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Nicola Gavey: *Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005, 268 pp. £16.95, 9780415310727 (pbk), £45.00, ISBN 9780415310710 (hbk).

Nicola Gavey's book *Just Sex: The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape* provides a complex, multi-layered, deeply feminist discussion of rape and the larger sociocultural context within which it is embedded. If you're looking for simple slogans and quick answers concerning the problem of rape, this is not the book for you. But if you appreciate nuanced analyses that shed light on old debates while simultaneously opening new sets of questions for consideration, *Just Sex* will not disappoint.

Taking a Foucauldian, social constructionist, position and drawing on the work of feminist theorists from Mary Wollstonecraft to Catherine MacKinnon, Gavey tackles two separate, but related, deconstructionist projects. First, she interrogates normative heterosexuality (or 'heterosex') to describe the myriad ways in which its narratives, scripts and discourses help create a structure (a 'scaffolding') that makes rape possible (and prevalent). Second, she interrogates the ways in which feminist researchers and activists have constructed rape, providing historical and strategic rationales for the choices made but also questioning these choices in light of their implications and repercussions.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section includes two excellent review chapters. Chapter 1 ('Rape as a Social Problem') provides a comprehensive and wide-ranging historical review of cultural and judicial constructions of rape (e.g. women have rape fantasies, women lie about rape, women say 'no' but mean 'yes') and a description of how feminism helped modify these constructions (e.g. through consciousness-raising groups and the research findings of feminist social scientists).

I was particularly impressed with Gavey's discussion of the 'rape is violence' vs. 'rape is sex' debate. She rightly points out that early feminist pronouncements that 'rape is violence not sex' must be understood within their sociohistorical context. The argument that rape is violence was articulated in response to the prevailing construction of rape as something that was at least a little bit sexually enjoyable for the victim; therefore, it was important to emphasize the elements of power, dominance and control that are inherent in rape.

Gavey provides an equally refreshing clarity in Chapter 2 ('Discovery of a Rape Epidemic') when she summarizes the extremely important prevalence studies conducted by Mary Koss (Koss and Oros, 1982; Koss et al., 1987) and Diana Russell (1982, 1984), studies that have been subjected to backlash critiques. Gavey summarizes these studies succinctly, while giving a careful and complete description of the methodologies used. She is able to clear up misconceptions inherent in the critiques, while not oversimplifying the underlying issues. As well, she problematizes the concept of 'unwanted sex' without conflating it with rape – a nuanced analysis that is shared by some feminist prevalence researchers (but not by the conservative backlash commentators), and one that Gavey returns to in greater depth later in the book.

In the second section, Gavey tackles her first deconstructive project in earnest as she begins to 'put heterosexuality under the microscope, to look at the ways in which power operates through contemporary cultural norms to render not all choices equal' (p. 7). To bring her reader up to speed on Foucault and on social constructionist theories more generally, she provides a clear, concise summary of these theories in Chapter 3 ('The Social Construction of Sex, Subjectivity, and the Body'). This discussion is tailored to her own purposes but is broad enough to serve as an accessible, standalone introduction to post-structuralism.

In Chapter 4 ('Heterosexuality Under the Microscope'), she builds the connections to support her main thesis. She reviews several dominant discourses of heterosex including the male sex drive discourse, the have/hold discourse, the permissive sex discourse, and the coital imperative discourse. Heterosex is constructed to meet men's 'needs' (as defined by these discourses); women's perspectives and needs are largely missing. In particular, there is no room for female sexual desire. To present these discourses in their sharpest relief, she provides quotes from a marriage manual (Eichenlaub, 1961) that is only a few decades old. It included such advice as:

Pleasing someone you love and meeting biologic needs competently with your body brings full contentment to many women during the non-climactic sexual intercourse, just as nursing a baby brings contentment to a willing mother. If anything, non-climactic sex is easier to enjoy than nursing, since a considerate husband can always make intercourse comfortable while even a well-meaning infant sometimes bites. (quoted on p. 116)

and

I usually tell women *always* to meet their husbands' sexual requirements unless frank disability keeps them from performing their usual household or working duties or specific disorders of the sex organs themselves make intercourse impossible. Sex is too important for any wife to give it less call upon her energy than cooking, laundry, and a dozen other activities. (quoted on p. 115)

In Chapter 5 ('Unsexy Sex; Unwanted Sex, Sexual Coercion, and Rape') we begin to see how these discourses of heterosexuality and heterosex play out in the lives of individual women. This is one of the most interesting chapters in the book, in part because Gavey quotes extensively from interviews she has conducted. Issues of identity crop up frequently. For example, women consent to unwanted sex because they have an identity as a woman who loves sex or because they want to avoid an identity of 'frigid' or 'uptight'. One woman nearly always had sex with her married lover, even when 'I absolutely detest it, I think it's *revolting* and they *stink*' (p. 140; she is describing having sex with her lover when he has been drinking). Part of what made her different from her lover's wife was that she rarely said no to sex with him whereas his wife very often did. Another theme in these interviews was unwanted sex as a kind of nurturance. If the man wants it so much and it means so much to him, and it is so easy to give (in the words of one respondent 'it's a nothing – it's like, having sex is like getting up and having breakfast'; p. 153) then why not do it? One should do it; it would be selfish and almost rude not to. Dr Eichenlaub would certainly agree with this conclusion.

In the final section of Chapter 5, Gavey discusses the blurriest of lines between unwanted sex and rape – women who 'consent' to sex in order to 'avoid' being raped. Identity and control seem to be important here, where deciding to 'give in' allows the woman to retain the illusion of control. As well, by reconstructing the forced sex as something that she freely chose, she avoids the experience of being raped (an experience labeled as rape, at least), although not necessarily some of the typical post-traumatic consequences of being raped (such as fear, anxiety, and hypervigilance around the perpetrator). This is a sophisticated mental strategy, one that does not seem easy to pull off, and the hesitations and disfluencies in the interview excerpts suggest the difficulty of this task:

Pat: Well, I wasn't raped, raped, because I did – I – See, I've actually never been raped, but I mean really it's a fine line, isn't it, between saying yes, whether you want to or not, to somebody like that, that I didn't really want to go to bed with. Ah, I've, I mean I suppose I've been (pause, sighing) sort of pushed around (pause) but, but not hurt. Just (pause) manhandled (long pause) but not (pause) violently. [gap] He, he didn't rape me, because I really more or less consented. (p. 159)

The interview excerpts here are fascinating and one can hear the effort needed to distance from the idea of rape.

In the third and final section of the book, Gavey takes up her second major deconstructive project – exploring the implications of specific feminist constructions of rape and sexual victimization. Here, her solid credentials as a feminist and as a methodologically sophisticated positivist social science researcher stand her in good stead. She is able to simultaneously praise and critique some of the choices feminists (both researchers and activists) have made in their constructions of rape. She celebrates the fact that a feminist agenda has led to great progress in our understanding of rape yet invites us to ask difficult, challenging questions that will help us move this agenda even further.

As she has done throughout the book, in Chapter 6 ('Can a Woman be Raped and

Not Know It?') Gavey explores questions that lie at the boundaries. Here, Gavey moves away from the grey area of unwanted sex and keeps her focus on acts that meet the legal definition of rape. But there are a variety of ambiguities even within this relatively narrow discursive space. Most importantly, not all women who experience such acts describe their experience as 'rape'. In the psychological literature, researchers usually describe these individuals as 'unacknowledged rape victims' (or survivors). Gavey discusses the reasons why this is a reasonable choice for researchers to make, reviews some of the backlash critiques of this choice, and invites us to give these critiques serious consideration while remaining firmly within a feminist theoretical framework. Does defining someone as a victim make them a victim, when otherwise they would suffer no ill effects (as some backlash critics have argued)? Or does giving someone a language and a narrative to help them understand their experience allow them to heal from its ill effects? Or could both be true, at least for some individuals? Gavey goes on to ask a variety of thought-provoking questions that push the edges of previous writing on this topic. She invites us to consider the differences in conceptualizing sexual assault or unwanted sex as injustice rather than victimization, to allow space for stories of strength and resistance (without allowing such stories to contribute to victim-blaming), and to ask whether and when it might be better for an individual woman *not* to see her sexual assault experience as rape.

Gavey explores yet another set of boundary issues in Chapter 7 ('Turning the Tables: Women Raping Men'). I was appreciative of Gavey's ability to acknowledge the benefits and the dangers, as well as the complexities, of studying female sexual aggression and male sexual victimization. She argues that if we acknowledge that women can rape men, we are challenging the dominant gender stereotypes in a powerful way, one that may well give us a foothold for rebuilding our scripts of heterosexuality. And if we didn't consider the possibility of female perpetrators, we would be helping to build a stereotyped cultural understanding of gender in which women are always weak and men are always aggressive. Simply asking this research question can be a powerful deconstructive tool. On the other hand, Gavey acknowledges various dangers in doing so, including the very real possibility that research on women as sexual aggressors (research that is seen as 'sexy' and newsworthy) will draw attention from the (tired, boring) issue of women as sexual victims. Moreover, Gavey is suspicious of a gender-neutral approach to this question, and rightly so. For a host of reasons, women's sexual coercion of men is likely to look and feel very different from men's sexual coercion of women. She invites us to consider these complexities as we begin to study this topic.

The book concludes with a final chapter on prevention ('Toward Ending Rape'). Gavey has a variety of specific suggestions. She wants us to encourage women and girls to develop their assertive/aggressive side, perhaps through participation in sport and/or through self-defense classes. She stresses the importance of working against compulsory heterosexuality and scripted encounters; we must make it clear that female (as well as male) desire is a prerequisite for sex. At the same time, it is vital to challenge and eventually eliminate constructions of masculinity that are hyper-masculine and violent. I was especially taken with her call for a 'politics of discursive intervention' (p. 227) in which we celebrate the telling of counter-stereotypic stories. By allowing and encouraging people to have a variety of narratives and ways of being

concerning their sexuality, and by providing the means and the space for these narratives to be disseminated to the broader culture (rather than censoring all narratives that don't fit the stereotype), we powerfully promote a greater diversity of sexual scripts. In so doing, we help to dismantle the scaffolding that supports rape.

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