

Dr. Griet Vandermassen

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Research interests:

- Darwinism, evolutionary psychology
- History and philosophy of science
- Feminism, gender studies
- Rape, sexual violence

Current research project (01/10/2007-30/09/2010): Rape: A philosophical analysis of feminist, social scientific, and Darwinian explanations

Supervisors: Prof. Marysa Demoor, Prof. Johan Braeckman

Aims and objectives:

Rape is a widespread social problem carrying heavy costs for the victim. In the last few decades a multiplicity of perspectives on its etiology have emerged. There is, among others, the psychiatric perspective, considering rape as a product of psychopathology; the developmental psychological perspective, seeking antecedents in early experiences of the rapist; the feminist perspective, proposing that rape is not primarily motivated by lust, but by hostility and the desire for dominance; social learning theory, focusing on the power of cultural traditions, such as the representation of women in the media; the cognitive perspective, focusing on cognitive distortions with regard to women; and the evolutionary or Darwinian perspective, that, based on the observation that forced copulation is not uniquely human, assumes that rape has deep evolutionary roots and is primarily motivated by lust. From a Darwinian point of view rape is either a byproduct of evolved sex differences or an adaptation. There is also a small number of attempts at an integrated theory. The multiplicity of approaches to and explanations of rape might be considered an example of theoretical pluralism: different theoretical frameworks focus on differential aspects of the etiology of sexual violence. Ultimately an integrated model will follow, shedding light on the development of sexually aggressive inclinations and on the

mechanisms leading to sexual violence, as well as on the heterogeneity of rapists and of types of sexual assault. As it turns out, however, there is little theoretical openness to be found among rape researchers. Interdisciplinary communication is scarce and often characterized by its sharp tone. This state of affairs can have serious social consequences, for it stands in the way of a full understanding of rape.

The aim of this project is an analysis of this state of affairs from a philosophy of science perspective, based on two questions: 1) to what extent are the existing explanatory models really competitors and to what extent are they complementary; and 2) what are the causes of this lack of openness and of the poor communication among rape researchers?

Recent publications:

- Vandermassen, G. Evolution as a Way Out of the Essentialism Debate. (under review)
- Vandermassen, G. Can Darwinian Feminism save Female Autonomy and Leadership in Egalitarian Society? *Sex Roles*. (forthcoming)
- Vandenbussche, Liselotte, Griet Vandermassen, Marysa Demoor and Johan Braeckman. Grappling with Evolutionary Theory. Femininities and Masculinities in the Work of Virginie Loveling (1836-1923). *Women's History Review*. (forthcoming)
- Buskes, Chris, Ranne Hovius en Griet Vandermassen (2009). In Darwins woorden. Leven, werk en denken van Charles Darwin. Amsterdam: Nieuwezijds.
- Vandermassen, G. (2008). Als vrouw geboren en tot vrouw gemaakt. Gender als product van onze culturele natuur. In: *Lief en leed 3. Seks en relaties anders bekeken*. Antwerpen: Sensoa, pp. 64-69
- Vandenbussche, Liselotte, Griet Vandermassen, Marysa Demoor en Johan Braeckman (2007). Darwin achterna? Erfelijkheid en evolutietheorie in het oeuvre van Virginie Loveling. *Mededelingen van het Cyriel Buyssegenootschap* XXIII:177-192.
- Co-author of Schmitt, D.P. et al (2007). The Geographic Distribution of Big Five Personality Traits: Patterns and Profiles of Human Self-Description Across 56 Nations. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 38(2):173-212.
- Kanazawa, Satoshi and Vandermassen, G. (2005). Engineers Have More Sons, Nurses Have More Daughters: An Evolutionary Psychological Extension of Baron-Cohen's Extreme Male Brain Theory of Autism. *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 233:589-599.
- Vandermassen, G. (2005). *Who's Afraid of Charles Darwin? Debating Feminism and Evolutionary Theory*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 229 pp.
- Vandermassen, G. (2005). *Darwin voor dames. Over feminisme en evolutietheorie*. Amsterdam: Nieuwezijds, 240 pp. (Dutch adaptation of *Who's Afraid of Charles Darwin?*. Shortlisted for the Socrateswisselbeker 2006 (best

work of philosophy in Dutch) and the Furoreboekenprijs 2006 (best work of non-fiction in Dutch)).

- Vandermassen, G., Marysa Demoor and Johan Braeckman (2005). Close Encounters with a New Species: Darwin's Clash with the Feminists at the End of the Nineteenth Century. In: *Unmapped Countries: Biological Visions in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, ed. Anne-Julia Zwierlein. London: Anthem Press, pp. 71-81.