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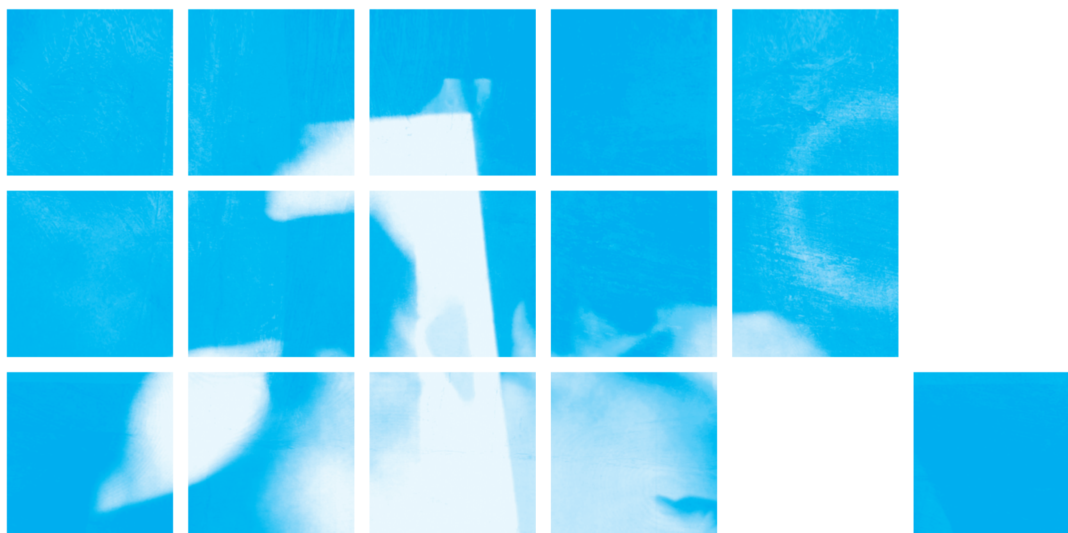

Chapter 10

Geography

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Key issues in this chapter:

- Gender relations and geographies are mutually constructed and transformed – spaces affect gender and gender affects spaces.
- Assumptions about gender have influenced the study of geography and the position of women in the discipline.
- Conceptions of the body are central to understanding gender and space relations.
- Gender influences the ways in which people understand, experience and use spaces like the home, the workplace and the street.
- Although geographic research on gender has 'traditionally' focused on the experiences and needs of women, geographers are increasingly interested in gaining a greater understanding of men and masculinities.

At the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- Critique works on people and their understandings, experience and use of space from a gendered perspective.
- Summarise how geography has engaged with gender and outline the liberal, socialist and post-structuralist approaches.
- Explain how the body is central to understandings of gender and space relations.
- Debate how the social construction of the home, the workplace and the street affects the ways in which people engage with and (inter)act in these spaces.

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Introduction

Gender has become a key analytical category within contemporary human geography. Since the impact of feminist scholarship in the 1970s, geographers have, to varying degrees, begun to think about how people, knowledge and institutions are subject to and defined by unequal gender divisions and, where possible, to implement more equitable alternatives. Such engagements with gender have been most significantly developed and sustained by scholars working within feminist geographies; however, interests in gender extend to other areas of the discipline including social and cultural, historical, political and urban geographies.

Geographers have been interested in the ways in which genders and geographies are mutually constituted for over 35 years. In this chapter we will firstly outline some of the key developments in geographers' approaches to gender. Secondly, we will 'flesh out' some of these developments through an examination of some of the ways in which the body has become central in geographers' understandings of gender and space relations. Thirdly we will look at how gender and space relations are constituted within three different spatial contexts – the home, the workplace and the street – in order to illustrate how spaces affect gender and gender affects spaces and finally we will demonstrate how contemporary geographers have broadened their understandings of gender through the development of a body of research on men and masculinities.

Gender and Geography?

Geographers' engagements with gender have evolved over three overlapping phases, ranging from the initial inclusion of women in academic thinking to deeper and more sophisticated understandings of male and female gender identities. The first phase in the 1970s, drawing on liberal approaches and the broader feminist movement, showed how social and economic processes created and maintained inequalities between men and women. They examined the ways in which differently gendered groups with varying types and degrees of power used, controlled or operated space (Women and Geography Study Group [WGSG], 1997). Questions were also raised about the place of women within geography as a discipline and in geographical research. In the UK concerns over the role of women in geography led to the establishment of the Women and Geography Study Group (WGSG) within the British professional association, the Institute of British Geographers (now merged with the Royal Geographical Society). This group had the dual aim of promoting theoretical work on gender in geography and improving the position of women (and their opportunities for career progression) within academic institutions (WGSG, 1984; McDowell, 1999). Elsewhere, Janice Monk and Susan Hanson (1982) argued that sexist bias in the content, methods and purpose of geographical research meant that only 'half of the human' were being included in human geography. Indeed, geography research, it was argued, took and reflected white, able-bodied, male, middle-class values and issues as the norm. Challenges to this male bias resulted in a growth in research into women's lives particularly in the spaces of the home, the workplace and the street.

The second phase, from the 1980s onwards, moved from simply placing women in geography, to examining the mechanisms that created the wide range of socio-material inequalities between men and women, particularly in the context of the workplace and the home. These works tended to be influenced by more radical socialist/Marxist trends and were concerned, for example, with examining gendered 'divisions of labour' in society and men and women's differential access to and roles within the labour market (see, for example, Massey, 1984) [**Hotlink →Work and Leisure → Gendered Labour (Chapter 14)**]. Space, which had previously been viewed as fixed and 'neutral', became increasingly recognised as being socially produced and interpreted, a phenomenon which Edward Soja (1985) referred to as *spatiality* (WGSG, 1997). In other words, space came to be understood as the product of social forces that create expected patterns of behaviour in spaces like the home, the street and the workplace which, in turn, as we will illustrate shortly, affect how people experience, use or avoid these spaces.

Part of this reconceptualisation of space involved a recognition that spaces were gendered. Men and women perform their gender in different ways, thereby constructing and reflecting the discourses around what

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it means to be a man or a woman. However, these actions have, at least historically, favoured men, to the point that patriarchy (men dominating women) became the norm. What is more, it has been argued that patriarchy operates within a heterosexual context, so that heterosexual values, norms and behaviours have come to be accepted and expected. Therefore, space can be seen to promote and reflect gendered and heterosexual values and norms so that many spaces can be argued to be *hetero-patriarchal* spaces (Valentine, 1993). For example, in public spaces like the street, a man and a woman kissing is unlikely to be noticed by many, yet a same-sex couple kissing is more likely to be perceived as being 'out of place' and receive disdain from others (Valentine, 1996a). However, it is not only 'public' spaces that are dominated by heterosexual and patriarchal values; these have often been replicated in 'private' or domestic spaces, such as the home.

Stop and think 10.1

Next time you walk down a street think about the ways in which the people and the objects that surround you (including buildings, public art, window displays in shops, advertisement boards etc.) reflect, promote or challenge patriarchal and heterosexual norms, values and behaviours.

The third and current phase recognises that even when increasing numbers of women are achieving economic equality with men, broader social and cultural beliefs and practices still influence the opportunities and expectations of women. Drawing on socio-cultural geography and post-structural and post-colonial approaches, feminist geographers from the 1990s onwards have thought about the ways in which gender is constructed through *gender identities*, where men and women become associated with particular spaces, jobs, interests, appearances and behaviours (Panelli, 2004) (see A Closer Look 10.1). This shift in approach has been accompanied by a growing interest in the geographies of the body and research on masculinities. Works in this area have further developed geographers' understandings of gender so that in the contemporary era gender is understood to be a contested and heterogeneous category, which varies over space and time. This means that geographers have begun to unsettle the binary construction 'male'/'female' and have become increasingly interested in the differences that exist amongst and between men and women [**Hotlink → Gendered Perspectives – Theoretical Issues (Chapter 1)**].

A closer look 10.1

Feminist approaches in Geography

Feminist geographies of gender have drawn on liberal, socialist and post-structuralist approaches to understand both how spaces become gendered and the spatiality of gender.

Liberal Feminist

Public and private spheres are regarded as different spaces; the space of the private is free from the intervention of the state. Their approach to gender is that there should be equality between men and women. However, liberal feminists have tended to add or increase women to existing situations without recognising the need for structural changes in society. In so doing, they also tend not to recognise the intersections with other identities which differentiate women e.g. class, age, sexuality or ethnicity. The liberal approach ties into the initial attempts by feminist geographers to include women in geography and geographical research.

Socialist Feminist

They believe that class and gender inequalities and the oppression of some social groups work to the advantage of others within the capitalist system. Links are made between the home as a site of reproduction and the workplace as a space of production, thereby linking patriarchy and capitalism.

Post-structural Feminism

This concentrates on the connections between power and the production of knowledge, the constitution and performativity of subjectivity, and the importance of difference. In short, it seeks to disrupt what is taken for granted. Feminist geographers have challenged binary constructions e.g. male/female and challenged essentialist ideas about gender. They explore differences among and between women and men and have considered the ways in which identities are embodied.

Source: Blunt and Wills (2000).

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Having outlined the broad history of gender in geography, we will now 'flesh out' some of these developments in greater detail. More specifically, we consider the central role that the body has played in geographers' understandings of gender and space relations and then in turn, will examine how gender and space relations are constituted in three different spatial contexts, which have received considerable attention by feminist geographers: the home, the workplace and the street. This chapter will therefore examine how gender affects spaces and spaces affect gender. Much of the research in this area has reflected the experiences of women and has highlighted the assumption of heterosexual norms, values and behaviours. However, as we will demonstrate at the end of this chapter, in recent years geographers' understandings of gender have been broadened through the development of a body of research on men and masculinities.

Embodying Geography

The idea that there are only two sexes (men and women) and that gender (drawing on notions of masculinity and femininity) is based on the biological differences between these sexes does not fully account for the complex nature and experience of sex and gender [**Hotlink → Chapter 1**]. Human geographers have made significant contributions in critiquing the binary construction 'male'/'female'; see, for example Julia Cream's (1995) work, which identifies three bodies that disrupt traditionally accepted notions of sex and gender: transsexuals, intersexed babies and XXY females. However, whilst biology cannot explain the difference between the experiences of men and women it is connected to the ways in which genders are socially constructed. The effects of these social constructions are significant and affect men and women's everyday lives. This also helps to explain why some spaces or actions are regarded to be gendered so that there are men's spaces and jobs and women's spaces and jobs. In the past these gender associations have been taken for granted and viewed to be fixed, but they are in fact dynamic and can be challenged by both men and women breaking from their gender's mould. This is not to suggest that all the roles or identities constructed around gender have changed, indeed, many roles still remain: for example, women are still often the primary carers for children.

In this section we explore the central role of the body in gender and space relations by drawing on four approaches that attempt to explain (or unsettle) gender differences and men and women's differential access to and experience of particular spaces. The first two approaches focus on fixed and essentialised conceptions of gender, whilst the second two highlight the ways in which gender is understood to be (re)produced through learnt bodily actions and performances.

The natural and the social

Historically, women have been stereotypically defined in terms of their biology. The notion that women were closer to nature and the animal world than men because they menstruate and give birth gained important currency in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Women's menstruation was read as signs of women's inherent lack of control over their bodies. Women leaked, while men were self-contained (although see Grosz's 1994 discussion of seminal fluid). Their role in reproduction was also understood to mean that they were 'naturally' more nurturing and therefore more closely linked to 'Mother Earth' than men. The other side of this association between women and nature was an assumption that just as nature was wild and potentially uncontrollable (except by rational male science) so women were less able to control their emotions and passions than men (Merchant, 1990). Indeed, women's unstable bodies were considered to be a threat to their minds (Jordanova, 1989). In the late nineteenth century when the suffragette movement with its campaigns for women's right to vote and to education began to gain momentum, opponents used scientific claims that women had naturally smaller brains than men and that education might damage their ovaries to justify excluding them from public life (Shilling, 1993). In other words, women's bodies were used to justify what was regarded as a 'natural inequality' between the sexes.

These notions that women's bodies are both different and inferior to men's persisted into the twentieth century. Chris Shilling (1993) notes that even in the

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1960s, the argument that women's hormones meant that they were inherently intellectually and emotionally unstable, was used to prevent women from being allowed to train as pilots in Australia.

These claims about the 'natural' differences between men and women are what are known as essentialist arguments. They assume that sexual differences are determined by biology, that bodies are 'natural' or prediscursive entities – in other words that bodies have particular stable, fixed properties or 'essences' (Fuss, 1990). Essentialist explanations have been challenged by social constructionists. They argue that there is no 'natural' body, rather that the body is always 'culturally mapped; it never exists in a pure or uncoded state' (Fuss, 1990: 6). So that what essentialists 'naturalise' or portray as 'essence' is actually socially constructed difference. These differences are produced through material and social practices, discourses and systems of representation rather than biology. Social constructionists demonstrate this by pointing to the fact that what is understood by 'man' and 'woman' varies historically and in different cultural contexts. What is perhaps most significant though is that gender – the social meanings which are ascribed to men and women – is socially constructed in a hierarchical way (WGSG, 1997; Laurie *et al*., 1999).

The mind/body dualism

The seventeenth-century philosopher Descartes established a dualistic concept of mind and body. He argued that only the mind had the power of intelligence, spirituality, and therefore selfhood. The corporeal body was nothing but a machine (akin to a car or a clock) directed by the soul (Turner, 1996). The Cartesian division and subordination of the body to the mind and the emphasis placed on dualistic thinking and scientific rationalisation had a profound impact on western thought.

This distinction between the mind and the body has been gendered. Whereas the mind has been associated with positive terms such as rationality, consciousness, reason and masculinity; the body has been associated with negative terms such as emotionality, nature, irrationality and femininity. Although both men and women have bodies in western culture white men transcend their embodiment (or at least have their bodily needs met by others) by regarding the body as merely the container of their consciousness (Longhurst, 1997). In contrast, women have been understood as being more closely tied to, and ruled by, their bodies because of natural cycles of menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth. Whereas, Man is assumed to be able to separate himself from his emotions, experiences and so on, Woman has been presumed to be 'a victim of the vagaries of her emotions, a creature who cannot think straight as a consequence' (Kirby, 1992: 12–13).

Feminist geographers such as Gillian Rose (1993) and Robyn Longhurst (2001) have argued that these dualisms are important because they have shaped geographers' understandings of society and space and the way geographical knowledge has been produced. As a result of this belief in the objectivity of masculinist rationality – that it is untainted by bodily identity and experience – Rose claims that it is assumed to be universal, the only form of knowledge available. In other words, she argues that white, bourgeois, heterosexual man tends to see other people who are not like himself only in relation to himself. She writes: 'He understands femininity, for example only in terms of its difference from masculinity. He sees other identities only in terms of his own self-perception; he sees them as what I shall term his Other' (Rose, 1993: 6).

Applying these arguments to geography, Rose (1993) shows how white, heterosexual men have tended to exclude or marginalise women as producers of geographical knowledge, and what are considered women's issues as topics to study [**Hotlink → Method, Methodology and Epistemology (Chapter 2)**]. The mind/body dualism has therefore played a key role in determining what counts as legitimate knowledge in geography with the consequence that topics such as embodiment, emotion and sexuality were, until the mid–late 1990s, regarded as inappropriate topics to teach and research. They have been 'othered' within the discipline (Longhurst, 1997; Bondi *et al*., 2005).

Fortunately, these sorts of critiques have played an important part in stimulating geographers at the end of the twentieth and at the beginning of the twenty-first centuries to challenge the privileging of the mind over the body within the discipline. As a result, what Longhurst (1997: 494) terms 'dirty topics' are being put on the map and geographers are beginning to think

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about ways of writing (for example, using autobiographical material and personal testimonies) and methodological practices which recognise that all knowledges are embodied and situated and appreciate that emotions lie at the heart of all human (inter)actions (Rose, 1997; Bondi *et al.*, 2002; Davidson *et al.*, 2005). However, as Juanita Sundberg (2005) argues this shift in geographical practice has not occurred in every part of the world (see World in Focus 10.1).

Stop and think 10.2

Whose understandings of gender most strongly influence the discipline in which you study/work? Are there any examples of alternative voices, perspectives or approaches that shed a different light on hegemonic conceptions of gender?

Performing gender

Understandings of gender in geography have been fundamentally challenged and reworked by the philosopher Judith Butler (1990, 1993). She rejects the notion that biology is a bedrock which underlies the categories of gender and sex. Rather, she theorises gender as performative, arguing that 'gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory framework that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler, 1990: 33). In other words, gender is an *effect* of dominant discourses and matrices of power. There is no 'real' or original identity behind any gender performance. Butler (1993) suggests that social and political change within the performance of identity lies in the possible displacement of dominant discourses. In a reading of drag balls she argues that the parodic

World in focus 10.1

Why bodies and geographies matter in the doing of geography

Recent debates in feminist geography have sought to raise awareness of the fact that much of feminist geography (and human geography more generally), is dominated by works written in the English language, which have been produced in Anglo-American universities. For example, in a recent survey of articles published in *Gender, Place and Culture* (one of feminist geography's key publications) Maria Dolors Garcia Ramon and colleagues (2006) state that out of the 242 authors who have been published in the journal between its first issue in 1994 and June 2005 only 19 were not based in Anglo-American universities or research centres (7.3 per cent of the total). In addition, out of the 320 books reviewed, only seven were written in a language other than English (2.19 per cent of the total) and looking at the bibliographies of the published articles only 5 per cent of the books and papers cited were written in non-English languages. Ramon and colleagues (2006) argue that the topics and theoretical elaborations that are featured in the journal may not represent the concerns and works of those geographers who are employed in non-Anglo-American institutions. In other words, there may be a whole range of feminist geographies that are not being represented in the journal.

This point is relevant for the ways in which gender has been conceptualised in geography. As Juanita Sundberg (2005) points out, many of the developments outlined above are at odds with the Latin Americanist geography within which she works. This is because prevailing notions of objectivity have (at least) two effects upon geographies in Latin America. The first is the disappearance of the geographer as a corporeal being, due to an embedded belief in the mind/body dualism, and the associated idea that researchers can be 'rational', 'value neutral' subjects. The second involves the obliteration of geography as a constitutive factor in the social and institutional life of the geographer, whereby no attention is paid to the different subject positionings of Latin American geographers who have a different relationship to the legacies of European colonisation and contemporary practices of US imperialism than their Anglo-American counterparts. Ramon and colleagues (2006) and Sundberg (2005) are important reminders that understandings of and engagements with gender differ spatially between different social groups and that the developments within Anglo-American geography may not mirror those in other parts of the world.

repetition and mimicry of heterosexual identities at these events disrupts dominant sex and gender identities because the performers' supposed 'natural' identities (as male) do not correspond with the signs produced within the performance (e.g. feminine body language, dress etc.). And that 'by disrupting the assumed correspondence between a "real" interior and its surface markers (clothes, walk, hair etc.), drag balls make explicit the way in which all gender and sexual identifications are ritually performed in daily life' (Nelson, 1999: 339). In other words, they expose the fact that all identities are fragile and unstable fictions.

Butler's (1990) writing has become important within social and cultural geography. The notion of performativity has been used to frame geographic studies, and to talk, not only about bodily identities, but also about space (Bell *et al*., 1994; McDowell and Court, 1994; Kirby, 1996; Lewis and Pile, 1996; Sharp, 1996; Valentine, 1996a; Rose, 1997; Delph-Januirek, 1999). Instead of thinking about space and place as pre-existing sites in which performances occur, some of these studies argue that bodily performances themselves constitute or (re)produce space and place. However, geographers have also been criticised for overlooking the problematic aspects of Butler's work (particularly in relation to her assumptions about subjectivity, agency and change) when employing her theorisation of performativity (Walker, 1995; Nelson, 1999) (see A Critical Look 10.1).

A critical look 10.1

Bodies (and spaces) *do* matter

Lise Nelson (1999) argues that most geographers need to read Judith Butler's work on performativity in a more critical manner. She argues that Butler (1990) 'provides no space for theorizing conscious reflexivity, negotiation or agency in the doing of identity' and that the subject of Butler's performance is 'abstracted from personal lived experience as well as from its historical and geographical embeddedness' (Nelson, 1999: 331). Nelson therefore argues that in order to properly understand how gender performances work, geographers need to recognise that the subjects of gender performances are thinking/speaking subjects located in particular times and places. Whilst there may be no 'real' or original identity behind any gender performance, Nelson suggests that the subjects of those performances are capable of intentionally performing their gender in particular ways in response to, for example, past gender performances and the spatial and temporal context in which they are located.

Bodily comportment

In an essay titled 'Throwing like a girl' Iris Marion Young (1990) argues that women are alienated from their bodies and, as a result, occupy and use space in an inhibited way compared with men. She begins her analysis by drawing on the observations of the writer Erwin Strauss about the different way that boys and girls throw a ball. Whereas boys use their whole bodies to throw, leaning back, twisting and reaching forward, girls Strauss noted, tend to be relatively stiff and immobile, only using their arms to produce a throwing action. Young (1990) argues that women demonstrate similar restricted body movements and inhibited comportment in other physical activities too. For example, women tend to sit with their legs crossed and their arms across themselves, whereas men tend to sit with their legs open and using their hands in gestures. In other words, Young (1990) claims that, women do not make full use of their bodies' spatial potentialities. This is not because women are inherently weaker than men but rather it is to do with the different way that men and women approach tasks. Women think they are incapable of throwing, lifting, pushing and so on and so when they try these sorts of activities they are inhibited and do not put their whole bodies into the task with the same ease as men (for example only using their arms to throw). Young (1990: 148) describes this as 'inhibited intentionality'. It is a bodily comportment which is learned. A number of writers have argued for example that teenage girls give up sport and leisure activities in order to spend time with boys (Griffin, 1985) whereas schools promote physicality amongst boys through sport (Mac an Ghaill, 1996) [**Hotlink → Work and Leisure (Chapter 14)**].

Not only do women underestimate their physical abilities and lack self-confidence but they also fear getting hurt. Describing women as experiencing their bodies as a 'fragile encumbrance', Young writes that 'she often lives her body as a burden which must be dragged and prodded along and at the same time protected' (1990: 147). Women also experience their bodies as fragile in another sense too, in that their bodies are the object of the male gaze. Young (1990) suggests that it is acceptable for men to look at, comment on or touch women's bodies in public space and that as a result women are fearful that their body space may be invaded by men in the form of wolf whistles, minor sexual harassment or even rape. As part of a defence against this fear of invasion women experience their bodies as enclosed and disconnected from the outlaying spatial field. Young writes: 'For many women as they move . . . a space surrounds us in imagination that we are not free to move beyond; the space available to our movement is a constricted space' (1990: 146). It is important to note, however, that Young (1990) does point out that her observations apply to the way women typically move but not to all women or all of the time.

In contrast to women, men learn to experience a connectedness between their bodies and their surrounding spatial field and to view the world as constituted by their own intentions. Bob Connell (1983) for example, argues that whereas women are valued for appearance, men are expected to demonstrate bodily skill in terms of their competence to operate on space, or the objects in it, and to be a bodily force in terms of their ability to occupy space. This competence is developed through cults of physicality, sport (formal and informal), drinking, fighting, work and so on. For example, certain forms of manual labour like lifting, digging, carrying are closely linked to some sense of bodily force in masculinity. Although economic restructuring means the stress on pure labouring has declined the social meanings and relations of physical labour, and bodily capacity to masculinity have not (Connell, 1995). According to Young (1990) men live their bodies in an open way. They feel about to move out and master the world. Connell explains: 'To be an adult male is distinctly to occupy space, to have a physical presence in the world. Walking down the street, I square my shoulders and covertly measure myself against other men. Walking past a group of punk youths late at night, I wonder if I look formidable enough' (1983: 19).

The difference in the meanings of men and women's physicality is evident in relation to naked bodies. Whereas a male stranger's naked body is seen as a sign of aggression and as frightening or threatening to women, a female stranger's body is not read in the same way by men. Men do not feel assaulted or threatened by seeing an unknown woman naked. It is assumed that men want to look at the nude bodies of women because they are an opportunity for pleasure. Consequently, in the eyes of the law women cannot commit the crime of 'flashing' because in contrast to men, their naked bodies are regarded as non-aggressive and not sexually threatening, being read instead as entertaining. The only time a woman can be arrested for indecent exposure is if her actions are understood to be an offence against public sensibilities (Kirby, 1995).

Stop and think 10.3

Collect a range of different women's and men's magazines. How are different bodies represented in these texts? What gender discourses can you identify? What are the similarities and differences in the ways that men and women perform their identities?

Gender and space relations in context

So far we have explored gender and space relations in relatively abstract ways highlighting some of the main theoretical approaches that geographers have drawn on to explain (or unsettle 'traditional') conceptualisations of gender. In this section we will think in more depth about how gender and space are mutually constituted by drawing on three spaces where gender and space relations take place: the home, the workplace and the street. Geographers' engagements with gender have not been confined to these spaces; however, they have been popular locations for thinking about how spaces affect gender and gender affects spaces.

Gendered geographies of domestic space

With the development of industrial capitalism there was a separation of activities with production increasingly taking place in large-scale factories; and reproduction being removed from the communal sphere of the village and relegated to the private sphere of the home. At the same time the meanings attached to family and home, and to men's and women's roles, also changed (McDowell, 1983). Families in pre-industrial societies were not very child-oriented, instead most acted like small businesses with all members, including children, working in order to contribute to the household economy (England, 1991). When production moved out of the home into the workplace so the house became a private place for the family – in other words a home. Whereas before, cooking, childcare, cleaning and so on had been done on a collective basis, this communal style of living broke down and families became emotionally and physically more enclosed or privatised. This definition of 'home' as a place separate from employment devalued the unpaid work done within it, precisely because it was not paid.

Women's roles also changed. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries women had participated in commercial life, but with the privatisation of the family and the separation of home and work a new ideology of gender difference emerged. A key element of this was the 'cult of true womanhood'. Women were attributed with the sort of emotional qualities necessary to nurture families and run the house (i.e. gentle, mild, passive) whereas men were seen as fiery, active, aggressive and so more suited to the public world of work. Soon the idea that a mother/wife was necessary for the healthy functioning of the family home became a taken for granted 'norm' (England, 1991). Women were regarded as responsible for the upkeep of the house, the emotional well-being of the family and reproducing the paid labour force (Bowlby *et al.*, 1982).

By the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, this privatisation of family life and women was articulated in changes in the built environment. On a city scale residential areas developed along road and railway lines allowing men to travel into the city to the workplace, leaving women and children in residential suburbs in the urban fringe. In other words, the built environment became characterised by a divide between specialist areas of reproduction: the suburbs, and production in the centre of cities. During this time having a non-working wife at home became a hallmark of respectability in upper- and middle-class households. While many low-income, working-class and immigrant women have always been engaged in paid employment outside the home, such households also began to aspire to replicate upper- and middle-class gender ideology (England, 1991). The Second World War brought a breakdown in many class divisions and a collapse of divisions between middle and working women (e.g. with the decline in domestic servants middle-class women became responsible for the domestic tasks that had previously been carried out for them) leading to the emergence of the classless 'housewife' (Ravetz, 1989).

Assumptions about gender roles were articulated in the design and layout of houses built immediately after the Second World War (Roberts, 1991). One of the major ideals of wartime social policy had been to preserve and protect the sanctity of family life. After the war nuclear families became prioritised over all other household types. Planners in both the UK and the US took what was called a *pro-natalist* approach to housing design. They were concerned about falling birth rates and argued that improved family housing would persuade more women to have children and remove temptations for them to work outside the home.

With rising standards of housing after the war also came rising standards of housework. Consumer durables such as washing machines and vacuum cleaners became commonplace and, as Justine Lloyd and Lesley Johnson (2004) illustrate, women's magazines became increasingly preoccupied with cleaning technologies and products (see Figure 10.1). In particular, the development of open plan houses began to erode traditional divisions between formal and informal space so that women were expected to keep a much larger space clean and tidy for 'show' (Matrix, 1984). Domestic ideology was such that housework became understood not just as a set of chores but as a moral undertaking. A woman's moral status could be read

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from the way she managed her house and by implication her family too (Roberts, 1991). A dirty home was equated with slovenliness, while cleanliness was equated with goodness. This ideology placed a heavy burden on women, as this statement from Mackintosh illustrates: 'The house is inseparable from the housewife. If it becomes dilapidated it becomes the wheel on which the housewife is broken' (Mackintosh, 1952: 110, cited in Roberts, 1991: 93).

Figure 10.1
Source: © Advertising Archives

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries the growth of women engaged in paid work outside the home, and the emergence of more female headed households, has led to a contradiction between the urban spatial form and contemporary gender roles and relations (England, 1991). Studies suggest that when women are in paid employment they continue to do the lion's share of domestic work and childcare. In trying to juggle these dual roles women confront spatial constraints in terms of a lack of affordable childcare in accessible locations and poor public transport which inhibit their employment opportunities outside the home (Tivers, 1985). As a result, feminist geographers have argued that the built environment with its dichotomous assumptions about home and work, has become dysfunctional for suburban women with multiple roles, and that indeed it never worked for those who were single, lone parents, elderly, or who wanted to live in other household arrangements (MacKenzie, 1984; England, 1991). It is a critique shared by the disabled who point to the ableist assumptions of the design professions and the consequent lack of affordable housing that is built to meet the needs of people with physical impairments (Imrie, 1996, 2004; Gathorne-Hardy, 1999).

The emphasis within housing design on the stereotype of the nuclear-family – which physically represents and reinforces the cultural norm of the reproductive, monogamous heterosexual unit – assumes and reproduces a privatised form of family life in which all tasks such as cooking, eating and childcare are contained within the home. There is a rich history, however, of academics speculating or theorising about alternative ways of living and of organising society that transcend the traditional divisions and limitations of home and workplace. For feminist planners and architects this has taken the form of considering what non-sexist housing and non-sexist cities might look like (see A Critical Look 10.2).

Despite these criticisms, this does not mean that geographers should abandon thinking about the relationship between gender, housing design and the spatial structure of the urban environment altogether. Because as Boys explains 'while architecture does not "reflect" society, and is only partially shaped by our

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A critical look 10.2

Critiques of work on gender and housing

Studies of gender, housing design and the spatial structure of the city played an important part in the development of feminist geography in the 1980s. In particular, by highlighting the social construction of the public as male and the private as female, and by demonstrating how the home has been regarded as the primary space of women's identification and work as the primary space of men's identification, feminist work has shown how these binary categories have played a part in defining women as secondary and as other in relation to men. As such this feminist writing laid the groundwork for the challenging of dualistic (male/female, public/private, home/work) ways of thinking and the collapsing of these boundaries. However, these studies of gender, housing design and the spatial structure of the city have also been criticised for a number of reasons.

Much of this writing was based on the misconception that the built environment is a simple metaphor for the society that produced it. Jos Boys (1998) recognises this failing in her own early work and acknowledges that feminists in the early 1980s often failed to think closely enough about who has access to, and control over how meanings about gender and the built environment are made, and about the mechanisms of translation through which society is articulated in space.

The work generally assumed uniform approaches to housing design, ignoring the fact that architectural knowledges, and positions within and between architects and builders about 'appropriate' socio-spatial concepts, are contested (Boys 1998).

It often came close to being environmentally determinist in the way that it cast women as the passive victims of housing designs and urban spatial structures produced by architects, planners, property developers and the state (England, 1991). In doing so it oversimplified complex relationships between society and space, failing to recognise that material environments are physically realised in different ways by different residents or 'consumers' and that as such, confusions about designs, unintended uses, and transgressions often arise. It also underplayed the role of women in actively contesting and transforming housing and the spatial structure of the city. For example, women have developed alternative housing and ways of living (Ettorre, 1978; Holcomb, 1986; Crabtree, 2006).

In focusing on male/female and public/private dichotomies feminist work has also treated men and women as homogeneous groups, ignoring the ways that gender identities are cross cut by other social identities. Most notably the research tended to focus on traditional heterosexual, white nuclear family households and as such it overlooked the fact that other social groups (such as lesbians and gay men, women gentrifiers, low-income female headed households and so on) may have had different living arrangements, experiences of, and relationships with, their spatial settings (Bondi and Rose, 2003; Blunt and Varley, 2004).

continuing and contested struggles for identity, the buildings . . . we inhabit remain deeply implicated in shaping our everyday experiences' (1998: 217).

Gender and the workplace

In the 1980s feminists argued that 'Our whole world is gendered, from shampoo and tissues and watches to environments as local as the "ladies' toilet" and as large as a North Sea oil rig. Things are gendered materially (sized or coloured differently) and also ideologically' (Cockburn, 1985). This process, it was argued, was extended not only to work tools (e.g. the typewriter is feminine and the crowbar masculine) but also to occupations themselves. Such is the association made between gender and sexuality, some writers argued that the heterosexuality of a person perceived to be in the 'wrong' gendered job would automatically be questioned. For example, nursing is gendered as a female job and as a consequence male nurses are commonly assumed to be effeminate and therefore gay. This carry over of gender/sex based expectations in the workplace is what Veronica Nieva and Barbara Gutek (1981: 59) termed 'sex role spillover'. In other words, the gendered characteristics of workers and occupations are mutually constituted [**Hotlink → Work and Leisure (Chapter 14)**].

In a classic study of the printing industry Cynthia Cockburn (1985) shows how both *essentialist* and *moral* explanations were used to justify men's claims that women were unsuited to the skilled and relatively well-paid work of print composition, although the

men showed no concern about women doing less remunerative jobs that involved similar skills but to which men had no claim. These essentialist justifications included assertions such as: women had weaker spines than men and so would not be able to stand up for long periods of time; that women were too soft and afraid of getting hurt to do what is a potentially dangerous job; that women were too irrational for an occupation that requires logical and problem solving abilities; that women had an innate aversion to machinery. The social and moral justifications rested on assumptions that it was logical and proper for the male head of the family to be the breadwinner and so well paid jobs should be the preserve of men; and that women would be coarsened by working alongside men because they would be subject to swearing and the general sexist abuse and so would lose their femininity.

Louise Johnson (1989) found evidence of similar arguments in her study of the Australian textile industry. Here skill was differentiated by sex and connected to sexed bodies. In the mending room speed and nimbleness combined with dexterity and a domestic skill produced a highly specialised and supposedly feminine task. Such a skill, although developed on the job was never seen as such, but was seen as an innate part of being a woman. In contrast men's skills were understood as acquired through conscious effort and training which enhanced their innate capacities such as technical competence, and mechanical affinity. Johnson (1989: 137) concluded that men's and women's bodies were characterised in different ways to the benefit of men over women and thus that 'an awareness of the sexed body in space, especially as it is lived and historically constituted is . . . a vital addition to any understanding of the workplace'.

There have been/are very different constructions of gender, each historically specific, and articulated in different ways within the societies in which they appear [**Hotlink → History (Chapter 3)**]. The post-industrial service economy which has emerged in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has brought new ways of working. The recognition in the studies of traditional industries that gendered characteristics of workers and occupations are mutually constituted has been extended to the structure of employees' bodies (McDowell, 1997). Within contemporary western economies aesthetic and emotional components of labour now increasingly have more value than their technological capabilities (Lash and Urry, 1994). Indeed, in relation to interactive service work Robin Leidner argues that:

> Workers' identities are not incidental to the work but are an integral part of it. Interactive jobs make use of their workers' looks, personalities, and emotions, as well as their physical and intellectual capacities, sometimes forcing them to manipulate their identities more self consciously than do workers in other jobs. As a result it is increasingly difficult to make a distinction between subjects (workers) and objects (commodities and services).
> (1991: 155–6)

Bodily 'norms' and standards – in which being slim, attractive and able-bodied are seen as aesthetic ideals for both women and men and as the physical embodiment of productivity and success – are an aspect of many organisations' recruitment criteria (McDowell, 1995). Working in a merchant bank in the City of London involves the expectation of conforming to gendered and embodied performances. The working environment is male-dominated and aggressive and is underpinned by heterosexual expectations and homophobia. Women need to appropriate masculine styles of behaviour to be accepted in this space, yet they are constantly reminded of their sex by negative comments from male colleagues. Linda McDowell (1995, and McDowell and Court, 1994) found that both women and younger male employees spend time and money on 'body work' and that consequently they were remarkably uniform in their appearance. Although, the effort and resources which are devoted to maintaining a particular state of embodiment are not usually recognised as part of the labour process and so are not remunerated as 'waged labour' (Shilling, 1993).

Through employee dress codes, appraisals, performance reviews, counselling and stress management employees are also being encouraged, or forced, to be self-reflexive (Lash and Urry, 1994). The assumption is that workers must manipulate their bodily performances to 'embody' the organisations in order to become and remain employees of particular companies (McDowell, 1997).

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In another example, Leidner (1993) illustrates how an American insurance company tries to mould its employees' lives by shaping their family life, political convictions, religious beliefs and even friends in a process which it terms 'duplicating'. The (hetero)sexuality of most organisations means that such institutional practices can exclude or alienate lesbian and gay employees (Hearn *et al.*, 1989; Valentine, 1993). In these ways institutions seek 'to gain a pervasive influence in every area of the employee's life' (Casey, 1995: 197). Surveillance – the open plan design of work spaces, electronically mediated panopticism such as the use of closed circuit television or electronic tills, and bodily screening through drug and alcohol testing – is used to enforce or encourage compliance. In this sense the body has become an important regulatory issue in the contemporary workplace (Casey, 1995).

Employees' bodies are not therefore merely reflections of wider social relations but are a product of organisational dynamics and the ability of these institutions to wield power and construct meanings. Though it is worth remembering, as Susan Halford and Mike Savage (1998) point out, that employees also take direct and covert forms of action to resist their employers.

Streets of fear

Street violence is regarded as an increasingly common problem in most North American and European cities. Although statistically it is young men who experience violence most in urban areas, it is women who are regarded as the group most at risk (Bondi and Rose, 2003) [**Hotlink → Violence and Resistance (Chapter 16)**]. The crimes women are most fearful of are sexual violence or assault by strangers. Statistically such incidents are relatively rare (especially in comparison with figures for domestic violence) although at some point in their lives most women encounter more minor forms of sexual harassment in public space such as verbal abuse, wolf whistling or flashing (Wise and Stanley, 1987). These 'everyday' incidents are linked on a continuum with extreme forms of violence and therefore are often regarded as a potential precursor to more serious forms of abuse. In other words, an 'everyday' awareness of the possibilities of harassment can contribute to some women's perceptions of insecurity on the street (Valentine, 1989) [**Hotlink → Work and Leisure (Chapter 14)**]. These anxieties are compounded for those who believe themselves to be unable to defend themselves against a male assailant. Some individuals consider themselves to be unable to do so, perhaps because they are elderly, ill or have a physical impairment which restricts their vision, mobility or strength. Others imagine that all women would be unable to defend themselves against a man because they regard all men as larger and stronger than all women (even though this is not the case and also overlooks the fact that self-defence techniques do not necessarily require bodily strength).

The media plays a part in exaggerating the extent of violent crimes such as rape and murder (Smith, 1984). Crime stories are easy to obtain, the human interest angle sells newspapers and they are also a useful editing device. The selective reporting of violent incidents also generates images about *where* and *when* women are at risk (Valentine, 1992). By disproportionately publicising attacks which occur in public space rather than domestic violence, the media contribute to creating a perception that the street is a dangerous place despite the fact that statistically women are more at risk from domestic violence (Warrington, 2001) [**Hotlink → Crime and Deviance (Chapter 17)**]. This maps onto the historical public–private dualism, in which women have been associated with the private space of the home and men with the public world of the street. This dualism has been used to draw a distinction between 'respectable' women and 'less deserving' women and between 'sensible' women and 'reckless' women. For example, in cases where women have been attacked in public space at night the police and the media have sometimes implied they are to a certain degree responsible for their own fate and have warned other women to avoid putting themselves in similar situations of vulnerability (Valentine, 1989) [**Hotlink → Sex and Sexuality → A Closer Look 15.5 (Chapter 15)**].

Women's perceptions of fear on the street are closely associated with their perceptions of who occupies and controls the space. Fear is closely associated with disorder. Graffiti (Ley and Cybriwsky, 1974; Cresswell, 1992), litter, groups of young people or the homeless on the street are often read as a sign that the space is not looked after or controlled, either formally

by the police or private security forces, or informally by local residents, passers-by, store keepers and so on. This in turn erodes women's confidence that anyone would notice or intervene to help if they were attacked (Valentine, 1989). Some commentators argue neighbourhood community is in decline and that this is contributing to people's perceptions of vulnerability in public space. Consequently, initiatives such as Neighbourhood Watch are launched to try to generate this sort of informal social control artificially.

Fear of crime increases at night because the use of the street changes so that this space is produced in a different way. During the day-time the street is usually occupied by people from all walks of life going to school, work, shopping and so on. However, at night, not only does darkness reduce visibility and increase the perception that potential attackers might be able to strike unobserved but there are also less people on the streets and they are usually dominated by the group women are most fearful of: unknown men (Koskela and Pain, 2000).

As a result many women adopt precautionary strategies to keep themselves safe at night. These might be *time–space avoidance strategies* to distance themselves in space and time from perceived danger (for example, by avoiding going out at night after a particular time, or by using a car or taxis to avoid walking in public space after dark) or *environmental response strategies* adopted by women when they are in public space (such as walking confidently, carrying a rape alarm or knife etc.). While most women might use a combination of strategies to keep themselves safe not all women have the same ability to adopt particular precautions. For example, those who work shifts may be unable to avoid public space at night, those on a low income do not necessarily have the option to use private transport or taxis. As a result some women's fear structures their use of space more than others. Indeed, although women may be frightened by an awareness of potential violence on the street many regard it as important to control these emotions so as not to let these fears restrict their use of public space and to resist discourses which construct women's place as in the private sphere (Mehta and Bondi, 1999) (see A Closer Look 10.2).

A closer look 10.2

Bold walking

Hille Koskela (1997) argues that most studies agree that women's fear is partly a reflection of gendered power structures in the wider society. If women's fear of male violence is understood to be a reflection of gendered power structures, Koskela argues that it follows that in societies with a relatively high degree of gender equality – such as her native Finland – women should feel confident in using public space. Drawing on research with 43 women between the ages of 20 and 82, Koskela reveals that although not all women in Finland are fearless (which is perhaps an indicator that the gender equality in Finnish society is partly a myth), there is a tradition of 'boldness' and independence amongst its female population. Note that boldness is not equated with recklessness: women who 'walk boldly' decide to go somewhere despite the perceived risks, but remain alert in their environment so that they can either escape or defend themselves or others if necessary. The fact that some women are bold and confident shows that women do not always have to passively experience space, rather they can actively take part in producing it. Indeed, Koskela argues that women can reclaim space for themselves through everyday practices and routinised uses of space (such as walking in public space at night, not taking alternative routes to avoid spaces that are perceived to be 'fearful' etc.). Through these acts of resistance – and an increased presence of women in public space – Koskela argues that women can produce space that is more available for other women. Just as women can learn to restrict their mobility in order to avoid fear of danger, they can also learn (or re-learn) to be spatially confident. If women can challenge the often unfounded 'fearful' representations of space that are promoted by the media, public opinion and parents, then they could become bolder in public space and encourage other women to reclaim the streets rather than be intimidated by continued warnings and restrictions [**Hotlink → Violence and Resistance (Chapter 16)**].

Recent research suggests that it is not only women who are fearful of violence on the street. There are also growing concerns in North America and Europe about children's safety in public space (Valentine, 1996b) and about the impact of fear of crime on the elderly

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(Pain, 1999). Well publicised cases of murders and violence assaults which have been motivated by racism and homophobia have also drawn attention to an escalation in 'hate crimes' (Herek and Berrill, 1992; Valentine, 1993). In 2004 the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) recorded 7,649 hate crime offences in the US.

In addition, in a study of young people's leisure activities in a British town, given the pseudonym Thamestown, Paul Watt (1998; see also Watt and Stenson, 1998) found a strong degree of localism amongst Asian young men who spent much of their time in Streetville, the neighbourhood where they lived. In contrast to the white middle-class youth Watt (1998) attributed this difference not just to the fact that the Asian young people had a strong sense of loyalty and belonging to where they lived, but also to the fact that this was a place where they felt safe from the sort of racist aggression and harassment which they encountered in other parts of the town. Indeed, the research also found some evidence that the Thamestown white youths actively used violence to exclude other ethnic groups from their neighbourhood streets (Watt and Stenson, 1998), although it did not uncover quite the same degree of territorialism – termed by Colin Webster (1996: 26) 'ethnic apartheid' – that has been evident in studies of other English towns and cities (Keith, 1995; Webster, 1996).

Geographies of masculinities

As the above discussion on geographies of fear partially illustrates geographers have, in recent years, begun to broaden their understandings of and engagements with gender through the development of a body of research on men and masculinities. Geography is a discipline that has been viewed as being 'traditionally' androcentric and masculinist (van Hoven and Hörschelmann, 2005) and it has a history that details the activities of men (albeit under the guise that male views and experiences were objective and 'rational'). This fact, as we discussed earlier, has affected the production of geographic knowledge (Rose, 1993; Nelson and Seager, 2005). However, where gender has been the focus of research, this has been assumed to mean research on women. Since the early 1990s (and in particular the late 1990s), geographers have sought to redress this imbalance with increasing attention being paid to men and masculinities. Interestingly, work in this area has been developed across many of geography's subdisciplines including urban geography (Sommers, 1998), economic geography (Blomley, 1996) and post-colonial geographies (Phillips, 1997; Berg, 1998), but discussions of masculinities are still absent or at least limited in some areas of the discipline including physical geography, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and population geography.

In a review of masculinities and geographies Lawrence Berg and Robyn Longhurst (2003) summarised this development from an initial focus on 'sex roles' to recognising the importance of the 'social relations that constitute the gender order' (Carrigan *et al.*, 1987: 89). Whilst Bob Connell (1985, 1987) is an important figure in the development of geographies of masculinities (see also his work with Carrigan *et al.*, 1987), it is perhaps Peter Jackson, who is largely responsible for the current growth of interest in this area. Jackson argues that gender relations are 'embedded in a matrix of social relations involving *both men and women*' (1989: 129, emphasis in the original) and that studies of gender need to examine the extent to which patriarchal gender relations 'lead to the oppression of some (gay and heterosexual) men as well as being inherently exploitative of women' (1991: 199). However, rather than advocating a situation where heterosexual men join forces with other groups that are attempting to challenge and resist patriarchal oppression (namely feminists, gay men and lesbians), Jackson (1991) argues that heterosexual men have their own political agenda to attend to where they should not only challenge theoretical connections, but certain ways of living and relating as men. Jackson himself has furthered geographers' understandings of men and masculinities through a number of studies including an extensive analysis of masculinities and men's magazines (Jackson *et al.*, 1999, 2001).

Since Jackson's initial intervention there has been an explosion of work on men and masculinities, which has highlighted how ideas of masculinities differ over space and time and has sought to examine the ways in which masculinities intersect with a range of other identities. Indeed, as Berg and Longhurst (2003) demonstrate

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studies of the geographies of men and masculinities are as varied as the subjects that they explore. For example, masculinities have been explored within rural landscapes (Bell, 2000; Liepins 2000; Little, 2002) and urban environments (Krenske and McKay, 2000; Lysaght, 2002); in historical contexts (Tervo, 2001; Myers, 2002) and in connection with other identities such as 'race' and ethnicity (Nayak, 1999; Day, 2006) and class (Mee and Dowling, 2000; McDowell, 2002).

Conclusion

In this chapter we have outlined some of the key themes in geographers' understandings of and engagements with gender. It has:

- outlined how gender has influenced the production of geographical knowledge;
- demonstrated the centrality of the body in understandings of gender;
- explored some of the ways in which gender and space are mutually constituted (through an investigation of the home, the workplace and the street); and
- highlighted how geographic works in geography are increasingly including the experiences of men and studies of masculinity.

However, this chapter has also (hopefully) demonstrated the complex and heterogeneous nature of gender. Understandings and experiences of gender shift over space and time and gender differences occur both among and between women and men. In the future it seems likely that geographers will continue to deepen their understanding of gender through studying the ways in which gender intersects with a range of identities (including those based on 'race', ethnicity, sexuality, (dis)ability and age) and investigating how gendered identities are performed in (and constitute) a range of different spaces.

Further reading

Linda McDowell (1999), *Gender, Identity & Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies*, Cambridge, Polity Press. This is a clearly written book that explores the ways in which gender, space and place are interrelated at a range of scales from the body to the nation-state. It also demonstrates how spatial divisions have been crucial in the establishment, maintenance and reshaping of gendered differences since the time of the industrial revolution.

Bettina van Hoven and Kathrin Hörschelmann (eds), (2005), *Spaces of Masculinities*, London, Routledge. This is a comprehensive introduction to the diverse and innovative research on spaces of masculinity. Drawing on a range of geographical projects, this book highlights the significance of research on masculinity in social science studies of gender.

Women and Geography Study Group (1997) *Feminist Geographies: Explorations in Diversity and Difference*, London, Longman. This groundbreaking text charts the development of feminist geographies in the UK. It introduces the key analytical concepts, outlines the history of the subdiscipline, explores methodological issues and considers the various ways in which feminist geographers have examined some of geography's key concepts including space, place, landscape and environment.

Gender Place and Culture – contents listing available online at: **http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/**. This journal, which is international in its focus, aims to provide a forum for debate in human geography and related disciplines on theoretically informed research concerned with gender issues. It also aims to highlight the significance of geographic research on gender for feminism and women's studies.

Websites

Geographical Perspectives on Women (GPOW) specialty group of the Association of American Geographers: **http://www.personal.psu.edu/users/a/k/akt122/gpow/index.htm**. This is the website of the main professional organisation for feminist geographers in the United States. It includes an online 'gender in geography' bibliography (established collaboratively with the WGSG) and web links to a range of websites that may be of interest to people studying/working in the field of gender and geography.

Women and Geography Study Group: **http://www.wgsg.org.uk/**. This is the website of the Women and Geography Study Group of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers. It features a link to the online 'gender in geography' bibliography (established with GPOW) and information on a self-published CD-Rom 'Geography and Gender Reconsidered' which was produced to celebrate and reflect upon the 20 years since WGSG's (1984) groundbreaking work *Geography and Gender*.

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End of chapter activity

Watch the first twenty minutes of the film *Disclosure* (1994). As you do so, consider whether the jobs in the firm were gendered and, if so, how? Think about the different ways in which the characters were dressed – what did their appearances say about their different roles in the workplace? How many examples of sexuality at work did you notice? How did these shape the production of different spaces? How are 'public' and 'private' spaces produced within this workplace?