



Out of place: Sexualities, sexual violence, and heteronormativity

Aliraza Javaid

University of the West of England (UWE Bristol), Frenchay Campus, Coldharbour Lane, Bristol BS16 1QY, United Kingdom



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Compulsory heterosexuality
Heteronormativity
Male rape
Homophobia
Deviant

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I offer a platform in which to theorise sexual violence against men. In doing so, I critically interrogate the ways in which male sexual victimisation is socially and culturally constructed in the public space of compulsory heterosexuality. Drawing on male rape as a case study and focus, I explore how rape against men is constructed and socially defined in public territory where homosexuality is often marginal, excluded, and stigmatised. The interactional, social and cultural contexts wherein rape against men is constructed are considered, with the adoption of the theoretical framework of heteronormativity to make sense of the connection between male rape and 'heterosexual spaces'. In respect of the binary distinction between the public and private, whereby homosexuality is deemed 'private' and heterosexuality 'public', and drawing on ideas of male sexual victimisation and victim blameworthy, I provide an improved understanding of the different ways in which rape against men is constructed within a heterosexual landscape that always surrounds us all.

1. Introduction

According to recent figures from the Crime Survey for England and Wales in 2013, approximately 75,000 men are victims of sexual assault or attempted sexual assault a year, while 9000 men are victims of rape or attempted rape each year (Ministry of Justice, 2014). Rape is often constructed only as a 'women's issue'. Of course, this is not to deny that many women continue to suffer extreme forms of sexual violence in their everyday life, but so do men. This paper seeks to understand more about male rape, theorising it since there has been a lack of work that specifically theorises male rape, though work on the theorisation of male violence is diverse (e.g., Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1994; Messerschmidt, 2016). In particular, this paper theoretically and conceptually explores the interconnection between sexualities, male sexual violence, and heteronormativity. I examine the ways in which male rape is socially and cultural constructed within heterosexual territory. The theoretical framework of heteronormativity elucidates these constructions. Queer theorists, such as Steven Seidman (1996), highlight the significance of problematizing the "operation of the hetero/homosexual binary...[focusing] on heterosexuality as a social and political organizing principle" (p. 9). By doing so, one can decipher politics of knowledge and difference. The ways in which heterosexuality is arranged, contested, multiple, and as a set of identity practices in relation to homosexualities can be understood. I focus on certain contexts as to how male rape is constructed; for example, the gay scene/community, prison establishments, and the policing landscape, which provide some understanding of how male rape is constructed in these particular

contexts. When I refer to the gay scene, I am referring to a community, a sense of belonging, and a form of unity. Though these shared values might not always be fixed and universal, the gay scene/community offers connections and responsibilities for each other. I do not claim that abuse, violence, and wrong doings cannot and do not manifest in gay spaces, but, as Jeffrey Weeks (2000) stated many years ago:

In the form of contemporary communitarianism, the pursuit of [gay] community suggests a revulsion against the coldness and impersonality, the instrumentality and narrow self-interest, of abstract individualism with its associated marketization and commodification of human bonds. The idea of community, in contrast to social atomisation, suggests that men and women should be members and not strangers, should have ties and belongings that transcend the monad (p. 181).

The gay scene/community can, then, provide unity, love, and belonging in the UK. Still, one must be cautious of essentialising gay communities and gay scenes for human atrocities do occur here, such as violence and male rape. Relatedly, I am sensitive to the notion that constructions of male rape are always changing, negotiated, and not static. Therefore, I do not determine and essentialise these constructions in these contexts where heteronormativity resides, but rather provide a snapshot of some constructions that are likely to foster through social and power relations, shaped by social structures, social institutions, and social practices. In addition, I provide a detailed analysis of the implications of certain constructions of male rape within heterosexual spaces, such as homophobia; gender bias; sexual violence; terror; and

E-mail address: Ali.Javaid@uwe.ac.uk.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2018.02.007>

Received 27 May 2017; Received in revised form 28 January 2018; Accepted 6 February 2018

Available online 10 February 2018

1359-1789/© 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

murder.

In terms of structure, I first set the scene by providing some understanding of the theoretical framework of heteronormativity that underpins the arguments made throughout this paper. Introducing this theoretical and conceptual framework will provide a useful basis in which to critically evaluate the social and cultural constructions of male sexual violence. When I introduce this framework, I apply it to certain salient features of everyday life where heteronormativity stubbornly persists, for example, in relation to the family, love and romance. Then, I critically examine the different ways in which male rape is constructed, particularly in two contexts where male rape often occurs and where heteronormativity is pervasive: the gay scene and prison. I draw on the theoretical framework of heteronormativity to theorise and make sense of the nuanced constructions of male rape in these two contexts. Thereafter, I critically explore the intertwinement of homosexuality and male rape, where I consider the social and cultural construction of ‘male rape as solely a homosexual issue’. I also locate this analysis in a policing context to exemplify the widespread perpetuation of this male rape myth and the implications of this. The penultimate section recognises the links between homophobia, hate crime, and male rape, where I argue that some heterosexual men carry out rape against gay men or men presumed to be gay as a way in which to express hatred and homophobia. Male rape, then, can be carried out as a form of hate crime/homophobic violence. Finally, the conclusion offers some final thoughts about sexualities, male sexual violence, and heteronormativity.

2. Heteronormativity and heterosexual arenas

Heteronormativity remains strongly in tact in many segments of society. It is the normalisation of heterosexuality through social structures, social practices, and social institutions. As Jeffrey Weeks (1996: 73) argues, “heterosexuality is hegemonic in our general culture”, serving to marginalise and regulate other sexualities, notably homosexualities and pushing them to the margins of normality. Heterosexuality continues to be the leading sexuality, which other sexualities are measured against; but it cannot function without other marginalised and subordinate forms of sexualities, such as homosexuality, bisexuality and other sexualities. In order for heteronormativity to successfully operate, it requires other subordinate sexualities to reinforce and reaffirm its superior position. Sexualities, then, are hierarchical. I do not claim that this sexual hierarchy is fixed and unchanging, but rather fluid, negotiated and dynamic depending on the context in which sexualities are enacted. For example, a person embodying homosexuality can, at a particular time and place, enact heterosexual practices to perpetuate and strengthen heteronormativity or be positioned in heterosexuality by others. However, in post-closeted contexts, Steven Seidman (2002) traces the altering status of heterosexuality. This led Seidman to believe that young heterosexuals contend with the increasing visibility of gay men, arguing that many heterosexuals are more and more self-conscious of their own heterosexual identifications due to the omnipresent of homosexual identifications and gay visual representations. Consequently, heterosexual men are constantly flagging up their straight identity in everyday life (Seidman, 2002) debunking any threats to it.

Through social institutions and social relations, as Steven Seidman (2009) argues, normative heterosexuality is culturally and socially “made”. According to Stevi Jackson (2006), “institutionalized, normative heterosexuality regulates those kept within its boundaries as well as marginalizing and sanctioning those outside them. The term ‘heteronormativity’ has not always captured this double-sided social regulation” (p. 105). What this suggests is that one ought to consider the power relations *within* heterosexual relations, as well as *outside* such relations. The perpetuation of heteronormativity, therefore, not only relies upon other marginal sexualities to serve its purpose, but also relies upon gender relations within heterosexual relations, notably

between men and women. For Steven Seidman (2005), heterosexualities are not static and monolithic; instead, among heterosexuals, there are good citizenship and hierarchies of respectability that are constantly being altered and changed through time and place shaped by social and cultural forces. He argues that heteronormativity “not only establishes a heterosexual/homosexual hierarchy but also creates hierarchies among heterosexualities”, which results in “hegemonic and subordinate forms of heterosexuality” (Seidman, 2005: 40). For example, one could argue that, on the one hand, heterosexual monogamy and marriage can enhance respectability among certain heterosexuals at certain contexts in which others respect these arrangements. On the other hand, one could argue that sexual promiscuity among some heterosexuals could position them in subordinate forms of heterosexuality.

With this in mind, I attempt to theorise the intersections between heteronormativity, sexualities, and the constructions of sexual violence against men. Although I have provided my own cultural definition of heteronormativity, there is no wider agreement of it in terms of conceptualisations of heteronormativity. This is due to several reasons, one of which is that many scholars approach the concept of heteronormativity from differing theoretical perspectives that focus on dissimilar dimensions of the social. There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ conceptualisation of the concept, I would argue, “but rather that the social is many-faceted and what is seen from one angle may be obscured from another” (Jackson, 2006: 106). Different conceptualisations of heteronormativity, then, allow us to ‘see’ social issues, such as male rape, in different ways. My own cultural understanding of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) allows one to make sense of the dissimilar ways in which male rape is constructed in places where heteronormativity remains unchallenged and intact, such as through social practices, social institutions, and social structures. It is so ‘normal’ that it becomes the unquestionable unless shown otherwise. As Jackson (2006: 107) rightly comments, “Heteronormativity defines not only a normative sexual practice but also a normal way of life”. How sexualities are ‘breathed’, lived, and embodied varies culturally, socially, and historically shaped by other social structures, such as gender, ethnicity, class and age that intersect with sexuality, producing and reproducing individual, socially located biographies. Every social practice and relation is embedded in meaning, that include discourses and languages consisting of one’s cultural understandings of sexualities and such meaning can change through time and place (Weeks, 2017). These meanings structure the ways in which we think about sexualities and how we respond to particular sexualities. Generally, norms, values, and beliefs are interpreted as being concerned with meaning that form social action. Heteronormativity underpins *all* social action, I argue.

Compulsory heterosexuality is institutionalised via social structures, such as families, love, and romance. Heteronormativity is a useful capsule to recognise the different ways wherein heterosexual privilege is embedded into the structure of everyday social life, insidiously and pervasively arranging everyday existence, notably within institutions. I want to focus on certain, yet overlapping, institutions that govern the use of heteronormativity; for instance, the family, love, and romance. Within heterosexual families, there is an ideal of heterosexual monogamous coupledom that is often seen as ‘normal’, desirable, and this ideal, as a result, is ingrained in institutional practices and state policy that define the types of ‘valid’ relationships (Weeks, 2017). However, the slow rise of gay rights with regards to gay marriage and homosexual relations decriminalised in certain parts of the world have allowed other sexualities to ‘live’ around compulsory heterosexuality, but I argue that this has not resulted in the weakening of heterosexual dominance. There is arguably a hierarchy of gay, in that hegemonic forms of gay are more respectable than subordinate forms of gay as similar to the hierarchy of heterosexualities noted above. For instance, gay men in monogamous relationships facilitates these types of men being positioned in higher levels of the sexual hierarchy, in contrast to other gay men who are deviating from monogamous coupledom and engaging in sexual promiscuous activities and so being positioned in

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6550030>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6550030>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)