

The aim of this article is to analyze some social meanings that male adolescents build over sexual coercion behaviors. Data proceeds from a qualitative research in Buenos Aires, Argentina, among male teenagers of middle and lower strata in 2001. From a gender framework, this research is guided by the assumption that the manners that masculine identities are culturally constructed could produce legitimating spaces for coactive behaviors.

Description of the Topic

The definition of the sexual coercion is complex; because the perceptions about what is or not sexual coercion vary agree with social, cultural, and individual differences. As Pantelides and Geldstein sustain (1999) "the understanding of sexual coercion, either from the researches (*etic* perspective) as from the social actors (*emic* perspective) is far from being clear. Although few researches have studied different aspects of the sexual coercion, just a few has considered the difficulties for defining the concept and the methodological consequences of using one or other definition. This problem guide us to the theoretical discuss about the wide or the restricted of such definition.

Muehlenhard and Kimes (1999) show that it does not exist a perfect methodological way for capturing the sense off this concept and it is needed taking in account that different definitions reflex different concerns of diverse groups. From a social constructivist perspective, it is sustained that which is understand for violence is socially constructed, and it has changed across the time. Muehlenhard and Kimes (1999) explain that the definitions of terms like sexual violence or domestic violence has the power of labeling some behaviors as negatives, meanwhile ignores or, implicitly, excuse others. The manners that these terms are defined take part in how the people explain, asses, and assimilate their own experience. Furthermore, the definitions of these terms contain a number of assumptions about power and coercion, sexuality and gender (Muehlenhard, Powch, Pelps and Guiusti, in Muehlenhard and Kimes 1999: 234-235).

In this article we agree with the social constructionist thinking in that what is sexual coercion depends on who defines and how is defined. Given this initial difficulty, we agree with Laumann et al. (1994: 333) when they sustain that the best way to prevent errors is to be the enough clear about what data say (with a clear definition) and about what data do not say. In this sense, in this research we adopted the following classical definition of sexual coercion: the act of forcing (or intent forcing) to other individual through violence, treats, verbal insistence, lies, cultural expectations or economical circumstances to have sexual relations against the wishes of the other person (Heise, Moore, and Toubia 1995a: 8). We think that this definition allows us to contrast a wide range conceptualization about sexual coercion with the meanings that these male adolescents give to these behaviors (behaviors that could be categorized as coercion from this feminist concept).

The review of sexual coercion literature shows that great part of this studies are quantitative that analyze the prevalence of sexual coercion experimented for women and/or men, mainly among young and adolescents in high school ages (Alksnis et al. 2000; Craig 1993; Halpern et al. 2001; Patel et al. 2003; Rotundo, Nguyen and Sackett 2001; Ross and Algeier 1996; Struckman-Johnson 1988) or in some cases these studies look for identifying variables that predict the fact of being victim or perpetrator of sexual coercion (Forbes and Adams-Curtis 2001; Haworth-Hoeppner 1998). Most part of these studies was realized in United States and there is most commonly focused to female populations.

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Although the evidence from developing countries is limited, the available data suggest that a considerable number of young and adolescent has experienced not consenting sex. Studies in diverse settings in Africa, Asia, and Latin America reveal that forced sexual initiation and following sexual coercion experiences are not uncommon (Ajuwon et al. 2001; Bott and Jejeebhoy 2003; Cáceres 2000; Moore 2003; Pantelides and Geldstein 1999; Patel et al. 2003; Population Council 2004a; Population Council 2004b; Ramakrishna, Karott and Murthy 2003; Ramírez Rodríguez and Vargas Becerra 1998; Sodhi and Verna 2003; Suárez and Menkes 2004).

Theoretical focus

From a theoretical perspective, the sexual coercion exercised by men over women appears as one of the most evident crystallization of the domination social relations based on gender. If we depart from a constructivist point of view, in which it is ruled out that the male violence is a mechanical result of the biology, it is needed to find the explanations of this violence searching on social and cultural conditions where the masculinity is constructed (Brittan 1989; Brod and Kaufman 1994; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Kaufman 1995; Kimmel and Messner 1992). In the present article we have two theoretical shafts. In the first place, we ask us about the constitutive importance that the asymmetric gender relations has on the construction of a masculine identity. Some political questions resides in this question: there are other possibilities?, is a change possible?. In second place, we explore the social meanings of the "sexualization" of this violence. In other words, if we choice a theoretical position against an essentialist perspective, where there are not the genes and neither the glands which determines the sexual violence, why does this kind of violence remain having a male to female almost exclusive direction? The political questions that resides here are the sexual relation by it selves a way to perpetuating the domination and subordination relations?, how could be it changed?

From an applied perspective, this line of studies has the intention of providing tools and knowledge for preventing not wished sexual interchange and health problems related to this coactive behaviors. As it is marked by Heise, Moore and Toubia (1995a and 1995b), this kind of behaviors are closely related with some of the most important reproductive health problems: not wished pregnancy, violent sexual initiation, harmful sexual practices (as not protected sex, sexually transmitted diseases), and potential harmful on mental health (depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress) (Figuroa, Stern and Medina 1999: p. 45).

Data and research methods

Given the exploratory nature of our objective and the type of information that we was looking for, it was selected a qualitative approach. We worked with primary data obtained from in-depth-interviews.

The sample was composed by 32 male adolescents, between 15 to 20 years old, residents of the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and from two different economical strata (low and middle). The sample selected was an intentional sample, and the criterion of theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was used for determining the last number of the sample.

For the data analysis and interpretation were used some procedures of the grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As Charmaz sustains (Charmaz cited by Ekins 1998), each researcher who works with this approach probably will develop his own variant. In this sense, we used some of the grounded theory procedures but we did not follow all its procedures, agreeing with the classical *bricoleur* metaphor for the qualitative researcher (Nelson, Treichler and Grossberg 1992; Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Becker 1989).

Findings

We analyze the perceptions and experiences of these male adolescents among different sexual coercion settings (verbal insistence, psychological pressure, physical pressure, and rape, settings than comes from our theoretical definition). Data shows that meanwhile a rape situation appears clearly delimited and defined by these male adolescents (as a violent action against victim will), a wide range of sexual behaviors seems to open when we analyze the sexual coercion; behaviors which are difficult to categorize as sexual coercion or as cultural dissimulated consent.

The scene change significantly when we analyze the experiences and perceptions of these boys as victims of sexual coercion. Although in their narratives emerges experiences of strong pressure, in general they could not recognize these intimidating behaviors as a pressure.

A social imperative that said that boys are who have to take the sexual initiative, aggregated to an essentialist concept about sexuality, place this male adolescents in an action framework where the limits between seduction games and the direct trampling on the sexual rights of the other person is not clear. Acting from binary codes, in the sense that depends on the gender and the kind of the person who one is interacting, leads to decipher what the other person say. Interpreting the different potential meanings when girls say no (different from when boys say no), reveals internalized domination structures.

At the same time, it operates in these male adolescents a pressure for self-legitimate their masculinities through the sexuality, wining (“*ganando*”) women. This pressure is not perceived as pressure by them but it is perceived as some kind of social requisite. It is possible to think in a double pressure: from the boy to the girl when she say no to his requires, insisting her verbally (in the best of the cases); and an intern pressure of this boy that have to legitimate his position as man, not only in front of a woman but also in front of other boys (pairs group).

We agree with Michel Foucault (Foucault 1990: p.139) that resisting against a power expression could not be satisfied reporting the violence or criticizing an institution. It is not sufficient with denouncing the rationality in general. It is necessary to question the expression of this existent rationality. Maybe questioning the rationality of these mechanisms that bring a great part of men to advance on the decisions of a great number of women, we could begin to take out rationality to this domination social relation.

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