiding things that leave room for doubt. As social theorist John Stoltenberg observes:

Most people born with a penis between their legs grow up aspiring to feel and act unambiguously male, longing to belong to the sex that is male and daring not to belong to the sex that is not, and feeling this urgency for a visceral and constant verification of their male sexual [pseudo] identity—for a fleshy connection to manhood—as the driving force of their life. The drive does not originate in the anatomy. The sensations derive from the idea. The ideas give the feelings social meaning; the idea determines which sensations shall be sought. (Stoltenberg 1989:31)

Many societies have evolved elaborate rituals and rites of passage to help induct young men into manhood. Some involve brutal hazings and tests of courage while others require endurance, aptitude and skill. They all share the underlying premise that real men are made, not born. This feeds into men's gender insecurity.

One way to feel unambiguously male in many cultures is to dominate women, to behave aggressively, and to take risks. A "real man" in the Balkans, for example, is one who drinks heavily, fights bravely, and shows "indomitable virility" by fathering many children (Denich 1974:250). In eastern Morocco, "true men" are distinguished based on their physical prowess and heroic acts of both feuding and sexual potency (Marcus 1987:50). On the South Pacific island of Truk, fighting, drinking, defying the sea, and sexually conquering women are the true measures of manhood (Caughy 1970; Marshall 1979; Gilmore 1990).

Significantly, sexual conquest and potency appear as repeated themes in many cultural definitions of manhood, placing women at increased risk of coercive sex. This is as true in the United States as it is elsewhere. Recently, nine teenage boys from an upper-working class suburb of Long Beach were arrested for allegedly molesting and raping a number of girls, some as young as ten. The boys, members of a group called the Spur Posse, acknowledge having sex with scores, or underage girls, as part of a sexual competition. In tabulating their sexual exploits, the boys make reference to the uniform number of the sports stars who are their heroes—"I'm 44 now—Reggie Jackson. I'm 50—David Robinson." Tellingly, some of the boys' fathers

appear boastful of their son's conquests. In a recent *New York Times* article, one father praised his son as "all man" and insisted that the girls his son had had sex with were "giving it away" (Gross 1993).

The salience of sex to some versions of masculine identity is likewise recognized in a Swedish Government report on prostitution, published in 1981:

The male confirms and proves his maleness, his virility, through his sexuality. It becomes the core, the very essence around which he consciously and unconsciously forms his idea about himself as a man. The female sexual identity has not been formed in relationship to sexuality, but in the need to be chosen by a man. . . . By being chosen the woman receives the necessary proof of her value as a woman—both in her own eyes and in others. (Olsson 1984:73)

Indeed, some theorists go so far as to assert that notions of masculinity help construct the experience of sex itself. Speaking from an Anglo-American perspective, John Stoltenberg argues that "so much of most men's sexuality is tied up with gender-actualizing—with feeling like a real man—that they can scarcely recall an erotic sensation that had no gender-specific cultural meaning. As most men age, they learn to cancel out and deny erotic sensations that are not specifically linked to what they think a real man is supposed to feel" (Stoltenberg 1989:33).

To the extent that masculine ideals are associated with violence, virility, and power, it is easy to see how male sexual behavior might emerge as predatory and aggressive. Indeed, the more I work on violence against women, the more I become convinced that the real way forward is to redefine what it means to be male. When masculinity is associated with aggression and sexual conquest, dominating sexual behavior and violence become not only a means of structuring power relations between men and women, but a way of establishing power relations among men. As Roger Lancaster observes in his ethnographic study of gender relations in Nicaragua, within many gendered systems sexual exploits are part of a system of posturing among men where women are merely the mediums of competition (see Lancaster 1992; see also Chapter Eight in this volume).

Since men have a collective interest in the perpetuation of gender hierarchies, individual male behavior is closely monitored by the male community (and sometimes by mothers acting on behalf of their sons). When the behavior of men or boys does not live up to the masculine ideal, they are frequently rebuked by invoking another gendered symbol: the male homosexual, however culturally defined. "Real men" are almost always defined in opposition to the queer, the *huevo*, the *cochón*, the sissy. Homosexual stigma is invoked to enforce the masculine ideal; it becomes part of the glue that holds male dominance together.

As Lancaster points out in his Nicaraguan example, homosexual stigma helps structure and perpetuate male sexual and gender norms. Lancaster maintains that by adolescence, boys are in open competition for the status of manhood. "The signs of masculinity," he argues, "are actively struggled for, and can only be won by wrestling them away from other boys around them" (Lancaster 1992; Chapter Eight in this volume).

Fortunately, the ethnographic record provides us with examples to prove that the world need not be constructed this way. After exhaustively reviewing existing information on masculinity cross-culturally, Gilmore notes that while "ideas and anxieties about masculinity as a special-status category of achievement are widespread in societies around the world, being expressed to varying degrees. . . they do not seem to be absolutely universal" (Gilmore 1990). He cites several exceptions: cultures where manhood is of minimal interest to men and where there is little or no social pressure to act "manly."

Among Gilmore's examples are the Semai people of Malaysia and inhabitants of Tahiti. In Tahiti, for example, there are no strict gender roles, no concept of male honor to defend, and no social expectation to "get even." Men share a cultural value of "timidity" which forbids retaliation, and even when provoked, men rarely become violent. According to Gilmore, the concept of "manliness" as separate from femininity is simply foreign to them (Gilmore 1990). An extensive ethnographic record reveals that a similar description would be appropriate for the Semai of Malaysia as well (Dentan 1979).

What is intriguing about these two examples is that they conform well to the picture of other societies known to have low or non-existent levels of violence against women. Indeed, both Peggy Sanday's cross-cultural study of rape and the anthology, *Sanctions and Sanctuary*, a cross-cultural look at wife beating, found that one of the strongest predictors/correlates of societies with high violence against women was the presence of a masculine ideal that emphasized dominance, toughness, or male honor (Counts, Brown, and Campbell 1992).<sup>10</sup> While these types of studies cannot prove causality, they do begin to suggest which factors appear especially predictive of high rates of violence against women versus those that predict low rates of gender violence. Table Five presents a simplified account of the major findings of the Levinson, Sanday, and *Sanctions and Sanctuary* studies.

Interestingly, the findings strongly support the feminist contention that hierarchical gender relations—perpetuated through gender socialization and the socioeconomic inequalities of society—are integrally related to violence against women. Male decisionmaking in the home and economic inequality between men and women are strongly correlated with high rates of violence

**Table Five:**  
Correlates of Gender Violence Based on Cross-Cultural Studies

Predictive of High Violence	Predictive of Low Violence
1. Violent interpersonal conflict resolution (1)(3)	1. Female power outside of the home (1)(2)(3)
2. Economic inequality between men and women (3)	2. Active community interference in violence (2)(3)
3. Masculine ideal of male dominance/toughness/honor (1)(2)	3. Presence of exclusively female groups (work or solidarity) (2)(3)
4. Male economic and decision-making authority in the family (3)	4. Sanctuary/shelters/friends/family (2)

- (1) = Sanday, P. 1981. "The Socio-cultural Context of Rape: A Cross Cultural Study." *Journal of Social Issues* 37(4):5-27.  
 (2) = Counts, Dorothy Ayers, Brown, Judith and Jacquelyn Campbell (eds.), (1992) *Sanctions and Sanctuary*, Boulder, Co.: Westview Press.  
 (3) = Levinson, David. (1989) *Violence in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Newbury Park: Sage Publishers.

against women, while women having power outside of the home (either political, economic, or magical) seems to offer some protection against abuse. Another particularly strong factor seems to be the social acceptance of violence as a way to resolve conflict: where interpersonal violence is tolerated in the society at large, women are at higher risk. Given that much behavior is learned by children through modeling, this finding is hardly surprising.

This generic picture conforms well to actual ethnographic descriptions of societies with little or no violence against women. Sanday uses the Mbuti Pygmic, a forest dwelling people, to illustrate her point. Violence between the sexes, or between anybody, is virtually absent among the Mbuti Pygmic when they are in their forest environment. There is little division of labor by sex. A man is not ashamed to pick mushrooms and nuts if he finds them, or to wash and clean a baby. Decision-making is by common consent; men and women have equal say because hunting and gathering are both important to the economy (Turnbull 1965). This description sounds remarkably similar to that offered for the Central Thai, the Senai of Malaysia, and the Tahitians, described earlier.

The factors that emerge as predictive of low violence are also enlightening. In addition to female power, the presence of all female coalitions or work groups appears to be significant. Whether this operates by increasing

women's economic power or through female solidarity and consciousness-raising, remains unclear. Especially significant appears to be the presence of strong sanctions against violence and access to sanctuary (hence the name of the anthology, *Sanctions and Sanctuary*). Sanctions can take the form of swift legal response, or they can involve informal community sanctions, like public humiliation. Likewise, "sanctuary" can be formal shelters or merely the cultural understanding that neighbors and/or family members will take in a woman whose partner is threatening her. Violence appears especially common in cultures where women leave their natal village to get married; not only are family members not present to intervene in disputes, but it is more difficult for the woman to seek refuge when relatives are distant (Counts, Brown, and Campbell 1992). In fact, active community or family interference in violent events emerged as an important predictor of low violence in both of the wife beating studies.

# CONCLUSION

These cross-cultural tidbits suggest that the possibility of a world without violence against women is not a hopeless fantasy. Societies have existed, and may still exist, that are essentially free of gender-based abuse. But social movements must have both vision and a sense of responsibility to those who must live within today's reality. The overwhelming presence of violence in many women's lives demands that we work on two fronts: to challenge the gender-based inequities and beliefs that perpetuate male violence and to provide services and support to those attempting to survive, despite the social forces allied against them. A range of professions—public health, family planning, sexuality research—have important roles to play. They can marshal their resources to help untangle the complex web of social forces that encourage violent behavior: they can design programs to empower women and enlighten men; and they can identify and refer women to helpful services. Given the health and social consequences of abuse, this is not only their prerogative, but their obligation.

# NOTES

1. As it stands, most international development funders see violence as outside of their area of responsibility. International funding tends to be very sectoral, with aid streams targeted specifically to education, agriculture, population control, or health. Since anti-violence initiatives, such as crisis centers, law reform efforts, and public education do not fall easily within any of these categories, they frequently cannot get outside funding or support. The *Violence, Health and Development* project helps articulate the links between violence and women's health with an eye toward recruiting more health dollars for violence related programming.
2. Although individually valid, these studies are not directly comparable because each

uses a different set of questions to probe for abuse. The vast majority of studies ask the respondents whether they have been "abused," "beaten," or "involved in a violent relationship." A subset (e.g., the studies from Barbados and United States) make this determination based on a list of "acts" that a woman may or may not have been subjected to during her lifetime (e.g., hitting with fist, biting, being hit with an object, etc.). Clinical and research experience suggests that allowing women to self-define abuse, if anything, underestimates the level of physical and psychological violence in intimate relationships. In many cultures, women are socialized to accept physical and emotional chastisement as part of a husband's marital prerogative, thereby limiting the range of behavior women consider "abuse." Moreover, women are sometimes reluctant to report abuse out of shame or fear of incriminating other family members. Both factors suggest that the prevalence rates in Table Two are likely to be underestimates of actual abuse.

3. All of the studies use legally-grounded definitions of rape; thus, forms of penetration other than penile-vaginal are included and women were not instructed to exclude rape by husbands. Questions were typically framed to define explicitly the behaviors that should be included in the definition. For example: "Has a man made you have sex by using force or threatening to harm you? When we use the word 'sex' we mean a man putting his penis in your vagina even if he didn't ejaculate (come)?" This is followed by: "If he did not try to put his penis in your vagina, has a man made you do other sexual things like oral sex, anal sex, or put fingers or objects inside you by using force or threatening to harm you?"
4. The estimates in Table Three are based on existing legal definitions of rape in the United States which recognize penetration of any orifice by physical force or threat of force, or because a woman is incapacitated due to drugs or alcohol.
5. In evaluating the sources of variability in prevalence of sexual abuse, Peters, Wyatt, and Finkelhor (1986) suggest that differences in definitions and the various methods used in these studies probably account for most of the variations reported.
6. This figure is quoted in "Rape: Can I have this Child?" a photomontage produced by Movimiento Manuela Ramos, Lima, Peru, as part of their campaign to decriminalize abortion in cases of rape.
7. Another significant subset reported positive intentions. While recalling some lack of pleasure due to inexperience, these girls actively agreed to intercourse and considered it part of an on-going process of sexual discovery that began earlier in life with sex play, petting, and masturbation.
8. By no means is male approval always the greatest determinant of contraceptive use. For examples of cases where it is, see Galton (1986) and Kincaid (1992).
9. Variables controlled for include: years in legal or common law union during previous five years; raised in lower class home; education of mother; education of father; raised in stable nuclear family; raised solely by mother; raised with a step father; degree of affection mother's partner showed her; degree of physical and emotional abuse to mother; degree of affection mother showed son; degree of affection mother's partner showed son; degree to which mother's partner physically and emotionally abused son; man's educational status; man's occupational status.
10. There are examples of peaceful societies that do have a notion of "achieved manhood," but generally this manhood is not linked to dominance, male honor, or aggression but to skill, often in the realm of hunting. In these societies—such as the Mbuti Pygmies and the !Kung Bushmen—hunting is not an "outlet for aggression," but is seen as "a contribution to society of both indispensable economic and spiritual value... truly a kind of indirect nourishing or nurturing" (Gillmore 1990:116).

## "That We Should All Turn Queer?"

8

Homosexual Stigma in the Making of Manhood and the Breaking of a Revolution in Nicaragua

Roger N. Lancaster

IN A BROAD SENSE, THE SANDINISTA REVOLUTION WAS UNDERMINED by an all-round war of aggression. On the military front, the U.S.-sponsored contra war had left thirty thousand people dead in a country of some three million. Contra attacks targeted schools, clinics, electrical facilities, bridges, and farms, traumatizing the country's economic infrastructure and disrupting social services. On the economic front, the U.S. economic embargo deprived Nicaragua of its historical market for agricultural products and, more importantly, of direct access to spare parts for its U.S.-manufactured machinery. And on the international front, U.S. vetos deprived Nicaragua of any relief it might have received from lending agencies.

As a result of this three-pronged attack, Nicaragua's per capita gross domestic product fell to roughly half its pre-war level. By the late 1980s, defense was consuming over sixty percent of government expenditures, and in 1988 the annual rate of inflation soared to thirty-five thousand percent. The cumulative effects of war and embargo totalled up to \$17 billion in direct and indirect damages—in a country whose gross domestic product never much exceeded three billion, even in good years. The result was social, economic, and personal discombobulation.<sup>1</sup>

In a narrower sense, though, Nicaraguan families, structured by a "culture of machismo" and rent by unresolved gender conflicts, proved the most effective medium of an intimate, low-intensity conflict that ate away at the revolution's base of popular support. Nicaraguan family life has long been characterized by widespread patterns of male abandonment. At the time of the revolution, some thirty-four percent of Nicaraguan families were headed by women, and the figure was closer to fifty percent in the cities. Brittle conjugal relations, in the context of a patriarchal economic structure, necessarily put women and children in a structurally disadvantageous social position.<sup>2</sup>

**Dennis Altman** teaches in the Department of Politics at La Trobe University in Australia.

**Lori L. Heise** directs the Violence, Sexuality, and Health Rights Program of the Pacific Institute for Women's Health, Los Angeles, California, and Washington, D.C., in the United States.

**Roger N. Lancaster** teaches in the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University in the United States.

**Barbara O. de Zaluondo** is in the Division of HIV/AIDS, USAID Office of Health and Nutrition, Washington, D.C., in the United States.

**Jean Maxius Bernard** is Director of the Bureau D'Emologie and Professor in the Faculte d'Emologie of the State University in Haiti.

**Edward O. Laumann** is Distinguished Service Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago in the United States.

**Robert T. Michael** is Dean at the Harris School of Public Policy Studies at the University of Chicago in the United States.

**Anthony P.M. Coxon** is Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Essex in the United Kingdom.

**I.O. Orubuloye** is Professor in the Department of Sociology at Ondo State University in Nigeria.

**Carl Kendall** is Professor in the Department of International Health and Development at Tulane University in the United States.

**Geeta Rao Gupta** is in the International Center for Research on Women, Washington, D.C. in the United States.

**Ellen Weiss** is in the International Center for Research on Women, Washington, D.C. in the United States.

**Shirley Lindenbaum** is Professor of Anthropology at the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York in the United States.

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