Sociological Analysis Of Violence Essay, Research Paper

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This essay will examine the social and cultural conditions, within the macro-diachronic and micro-synchronic theoretical models , that intensify or perpetuate sexual assault. I have chosen only one concept from each model because these are the only concepts that I feel that I can use to most accurately and comprehensively depict causes and reasons for why sexual assault is deeply entrenched in our social structure. I will thus explore, from these ideological viewpoints, some of the motivations and circumstances which lead offenders to sexual assault. I will also fuse some of the historical attitudes from which today’s concepts have evolved to our contemporary understanding of this social phenomena. However, it?s important that we look beyond both offenders’ motivations and history, and to the greater sociological view, if we are to correctly reconstruct acts of violence such as sexual assault.

Sexual assault (the term, rape, is no longer used in Canadian criminal law) is an act of violence that is a criminal offence under the federal Criminal Code of Canada. The Criminal Code is constantly being amended by the federal Canadian Parliament, as well as interpreted by court cases. A victim of a sexual assault (sexualized violence) may also bring a private action called a civil suit, suing the person who assaulted her or him for money damages.This cause of action is distinguishable from a criminal action, which is defined by a different body of law, has a different burden of proof, and has different results. The civil suit is generally defined by court cases, rather than by treatment of law, as is criminal justice.

The macro-diachronic approach is a modern theoretical model of crime and deviance, which specifically attempts to delineate which dynamics account for social transformation of crime and criminal justice. More specifically, in the case of sexual assault, this approach focusses on the changes in the labour force (gender based) and conflicts between genders over the acceptability and criminalization of sexualized -2 violence as the starting point of explanation. One such concept is marxist-feminism, as a form conflict theory. According to this theory, the incidence of sexual assault in Canada is a result of the power imbalance between men and women, in which women are expected to assume a subordinate relationship to men in our capitalist society. Consequently, sexual assault can be seen as a logical extension of the typical interactions between women and men in which women are made dependent on men for economic production. Women’s vulnerability to sexual assault is a result of their subordinate relationship to men. The set of beliefs and attitudes that divide people into classes by sex and justify one sex’s superiority is called sexism. There are a number of sexist dictates that serve to maintain this subordinate relationship. The first tenet concerns women’s status in society: women occupy a relatively powerless position in society and are the recipients of fewer advantages and privileges (economic). Men’s benefits are built into a patriarchal system which begin in a basis of economics and branch out to other aspects of social life from there. Secondly, sexual assault is as a means of control over women: assault plays a role in maintaining patriarchy by perpetrating the threat of violence. The acts of just a few violent men can terrorize all women and can control women’s lives. The indifference of other men reinforces this effect. Thirdly, women’s dependence on men is also a factor; many women receive most of their benefits, especially economic, through men rather than through their own ability. This dependence is reinforced by the cultural belief that dependence is a “womanly” trait. Women are dependent on men for political representation, social position, psychological approval, and the base foundation of economic support.

According to marxist-feminism, a strategy for eliminating women’s vulnerability to assault involves altering the power relationship between women and men. Women’s vulnerability will not end with individual change alone; there -3

will have to be across the board social change as well. The whole assumption of male superiority will have to be negated. Assault must be viewed as a sociopolitical issue, because it keeps women powerless and reinforces the status quo of male domination. There are many factors, beginning with economics, which enforce the belief that “a woman’s place is in the home.” Consequently, women tend to be displaced from the mainstream of community action, employment, and decision making.

The traditional female, in a patriarchal pedagogy, is supposed to be passive and put others’ feelings before her own; the traditional male is expected to be aggressive and forward. Men are supposed to go after what they want. They’re seen as aggressors; women are the gatekeepers. Marxist-feminism believes that these stereotypes are directly related to sexual assault. One way to analyze the power relationship between men and women is by examining some of the common social rules women are taught, which is a notion that overlaps social learning theory.

Glaser?s theory of differential identification, as a form of social learning theory, is a micro-synchronic approach. The micro-synchronic approach is concerned with why certain individuals behave differently from others. Most sociological studies are done from this approach, as it reflects the popular view of societal workings. Differential identification suggests that to be influenced by criminal traditions (e.g. acts of violence), the individual must identify with definitions of deviance conveyed by real or imaginary models of the deviant behaviours. Specifically, the media, for example, provides women with a complete list of behaviours that precipitate rape. Social training about what is proper and ladylike, as well as what is powerful and macho, teaches women to be victims and men to be aggressors.

From very early ages, men and women are conditioned, by parents who hold

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such beliefs, to accept different roles. In western culture, women are raised to be passive and men are raised to be aggressive. We are conditioned to accept certain attitudes, values, and behaviours. Our conditioning by those who represent a ?normative? role is continuously and relentlessly encouraged and reinforced by the popular media, cultural attitudes, and the educational system. The media is a major contributor to gender-based attitudes and values which subscribe to sexualized violence as acceptable.

If a male child is raised in an environment where sexualized violence is the norm, according to differential association, the child will identify with this behaviour, even if he is a member of a group that does not condone violence. This example accounts for why differential identification is more accurate than differential association (Sutherland), which accounts for how violence is transmitted only as a cultural commodity and part of our cultural and sub-cultural identities.

Glaser?s differential identification emphasizes individual role taking and choice making, which is useful in mediating non-group influences as contributors to social learning in the creation of deviant behaviour.

Society, through individual models such as a parent, sibling, or care giver, trains females to be physically and emotionally unequipped to respond effectively to danger. Training begins at an early age. Boys and girls are channelled into different physical activities by individuals responsible for them, because of the believed differences in physical and muscular development and stamina. Consequently, as adults, females are unable to gauge both their own bodies’ resistance to injury, and their own strength and power. The emotional training women receive from role models also contributes to their inability to successfully fight back. Women learn to be passive, gentle, nurturing, accepting and compliment. Rapists select victims they -5

can intimidate and overpower. Most women are reluctant to challenge men’s offensive behaviour because of their emotional training and conditioning (i.e., it is not proper to “make a scene?). In addition, women in our society tend to have an aversion to violence, due to social conditioning by parents, who received similar teachings from their own role models. It is not recognized that non-violence is no longer a virtue if it serves to maintain victimization. There is a difference between becoming a violent person and responding to violence in an appropriate and assertive manner. Women are also kept vulnerable through their isolation from each other. Women are socialized by those who raise them, or by peers, to compete with each other for the attention of men and to mistrust each other.

A concrete example of social learning in our culture is that many women believe that being ogled by a group of construction workers is nothing more

than a form of praise. Many sexual assaults, however, begin with a “harmless” compliment or inquiry from a rapist. His comments are a way of testing how accommodating the woman might be. The lack of clarity about what constitutes insulting behaviour and the learned ambivalence women have about unwanted approaches makes them vulnerable to sexual assault.

Many of the attitudes, beliefs and mistaken ideas about rape have been with us for centuries. By looking at myths such as, “women ask for it,” and “women secretly enjoy rape,” from a historical perspective, we can better understand how they evolved through social learning mechanism. Our understanding of the evolution of common myths can provide us with a firmer foundation from which to understand how sexual assault is socially constructed. Present myths and attitudes stem, in part, from past laws. These laws developed from, among numerous examples, the English Common Law system which in turn had its roots from the Bible. In early recorded history, rape was a ritualistic way by which a wife could be -6

obtained. Rape was always defined in relation to marriage, and marriage was considered an exchange of property. In sum, women were considered pieces of property: they were first obtained by their fathers, and then by their husbands. The “women as property” concept was the first step in the development and institution of slavery. Present day laws are not nearly as extreme. However, many of the beliefs underlying ancient laws are still prevalent. Some people still believe that a women cannot be raped. Consent is the oldest and most frequently used defence against the charge of rape. Furthermore, rape is the only crime in which the victim is doubted. In other words, when a woman is sexually assaulted, it is not uncommon that some of the blame and responsibility for the assault is put on her. This is probably one reason for the present incredibly low conviction rate of rapists in our criminal justice system. This might also explain why our justice system reflects the prevailing societal attitude that women are partially responsible for sexual assault.

Why does sexual assault exist? What causes sexual assault? The question of why some men sexually assault women is thus connected to the question of why sexual violence is tolerated. This connection exists at a double intersection: between attitudes and actions, between violence and notions of masculinity. Men are all connected to these intersections because this is where they have grown up as men in our society and have learned through group and individual models of deviant behaviour. The patriarchal pedagogy and structures that set the stage for permitting sexual assault to occur historically, still continue today, although in more subtle ways. Women are still seen as the property of men, and are protected as such. Men and women are still taught to occupy very different roles in today’s world. Men are usually in power positions, especially of an economic nature, and women are seen as passive. Marxist-feminist and differential identification are two theories that can be used to effectively explicate the cycle of sexualized violence in Canadian society -7

today. In order to deal with the occurrence of sexual assault in our society, we must examine its causes more deeply. We must understand the sociology of sexualized violence in order to effectively explicate its groups and individual dynamics.

Critical Analysis of the Media

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Critical Analysis of the Media

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05 July, 2000

In our society today, control is maintained by the authorities through regulation. In North America, major regulatory systems comprise two main systems of expertise. One is the criminal justice system, which is concerned with what will we do about crime and deviance. The other is the academic system of expertise, which is concerned with why crime and deviance exists. Academic expertise is the type of discourse deployed in the article by Michael Conlon to show, with ostensible authority, that maternal smoking during pregnancy is ?linked? to adult criminal behaviour.

By using a recently published study, the article sets up the system of expertise to lend credibility to its headline and make a very persuasive (at first glance) claim. Scientists have high credibility and prestige in our society, and the article plays greatly on this assumption.

The key idea of the article is that criminal males are the product of mothers who smoked during pregnancy. The fallacy of affirming the consequent is evidenced in this statement when a closer look at the clarification of the meaning of the premise, and its significance, is made. To seriously answer questions of cause and consequent, the reader must assemble (?accurately?) measured covariables and variables and draw reliable conclusions from them. While the researchers of this data present certain conclusions, these conclusions may not necessarily be reflected in the media report. The media is capable of manipulating the information from the research report in order to support their own biases or beliefs.

In the year 2000, smoking has fallen out of public favour and is seen as an undesirable social and physical health habit; many cities across Canada have banned smoking in all indoor, and in some cases in certain outdoor, areas. This article accurately reflects the general public opinion that smoking is ?bad?, but it does not necessarily accurately reflect the results of the main study it is citing, but rather -2

could be using only parts of the study to support the evil-causes-evil fallacy, i.e., smoking causes criminal behaviour.

There are also some reporting problems in the article regarding the applicability of the the study?s findings. The sample of the study was taken from several small, affluent Western European countries, where poverty is low, compared to many larger industrialised nations such as Canada, and where minorities make up a very small part of the population (i.e., it is mainly a white society) . Another incongruity is evident in the reporter?s assembling of data; the reporter cites a study done in Western Europe, based on western European data, but also quotes North American researchers, who confirm that the link between the independent variable (smoking) and the dependent variable (adult male deviance) exists. Thus the validity of the conclusion the article puts forth is questionable, as it may not be generalizable to all western societies.

The article uses the simplest statistical analysis of acts (of criminal behaviour) isolated in a single types, specifying neither more detailed forms or variations nor phases or sequences through which it might move. The statistics show a relatively small differences between what would appear, to the lay reader, as inconsequential differences regarding the numbers of cigarettes smoked by the pregnant mother linked to the incidence of criminal behaviour by adult males. There is no information about whether control groups were used in the study, or if there was even consideration of control in the research, other than the few social factors mentioned.

The reporter?s stating observations of adult male criminal behaviour (especially persistent behaviour) around maternal smoking during pregnancy serves as a manoeuvre of definition. Defining male criminal behaviour in terms of maternal smoking suggests that maternal smoking must be bad, as we already know -3

that criminal behaviour is ?bad?. The evil-causes-evil fallacy can thus also be explicated through the writer?s operational definitions.

The article is also sensational and controversial because there is presently a back-lash by smokers for their ?rights? in the face of the general anti-smoking sentiment that has risen in recent years in western society. Also implicit in the articles? tone is the stigmatization of smoking, which also serves to reflect the general attitude of anti-smoking that exists today.

The article states that the researcher accounted for other factors, such as SES, parental, psychiatric problems, age, and the father?s criminal history. However, there are many other important factors that could contribute to the cause of male criminal behaviour, such as single parent homes, Child Sexual Abuse, or drug and alcohol use in the home, to name a few. The correction between the variables is also spurious, as it is not mentioned if another important factor, such as if it was a single parent family, could be isolated in the equation.

It is important to realize that the experts, such as the academics, do not allow blame to dominate the structure of their research. Rather, it is the media who is responsible for framing studies as heavily concerned with the idea of blame as explanation.

An overview critique of the article also brings to mind the idea that language, the words we use to convey meaning, is not clear or pure. Words take on different meanings in different cultures, classes, and even for individuals, depending on their background, experience, and training. Linguistic content makes meaning very tenuous, and therefore meaning cannot be as clear as we believed it was. For example. part of the headline of the article states, ?Habit in pregnancy thought to damage fetus?s nervous system, causing long-term misbehaviour.? The sentence is

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intended to convey a purported ?fact?, though a close look at the language used (i.e., ?thought?, which does not connote fact) does not agree with this intention.

The construction of the media report on a correlational study between maternal smoking and male criminal behaviour suggests a media bias and framing of information to serve their biases. In a practical sense, the reader should only need the key ?facts? to make a judgment on the reliability and validity of the reported claims. However, language, types of data description, popular fallacies, and spurious correlations deployed by the media can throw the reader off track. These media tactics make a critical analysis of the article?s ?truth? not necessarily easy in assessing the extent of ?blame? for deviance and crime in contemporary society.

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