



This item was submitted to Loughborough's Institutional Repository (<https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/>) by the author and is made available under the following Creative Commons Licence conditions.

 **creative commons**
C O M M O N S D E E D

Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5

You are free:

- to copy, distribute, display, and perform the work

Under the following conditions:

 **Attribution.** You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor.

 **Noncommercial.** You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

 **No Derivative Works.** You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

- For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work.
- Any of these conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder.

Your fair use and other rights are in no way affected by the above.

This is a human-readable summary of the [Legal Code \(the full license\)](#).

[Disclaimer](#) 

For the full text of this licence, please go to:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/>

1 **Here, there, everywhere:**
2 **the ubiquitous geographies of heteronormativity**

3

4

5 **Phil Hubbard**

6

7 **Abstract:** From its first tentative forays into questions of gay and
8 lesbian residence, the discipline of geography has made
9 increasingly important contributions to literatures on sexual
10 identities, practices and politics. In this paper, I seek to highlight
11 the breadth and depth of contemporary work on sexuality and
12 space by exploring the contributions made by geographers to the
13 theorization of heteronormativity. Specifically, this paper explores
14 how heterosexual norms are maintained and performed spatially,
15 noting the increasing body of work which moves beyond
16 examination of heterosexuality's Other (i.e. homosexuality) to
17 consider the multiple desires and bodies that can be
18 accommodated within the category 'heterosexual'. Moving from
19 urban to rural contexts, this paper hence reviews literatures
20 detailing how particular heterosexual practices are rendered
21 normal, concluding that this literature is usefully shifting from a
22 focus on identity and community to questions of practice and
23 performance.

24

1 **Introduction**

2

3 Long marginalized in the academy, studies of sexuality have now
4 become a familiar – if sometimes contested – fixture in the
5 geographical curriculum. The inclusion of sections on geographies
6 of sexualities in major student texts is evidence of this, as is the
7 existence of thriving speciality groups of geographical societies
8 (e.g. Royal Geographical Society or Association of American
9 Geographers) that support the study of sexuality and space. While
10 sexuality was, until relatively recently considered of little relevance
11 to human geography, it now seems absurd to imagine a geography
12 untouched by sexuality studies and queer theory given all this
13 implies about the relationship between bodies, spaces and
14 desires. Indeed, as Brown and Knopp (2003, 313) argue,
15 geographies of sexuality have proved ‘an especially potent force’
16 in debates concerning the epistemology, philosophy and
17 methodology of human geography, challenging many taken for
18 granted assumptions about subjectivity, power and representation.
19 Within a decentred social and cultural geography that is always
20 alert to contingency, difference and Otherness, the attention
21 devoted to matters of sexuality is perhaps not surprising; the
22 impact of sexuality studies on economic, political and
23 environmental geographies may be less significant, yet is still
24 palpable.

25

26 The emergence of geographies of sexuality as a recognised
27 subdiscipline is thus widely noted, with a recent edited collection -
28 *Geographies of Sexualities* (Browne et al, 2007) - able to reflect on
29 a remarkable ‘explosion’ of sexuality studies since the first major

1 edited collection on the subject – *Mapping Desire* - was published
2 (Bell and Valentine, 1995). But, as this collection stresses, the
3 ‘institutionalisation’ of sexuality studies has involved compromises
4 and conciliations on both sides, not least the watering down of
5 queer political agendas which were intended to profoundly
6 challenge the structures of academia which order, categorise and
7 ultimately discipline knowledge (see Oswin, 2005). In this paper,
8 however, I address another major concern; namely, that
9 geographies of sexuality overwhelmingly focus on the way that
10 spaces are produced as *either* heterosexual or homosexual, and
11 consequently fail to acknowledge the diverse sexualities that may
12 exist within these broad categories. As will be detailed in this
13 paper, it is hence vital that geographers acknowledge the
14 existence of many different ‘heterosexual’ practices and spaces (in
15 the same way that they must reject the idea of a monolithic gay
16 identity to explore multiple queer subjectivities).

17

18 This paper accordingly reviews the post-millennial literature on
19 sexuality and space to demonstrate that questions of sex and
20 desire infuse all manner of spaces – and not just the ‘gay spaces’
21 which have become such a focus for tourism and consumption (as
22 well as academic scrutiny). Throughout, I will focus on
23 heteronormativity as a guiding concept within the literature,
24 recognising its considerable theoretical worth but also arguing that
25 it comes freighted with dangerous assumptions about the nature of
26 sexual identities. As such, I begin by posing the vexed question of
27 whom (or what) is heteronormal.

28

29

1 **The heteronormal: a brief introduction**

2

3 In all societies, people are classified in all number of ways
4 according to their age, class, race, gender and, inevitably,
5 sexuality. Over time, these classifications take on a truth that
6 makes them seem beyond question, to the extent they become
7 taken for granted. This is especially the case when such social
8 categorisations are related to seemingly indisputable biological
9 facts. For instance, racial classifications are often regarded as
10 valid because they can be mapped onto particular phenotypical
11 features (skin colour especially); classifying people as men or
12 women is also considered normal given individuals can be
13 classified as female or male depending on the basis of their sexual
14 organs. Yet social scientists have sought to expose such acts of
15 naming as problematic in a number of regards, not least when
16 people are expected to act in particular ways according to these
17 biologically- sutured designations. Moreover, even the act of
18 classifying on the basis of people's physicality is fraught with
19 difficulty. In relation to gender, for example, there is an ever
20 expanding lexicon required to describe those who do not fall neatly
21 into male/female distinctions, with transgender and intersexed
22 individuals showing that the world does not neatly divide into
23 male/female (or black/white, young/old, able-bodied/disabled etc)
24 (Hemmings, 2002).

25

26 These ideas of social construction are highly relevant in the field of
27 sexuality studies (Vance, 1995). Indeed, ideas about sexuality
28 often draw sustenance from the biological 'fact' of someone's
29 anatomical gender. Women, it is assumed, are normally sexually

1 attracted to men, and vice versa, with procreation and bringing up
2 children seen as fulfilling outcome of 'sexual congress'. The
3 seemingly indisputable fact of reproduction – an egg meeting a
4 sperm – supports the idea that this is the natural (and perhaps
5 'god-given') order of things, and that other sexual possibilities are
6 simply aberrations. This idea hence infuses society, being
7 maintained by sex education in schools, bolstered by social policy
8 and romanticised in popular media, films and pop songs.

9

10 There is hence an important tradition in sexuality studies of
11 exploring the discursive and institutional conditions that encourage
12 certain biological differences to become the salient characteristics
13 of sex. It is here that 'queer' critiques come into their own, drawing
14 on post-structural theorists such as Michel Foucault, Jaques
15 Derrida, Giles Deleuze and Luce Irigaray to show that
16 heterosexuality is a regulatory fiction (i.e. an effect of discourse)
17 and the outcome of many representations and knowledges. In the
18 work of Jeffrey Weeks (1989), for example, heterosexuality was
19 exposed as a social practice invented – and subsequently
20 normalized – through the work of health practitioners, therapists,
21 social workers, educationalists and those who claim to be 'sex
22 experts'. Particularly important, perhaps, are those pioneering
23 sexologists who named homosexuality and heterosexuality as
24 distinctive categories of sexual belonging, with the distinguished
25 sexologist Krafft-Ebing, for example, arguing that men possessed
26 both homosexual and heterosexual instinct, and that a man's final
27 sexual preference was determined by the strongest gendered,
28 sexual feeling. Seduction by members of the same-sex was
29 identified as a catalyst to 'permanent homosexuality' with those

1 men 'unable to control their passions' being 'sucked into an abyss
2 of base, undifferentiated sexuality and drowned in a sea of bestial
3 pleasures' (Krafft-Ebing, 1892 in Brickell, 2006, 431).

4
5 Most commentators interested in histories of sexuality have
6 focused on the diagnosis and subsequent classification of
7 homosexuality as pathology, perversion or, more benignly, cultural
8 choice. A key argument here is that although sexual acts involving
9 those of the same sex have been evident in all societies since time
10 immemorial, categories of sexual belonging are a more recent
11 'discovery' or, as social constructivists would insist, 'invention'.

12 Accepting that the classification of people as homosexual or
13 heterosexual (or straight/gay, man/women etc) is a social invention
14 is important in the context of struggles for gay, lesbian and
15 transgender rights because it implies these categories can be
16 *reinvented*. Yet despite multiple attempts to destabilize these
17 sexual categories, it appears that homosexuality remains
18 understood in relation to heterosexuality, with homosexuality
19 deemed Other to a heterosexuality widely represented as normal,
20 healthy and fulfilling.

21
22 In this sense, *heteronormativity* is a term that captures the
23 imposition of certain beliefs about sexuality through social
24 institutions and social policies. These ideas concern a 'normative
25 heterosexuality' in which it is assumed individuals' sexual identities
26 conform to a social norm of heterosexual love, sex and
27 reproduction. Far from being one sexual choice among many, this
28 stresses that heterosexuality is culturally hegemonic, with the
29 reproduction of a heterosexual/homosexual binary an important

1 structuring device subordinating the homosexual at the same time
2 that it institutionalises the heteronormal (Weeks, 2007). Politicians
3 accordingly extol the virtues of the (heterosexual) nuclear family
4 and support it with a range of income tax and other measures,
5 while they often decry recognition of same-sex relationships:
6 'heterosexual relationships are legitimately public, and deserving
7 of recognition; same-sex relationships are not' (Johnson, 2002,
8 325).

9
10 Geographers have intervened in these debates in a number of
11 ways, demonstrating that assumptions about normal sexuality are
12 spatially produced and maintained, diffusing from particular sites of
13 knowledge/power (e.g. parliament, the high court, hospitals,
14 schools, clinics) to encompass the social body with varying
15 degrees of success (Mort and Nead, 2003; Rand, 2003). Particular
16 sites of sex education have been explored by geographers in
17 terms of their role in encouraging particular forms of sexual
18 comportment (Thomas, 2004), while the home has been theorized
19 as a site where sexual norms may be regulated through forms of
20 self-governance as well as parental control (Hockey, 2004). Those
21 'sexual Others' who do not conform to the expectations inscribed
22 in such spaces may feel 'out of place', and experience a range of
23 emotional conflicts that require management and a duplicitous
24 'presentation of self'.

25
26 Yet it is the wider spatial consequences of this Othering that have
27 most interested geographers, with the stigmatization (and even
28 criminalization) of homosexuality seen to encourage a furtive use
29 of space among non-heterosexuals, who may deny their sexuality

1 except when in closeted or safe spaces. Spaces where men can
2 meet other men for sex, in view of one another but away from the
3 gaze of the state, law and disapproving heterosexual populations,
4 have hence been identified, with significant literatures emerging on
5 cottaging (Houlbrook, 2000), cruising (Turner, 2005) and public
6 sex environments, both urban (Binnie, 2001; Brown, 2004) and
7 rural (Bell, 2006). Knopp (2007, 23) hence conceptualises the
8 'sexual experiences of queers' as an integral part of the transitory
9 spaces they inhabit: '[s]ocial and sexual encounters with other
10 queers can feel safer in such contexts – on the move, passing
11 through, inhabiting a space for a short amount of time - and a
12 certain erotic (or just social) solidarity can, ironically, emerge from
13 the transient and semi-anonymous nature of such experiences'.
14 This said, much of the literature has focused on the lives of gay
15 men, but there is also an emerging literature on the social and
16 sexual spaces of lesbian women (Valentine, 1993, Browne, 2004;
17 2007; Nash and Bain, 2007, Muller, 2007) as well as bisexuals
18 (Hemmings, 2002) that picks up themes of spatial transgression
19 and transformation.

20
21 The idea that gay, lesbian and other non-heterosexual individuals
22 adopt 'passing' strategies when in public space has been duly
23 noted (Johnson, 2001), albeit that such individuals may use certain
24 ways of dressing and looking (e.g. the 'backward glance') to signal
25 their sexuality to the initiated (Turner, 2003). The development of
26 gay venues, initially discrete but increasingly visible and
27 commercial, has also been mapped by geographers (Knopp and
28 Brown, 2006), the formation of 'gay villages' occurring as a critical
29 mass of venues emerges (Bassi, 2006).

1

2 The unspoken assumption in much of the work on non-
3 heterosexual identities is that everyday ('normal') space is
4 perceived, occupied and represented as heterosexual.
5 Homophobia and prejudice is seen to occur in such spaces
6 (Kitchin and Lysaght, 2003); conversely, the creation of
7 increasingly visible gay spaces is regarded as something of a
8 victory on the road to full citizenship rights. The overall significance
9 of such spaces remains debatable, however, with interesting work
10 having been published considering the way such sites are
11 incorporated into heterosexual leisure and entertainment rituals,
12 considering what happens when 'straights' enter gay space
13 (Casey, 2004, Moran et al, 2002). Moreover, the commodification
14 of such gay spaces (and overt attempts to attract the 'pink pound')
15 have attracted a number of critical queer commentaries given it is
16 a particular (and arguably sanitised) version of gay male desire
17 that is inscribed in the landscape (Binnie, 2001; Nast, 2002, Baasi,
18 2006). What is significant about such critiques is that they alert us
19 to the existence of multiple identities and subjectivities, and stress
20 that there is not one gay community, or even one queer
21 movement, but many.

22

23

24 **Other heterosexualities**

25

26 With the goal of promoting gay and lesbian rights, those working
27 with queer theory have often railed against the heteronormativity
28 that infuses society. Yet some geographers (e.g. Hubbard, 2000,

1 Binnie, 2007) have begun to question the usefulness of the
2 heteronormative as a concept, suggesting that it forces a variety of
3 subject positions and practices into simplistic categories of
4 belonging:

5
6 The reservations about focusing excessively on dualistic
7 thinking...imply that it may be particularly important to
8 encourage non-heteronormative constructions of heterosexual
9 identity, rather than seeing heterosexual identity categories as
10 inevitably producing their 'other', namely, subordinated lesbian
11 and gay identities and vice versa. Non-heteronormative
12 heterosexuality would be based on not privileging
13 heterosexual identity over other categories such as gay,
14 lesbian or transgendered identity (Johnson, 2002, 301).

15
16 There is an important sense here in which some queer theorists
17 are beginning to assert the importance of queering
18 heteronormality, exposing this not just as a regulatory fiction that
19 represses non-heterosexuals, but as one that imposes a *particular*
20 heterosexual norm that also marginalises many heterosexual
21 identities and practices (see Katz, 1995; Richardson, 1996, 2004,
22 2005; Jackson, 1999). Despite the focus on questions of sexual
23 politics, this is not a particularly new argument, as feminist writings
24 at least as far back as the work of Rich (1980) have argued that
25 compulsory heterosexuality imposes forms of gender identification
26 that ostracise those heterosexual women who do not conform to
27 an ideal of femininity (see also Domosh, 1999, on the 'sexing' of
28 feminist geography). Literatures on the regulation of immoral or
29 'perverse' heterosexualities make this clear, whether these focus

1 on the historical regulation of single mothers, premarital sex or the
2 selling of sexual services (Bland, 1995). In contrast, less has been
3 said about the ways that dominant heterosexualities have
4 marginalised particular masculine identities and practices, though
5 the way that moral panics are whipped up around figures including
6 bigamists, perpetrators of domestic violence, errant fathers,
7 paedophiles (always it seems, male) and sex tourists suggests
8 dominant notions of heterosex cannot accommodate many
9 expressions of male desire (see Pheonix and Orton, 2005).

10
11 There is clearly a strong case for opening up the 'black box' of
12 heterosexuality to explore the many possible articulations of
13 heterosexual desire that are included or excluded within a
14 dominant construction of heteronormality. Considering the
15 emergence of 'panic figures' and the measures used to regulate
16 excessive, perverse or immoral forms of heterosex is therefore one
17 possible route into mapping the geographies of heterosexuality
18 (Hubbard, 2000). Literatures on prostitution in particular help to
19 clarify how heteronormativity is reproduced spatially through the
20 exclusion and containment of commercial sex work away from
21 'family spaces' (the subtext here being that prostitution and
22 pornography threatens to *seduce* the innocent into immoral sexual
23 practices). Overt policies of zoning and licensing hence exclude
24 brothels, lap dancing clubs and sex shops from the proximity of
25 educational establishments (Papayanis, 2000; Hubbard et al
26 2007), as well as, it seems, spaces associated with more
27 respectable femininities (Tani, 2002). Yet the sexual double
28 standards evident here (i.e. male sexual promiscuity is normal, but
29 in women it is a sign of disrepute) intersect with notions of class in

1 complex ways, with 'high-class hookers' imagined to occupy
2 different social worlds than the 'lower class streetwalkers'.
3 Moreover, Bott's (2006) engaging study of women employed as
4 lap-dancers in Tenerife shows that many took up this form of
5 employment to seek respectability (i.e. dissociating themselves
6 from pathologized version of working class femininity). Crucial in
7 this case was the idea that working in the 'respectable' adult
8 entertainment sector distanced workers from the 'dirt' associated
9 with prostitution

10

11 This implies that the moral contours of commercial sex are
12 constantly shifting. Once largely confined to derelict and somewhat
13 marginal urban sites, male-oriented 'girlie shows' are being
14 reinvented as adult cabaret, and taking their place within the
15 mainstream night-time economy of the Western city (Hubbard et
16 al, 2007). Visitors to sex shows, so long stigmatised as inadequate
17 and even *failed* men (the 'dirty mac' brigade), are now taken to
18 include respectable business travellers, with sites of commercial
19 sexuality seen to be significant sites of corporate entertainment
20 which welcome both women and men (Holgersson and Svanstrom,
21 2007). This implies a shift in the consumption and production of
22 commercial sexuality that has been accompanied by changing
23 notions of appropriate sexual comportment, described variously as
24 the mainstreaming of 'porno chic' or striptopia (McNair, 2002).
25 Readers of pornographic magazines were once regarded as
26 socially deviant: now, the codes and conventions of porn 'become
27 indicators of a sophisticated late-modern sexual sensibility'
28 (McNair, 2002, 77).

29

1 Attwood (2005) accordingly explores the emergence of new forms
2 of heterosexuality by charting the changing forms of masculinity
3 represented in British men's lifestyle magazines, and looks at the
4 way in which sexual prowess is scripted as a key component
5 within contemporary masculine identities. Attwood (2005) argues
6 that the migration of soft porn out of sex shops and into readily
7 available magazines (e.g. *Nuts*, *Zoo*, *Loaded*, *FHM*) is symbolic of
8 a form of modern sexuality that emerged in the 1990s: the 'new
9 laddism'. Unlike some versions of masculinity to the fore in the
10 1980s, particularly the idea of the 'new man' or househusband in
11 touch with his 'feminine' side (Aish, 2001), such representations
12 suggest that it is normal for men to go for nights out with 'the boys'
13 in which excessive consumption of alcohol, forms of competitive
14 homosociality and sexual predation go hand in hand. Though such
15 representations exist in tension with more upmarket
16 representations of masculinity in which style and narcissism are
17 given more importance, Attwood argues they signal a return to a
18 'libidinous heterosexuality' that must be understood as a reaction
19 to the 'narcissism, sexual puritanism, asexuality and inauthenticity
20 associated with the new man, political correctness, feminism, HIV
21 and AIDS' (see also Jackson et al, 2001).

22

23 In many ways, these images and stories of male sexual prowess
24 inform the rituals of consumption and leisure played out in British
25 city centres every weekend, with alcohol-fuelled and testosterone-
26 pumped men performing assertive and often aggressive
27 masculinities when 'out of the town'. Notably, some towns and
28 cities appear to accommodate such sexualised rituals more

1 comfortably than others: for example, Nayak (2006, 6) notes
2 Newcastle's role as a '[p]arty city: a site for excessive drinking and
3 wild stag and hen nights.' Indeed, cities including Newcastle,
4 Nottingham and Leeds have joined traditional seaside resorts
5 (Blackpool, Brighton, Bournemouth) as centres of a stag and hen
6 tourist market worth over £500 million to the UK annually (Morgan
7 Stanley, 2005). Visits to sites of adult entertainment are customary
8 in such celebrations, which constitute a celebration of the carnal:
9 sex toys are openly paraded, bodies are exposed, cross-dressing
10 is *de riguer*. Reactions are decidedly mixed: tourist authorities
11 have sometimes claimed to be concerned about the presence of
12 large groups of disorderly men on the streets, suggesting that such
13 groups stigmatise resorts and put off family consumers (e.g. 'Stag
14 parties ruin Blackpool trade', *BBC News* 24 July 2003; 'Capital
15 crackdown on stag and hen parties is on the cards *The Scotsman*,
16 25 March 2004).

17

18 Whether one regards these events/celebrations as harmless fun
19 or, conversely, as profoundly antisocial, it must be conceded that
20 such displays are fairly 'normal' (Grazian, 2007). What is also
21 evident is that the new lad has found his counterpart in the
22 'ladette', a label connoting women who are 'boisterously assertive',
23 'sexually aggressive' and drink 'like a man' (Skeggs, 2005;
24 Jackson, 2006). Something of a panic figure for the media (and
25 often woven into accounts of job culture in binge-drinking Britain),
26 the ladette's existence is suggestive of shifts in expectations of
27 feminine sexual comportment. It is very easy, perhaps, to suggest
28 that the 'new lad' signals a return to the 'bad old days' in which
29 sexism and misogyny were rife, and to label ladettes as traitors to

1 the feminist cause. Against this, some commentators regard the
2 ladette as having seized phallic power back from men (McRobbie,
3 2006), creating a new heterosexual 'playing field' in which men
4 and women play to the same rules. It is thus possible to read the
5 'lad's mags' that some regard as sexually regressive as
6 symbolising this new equivalence. Attwood (2005) argues that
7 within the magazines, the (usually scantily clad) female body is
8 displayed to induce male sexual pleasure, but that women are
9 elevated within the magazines to a position equal to that of the
10 male reader. Unlike the well-rehearsed feminist argument of the
11 exploitation of the female body for male pleasure through 'the
12 gaze', Attwood (2005) maintains that there is 'a rough kind of
13 equivalence in the way that sex is narrated here. ... Both crave
14 sex; both are active, hot, wet, eager for more, eager for the
15 same...'. Likewise, many of the academic interpretations of the
16 HBO series *Sex and the City* suggest that images of sexually
17 assertive women in the media reflect changing expectations of
18 how (and where) women express their sexuality.

19

20 In recounting such arguments it is important to remember that
21 there are others who regard the presence of sexualised images of
22 women in the public realm as offensive and intimidating,
23 perpetuating ideas that women are always 'on display' as sexual
24 objects (Rosewarne, 2005). There is of course a rich vein of urban
25 writing which considers the historical role of the city as a site of
26 spectacle, visual pleasure, and (male) voyeurism: as early as the
27 1800's a series of publications were produced for urban
28 'ramblers' in pursuit of pleasure in many forms (Rendell, 2000).
29 The magazines produced during this time - such as *The Rambler's*

1 *Magazine* - invoked real and imagined sexual pleasures of the city,
2 and also published explicit details of where sex workers could be
3 found (Rendell, 2000). In a wider sense, they reflected the fact that
4 consumption in cities (so often imagined to be 'women's work) also
5 concerned men's consumption of *women*.

6

7 Women are exchanged, both socially and symbolically, as
8 commodities with use values (sex and/or child-bearing and
9 rearing) and exchange values (signifiers of male worth
10 in terms of property and commodities)...men organise and
11 display their activities of exchange and consumption, including
12 the desiring, choosing, purchasing and consuming of female
13 commodities, for others to look at in public space (Rendell,
14 2002, 19)

15

16 What many accounts of flaneurialism also highlight is that the 'man
17 about town' not only took pleasure in gazing on women, but also
18 took narcissistic pleasure in being seen. To invoke a more
19 contemporary idiom, we might identify the eighteenth and
20 nineteenth century flaneur as the forerunner of the 'metrosexual', a
21 bicurious male consumer said to 'endorse equal opportunity vanity
22 through cosmetics, softness, hair care products, wine bars, gyms,
23 designer fashion, wealth, the culture industries, finance, cities,
24 cosmetic surgery, David Beckham, and deodorants' (Clarkson,
25 2005, 35). A decidedly post-industrial masculine identity, the
26 metrosexual may be as much as a media invention as the lad or
27 ladette, but is none the less real for all that. Indeed, the
28 identification of a 'feminized male' who blurs the visual style of
29 straight and gay in a restless search 'to spend, shop and deep-

1 condition' poses interesting questions about the ability of the post-
2 industrial, post-Fordist city to foster new masculinities based on an
3 ambivalent relationship to traditional heterosexualities in which
4 men were 'strong and silent' (Craine and Aitken, 2004,
5 Rasmussen, 2006, Sender, 2006).

6

7 Working through these debates, it seems that the identities and
8 spaces which can be accommodated within normative
9 heterosexuality are currently and constantly changing..This
10 suggests that heteronormativity is not a monolithic or unbending
11 structure, but a concept that shifts to encompass different
12 masculine and feminine performances over time. It is perhaps
13 useful here to invoke Butler's notion of a 'heterosexual matrix' to
14 make conceptual sense of what she describes as the 'self-
15 supporting signifying economy that wields power in the marking off
16 of what can and cannot be thought within the terms of cultural
17 intelligibility' (Butler, 2000, 99-100). In her writing, the heterosexual
18 matrix is described as a distinctly 'masculine sexual economy' in
19 which gender categories support 'gender hierarchy and
20 compulsory heterosexuality' (Butler, 2000, xxviii). This
21 heterosexual matrix enables certain identifications, foreclosing and
22 disavowing others, with 'the repeated stylization of the body'
23 congealing over time to produce 'the appearance of substance, a
24 natural sort of being'. To put this more simply, by repeatedly
25 conforming to ideas as to how men or women are supposed to
26 dress, talk and behave, we naturalise the idea that certain
27 heterosexual identities are normal. Butler's ideas also allow for the
28 possibility of resistance from the dominant forms of sexual
29 performance suggesting that if they repeatedly subvert, parody or

1 challenge these norms, dominant 'scripts' might change.

2

3

4 **Heterosex in unsexy spaces**

5

6 So far, it has been suggested that the study of sexuality and space
7 needs to encompass the spaces of heterosexuality as well as
8 those associated with non-heterosexual and homosexual
9 practices. Yet when talking of the spaces of heterosexuality it is
10 tempting to refer primarily to those spaces of leisure, consumption
11 and nightlife which are overtly sexualised through the rituals of
12 encounter, negotiation and, sometimes, sex itself. Sex shops, red
13 light areas, nightclubs or pubs are all places which we would
14 expect to be studied in relation to theories of sexuality, not least
15 because these are sites which act as foci in debates about
16 sexuality morality. However, Phillips (2006) argues that the
17 construction of hegemonic sexualities occurs not only at points of
18 contestation, but also at quiet, unobtrusive points in everyday
19 practice. Phillips takes the example of railway stations and
20 maritime ports as points of passage, showing that, in the
21 nineteenth century, unaccompanied women passing through such
22 'unsexy' sites were regarded as at risk, and in need of
23 chaperoning. Guides for the woman traveler advised as to the
24 potential dangers of foreign lands, while certain ways of dressing
25 were discouraged (see also Gerodetii and Bieri, 2006). One can
26 see echoes of this in contemporary travel guides that offer
27 distinctive advice for women travelers replete with assumptions
28 about women's sexuality. And it isn't just when traveling abroad

1 when women are given advice on how to dress and act: Boyer's
2 (1996; 2003) reflections on women's incorporation in the
3 masculine worlds of work suggests that notions of appropriate
4 heterosexuality also infuse workspaces (see also Longhurst, 2001,
5 on the working body and Tyler and Cohen, 2007, on gendered
6 office politics).

7

8 These examples show that ideas of appropriate heterosexual
9 conduct are constructed in all manner of sites, and not just those
10 represented as 'sexual' (Nast, 1998). This point has also been
11 made in literatures concerning rural sexualities. Though the
12 countryside is often imagined as a site of sexual stability and
13 heteronormativity, away from the sites of sexual experimentation
14 and adult entertainment characteristic of many cities, some have
15 argued that its sexual geographies are a good deal more complex.
16 Various a haven for gay and lesbian individuals (Phillips et al,
17 2001), an imagined sexual arcadia (Cook, 2003) potential site of
18 zoophilia (Campbell et al, 2006), and public sex environment (Bell,
19 2006), these diverse sexualities are often subsumed within
20 representations of masculinity and femininity based on more
21 traditional notions of male activity and female passivity (Hughes,
22 1997). In the work of Jo Little, this taken-for-granted 'conventional
23 rural heterosexuality' has been theorized as the outcome of any
24 number of social 'projects' that direct the forms of sexual relations
25 entered into by men and women in the rural. For example, Little's
26 (2003) analysis of rural 'bachelor's balls' and attempts to find
27 (female) partners for male farmers (in the TV series *The Farmer
28 Wants a Wife*) suggests that many rural farmers assess potential
29 sexual partners in terms of their ability to help nurture the 'family'

1 farm, separating ‘city girls’ from ‘country girls’. As she concludes:

2

3 Inscribed in both campaigns, then, were strong beliefs about
4 the association between farming, rural survival, the family
5 and the sorts of women required and, critically, seen as
6 suitable for farming/rural lives. Being interested in a serious
7 relationship, family relationship and permanence, was, it
8 seemed associated with qualities such as being level-headed
9 and down to earth (Little, 2003, 410)

10

11 The strong association made between conventional masculinities,
12 femininities and ruralities in this instance suggests parallels can b
13 drawn between the preservation of rural life and the continuation of
14 normal heterosexual identities (Little 2003, 415). Even when the
15 rural body is presented as an object of desire – as in the Women’s
16 Institute nude calendar that inspired the film *Calendar Girls* – It is
17 often represented as engaged in rural pursuits such as jam-
18 making, flower arranging or baking: though not supposed to be
19 taken too seriously, the sexualised representation of a ‘homely’
20 body is in marked contrast of more conventional tropes in glamour
21 photography.

22

23 Notions of ‘nature’ and ‘the natural body’ are clearly in play here,
24 with iterative performances folding nature and heterosexuality back
25 into one another (Little and Paneill, 2007, 187), creating ideas of a
26 rural sexuality that, if not morally superior to that found in the
27 urban, is often deemed to be part of the ‘natural order’. Such ideas
28 about the connections between heterosexuality and nature are

1 also explored in Johnston's (2006) account of wedding tourism in
2 New Zealand. Like stag and hen do's, wedding celebrations are
3 crucial public performances of heterosexuality, with subsequent
4 honeymoons also 'powerful markers of a couple's normality,
5 morality, productivity and appropriate gendered subjectivities'
6 (Johnston 2006, 192). As she writes, when the bride and groom
7 are gathered together into an 'exotic' down-under 'primitive' locale,
8 heterosexuality is enfolded into nature, and nature into
9 heterosexuality; 'the destination wedding entwines sexuality with a
10 sensory appreciation of landscape'. The representation of New
11 Zealand as one of the world's premier nature spaces is especially
12 significant in romanticizing the wedding as well as nature: as such,
13 heterosexuality is made to appear as natural and timeless as the
14 landscape in which it is celebrated.

15
16 Studies such as these point to an increasing interest in the role of
17 place in reproducing normative heterosexualities (as well as
18 excluding non-normative heterosexualities). But – as Johnston
19 (2006, 206) notes - it is impossible to talk of heterosexual spaces
20 per se, with such spaces being constituted through *practice*. This
21 suggests that labelling certain spaces (e.g. the suburbs, the rural,
22 exotic resorts) as paradigmatic spaces of heterosexuality is
23 problematic: rather than theorising such spaces as heteronormal,
24 geographers need to explore the heterosexual acts and rituals that
25 give these the appearance of being heteronormal. After all, all
26 manner of sexual practices are possible in different spaces. And,
27 in any case, to speak of people being either heterosexual or
28 homosexual is, as we have seen, highly problematic. Research on

1 men who sell sex to men, for example, shows that men who
2 identify as heterosexual may sell sexual services to other men
3 (Aggleton, 1996). One could label these individuals as bisexual;
4 however, it is perhaps better to think of sexuality as immanent,
5 defined in the moment, and never easily classified (Conlon, 2004).
6 Indeed, our sexual identities are made up of different encounters
7 and relations which, taken together, constitute our sex life. For
8 most of us, this rarely amounts to a consistent story, and our sex
9 lives are seldom predictable. Hence, even if some of us feel able
10 to identify as straight or gay, which of us can really claim to be
11 'normal'?

12

13

14 **Conclusion**

15

16 Sexuality studies appear to be firmly on the curriculum of twenty
17 first century human geography. But rather than circling endlessly
18 around the same debates concerning gay ghettos and the spatial
19 expressions of homophobia, current interventions offer a wide
20 purview of sexual geographies. Both heteronormative and
21 homonormative assumptions about space are now routinely
22 brought into question, with studies exploring how the identification
23 of spaces as nominally 'straight' or 'gay' creates exclusions not just
24 along lines of sexuality, but also class, age and ethnicity (Nast,
25 2002; Baasi, 2006; Browne et al, 2007). Yet, as this review has
26 suggested, there remains much that could – and should – be said
27 about the geographies of heterosexuality. Studies of both 'sexy'

1 and 'unsexy' spaces reveal heterosexuality as a fractured and
2 complex set of practices, albeit with certain performances of
3 masculinity and femininity being deemed normal.

4

5 In this article I have argued that constantly shifting ideas of what is
6 sexually 'normal' are mapped onto, and out, of spaces whose
7 production demands further study. Some of these spaces appear
8 distinctly 'unsexy' at first glance, while others are sites firmly
9 associated with the sensual, the sexual and the erotic. But in either
10 case, it is clear that sex itself should not be ignored, no matter how
11 troubling the relationship between erotics, the body and sexuality
12 might be for geographers (Binnie, 2007). Rather than attempting to
13 map where different sexual communities and identities belong,
14 therefore, the challenge ahead is to consider how sexuality is
15 performed and practised, spatially.

16

17

1 **References**

2

3 **Aggleton P** (ed.) (1996) *Men Who sell sex: International*
4 *perspectives on male prostitution and HIV/AIDS* Philadelphia,
5 Temple University Press.

6 **Aish A** 2001 Househusbands: the socio-spatial construction of
7 male gender identity, in Limb, M. and C. Dwyer (eds) *Qualitative*
8 *Methodologies for Geographers: issues and debates*, London:
9 Arnold, 285-287.

10 **Attwood F** 2005 'Tits and arse and fighting' Male heterosexuality
11 in magazines for men *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8
12 83-100.

13 **Bain A** and **Nash C** (2007) The Toronto Women's Bathhouse
14 Raid: Querying Queer Identities in the Courtroom *Antipode* 39 17-
15 34

16 **Bassi C** 2006 Riding the dialectical wares of gay political
17 economy: a story from Birmingham's commercial gay scene.
18 *Antipode* 38 213-35.

19 **Bell D** 2006 Bodies, technologies, spaces: on dogging *Sexualities*
20 9 387-407.

21 **Bell D** and **Valentine G** 1995 *Mapping desire: geographies of*
22 *sexualities* Routledge, London.

23 **Bell D** and **Valentine G** 1996 Queer country: rural lesbian and gay
24 lives *Journal of Rural Studies* 11 113-122.

25 **Bell D, Binnie J, Cream J** and **Valentine G** 1994 All hyped up
26 and no place to go. *Gender, Place and Culture* 1 31-47.

27 **Berg, L.D.** and **Longhurst, R** 2003 Placing masculinities and
28 Geography *Gender, Place and Culture* 10 351-360

29 **Bernstein E** 2004 Desire, demand and the commerce in sex, in E
30 Bernstein and Shaffner, L. (eds) *Regulating Sex: The Regulation*
31 *of Intimacy and Identity* Routledge, New York, 101-128.

32 **Binnie J** 2001 The erotic possibilities of the city In Bell, D. Binnie,
33 J. Holiday, R. Longhurst, R. and Peace, R. (Eds.) *Bodies, Cities,*
34 *spaces, Pleasure Zones* New York, Syracuse 73-119

35 **Binnie J** 2007 Sexuality, the erotic and geography in **Browne K,**
36 **Lim J** and **Brown G** (eds) 2007, *Geographies of sexualities:*
37 *theory practices and politics* Ashgate, Aldershot, 29-38.

- 1 **Bland L** 1995 *Banishing the beast: English feminism and sexual*
2 *morality, 1885–1914* London, Penguin Books.
- 3 **Bott E** 2006 Pole position: migrant women producing Selves
4 through lap-dancing work *Feminist Review* 83, 23-41
- 5 **Boyer K** 1996 What's a girl like you doing in a place like this? A
6 geography of sexual violence in early twentieth century Vancouver.
7 *Urban Geography* 17 286-293.
- 8 **Boyer L** 2003 Neither Forget Nor Remember Your Sex': Sexual
9 Politics in the Early Twentieth-Century Canadian Office *The*
10 *Journal of Historical Geography* 29 203-230.
- 11 **Brickell C** 2006 Sexology, the homo/hetero binary, and the
12 complexities of male sexual history *Sexualities* 9 423-447.
- 13 **Brown G** 2004 Sites of public homosex, in Lees L (ed) *The*
14 *Emancipatory City* London, Sage, 91-107.
- 15 **Brown M** and **Knopp L** 2003 We're here! We're queer! We're over
16 there, too! Queer Cultural Geographies, in Anderson K, Domosh
17 M, Pile S and Thrift N (eds) *Handbook of Cultural Geography*
18 Sage, London
- 19 **Browne K** 2004 Genderism and the bathroom problem:
20 rematerialising sexed sites, recreating sexed bodies *Gender,*
21 *Place, Culture* 11 331-346
- 22 **Browne K** 2007 (Re)making the Other: heterosexualising
23 everyday space *Environment and Planning A* 39 996-1014
- 24 **Browne K, Lim J** and **Brown G** (eds) 2007, *Geographies of*
25 *sexualities: theory practices and politics* Ashgate, Aldershot.
- 26 **Butler J** 2000 *Gender trouble* London, Routledge
- 27 **Campbell H, Mayfield Bell M** and **Finney M** 2006 *Country boys:*
28 *masculinity and rural life* Penn State Press.
- 29 **Casey M** 2004 De-dyking Queer Space(s): Heterosexual Female
30 Visibility in Gay and Lesbian Spaces *Sexualities* 7 446-461.
- 31 **Clarkson J** 2005 Contesting masculinity's makeover: *Queer Eye,*
32 consumer masculinity and 'straight-acting' guys *Journal of*
33 *Communication Inquiry* 29 235-255
- 34 **Conlon D** 2004 Park Productive Bodies, Performative Spaces:
35 Everyday Life in Christopher *Sexualities* 7 462-473
- 36 **Cook M** 2003 *London and the culture of homosexuality 1885-1914*
37 Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

- 1 **Cowen D** 2003 From the American lebensraum to the American
2 living room: class, sexuality, and the scaled production of
3 'domestic' intimacy *Environment and Planning D - Society and*
4 *Space* 22 755 – 771.
- 5 **Craine J and Aitken S** 2004 Street fighting: placing the crisis of
6 masculinity in David Fincher's *Fight Club* *Geojournal* 59 289-296.
- 7 **Domosh M** 1999 Sexing feminist geography *Progress in Human*
8 *Geography* 23 429–37.
- 9 **Gerodetti N and Bieri S** 2006 (Female hetero)sexualities in
10 transition *Feminist Theory* 7 69-87.
- 11 **Grazian D** 2007 The Girl Hunt: Urban Nightlife and the
12 Performance of Masculinity as Collective Activity Symbolic
13 Interaction 30 221-243
- 14 **Hemmings C** 2002 *Bisexual spaces: a geography of sexuality and*
15 *gender* Routledge, London.
- 16 **Holgersson. C and Svanstrom, Y.** 2007 Sexual entertainment as
17 corporate entertainment *Gender, Work and Organisation*
18 forthcoming.
- 19 **Houlbrook M** 2000 The Private World of Public Urinals: London
20 1918-57 *London Journal* 25, 43-60.
- 21 **Hubbard P** 2000 Desire/disgust: mapping the moral contours of
22 heterosexuality *Progress in Human Geography* 24 191-217
- 23 **Hubbard P** 2004 Revenge and injustice in the revanchist city:
24 uncovering masculinist agendas *Antipode* 36 665-686.
- 25 **Hubbard P, Matthews R, Scoular J and Agustin L** forthcoming
26 Men behaving badly? Exploring the gendered geographies of
27 'adult entertainment' *Progress in Human Geography*
- 28 **Hughes A** 1997 Rurality and cultures of womanhood: domestic
29 identities and moral order in village life. In P. Cloke, editor,
30 *Contested countryside cultures*. London, Routledge, 123-137.
- 31 **Jackson C** 2006 'Wild' girls? An exploration of 'ladette'
32 cultures in secondary schools *Gender and Education* 18 339 – 360
- 33 **Jackson P, Stevenson N and Brooks K** 2001 *Making Sense of*
34 *Men's Magazines* Oxford, Polity.
- 35 **Jackson S** 1999 *Heterosexuality in Question* London, Sage.
- 36 **Johnson C** 2002 Heteronormal citizenship and the politics of
37 passing *Sexualities* 5 317-331.

- 1 **Johnston L** 2006 I do down under: naturalising landscapes and
2 love through wedding tourism in New Zealand *Acme* 5 191-208.
- 3 **Katz J N** 1995 The invention of heterosexuality Chicago,
4 University of Chicago Press.
- 5 **Kawale R** 2004 Inequalities of the heart: the performance of
6 emotion work by lesbian and bisexual women in London, England
7 *Social and Cultural Geographies* 5 565-581.
- 8 **Kitchin R** and **Lysaght K** 2003 Heterosexism and the
9 geographies of everyday life in Belfast, Northern
10 Ireland *Environment and Planning A* 35 489 – 510
- 11 **Knopp L** 1995 Sexuality and urban space: a framework for
12 analysis. In D. Bell and G. Valentine, editors, *Mapping desire:
13 geographies of sexualities*, London, Routledge, 149-162.
- 14 **Knopp L** 2007 From lesbian to gay to queer geographies: Pasts,
15 prospects and possibilities. In Brown, G. Lim, J. And Browne, K.
16 (Eds.) *Geographies of sexualities: Theory practices and politics*
17 Chichester, Ashgate.
- 18 **Knopp L** and **Brown M** 2006 Places or Polygons:
19 Governmentality, Scale, and the Census in The Gay and Lesbian
20 Atlas *Population, Space & Place*, 12, 211-222.
- 21 **Lauria M** and **Knopp L** 1985 Towards an analysis of the role of
22 gay communities in the urban renaissance *Urban Geography* 6
23 152-169.
- 24 **Little J** 2002 Rural geography: rural gender identity and the
25 performance of masculinity and femininity in the countryside'
26 *Progress in Human Geography* 26 665-670
- 27 **Little J** 2004 Riding the rural love train *Sociologica Ruralis* 43
28 400-417
- 29 **Little J** and **Panelli R** 2007 Outback romance? A reading of
30 nature and heterosexuality in rural Australia *Sociologia Ruralis* 47
31 173-188.
- 32 **Longhurst R** 2001 *Bodies* Routledge, London.
- 33 **McNair B** 2002 *Striptease Culture: Sex, Media and the
34 Democratisation of Desire* Routledge, London.
- 35 **McRobbie A** 2006 *Cultural studies in question* London, Sage.
- 36 **Mintel Reports** 2003 *Stag and hen holidays UK* London, Mintel.
- 37 **Moran L, Skeggs B, Tyrer P** and **Corteen K** 2001 Property,

1 boundary, exclusion: making sense of heteroviolence in safer
2 spaces *Social and Cultural Geography* 2 407-416.

3 **Mort F** and **Nead L** 2003 Introduction – sexual geographies *New*
4 *Formations* 37 1-19.

5 **Muller T** 2007 Performing community: lesbian community in
6 WNBA spaces *Social and Cultural Geography*

7 **Nast H J** 1998 Unsexy geographies *Gender, Place and Culture* 5,
8 191-206.

9 **Nast H J** 2002 Queer patriarchies, queer racisms, international.
10 *Antipode* 34 874-904.

11 **Nayak A** 2006 Displaced Masculinities: Chavs, youth and class in
12 the Post-industrial city *Sociology* 40 813-831

13 **Oswin N** 2005 Towards radical geographies of complicit queer
14 futures *ACME* 79-86

15 **Papayanis M** 2000 Sex and the revanchist city: zoning out
16 pornography in New York. *Environment and Planning D - Society*
17 *and Space* 18 341-354.

18 **Phillips R** 2006 Unsexy geographies: heterosexuality
19 respectability and the traveller's aid society *Acme* 5 (2) 163-188

20 **Phillips R, Watt D** and **Shuttleton D (eds)** 2000 *De-centring*
21 *sexualities: politics and representations beyond the metropolis*
22 Routledge, London.

23 **Phoenix J** and **Oerton S** 2005 *Illicit and Illegal: sex, regulation*
24 *and social control* Cullompton, Willan Press.

25 **Rand E** 2003 Breeders on a golf ball: normalizing sex at Ellis
26 Island *Environment and Planning D – Society and Space* 21 441-
27 460.

28 **Rasmussen C E** 2006 We're no metrosexuals: identity, place and
29 sexuality in the struggle over gay marriage *Social and Cultural*
30 *Geography* 7 807-825

31 **Rendell J** 2000 Pursuits, in Pile, S. and Thrift, N. (Eds.) *City A-Z*
32 London, Routledge.

33 **Rendell J** 2002 *The pursuit of pleasure* London, Athlone.

34 **Rich A** 1980 Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence
35 *Signs* 5 631-660.

36 **Richardson D** 1996 *Theorizing Heterosexuality: Telling it Straight*
37 Buckingham, Open University Press.

- 1 **Richardson D** 2004 Locating sexualities: from here to normality
2 *Sexualities* 7 391-411.
- 3 **Richardson D** 2005 Desiring Sameness? The rise of a neoliberal
4 politics of normalization *Antipode* 515-535.
- 5 **Robinson V, Hockey J and Meoh A** 2004 What I used to do on
6 my mother's knee: spatial and emotional aspects of
7 heterosexualy in England *Gender, Place and Culture* 11 417-
8 435.
- 9 **Rosewarne L** 2005 The men's gallery: Outdoor advertising and
10 public space *Women's Studies International Forum* 28 67-78.
- 11 **Sender K** 2006 Queens for a Day: Queer Eye for the Straight Guy
12 and the Neoliberal Project *Critical Studies in Media*
13 *Communication* 23 131 - 151
- 14 **Skeggs B** 2005 The making of class and gender through
15 visualising moral subject formation *Sociology* 39 965-983.
- 16 **Tani S** 2002 Whose Place is This Space? Life in the Street
17 Prostitution Area of Helsinki, Finland *International Journal of Urban*
18 *and Regional Research* 26, 343-359
- 19 **Thomas M E** 2004 Pleasure and propriety: teen girls and the
20 practice of straight space *Environment and Planning D – Society*
21 *and Space* 22 773 – 789.
- 22 **Turner M W** 2003 *Backward glances: Cruising the queer streets of*
23 *New York and London* Reaktion Books, London.
- 24 **Tyler M and Cohen L** 2007 Management in/as Comic Relief:
25 Queer Theory and Gender Performativity in *The Office* *Gender,*
26 *Work & Organization*
- 27 **Valentine G** 1993 Hetero-sexing space: lesbian perceptions and
28 experiences of everyday spaces *Environment and Planning D -*
29 *Society and Space* 9 395-413.
- 30 **Vance C** 1995 Social construction theory and sexuality, in Berger
31 M, Wallis B, and Watson S (eds.) *Constructing Masculinity*
32 Routledge, London
- 33 **Weeks J** 1989 *Sex, Politics and Society. The Regulation of*
34 *Sexuality since 1800* Longmans, Harlow
- 35 **Weeks J** 2007 *The world we have won* London, Routledge
- 36