

Gender and geography in the United Kingdom, 1980-2006

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Data de recepció: octubre del 2006
Data d'acceptació definitiva: febrer del 2007

Abstract

This paper discusses the progress of feminist geography in the UK over the past 25 years. The first part of the paper refers to the earlier books and articles to establish key «moments» in the development of feminist geography in the UK; the second part goes on to document more recent developments in feminist geography such as the adoption of the concept of gender identity; the third section attempts to illustrate the main developments in feminist geography in the UK through reference to my own area of research, rural geography. Finally the paper briefly examines, by way of conclusion, the development of feminist geography in the UK in the context of teaching.

Key words: gender, geography, United Kingdom, rural geography, teaching.

Resum. *Gènere i geografia al Regne Unit, 1980-2006*

Aquest article presenta l'evolució de la geografia feminista al Regne Unit en els darrers vint-i-cinc anys. La primera part de l'article es refereix als primers llibres i articles per tal d'establir els «moments» clau en el desenvolupament de la geografia feminista al Regne Unit; la segona part documenta la recerca més recent en geografia feminista, com ara l'adopció del concepte d'identitat de gènere; la tercera secció pretén il·lustrar els principals treballs realitzats en relació amb la meua àrea de recerca, la geografia rural. I, finalment, a manera de conclusió, l'article examina el desenvolupament de la geografia feminista en el camp de l'ensenyament.

Paraules clau: gènere, geografia, Regne Unit, geografia rural, ensenyament.

Resumen. *Género y geografía en el Reino Unido, 1980-2006*

Este artículo presenta la evolución de la geografía feminista en el Reino Unido en los últimos veinticinco años. La primera parte del artículo se refiere a los primeros libros y artículos, a fin de establecer los «momentos» clave en el desarrollo de la geografía feminista en el Reino Unido; la segunda parte documenta la investigación más reciente en geografía feminista, como la adopción del concepto de identidad de género; la tercera sección pretende ilustrar los principales trabajos realizados en relación con mi área de investigación, la geografía rural. Y, finalmente, a modo de conclusión, el artículo examina el desarrollo de la geografía feminista en el Reino Unido en el campo de la enseñanza.

Palabras clave: género, geografía, Reino Unido, geografía rural, enseñanza.

Résumé. *Genre et géographie au Royaume Uni, 1980-2006*

Cet article présente l'évolution de la géographie féministe au Royaume Uni pendant les derniers 25 ans. La première partie de l'article fait référence aux premiers livres et articles afin d'établir les «moments» clé du développement de la géographie féministe au Royaume Uni; la deuxième partie documente la recherche la plus récente, telle que l'adoption du concept d'identité de genre; la troisième section a pour but d'illustrer les principaux travaux concernant mon domaine de recherche, la géographie rurale. Finalement, en guise de conclusion, l'article examine le développement de la géographie féministe dans le domaine de l'enseignement.

Mots clé: genre, géographie, Royaume Uni, géographie rurale, enseignement.

Summary

Introduction	Feminist rural geography
Early feminist geography in the UK	Teaching feminist geography
Gender identities	References

Introduction

This paper discusses the progress of feminist geography in the UK over the past 25 years. The development of feminist geography in the UK both as a distinct conceptual approach (or set of approaches) to the study of geography and as a political movement within the discipline has been the focus of attention from the early 1980s so there is a considerable literature commenting on the progress of this academic sub-discipline (see Bowlby *et al.*, McDowell, 1993; 1989; WGSG, 1984). Thus many rich texts can be drawn on to inform a review of feminist geography —these have been widely circulated and some have become «classics» within the discipline more generally. The intention here, in the first part of this paper, is to reference these earlier books and articles to establish key «moments» in the development of feminist geography in the UK. In doing so the paper will show how these initial debates laid the foundations of work on gender, establishing new theoretical directions and contesting taken for granted knowledges.

The second part of the paper then goes on to document more recent developments in feminist geography in the UK. It discusses, in particular, the ways in which geographers have adopted the concept of gender identity enabling them to explore more effectively the differing experiences between and within genders. The paper also shows how work on sexuality and the body has had a growing influence on the examination of gender and on the construction and experience of identity. This part of the paper highlights a key shift in the study of feminist geography from examining the constraints operating on particular groups and individuals in particular places, to exploring the co-construction of places and identity in an acknowledgment of the performative

nature of gender identity. In the third section of the paper I attempt to illustrate the main developments in feminist geography in the UK through reference to my own area of research, rural geography. Although not an area noted for its role in driving feminist debates in geography, rural geography has made good use of the increasing legitimacy of work on gender and has drawn on feminist geography to inform the examination of social and economic relations in rural communities and spaces. Again, in the area of rural geography there has been a shift in the focus of feminist approaches; while early work studied the barriers facing women living in rural communities, more recent studies have explored the ways in which gender and rural space are mutually constituted. Finally the paper briefly examines, by way of conclusion, the development of feminist geography in the UK in the context of teaching. This section notes the important contribution of feminist geography to gender equality in academia and geography in particular. It notes how early attempts to make women visible in geography as both the subjects of research and as those doing the research were at the heart of the feminist geography project. Recent writing (see Sharp *et al.*, 2004) asserts the need for a continued emphasis on gender equality, noting that despite considerable change in the position of women geographers, subtle barriers to inclusion and equity still exist for women working in the academy.

Early feminist geography in the UK

It is clearly impossible to pinpoint a precise date or moment when feminist geography «began» in the UK, especially since recognition is rarely given to work that is not published through accepted academic channels. By the mid 1970s, however, a body of research was beginning to emerge that looked explicitly at differing gender roles. Much of it addressed women's lives since it was, as Suzanne MacKenzie (1984, p. 3-4) noted, «generally women who experience gender relations as oppressive and constraining». Research focused on the daily activities of women, drawing attention to the relationship between inequality of opportunity and the gender division of labour within the household. It argued that geography was dominated by a masculine approach that failed to take seriously the lives of women and failed to acknowledge how daily activities were organised to reinforce gender inequality.

This early focus on gender roles in UK geography was heavily influenced by the feminist movement of the time and although emphasising the position of women as a neglected group in social scientific analysis, was underpinned by a broader politics of gender inequality. Thus, it was argued, understanding of gender was critical to a broader understanding of human-environment relations as a whole. MacKenzie (1984) summarises the three underlying assumptions that shaped (and were shaped by) the development of this initial phase of feminist geography. Firstly, women, in their daily lives, enter into social relationships which are different to those of men. Secondly, these relationships mean women have a different experience and perception of the environment

than men and, thirdly, these differences are important in understanding the use and development of (urban) space.

Work around these basic assumptions contributed significantly to making women, and their marginalisation, visible. It tended to focus, however, on the ways in which women's activities were spatially constrained as a result of their roles. Such work was later criticised for measuring women against a set of accepted, masculine codes and patterns of behaviour rather than looking at women's particular needs and aspirations for living in and using the city. This focus on the restricted activity spaces of women that characterised very early feminist geography was particularly committed to showing how the problems women faced in their use of the built environment were reinforced by their dual roles. The growing participation of women in paid employment meant that many were combining productive and reproductive activity. The separation of home and work, a key feature of urban design and planning in the late nineteenth and twentieth century city, made moving between the spheres time consuming and complicated. Hence, it was argued, women's gender roles were increasingly problematic and constraining. Feminist geographers claimed that insufficient attention had been given to women's experience of the relationship between gender roles and urban design and that it was only in drawing attention to such spatial constraints that new priorities for urban development could be developed.

Although this work on the spatial restrictions facing women in the operation of their gender roles was undoubtedly valuable and marked the start of an explicit focus on women as a group, it was criticised in two related ways. First it was restricted, essentially, to a spatial framework, highlighting the barriers to women's lives and drawing attention to the way their choices were limited by issues of access and service provision. As such, it contributed little to theoretical ideas on the development of urban space. It failed to conceptualise gender as part of the formation of space and place, simply as affected and shaped by it. The second main criticism of this early work was that it was limited to description. Thus it identified the unequal roles of women and men, emphasising the constraints operating on women, yet it did not attempt to go beyond description to explanation. As feminist geography became more established in the 1980s, attention shifted, in an effort to address these criticisms, to considering the social conditions structuring women's social position and to place inequality experienced by women within a broader framework of gender relations.

Patriarchy and the study of gender relations

Geography and Gender (WGSG, 1984), written collectively by UK women geographers and published in the mid 1980s was a highly significant text that helped to consolidate geographical studies on gender roles. Importantly, however, it also shared this concern to move beyond description and to focus on gender relations in order to explain unequal gender roles. In so doing it argued

that gender relations needed to be seen as a set of power relations between men and women and that women's inequality was the result of the systematic operation of male power over women in all areas of society. Like other geographical work on gender being done at the time, *Geography and Gender* saw that essential to a greater understanding of gender inequality and the gendering of space more broadly was patriarchy, both as a theoretical concept and a set of material practices.

Geographers mobilised a wide range of studies to show how patriarchy operated in the «public» sphere of the economy, politics and waged work as well as in the «private» sphere of the home and family. As Bowlby *et al.* (1989) note, such investigations were given added significance by the importance attached to «locality studies» in geography at the time in which the interrelations between local and global processes were seen to drive economic and social restructuring. Such studies provided an important opportunity to develop both theoretical understanding and empirical observation of the operation of patriarchy. In particular they raised issues of the relationship between gender and class in discussion of the relative importance of patriarchy and capitalism. This fuelled a debate in which geographers discussed the conceptualisation of the links between gender relations and class (see Foord and Gregson, 1986; McDowell, 1986) and sought to define the «necessary and contingent conditions for the existence of patriarchal gender relations» (Bowlby *et al.*, 1989, p. 164). Some argued that patriarchy and capitalism, although linked in social practice, should be seen as conceptually distinct while others believed that the two sets of social relations are intertwined such that they form one system of capitalist patriarchy. The details of the debate are not the concern of this paper, save in demonstrating the interest shown by geographers not only in the material outcomes of patriarchy in terms of gender inequality but also in its theoretical underpinning.

In discussing the nature of patriarchy and its importance in understanding gender inequality, geographers also drew on research from outside the discipline. Cultural studies literature, for example, provided insights into the city as a site of sexual imagery and control where women's exclusion was related to social expectation around their sexual identity (see, for example, Wilson, 1993). Work from urban studies and planning considered the city as a physical expression of patriarchy showing how the design of urban space reflected male power in terms of both the structure of land use and the emotional response to different parts of the urban environment (Darke *et al.*, 1996).

Increasingly, as gender studies developed in the 1980s, geographers questioned the classic dichotomies that structure western thought. In common with other feminist scholars they started to look at how dichotomies such as mind/body, culture/nature, public/private, reason/emotion are mapped onto gender difference in a way that assumes the inferior of the two attributes to be feminine. As McDowell (1992) notes, the questioning of such phallogocentric dichotomies by feminist geographers helped to reveal how the feminine has been constructed as «natural» and, as such, excluded from theorising. Break-

ing down the idea of the feminine as natural turned attention away from the idea that gender differences were biologically fixed and towards the recognition that they reflect socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity.

Gender identities

It is generally considered that as interest in the social construction of masculinity and femininity took hold within UK geography, the focus of research shifted from discussion of grand theory to the recognition and examination of difference. The notion of gender identity increasing replaced gender relations and roles in suggesting that characteristics of masculinity and femininity are not fixed or essential but are culturally constructed and change over time and space. While subject to social regulation, identities are more open to choice and to defining individual's sense of self. Moreover, as Jackson (1999, p.132-3) points out:

Whereas older theories of identity posited a stable and core sense of self, often closely tied to differences of social class, recent theories have asserted the possibilities and problems associated with more «hybrid» (unstable, mixed and multiple) notions of identity, often conceptualised in highly voluntaristic terms as past of an individual «lifestyle» choice.

It was only through looking at identity, feminist geographers argued, that the complex and diffuse nature of gender could be appreciated. The attention drawn to the multiplicity and fluidity of gender identity prompted, in addition, the recognition that feminist research in geography could no longer rest on a single unproblematized concept of patriarchy but needed to incorporate a complex set of gender relations which varied over time and place (McDowell, 1992). Thus feminist geographers started to move away from the study of women as an «undifferentiated category» (McDowell, 1993) to think about the social dimensions that divide women. They focused on how the characteristics of masculinity and femininity varied between different classes, «races», ethnicities, sexualities and ages and on how such characteristics were spatialised. An impressive number of studies from across the discipline drawing attention to the localised and individual experiences of gender identity were (and continue to be) produced (see, for example Dwyer, 1999; McDowell, 1999, Valentine, 1993). In these studies the differences *amongst* women and *amongst* men became as important as those *between* men and women.

This direction in UK feminist geography was strongly influenced by feminist studies generally and also by the wider feminist political movement. By the 1990s fundamental questions were being asked about the «audience» for feminist scholarship and activism. Concerns that the feminist movement was failing to address the particular circumstances of women of colour and non-western women were reinforced by an attack on white women working in the academy who were seen, by elements of the feminist movement, as part of the

problem of inequality and exclusion rather than part of the solution (McDowell, 1993). Questions started to be asked about the claims of feminist scholarship and, in particular, how relevant theoretical debates about the nature of women's oppression and the operation of patriarchy were in understanding the multiple divisions between different identities.

Examining difference, then, had wider implications than simply drawing attention to the diversity of gendered experiences; it challenged the salience of gender as an analytical category. By suggesting that identities were fractured, partial, decentred and shifting, feminists had successfully argued that the experience of gender was not uniform and could not be «read off» according to a set of universal characteristics and power relations. While this was extremely helpful in broadening the understanding of women's inequality, it potentially undermined the importance of gender both as a theoretical concept and as a basis for empirical observation and experience. Thus as Linda McDowell wrote in 1992 (p. 412):

One of the consequences of the recognition of differences between women has been the development of what Susan Bordo (1990) has termed «gender scepticism».

She goes on to argue that one of the consequences of such «gender scepticism» was that the idea of a single feminism was untenable and should be replaced by multiple feminisms in which theories are built around particular circumstances and political alliances around specific issues. Similarly, Liz Bondi (2004) recognises the inherent contradiction for feminist politics of difference and while arguing that acknowledging a multiplicity of gender identities requires us to think differently about the universal tendencies of feminist theory, she warns of the dangers of fragmentation.

Geographers in the UK have debated the continuing relevance of gender in the context of studying multiple identities and have remained positive about the focus on difference. There has been a broad recognition of notions of difference and the study of multiple subjectivities as empowering rather than disabling, helping to animate the field of feminist studies in various ways. Bondi (2004) notes how the study of processes and outcomes over space has long brought geographers into contact not only with the fractured nature of gender but with the need to build alliances. Geographers are well-placed to help ensure that these alliances take place over space and that negotiation takes place around «different differences». In doing so, Bondi (2004, p. 11) warns of the importance of being open to possibilities and seeing space as «neither gender-free nor gender-saturated».

Feminist geography and embodiment

With the focus on difference and deconstruction, feminist geography in the UK has increasingly turned its attention to the body. Drawing on theorists

such as Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz (Butler, 1990; Grosz, 1994), geographers have sought, over recent years, to pay greater attention to the performative nature of gender identity. In recognising that gender categories are not fixed or universal, greater emphasis has been placed by feminist scholars on the ways in which gender is constructed and performed in different places at different times. This focus on the performative nature of identity has foregrounded the body, arguing that it is through embodied acts of repetition and style that our identities are created and reproduced. These theoretical discussions within feminist geography have encouraged a host of studies on the embodied experience of gender identity in which geographers have explored the materiality of the body (Ainley, 1998; Little and Leyshon, 2003; McDowell, 1995; Nast and Pile, 1998) showing how constructions of masculinity and femininity are etched on to and shaped by embodied performance. Increasingly, the body has been seen as central to understandings of a range of topics such as consumption, mobility, disability and health. In addition, ideas about the body and expectations surrounding the body have been considered important in understanding the ways in which we experience and value different places. Work on the body has been used, specifically, to further break down established binaries which associate the body with nature, femininity and emotion and as such in opposition to masculinity, rationality, science and the mind.

Where bodies have been seen as particularly relevant to geographical enquiry is in work on sexual identity. Early work on gender from feminist geographers constantly fought to show how gender was socially constructed and not a function of physical or biological difference between men and women. In striving to emphasise the importance of gender as a social construct, however, the sexual tended to be incorporated with the physical and, consequently downplayed. As Bondi (1997, p. 177) summed up:

[...] while the expressed intention of the sex/gender distinction widely adopted in feminist urban studies has been to exclude questions of biological sex to make the point that gender divisions are socially constructed, one of the effects has been to exclude questions of sex in the sense of sexuality and sexual practice [...] Thus despite the feminist claim that the personal is political, and despite the feminist critique of the public/private dichotomy [...] we have largely avoided matters regarded as personal or private.

In striving to disconnect the body from the physical characteristics of gender identity, biology has thus been relegated in favour of a focus on the social. Yet recently there have been calls (Grosz, 2005; Young, 2002) for studies of the body to pay more attention to the biological, particularly in relation to debates around the relationship between the body and nature. The notion of the lived body has emerged as potentially useful in bringing together social and physical analyses of the gendered body.

The focus on the body has provided an important encouragement for studies of sexuality (see Bell, 2000; Binnie and Valentine, 1999) by feminist geo-

graphers. They have emphasised that sexual identity is separate from gender identity and that, like gender, it is socially constructed. Geographers have again drawn on the work of feminist theorists on the body in exploring how the sexed body is incorporated in the performance of identity and how it is regulated and controlled in accordance with the hegemonic power of heterosexuality.

As with work on the body, there now exists a rich and diverse literature geographies of sexuality in the UK. It has highlighted the marginalisation of «different» sexualities in particular spaces and attempted to show how sexual identity is performed, contested and disciplined through the body in different spatial contexts. Geographers such as Hubbard (2000) and Kitchen and Lysaght (2003) have shown how a «moral geography» has shaped the relationship between sexual identity and space in defining acceptable and unacceptable practices and regulating sexual activity. They, and others, discuss, how this renders particular bodies «out of place» in particular spaces and times. They also show how this regulation of sexual identity goes beyond a homosexual/heterosexual division to control any form of sexual practice that does not conform to a family-based hetero-normalcy. The body has also been seen, importantly, by feminist geographers as a site for the contestation of sexual and gender identity. Studies have looked at the ways in which the body is used to destabilise assumptions about the relationship between sexuality and space and to take control of different spaces for «non-traditional» and marginalized identities. Such work has focused on spaces of leisure and the street in particular, looking at how such spaces become the sites of public displays of homosexuality at certain times (see for example Hubbard and Sanders, 2003; Kitchen and Lysaght, 2003; Valentine, 1993; 1996). In describing how the heterosexuality of space is destabilised, geographers seek to emphasise how places are constantly in the process of becoming; they are not fixed but are made and remade through the negotiation of power relations and the expression of different identities.

The performative approaches adopted by feminist geographers have incorporated a growing emphasis on emotions. Still in its infancy, such work is already having a significant impact on the nature of topics studied and the value placed on understanding varying ways of experiencing space and place. It is part of a movement to show how the co-construction of place and identity incorporates a range of different influences (for example memory, sense, faith and belief) not previously given much attention by geographers (Davidson *et al.*, 2005; Bondi, 2005).

This outline of feminist geography in the UK has, by necessity, been wide ranging and rather superficial but it has tried to indicate the various key «phases» of development in academic approaches to the study of gender. While it has implied a sequential replacement of one «phase» by another, in reality different approaches have merged and co-existed. For example, despite the recent recognition of gender identity and its fluidity, some current research continues to identify changes in gender roles and to assert the continued relevance of

patriarchy. One way of showing the development of approaches to feminist geography is to look at a particular area of geography. Here rural geography is used to illustrate the way feminist geography has been adopted through the different phases of its development. The discussion charts the shift from early work on rural gender roles and the introduction of feminist perspectives to rural geography, through a focus on gender relations and patriarchy to recent examination of gender identity, the body and sexuality in rural areas.

Feminist rural geography

Reference to rural gender issues and, in particular, women's roles, first emerged through research on agriculture and the family farm. While not adopting an explicitly feminist theoretical framework, this work drew attention to unequal gender roles within agriculture and the routine undervaluing of women's contribution to the farm business (see, for example, Gasson, 1992; Whatmore, 1991; Whatmore *et al.*, 1994). Interest was stimulated initially through studies of the family farm as an example of petty commodity production and the particular position of family labour as an aspect of capitalist labour relations. It was argued that many farm businesses were only viable because of the reliance on family labour and that the business could survive without being subject to labour costs. As part of this analysis, feminists began to draw particular attention to the lack of recognition of women's work. They showed how women's labour was critical to the survival of the family farm both in terms of the agricultural work and domestic reproduction (Symes and Marsden, 1983). Debates around the work of women on the farm were used, importantly, to show how the spheres of production and reproduction were intricately linked and it was argued that women's domestic work was as valuable to the productive work on the farm as their agricultural activity (Evans and Ilbery, 1992).

Following this initial exploration of women's roles in agriculture, work on gender roles in other areas of rural community and society began to be produced (Middleton, 1986; Stebbing, 1984). In common with directions in feminist geography at the time, this research sought to «add women in» to existing rural studies, highlighting where male and female roles in rural areas differed. Again, the emphasis of this early phase was about making rural women visible and showing how existing research had neglected their activities, needs and interests. Much of the work focused on employment and service provision and argued that rural women were subject to a «dual burden» in that they were excluded from employment and access to services as a result of both their gender and their location. The disadvantage faced by women (in for example, access to employment opportunities) as a result of their gender role was seen to be reinforced by the conditions of rurality, in particular the lack of services and low levels of transport (see Halliday, 1997; Little, 1991).

The examination of different gender roles and the recognition of women's «dual burden» in rural areas was, as in the study of feminist geography generally, followed by calls for explanation and for theorising gender relations. In

response, research on rural gender began to incorporate an understanding of power relations, including the operation of patriarchy, showing how unequal gender roles were the outcome of a set of power relations between men and women in the domestic sphere and in the world of waged work. These power relations were examined amongst men and women in both farming and non-farming environments. Patriarchal power was seen as the basis of women's inequality and also responsible for exposing women to the more problematic aspects of rural life, in particular the lack of opportunity in terms of childcare, services and employment (Little, 1987).

While drawing on broad theories of gender inequality, those studying rural gender issues also stressed the spatial basis of power relations and the particular implications of rurality. Thus they sought to make it clear that patriarchy, as a global process, shaped rural women and men's lives as it did the lives of women and men in general. But they also argued that patriarchy took a particular form in rural areas and communities that made the operation of gender relations potentially different from those taking place elsewhere. They stressed, in particular, that rural society and community placed a powerful set of expectations and assumptions on women in relation to the operation of their gender role. Rural women, it was argued, were subject to much more conventional gender relations due to the overwhelmingly conservative and traditional nature of rural society. Pressures to conform to classic gender roles were part of a *rural* patriarchy that remained largely uncontested in rural communities.

A significant body of work was published in UK rural geography during the 1990s showing how rural women were subject to strong «cultures of domesticity» (Hughes, 1997) and how, as such, they occupied an important place in the centre of the family and rural domestic life (Little, 1997). This domestic role was also seen to spill out into the community; part of the accepted role of rural women was as the «lynch pins» of the rural community, both practically and ideologically. Studies argued that pressure to conform to the domestic and community-based roles had implications for rural women's participation in the labour market. Such pressures, combined with the practical difficulties of living in remote(r) environments, restricted their employment and further reinforced their roles in the private spheres of home and community.

Following the development of feminist geography generally, recent work on rural gender has focused more directly on the construction and performance of identity. The «cultural turn» in geography stimulated the study of rural gender in two important ways: empirically in the exploration of rural women as a «neglected other» (Philo, 1992) and theoretically in discussions around the relationship between cultural constructions of rurality and gender identities. Both are ongoing areas of enquiry and have provided important contributions to understanding both the day to day experiences of rural women and men and to the ways in which concepts of rurality and gender can be articulated in a cultural context. Again, one of the key directions of this work is to show how ideas of rurality are folded into the ways in which gender identities

are made and remade on a daily basis. Recognition has been given to the varying and multiple ways in which this relationship develops in different places amongst different individuals and groups. It has also stressed the co-construction of rurality and gender, suggesting that the two are constantly negotiated in the way they come together in specific cases.

In looking at the construction of rural gender identities, geographers have started to engage with ideas on embodiment. Some interesting work on rural masculinity has shown how conventional assumptions about the male body continue to dominate in rural areas, particularly in an agricultural context. Authors such as Brandth (1995) and Liepins (2000) have shown how representations of farmers emphasise a traditional masculinity that celebrates the fit, healthy and powerful body. They argue that such embodied forms of masculinity carry with them associations of broader skills and competences, thus making the link between the body and gender identity. Recently work on the rural body has been developed to include a greater consideration of sexual identity, suggesting that more traditional ideas towards the body reflect and are shaped by the dominance of a very conventional form of hetero-normalcy (see Little, 2003). This, it is argued, is rooted in a conservative construction of rurality that has at its centre the nuclear family and associated heterosexual gender identities. Research on the body and sexual identity by rural geographers is in its relative infancy and remains a rich area for future research and writing.

Teaching feminist geography

The preceding sections of this paper have provided a brief history of the development of feminist geography in the UK. This has not, of course, been comprehensive but has attempted to pick out the key areas of debate and to show how theoretical understanding has unfolded in line with both geography and women's studies. The case of rural geography has been used to illustrate how the different theoretical «phases» of feminist geography have influenced the content and direction of one sub-disciplinary area. The task of this final part of the paper is to address the relationship between feminist geography as an academic area of study and as a political direction within the academy. In so doing the main focus is on the way feminist geography has been communicated through teaching.

Perhaps the most striking point to note about the teaching of feminist geography in the UK over the past 25 years is the major shift in attitudes towards its acceptability. Feminist geography has, over this time, moved from the margins of the subject to, if not quite the centre, then at least the mainstream. It is now a legitimate area of research and teaching and, moreover, its development is generally included as an element in courses on the development of concepts in human geography. Further, feminist geography today, it may be argued is less often ghettoised in teaching, increasingly seen as broadly relevant to a range of topic areas and not simply taught in specialist courses.

es on gender. While acknowledging that the teaching of feminist geography has come a long way since the early battles over legitimacy, Sharp *et al.*, (2004), writing in a recent Women and Geography Study Group publication, warn of the dangers of complacency and of the need to keep drawing attention to gender issues both as an area of study and as a feature of the institutional base of the discipline.

Perhaps rather strangely I have not mentioned the contribution and influence of the Women and Geography Study Group (WGSG) of the Institute of British Geographers (now the Royal Geographical Society/IBG) in my earlier discussion of the development of feminist geography in the UK. It is important to recognise, however, that the way the subject emerged and developed to contribute in such a powerful way to UK geography was due, in no small part, to the WGSG. This group, which began as a very small and informal collection of women academics scattered through British academia, acted (and continues to act) as an important source of contact for those interested in drawing attention to gender issues in geography. It provided a forum for debate and for writing (the results of which are some well-known and important publications (see WGSG, 1984, 2004; Laurie *et al.*, 1997) and as a mark of institutional acceptability at a time when many of the ideas being put forward were seen as, at best irrelevant and at worst, unacceptable, in some geography departments. The WGSG has not remained static but has evolved as the pressures on feminist studies in geography have changed. It remains, however, an important source of support for those researching and teaching feminist geography in the UK and overseas.

One of the key issues that has accompanied the increasing visibility of feminist geography in research and teaching is the development of feminist methodologies. Again, space has not allowed me to pay much attention to this theme although it should be mentioned here as playing a particular part in teaching feminist geography. Feminist geographers have sought, throughout their development of gender studies, to encourage debate on and adoption of more qualitative research methods; these they see as a crucial tool in research that is more centred on the individual and the household and which seeks to explore questions of experience and lifestyle (see McDowell, 1992; Maynard and Purvis, 1994; Staeheli and Lawson, 1994). Coupled with the use of these qualitative methods is a concern for the positionality of both researcher and researched (Pain, 2004; Sharp, 2005). Feminist methodologies stress the ethical responsibilities of the researcher and acknowledge the power relations inherent in the research process. They take seriously the need to include the research subject in the design of research and to make research findings available to those who have been active in its production. Methodology has become a rich area of writing and publishing within feminist studies and one that is seen to cross the borders between human and physical geography.

It is not possible to end a paper like this without drawing attention to the vast distances covered by feminist geography in the UK over the last 25 years. Here I have not been able to do justice to more than a very small fraction of the

work that has formed part of this movement. My intention was to convey something of the diversity of the endeavours and of the progress that has been made in theoretical understanding of gender issues and feminist geography. That examples of feminist work can now be found throughout different parts of UK geography is testimony to the strides that have been made in asserting its relevance and contribution. Geography itself has developed in a way that has allowed feminist work to flourish (particularly with the increasing attention given to difference with the postmodern turn) but feminist geography must also take some credit for this, an indication again of its importance beyond the boundaries of specific work on gender. This paper may incite criticism for its unflinchingly positive reflection. Of course, within the history I have described there have been battles and setbacks as well as concerns at times about the direction of feminist geography. There still remains an imbalance in terms of membership of the academy with fewer women than men becoming lecturers and obtaining the more senior roles. Despite these more negative points, however, I defend the positive stance I have taken in recognition of not only the rich work that has existed to date but also the promise for the future.

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