

**A Book Review of Rape, Love and Sexuality: The Construction of Women in Discourse. Sylvia “Guy” Estrada Claudio, Quezon City: UP Press, 2002. 123 pp.**

### **To Be a Feminist Is to Be Immoral**

**Ma. Anicia Manalang Sta. Ana\***

By her own account, Guy Estrada Claudio has been accused of being immoral, colonial-minded and anti-male for advocating women’s rights, for speaking of sexual oppression and— heaven forbid—seriously delving into the ticklish issue of women’s sexuality.

If you disagree with her feminism, her book offers “proof” of her immorality, colonial mentality, and anti-male bias.

But if you hold even only some feminist views, the book will add to your deeper understanding of the various ways of how Filipinas are sucked into gender oppression. As it turns out, it happens insidiously and this can be seen in such seemingly innocuous things as love letters, or in supposedly factual and objective reports on rape found in tabloids.

Deftly, succinctly, and critically discussing the psychological (both Western and Filipino) foundations of the discourse on sexuality and related concepts, the author clearly states her perspective: that which accepts the existence of national, class and

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gender systems of oppression. To wit: "Indeed for those of us interested in finding strategies to end gender oppression, it is crucial to understand how people become gendered beings."

Guided by the philosophical premises of poststructuralism, Guy investigated Filipino culture's construction of sexuality, femininity, and personality. Guy did a discourse analysis of 70 news stories found in 9 tabloids, 55 love letters and one chapter in a feminist book on women's health, all written in Filipino. They were chosen because they were written with the poor majority in mind as target readers.

Through her analysis of text and context of the printed material, Guy surfaced different levels of meaning and consequently offers us insights into Filipino views on sexuality, identity, personality, love and romance.

To put it simplistically, her findings are not pretty at all. If anything, they are quite disturbing, to say the least. Those among us who have long been aware of the experience of gender oppression in various degrees and forms can "attest" to their truth. Some of these are:

1. A woman's beauty alone inspires undying love, such as it is, in a man;
2. A man's notions of love are self-absorbed and infantile; they deal largely with how HE feels about the woman;
3. Women are objects rather than subjects of love; we know nothing about what they are like in the love letters;
4. Even feminists subscribe to sexist Freudian notions of sexuality; and
5. Friendship offers women the widest latitude to be themselves.

Lest you be frightened at the seriousness of the issues tackled in the book, the icing on this cake of a book is the writer's sense of humor. For while Guy shows how seriously flawed some of our cultural notions are, she pokes fun at them as well but without trivializing the issues. This can be seen even in the tongue-in-cheek headings and sub-headings she uses. For instance, in her analysis of rape stories in tabloids, one subhead says, "Victim and Suspect: Why the Rape Happened But No One Did It." The title of chapter two on love letters in itself gives you an idea of her findings and discussion: "Only Men Can Love." Or in such subheads as "I Have Learned That It Is Difficult to Love, or "You Taught Me to Love."

The short but pithy book is a must-read for all women advocates, academics, media people and anyone else who wants to see women freed from that which bind them because they are women.

