

Summary

This paper aims to deconstruct ("*desalambrar*") the links between violence, gender and sexuality in order to explore how gender politics may be shaped by hegemonic discourses, beliefs, and behaviours that promote the normalization of everyday violence against women. All types of violence against women have a common denominator in that they are all *sexual* violence – based on women's physical difference and social and economic subordination within families, societies and States. Sexuality is an integral component of the web of gendered power relations that reach beyond the economic and political spheres to control women's behaviour and maintain their subordination. Yet, sexuality is rarely discussed in development theory and practice, except in terms of population or reproductive health, and, within this discourse, women's sexuality is primarily equated with their reproductive function and tied to national and economic well-being. While development discourse and practice are seldom defined in terms of gender and sexuality, they are nevertheless both gendered and sexed as they often revolve around women's roles as child-bearers, mothers and wives. This marking has qualified developing world women's sexuality with a powerful discourse that emphasizes their maternal role and the denial of sexual feeling and desire. Within this discourse, women's bodies are exposed to violence in two ways: firstly, by equating womanhood with motherhood and imposing a utilitarian view of the mother/woman as a reproductive entity i.e., bearers of the family and guardians of national honour-; and secondly, violence against women who exhibit their sexual autonomy in opposition to the *asexual* construction of the mother figure. This paper will argue that the current discourse on women's sexuality perpetuates violence against women by legitimizing the use of their bodies for political, cultural and economic consolidation. In addition, the paper will question the shortcomings of current theory and practices for addressing VAW, and discuss the possible utility of a new perspective, that of *gender and sexuality*, for explaining and challenging violence against women. Based on examples from the Latin American region, the paper will conclude with a recommendation for incorporating a gender and sexuality perspective in efforts to address and eliminate violence against women as a means to advance women's citizenship and to give full meaning to "A Life Free of Violence."