Intersectionality, Sexuality & Violence

Week 6
Feminist Studies 60
Professor Miller-Young
• Our education in sex and sexuality is limited and biased
• Privileges an understanding of sex as a social, health, and moral problem
• Ignores sexual pleasure and sexual violence
• Heterosexual and Heteronormative in orientation
Understanding Sexuality

Erotic desires, expressions, practices, and identities, shaped by personal and social life
Sexuality and Power

• Sexuality as a vector of power, influences experience, desire, and identity.

• Identity, which does not necessarily equal one’s desires or expressions, is socially constructed and often imposed or policed.

• Sexuality a key dimension of WOC experiences of subordination and exploitation BUT also of resistance and empowerment.
Dimensions of Sexuality We Will Examine

- Sexual Violence
- Sexual Identity Formation
- Sexual Representation
- Sexual Labor
Sexual Violence & Domestic Violence

• 1) Intimate, interpersonal
• 2) Structural, systemic

“Sex is an important mechanism of power and social control in an abusive relationship and is used by men as a way of attaining and maintaining a relationship of dominance and subordination that is central to the patriarchal order.” (Abraham, 86)
South Asian Immigrant Women and Sexual Abuse

• 1) marital rape and sexual assault
• 2) sexual control through manipulation of reproductive rights
• 3) sexual control through the construction of the sexual other
State as Solution?

Can a state that is thoroughly infused with racism, male dominance, class bias, and homophobia and that constructs itself in and through violence act to minimize violence in the lives of women? Should we rely on the state as the answer to the problem of violence against women? (Angela Davis)
Immigrant Women & Violence

The 1990 Immigration and Nationality Act, Waiver Provision (U Visa) forces women to “prove” their abuse in order to avoid deportation.

- Cultural barriers discourage women from reporting or escaping, enforce dependence.
- Fear of legal status, especially for undocumented women or undocumented partners.
Heteronormativity

- Posits that all people fall into two distinct, complementary categories of sex (male and female), and of gender (men and women), and that these are innate and stable.
- Assumes sexual and marital relations are normal only when between two people of different genders, and that monogamy and marriage are the ideal gender-sexual arrangements.
- Heteronormativity functions alongside Heteropatriarchy and Heterosexism, to privilege heterosexuality, monosexuality, and masculine dominance over other gender-sexual identities and expressions (such as homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexuality, polysexuality, or asexuality).
- Queer is an identity category that encompasses a whole range of gender/sexual identities, and is fluid and varied over rigid or stable.
Sexual Stereotypes

- Sexual stereotypes as systematic forms of oppression
- Stereotypes legitimize exploitation, use myth of “hypersexuality”
- Stereotypes have “material” significance, are what Patricia Hill Collins calls “controlling images”
- Influence WOC’s identities, desires, expressions, and experiences
- Function through political, economic, social, educational, and legal institutions
Sexuality--Process of Othering

- Sexual stereotypes of WOC as DEVIANTS reveal the racialization of sexuality and the sexualization of race.
- Stereotypes inform the ontologies (what we know) and epistemologies (how we know) about WOC.
- Stereotypes are linked to histories of conquest.
- WOC understand ‘Othering’ as a sexualized form of oppression.
Representing Difference

• Stereotypes represent ‘symbolic boundaries’ in our culture. They mark difference and define belonging.
• Create a ‘spectacle’ or visual discourse that reproduces otherness through power/knowledge.
• The symbolic power of stereotypes circulates as they are repeated again and again.
• Conscious and unconscious, sexual stereotypes are linked to desire and disavowal (rejection).
WOC Negotiating Sexuality

• Sexual silences and taboos
• Sexuality in relation to racial/ethnic community as a paradox of empowerment and disempowerment
• Audre Lorde’s concept of the Erotic, offers an alternative paradigm sexuality.