Chapter 2

Situating Gender

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Introduction

Over the past three decades, feminist geographers have challenged entrenched processes through which the discipline of geography has produced and reproduced inequalities between women and men. Importantly, this work has considered how geography is taught, and practices of academic labor, as well as the substance of research. Thus, for the pioneers of feminist geography, key tasks have included redressing the neglect of women, challenging misrepresentations of women, and insisting on the salience of gender as an axis of social differentiation and inequality, in teaching materials, within the academic workforce, and in geographic research (Harford, 1974; Tivers, 1976; Monk and Hanson, 1982; McDowell, 1983, 1992; Women and Geography Study Group, 1984).

One of the most important effects of feminist geography has been to unsettle taken-for-granted assumptions about women’s and men’s “places” in the societies, communities, organizations, and relationships within which we live and work. Thus, feminist geography has opened up questions about ways in which spaces and places—from bathrooms to call centres, from urban parks to teaching spaces—are experienced differently by different people, and come to be associated with the presence or absence of different groups of people (Nairn, 1997; Burgess, 1998; Longhurst, 2001; Belt et al., 2002). While gender is one salient dimension in these experiences and associations, so too are age, class, ethnicity, and many other factors. Consequently, bringing issues about gender into geography has entailed much more than attending to differences and inequalities between women and men. It has also prompted much reflection on what the categories “women” and “men” mean, and on the concept of gender, in the context of social identities and social relations more generally. One expression of this has been growing interest in a diversity of “masculinities” and “femininities”; that is, in different ways of being men and women (Valentine, 1996; Ainley, 1998; Laurie et al., 1999; Longhurst, 2000).
These definitions of space, and their reefs, have been subject to ongoing dialogue and integration of theoretical approaches to geographical space, the notion of space as a social construct, and the role of gender in shaping spatial experiences. The relationship between gender and space is complex and multifaceted, with gender roles and expectations often influencing the way individuals perceive and interact with their environment.

In many societies, gender roles and expectations are highly prescribed, with men and women occupying different roles and responsibilities. These roles are often linked to spatial practices, with men typically involved in activities such as farming and hunting, while women are often responsible for domestic tasks such as cooking and childcare. This gendered division of labor can result in unequal access to resources and opportunities, with men often having more access to land and other resources than women.

The role of gender in shaping spatial experiences is not just limited to the physical environment. Gendered norms and expectations also influence the way individuals perceive and interpret space, with women often experiencing more restrictive and constrained environments than men. This can be seen in the way women are often confined to their homes, leading to limited opportunities for social interaction and personal development.

As global perspectives on gender and space have evolved, there has been an increasing recognition of the need to consider gender in all aspects of spatial analysis. This has led to the development of new theoretical frameworks that integrate gender and spatial analysis, with a focus on understanding the ways in which gendered norms and expectations influence spatial practices and perceptions.

Despite these advances, there is still much work to be done to fully understand the complex relationship between gender and space. This will require continued dialogue and collaboration among scholars from a range of disciplines, including geography, sociology, and anthropology, to develop new methods and approaches for analyzing the ways in which gender influences spatial experiences.
relatively high degree of autonomy and masculinity. Elements of both dominance and submissiveness are present in the relationship, with the woman taking on a more passive role and the man assuming a more active one. This dynamic is often referred to as traditional gender roles. The concept of gender roles is heavily influenced by cultural and societal norms, which dictate how men and women should behave in different contexts. These norms are often reinforced through socialization processes that begin in early childhood and continue throughout life. Gender roles can vary significantly across different cultures and historical periods, reflecting the unique values and priorities of each society. However, the idea that gender roles are fixed and unchangeable is increasingly being challenged, as people recognize the need for greater gender equality and the recognition of diverse identities. This shift towards a more inclusive and flexible understanding of gender roles is helping to break down traditional stereotypes and promote a more diverse and accepting society.
by employers, perpetuated, assumptions, about household gender, retaining, for example, the expectation that the women's housework, and the men's outside, or professional, work. However, this is not the case, as we can see from the examples of the women who work outside the home and the men who do housework. It is clear that the division of labor is not limited to one gender, and that both men and women can perform any task, whether it is housework or professional work. This is a significant shift in the way we think about gender roles and responsibilities.

In summary, this section has discussed the influence of class and gender on the concept of space. The concept of space is shaped by the intersection of these factors, and the way in which they interact can have a significant impact on our experiences of space. The examples provided illustrate the complexity of this relationship, and the need for further research to understand the full extent of the influence of gender and class on our perceptions of space.

Reimagining Gendered Space

In Feminism and Geography, Carol Rose (1989) introduced the concept of 'gendered space.' This concept refers to the ways in which space is constructed and experienced by different genders. It highlights the fact that space is not neutral, but is influenced by gendered power relations. Rose argues that gendered space is constructed through a series of practices and processes, including the naming of spaces, the use of space by different genders, and the ways in which space is experienced.

This concept is important because it exposes the ways in which space is often designed and used in ways that favor one gender over another. For example, public spaces may be designed for men, while women are encouraged to use private spaces. This can be seen in the way that public transportation systems are often designed with the needs of men in mind, while women are often expected to use their homes for transportation.

One of the key implications of this concept is that it challenges the notion that space is a neutral, objective reality. Rather, space is a social construct, shaped and experienced by different genders in different ways. This has important implications for the way we think about gender and space, and the way in which we design and use our physical environments.

In conclusion, the concept of gendered space is important for understanding the ways in which gender influences our experiences of space. By recognizing the ways in which space is constructed and used, we can begin to challenge gendered power relations and work towards more equitable and inclusive spaces for all.
SITUATING GENDER

Agoraphobic respondents frequently referred to consumer spaces—shops, streets, supermarkets, and especially shopping malls—as sites most strongly associated with panic attacks. Reflecting on why shopping spaces present such acute difficulties, sufferers described the variety and intensity of the multisensory stimuli characteristic of these environments, which they argued are liable to confuse and displace any prior sense of calm for phobic and non-phobic alike (Davidson, 2001b). Shopping, especially in the mall, has been described as contradictory, even paradoxical: “it is an experience that yields both pleasure and anxiety, a ‘delightful experience’ that can quickly become a ‘nightmare’” (Falk and Campbell, 1997, p. 12). Consumer spaces are designed to appeal to, and capture our attention; actively unsettling our sense of secure boundaries in order to encourage us to “fix” ourselves up with appropriate goods and services (Longhurst, 1998). Moreover, consumer spaces are also strongly gendered. As Nicky Gregson has pointed out, “it is still overwhelmingly women who shop... it is women who form the majority of retail sales workers” (Gregson, 1995, p. 137; also see Lowe and Crewe, 1991). Shopping spaces are thus very much part of women’s spatial experience, and marketing strategies often make extensive use of ideas about gender simultaneously addressing women as consumers and objectifying women’s bodies. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that consumer spaces stir up troubling emotions and associations for many women. For women whose sense of self is fragile or impaired, they can be incomparably difficult places to be. Thinking about space as produced and saturated with, traditional and often contradictory conceptions of gender within which women are caught and confined sheds new light on women’s everyday experiences, whether or not we suffer from agoraphobia.

Returning to Gillian Rose’s (1993) account of paradoxical space, she argued that as well as recognizing the powerful effects of hegemonic spatialities, women need to find ways in which to exercise our particular positioning for personal and political advantage. In other words, women must “intersect the mobility of gender with the space of the city” (Rose, 1993, p. 155). Dominant geographies need to be challenged, and, although women are often caught in oppressive spaces, Rose argued that this capture is only ever partial. Thus, while women are trapped within oppressive, hegemonic spaces, we are at the same time able to elude or escape the ground of their dominion. Women are thus simultaneously both “prisoners and exiles”: “no wonder,” according to Rose (1993, p. 150), “space is so toruous for so many women.” However, this positioning—as simultaneously trapped and excluded—is paradoxical in the sense of invoking an apparently impossible combination of positions. Rose (1993) insisted that this contradictroricness is generative in the sense that some aspects of our identities always exceed the constraining framework of hegemonic, masculine space. It is in this excess that the radical, emancipatory potential of paradoxical space lies.

To illustrate the possibility of resisting dominant spatialities, we return to experiences of agoraphobia. As well as highlighting the oppressiveness and constraining effects of dominant understandings and enactments of space, place and gender, accounts of agoraphobia contain suggestions of radically different, potentially liberating, spatialities. In a chapter co-authored with her sisters, feminist theorist Susan Bordo offered an insightful analysis of her own relatively brief but nevertheless debilitating experience of agoraphobia (Bordo et al., 1998). She described a panic attack in a crowded supermarket, when everything felt alien and frightening to her, “the noise, the crying children, the pushing and shoving” (Bordo et al., 1998, p. 84). As with other agoraphobics, her experience made her long for something solid to grab hold of: “I was stranded on the edge of an enormous [iceberg], rising high out of the sea, perched, precarious, desperate for walls to plant my hands against” (Bordo et al., 1998, p. 80). However, Bordo also explained how, when she was recovering, spaces that had once radically threatened her sense of herself came to enhance her feeling of embodied identity. “Being outside, which when I was agoraphobic had left me feeling meaningless, a medium through which body, breath, and world would rush, squeezing my heart and distorting my vision, now gave me definition, body, fixed my gaze” (Bordo et al., 1998, p. 83).

The fragile relationship between self and space associated with panic can thus be transformed into excitement. Like the child who spins in circles, manufacturing distance for the delightful disorientation it creates, temporary shifts in “normal” perspctive can be liberating. To open oneself up to excitement, to learn to endure and even enjoy the radical otherness of “disorderly” spatial experiences, is to glimpse the potentials of paradoxical space. As Davidson (2002, pp. 31-2) has noted

"the persons who are "ill" will most likely want nothing more than to "fit in", to conform with society's expectations of normality... but the language used by [agoraphobics] is a way for women to express their experience as it is at times an attempt to transcend the dualisms implied by, and inherent to, our specular symbolic order (Irigary, 1985). Consequently, it may not always be helpful... to attempt this experience back into dualistic discourse.

Accounts of agoraphobia provide one example of how the idea of paradoxical space has helped feminist geographers to make sense of women's emotional, embodied, spatial experience, and to develop new understandings of the spatial constitution of gender. But it is important to note that agoraphobics are just one of many “groups” confronted with a sense of space as restrictive, ill-fitting, and prejudicial, and whose experiences can be understood as calling into question hegemonic versions of spatial subjectivity. Indeed, we are all paradoxically positioned, albeit in many different ways, which are often closely bound up with major axes of differentiation such as age, class, sexuality, and race, as well as gender, and the means by which we might seek to contest dominant spatialities therefore differ in numerous ways. To illustrate this further we draw on discussions of sexuality, which we use to show how dominant and restrictive spatialities can be challenged and even "breached" by subversive actions, but also how uncertain and contestable the effects of such actions can be.

Feminist geographers have shown that, like agoraphobics, although for different reasons and in different ways, gays and lesbians also often experience feelings of exclusion in, and exclusion from, dominant, taken-for-granted, everyday spaces. Following arguments developed by feminist and "queer" theorist Judith Butler...
Gay pride parades and similar "spectacles" can also disrupt the status quo in the public sphere. This can be seen in the way that certain events are organized and advertised, leading to a sort of "paradoxical" experience of space by those who are marginalized. For example, the "paradoxical" experience of space by gay and lesbian activists during pride parades is characterized by a sense of both celebration and resistance.

Pride parades are a form of protest, and as such, they challenge the norms and conventions of the dominant cultural discourse. They are a form of "speak out" for those who are often voiceless. However, they are also a form of celebration, a way of marking the space of the city as their own.

In conclusion, it is important to acknowledge that this concept of a "paradigmatic space" is only one of many ways of understanding the role of the public sphere in society. Other perspectives, such as those that focus on the role of the media or the role of the state, are also important. But overall, it is clear that the public sphere is a complex and dynamic space that is constantly changing and evolving.
Conclusion

In the preceding sections we have outlined and illustrated two different ways in which feminist geographers have conceptualised gender, space, and place as interrelated terms. In conclusion we briefly discuss the consequences of these two approaches for the discipline of geography and for feminist politics.

The approach to space, place, and gender described in the section on "sedimenting gender" exemplifies materialist analyses of geographies of gender, class, "race," and other forms of social differentiation. That is, it attends to the material conditions of people's lives, and elaborates how space, place, and gender are interwoven through which inequalities and oppressions are forged and perpetuated. In so doing, this perspective presents important challenges to the discipline of geography in (at least) two ways. First, it demonstrates the vital importance of attending to gender as a key dimension through which spaces and places are produced, reproduced and transformed. Second, just as it helps to make visible the reality of women's lives within a discipline that has traditionally neglected or misrepresented "half the human in human geography" (Munk and Hanson, 1982, p. 11), so too it helps to illuminate the taken-for-grantedness of dominant conceptualisations of space. More specifically, this approach advocates and develops an understanding of the dynamic, mutual construction of the spatial and the social, thereby challenging traditional distinctions between places as discrete assemblages of attributes, and space as abstract three-dimensional geometry.

This materialist approach to space, place, and gender offers important resources to feminist politics as well as to the discipline of geography. By attending to the geographical construction of class, gender, and other forms of social differentiation, this approach speaks to a feminist political strategy of building alliances across differences. This is of particular importance in the context of what are sometimes called "horizontal hostilities" among women — conflicts generated by affirmations of distinctive identities articulated in terms of dis-identifications, exclusions, and even, on occasion, hatreds (Fraser, 1995, 2000; Ahmed, 2002). In this context, Geraldine Pratt and Susan Hanson (1994, pp. 23-25) expressed the scope for building alliances in appropriately tentative terms:

"by writing" about the ways in which differences are constructed, we hope to allow groups of women, who conceive themselves as different from one another, to gain some mutual understanding; we hope, too, for cross-cultural identification, but an informed knowledge of how the conditions of others' lives are shaped by local opportunities and in relation to each other.

However modest such hopes may be, they illustrate the profound importance of feminist geographical analyses for feminist politics.

The approach to space, place, and gender described in the section on "reimagining gendered space" exemplifies the application by feminist geographers of theories of subjectivity, including especially phenomenological and psychoanalytic theories, which in different ways problematically analyse taken-for-granted features of everyday life (for feminist renditions see, for example, Goode, 1994; Butter, 1997; Battersby, 1998). Although phenomenology has been drawn upon by geographers over many years (for example, Ralph, 1976; Tuart, 1977; Pickles, 1985; Strenfuo, 1998) these uses have largely failed to consider (gendered) embodiment as integral to human existence. In the case of psychoanalytic theories, feminist geography has been a key route through which such ideas have been brought to bear on geographic concerns. Overall, therefore, this approach to space, place, and gender has enriched the discipline of geography by opening up and extending geographical analyses of human subjectivity (Bondi et al., 2002). It has also elaborated and invited subversive ways of working within and against disciplinary conventions by simultaneously questioning the authority of geographic knowledge, and reaching beyond that authority to generate new geographies (Rose, 1996; Bondi, 1997).

The project of reimagining space beyond the limits of a gender binary has important and enabling implications for feminist politics. As we have shown, this approach helps to explain why keenly felt aspects of women's experience are often difficult to represent by bringing into view ways in which what constitutes "knowledge" is limited. By insisting on the productive possibilities of paradoxical space, this approach invites feminist interventions at numerous sites, whether construed as central or marginal. In this context it is important to stress that the two approaches we have discussed are complementary and overlapping. By challenging the constraints of binary thinking, paradoxical space is an approach that seeks to disrupt the opposition between similarity and difference that underpins "horizontal hostilities" among women. This perspective seeks to dissolve the idea that identities (or places) are ever coherent or stable enough to provide a basis for collective action, and invites instead a creative engagement with the uncertainties, fractures, and differences that are integral aspects of all of us.

In this chapter we have introduced and illustrated two of the ways in which feminist geographers have conceptualised space, place, and gender. In so doing, we have shown how feminist geography has unleashed new creative energy for thinking about the world we inhabit. The remaining chapters in this volume elaborate some of the rich possibilities that ensue.

NOTES
1. In this chapter we focus on feminist geography as it has developed in the anglophone literatures, primarily within Anglo-American contexts. There are important issues to consider about the multiple genealogies of related concepts across languages and contexts, but these lie beyond the scope of this chapter.
2. Our discussion skips between the third person ("women" as "they") and the first person ("women" as "us") in a way that reflects our argument about the contradictory positions invoked by the idea of paradoxical space. While we belong to the broad category of "women" about whom we write, we also take up a position apart from that category as we question its limits and meanings.

BIBLIOGRAPHY