

<http://gjss.org>

Volume 9, Issue 3, November 2012



# *Gendered Subjects*

*Guest Edited by Amy Burns & Clare Wiper*



*Graduate Journal of Social Science* November 2012, Vol. 9, Issue 3

**Editors:**

editors@gjss.org

Alexa Athelstan, University of Leeds, UK  
Rosemary Deller, University of Manchester, UK

**Book Review Editor:**

Melissa Kelly, Uppsala University, SE  
bookreviews@gjss.org

**Copy-Editor:**

Caroline Starkey, University of Leeds, UK  
Megan O'Branski, Newcastle University, UK

**Web-Editor:**

Robert Kulpa, Birkbeck College, London, UK

**Liaison and Board Coordinator Officer:**

Adam Pearson, Durham University

**Financial Officer:**

Lia Kinane, Lancaster University, UK

**Design and Layout:**

Amanda Conroy, London School of Economics, UK

The Graduate Journal of Social Science (ISSN: 1572-3763) is an open-access online journal focusing on methodological issues of interdisciplinary relevance. The journal publishes three issues per year, two of which are regular thematic editions organised by the in-house editors and one of which is a special edition organised by guest editors, which brings together innovative and instructive papers from all disciplines. GJSS welcomes submissions from both senior and junior academics, thus providing a forum of publication and exchange among different generations engaged in interdisciplinary research. GJSS is published by EBSCO publishing.

For subscription inquiries, requests, and changes, please visit: <http://gjss.org/index.php?/Contact-us/Graduate-Journal-of-Social-Science.html>. or Email: editors@gjss.org

All the content and downloads are published under Creative Commons license

© 2012 by Graduate Journal of Social Science. All Rights Reserved.

# CONTENTS

Contributors	4
Editorial: Gendered Subjects Amy Burns and Clare Wiper	9
Risky pleasures? To what extent are the boundaries of contemporary understandings of (in)appropriate femininities shaped by young women's negotiation of risk within the Night Time Economy? Emily Nicholls	15
The postfeminist flâneuse: the literary value of contemporary chick lit Amy Burns	23
Queer migrations and straight subjects Nicole Shephard	30
Responding to violence against South Asian women in the British domestic violence movement Clare Wiper	38
Reflecting on media texts as platforms for sexuality research in Arab countries: the case of Jordan Ebtihal Mahadeen	47
Young adults' lesbian, gay and bisexual identity construction within schools: a post-Section 28 climate Amy MacMillan	54
For real: Tracey Emin and the problem of authenticity Rachel Robson	65
Feminist academics: killjoys, unhappy, dissident? An approach to the notion of the feminist in the work of Sara Ahmed Jeannette Silva Flores	71
And then there were the men: masculinity and the Youth Justice System in England and Wales Eric Baumgartner	79
A close shave: masculinity and bodywork in dementia care Sarah Campbell	87

Questioning female subjectivity in Alain Resnais's Muriel Mani Sharpe	96
Women, marriage and selfhood – why change names? Rachel Thwaites	103
Gender Studies: An academic insight Compiled by Amy Burns and Clare Wiper	109

## CONTRIBUTORS

---

**Eric Baumgartner** is in his final year of his PhD in Sociology at Durham University. His research interests include masculinity, gender, youth justice, criminology, and social policy. His thesis, 'Boys will be Boys – Masculinity and the Youth Justice System in England and Wales', examines the construction of masculinity of young people who have offended, and staff in the Youth Justice System in England and Wales on the example of a Youth Offending Team. Further, it highlights the importance of conceptions of masculinity in the work with young men, both from a practitioner's and young person's perspective. Eric has been teaching Sociology, Social Policy, Gender Theory and English for the last 10 years and has recently assisted in conducting a nationwide and user-led research project with Young People who have offended and given seminars on Masculinity and Criminal Justice with the Probation Service. Email: [e.c.baumgartner@durham.ac.uk](mailto:e.c.baumgartner@durham.ac.uk)

**Amy Burns** is a PhD Candidate in English Literature at Northumbria University. She is interested in postfeminist popular fictions and the representation of gendered subjects in contemporary 'chick' culture. Email: [amy2.burns@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:amy2.burns@northumbria.ac.uk)

**Sarah Campbell** is a researcher and doctoral student within the Dementia and Ageing Research team in the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work at the University of Manchester. Prior to this she has worked within the voluntary sector as a researcher at The Mental Health Foundation, and as a trainer and user-group support worker for a community mental health organisation. She has also worked as a freelance researcher and group facilitator. Her research interests are in the body and embodiment; dementia and identity; the subjective experiences of people with dementia; feminist research; sensory and visual ethnography. Email Address: [sarah.campbell@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.campbell@manchester.ac.uk). Project contact: [www.thehairandcareproject.com](http://www.thehairandcareproject.com), Tweet @dignityhaircare

**Dr. Rachel Carroll** is a Senior Lecturer at Teesside University. Her research interests are in two broad fields: gender and sexuality in contemporary fiction and film and television adaptations. Her book *Rereading Heterosexuality: Feminism, Queer Theory and Contemporary Fiction* (Edinburgh University Press 2012) explores the affinities and tensions

between feminist and queer theory perspectives on non-normative female heterosexual identities. Recent publications include articles on transgender and feminism in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (*Women: a cultural review* 2011), cloning and heterosexuality in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (*Journal of Gender Studies* 2010) and intersexed identity in Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex* (*Journal of American Studies* 2009). Her edited collection, *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture: Textual Infidelities*, was published by Continuum in 2009. She is currently co-editing an interdisciplinary collection entitled *Litpop: Writing and Popular Music* (with Adam Hansen). Email Address: [r.carroll@tees.ac.uk](mailto:r.carroll@tees.ac.uk)

**Professor Gabriele Griffin** is Professor of Women's Studies at the University of York. She edits the 'Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities' series (Edinburgh UP). She has co-edited *The Emotional Politics of Research Collaboration* and *The Social Politics of Research Collaboration* (both Routledge 2013), and is writing a monograph titled *On Not Owning A Story*. Email: [Gabriele.griffin@york.ac.uk](mailto:Gabriele.griffin@york.ac.uk)

**Dr. Tracey Jensen** teaches media and cultural theory at Newcastle University. Her research interests revolve around the politics of (mis)representation, gender, social class and social mobility in popular culture and the production of social and symbolic value. Previous research has explored the intersections of class and gender in parenting culture and current work critically connects austerity culture and 'thrift' with gender, social class and the emerging science of happiness. Email: [Tracey.jensen@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:Tracey.jensen@ncl.ac.uk). Tweet @Drtraceyjensen

**Dr. Ruth Lewis** is a Senior Lecturer at Northumbria University. Her current research examines feminism as enacted by different generations of women, and focuses on the North East of England. In collaboration with Dr Susan Marine (Merrimack College) she is bringing empirical data from the US and UK to bear on debates which critique contemporary feminism amongst young women. Her work also explores the value and tensions in inter-generational exchange amongst feminist activists. Her previous research explored violence against women, especially intimate partner violence and legal responses, as well as homicide. Email: [ruth.lewis@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:ruth.lewis@northumbria.ac.uk)

**Amy MacMillan** is a 2nd year part-time PhD student at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies at the University of Leeds. She com-

pleted her BSc in Sports Science and Social Science at Loughborough University in 2005 and her MA in Gender, Sexuality and Queer Theory at the University of Leeds in 2008. Her current research focuses on young lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) identity development, particularly within the school context. Amy's research is interdisciplinary working within a socio-legal framework, and engaging with youth, sexuality and identity studies, and with queer theory and notions of performativity. Having volunteered for a number of years within the LGBT youth/education sector, specifically with Schools Out [www.schools-out.org.uk](http://www.schools-out.org.uk) and LGBT History Month [www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk](http://www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk), Amy is keen to bridge the gap between academia and activism. Her research aims to enhance the effectiveness of existing policy to combat homophobia in schools, and to contribute to policy debates around young people and sexuality, ultimately making a real difference to the lives of LGB young people. Email: [a.i.macmillan07@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:a.i.macmillan07@leeds.ac.uk)

**Ebtihal Mahadeen** is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Women's Studies at the University of York. She explores representations of female virginity in Jordan, through analyzing both media coverage and Jordanians' attitudes to female virginity through examining news stories published in online media (such as newspaper websites, independent news websites, and blogs) and readers' comments which influence, and are influenced by, the stories themselves. Email: [im544@york.ac.uk](mailto:im544@york.ac.uk)

**Emily Nicholls** is a second year PhD researcher in Sociology at Newcastle University, investigating performances of appropriate and inappropriate femininities within the Night Time Economy. Her research interests centre around gender, contemporary femininities, sexuality, and the night-time economy. For further information on any aspect of her research including details of how to participate, please contact [e.nicholls@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:e.nicholls@newcastle.ac.uk) or visit <http://research.ncl.ac.uk/agnorp>

**Rachel Robson** is interested in modern and contemporary poetry and fiction, visual art and cultures, gender, sexuality and difference, feminism, queer theory, contemporary culture, confession and intersectionality. She recently completed an MRes in English Literature at Northumbria University in 2012 where her work considered the issue of confession in the art of Tracey Emin and Sophie Calle. Her wider research interests are in modern and contemporary literature and culture and the visual arts, exploring issues of gender, sexuality and representation. Email: [rachelrobson\\_8@hotmail.com](mailto:rachelrobson_8@hotmail.com)



**Dr Julie Scanlon** is a senior lecturer in English Literature at Northumbria University. Her research interests are contemporary theories of gender and sexuality in relation to literature, film and television; narrative and literary theory; contemporary women's fiction; and representations of place. Email: [julie.scanlon@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:julie.scanlon@northumbria.ac.uk)

**Mani Sharpe** is a third year PhD candidate specialising in 1960s French and Algerian cinema at Newcastle University. His current interests include notions of space (narrative space, transgression, screen space, gendered spaces), gender (trauma/hysteria, gendered viewing practices/crises in masculinity), and trauma (representing trauma, trauma as film form, trauma and gender). Email: [m.sharpe@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:m.sharpe@newcastle.ac.uk)

**Nicole Shephard** is a PhD candidate at the LSE Gender Institute. Her research interests are in gender, transnational migration, sexualities, queer theory, social movements, and research methods. She holds an MSc in International Development from the University of Bristol and a BA in Social Policy and Social Work with a minor in Social Anthropology from the University of Fribourg (CH). Under the working title 'Towards a queer intersectional approach to subject formation in transnational social spaces', her thesis conceptually explores how people become transnational subjects. The analysis engages with the notion of transnational social space as well as feminist, postcolonial, and queer interventions into transnational migration research. Drawing on intersectional theories in gender studies and the queering of methodologies beyond the study of queer subjects, the project explores the productive gaps and overlaps between these conceptual and empirical literatures to propose a queer intersectional framework for research on transnational subjects. To illustrate and critically evaluate how this emerging framework plays out in an empirical context, it will be adopted in a case study on subject formation within the British South Asian transnational social space. Email: [n.shephard@lse.ac.uk](mailto:n.shephard@lse.ac.uk)

**Jeannette Silva Flores** is a Doctoral Researcher in Sociology at the University of Warwick. She did her BA in Sociology at the Pontificia Universidad Católica, Chile, her Diploma in Public Opinion at the Universidad Diego Portales, Chile and Masters in Global Studies at Lund University in Sweden. Jeannette has a wide range of research interests within the field of sociology of higher education. She is also interested in topics such as gender and higher education; feminist theories, meth-



odologies, and activism; citizenship and migration. Her current doctoral research 'Being feminist, doing academia' is looking at experiences of feminist academics in the UK. Email: [J.T.Silva-Flores@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:J.T.Silva-Flores@warwick.ac.uk). Website: <http://warwick.academia.edu/jeannettesilva/About>

**Dr. Angela Smith** is Reader in Language and Culture at the University of Sunderland, and a member of the Ross Priory Broadcast Talk Group. She has published widely on gender and the politics of representation and, with Claire Nally, edits the *I.B. Tauris International Library of Gender and Popular Culture*. Email: [angela.smith@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:angela.smith@sunderland.ac.uk)

**Rachel Thwaites** is a PhD student at the Centre for Women's Studies, University of York. Her current research interests include heterosexuality, social organisation, space and borders, and identity creation. For comments or questions about this paper the author can be contacted at [ret508@york.ac.uk](mailto:ret508@york.ac.uk)

**Clare Wiper** is currently a second-year PhD student at Northumbria University. Building upon her MRes dissertation research, which provides an insight into South Asian domestic violence activists' concerns about state racism, social policy and the marginalisation of black 'specialist' domestic violence organisations in Northern England, Clare's thesis aims to provide a contemporary intersectional analysis of the nature and dynamics of third sector domestic violence activism in North East England, with a particular focus on activists' experiences, and the challenges they face in negotiating their strategies and needs within the current social, political and economic climate. Email: [Clare.wiper@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:Clare.wiper@northumbria.ac.uk)



# Editorial: Gendered Subjects

Amy Burns and Clare Wiper

---

This supplementary edition of the *Graduate Journal of Social Science* was inspired by two events held in North East England in 2011/2012, both of which brought researchers from across the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences together to explore and debate current issues in the field of Gender Studies. The first of these interdisciplinary events was hosted by the Durham Gender and Sexualities Research Network (GASRN) at Durham University in September 2011, under the title '**Gender, Sex and Sexualities: A Day of Provocations**'. A range of researchers, both post-graduate and academic, presented short and pithy 'provocations' outlining an area of their work, which then led to broader interdisciplinary discussions with an aim that contributors would feel energised, emboldened and empowered in their work. **Dr Sylvie Gambaudo** – event co-organiser and Deputy Director of the Centre for Sex, Gender and Sexualities at Durham University – explained that the event 'felt like a celebration of all research gendered and sexualised... it was a pleasure to see so much vitality and joyfulness shared during the day' (Gambaudo 2011). **Dr Gambaudo** went on to outline her hopes for the

Centre, and for current research in the field of gender:

We announced our current project to have a Research Centre for Sex, Gender and Sexuality, here at Durham, a Centre that would allow us to organise more events like this one, focused on gender, sexuality, feminism, diversity, equality. I was personally very-moved by what came out of our 'What next?' session, the many requests that, whether Network or Centre, the project should be about 'people'. Yes, there is the Research Excellence Framework, there is prestige, funding, competition, promotion, but these should not overshadow the fact that our work is about real people, fully fleshed human beings who want to do the research they do and hope to find support on the way (Gambaudo 2011).

The second event, '**Gendered Subjects**', held at Northumbria University in June 2012, was largely inspired by the first and sought to build on its success – offering a platform to post-graduate students from across the North East to present a 'snapshot' of their current research. The event was initiated by

**Dr Rosie White**, Senior Lecturer in Contemporary Literature, Theory and Popular Culture at Northumbria University, who recognises how post-graduate research in gender ‘expands the boundaries of the academic world by engaging with local and international groups to make new contacts and foster new collaborations’ (White 2012: 4), and felt the event was a timely contribution to current work in the field.

This supplementary edition was born through these events, both of which demonstrated the high-quality research and discussions taking place at institutions across the North East in relation to gender. The ‘**Gendered Subjects**’ theme from the Northumbria University event has been retained for this issue, which connects with the focus **Dr Gambaudo** outlined, that gender research is about real people – gendered subjects – and as such has relevance and depth for both us as researchers, and also those who are the subject of our work. The format of ‘snapshots’ has also been chosen for this issue, so the papers presented here are shorter than a regular GJSS article yet seek to capture the essence of each individual’s research and, together, present an overview of current research being conducted and discussed across the North East.

The snapshots in this edition successfully illustrate the interdisciplinary nature of Gender Studies, with analyses of gendered representa-

tions in literature, film and art sitting alongside empirical social science research into the actual lived experiences of men and women in contemporary societies. **Emily Nicholls**’ snapshot ‘**Risky pleasure? To what extent are the boundaries of contemporary understandings of (in)appropriate femininities shaped by young women’s negotiations of risk within the Night Time Economy?**’ provides a convincing rationale for the need to reconceptualise contemporary femininities in the Night Time Economy. With a sociological focus on the everyday practices of young women who occupy the bars and clubs of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, **Nicholls** proposes a re-examination of traditional notions of femininity as based on responsibility and risk management, against contemporary post-modern and postfeminist readings of femininity as based on women’s liberation, empowerment and sexual freedom. This discussion is complemented by **Amy Burns**’ snapshot ‘**The postfeminist flâneuse: the literary value of contemporary chick lit**’, which questions how contemporary popular fiction for women could be re-constructing the long-standing literary figure of the flâneur – an individual who is free to explore the city on their own terms. Questions of gender have long-haunted this traditionally male figure, so **Burns** examines the possibility that postfeminist culture, and the potential freedom and liberation it offers,

might be paving the way for women to take on this role.

**Nicole Shephard's** snapshot '**Queer migrations and straight subjects**' grapples with the methodological dilemmas of studying subject formation within hybrid transnational social spaces. In an attempt to challenge conventional disciplinary boundaries and overcome the heteronormativity often associated with feminist transnational migration scholarship, **Shephard** proposes a methodological approach that incorporates intersectionality theory and queer theory in an effort to expose the complex relationship between gender, sexuality and other axes of social difference within the British South Asian transnational social space. While gender is indeed the centre of scholarly analysis in this edition, **Shephard**, along with many other contributors, engages with the complex ways in which gender intersects with race, ethnicity, age, class, sexuality and nationality to condition women's and men's day-to-day lives. This understanding that gendered experiences are shaped at the intersection of various dimensions of identity is further explored in **Clare Wiper's** snapshot '**Responding to violence against South Asian women in the British domestic violence movement**'. **Wiper** demonstrates how gender intersects with race, ethnicity and culture in ways that not only exacerbate violence against South Asian women, but also complicate domes-

tic violence activists' abilities to respond effectively and fairly to this violence.

Exploring the intersection of gender and sexuality, **Ebtihal Mahadeen's** *snapshot* '**Reflecting on media texts as platforms for sexuality research in Arab countries: the case of Jordan**' exposes both the importance and the complexities of conducting research on the topic of sexuality in Jordan; a country that arguably requires urgent sexuality-related education and health care for young people but seemingly rejects the topic of sexuality as offensive and subsequently off-limits. **Mahadeen** proposes that an analysis of Jordanian online media texts and readers' comments presents the most effective way of accessing young Jordanian people's attitudes towards sexuality. **Amy MacMillan** contributes further to this discussion of gender and sexuality with a snapshot entitled '**Young adults' lesbian, gay and bisexual identity construction within schools: a post-Section 28 climate**'. Since the repeal of Section 28 in 2003 which discouraged the promotion of homosexuality within British schools, **MacMillan** recognises the importance of researching its legacy and the impact it has had on young adults' constructions of their lesbian, gay and bisexual identities within the contemporary school environment.

Continuing the theme of identity construction, but with a focus on

the 'confessional' art work of Tracy Emin, **Rachel Robson's** snapshot '**For real: Tracey Emin and the problem of authenticity**' problematises readings of Emin's work as authentic and autobiographic. **Robson** suggests that Emin's work creatively examines the 'self' by drawing upon women's real life feelings and the challenging and harmful issues that they experience, such as abortion, rape and abuse. **Jeannette Silva Flores's** snapshot '**Feminist academics: killjoys, unhappy, dissident? An approach to the notion of the feminist in the work of Sara Ahmed**' considers the implications of identifying as a feminist academic. In particular, **Silva Flores** reflects on Sara Ahmed's interpretations of what it is to be a feminist within academia, and draws upon her own empirical data to evidence feminist academics' experiences of support and solidarity as well as marginalisation and prejudice in their day-to-day work.

Although the field of gender research was largely pioneered by feminist scholars who developed a predominant focus on women, the expansion of Gender Studies in recent decades has brought with it an increasing focus on men and masculinities. Contributing to the study of young men, **Eric Baumgartner's** snapshot '**And then there were the men: masculinity and the Youth Justice System in England and Wales**' highlights a gap in gender scholarship which overlooks both

the ways in which theoretical conceptualisations of masculinity inform professional practice with men in the Youth Justice System, and the extent to which these practices are guided by the actual lived experiences of men. **Baumgartner** argues that concepts of masculinity must be revisited and reconceptualised within the Youth Justice System to inform policy and practice. Focusing on masculinity within a different setting, **Sarah Campbell's** snapshot '**A close shave: masculinity and bodywork in dementia care**' argues for a gendered analysis of the experiences of people living in dementia care settings. In particular, **Campbell** considers the relationship between male shaving and constructions of masculinity amongst men with dementia and uses field-note extracts to provide an original insight into men's gendered and sensory experiences of this everyday care activity.

**Mani Sharpe** and **Rachel Thwaites** draw attention to the structures of inequality and power that govern gender relations between men and women. Sharpe's snapshot '**Questioning female subjectivity in Alain Resnais's *Muriel***' questions whether the French film *Muriel* truly diverges from the traditional patriarchal patterns associated with 1960s Hollywood cinema as some critics have suggested, or whether the female protagonist continues to embody the silence and passivity associated with the female

characters of this era. **Thwaites'** snapshot '**Women, marriage and selfhood – why change names?**' considers the reasons behind women's decisions to change their surnames to their husbands' after marriage, and the implications this may have for a woman's sense of identity and her experiences of gender inequality. **Thwaites** presents the main explanations that emerged from her empirical research with married women, including love, feelings of 'oneness', and the desire to conform to tradition and societal expectations.

The culminating snapshot of this edition features the thoughts of six academics working in the field of Gender Studies within North East institutions. Responding to a set of questions, the academics highlight what they consider to be important developments in this field, from **Dr Rachel Carroll's** interest in the representation of disability with regards to reproductive sexuality, to **Dr Tracey Jensen's** appreciation of the recent advancements of intersectionality theory in exposing gender as but one form of privilege and oppression among many. **Dr Ruth Lewis** expresses the increasing need to bridge the divide between feminists inside and outside of the academy because, as **Dr Angela Smith** also effectively explains, issues of gender are resurfacing as political in response to the current financial crisis and its disproportionate impact on women and the

poor. While **Professor Gabriele Griffin** is sceptical about whether a feminist resurgence is actually taking place, she is keen to see a stronger feminist public presence as women attempt to address issues that threaten their future. **Dr Julie Scanlon** hopes this resurgence will result in consciousness-raising and that increasing visibility will encourage younger generations of men and women to re-engage in feminist organising. All of the academics acknowledge interdisciplinary post-graduate research as essential to the future of Gender Studies.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our thanks to all contributors for sharing snapshots of their research for this supplementary edition of the GJSS. Thank you to our principle supervisors Rosemary White and Ruth Lewis at Northumbria University for supporting us, and a special thank you to Alexa Athelstan and Rosemary Deller for agreeing to publish this edition, and for providing us with thoughtful advice throughout this entire process.

### References

- Gambaudo, Sylvie. 26 Sep 2011. One Response to Gender Sex and Sexualities: A Day of Provocation, Friday 23 September, Registration Now Open. Durham University's Gender and Sexuality Research Network and Centre for Sex, Gender and Sexualities (online blog). <http://gasrn.wordpress>.



[com/2011/08/25/gender-sex-and-sexualities-a-day-of-provocations-friday-23-september-registrations-now-open/](http://www.gjss.com/2011/08/25/gender-sex-and-sexualities-a-day-of-provocations-friday-23-september-registrations-now-open/) (accessed 21 October 2012).

White, Rosie. February 2012. Foreword, by Dr Rosie White, Programme Leader for MRes Gender Studies. *School of Arts and Social Sciences: Showcasing Excellence*, Gender 5: 4.

# Risky pleasures? To what extent are the boundaries of contemporary understandings of (in)appropriate femininities shaped by young women's negotiation of risk within the Night Time Economy?

Emily Nicholls

---

*This snapshot will offer a summary of my current research project on how the boundaries of appropriate femininities might be policed and managed through women's everyday practices within the Night Time Economy (NTE) in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North East England. Through focus groups and semi-structured interviews with young women, my research will explore the embodied practices of alcohol consumption, presentation of the body and patterns of use of the NTE, facilitating a greater understanding of the extent to which notions of risk and respectability might continue (or otherwise) to regulate young women's behaviour, and providing an insight into how particular classed and sexualised (in)appropriately feminine identities are conceptualised and performed.*

*Keywords: Femininities, Night Time Economy, Risk, Identity*

---

It is widely recognised that only certain manifestations of femininity are deemed appropriate. However, the literature on gendered subjects has long identified various tensions and contradictions within young women's performances of appropriate femininity. These may have be-

come particularly salient in recent years, where supposed 'new' femininities advocating agency and empowerment (see McRobbie 2007) may continue to sit awkwardly alongside more traditional notions of femininity (Griffin 2004). As a result, contemporary femininity can be the-

orised as a space for hedonism and fun, yet also regulation and insecurity (Skeggs 1997, 116). For this reason, further research into the ways in which the boundaries of femininity might be negotiated remains pertinent and important. Drawing upon a symbolic interactionist framework, a study of the everyday practices of young women within the Night Time Economy (NTE) will provide an opportunity to explore in more detail the ways in which these conflicting conceptualisations of (in)appropriateness might be negotiated and lived, and the ways in which the potentially complex and shifting boundaries of acceptability might be managed.

The performance of 'appropriate' femininity has long been bound up with ideas of risk and respectability (Campbell 2005). This project will examine how far negotiations of risk to safety and respectability within the NTE might shape individual and collective understandings of classed and sexualised (in)appropriate femininities. Traditional femininity is tied to the management of physical risks and the performance of effective 'safekeeping' strategies (Campbell 2005) as women are charged with taking responsibility for their own safety and may be subjected to blame or alienation if they are seen to have made themselves 'vulnerable' to risky situations through failing to adhere to standards of appropriate feminine behaviour (Brooks 2008). Traditional femininity is also

bound up with notions of respectability and reputation. This is frequently linked to the 'othering' of less respectable, more 'risky' bodies (see Cowie and Lees 1981; Green and Singleton 2006). These apparently constraining and 'victim-blaming' discourses – which also clearly deny an active female sexuality – need to be re-examined against the supposed 'new' femininities of liberation and sexual empowerment (see McRobbie 2007; Waitt, Jessop, and Gorman-Murray 2011).

Whilst there has been a considerable amount of useful research on risk and safekeeping within the NTE, this often focuses on management of physical risks to safety such as drink-spiking (Burgess, Donovan, and Moore 2009), rather than combining this with a broader understanding of risk to reputation or exploring how risk might be negotiated through more subtle means such as clothing and appearance. Furthermore, existing research in this area often fails to draw upon the ways in which the dimensions of class and sexuality might impact on understandings of risk, the boundaries of (in)appropriate femininities and the creation of different identities (Haydock 2009). William Haydock argues that research on the NTE frequently fails to focus on how young people themselves negotiate drinking, and calls for future research to explore the way in which practices within the NTE actively construct – rather than simply reflect – gender

(Haydock 2009, 20).

In addition, Jo Lindsay argues that little research on risk has been carried out with young working populations (Lindsay 2003, 3). Whilst this comment was made almost ten years ago, little research since then has addressed this issue. For example, Oona Brooks (2011) researched predominantly heterosexual students only, and – as Haydock (2009, 137) and Jan S. Gill et al (2007, 27) argue – a large amount of other research also focuses primarily on easily accessible student populations (although see Laura Sheard (2011) for a notable exception). This is recognised as a problem as students are often in quite different circumstances to their peers who are not in higher education (Haydock 2009, 137).

### **The Night Time Economy**

The complexity of these discourses around risk and respectability is epitomised within the often highly gendered and (hetero)sexualised spaces of the NTE (see Laurie et al 1999; Skeggs 2001; Valentine 2001), the site of a number of contradictory and competing scripts surrounding the participation and presentation of women's bodies (Cullen 2011). The NTE has been conceptualised both as a site of female pleasure, empowerment, sexual agency, independence and bonding (Skeggs 1997; Leyshon 2008) and also as a key site of regulation in which women are ex-

pected to conform in appearance and behaviour to certain modes of heterosexual femininity (Waitt, Jessop, and Gorman-Murray 2011) and manage risk in spaces that carry the threat of male violence (Brooks 2011; Sheard 2011). Furthermore, whilst prior research demonstrates that young women report that they engage in 'an extensive range of safety behaviours' (Brooks 2011, 639) within the NTE (often simply accepting them as 'commonsense' gender-specific measures), further research into this area is important in order to understand whether this might be changing in light of arguments around the 'feminisation' of the NTE (Day, Gough, and McFadden 2004).

Such contradictions mean the NTE is an ideal site within which to examine the embodied practices of young women. The context of the study within the 'party city' (Nayak 2003) of Newcastle-upon-Tyne is also important and relevant. There has been prior, illuminating research within the city (Chatterton and Hollands 2003), which will act as a useful foundation upon which to build, whilst sufficient time has elapsed that further research is timely. Much research has also focused on post-industrial masculinities within Newcastle (Nayak 2003) and it will be interesting to explore this from a different angle by looking at contemporary femininities and how these are negotiated within spaces that may 'remain highly masculinised

in terms of the male domination of space and the policing of compulsory heterosexuality' (Chatterton and Hollands 2003, 148).

Three key themes will be explored through the research:

### **Drinking practices**

Women's alcohol consumption has been popularly portrayed as a threat to safety, health and – ultimately – femininity (Day, Gough, and McFadden 2004; Meyer 2010), with research on the embodied drinking practices of young women suggesting that they 'show self-policing and self-restraint in terms of intoxication in order to stay within the boundaries of traditional femininity' (Measham 2002, 358), both to avoid being seen as sexually promiscuous and to ensure their own safety. The respectability of young women in relation to drinking practices may be maintained by eschewing or 'othering' excessively drunken girls (Cullen 2011, 131). This is often described as a classed and sexualised process, with the female binge drinker 'generally marked as white, working class and heterosexual' (Griffin et al 2009, 458).

However, alternative conceptualisations see alcohol consumption as empowering and a key component of female socialising. Alcohol consumption has been linked to the negotiation of pleasure, relationships and group identity and to conceptualisations of femininity as assertive and sexually empowered

(Sheehan and Ridge 2001). With drinking now portrayed as a means 'for women to accomplish a range of both traditional and non-traditional femininities' (Measham 2002, 362) in this way, the clear need for further research in this area in order to untangle this complex and sometimes contradictory interplay of factors is further highlighted.

### **Bodily presentation, appearance and dress**

Management of bodily presentation (through strategies such as grooming, make-up and dress) is a key element of the performativity of appropriate femininity (Nayak and Kehily 2006). The NTE is a space in which the 'rules' regarding appropriate dress may be different to other everyday settings – a space for the visual display of 'hyper-sexualised femininities' through clothes that are glamorous, revealing and erotic (Buckley and Fawcett 2002, 132).

However, dress and appearance is another area that may be defined by complex contradictions, with Beverley Skeggs reporting that 'appearance is simultaneously and across time a site for pleasure and strength but also a site of anxiety, regulation and surveillance' (Skeggs 1997, 107; Buckley and Fawcett 2002). Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott summarise these tensions neatly; 'young women remain concerned with maintaining appropriately feminine sexual respectability while representing themselves as sexually

desirable' (Jackson and Scott 2010, 96).

Gordon Waitt, Loretta Jessop and Andrew Gorman-Murray found in their study of young women's engagements with the NTE that dress and appearance could be harnessed as a perceived source of confidence-boosting 'power' over men (Waitt et al 2011, 264). Several participants were 'emotionally invested in "doing" a femininity that best approximated normative understandings of feminine and "sexy"' and commented that they enjoyed flirting with men and receiving attention, suggesting a sense of individual empowerment (Waitt et al 2011, 265). Yet even as some participants embraced this sexualised femininity through their clothing and appearance, others read these appearances as performative of a kind of unrespectable and promiscuous femininity (Waitt et al 2011, 265), with other contemporary research also suggesting that some women can continue to be scathing of a perceived 'overdone' performance of femininity (see Haydock 2009, 211). There is a clear classed element to this, with Skeggs referring to the 'devalued class signifiers of excess (big hair, short skirts, lots of make-up)' (Skeggs 2001, 302). This is supported by Cheryl Buckley and Hilary Fawcett's argument that overtly sexualised performances of hyper-femininity are strongly linked to traditional working-class identities (Buckley and Fawcett 2002, 138).

### **Patterns of use of venues and space**

Finally, the ways in which the bodies of young women physically engage with – and move through – the spaces and venues of the NTE will be explored. Numerous studies outline the risk management strategies young women might take within the spaces of the NTE; these may include regarding certain spaces or venues as 'off-limits' or arranging transport home in advance (Sheehan and Ridge 2001; Montemurro and McClure 2005). This is supported by a vast body of work on the positioning of women in public space, which argues that the physical movements of women through space are informally policed and curtailed by the threat of violence (Green, Hebron, and Woodward 1987), thus severely impacting on women's freedom and their ability to engage with social, political and work opportunities (Radford 1987).

Sexuality and class may also be important dimensions shaping young women's use of space. For example, different venues may appeal to different groups of clientele, with some prohibiting certain groups through exclusionary pricing or dress codes or an environment where only heterosexuality is perceived as welcome. Non-heterosexual women may be required to take additional measures to manage different kinds of risk in public space, for example by self-policing the more visible indicators of their sexuality in order to



limit the risk of homophobic violence (Corteen 2002).

### Summary

The literature explored above has offered a snapshot of some of the proposed tensions surrounding the participation of women in the NTE and the ways in which their behaviours and practices might be shaped by the negotiation of risk to both safety and reputation, alongside current gaps in the literature. My study of the actual everyday practices of young women will help to highlight the extent to which these tensions continue to exist and the ways in which they might be managed and negotiated to create (in) appropriately gendered subjects. My work will develop understandings of the classed and sexualised identities that are enabled through young women's performances of appropriately safe and respectable (or not) femininities within the NTE. This will have real implications in terms of contributing to understandings of embodied, contemporary femininity.

### References

- Brooks, Oona. 2008. Consuming Alcohol in Bars, Pubs and Clubs: A risky freedom for young women? *Annals of Leisure Research* 11 (3-4): 331-50.
- Brooks, Oona. 2011. 'Guys! Stop Doing It!': Young Women's Adoption and Rejection of Safety Advice when Socializing in Bars, Pubs and Clubs. *British Journal of Criminology* 51 (4): 635-51.
- Buckley, Cheryl, and Hilary Fawcett. 2002. *Fashioning the Feminine Representation and Women's Fashion from the Fin de Siècle to the Present*. London: I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, Macmillan Distributor.
- Burgess, Adam, Pamela Donovan, and Sarah Moore. 2009. Embodying Uncertainty? Understanding Heightened Risk Perception of Drink 'Spiking'. *British Journal of Criminology* 49 (6): 848-62.
- Campbell, Alex. 2005. Keeping the 'Lady' Safe: The Regulation of Femininity through Crime Prevention Literature. *Critical Criminology* 13 (2): 119-40.
- Chatterton, Paul, and Robert Hollands. 2003. *Urban nightscapes: Youth Cultures, Pleasure Spaces and Corporate Power, Critical Geographies*. London: Routledge.
- Corteen, Karen. 2002. Lesbian Safety Talk: Problematizing Definitions and Experiences of Violence, Sexuality and Space. *Sexualities* 5 (3): 259-80.
- Cowie, Celia, and Sue Lees. 1981. Slags or Drags. *Feminist Review* 9: 17-31.
- Cullen, Fin. 2011. 'The Only Time I Feel Girly is When I Go Out': Drinking stories, Teenage girls, and Respectable Femininities. *Interna-*



- tional Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 16 (2): 119-38.
- Day, Katy, Brendan Gough, and Majella McFadden. 2004. 'Warning! Alcohol Can Seriously Damage Your Feminine Health'. *Feminist Media Studies* 4 (2): 165-83.
- Gill, Jan, S., Marie Donaghy, Jennifer Guise, and Pamela Warner. 2007. Descriptors and Accounts of Alcohol Consumption: Methodological Issues Piloted with Female Undergraduate Drinkers in Scotland. *Health Education Research* 22 (1): 27-36.
- Green, Eileen, Sandra Hebron, and Diana Woodward. 1987. Women, Leisure and Social Control. In Jalna Hanmer and Mary Maynard eds. *Women, Violence and Social Control*, London: Macmillan Press.
- Green, Eileen, and Carrie Singleton. 2006. Risky Bodies at Leisure: Young Women Negotiating Space and Place. *Sociology* 40 (5): 853-71.
- Griffin, Christine. 2004. Good Girls, Bad Girls: Anglocentrism and Diversity in the Constitution of Contemporary Girlhood. In Anita Harris ed. *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Griffin, Christine, Andrew Bengry-Howell, Chris Hackley, Willm Mistral, and Isabelle Szmigin. 2009. 'Every Time I Do It I Annihilate Myself': Loss of (Self-)Consciousness and Loss of Memory in Young People's Drinking Narratives. *Sociology* 43 (3): 457-76.
- Haydock, William. 2009. *Gender, Class and 'Binge' Drinking: An Ethnography of Drinkers in Bournemouth's Night-Time Economy*. PhD Thesis. Bournemouth University.
- Jackson, Stevi, and Sue Scott. 2010. *Theorizing Sexuality*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Laurie, Nina, Claire Dwyer, Sarah Holloway, and Fiona Smith. 1999. *Geographies of New Femininities*. New York: Longman.
- Leyshon, Michael. 2008. 'We're Stuck in the Corner': Young Women, Embodiment and Drinking in the Countryside. *Drugs: Education, Prevention, and Policy* 15 (3): 267-89.
- Lindsay, Jo. 2003. 'Partying hard', 'Partying Sometimes' or 'Shopping': Young Workers' Socializing Patterns and Sexual, Alcohol and Illicit Drug Risk Taking. *Critical Public Health* 13 (1): 1-14.
- McRobbie, Angela. 2007. TOP GIRLS? Young Women and the Post-Feminist Sexual Contract. *Cultural Studies* 21 (4-5): 718-37.
- Measham, Fiona. 2002. 'Doing Gender' – 'Doing Drugs': Conceptualizing the Gendering of Drugs Cultures. *Contemporary Drug Problems* 29 (1): 335 - 73.
- Meyer, Anneke. 2010. 'Too Drunk To Say No': Binge Drinking, Rape

- and the Daily Mail. *Feminist Media Studies* 10 (1): 19-34.
- Montemurro, Beth, and Bridget McClure. 2005. Changing Gender Norms for Alcohol Consumption: Social Drinking and Lowered Inhibitions at Bachelorette Parties. *Sex Roles* 52 (5/6): 279-88.
- Nayak, Anoop, and Mary Jane Kehily. 2006. Gender Undone: Subversion, Regulation and Embodiment in the Work of Judith Butler. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27 (4): 459-72.
- Nayak, Anoop. 2003. Last of the 'Real Geordies'? White Masculinities and the Subcultural Response to Deindustrialisation. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21 (1): 7-25.
- Radford, Jill. 1987. Policing Male Violence – Policing Women. In Jalna Hanmer and Mary Maynard eds. *Women, Violence and Social Control*, London: Macmillan Press.
- Sheard, Laura. 2011. 'Anything Could Have Happened': Women, The Night-time Economy, Alcohol and Drink Spiking. *Sociology* 45 (4): 619-633.
- Sheehan, Margaret, and Damien Ridge. 2001. 'You Become Really Close . . . You Talk About the Silly Things You Did, and We Laugh': The Role of Binge Drinking in Female Secondary Students' Lives. *Substance Use and Misuse* 36 (3): 347-72.
- Skeggs, Beverley. 1997. Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable, *Theory, Culture & Society*. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE.
- Skeggs, Beverley. 2001. The Toilet Paper: Femininity, Class and Mis-Recognition. *Women's Studies International Forum* 24 (3-4): 295-07.
- Valentine, Gill. 2001. *Social Geographies: Space and Society*. Harlow: Prentice Hall.
- Waitt, Gordon, Loretta Jessop, and Andrew Gorman-Murray. 2011. 'The Guys in There Just Expect to be Laid': Embodied and Gendered Socio-Spatial Practices of a 'Night Out' in Wollongong, Australia. *Gender, Place & Culture* 18 (2): 255-275.

# The postfeminist *flâneuse*: the literary value of contemporary chick lit

Amy Burns

---

*This snapshot outlines the broader area of my research into the literary 'status' and 'value' of contemporary chick lit, and then focuses on one area of my analysis – how chick lit is contributing to the literary debate of the 'flâneuse'. The potential of a flâneuse – a female version of the traditionally male literary figure who observes and experiences the city – has been argued for nearly thirty years. Given Gemma Burgess' use of the term in her 2011 chick lit novel A Girl Like You, could it be that it is now possible, in this postfeminist environment, for women to embody this role? This snapshot will offer a brief overview of the flâneur/flâneuse debate and use Burgess' novel to consider its current relevance – and question whether, finally, a woman can be a flâneuse in contemporary culture.*

*Keywords: Postfeminism, Flâneur, Chick Lit, Gender, Literary Status*

---

## Introduction

Since the publication of *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Fielding 1997), the text which is widely credited for triggering the avalanche of novels commonly labelled 'chick lit', this genre of fiction has become one of the most popular amongst the contemporary female reading public. Chick lit has attracted huge attention in the academic world, where these texts have been debated, criticised and analysed at length within the concept of 'postfeminism' (see for example Ferriss and Young 2006b; Genz 2009; Genz and Brabon 2009;

Gill 2007; Harzewski 2011; McRobbie 2009; Whelehan 2005) and in order to examine representations of contemporary femininity and culture (see for example Ferriss and Young 2006a; Fest 2009; Gill and Herdickerhoff 2006; Smith 2008). Yet whilst this work provides a valuable commentary on these postfeminist cultural texts, it could be said that academic analysis thus far has concerned itself with the 'chick' of chick lit, and the 'lit' aspect – that these are 'literary' texts – has been somewhat overlooked. The one exception to this is a common acknowledge-

ment of the intertextual heritage of the genre which most often references the influence of Jane Austen; yet even here it is made clear that although Austen may influence the genre, 'chick lit cannot justifiably make a claim to comparable literary status' (Ferris and Young 2006a, 4).

It is this idea of 'literary status' which directs the focus of my PhD research. By this I mean the traditional, hierarchical understanding of 'literature' as different and somehow more important and of greater value than 'popular fiction'. Questions of gender continually intersect with these discussions, as it is very often the popular genres of fiction aimed at women which are most derided (see Gelder 2004; McCracken 1998). My research aims to interrogate these distinctions, examining how these categories are decided and validated, and use a literary analysis of chick lit – not only a genre of popular fiction, but a genre intentionally produced by and for women – to seek to destabilise these rigid categories. In this snapshot I will share an aspect of this analysis, offering a brief examination of how the chick lit novel *A Girl Like You* by Gemma Burgess (2011) engages with the literary figure of the *flâneur*.

### **The *flâneur***

The *flâneur* was originally tied both historically and geographically to nineteenth century Paris, but throughout the last century he has wandered in many directions,

through continued theorisation by a number of literary critics. The *flâneur* figure was first characterised by the French poet Charles Baudelaire, who described him as 'a passionate spectator' of the city and its crowds, one who has a 'capacity of seeing' and an 'acute and magical perceptiveness' (Baudelaire 1964 [1863], 9-12). For Baudelaire the *flâneur* was a philosopher, poet and artist – an observer of modern urban life.

Many critics have continued theorising the *flâneur* and this figure is now widely accepted as 'the secret spectator of the spaces and places of the city... [whose activity] is essentially about freedom [and] the meaning of existence, or the lack of a meaning' (Tester 1994, 7-8). The *flâneur* is free to wander the streets in order to experience the city – watching, consuming, thinking – enjoying the privileged position of observer, and yet this figure is not without contention. Along with questions of class, cultural position and contemporary relevance, perhaps the greatest area of debate is over whether the *flâneur* can ever be female: can a *flâneuse* exist, accessing and enjoying the same freedom and privilege as the traditionally male *flâneur*?

Baudelaire's original assertion was that a woman could not take on this role, predominantly because she is part of the male *flâneur's* observation: '[woman is] the object of the keenest admiration and curiosity... a

kind of idol, stupid perhaps, but dazzling and bewitching' (Baudelaire 1964 [1863], 30). This objectification of woman as idol, made silent and 'stupid', allows no possibility for female agency or subjectivity. Janet Wolff brought attention to the 'invisible *flâneuse*' in her 1985 article by that title, claiming that a female *flâneur* 'was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the 19th century' (Wolff 1985, 45) and this suggestion was subsequently backed up by a number of other theorists (see Felski 1995; Pollock 1988). Yet most of the discussion of the *flâneuse* has been historically situated, focussing on whether *flânerie* was possible for women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and based on literature from that time period. My research has led me to question, firstly, whether *flânerie* is a historically defined concept or does the *flâneur* still manifests himself in the contemporary culture of twenty-first century cities? If the response to this is yes, then could it be that given social changes following second-wave feminism, a *flâneuse* could now exist in this contemporary postfeminist moment – found in the pages of contemporary postfeminist novels – finally experiencing the city on her own terms, with the freedom and privilege that brings?

### **A Girl Like You**

There's nothing I have to do.  
And nowhere I have to be. With

no destination, no map, and no agenda, I'm free to just wander... [Usually] I have a list of errands to run, shoes to look for, dates to think about, texts to send. Busyb-  
usybusy.

But not today.

The French have the perfect word for it: '*flâneur*'. It means to stroll around aimlessly but enjoyably, observing life and your surroundings. Baudelaire defined a *flâneur* as 'a person who walks the city in order to experience it'.

As Plum would say: I'm *flâneur*-ing like a mother\*\*\*\*er (Burgess 2011, 339-340).

Given Burgess' reference of not only the *flâneur* but Baudelaire himself, a close reading of this novel was clearly the most appropriate way to begin my literary analysis of chick lit. The heroine of the text, Abigail, both embodies and challenges the figure of the *flâneur* throughout the novel, and whilst this examination may raise more questions than it answers, I will use this snapshot to offer a few examples of her *flânerie*.

Abigail is without doubt a woman in the city and a woman of the city. The text is littered with references to areas of London, at times labelling specific locations: 'my new flatshare [is] in the delightfully-monikered Primrose Hill... my office is just behind Blackfriars... we're meeting at

the Albannach bar, just off Trafalgar Square... we start walking back up Portobello Road towards Notting Hill Gate... I walk towards Fleet Street and then up to Covent Garden' (Burgess 2011, 9, 20, 49, 97, 375). Just as the traditional *flâneur* is 'a living guidebook' who has 'at his fingertips all the important addresses' (Parkhurst Ferguson 1994, 30-31), Abigail has an extensive knowledge of London as locations to be navigated geographically, but she also has an awareness of the city's contemporary cultural environments – she doesn't just know the city, she knows how to use the city.

In many situations Abigail displays the 'aloof independence' and 'disdainful individuality' attributed to the *flâneur* (Gilloch 1996, 153), and she has a nostalgia for the 'old' city in her love of old pubs and coffee shops: 'we walk to a tiny Italian coffee shop that I'm pretty sure has been here since the 1950s... it makes me happy somehow, to be here where they've been serving coffee for 60 years, rather than at a big *Pret-A-Costabucks* chain' (Burgess 2011, 63). This explicit rejection of consumer culture seems most appropriate for a *flâneur*, highlighting the 'necessary distance which characterises the *flâneur's* relationship to the public sphere' (Wolff 1995, 102), and also stressing a desire for authenticity and the 'real' city.

Throughout the novel there are multiple references to people-watching and observation and Abi-

gail often sits outside or at windows in public places and busy areas so that she can see people, fulfilling Rob Shields' claim that 'the *flâneur* is out to see and be seen, and thus requires a crowd to be able to watch others and take part of the metropolitan throng... observation is the *raison d'être* of the *flâneur*' (Shields 1994, 65). Further, the novel includes long sections of introspection, reflecting on what Abigail has seen and experienced. Given that *A Girl Like You* is written in the first person, Abigail becomes Baudelaire's poet, artist, philosopher *flâneur* in her musings: the 'I' with an insatiable appetite for the 'non-I', at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself' (Baudelaire 1964 [1863], 9).

Whilst this snapshot is just a glimpse of the full analysis, it is hopefully enough to warrant my claim that Abigail is indeed a *flâneur* and perhaps postfeminist culture has provided a way for the elusive *flâneuse* to finally make her way onto the streets of the metropolis – her *flânerie* however, is not without its complexities. One significant way in which Abigail challenges the traditional figure of the *flâneur* is by her persistent need to engage in contemporary cultural social exchanges, most particularly by texting and using Facebook. When she is early to meet a friend she decides to sit outside in Trafalgar Square, seemingly a perfect opportunity to engage in detached observation as



a *flâneur*, yet she chooses to use the time to text a number of friends, expressing agitation when no-one immediately responds. Yet perhaps this is part of how *flânerie* must develop in the twenty-first century, given the contemporary cultural importance of social media and interaction; examination and discussion of this issue will be an integral part of my future research.

More significantly, with regards to this journal edition's focus on current research within 'gendered subjects' and chick lit's position with postfeminism, is the way Abigail's romantic relationships further complicate her *flânerie*; most often her relationship with Robert, the hero of the novel. Abigail's enjoyment of the city is increased when it is shared with Robert, but is severely limited by their erratic relationship – when they argue she is unable to enjoy the city to the same extent: 'I walk back down through Regent's Park, which is far less delightful now that I'm alone' (Burgess 2011, 133). Perhaps in this area Abigail is not quite able to retain the distance from self needed to truly observe, consumed as she is within the minutiae of her romantic entanglements. Anne Friedberg argues that *flânerie* was not possible for a woman 'until she was free to roam the city on her own' (Friedberg 1993, 36), and whilst Abigail does this physically – and often enjoys it – in her mind she is never far from Robert or the man she is currently dating, even whilst

she is observing: 'walking back up Portobello road... I just remembered something about Adam... I wonder if this is what Dave loves about Hong Kong, I think involuntarily... The piazza in Covent Garden is so beautiful and yet it's somewhere Londoners practically never go, I muse... and automatically, my mind goes back to Robert' (Burgess 2011, 97, 341, 375). This consistent focus on the men in her life fulfils Juliette Wells' assertion that 'every chick lit novel centres on a love plot' (Wells 2006, 49), but does little to rebuff the argument against female *flâneurs* which 'stems in large part from [their] presumed incapacity for self-sufficiency' (Parkhurst Ferguson 1994, 31).

### Conclusion

Clearly, many questions remain regarding the possibility of twenty-first century *flânerie*, as well as the actuality of postfeminist freedom on offer to women, and I will be continuing to examine these issues. I do feel though, that a 'literary' reading of chick lit not only allows for development in existing theories of gender and postfeminist culture, but begins to challenge the rigid hierarchies of literature. As my research progresses I hope to pursue this interrogation, and potentially work to disrupt and destabilise this categorisation.

### References

Baudelaire, Charles. 1964 [1863]. The



- Painter of Modern Life. In Jonathan Mayne ed. trans. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. London: Phaidon Press.
- Burgess, Gemma. 2011. *A Girl Like You*. London: Avon.
- Felski, Rita. 1995. *The Gender of Modernity*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Ferriss, Suzanne and Mallory Young. 2006. *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Ferriss, Suzanne and Mallory Young. 2006. Chicks, Girls and Choice: Redefining Feminism. *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue* 06: 87-97.
- Fest, Kerstin. Angels in the House or Girl Power: Working Women in Nineteenth-Century Novels and Contemporary Chick Lit. *Women's Studies* 38 (1): 43-62.
- Fielding, Helen. 1997. *Bridget Jones's Diary*. London: Picador.
- Friedberg, Anne. 1993. *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*. London: University of California Press.
- Gelder, Ken. 2004. *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field*. London: Routledge.
- Genz, Stéphanie. 2009. *Postfemininities in Popular Culture*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Genz, Stéphanie and Benjamin A. Brabon. 2009. *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Gill, Rosalind. 2007. *Gender and the Media*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Gill, Rosalind and Elena Herdieckhoff. 2006. Rewriting the Romance: New Femininities in Chick Lit? *Feminist Media Studies* 6 (4): 487-504.
- Gilloch, Graeme. 1996. *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Harzewski, Stephanie. 2011. *Chick Lit and Postfeminism*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press.
- McCracken, Scott. 1998. *Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- McRobbie, Angela. 2009. *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. London: Sage.
- Parkhurst Ferguson, Priscilla. 1994. *The Flâneur On and Off the Streets of Paris*. In Keith Tester ed. *The Flâneur*. London: Routledge.
- Pollock, Griselda. 1988. *Vision & Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*. London: Routledge.
- Shields, Rob. 1994. Fancy Footwork: Walter Benjamin's Notes on *Flânerie*. In Keith Tester ed. *The*

- Flâneur. London: Routledge.
- Smith, Caroline J. 2008. *Cosmopolitan Culture and Consumerism in Chick Lit*. London: Routledge.
- Tester, Keith. 1994. *The Flâneur*. London: Routledge.
- Wells, Juliette. 2006. Mothers of Chick Lit? Women Writers, Readers and Literary History. In Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young eds. *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Whelehan, Imelda. 2005. *The Feminist Bestseller: from Sex and the Single Girl to Sex and the City*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wolff, Janet. 1985. The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity. *Theory Culture Society* 2 (3): 37-46.
- Wolff, Janet. 1995. *Resident Alien: Feminist Cultural Criticism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

# Queer migrations and straight subjects

Nicole Shephard

---

*Through asking what queer migrations may have to do with straight subjects, this snapshot suggests putting scholarship concerned with the transnational social space, the gendering of migration research, and insights from queer migration studies into productive dialogue with one another. After a brief rationale for the wider project on subject formation in transnational social spaces, three examples illustrate how the gaps and overlaps between these literatures lead me to argue for the queering of social science methodologies to address heteronormative assumptions underlying much theorising and research on gender and transnational migration.*

*Keywords: Transnational Subjects, Queer Methodologies, Queer Migrations, Gender and Migration*

---

True to the 'snapshot' idea, I begin by briefly outlining the rationale for my project, and then narrow down the focus to a single question relevant to my work. By the means of selected examples, I discuss how the gaps and overlaps between scholarship concerned with the transnational social space, the gendering of migration research, and insights from queer migration studies lead me to argue for the queering of methodologies beyond the study of queer subjects.

In short, my research is interested in how people become transnational subjects. The analysis engages with the notion of transnational

social space emerging from transnational migration studies and theories of subject formation on the one hand, as well as with feminist, post-colonial and queer interventions into transnational migration research on the other. Drawing on intersectional theories in gender studies and the queering of methodologies beyond the study of queer subjects, I am working towards a queer intersectional approach to subject formation in transnational social space. To illustrate, discuss and critically evaluate how a queer intersectional approach plays out in an empirical context, this emerging approach is then adopted in a case study on sub-

ject formation in the British South Asian transnational social space.

The notion of transnational social space has emerged from the study of transnational migration and its definition remains contested terrain. Much of the literature emphasises simultaneous links between migrants' societies of origin and residence (Glick Schiller et al 1992; Vertovec 2004; Vertovec 2009), the social networks through which economic, cultural and social capital is organised and transformed, as well as regulations and constraints imposed by nation-states and institutions (Faist 2000; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). While some scholars have argued for a sounder empirical delimitation of the phenomenon (Portes et al 1999) and meticulous definition of the units of reference, analysis, and measurement (Pries 2008), I follow Peter Jackson, Philip Crang and Claire Dwyer (2004) in extending the scope 'beyond the confines of still-bounded-but-displaced "ethnic communities" to encompass a more multidimensional, materially heterogeneous social field, characterized by multiple inhabitations and disjunctions' (Jackson et al 2004, 15). This allows for a conceptualisation of space as no longer confined to particular ethnically defined communities and their bifocal negotiations of subjectivity between home and host-society, and accounts for heterogeneity of relations and experiences within transnational social spaces. Based on the idea that not

everyone participating in transnational social spaces is necessarily a migrant (see Mahler 1998; Jackson et al 2004; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Vertovec 2004), this definition decouples the transnational social space from the act of migration as such and extends it to people from diverse backgrounds. For example, subsequent post-migration generations who 'may have residual affinities to the transnational identities of earlier migrant generations or emergent identities as a result of their own current transnational experiences' (Jackson et al 2004, 3).

The transnational social space holds the potential for transforming and uniting a set of different temporal and spatial locations in one social space; 'by being experienced, expressed, and performed, transnational spaces transform into different forms of places' (Sørensen 1998, 244), that are 'complex, multi-dimensional and multiply inhabited' (Jackson et al 2004, 3). While the transnational social space is thus conceptualised in a rather fluid and hybrid manner, I root it in the framework of transnational migration to avoid the uncritical use of abstract concepts of 'in-betweenness' and 'deterritorialised' free-floating identity formation which Luis Eduardo Guarnizo and Michael Peter Smith warn against when they note that 'transnational practices cannot be construed as if they were free from the constraints and opportunities that contextuality imposes' (Guarni-

zo and Smith 1998, 11). Within the contextuality of the transnational social space, and bearing in mind that transnationality is 'embodied in specific social relations established between specific people, situated in unequivocal localities, at historically determined times' (Guarnizo and Smith 1998, 11), this project explores ways to investigate subject formation within such spaces. Accounting for the heterogeneity such an understanding of the transnational social space entails, requires a theorisation of subject formation that challenges any stable and homogenous notions of identity. Subjects are understood as discursively produced in their temporal and spatial units of reference, ambivalent and hybrid, as well as always material and embodied. Drawing on Michel Foucault's work on the subject (1979; 1982; 1984; 1988), Judith Butler's theory of performativity (1990; 1993; 2004), and the notion of entanglement (Barad 2007; Kirby 2011), I theorise the transnational subject as a material-discursive entity.

This conceptualisation of the transnational social space and of the material-discursive production of transnational subjects appears to contrast with much of the empirical research in transnational migration. Here, the main focus has been on identifying patterns of transnational migration, networks across national borders and transnational practices such as hometown associations and

remittances (Goldring 2001; Vertovec 2004). How the participants in such transnational social spaces come to view themselves as transnational subjects, and how they negotiate the multiplicity and hybridity such an understanding of transnational social space entails, has been neglected. My project takes this gap as a starting point to further explore how gender and transnational migration research can benefit from integrating an open conceptualisation of transnational social space and the material-discursive production of subjects, towards a more complex picture of transnational subjects than has been accounted for so far. To that end, I examine how the conceptual literatures outlined above and empirical work on transnational migration (see Goldring 2001, Levitt 2001; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004), feminist and post-colonial interventions into transnational migration research (see Bhachu 1993; Brah 1996; Mahler 1998; Pessar and Mahler 2001, 2003; Pratt and Yeoh 2003; Puwar 2003) and scholarship on queer migrations (see Luibhéid and Cantu Jr. 2005; Manalansan IV 2006; Luibhéid 2008; Cantu Jr. 2009) complement one another in fruitful ways and illustrate one another's limitations. While they share a concern with similar (if not the same) social relations, spaces and subjects, they have often evolved in parallel rather than in dialogue. This snapshot invokes three brief examples to illus-

trate why I argue for the queering of methodologies beyond the study of queer subjects. In other words, what do queer migrations have to do with straight subjects?

### **Gender, sexuality and transnationalism**

Feminist interventions into transnational migration scholarship have successfully shown how gender is relevant to all aspects and processes of migration (see Morokvašić 1984; Pedraza 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000; Pessar and Mahler 2001, 2003; Pratt and Yeoh 2003) and, as a consequence, gender-aware analyses of transnational migration and subjects have become widespread. However, the emphasis has rarely been on how gender impacts on the production of the transnational subject (or transnationality on the gendered subject), but on disaggregating research by gender in terms of a binary variable with the attributes male and female. While feminist work on migration seems to offer a setting for thinking about sexualities and migration, that very same research often reinscribes heteronormative assumptions by conflating sexuality with gender 'which in turn is often conflated with women — a triple erasure meaning that only women have sexuality, sexuality is gender, and gender or sexuality is normatively heterosexual' (Luibhéid 2004, 227). Taking an intersectional approach, particularly the sort Leslie McCall (2005, 1773)

defines in terms of anticategorical complexity, allows for an analysis of subject formation that pays close attention to the contextually prevalent multiplicity in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, class, religion, sexuality or other potential axes of difference. This approach thus pushes the researcher to take into account the messiness Paula-Irene Villa attests human beings when she notes how 'real-life persons are — compared with discursive order — a mess: untidy, complex, fuzzy, multi-layered, dynamic' (Villa 2011, 173). Intersectional theory incorporates sexuality as one possible avenue for subject formation. It thus draws attention to the ways in which such axes of difference intersect and impact on the experience of, for instance, a queer migrant woman of colour compared to, say, a straight man of the same cultural and ethnic background. It does not, however, provide the researcher with a conceptual tool to pay attention to the ways in which gender and sexuality normalise social relations, particularly to heteronormativity.

### **Queering heterosexuality**

In queer migration scholarship, on the other hand, sexuality is at the forefront of research interest. The focus of much research, however, quite understandably remains on queer subjects engaging in cross-border mobility in different geopolitical contexts. Queer migration studies open the door to complicat-



ing heteronormative assumptions in mainstream migration research. A number of scholars (see Valocchi 2005; Manalansan IV 2006; Luibhéid 2008) suggest that queer methodologies need not be limited to the study of queer subjects, but used as an instrument to explore how heteronormativity and sexualities play a role in producing not only those constructed as queer but also those who become normalised by those very same discourses. They not only exclude non-heterosexual subjects, but are deeply entrenched in the production of all subjects. Heteronormativity on the one hand makes the social world intelligible to its inhabitants, while, on the other, meaning 'is also negotiated in, and emergent from, the mundane social interaction through which each of us makes sense of our own and others' gendered and sexual lives' (Jackson 2006, 112). It not only imposes normative sexuality and sexual practice, but also normative ways of life and legitimate forms of relationships (Jackson 2006, 110).

### **Queering transnationality**

Both transnational and queer migration scholarship can be read as interventions into mainstream migration scholarship to complicate the latter by shifting the focus to 'contradictions, relationality, and borders as contact zones, and the construction of identities, communities, practices, hegemonies and alternatives linked to local, national,

and transnational circuits' (Luibhéid 2008, 173). Both are thus invested in similar moves away from theorising migration as rational choice within push and pull frameworks towards a more holistic 'understanding that overlapping, palimpsestic histories of imperialism, invasion, investment, trade, and political influence' (Luibhéid 2008, 173) form the basis of migratory movements as well as transnational circuits. Perhaps surprisingly, the insights from queer migration scholarship have not yet found their way into transnational migration research practice. In most migration research, 'sexuality and heteronormativity remain ignored, trivialized, derided, or conflated with gender' (Luibhéid 2004, 233).

In conclusion, I believe that queer migrations have a great deal to do with straight subjects. It is scholarship on queer migrations that invites us to complicate heteronormative assumptions underlying much theorising and research on gender and transnational migration. From the margins of the sociology of migration, queer migrations serve as a focal point from which to re-examine the ways in which transnational subjects, straight or otherwise, have been approached in the past. Queer migration scholarship thus encourages us to put valuable insights from transnational migration studies, gender studies, and queer theory into productive dialogue with one another. An important concern driving my project is taking seriously



this call for the queering of social research, 'to bring [queer theory's] conceptual and theoretical apparatus to the study of heterosexuality and heterosexuality's relationship to gender and other axes of social difference such as class, ethnicity, and race' (Valocchi 2005, 762). Pairing an intersectional lens with queer methodologies acknowledges heteronormative discourses as part of the social space within which transnational subjects are produced and performed, and draws attention to the relationship between gender and sexualities and the (non-)normative alignments across those and other axes.

### References

- Barad, Karen. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bhachu, Parminder. 1993. Identities Constructed and Reconstructed: Representations of Asian Women in Britain. In Gina Buijs ed. *Migrant Women: Crossing Boundaries and Changing Identities*. Oxford: Berg.
- Brah, Avtar. 1996. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Cantù Jr., Lionel. 2009. *The Sexuality of Migration*. New York: New York University Press.
- Faist, Thomas. 2000. *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Space*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1979. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, Michel. 1982. The Subject and Power. *Critical Inquiry* 8 (4): 777-95.
- Foucault, Michel. 1984. Nietzsche, Genealogy, History. In Paul Rabinow ed. *The Foucault Reader*. London: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, Michel. 1988. *The History of Sexuality, Vol 3: The Care of the Self*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Glick Schiller, Nina, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton. 1992. Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration. In Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton eds. *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered*. New York: The New York Academy of Sciences.
- Goldring, Luin. 2001. The Gender and

- Geography of Citizenship in Mexico-U.S. Transnational Spaces. *Identities* 7 (4): 501-37.
- Guarnizo, Luis Eduardo, and Michael Peter Smith. 1998. The Locations of Transnationalism. In Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo eds. *Transnationalism From Below*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierette. 2000. Feminism and Migration. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 571 (2000): 107-20.
- Jackson, Peter, Philip Crang, and Claire Dwyer. 2004. Introduction: The Spaces of Transnationality. In Peter Jackson, Philip Crang, and Claire Dwyer eds. *Transnational Spaces*. London: Routledge.
- Jackson, Stevi. 2006. Gender, Sexuality and Heterosexuality. The Complexity (and Limits) of Heteronormativity. *Feminist Theory* 7 (1): 105-21.
- Kirby, Vicky. 2011. *Quantum Anthropologies*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Levitt, Peggy. 2001. *The Transnational Villagers*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Levitt, Peggy, and Nina Glick Schiller. 2004. Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society. *International Migration Review* 38 (3): 1002-39.
- Luibhéid, Eithne. 2004. Heteronormativity and Immigration Scholarship: A Call for Change. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10 (2): 227-35.
- Luibhéid, Eithne. 2008. Queer/Migration an Unruly Body of Scholarship. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14 (2/3): 169-90.
- Luibhéid, Eithne, and Lionel Cantù eds. 2005. *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, US Citizenship, and Border Crossings*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mahler, Sarah J. 1998. Theoretical and Empirical Contributions Toward a Research Agenda for Transnationalism. In Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo eds. *Transnationalism From Below*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Manalansan IV, Martin F. 2006. Queer Intersections: Sexuality and Gender in Migration Studies. *International Migration Review* 40 (1): 224-49.
- McCall, Leslie. 2005. The Complexity of Intersectionality. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30 (3): 1771-880.
- Morokvašić, Mirjana. 1984. Birds of Passage Are Also Women. *International Migration Review* 18 (4): 886-907.
- Pedraza, Silvia. 1991. Women and Migration: The Social Consequences

- es of Gender. *Annual Review of Sociology* 17: 303-25.
- Pessar, Patricia, and Sarah Mahler. 2001. Gendered Geographies of Power: Analyzing Gender Across Transnational Spaces. *Identities* 7 (4): 441-59.
- Pessar, Patricia, and Sarah Mahler. 2003. Transnational Migration: Bringing Gender in. *International Migration Review* 37 (3): 812-46.
- Portes, Alejandro, Luis E. Guarnizo, and Patrizia Landolt. 1999. The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (2): 217-37.
- Pratt, Geraldine, and Brenda Yeoh. 2003. Transnational (Counter) Topographies. *Gender, Place and Culture* 10 (2): 159-66.
- Pries, Ludger. 2008. Transnational Societal Spaces: Which Units of Analysis, Reference and Measurement? In Ludger Pries ed. *Rethinking Transnationalism*. London: Routledge.
- Puwar, Nirmal. 2003. Melodramatic Postures and Constructions. In Nirmal Puwar and Parvati Raghuram eds. *South Asian Women in the Diaspora*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Sørensen, Ninna Nyberg. 1998. Narrating Identity Across Dominican Worlds. In Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo eds. *Transnationalism From Below*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Valocchi, Stephen. 2005. Not Yet Queer Enough: The Lessons of Queer Theory for the Sociology of Gender and Sexuality. *Gender & Society* 19 (6): 750-70.
- Vertovec, Steven. 2004. Migrant Transnationalism and Modes of Transformation. *International Migration Review* 38 (3): 970-1001.
- Vertovec, Steven. 2009. *Transnationalism. Key Ideas*. London: Routledge.
- Villa, Paula-Irene. 2011. Embodiment is Always More: Intersectionality, Subjection and the Body. In Helma Lutz, Maria Teresa Herrera Vivar, and Linda Supik eds. *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies*. Farnham: Ashgate.

# Responding to violence against South Asian women in the British domestic violence movement

Clare Wiper

---

*Over the last decade there has been an increasing amount of societal and political attention given to violence against women in South Asian communities in Britain. This mounting interest has mostly been focused on specific forms of abuse – namely honour-based violence and forced marriage – which have been associated predominantly with South Asian, and in particular Muslim, cultures. However, evidence suggests that Western conceptualisations and responses to this violence have been largely informed by simplistic and essentialist notions of culture, leading to stereotypes and misapprehensions of South Asian communities as homogenous, patriarchal and inherently violent, and of South Asian women as passive victims waiting to be rescued by more civilised (Western) societies. To date there is currently little, if any, empirical research that examines how the British domestic violence movement is operating in this difficult terrain. This snapshot outlines an aspect of my PhD research which aims to examine how notions of culture and difference shape movement responses to violence against South Asian women.*

*Keywords: Domestic Violence Movement, Violence against South Asian Women, Racism, Cultural Essentialism, Intersectionality Theory*

---

## Introduction

Issues of racial exclusion and discrimination have long haunted the domestic violence movement. Substantial evidence suggests that racially exclusive practices have affected movement membership and corrupted domestic violence work

for decades, particularly in relation to outreach and support efforts in black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities (Mama 1989; Bent-Goodley 2005). Indeed, during the earlier stages of the movement white radical feminists strategically situated gender inequality

as the sole determining factor of violence against women in order to demonstrate that all women, irrespective of age, class or race, were its potential victims (Russell 1975; Martin 1976; Barry 1979), yet in doing so largely failed to represent the diverse experiences and needs of abused poor and BAME women across Britain (Carby 1982; Hill Collins 1990). However, while recent studies have highlighted the enduring ethnocentricity of the domestic violence movement as a 'white woman's movement' (Lehrner and Allen 2009, 13; see also Macy et al 2010), my research intends to draw attention to rather the opposite occurrence, whereby the increasingly problematic race-focused and Eurocentric gaze of the British domestic violence movement is facilitating a disproportionate amount of attention to violence against South Asian women. It appears that issues of difference and diversity are resurfacing as main challenges for the movement, both in relation to fragmentation between specialist identity groups and organisations (Bent-Goodley 2005), and with regards to responding effectively to the diverse needs of abused women situated at the intersections of race, ethnicity and culture (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005; Motta et al 2011).

This snapshot therefore establishes the importance of empirically examining the extent to which domestic violence activists and organisations in North East England feel

they are responding effectively to all forms of violence against South Asian women. This is especially important to explore in the current climate, which several feminist scholars and activists have argued is characterised by essentialist conceptualisations that tend to link this abuse solely to South Asian cultural practice and traditions, or to notions of 'honour' and 'shame' (Meetoo & Mirza 2007). However, while examples of inadequate state responses to this violence are plentiful (see Gupta 2005 in particular), there is currently very little, if any, empirical research to evidence the challenges and strategies that the domestic violence movement – and in particular activists from non-BAME led organisations – has established when responding to violence against women from different cultures and ethnicities to their own. Considering that domestic violence organisations are usually the first point of contact for victims of domestic abuse, it seems significant to study their understandings of, and responses to, this violence and the implications this might have for the safety and rights of abused South Asian women. I explore these issues throughout this snapshot, and conclude by considering the practicality of intersectionality theory for domestic violence movement praxis: might this positioning help domestic violence activists address the multiple and intersecting factors that condition the experiences and needs of

abused South Asian women, rather than making purely race-focused enquiries that reproduce racism and cultural essentialism?

### **From ethnocentricity to Eurocentricity**

During the 1970s and 1980s the voices of BAME women were largely missing from the domestic violence movement (Naples 1998), but over the last two decades BAME feminists have provided invaluable theoretical contributions that have undeniably transformed feminism as a whole (Crenshaw 1991; Bryson 2003). Making a stand against the ethnocentric (white) interests of the movement, they demonstrated that the power structures which assemble around race and ethnicity interact with patriarchy to condition experiences of violence that reflect the power relations and cultural norms within specific communities and societies (Mama 1989; Hill Collins 1990; Wilson 2006). The importance of claiming a space within the British domestic violence movement was increasingly recognised by South Asian women who were responding to patriarchal gender relations both within South Asia and the South Asian diaspora in the UK during this period (Gupta 2004; Wilson 2006). In particular, South Asian feminists and activists focused on concepts of 'honour' and 'shame', explaining that the sexual purity of South Asian women is often strictly controlled by South Asian men, meaning that ex-

tra-marital relationships, refusal to marry a man chosen by her father, or becoming too 'westernised', might bring 'shame' upon the family and community, which is often enough to justify punishment (Johal 2003; Gill 2004). Today this punishment is often referred to as 'honour'-based violence, which can include physical, emotional, psychological and financial abuse, confinement or imprisonment, being forced into marriage, female genital mutilation and murder (Meetoo and Mirza 2007). Yet before this time, honour-based violence was relatively unheard of in Britain.

However, it appears the ethnocentric gaze of the British domestic violence movement is no longer the main concern of South Asian women, as the global context in which feminists and activists are responding to violence against women in South Asian communities has seemingly changed over the last decade, particularly following the events of September 11. Initially a triumph, the efforts of South Asian feminists to get honour-based violence recognised at a political level has resulted in a dangerous preoccupation with these crimes, which have become synonymous with South Asian culture despite the occurrence of this violence in the Middle East, Africa, Europe and the UK, and throughout different cultures and religions (Welchman & Hossain 2005). Scholars have argued that the current climate is characterised



by heightened societal and institutional racism against the South Asian diaspora (Burman et al 2004; Gill 2004; Patel 2008), essentialist and homogenised conceptualisations of South Asian culture (Volpp 2000, 2003; Wilson 2006) and Islamophobia-fuelled moral panics about the Muslim population (Warrier 2008; Khan 2010), all of which have made it more difficult for South Asian women attempting to challenge violence occurring within their communities. Indeed, there is substantial evidence to suggest that Western responses to forms of violence against South Asian women have been informed by stereotypes and misconceptions of South Asian culture as 'more' violent and male-controlled than Western cultures (Gupta 2003; Gill 2006; Khan 2010) and of South Asian women as homogenous, passive victims waiting to be rescued by the more civilised Western world (Volpp 2003; Sanghera 2009). Sujata Warrier (2008) argues that South Asian women have become hyper-visible in public consciousness due to the discourses of fear and risk that have been imposed on these supposedly alien and backward 'others' in recent years. Similarly, Purna Sen contends that the West's colonial encounters with 'other' cultural practices, such as the dowry, the burka, honour killings and forced marriages, have reinforced within British feminism the 'assumed moral superiority of the West over the rest' (Sen

2005, 43), hence the disproportionate attention being given to forms of honour-based violence.

### **The complexities of difference**

The position of South Asian scholars and activists within the British domestic violence movement has thus largely shifted from their challenging of the ethnocentrism inherent in white feminists' conceptualisations of domestic violence which situated gender inequality as the sole cause of violence against women, to a critique of the increasingly problematic Eurocentric and race-focused interests of the movement which has facilitated a disproportionate amount of scholarly and political attraction to violence against South Asian women. South Asian feminists have expressed concern about the overemphasis on cultural difference and its implications for practice, particularly with regards to the domestic violence movement 'disempowering [South Asian] women still further by reinforcing negative stereotypes' (Thiara & Gill 2010, 48). In their book *From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers* (Gupta 2003), South Asian-led domestic violence organisation Southall Black Sisters have stressed the dangers of the cultural relativist assumption that all forms of violence against women from South Asian communities are related to their cultural codes and practices (i.e. to honour codes). Such outlooks have rendered activists and state agen-

cies reluctant to intervene due to respect for multiculturalism (Mee-too & Mirza 2007), and has also enabled them to overlook poverty, racism, language barriers, insecure immigration statuses, childcare responsibilities, unawareness of UK laws, fear of the police and fear of further violence as common factors that exacerbate or prolong violence against South Asian women (Burman et al 2004; Gill 2004; Sokoloff 2008). In order to effectively respond to this violence, the domestic violence movement as a whole must acknowledge these issues.

As such, my research aims to uncover how domestic violence activists in the North East are articulating and responding to the needs of abused South Asian women in the midst of problematic conceptualisations of this violence. In particular, I am interested in examining how activists might frame this violence in a way that enables them to overcome the prejudice or assumptions that hinder their attempts to effectively support and empower abused South Asian women. The problem, it seems, is that domestic violence activists are currently trapped between two essentialist discourses. To focus too much on the differences between women could lead to stereotyping and 'othering' women and cultures, as well as creating a lack of common ground between movement activists and organisations that represent different social groups, but to focus solely on

gender and patriarchy often means overlooking the ways in which gender intersects with race, ethnicity, culture, religion and other axes of identity to condition diverse experiences of violence. Furthermore, focusing solely on sameness might encourage activists to overlook structural factors, such as racist and classist social policies, and the impact this can have on women's experiences of violence and barriers to justice. It is for these reasons that my research will argue that activists' framings of domestic violence could be advanced by drawing upon intersectionality theory.

### **Recognising intersecting oppressions**

With regards to what constitutes an effective response to violence against South Asian women, scholars, activists and several South Asian women's organisations have highlighted the importance of intersectionality theory to movement praxis (Hill Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1991; McCall 2005), and feminist academics Ravi Thiara and Aisha Gill have positioned intersectionality as 'the best hope for a nuanced approach to [violence against women]' (Thiara and Gill 2010, 48). Intersectionality theory advocates recognition of 'how a woman's culture of origin, her place within the social, political and economic world, and within the society's dominant culture, can affect her experience of violence and the options available to her' (Lock-

hart and Danis 2010, xxiii). From this outlook, South Asian women are not viewed as a homogenous group that share the same cultural experiences of violence, but instead transcend this essentialist binary construction to exist as subjective individuals who are affected to different extents by intersecting forms of domination and oppression.

For example, the Western assumption that South Asian women are passive victims of cultural violence is highly problematic because it renders invisible policies that have undeniably made leaving violent relationships significantly more difficult for women from BAME communities in the UK (see Burman and Chantler 2005). State policies and practices, particularly those associated with immigration control, policing and surveillance, multiculturalism and multi-faithism agendas, English Language (ESOL) provision and housing benefits, continue to condition BAME women's experiences of domestic violence in numerous ways. While there is not sufficient space to engage with all of these issues here, a pertinent problem that numerous Black and South Asian-led organisations have been keen to address is the discrimination evident within British immigration legislation, particularly with regards to the Two Year Rule which advocates the deportation of any immigrant with a spousal visa who leaves their partner within two years of marriage. Substantial evidence

has highlighted that BAME women experiencing domestic violence within this probationary period are unlikely to report abuse due to fear of deportation (Gupta 2003). The 'no recourse to public funds' clause attached to the Two Year Rule also increases the likelihood that an immigrant women will remain in a violent relationship because, as a non-British citizen, she does not have access to state funding to pay for housing and refuge needs, or to buy food and pay for transport (Wilson 2006). Recognising forms of 'structural intersectionality' (Crenshaw 1991) is thus essential to understanding violence against diverse groups of women.

### **Conclusion: unanswered questions**

While intersectionality theory has certainly enhanced the study of domestic violence within the academy, there is little knowledge of how this highly complex holistic approach might be, or has been, translated into practice. What strategies have domestic violence activists and organisations in the North East created for themselves, outside of the academy, in order to avoid essentialist and relativist responses to violence against women from diverse cultures, ethnicities and religions? Is a holistic, intersectional approach to violence against women even possible at a practical level? Indeed, that all violence should be explored in relation to wider social, politi-

cal and economic forces that intersect to shape inequalities, heighten the conditions for violence against women, and create barriers for justice, is arguably a rather ambitious goal for domestic violence organisations, especially in the face of recent cuts to domestic violence sector funding, organisation closures and burn-out (Towers and Walby 2012). Furthermore, might too much attention to difference pose a challenge to alliance-building strategies and collective movement identity? Is this already the case? With the aim of producing research of relevance to the domestic violence movement, I seek answers to such questions. After all, while analyses of the theoretical dimensions of cultural and ethnic difference have been enhanced by the concept of intersectionality in the academy, it is integral that we don't overlook the methodology of the movement.

### References

- Barry, Kathleen. 1979. *Female Sexual Slavery*. Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bent-Goodley, Tricia. 2005. Culture and Domestic Violence: Transforming Knowledge Development. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 20 (2): 195-203.
- Bryson, Valerie. 2003. *Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction*. Palgrave Macmillan: Hampshire.
- Burman, Erica, Sophie Smailes and Khatidja Chantler. 2004. 'Culture' as a Barrier to Service Provision and Delivery: Domestic Violence Services for Minoritized Women. *Critical Social Policy* 24 (3): 332-57.
- Carby, Hazel. 1982. *White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood*. Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1991. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1214-99.
- Dejong, Christina, Amanda Burgess-Proctor and Lori Elis. 2008. Police Officer Perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence: An Analysis of Observational Data. *Violence and Victims* 23 (6):683-96.
- Dobash, R. Emerson and Russell P. Dobash. 1992. *Women, Violence and Social Change*. Taylor and Francis: Routledge.
- Gill, Aisha. 2004. Voicing the Violent Fear: South Asian Women's Experiences of Domestic Violence. *The Howard Journal* 43 (5):465-483.
- Gupta, Rahila. 2003. *From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Hill Collins, Patricia. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Con-*

- sciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. London: Routledge.
- hooks, bell. 1981. *Ain't I a Woman?* Pluto Press.
- Johal, Anita. 2003. Struggle not Submission: Domestic Violence in the 1990s. In Rahila Gupta ed. *From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Kelly, Liz. 1988. *Surviving Sexual Violence*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Khan, Mishal. 2010. Globalization and the Politicization of Muslim Women: Consequences for Domestic Violence in the Netherlands and the United States. *Macalester International* 25 (9), n. pag.
- Lehrner, Amy and Nicole Allen. 2009. Still a Movement After All These Years? Current Tensions in the Domestic Violence Movement. *Violence Against Women* 15 (6): 656-67.
- Lockhart, Letti and Fran Danis. 2010. *Domestic Violence: Intersectionality and Culturally Competent Practice*. Columbia University Press: New York.
- Macy, Rebecca, Mary Giattina, Susan Parish and Carmen Crosby. 2010. Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services: Historical Concerns and Contemporary Challenges. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 25 (3): 3-31.
- Mama, Amina. 1989. *The Hidden Struggle: Statutory and Voluntary Sector Responses to Violence Against Black Women in the Home*. Russell Press: Nottingham
- Martin, Del. 1976. *Battered Wives*. San Francisco: Glide Publications
- McCall, Leslie. 2005. The Complexity of Intersectionality. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30 (3): 1771-1800.
- Meetoo, Veena and Heidi Mirza. 2007. There is Nothing Honourable about Honour Killings: Gender, Violence and the Limits of Multiculturalism. *Women's Studies International Forum* 30 (3): 187-200.
- Motta, Sara., Cristina Fominaya., Catherine Eschle and Laurence Cox. 2011. Feminism, Women's Movements and Women in Movement. *Interface* 3 (2): 1-32.
- Nixon, Jennifer and Cathy Humphreys. 2010. Marshalling the Evidence: Using Intersectionality in the Domestic Violence Frame. *Social Politics* 17 (2): 137-58.
- Richie, Beth. 2005. A Black Feminist Reflection on the Antiviolence Movement. In Natalie Sokoloff and Christina Pratt eds. *Domestic Violence at the Margins: Readings on Race, Class, Gender and Culture*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press
- Russell, Diana. 1975. *The Politics of Rape: The Victim's Perspective*. New York: Madison Books.

- Sanghera, Jasvinder. 2009. *Daughters of Shame*. Hodder Paperbacks.
- Sen, Purna. 2005. Crimes of Honour, Value and Meaning. In Lynn Welchman and Sara Hossain eds. *Honour: Crimes, Paradigms and Violence Against Women*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Siddiqui, Hannah. 2003. It was Written in her Kismet: Forced Marriage. In Rahila Gupta ed. *From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Sokoloff, Natalie. 2008. *Domestic Violence at the Margins: Readings on Race, Class, Gender, and Culture*. Rutgers University Press.
- Sokoloff, Natalie and Ida Dupont. 2005. Domestic Violence at the Intersections of Race, Class and Gender: Challenges and Contributions to Understanding Violence Against Marginalised Women in Diverse Communities. *Violence Against Women* 11 (1): 38-64.
- Thiara Ravi and Aisha Gill. 2010. *Violence Against Women in South Asian Communities: Issues for Policy and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Towers, Jude and Sylvia Walby. 2012. *Measuring the Impact of Cuts in Public Expenditure on the Provision of Services to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls*. Trust for London and Northern Rock Foundation.
- Volpp, Leti. 2003. On Culture, Difference and Domestic Violence. *Gender, Social Policy and Law* 10: 393-99.
- Volpp, Leti. 2000. Blaming Culture for Bad Behaviour. *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 12: 89-116.
- Wilson, Amrit. 2006. *Dreams, Questions, Struggles: South Asian Women in Britain*. Pluto Press.
- Warrier, Sujata. 2008. 'It's in Their Culture': Fairness and Cultural Considerations in Domestic Violence. *Family Court Review* 46 (3): 537-42.
- Welchman, Lynn and Sara Hossain. 2005. *Honour: Crimes, Paradigms and Violence Against Women*. London: Zed Books Ltd.



# Reflecting on media texts as platforms for sexuality research in Arab countries: the case of Jordan

Ebtihal Mahadeen

---

*Sexuality continues to be an under-researched and overall taboo subject in the Arab world. In this snapshot I propose that media texts, particularly interactive online media texts, offer important platforms for sexuality research, enabling researchers to maneuver the restrictions placed on this kind of inquiry in other settings. Based on my doctoral project, I discuss the potential that critical and Foucauldian discourse analyses hold for this type of media-and-sexuality research and offer a few findings from my empirical study as examples of the methodological and theoretical promise of this type of analysis.*

*Keywords: Sexuality, Media, Arab Women, Virginity, Discourse Analysis*

---

Sexuality continues to be a taboo subject across the Arab world. This collective silence poses considerable challenges to young people's access to sexuality-related information and healthcare, and poses a significant challenge for researchers attempting to explore topics related to sexuality. This snapshot argues for the potential of media texts – particularly online media texts – to provide a platform for researchers attempting to access data on attitudes towards, and perceptions of, sexuality in order to address the current lack of information on sexuality more generally. This proposal is premised on the rising rates of

internet penetration in the region as well as the unprecedented broaching of previously-taboo sexual topics in Arab media, such as hymen reconstruction surgeries and fake hymens. To this end, my own approach to researching the representation of virginity in Jordanian online media is presented as a case study.

A number of studies have found that access to sexual health services and information is heavily restricted in the Arab world (Almasarweh 2003; DeJong et al 2005; Khalaf et al 2010). Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi and Shereen El Feki's (2011) detailed study of young people's sexuality and reproductive health in Arab

countries demonstrated that youths are ill-informed, and lack knowledge and access to services. It also revealed that there is a gender gap in sexual knowledge as men are implicitly allowed to pursue sexual adventures while women are strictly prohibited from doing so. DeJong et al had previously reached the same conclusions in 2005: young Arabs lack information on sexual matters, the family unit compounds their ignorance through its excessive protectiveness, and health providers do not recognise the needs of young people and do not welcome them, particularly if they are unmarried. As DeJong et al put it, 'within the public domain, an overt recognition that young people have sexual needs and desires and may be sexually active before marriage, and that married couples experience sexual and reproductive health problems is deeply problematic' (DeJong et al 2005, 52).

Taking a closer look at Jordan, the case study at hand, the same sensitivity surrounding sexuality exists. Several scholars shed light on the problems created by public policy silence on matters pertaining to sexuality (Almasarweh 2003; Khalaf et al 2010; Al-Shdayfat and Green 2012). In fact, these researchers have agreed that there is a glaring absence in sexuality research in the country due to social and official restrictions placed on conducting such research. Because of entrenched taboos, this type of research contin-

ues to face tremendous challenges, especially if it aims to focus on the sexual lives of unmarried people. Researchers have thus found it very challenging to conduct research on premarital or extramarital sexual practices in Jordan. Al-Shdayfat and Green's testimony about the difficulties they faced while conducting research on Jordanian Bedouin women's sexuality is expressive of the deep-seated prohibitions placed on the subject:

Talking about sexuality is so taboo in Jordan that in this study it proved impossible to ask any questions to married and unmarried Jordanian Bedouin young women about pre-marital or extramarital sexual behaviour. Neither was permission obtained to ask participants their attitudes about sex outside marriage (Al-Shdayfat and Green 2012: 107)

Clearly, the collective silence on sexuality in Jordan not only restricts young people's access to information and health services, but also researchers' ambitions and abilities to access information, analyse it, and gain knowledge in order to inform sexuality-focused policy and practice. From where do young Jordanians receive sexual information? And how can researchers obtain information on sexuality in light of the social and official censorship currently in place?

The lack of information on sex in the Arab region is somewhat offset

by Jordanian and Arab youths' avid consumption of the media. This consumption has been identified as a potential way for youths to overcome public censorship of sexual matters (Almasarweh 2003; Roudi-Fahimi and El Feki 2011; Al-Shdayfat and Green 2012). The media, therefore, can play a vital role in addressing this gap in knowledge, even if only a partial one. While the media cannot compensate for access to sexual and reproductive health services, it could perhaps be used to educate and bring to Jordanian youths' attention issues which they might be unaware of, such as protection and safe sex. However, it is worth noting that the types of media Jordanian youth consume remain unidentified and it is therefore difficult to assess their advantages and disadvantages as sources of sexual education. What little information is available points to high consumption of pornography among Arab youth in general (Roudi-Fahimi and El Feki 2011), which poses many questions about the quality and the type of sex education youths are being exposed to in the absence of more balanced and healthy alternatives. This indicator also calls for more in-depth studies to gauge the true nature of media consumption in the region and its potential for providing positive sex information in a manner that overcomes the lack of such information in other settings.

In addition to the media acting as a potential source of sexual informa-

tion, media texts on sexual subjects can serve as sources of rich data on sexual norms and practices. In Jordan, for example, topics that were traditionally taboo have surfaced in media coverage in recent years. Issues such as virginity tests, hymen reconstruction surgeries, and fake hymens appeared in Jordanian media texts both offline (in print newspapers) and online (in independent news websites and the websites of newspapers). The emergence of this type of coverage is in itself a phenomenon worth investigating, as it may indicate a shift in the social perception of these issues as unapproachable. It may also point to nascent liberal attitudes to sexuality in society at large – a hypothesis which still needs testing through targeted studies. Either way, this coverage affords researchers a window of opportunity that was not available before: a plethora of texts (news items, investigative reports, and opinion columns) that now openly tackle sexual issues, offering a wealth of data to tap into. More importantly, as I will discuss below, these texts invite readers' input, adding another layer of complexity to their make-up.

My own doctoral research takes advantage of this recent development by investigating how virginity is represented in Jordanian online media and what this might tell us about gender, power, and sexuality in Jordanian society. My project relies on a marriage between critical discourse analysis (CDA) and Fou-

cauldian discourse analysis (FDA) (1972, 1980, 1984, 1996) as a basis for its theoretical and analytical framework. CDA in particular is a useful lens through which to conduct this type of research. The works of Ruth Wodak (2001), Wodak and Michael Meyer (2001), Teun A. Van Dijk (2001) and Norman Fairclough (1995, 2001a, 2001b) provide an extensive framework for this analytical approach. CDA is a kind of dissident discourse-analytical research that concerns itself with the study of the relationship between semiosis (ways of making meaning) and power. Michel Foucault's work on the relationship between discourse, power and knowledge had a strong influence in CDA. Foucault maintained that discourses play a crucial role not just in constraining participation through their determination of subject positions within social life, but also in constructing objects through the use of particular vocabularies (Foucault 1984). These two effects of discourse, in turn, have a normalising role and a regulatory orientation (Carabine 2001; Wooffitt 2005). In other words, Foucault asserts that discourse is the site of knowledge and power, and it is the location where they are expressed through a number of statements which come together to build a representation of an issue (Foucault 1984). Discourse is thus productive in the sense that it produces the objects it speaks of and it has power outcomes such as defining

what is normal or 'true' at any given moment in history, and what is not (Carabine 2001). The most important implication of this theoretical framework was the grounding of my findings in both texts and context. Moreover, the use of CDA and FDA in my project has been instrumental in shaping my understanding of the discourse of virginity propagated in Jordanian media through the use of several sub-discourses: medial, religious, legal/state-control, and social discourses which all reinforce this dominant discourse and lend it legitimacy.

Yet the true potential of media texts for sexuality research lies, as I have found, in their participatory and interactive capacity. This is especially true since online Jordanian media have taken a step towards interactivity by offering readers the opportunity to express their views in comments. These comments, while subject to moderation policies, offer a wealth of data. In fact, I argue that the interactivity of online Jordanian media enables researchers to access both the original texts and reader-contributed texts as well, thus allowing them to identify the dominant discourses present in both levels and any attempts to challenge them. This renders media texts (and by media texts I mean both the original media items and readers' comments) into a rich and multi-layered resource that grants researchers access to aspects of attitudes towards sexuality that are difficult to

reach otherwise. Readers' ability to post comments anonymously without fear of being identified enhances the chances of genuine self-expression, as opposed to respondents' reluctance to speak on premarital and extramarital sex in personal interviews – a difficulty encountered in traditional qualitative studies such as Al-Shdayfat and Green's (2012). In my own study and, given the challenges facing sexuality research in Jordan, it would have been prohibitively difficult to collect data about readers' reactions to media topics relating to virginity in Jordan in any other way. My position as an unmarried Jordanian woman would have complicated this quest even further due to the enduring sensitivity of the topic. Therefore, I relied on readers' comments to gauge their responses to and attitudes towards media stories. One of the key findings of my study was the active role readers played in supporting or resisting the discourses used in the original texts on virginity. Readers actively engaged with the texts, interpreted them, and wielded considerable power over channelling the discussion towards certain discourses at the expense of others.

Despite its versatility, the theoretical and methodological approach I chose for my project is merely one strategy to capitalise on online media in order to conduct sexuality research in the Arab world. If anything, internet research methods are varied and versatile enough to

be tailored to the specific conditions of sexuality research in the region. Targeted online questionnaires, email interviews, and other methods made possible by the internet are all promising approaches that can aid researchers in their quest for data on both sexual practices and attitudes to sexuality in Arab countries. The rising levels of internet access across the region provide a solid grounding for this type of research, anchoring it in increasingly larger sample sizes.

### **Conclusion**

This snapshot has demonstrated that while the challenges of conducting sexuality research in Arab countries are tremendous, media texts, and in particular interactive online media texts, can be useful to academic researchers eager to access data on sexuality in these countries. This, alongside their potential for addressing the gap in sex education in these societies, makes them useful on more than one level. I have argued for the promise of online media texts to sexuality research, grounding this argument in the theoretical and methodological approaches I used in my doctoral study whilst emphasising the flexibility of online research methods. Finally, as I have tried to illustrate in this snapshot, the intersection between media and sexuality studies in the region remains vastly under-explored and, as this snapshot has argued, merits academic attention.

## References

- Al-Shdayfat, N. and G. Green. 2012. Reflections on Sex Research Among Young Bedouin in Jordan: Risks and Limitations. *Culture, Health & Sexuality: An International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care* 14: 101-111.
- Almasarweh, Issa. 2003. *Adolescent and Youth Reproductive Health In Jordan: Status, Issues, Policies, and Programs*. [http://www.genderandaids.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=103:adolescent-and-youth-reproductive-health-in-jordan&catid=36:arab-states&Itemid=116](http://www.genderandaids.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=103:adolescent-and-youth-reproductive-health-in-jordan&catid=36:arab-states&Itemid=116) [Accessed 15 March 2012].
- Carabine, J. 2001. Unmarried Motherhood 1830-1990: A Genealogical Analysis. In Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates eds. *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*. London: Sage.
- Dejong, J., R. Jawad, I. Mortagy, and B. Shepard. 2005. The Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young People in the Arab Countries and Iran. *Reproductive Health Matters* 13: 49-59.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1995. *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, Harlow: Longman.
- Fairclough, Norman. 2001a. Critical Discourse Analysis as a Method in Social Scientific Research. In Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer eds. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage.
- Fairclough, Norman. 2001b. The Discourse of New Labour: Critical Discourse Analysis. In Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates eds. *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*. London: Sage.
- Foucault, Michel. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Foucault, Michel. 1980. *Power/Knowledge*. New York, Pantheon.
- Foucault, Michel. 1984. *The Foucault Reader*. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Foucault, Michel. 1996. *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Khalaf, I., F.A. Moghli, and E.S. Froelicher. 2010. Youth-friendly Reproductive Health Services in Jordan from the Perspective of the Youth: A Descriptive Qualitative Study. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences* 24: 321-31.
- Roudi-Fahimi Farzaneh and Sherleen El Feki. 2011. *Facts of Life: Youth Sexuality and Reproductive Health in the Middle East and North Africa*. <http://www.prb.org/pdf11/facts-of-life-youth-in-middle-east.pdf> [Accessed 15 March 2012].
- Van Dijk, Teun A. 2001. Multidisciplinary CDA: A Plea for Diversity. In Ruth



Wodak and Michael Meyer eds.  
*Methods of Critical Discourse  
Analysis*. London: Sage.

Wodak, Ruth. 2001. What CDA is About  
- A Summary of Its History, Important  
Concepts and Development.  
In Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer  
eds. *Methods of Critical Discourse  
Analysis*. London: Sage.

Wodak, Ruth & Michael Meyer eds.  
2001. *Methods of Critical Dis-  
course Analysis*. London: Sage.

Wooffitt, Robin. 2005. *Conversation  
Analysis & Discourse Analysis:  
A Comparative and Critical Intro-  
duction*. London: Sage.

# Young adults' lesbian, gay and bisexual identity construction within schools: a post-Section 28 climate

Amy MacMillan

---

*My PhD research works within a socio-legal framework and engages with youth, sexuality and identity studies in seeking to discover how young adults within post-Section 28 school environments construct and understand their lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) identities. Analysing educational and social policy relating to sexualities and engaging with queer theory and notions of performativity, I attempt to understand how young people negotiate LGB identities through social practices and cultural discourses. This snapshot demonstrates why this work is necessary, outlining my intended research design and objectives and setting out my central research questions.*

*Keywords: Section 28, Schools, Young People, LGB Identity Construction, Heteronormativity, Homophobia, Queer Theory*

---

## Introduction

This snapshot outlines my PhD thesis: '*Young Adults' Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Identity Construction – A Post-Section 28 Environment*'. The project is currently in its early stages; therefore I will not be making any solid conclusions in this snapshot, but will instead use this opportunity to highlight the need for my research. I outline what I intend to research and why; what I envisage my central research questions will be; and I indicate my initial thoughts on how I intend to conduct this research, all of which

are subject to change as I continue reviewing literature and developing my theoretical framework and methodology. This snapshot aims to give a taste of my work and encourage dialogue and debate within and beyond the field of gender studies in which my research is situated.

## Research overview

Section 28 (S28) was introduced in 1989 and stated that local authorities should not 'intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality' (Local Government Act

1988: s28(1) 2A. (1) (a)), nor should they 'promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretend family relationship' (s28 2A. (1) (b)). It was repealed in 2003. The primary purpose of my research is to discover how young adults within post-S28 school environments construct and understand their lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) identities. This will be achieved primarily through speaking to LGB young people, aged approximately 16-25, who have attended state school since the repeal of S28. I propose that not only are young people affected by the legacy of S28, but additionally, the heteronormative environment of schools can negatively affect LGB young people.

### **Why this research?**

Government funded research (Hunt and Jensen 2007; Guasp 2012) into the experiences of school pupils who identify as LGB highlights that homophobia in UK schools continues to be a major problem. This research identifies many of the complex issues around homophobic bullying and LGB identities, for example: prevalence of physical and verbal violence; gaps in knowledge about LGB identities; and lack of support and training for teachers. However, although policy *has* been developed (for example DCSF 2007a) and numerous recommendations for action to challenge homophobia in schools *have*

been made (for example DCSF 2007a, 2009a; Guasp 2009; Jennet et al. 2004; Warwick et al. 2004), no recommendations or policies are statutory. At best they only address the specific issue of bullying, but not wider problems such as the heteronormative environment of schools, or the ignorance on which much bullying is based. Furthermore, research on the implementation of these recommended actions and of the wider effects of homophobia and heteronormativity upon young people (see for example Rivers 2000, 2004, 2011; Warwick et al 2001) suggests that the effects of bullying and heteronormativity in school can be negative and have far-reaching implications. However, such research does not fully address these implications, nor has it been picked up and used productively in government policy or guidance.

My research aims to address these neglected areas by focusing on the lived experiences of young people who identified, or were beginning to identify, as LGB at school, and attempting to understand their identity negotiations within school environments. The research seeks to discover how LGB identities are developed and lived out within schools, and how experiences at school have affected LGB young adults in their wider lives. I will analyse educational and social policy relating to sexualities and examine how sexual identities are constructed at an experiential level in

relation to these policies in order to understand the current climate for LGB young people in schools. My research also aims to enhance the effectiveness of existing policy to combat homophobia in schools, and to contribute to policy debates around young people and sexuality.

On the surface, equality and diversity, including LGB rights, were high on the previous government's agenda and remain so within the current Coalition government, despite the change in fundamental political stances from left to right. For example, as well as the repeal of S28, Labour oversaw a range of education specific policies reflecting liberalising attitudes towards LGB identities (such as DCFS 2007a, 2007b; DfEE 2000a, 2000b; DfES 2003, 2004, 2006; Jennet et al. 2004; Miginiuolo 2007). Further, there are currently a number of campaigns specifically targeting homophobia in schools, and research, guidance and resources produced by NGOs, voluntary organisations and Unions, for example: *Education Champions Programme* (Stonewall 2010a); *Education for All* (Stonewall 2010b); *FIT* (Beadle-Blair 2010); *The Homophobia Project* (Orbaum 2010); *National Healthy Schools Programme* (DCSF 2009b); *Prevalence of Homophobia Surveys* (Oldham NUT 2008, 2010; Blackpool NUT 2009; Lancashire NUT 2009; Liverpool NUT 2010; Salford NUT 2010); and the ongoing work of the NSPCC, Schools Out, Diver-

sity Role Models and Educate and Celebrate<sup>1</sup>. However, the Government's own research, both Labour and Coalition (Hunt and Jensen 2007; Guasp 2012), highlights the significant gap between both administrations' stated aims and what is actually happening on a day-to-day basis for LGB young people.

Additionally, Labour's commitment to equality and diversity was not always met with support. This was particularly reflected by the turbulent ascent of the *Single Equality Bill* (2009-2010)<sup>2</sup> during their last Parliamentary session in government and a failure to implement the Act fully before the dissolution of Parliament. Indeed, since the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition took office in May 2010 there have been questions over whether the *Equality Act* (2010) will remain in its present format, or in fact at all. There have also been specific debates about if and how it relates to education, for example, Education Secretary Michael Gove has stated that:

The education provisions of the Equality Act 2010 which prohibit discrimination against individuals based on their protected characteristics (including sexual orientation) do not extend to the content of the curriculum. Any materials used in sex and relationship education lessons, therefore, will not be subject to the discrimination provisions of the act (Gove 2012, 1).

The current political climate raises questions about the government's future commitment to equality issues, and specifically, questions ensue about commitment to the Equality Act (2010) and the development of progressive work on LGB rights in education and further afield. As such, my research comes at an essential time, when the agenda of sexualities equality and diversity is fragile.

### **Key objectives and central research questions**

Having reviewed a significant amount of literature both around the specific issues of young people, education and non-normative sexuality (for example Ellis and High 2004; Epstein 1994, 2000; Harris 1990; Harris 1997; Jones and Mahony 1989; Rivers 1995, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2011; Trenchard and Warren 1984; Vicars 2006) and wider literature on non-normative sexualities, historically and in contemporary society (for example, Brickell 2006; Durham 1991; Foucault 1990; Richardson and Monro 2012; Sedgwick 2008; Weeks 2007), I have identified four key objectives which I aim to address in my thesis:

1) Explore the legacies of S28 and how these impact on young people in schools

2) Evaluate current practice regarding sexual identities within

schools in relation to existing policy

3) Examine how LGB young people understand their sexual identity development in relation to their school experiences

4) Understand how young people negotiate their sexuality within the school environment

5) The research objectives will be met through the theoretical and methodological frameworks outlined below, and through the following central research questions:

-What has the repeal of S28 meant for LGB identities in schools – in theory and in practice? (Objectives 1 and 2)

-How have LGB young people attending secondary school since S28's repeal experienced their sexuality? (Objectives 3 and 4)

-What impact does explicit homophobia in schools have on LGB young people, particularly in relation to their identity construction? (Objectives 3 and 4)

-What are the effects of heteronormativity in schools on sexual identity development of LGB young people? (Objectives 3 and 4)

-Why are schools particularly homophobic environ-

ments? (Objectives 1 and 2)

Together these five questions merge into one major research question, which is: How does the post-S28 school environment affect LGB young people's identity development?

### **Theoretical framework**

Whilst remaining firmly grounded in sociology and social policy, my work engages with youth, sexuality and identity studies (for example Savin-Williams 1990; Unks 1995; Owens 1998; Miceli 2002; D'Augelli and Patterson 2001; Mac an Ghail 1994) and with educational theories and frameworks relating to sexuality (such as Ali et al 2004; Epstein and Johnson 1998; Kehily 2002; Mac an Ghail 1994; Rasmussen et al 2004; Rasmussen 2006; Rofes 2005). In order to better understand LGB social and cultural positions and young people's sexual identity development, my research will also engage with queer theory and notions of performativity, using, for example, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (2006). Here, concepts from Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1990) and Eve K. Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (2008) will also be employed to explore the extent to which young people are able to negotiate non-heterosexual identities through competing social discourses.

My work views schools as institutions that discursively encourage

normative sexuality and thus as arenas where LGB identity constructions are problematic (see Thorne 1993; Owens 1998). Although my work focuses on the experiences of secondary school age youth, it seeks to explore how these young people arrived at their understandings of sexualities prior to their teenage years. These understandings will have inevitably been influenced by primary school experiences. As such I also engage with work on sexualities in primary schools (for example, Blaise 2005; DePalma and Atkinson 2008, 2009, 2010; Renold 2002) and will draw on the recent Economic and Social Research Council funded work - *No Outsiders* (see Allan et al 2008; Atkinson and DePalma 2009; DePalmer and Atkinson 2008, 2009, 2010; DePalma and Jenet 2010; No Outsiders Project Team 2010).

### **Methodology**

My research will be undertaken through a combination of policy analysis, qualitative interviews and focus groups. The policy analysis will focus on S28 and policies that aim to protect LGB people (see above). Textual analysis is ideally suited to deconstructing assumptions within policy documents and will thus be employed in order to examine the ways in which sexuality is understood within, and constructed by, policy. While textual analysis will be used to address research objectives 1 and 2, in order to better



understand individual experiences, understandings and processes of negotiation (research objectives 3 and 4), qualitative research will be undertaken in the form of one-to-one interviews with approximately 25 LGB young people from across the UK and 2 focus groups of between 5-9 LGB young people. The interviews and focus groups will be used to elicit accounts of experiences and emotions. The identified methodologies —policy analysis, qualitative interviews and focus groups— will complement each other to allow exploration of policy and subjective meanings, and of the similarities and differences between these.

### Conclusions

This snapshot has highlighted the need for my research, the gaps that it will fill and the contributions it will make across the UK. In summary, my main contributions will be to engage with and extend existing research on LGB issues, youth and education work; enhance the impact of existing educational and social policy in relation to LGB identities and young people; engage with policy development, crucial in this new political era; and, perhaps most importantly, make a real difference to young people's lives, particularly (but not limited to) LGB young people. In investigating the impact of discriminatory cultural climates on LGB young people, and identifying gaps in policy provision,

my work will explore how policy and social and cultural understandings of sexuality more broadly, can be formulated in ways which challenge discrimination. The proposed socio-legal focus of this research is thus timely, original and has significant possibilities for impact.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk); [www.schools-out.org.uk](http://www.schools-out.org.uk); [www.diversityrolemodels.org.uk](http://www.diversityrolemodels.org.uk); [www.ellybarnes.com](http://www.ellybarnes.com) for information on the work of these organisations.

<sup>2</sup> The Single Equality Bill (2009-2010) received royal assent on 8th April 2010 and became The Equality Act (2010). It aims to bring together different strands of equality law and thus make the law more transparent. The provisions of the Act came into force in October 2010 with a graduated timescale for implementation. However, the change in administration has meant changes to the implementation and timescale.

### References

- Ali, Suki, Shereen Benjamin and Melanie L. Mauthner eds. 2004. *The Politics of Gender and Education: Critical Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Allan, Alexandra, Elizabeth Atkinson, Elizabeth Brace, Rene DePalma and Judy Hemingway. 2008. Speaking the Unspeakable in Forbidden Places: Addressing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equality in the Primary School. *Sex Education* 8(3): 315-328.
- Atkinson, Elizabeth and Renee De-

- Palma. 2009. Un-Believing the Matrix: Queering Consensual Heteronormativity. *Gender and Education* 21(1): 17-29.
- Beadle-Blair, Rikki. 2010. *FIT*. DVD. Stonewall/Stephen Austin & Sons Ltd. Available to order from [http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at\\_school/fit/3780.asp](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at_school/fit/3780.asp) (accessed 12 May 2010).
- Blackpool NUT. 2009. Prevalence of Homophobia Survey. Blackpool: NUT. <http://www.schools-out.org.uk/> (accessed 23 May 2010).
- Blaise, Mindy. 2005. *Playing in Straight: Uncovering Gender Discourses in Early Childhood Education*. New York, Routledge.
- Brickell, Chris. 2006. The Sociological Construction of Gender and Sexuality. *The Editorial Board of the Sociological Review* 54(1): 87-113.
- Butler, Judith. 2006. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge.
- D'Augelli, Anthony R. and Charlotte J. Patterson eds. 2001. *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities and Youth: Psychological Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- DCSF. 2007a. *Homophobic Bullying. Preventing and Responding to Homophobic Bullying in Schools. Safe to Learn: Embedding anti-bullying work in schools*. London: DCSF. <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/homophobicbullying/> (accessed on 7 May 2010).
- DCSF. 2007b. *The Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures*. London: DCSF. <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrensplan/> (accessed 7 May 2010).
- DCSF 2009a. *Guidance for Schools on Preventing and Responding to Sexiest, Sexual and Transphobic Bullying*. London: DCSF. <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-01136-2009&> (accessed 12 May 2010).
- DCSF. 2009b. *Healthy Schools*. London: DCSF. <http://home.healthy-schools.gov.uk/> (accessed 7 May 2010).
- DePalmer, Renee and Elizabeth Atkinson eds. 2008. *Invisible Boundaries: Addressing Sexualities Equalities in Children's Worlds*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
- DePalmer, Renee and Elizabeth Atkinson eds. 2009. *Interrogating Heteronormativity in Primary Schools: The No Outsiders Project*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
- DePalmer, Renee. and Elizabeth Atkinson eds. 2010. *Undoing Homophobia in Primary Schools*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
- DePalmer, Renee and Mark Jennet. 2010. *Homophobia, Transphobia and Culture: Deconstructing Het-*

- eronormativity in English Primary Schools. *Intercultural Education* 21(1): 15-26.
- DfEE. 2000a. *Sex and Relationship Education Guidance*. London: DfEE. [www.dfes.gov.uk/sreguidance/sexeducation.pdf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/sreguidance/sexeducation.pdf) (accessed 7 May 2010).
- DfEE. 2000b. *Bullying – Don't Suffer in Silence: An Anti-Bullying Pack for Schools*. London. DfEE. <http://www.swlauriersb.qc.ca/english/edservices/pedresources/bullying/02.pdf> (accessed 28 August 2012).
- DfES. 2003. *Every Child Matters*. London: DfES. [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/publications/](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/publications/) (accessed 7 May 2010).
- DfES. 2004. *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners*. London: DfES. [www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/5yearstrategy/](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/5yearstrategy/) (accessed 7 May 2010).
- DfES. 2006. *Youth Matters: Next Steps*. London: DfES. <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/youth/pdf/Next%20Steps.pdf> (accessed 7 May 2010).
- Durham, Martin. 1991. *Sex and Politics: The Family and Morality in the Thatcher Years*. London, Macmillan.
- Ellis, Viv and Sue High. 2004. Something More to Tell You: Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual Young People's Experiences of Secondary Schooling. *British Educational Research Journal* 30(2): 213-225.
- Epstein, Debbie ed. 1994. *Challenging Lesbian and Gay Inequalities in Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Epstein, Debbie. 2000. Sexualities and Education: Catch 28. *Sexualities* 3(4): 387-394.
- Epstein, Debbie and Richard Johnson. 1998. *Schooling Sexualities*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Equality Act. 2010. London: HMSO. [http://www.equalities.gov.uk/equality\\_bill.aspx](http://www.equalities.gov.uk/equality_bill.aspx) (accessed 7 May 2010).
- Foucault, Michel. 1990. *The History of Sexuality Vol.1: An Introduction*. USA: Vintage.
- Gove, Michael. 2012. <http://adam1cor.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/michael-gove-letter-260112.pdf> (accessed 27 August 2012).
- Guasp, April. 2009. *The Teacher's Report*. London: Stonewall. [http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at\\_school/resources/3776.asp](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at_school/resources/3776.asp) (accessed 12 May 2010).
- Guasp, April. 2012 *The School Report*. London: Stonewall. [http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/school\\_report.pdf](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/school_report.pdf) (accessed 27 August 2012).
- Harris, Mary ed. 1997. *School Experiences of Gay and Lesbian Youth: The Invisible Minority*. Bingham-

- ton: The Harrington Park Press.
- Harris, Simon. 1990. *Lesbian and Gay Issues in the English Classroom*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Hunt, Ruth and Johan Jensen. 2007. Stonewall School Report. London: Stonewall. [http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at\\_school/resources/3778.asp](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at_school/resources/3778.asp) (accessed 12 May 2010).
- Jennet, Mark ed. with Ian Rivers, Kirsten Jowett, Paula Power and Roz Caught. 2004. *Stand Up For Us: Challenging Homophobia in Schools*. London: DoH. <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=challenge-homophobia&> (accessed 7 May 2010).
- Jones, Carol and Pat Mahony eds. 1989. *Learning Our Lines: Sexuality and Social Control in Education*. London: The Women's Press Limited.
- Kehily, Mary J. 2002. *Sexuality, Gender and Schooling Shifting Agendas in Social Learning*. London: Routledge-Falmer.
- Lancashire NUT. 2009. Prevalence of Homophobia Survey. Lancashire: NUT. <http://www.schools-out.org.uk/> (accessed 23 May 2010).
- Liverpool NUT. 2010. Prevalence of Homophobia Survey. Liverpool: NUT. <http://www.schools-out.org.uk/> (accessed 23 May 2010).
- Local Government Act 1988. (c.9) London: HMSO. [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1988/ukpga\\_19880009\\_en\\_5](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1988/ukpga_19880009_en_5) (accessed 7 May 2010).
- Mac an Ghaill, Mairtin. 1994. *The Making of Men: Masculinities, Sexualities and Schooling*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Miceli, Melinda S. 2002. Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Youth. In Diane Richardson and Steven Seidman eds. *Handbook of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. London: Sage.
- Miginiuolo, Frances. 2007. *Gender Equality Duty and Schools*. London: EOC. [www.schools-out.org.uk/policy/docs/Gender\\_equality\\_duty\\_and\\_schools.doc](http://www.schools-out.org.uk/policy/docs/Gender_equality_duty_and_schools.doc) (accessed on 7 May 2010).
- No Outsiders Project Team. 2010. *Undoing Homophobia in Primary Schools*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
- Oldham NUT. 2010. *Prevalence of Homophobia Survey*. Oldham: NUT. <http://www.schools-out.org.uk/> (accessed 23 May 2010).
- Orbaum, Jason. 2010. *The Homophobia Project*. DVD. Surrey: Peer Productions. Available to order from [www.peerproductions.co.uk](http://www.peerproductions.co.uk) (accessed 28 August 2012).
- Owens, Robert. 1998. *Queer Kids: The Challenges and Promise for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth*. Binghampton: Harrington Park

- Press. 25(4): 1-7.
- Rasmussen, Mary L. 2006. *Becoming Subjects: Sexualities and Secondary Schooling*. New York: Routledge.
- Rasmussen, Mary L., Eric Rofes and Susan Talburt eds. 2004. *Youth and Sexualities: Pleasure, Subversion, and Insubordination In and Out of Schools*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Renold, Emma. 2002. Presumed Innocence: (Hetero)Sexual, Heterosexist and Homophobic Harassment Among Primary School Girls and Boys. *Childhood*, 9: 415-434.
- Richardson, Diane and Surya Monro. 2012. *Sexuality, Equality and Diversity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rivers, Ian. 1995. The Victimization of Gay Teenagers in Schools: Homophobia and Education. *Pastoral Care* 13(1): 35-41.
- Rivers, Ian. 2000. Social Exclusion, Absenteeism and Sexual Minority Youth. *Support for Learning* 15(1): 13-17.
- Rivers, Ian. 2001. The Bullying of Sexual Minorities at School: Its Nature and Long-Term Correlates. *Educational and Child Psychology* 18(1): 32-46.
- Rivers, Ian. 2004. Recollection of Bullying at School and Their Long-Term Implications for Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals. *Crisis* 25(4): 1-7.
- Rivers, Ian. 2011. *Homophobic Bullying: Research and Theoretical Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rofes, Eric. 2005. *A Radical Rethinking of Sexualities and Schooling: Status Quo or Status Queer?* USA: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Salford NUT. 2010. *Prevalence of Homophobia Survey*. Salford: NUT. <http://www.schools-out.org.uk/> (accessed 23 May 2010).
- Savin-Williams, Ritch, C. 1990. *Gay and Lesbian Youth: Expressions of Identity*. New York: Hemisphere Publishing.
- Sedgwick, Eve, K. 2008. *Epistemology of the Closet*, 2nd ed. USA: University of California Press.
- Single Equality Bill. 2009-2010. London. House of Commons. All versions of the Bill including amendments and proposals for changes during its progression through Parliament available from <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2008-09/equality/documents.html> (accessed 7 May 2010).
- Stonewall. 2010a. *Education Champions Programme*. Information available from [http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at\\_school/education\\_champions\\_programme/default.asp](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at_school/education_champions_programme/default.asp) (accessed 12 May 2010).
- Stonewall. 2010b. *Education for All: National Campaign Against Ho-*

*homophobic Bullying in Britain's Schools*. Information available from [http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at\\_school/education\\_for\\_all/default.asp](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at_school/education_for_all/default.asp) (accessed 27 August 2012).

Thorne, Barrie. 1993. *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School*. London: Open University Press.

Trenchard, Lorraine and Hugh Warren. 1984. *Something to Tell You*. London, London Gay Teenage Group.

Unks, Gerald ed. 1995. *The Gay Teen: Educational Practices and Theory for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Adolescents*. New York: Routledge.

Vicars, Mark. 2006. Who Are You Calling Queer? Sticks and Stones Can Break My Bones But Names Will Always Hurt Me. *British Educational Journal* 32 (3): 347-361.

Warwick, Ian, Peter Aggleton and Nicola Douglas. 2001. Playing it Safe: Addressing the Emotional and Physical Health of Lesbian and Gay Pupils in the U.K. *Journal of Adolescence* 24: 129-140.

Warwick, Ian, Elaine Chase and Peter Aggleton, with Sue Sanders. 2004. *Homophobia, Sexual Orientation and Schools: A Review and Implications for Action*. DfES: London. [www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR594.pdf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR594.pdf) (accessed 7 May 2010).

Weeks, Jeffery. 2007. *The World We Have Won*. London: Routledge.



# For real: Tracey Emin and the problem of authenticity

Rachel Robson

---

*This snapshot examines the visual and textual art of Tracey Emin and the response it generates. It asks why, in a climate of celebrity worship and reality television, her self-revelatory work still provokes such heated debate and demands for authenticity. Creative work which is apparently 'confessional' has long been the site of controversy, and this snapshot draws on feminist thinking about confessional poetry to discuss some of the difficulties in reading Emin's work as directly autobiographical and further, to interrogate why her subject matter seems to create such discomfort amongst her audience.*

*Keywords: Confession, Art, Feminism, Tracey Emin, Autobiography*

---

In this research snapshot I examine the work of British artist Tracey Emin and aim to consider why, through an examination of theories of confessional literature and feminist notions of the body, readings of her work as directly authentic and autobiographical are problematic and require interrogation. I suggest that rather than directly produced from life, Emin's art works with real life feelings and experiences in a creative process of examining the self. Further, I seek to examine why Emin's production of 'the real' provokes such apparent discomfort in her audience through a consideration of notions of autobiography and the abject.

In 2011, The Hayward Gallery in London showed Emin's major retrospective *Love is What You Want*, and her new exhibition *She Lay Down Deep Beneath the Sea* opened in 2012, housed in the new Turner Contemporary Gallery in Emin's home town of Margate. These recent shows provoke a new response which makes academic consideration of Emin's *oeuvre* as relevant as ever. Tracey Emin's art work frequently deals with challenging issues of female experience: sex and excess, abortion, rape and abuse, much of which is drawn from her own lived experience. Her work is consistently described by the press and art critics as both 'con-

fessional' and 'controversial' and Emin herself says that her work is always 'based on some real event, something that happened' (Brown 1998, 33) and has stated that her creative career 'started on the day she was born' (Lauson 2011, 16). Art critic Daniel Barnes describes *Love is What You Want* as 'a seemingly relentless barrage of desperation, loneliness and outright anguish' (Barnes 2011). Emin's use of personal and found objects in her work and of the ephemera of everyday life, including letters and diary entries which reference her experiments in self-chronicling further lend her work a direct 'realness' that simultaneously attracts and repels her audience. Commentators are fascinated by Emin's intimate subject matter and her frank display of embodied experience, whilst others criticise her for cynically employing her own misery in order to make money. Phillipe Lejeune famously suggests that there exists in life-writing an unspoken 'autobiographical pact' that allows the audience to safely assume that what they are reading references the author's true lived experience (Lejeune 1989). Similarly, Michel Foucault describes confession as the production of truth (Foucault 1978). I would suggest that the formal mode of confession normally located in and associated with a courtroom, church or medical establishment implies an admission of guilt, misdemeanour or at the very least an error of judgement

which lends a negative tone to perceptions of confessional art work. Whilst Emin consistently identifies her own work as confessional or autobiographical, such a direct reading of her work is undeniably problematic. Theorists of confessional poetry such as Elizabeth Gregory suggest that there is a tendency amongst readers to look down upon confessional work by women as an unmediated outpouring of emotion, disparaged as 'too feminine... trivial and self-indulgent' (Gregory 2005, 33).

Emin's bold, hurried strokes, frequent misspellings and letter reversal caused by her mono-printing technique lend her work a sense of immediacy and unbridled emotion which emphasises its apparent authenticity. However, this is contradicted when the same statements are transformed into neon or painstakingly embroidered onto fabric in a time-consuming and meditative process. Gregory notes that the 'shock value' of confessional work can obscure the artistry inherent in it (Gregory 2005, 34). Emin's work draws attention to this tension by transforming quickly rendered sketches into meticulous tapestries of the same words and image, or into neons which accurately reproduce her style of handwriting, without first editing or sanitising them. Here, I would suggest, Emin produces a facsimile of the original piece which illuminates how her works are themselves reproductions of

her experiences. The neon *She Lay Down Deep Beneath The Sea* is inspired by her father's death. She says; 'I just wrote the words, "She lay down deep beneath the sea", and it's about having weight and immensity of everything on top of you, pressing down' (Emin 2012). Recreated in neon, the work can be seen as a meditation on this experience and on the temporal and evolving experience of grief, rather than the original outpouring of emotion which inspired it.

The repetition and reproduction common in Emin's work might be further illuminated by feminist understandings of selfhood as a process rather than an experiential certainty. In her work on Sylvia Plath, Susan Van Dyne states:

We need to resist the unexamined assumption (and often in biographies of women what amounts to the misogynist practice) that a woman can only write out of or about what she has actually lived. Such a premise disallows the transformative power of a woman's art as epistemology, as an alternative, equally self-constituting form of knowing and being (Van Dyne 2006, 17).

I would suggest that the artist Tracey Emin is continually engaged in a creative exploration of what it means to be 'Tracy Emin' the subject, which draws upon, re-imagines and re-interprets her personal truth. However, Emin's particular produc-

tion of 'the real' is one that I also argue provokes a sense of unease and discomfort amongst her audience. The now infamous installation piece, *My Bed*, is made up of Emin's own real bed and the detritus which surrounded it in her bedroom, including knickers, used condoms and the stains of bodily fluids, which are meticulously transported to and recreated in the formal 'white cube' of the gallery as an installation. The work exemplifies Emin's self-conscious play with the boundary between art and life; what Gregory calls a 'reality trope' in which the viewer assumes that the subject and artist are one (Gregory 2005, 32). In bringing her own bed into the gallery Emin might be seen to be suggesting that this, genuinely, is the bed that she sleeps in. However an unsettling blurring of boundaries is at play. *My Bed* is immediately transformed by being relocated to the gallery and the domestic nature of it is troubled by its chaos. Here, as in other examples of her work, Emin juxtaposes comforting images of domesticity – beds, blankets and pillows and craft techniques which might be seen as traditionally female art forms – with objects which destabilise this familiarity and create a sense of disorder. Emin's bed is the site of pain, loss and loneliness, not one of comfort and nurture. Her work also challenges notions of feminine decorum, insisting on talking about things that women shouldn't talk about. Moreover, I suggest, Emin blurs boundar-

ies of class and decorum by invading refined bourgeois art space with noisy, messy, working-class reality. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson neatly put it: 'Nice girls, well brought up girls, simply do not rehearse their intimate lives in public, let alone display the sordid leavings of them' (Smith and Watson 2011, 11).

Rosemary Betterton notes that Emin 'frequently uses images, objects, and materials from her life to address such dangerous subjects for women as female desire, sexual acts and abortion, consciously mobilizing her life story as a set of narratives and performances' (Betterton 2006, 84). Emin's figurative art frequently employs the abject, disrupting the idea of stable bodily norms and boundaries and can be seen to embody primal fears and cultural anxieties about the female body, particularly the productive and fertile female body, and of female sexual excess. Emin presents her audience with what makes us most anxious about our corporeality; her bodies are unreliable and uncontained, blood, tears, semen and excrement spill out of them onto the surfaces of her art. Betterton argues, however, that the abjection in Emin's work can be 'more specifically situated in the loss that it repeatedly enacts' (Betterton 2006, 91). Emin is a 'failed maternal subject' (Betterton 2006, 92) and her mourning is re-enacted in her work. Emin's body is not just an abject, maternal one; it is also one in pain, and her audience

is not permitted to avoid or deny this fact. I would argue that, in addition to fears of female productivity, Emin's art also addresses, head-on, fears about maternal lack and want; of the non-productive, barren or failed maternal body which might be seen as particularly uncomfortable in a cultural climate which some critics have suggested seems determined to react against feminism and reinstate women into the role of domestic child bearer (Cochrane 2005).

Emin's particular brand of truth and her privileging of uncomfortable and particularly female subject matter may be one that is all too easy for her audience to relate to. To some extent her issues are universal ones and her destabilising of gendered norms of behaviour and decorum threaten patriarchal order. It is for this reason I argue that criticisms of Emin's work might in some ways be seen as an attempt to situate the artist and her work as abject and 'other' in a process of defining the self. Emin's audience resists her depiction of disorder in order to create a sense of order within themselves.

Emin's newer exhibitions see critics attempting to return to familiar ground in their interpretation of Emin's methods. It is notable that commentators appear to struggle to locate and therefore criticise Emin's signature unmediated confession in what is more subtle work that Emin says is about love. Emin as a character is transformed, and so is her confessional mode. In a recent in-

interview Emin said:

I still have all those subject matters that I work with and I still work with them, but maybe in a different kind of way or in a more in depth way... the screaming adolescent girl hasn't got any more energy left, now I've got to sit down and think what have I got, what can I work with (Sakur 2012).

In considering her newer work, which, as ever, is a meditation on her experiences, Emin's audience must remember that it is drawn from an older, wiser Emin who is reflecting on new experiences and considering older ones anew and with a wry humour.

## References

- Barnes, Daniel. 2011. Radical Aesthetics: The Myth of Mad Tracey. *Ceasefire Magazine*. <http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/radical-aesthetics-4/> (accessed 20 January 2012).
- Betterton, Rosemary. 2006. Promising Monsters: Pregnant Bodies, Artistic Subjectivity, and Maternal Imagination. *Hypatia* 21: 80-100.
- Brown, Neal. 2012. *She Lay Down Deep Beneath the Sea. Tracey Emin at Turner Contemporary: Background Resource for Teachers, School Staff and Educators*. London: T.E. Tate.
- Cochrane, Kira. 2008. Now, the Backlash. *Guardian* (online). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jul/01/gender.women> (accessed 10 July 2012).
- Emin, Tracey. 2011. *Love is What You Want*. London, Hayward Gallery Press.
- Emin, Tracey, She Lay Down Deep Beneath the Sea. <http://www.turnercontemporary.org/exhibitions/tracey-emin-she-lay-down-deep-beneath-the-sea> (Accessed 8 July 2012)
- Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Gregory, Elizabeth. 2005. Plath, Sexton, Berryman, Lowell, Ginsberg and the Gendered Politics of 'The Real'. In Jo Gill ed. *Modern Confessional Writing: New Critical Essays*. New York: Routledge.
- Lauson, Cliff. 2011. *Tracey Emin: Love is What You Want*. Manchester, Cornerhouse Publications.
- Lejeune, Philippe. 1989. *On Autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sakur Steven. Hard Talk: Tracey Emin – Artist. *BBC News*. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b01jc7xv/HARDtalk\\_Tracey\\_Emin\\_Artist/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b01jc7xv/HARDtalk_Tracey_Emin_Artist/) (accessed 15 June 2012).
- Van Dyne, Susan R. 2006. The Problem of Biography. In Jo Gill ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Sylvia Plath*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Watson, Julia and Sidonie Smith. 2001.  
The Rumpled Bed of Autobiography: Extravagant Lives, Extravagant Questions. *Biography* 24 (1):  
1-14.



# Feminist academics: killjoys, unhappy, dissident? An approach to the notion of the feminist in the work of Sara Ahmed

Jeannette Silva Flores

---

*This snapshot analyses the experiences of feminist academics in the UK. As my current research understands academia as a gendered social reality, this snapshot looks at how this gendered social reality affects and shapes feminist academics' experiences. In this snapshot, I draw particular attention to the work done by Sara Ahmed (2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d) who proposes that 'feminist' is understood as a difficult category, with the subject perceived to be stubborn and 'unhappy'. In addition, empirical evidence from my current research is discussed in order to further illustrate my argument.*

*Keywords: Feminist, Academia, (Un)Happiness, Affect Alien*

---

## Introduction

I am interested in analysing the experiences of feminist academics in the UK since they have been crucial actors in the development of critical ways of knowing (such as those based on people's experiences), more access to education for women, particularly higher education – one of the most relevant feminist demands during the last three decades - and insightful critiques of the gendered, classed and racialised division of society (see Antheas and Yuval Davis 1992; Skeggs 1997; and Reay 1998, amongst

others).

This snapshot is based on my current research in which academia is understood as a gendered social reality, and both my current research and this snapshot attempt to understand how this gendered social reality affects feminist academics' experiences. The focus is on their experiences, since 'experience' is not only one of the key concepts in feminist theory and research (Hughes 2002), but it has also been a crucial concept for feminist critiques of knowledge production, particularly against the

notions of objectivity and neutrality; the position of knower and what can be known (Harding 1987, 1991; Haraway, 1988; Maynard and Purvis 1994). In this snapshot I draw attention to the work done by Sara Ahmed (2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d) who proposes that 'feminist' is understood as a difficult category, with the subject perceived to be stubborn and 'unhappy'. In addition, empirical evidence from my current research is presented in order to illustrate the line of argument of this piece of work.

Conditions of new governance, managerialism, inspection and accountability (Lucas 2006; Deem et al 2007; Lambert et al 2007) together with structural transformation, changes in resource allocation and conditions of service for academics (Blaxter et al 1998; Black 2005), and the recently announced higher education cuts - which are political decisions influenced by global neoliberal trends (Olssen and Peters 2005) - characterise the current academic context in the UK. That is why to place this paper in this particular context of marketisation of higher education in the UK (Neary and Winn 2000; Furedi 2011) makes it interesting, challenging and pertinent.

### **Feminist academics: towards a definition**

In Britain there was an abundance of writing about feminists, and particularly feminist academ-

ics, during the late 1980s and the 1990s; however there has been a decline in this debate from the late 1990s to the present day. Nonetheless, some interesting ideas have emerged recently. In one of the most contemporary and thought-provoking approaches to the notion of being a feminist, Ahmed proposes that:

A feminist story can be a beginning ... we can make sense of the complexity of feminism as an activist space if we can give an account of how feminism becomes an object of feeling, as something we invest in, as a way of relating to the world, a way of making sense of how we relate to the world (Ahmed 2010a, 1).

According to Ahmed, her story, and to some extent our own feminist stories, begins with a table, 'the happy table'. However, because it is difficult to preserve the order of happiness, tense and problematic conversations are inevitable, there are moments when one becomes 'the problem' - the object of shared disapproval, the cause of distortion - and therefore one becomes alienated. In that sense, being a feminist implies a process of alienation from happiness (Ahmed 2010a, 1-2).

By discussing the relationship between objects, affects and causality, Ahmed (2010a, 2010b) shows how to deconstruct the way in which these objects are bound up with affects. She places the figure

of 'the feminist killjoy' in the context of a feminist critique of happiness, particularly, of how happiness is understood as a justification of social norms as social goods. In this liberating act for which she claims the right to be orientated towards unhappiness, she finds a way of being feminist, which means to be sceptical of those things, objects and affects that are taken for granted in our societies:

The feminist is an affect alien, estranged by happiness... Feminists... are already read as destroying something that is thought of by others not only as being good but as the cause of happiness. *The feminist killjoy* spoils the happiness of others; she is a spoilsport because she refuses or to meet up over happiness... feminists are thus attributed as the origin of bad feeling... (Ahmed 2010b, 581-2).

The feminist is usually seen as the one who is 'causing the argument' and disturbing the fragility of peace (Ahmed 2010d, 65). According to Ahmed, feminists - including those who define themselves as feminist academics - can be conceived as 'sitting at their own tables', creating their own emotional spaces to share experiences and struggles. Ahmed also argues that feminists are having their own conversations, being creative by doing the 'wrong' things, wanting what they are asked to give up (for example, desire, imagination and curiosity) and creating life

worlds around these desires. In doing so, they are developing a political consciousness against what has been taken for granted, they are 'out of place' trying to secure a place that is not already given; they become dissidents (Ahmed 2010a, 2010b, 2010c).

### **Feminist academics and their experiences**

My experience of being a feminist has taught me much about rolling eyes  
(Ahmed 2010d, 65).

Ahmed indicates that feminists are seen as sources of bad feelings, 'as the ones who ruin the atmosphere', 'as grumpy and humourless', 'as killjoy(s)' and troublemakers. In her view, being a feminist seems to be an obstinate subject (Ahmed 2010d, 65). Participants in my research have had similar experiences:

... In some Universities, [we as] feminists are regarded as marginal or as troublemakers or as second rate... [Louise].

I used to watch their eyes roll, used like as if to say 'here she goes again', you know... [Mary].

Elizabeth Bird describes the experience of being a feminist academic during the 1970s and the 1980s as one in which:

...the experience of being a wom-

an in 'a man's world'... is now remembered as one in which everyday life, both within and outside the academy, was carried out in the context of the sexual politics of the period when men were considered to be regarded as 'the enemy' (Bird 2004, 52).

Following Bird, being a feminist academic within the patriarchal context of the academy was a huge struggle and a label that provoked hostility, disrespect and derision from male colleagues (Bird 2002, 2004). In the context of my current research, participants have expressed their experiences as follows:

Feminism allows men the opportunity to smirk for what you engage with... [Ruth].

Louise Morley and Val Walsh point out that feminist academics 'are in the need' of articulating creatively feelings and ideas in contexts of disembodiment, and to produce knowledge with authority and excellence within these particular organisational and social conditions of academia that disempower them materially and psychologically (Morley and Walsh 1995, 1-2). Today, feminist academics articulate their struggles as follows:

Because it is seen as old-fashioned stuff you have to work very hard, show people the very best... [Rose].

In addition, feminist academics have explained that there is a risk of being marginalised and stigmatised as opportunities to publish and access research funding become more difficult:

I think it's hard to get our work published... it's hard to get research funding... if you're known to be a feminist, anything you say is automatic, they can automatically be dismissed. Oh well she's got a bias [Pauline].

### **Feminist academics and their characteristics**

In the study I am conducting, participants have referred to the main characteristics of being a feminist academic. Even though their definitions may vary, they have certain aspects in common, such as the content and form of their teaching practices, research topics, content and type of publications and their critical approaches to gendered academia and society:

I would say they do always bring a critical gender analysis to whatever their specialism is... they would be able to articulate for you and everybody else why it was important to discuss, overtly bring gender, the gender features of whatever the topic was... There's a gender dimension that we need to look at. So I think that for me constitutes the core of being a feminist academic... [Ruby].

They are also categorised as talented and critical female thinkers with a sense of humour and irony for facing the intricacies of gendered academia:

[Feminist academics are] Generally women... who laugh at what stupid men are doing... So yeah humorous and funny and clever, lots of very clever women... [Pauline].

These academics are women able to criticise the current state of higher education but still have the ability to laugh, as stated by The FAAB Collective1:

A humourless audit will no doubt assess us and declares us merely feminist jesters. There's no RAE outputs but we'll be all be fine if we can raise a grin in these performative times (The FAAB Collective 2007, 5).

In the same line of argument, Ahmed understands the 'feminist killjoy' as a subject of joyful criticism and solidarity:

In order to get along, you have to participate in certain forms of solidarity: you have to laugh at the right points (Ahmed 2010d, 65).

In addition, the sharing of values, thoughts and spaces provide feminist academics with a sense of community and belonging:

You can meet like-minded people... You can create ways of getting together, speaking together...

er... And it's great because... it's the forum for women who have feminist views to meet up and discuss work and to carry on thinking about how this shapes our work... [Jo].

They are creating spaces for collaboration; they are sitting at their own tables of support, creativity and reflective work:

...We had a great time. Yeah, because we all had something in common which is that we were all doing feminist research from a feminist perspective and we were all openly feminist. And everyone was saying how nice it is to spend an entire day with seventy feminists... [Pauline].

## Final Words

I think also as a feminist, people know that you're challenging the gender hierarchy and not everyone wants you to do that [Pauline].

First of all, it can be said that being a feminist academic is a specific way of being part of this world that highlights the critical way in which one relates to the world, the country, the society and community one is living in. Secondly, the figure of the feminist as killjoy is understood as someone who relates to the world differently, who always brings a specific critical analysis to those things that are taken for granted (for exam-

ple, what education is for) and who is both ironic and sceptical. This is particularly challenging within the current academic context in the UK. Thirdly, this snapshot has revealed feminist academics' experiences of being feminists, which has included experiences of joy, collaboration, support, recognition, solidarity, interesting research topics and innovative teaching practices as well as misrecognition, marginalisation, prejudices and dismissal. Fourthly, by criticising the idea of happiness, Ahmed has put into question fundamental aspects of the gendered and racialised division of society and, to a large extent, of gendered academia. In addition, Ahmed is not only providing a feminist critique of happiness but is also contributing to articulate a feminist critique of the current neoliberal trend within higher education in the UK. Finally, being a feminist whilst 'doing academia' invites one to think deeply about the complexities of the academic world. Being a feminist killjoy may be challenging and may imply the risk of being stigmatised and marginalised, nonetheless, it is a meaningful way of resisting dominant discourses in the academy and creating alternative worlds without becoming dogmatic.

## References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2010a. Feminist Killjoys (and Other Willful Subjects). *The Scholar and Feminist Online*, 8(3): 1-11. Available at: [http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/polyphonic/print\\_ahmed.htm](http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/polyphonic/print_ahmed.htm). (accessed 7 March 2011).
- Ahmed, Sara. 2010b. Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness. *SIGNS*, 35(3): 571-94.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2010c. Orientations Matter. In Diane Coole and Samantha Frost eds. *New Materialism. Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2010d. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Anthias, Floya and Nira Yuval-Davis. 1992. *Racialised Boundaries*. London: Routledge.
- Bird, Elizabeth. 2004. The Sexual Politics of Introducing Women's Studies: Memories and Reflections from North America and the United Kingdom 1965-1995. *Gender and Education*, 16 (1): 51-64.
- Bird, Elizabeth. 2002. The Academic Arm of The Women's Liberation Movement: Women's Studies 1969-1999 in North America and the United Kingdom. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 25(1): 139-49.
- Black, Paula. 2005. Class Matters in UK Higher Education. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 28: 127-38.
- Blaxter, Lorraine, Christina Hughes



- and Malcolm Tight. 1998. Writing on Academic Careers. *Studies in Higher Education*, 23(3): 281-95.
- Deem, Rosemarie, Sam Hillyard and Michael Reed. 2007. *Knowledge, Higher Education and the New Managerialism: The Changing Management of UK Universities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Furedi, Frank. 2011. Introduction to the Marketisation of Higher Education and the student as consumer. In Mike Molesworth, Richard Scullion and Elizabeth Nixon eds. *The Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.
- Haraway, Donna. 1988. Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3): 575-99.
- Harding, Sandra. 1991. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*. USA: Cornell University Press.
- Harding, Sandra. 1987. Introduction: Is there a Feminist Method? In Sandra Harding ed. *Feminism and Methodology: Social Sciences Issues*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Hughes, Christina. 2002. *Key Concepts in Feminist Theory and Research*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Lambert, Catherine, Andrew Parker and Mike Neary, M. 2007. Entrepreneurialism and Critical Pedagogy: Reinventing the Higher Education Curriculum. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 12(4): 525-37.
- Lucas, Lisa. 2006. *The Research Game in Academic Life*. London: McGraw-Hill Education & Open University Press.
- Maynard, Mary and June Purvis eds. 1994. *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*. London: Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- Morley, Louise and Val Walsh eds. 1995. *Feminist Academics. Creative Agents for Change*. UK: Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- Neary, Mike and Joss Winn. 2000. Student as Producer: Reinventing the Student Experience. In Les Bell, Howard Stevenson and Mike Neary eds. *The Future of Higher Education: Pedagogy, Policy and the Student Experience*. London: Continuum. 126-138.
- Olssen, Mark and Michael A. Peters. 2005. Neoliberalism, Higher Education and the Knowledge Economy: From the Free Market to Knowledge Capitalism. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(3): 313-45.
- Reay, Diane. 1998. Rethinking Social Class: Qualitative Perspectives on Gender and Social Class. *Sociology* 32(2): 259-75.
- Skeggs, Beverly. 1997. *Formations of Class and Gender*. London: Sage.
- The FAAB Collective. 2007. *The Personal and Political Tensions of*

*Doing Feminisms in the Academy:  
From Licensed Jesters to Radical  
Cheerleaders?* Work in progress and performance presented  
at GEA Conference, Dublin, April  
2007.

# And then there were the men: masculinity and the Youth Justice System in England and Wales

Eric Baumgartner

---

*This snapshot of my ESRC-funded research project summarises how the absence of men in the discussion of social policy, in effect, contributes to the gendering of men as men. It highlights, on the example of the Youth Justice System in England and Wales, how an incorporation of concepts of masculinity can inform practice when working with men and stresses the need for the inclusion of lived experiences of men in the conceptualisation of masculinity.*

*Keywords: Masculinity, Hegemonic Masculinity, Youth Justice, Social Policy*

---

## **The absence of masculinity**

‘Why the heck do we bother asking about their gender, if we then go on to do absolutely nothing with it?!’ (Senior Practitioner, YJS, 2011)

Recent feminist and queer literature has offered us many an explanation as to the workings of masculinity and male identity (Connell 1987; Butler 1990; Ingraham 2002; Wittig 2002). The pendulum of theories of masculinity and male identity, however, appears to swing between hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005) and hypermasculinity (Broude 1990) without offer-

ing practical advice on how these theoretical constructs can inform and be applied to professional practices when working with men. Consequently, the absence of explicit discussion of masculinity in social, health and crime policies is not particularly surprising (Hearn 2010). This ESRC-funded PhD research project aims to explore the ‘formation’ of masculinity and male identity on the level of individual agency as service recipients and the potential gendering of men by service providers in the public sector (Hearn 2010). It investigates which role, if any, concepts of masculinity do or can play in Youth Justice Policy and will consider the wider implications

of the findings in relation to social policy. The overall objective is to put men back into the research and theory on masculinity and male identity (Hearn 2010).

### **Masculinity and crime**

‘Crime [...] is a male occupation’ (Coote 1993).

This research is motivated by some of the academic literature on masculinity and offending, which makes strong connections between criminal behaviour and codes of masculinity (Hobbs 1994; Jefferson 1994), the way masculinity has been socially defined (Hatty 2000), and the theoretical link between male gendered identity and crime (Collier 1998; Winlow 2002). Particular attention here is paid to ‘the bottom of the social hierarchy’, where men utilise their gendered behaviour and coping strategies to achieve their aims (Holter 2005), especially if ‘access to male identity as moral and economic categories is denied’ (Morgan 2005: 169). Theoretically embedded in ideas of ‘hetero-normativity’ (Ingraham 2002; Wittig 2002) in relation to the formation of gendered identities, the assumption is that learned gendered behaviours lay the foundations of future responses to non-conforming and discrepant experiences (Boenisch and Winter 1993), and ‘socially conditioned ideas of entitlement and aggression’ (Hatty 2000: 70)

become determining factors when choosing ‘deviant coping strategies’ (Lui and Kapland 2004). The underlying assumption is that the experience of violence, physical, sexual and psychological abuse (Malamuth and Thornhill 1994), learned coping strategies, the function of male role models (Harris 1995) and the absence of alternative coping mechanisms (Spatz Widom 1994; Hatty 2000) potentially generate delinquent behaviour, ‘which is not wholly different from the dominant male adult culture’ (Hobbs 1994; Winlow 2002: 40). Despite theoretical links between masculinity and criminal behaviour made in the literature, little research has explored whether, and if so, how male identity is linked to the offending behaviour of boys and men, thereby ignoring long-standing calls for gender-focused approaches and understandings of masculinity in the work with boys and men and crime prevention and intervention (Dominelli 1992; Buckley 1996; Scourfield 1998).

### **The setting**

How, then, can theories of masculinity inform research with and on young males and why should this research take place in the arena of youth justice and crime? Approximately 80% of young people in contact with the Youth Justice System (YJS) are male and 85% of those males are ‘white British’ (Youth Justice Board (hereafter YJB) 2009). Although the ‘gender gap’ in pros-

ecution of crimes is shifting towards a more equal treatment (Steffenmeier and Schwartz 2009), boys and girls are still treated differently by the YJS (Feizler and Hood 2004). Whereas boys' criminal behaviour is commonly viewed as normative and is central to cultural codes of masculinity and male toughness (Muncie 1999), girls are not sanctioned simply for the crime committed, but also for the 'social crime of contravening normative expectations of appropriate female conduct' (Ashford et al 1997: 9). If the epitome of masculinity, in particular for males situated at the lower end of the social hierarchy (Holter 2005), is the expression of aggression and violence accessed when other subject categories as males are denied, then the demographic data of young people in the YJS lends itself to an appropriate research area to explore masculinity and the formation of male identity. As highlighted earlier, the contemporary literature on masculinities, and the development of male identity in itself, provides sufficient evidence for steering youth justice practices in a more gendered direction, accommodating theories of how male socialisation heavily influences the way a young person develops personal relationships, his lifestyle, physical health, emotional and mental health, and his perception of self and others. However, since the reformation of the YJS by New Labour in 1998, no attempt has been made to enquire

into masculinity and offending, or indeed explore gendered approaches in relation to men in order to inform crime prevention and intervention, although the most obvious common denominator of young people in the YJS is their gender. Linking masculinity and offending behaviour back to the literature and justifying the YJS as a research setting to explore masculinity, Oystein G. Holter (2005) suggests that men at the bottom of the social hierarchy in particular utilise their gendered behaviour and coping strategies to achieve their aims, especially 'if access to male identity as a moral and an economical category is denied' (Morgan 2005: 169) The child's experience of its gendered socialisation lays the foundation for future strategies to responses and behaviour (Boenisch and Winter 1993). Role expectations and structural inequalities add to the determining factors when choosing deviant coping strategies (Lui and Kapland 2004), which are tied to the socio-structural disadvantaged and 'generally enacted or inflicted upon the more marginalised groups of society' (Hatty 2000:6). This applies particularly if the subject in question has experienced physical and psychological abuse during his childhood (Egeland 1993; Spatz Widom 1994), which is the case for a high number of adult male prisoners (Morgan 2002). Hence, it appears entirely reasonable to understand men's higher involvement in the arena of criminal offences as

a product of socially learned and validated expressions of masculinity, internalised as legitimate parts of male identity and coupled with the absence of alternative coping strategies or models of behaviour (De Keseredy and Schwartz 2005). The literature highlights that lower income male youth are more likely to be 'pushed towards delinquency' (Hobbs 1994; Winlow 2002: 38), which justifies the YJS as the chosen research setting. Lastly, the YJS and the Criminal Justice System have repeatedly been accused of being designed around the needs of male offenders (Caulfield 2010) and on the basis of male values (Libbling 2004), so it lends itself as the ideal research setting for research on masculinity and young males.

### **Issues with current debates on masculinity**

However, there are several conceptual issues with theories on masculinity in general and masculinity in the context of the YJS. Prominent ideas of masculinity are strongly embedded in feminist theory of patriarchy and analysed as relations of power and control, on one hand, and consequently, as oppression and dependency on the other (Connell 1987, 2005; Hearn 2010). Theoretically speaking, this approach generates polarised constructs of 'the masculine' and 'the feminine' and thereby paves the way for the rather ominous concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Demekratis

2001; Connell 2005). This concept, in turn, is utilised to explain, research, and understand masculinity and logically reinforces its roots in the conceptual framework of the patriarchy (Fuss 1990). Therefore, the very dichotomy at the foundation of theories of the patriarchy allows no other conceptual understanding of masculinity and femininity than their contrariety to one another (Acker 1989). Although theories of the patriarchy lend themselves to perhaps understanding gender structurally, they assist little in comprehending the formation of gender identity on the level of agency and in any specific cultural and social context (Acker 1989). Furthermore, while queer theory (Ingraham 2002; Wittig 2002) underlines how concepts of masculinity (and femininity) are strongly tied into heteronormative subject positions of male and female and do not translate into terminology beyond this dichotomy, it does not offer any comprehensive theoretical framework to understanding the formation of male identity. Instead, the coherent and comprehensible concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' has been distraught into an almost in-cohesive and fragmented 'male identity' with its main feature being that it is different. At best, however, this approach to masculinity offers explanations for any expression and formation of male identity which is essentially deviant to 'hegemonic' masculinity, and thereby is equally 'relational' in terms of its position



within a theoretical dichotomy, but also assists little in establishing a more rounded idea of the formation of masculinity. In addition to these conceptual issues, there is a distinct lack of the actual lived experience of men in the research and theory on the formation of male identity and masculinity (Seidler 2006). While they embark on a theoretical exploration of masculinity and the formation of male identity on a mainly structural level, the actual performance of gender and the practical negotiation of masculinity as active agents are absent from the debate. Here, Judith Butler (1990) and Beverley Skeggs (1997) offer some very useful insights into how masculinity (and femininity) unfold in the actual social agent, but remain distant from research on masculinity, which includes men and their actual lived experiences as men. Lastly, a shift from masculinity to its plural, masculinities, to grant space to some heterogeneity within the discourse on masculinity does not fill the rifts conceptual issues of theories on masculinity have left, and again leave actual men out of the research and theory on masculinity (Fuss 1990).

### **Men – essentially speaking**

Acknowledging conceptual issues of theories on masculinity, for the purpose of the research it appears necessary in order to conduct research on men to return to an essentialist understanding of gender to identify research subjects and

participants as 'male' and 'female' (Fuss 1990). The research itself has been designed to accommodate not only the lived experience of (young) men themselves, but also practitioners' ideas around masculinity in the YJS, on the Practice Level, and the incorporation of assessment forms of young males to explore how, if at all, masculinity does or can play a role in youth justice policy, on the Policy Level. The overall research question formulated in order to meet those objectives is: What, if any, role does masculinity play in the context of the Youth Justice System? Specific focus will be on potential links which can be made between concepts of masculinity and male youth offending, the experience of masculinity of young men themselves in the YJS, how the assessment of young males in the YJS is influenced, or not, by concepts of masculinity, and how, if at all, Youth Justice Policy incorporates concepts of masculinity. Research methods employed to investigate the role of concepts of masculinity in the YJS, or indeed their absence, are entirely qualitative and consist of focus groups and interviews with staff and young people, ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation as well as secondary analysis of assessment documents of the young people. This multi-methods approach aims to encompass not only the experience of the young males themselves, but also ideas of masculinity of the staff, and the relevance of such, as well

as an analysis of whether, and if so how, documents designed for the purpose of assessing young men in the YJS bear any notion of concepts of masculinity.

### The boy turn in Youth Justice

As such, the research aims to not only provoke a 'boy turn' (Hightower 2004) in Youth Justice Policy, but also hopes to be able to draw more far-reaching conclusions for social policy in general by uncovering how the absence of the discussion of men and masculinity itself is part of men's gendering (Hearn 2010). Its objective is to put men and boys back into the research and conceptualisation of masculinity by including their lived experiences of masculinity. Further, by highlighting its absence, this project underlines the lack of lived experience of women in policy also (Caulfield 2010), and aims to uncover the contribution social, crime, political and economic policies make to the gendering of individuals by conforming to 'hegemonic' (Connell 2005) and 'hetero-normative' (Ingraham 2002) ideas of men and women without taking lived experiences into account (Seidler 2006).

### References

- Acker, Joan. 1989. The Problem with Patriarchy. *Sociology* 23 (2): 235-40.
- Ashford, Mark, Alex Chard and Naomi Redhouse. 1997. *Defending Young People in the Criminal Justice System*. London, UK: Legal Action Group.
- Boenisch, Lothar and Reinhard Winter. 1993. *Male Socialisation, Issues with the Management of Male Identity throughout the Life Course* (Original Title: *Maennliche Sozialisation, Bewaeltigungsprobleme maennlicher Geschlechtsidentitaet im Lebenslauf*). Weinheim and Muenchen: Juventa Verlag.
- Broude, Gwen J. 1990. Protest Masculinity: A Further Look at the Causes and Concept. *Ethos* 18(1): 103-22.
- Buckley, Karen. 1996. Masculinities in the Probation Service and Causes of Offending. In Tim May and Antony A. Vass eds. *Working With Offenders: Issues, Contexts and Outcomes*. London: Sage Publications.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Caulfield, Laura. 2010. Rethinking the Assessment of Female Offenders. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 49(4): 315-27.
- Collier, Richard. 1998. *Masculinities, Crime and Criminology*. London: Sage Publications
- Connell, R. W. 1987. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sex-*

- ual Politics*. California: Stanford University Press.
- Connell, R. W. 2005. *Masculinities*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Coote, Anna. 14th Nov 1993. *Boys Who Can't Grow Up: Men Use Crime to Prove their Masculinity*, The Independent.
- De Keseredy, Walter S. and Martin D. Schwartz. 2005. Masculinities and Interpersonal Violence. In Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn and R. W. Connell eds. *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*. London: Sage Publications.
- Demekratis, Demetriou. 2001. Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique. *Theory and Society* 30(3): 337- 61.
- Dominelli, Lena. 1992. Sex Offenders and Probation Practice. In S. A. Woodhill ed. *Gender, Crime and Probation Practice*. London: PAVIC Publications.
- Feizler, Martina and Roger Hood. 2004. *Differences in Discrimination?* London: UK Youth Justice Board.
- Fuss, Diana. 1990. *Essentially Speaking - Feminism, Nature and Difference*. London, U.K: Routledge.
- Harris, Ian M. 1995. *Messages Men Hear – Constructing Masculinities, Gender, Change and Society*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Hatty, Suzanne E. 2000. *Engendering Violence: Masculinities, Violence and Culture*. London: Sage Publications.
- Hearn, Jeff. 2010. Reflecting on Men and Social Policy: Contemporary Critical Debates and Implications for Social Policy. *Critical Social Policy* 30: 165- 88.
- Hightower Weaver, Marcus. 2003. Boy Turn in Research on Gender and Education. *Review of Educational Research* 73(4): 471- 98.
- Hobbs, Dick. 1994. Mannish Boys: Danny, Chris, Crime, Masculinity and Business. In Tim Newburn and Elizabeth A. Stanko. *Just Boys Doing Business? Men, Masculinity and Crime*. London: Routledge.
- Holter, Oystein G. 2005. Social theories for Researching Men and Masculinities. In Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn and R. W. Connell. *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*. London: Sage Publications.
- Ingraham, Chrys. 2002. The Heterosexual Imaginary. In Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott. *Gender – A Sociological Reader*. London: Routledge Student Readers.
- Jefferson, Tony. 1994. Theorizing Masculine Subjectivity. In Tim Newburn and Elizabeth A. Stanko. *Men, Masculinity and Crime – Just Boys Doing Business*. London: Routledge.
- Liebling, Alison. 2004. *Prison and their Moral Performance- A Study of*

- Values, Quality and Prison Life.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Lui, Ruth X. and Howard B. Kaplan. 2004. Role Stress and Aggression Amongst Young Adults. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 67(1): 88-102.
- Malamuth, Neil M. and Nancy W. Thornhill. 1994. Hostile Masculinity, Sexual Aggression, and Gender-Biased Domineeringness in Conversations. *Aggressive Behaviour* 20: 185-93.
- Morgan, David. 2005. Class and Masculinities. In Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn and R. W. Connell. *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities.* London: Sage Publications.
- Morgan, Rod. 2002. Imprisonment- A Brief History: The Contemporary Scene and Likely Prospects. In Mike Maguire, Rod Morgan and Robert Reiner *Handbook of Criminology.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Muncie, John. 1999. *Youth and Crime.* London, UK: Sage Publications
- Scourfield, Jonathan B. 1998. Probation Officers Working with Men. *British Journal of Social Work* 28(4): 581-99.
- Seidler, Victor. 2006. *Re-thinking Male Violence: Transforming Masculinities - Men, Cultures, Bodies, Power, Sex and Love.* London, UK: Routledge.
- Skeggs, Beverley. 1997. *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable.* London, Sage Publications.
- Spatz Widom, Catherine. 1994. Childhood Victimization and Adolescent Problem Behaviours. In Robert D. Ketterlinus and Michael Lamb. *Adolescent Problem Behaviours – Issues and Research.* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Steffenmeier, Darrel and Jennifer Schwartz. 2009. Trends in Girls' Delinquency and the Gender Gap- Statistical Assessment of Diverse Sources. In M. Zahn ed. *The Delinquent Girl.* Philadelphia, USA: Temple University Press.
- Winlow, Simon. 2002. *Badfellas: Crime, Tradition and New Masculinities.* Oxford: Berg Publications.
- Wittig, Monica. 2002. The Straight Mind. In Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott eds. *Gender – A Sociological Reader.* London: Routledge Student Reader.
- Youth Justice Board (YJB). 2009. *Youth Justice Annual Workload Data 2007/08.* London, U.K: Youth Justice Board.

# A close shave: masculinity and bodywork in dementia care

Sarah Campbell

---

*This snapshot focuses on a doctoral study at the University of Manchester which is situated within a larger ESRC funded study, 'The Hair and Care Project', which seeks to explore the relationship between appearance and personal identity for people with dementia. The doctoral study accesses data from this wider study (<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/my-esrc/grants/RES-061-25-0484/read>). The snapshot presents male shaving as a case example of bodywork in dementia care and argues that male shaving could be a revealing lens through which to explore masculinity and embodiment in dementia care.*

*Keywords: Dementia, Masculinity, Bodywork, Male Shaving, Embodiment.*

---

## Introduction

This snapshot relates to an ethnographic study exploring masculinity, embodiment and bodywork in dementia care with a specific focus on the relationship between appearance and personal identity for people with dementia. This snapshot highlights the significant gender gap in dementia research, and argues that everyday care activities such as bodywork may be important investigative topics to explore the gendered experiences of people with dementia living in dementia care settings.

## Dementia and gender

Tom Kitwood's (1997) seminal

work 'Dementia Reconsidered: The Person Comes First' reconceptualised dementia and influenced research, policy and practice in the UK and internationally. Instead of a deficit-based model focussing on the person-with-DEMENTIA, Kitwood promoted a more individualised and self-deterministic approach with an emphasis on the PERSON-with-dementia (Kitwood 1997, 7). To augment his thinking, Kitwood developed the concept of 'personhood' as:

a standing or status that is bestowed upon one human being by others in the context of relationship and social being. It implies recognition, respect and trust (Kit-

wood 1997, 8).

Although this made a major contribution to thinking on dementia, academic discourses continue to centre on 'the person' and de-gender the experiences of those living with the condition. Even within psychosocial reviews of the literature on dementia, concepts of identity and social difference have been largely overlooked (Downs 1997; Innes et al 2004; Hulko 2009; O'Connor et al 2009). The literature that does exist explores formal and informal care giving roles and whether or not gender is a salient issue within them (Miller & Cafasso 1992; Fisher 1994; Ford et al 1997; Bywater & Harris 1998; Lindsay and Skea 1997). Whilst these studies provide some focus on gendered subjects, they are not grounded in the perspective of the person with dementia; therefore an understanding of the gendered experiences of people with dementia is missing.

When men are considered in dementia research and practice it is often through the lens of a 'problem' and connected to challenging behaviours, such as 'sexually inappropriate behaviours' (Archibald 1998; Ward et al 2005). There is little in the dementia literature related to either male or female gendered experiences of receiving care. For instance, a recent systematic review of the impact of dementia on self-image by L. Caddell and L. Clare (2010) made no mention of gender,

despite long-standing recognition in feminist gerontology that gender is central to self and identity throughout the lifecourse (Arber and Ginn 1995; Calasanti 2004).

There are significant gaps in gender research in wider gerontology, particularly in terms of exploring masculinity for older men, men with disability and embodied masculinity in later life. A. A. Fleming has argued that there is a lack of work exploring masculinity in later life and male embodiment despite the focus on male bodies in defining 'masculinity' (Fleming 1999). Sara Arber and Jay Ginn (2005) state that where there was a 'feminisation of older age' this is less the case because the ratio of women to men in later life is decreasing. They argue that it is important to explore 'the maintenance of masculinity and autonomy among men in later life' (Arber et al 2003, 5). Hence there are a growing number of gerontological feminist commentators focusing on gender, with some exploring masculinity in particular.

A recent study undertaken by Linn Sandberg (2011) suggests a rethinking of old age and masculinity. Sandberg's work explores the contradictory discourses of maturity and experience pitted against failing bodies, which is often linked to a failing sexual prowess. Sandberg argues that 'bodies are essential for understanding both gender and age' (Sandberg 2007, 88). She reaffirms the arguments of J. Twigg



(2004) that social gerontology has abandoned bodies to medicine in their struggle against biological determinism, while feminist scholars, although paving the way for a sociology of the body, have largely left out the ageing body. Sandberg's work engages with men's bodies to develop a framework of old age that challenges simple oppositions of successful/positive ageing versus negative/declining ageing to create the notion of 'affirmative ageing'. Sandberg explores old men's sexuality and suggests that new pleasures are discovered through closeness and touch in later life (Sandberg 2011). Sandberg's study explores touch and intimacy and suggests there may be useful connections for people with dementia, where sensory experiences have heightened potency as verbal language diminishes (Sandberg 2011, 267). Sandberg acknowledges that she is exploring touch and intimacy in consensual relationships and that is very different to understanding touch where it may not be wanted (Sandberg 2011, 265). By contrast, Twigg's study of 'Bathing, body and community care' explores the complex power dynamic in care work, stating:

Clients struggle to resist the domination of workers and to maintain a fragile sense of self in the face of the erosions of disability and age (Twigg 2000, 179).

I wish to argue that this is particularly interesting in a consideration of body work, masculinity and dementia.

### **Bodywork and dementia**

Bodywork is central to health and social care and is work carried out on the bodies of others (Twigg et al 2011). Much of the work in dementia care is non-medical and includes bodywork with relation to personal care, personal grooming and dressing. It is a growing area of interest in sociology and for social gerontology (Wolkowitz 2002). Bodywork is an area where both gender and sexuality have great significance for both the person receiving care and the worker (Archibald 2002; Ward et al 2005). Twigg (2000) argues 'carework as a form of bodywork' and suggests that it is more often considered 'women's work' because of a number of complex concerns relating to women being associated with their bodies and bodies are connected to the domestic sphere as the site of caring work. Certainly it is the case that most paid carework is undertaken by low paid, often migrant women (Lee-Treweek 1998; Twigg 2000; Twigg et al 2011). This leads to a complex set of power relations when working with men living in care including vulnerability for the person in receipt of care (Twigg 2000), an experience that is challenging to hegemonic concepts of masculinity (Connell 1995; Gill et al 2005).

Care settings for people with dementia are gendered spaces. There are twice as many women as men living in residential or nursing homes (Arber and Ginn 2005) and the majority of the formal care workforce is also female (Lee-Treweek 1998; Twigg 2011). Yet despite this, there has been limited research undertaken to explore gender relations in these places. R. Ward et al. argue that gender has a significant role to play in the experience of dementia care:

Differences of age, class, gender, 'race' and culture structure social relations within care settings and are negotiated on a day-to-day basis during the provision of care. When drawing upon proxy accounts of the conduct and experiences of people with dementia there is a need to recognize how such accounts are mediated by social difference (Ward et al 2005, 56).

### **Male shaving as a case example**

In my own doctoral study, I am carrying out an exploration of shaving as a sensory experience that interlinks both an individual's bodily self and gendered self. There are great methodological challenges in how to investigate and understand someone else's sensory experience (Pink 2012). However, I wish to argue that in considering bodywork in these settings there is much to be gained from an investigation of shaving routines. G. B. Retallack consid-

ers shaving a 'persistent and deeply rooted reflection of cultural norms and symbols' (Retallack 1994, 4). Shaving holds significance in dementia care because it is a complex task that may be affected early on in the onset of dementia and consequently support may be required to help men undertake this grooming activity. More often as the condition progresses, shaving becomes no longer the private ritual undertaken by the individual but a 'task' undertaken by a care worker incorporated into their daily routines. Retallack argues that shaving is more than a grooming activity and that it is a 'culturally defined and refined process entirely devoted to converting the biological "man" into the "social" man' (Retallack 1999, 4). Therefore the notion of being shaved by someone else (not out of choice) brings into play a complex set of power relations that extend well beyond the simple completion of a care task.

Retallack argues that shaving is something performed by men that is linked to the very making of their masculinity (Retallack 1999). Therefore I would ask, if this task is no longer controlled by the men themselves in the midst of growing levels of dependency associated with receiving care, could it be experienced as a disintegration of their masculinity? It is an activity where men become visible as men and hence often 'other' to a largely female workforce of carers. Furthermore, there are possible is-

sues relating to the intercorporeal and sensory experience of shaving as the sensitivity of skin and the use of different types of razors may lead to it being an uncomfortable or distressing experience, perhaps particularly so for men with dementia who may not fully apprehend what is being done to them or why. So by contrast to the exploration of touch and intimacy in Sandberg's (2011) study of ageing masculinities, this is a sensory experience that may not be pleasurable. This was substantiated through interviews with health and social care staff carried out for this study. Many of whom, like this care worker, described shaving as a difficult task:

...it [shaving] is very difficult. I think you have to assess what kind of mood they are in. Now it is easier to electric shave somebody with dementia than it is to wet shave because the process is not as long if you like.... it's a lot less invasive with somebody that doesn't understand.

However I wish to suggest it is also possible that these shaving struggles are related to something far deeper that is more fundamental to an embodied experience of masculinity. The question that has arisen from my fieldwork is whether, in the context of dementia care, the experience of being shaved supports or affirms masculinity or whether a gendered sense of self is being undermined through such

everyday appearance-related activities and the way they are appropriated by the care regime?

The following extract from my field-notes describes a once private ritual now being conducted by a member of care staff in a care home:

Brigit puts a towel around Samuel's front and shoulders and then sprays the foam which has a smooth texture, she rubs it across his face. He has his eyes closed and his mouth is open. ... I ask Samuel if he has always been clean shaven or if he has ever had a moustache or beard and he says "oh god no!".

Brigit begins to shave, she pulls the razor one way and then the other. I ask Samuel if he has always had wet shaves rather than an electric razor and he says "oh yes". Brigit says she has never done a wet shave before and Samuel says "now you tell me!" Samuel says "don't chop away" and Brigit says "ok I'm trying not to" and begins to pull the razor for longer sweeps. Samuel has a frown on his face and I ask him if his skin is sensitive and he says "yes it is". For a short time I hear the scrapes of the razor across the skin and whiskers. Brigit moves around Samuel's face and he keeps his eyes shut. She is on his chin and the strokes are shorter, Samuel seems to move his face with the razor pulling his mouth up to push out his chin. It

is quite fast and Brigit says “I’ve done it”. .... I ask him how it is being shaved by someone else and he says “it depends on who does it, sometimes it’s chop chop chop”... I ask him what having a shave is like and he says “horrible, you want to get it out of the way quickly with as little discomfort as possible”. Then he says “you often don’t have a lot of time before work and then away you go”. (29th October 2011 HC05 field notes -all names have been altered).

The above description is of an embodied sensory process with many references to the sensory experience. Samuel describes the discomfort of shaving ‘don’t chop away’ or ‘chop, chop, chop’. However he is also able to biographically locate the experience of being shaved to a time of day and to a presentation of self as a working man when he states ‘you don’t often have a lot of time before work and then away you go’. He also makes reference to a strong sense of his appearance preferences regarding shaving when he states clearly ‘God no!’ to the question of whether or not he had ever had a beard or moustache and to the type of shave he prefers, ‘a wet shave’.

This extract illustrates the sensory and bodily experiences of a man with dementia during an everyday care practice. The associations with his presentation of self relates

to Retallacks’s (1999) link between shaving and the making of a ‘social’ man. The extract presents an insight into the connection between shaving rituals and aspects of self of which masculinity is a significant part. It is noteworthy that Samuel links the ritual to his identity as a (younger) working man, an aspect of self perhaps connected to status within a hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995). This is deeply relevant here amidst the gendered relations at play between the care worker and man with dementia and his new position of dependency.

### **Conclusion**

This snapshot illustrates the value of using an everyday care activity as a lens through which to explore gender relations and gendered experiences in dementia care. Gendered experiences have been given scant consideration in dementia research and yet they are experiences worthy of much closer examination. Shaving is an everyday activity, but it is also a symbol that locates a man culturally and socially. It has been argued that people with dementia are deeply engaged with their bodies in their environment as their communication and other abilities diminish. So what do the processes involved in this symbol of masculinity mean for men’s gendered identity? Does the replacement of the ability to carry out this private ritual with a scenario where individuals’ bodies are

worked upon by others negate their embodied gender identity? This is a question that I intend to pursue in my ongoing research. Dementia research must explore the everyday to understand what experiences for people with dementia are like. Examining how gender might shape these experiences is a vital component of that research.

### References

- Arber, Sara. & Jay Ginn. 2005. 'Gender Dimensions of the Age Shift'. In Malcolm L. Johnson, Vern, L. Bengston, Peter G. Coleman, Thomas B.L. Kirkwood eds. *The Cambridge Handbook of Age and Ageing*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Arber, Sara. Kate Davidson, and Jay Ginn. 2003. 'Changing Approaches to Gender and Later Life'. In *Gender and Ageing: Changing Roles and Relationships*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Arber, Sara. & Jay Ginn eds. 1995. *Connecting Gender and Ageing: A Sociological Approach*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Archibald, C. 2002. Sexuality and Dementia in Residential Care – Whose Responsibility? *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 17 (3): 301-9.
- Archibald, C. 1998. Sexuality, Dementia and Residential Care: Managers' Report and Response. *Health and Social Care in the Community* 6 (2): 95-101.
- Bywaters, P and A. Harris. 1998. Supporting Carers: Is Practice Still Sexist? *Health and Social Care in the Community* 6 (6): 458-63.
- Caddell, L and L. Clare. 2010. The Impact of Dementia on Self and Identity: A Systematic Review. *Clinical Psychology Review*. 30: 113-26.
- Calasanti, T. 2004. Feminist gerontology and old men. *Journal of Gerontology Series B Social Sciences*. 59 (6): S305-S314.
- Calasanti, Toni. 2003. 'Masculinities and Care Work in Old Age'. In Sara Arber, Kate Davidson and Jay Ginn ed. *Gender and Ageing: Changing Roles and Relationships*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Connell, R.W. 1995. *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Downs, M. 1997. The Emergence of the Person in Dementia Research. *Ageing & Society* 17: 597-607.
- Fleming. Alfred Andrew. 2001. *Older Men 'Working It Out': A Strong Face of Ageing and Disability*. PhD Thesis. School of Behavioural and Community Health Sciences, University of Sydney. Australia.
- Fleming, A. A. 1999. Older Men in Contemporary Discourses on Ageing: Absent Bodies and Invisible Lives. *Nursing Inquiry* 6: 3-8.
- Fisher, M. 1994. Man-Made Care:

- Community Care and Older Male Carers. *British Journal of Social Work*. 24: 659–80.
- Ford, G. R., K. T. Goode. J. J. Barrett. L. E. Harrell and W. E. Haley. 1997. Gender Roles and Caregiving Stress: An Examination of Subjective Appraisals of Specific Primary Stressors in Alzheimer's Caregivers. *Aging and Mental Health*. 1 (2): 158–65.
- Gill, R. K. Henwood and C. McLean. 2005. Body Projects and the Regulation of Normative Masculinity. *Body & Society* 11: 37-62.
- Hulko, W. 2009. From 'Not a Big Deal' to 'Hellish': Experiences of Older People with Dementia. *Journal of Aging Studies* 23: 131-44.
- Innes, Anthea, Carole Archibald, and Charlie Murphy eds. 2004. *Dementia and Social Inclusion: Marginalised Groups and Marginalised Areas of Dementia Research, Care and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Kitwood, Tom. 1997. *Dementia Reconsidered*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Kontos, P. 2005. Embodied Selfhood in Alzheimer's Disease. *Dementia* 4 (4): 553-570.
- Kontos, P. and G. Naglie. 2006. Expressions of Personhood in Alzheimer's: Moving From Ethnographic Text to Performing Ethnography. *Qualitative Research* 6 (3): 301-17.
- Lee-Treweek, G. 1998. Women, Resistance and Care: An Ethnographic Study of Nursing Auxiliary Work. *Work, Employment and Society* 11 (1): 47-63.
- Lindesay, J. and D. Skea. 1997. Gender and Interactions Between Care Staff and Elderly Nursing Home Residents with Dementia. *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 12 (3): 344-48.
- Miller, B. and B. Cafasso. 1992. Gender Differences in Caregiving: Fact or Artefact? *Gerontologist* 32 (4): 498-507.
- O'Connor, D., A. Phinney, A. Smith, J. Small, B. Purves, and J. Perry. 2007. Personhood in Dementia Care: Developing a Research Agenda for Broadening the Vision. *Dementia* 6: 121-142.
- Pink, Sarah. 2012. *Situating Everyday Life*. London: Sage.
- Retallack, G. B. 1999. Razors, Shaving and Gender Construction: An Inquiry into the Material Culture of Shaving. *Material History Review* 49: 4-19.
- Sandberg, Linn. 2011. *Getting Intimate: A Feminist Analysis of Old Age, Masculinity and Sexuality*. PhD Thesis. Linköping University, <http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:408208> (accessed online 18 Oct 2010).
- Sandberg, Linn. 2009. 'Getting Intimate: Old Age, Masculinity and New (?)



- Heterosexual Morphologies'. In Jeff Hearn ed. *Deconstructing the Hegemony of Men and Masculinities*. GEXcel Work in Progress Report. Linköping University and Örebro University.
- Sandberg, L. 2008. The Old, the Ugly and the Queer: Thinking Old Age in Relation to Queer Theory. *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 5 (2): 117-39.
- Sandberg, L. 2007. Ancient Monuments, Mature Men and Those Popping Amphetamine: Researching the Lives of Older Men. *Nordic Journal for Masculinity Studies* 2 (2): 85-108.
- Twigg, J. C. Wolkowitz, R.L. Cohen, and S. Nettleton. 2011. Conceptualising body work in health and social care. *Sociology of Health and Illness* 33 (2): 171-88.
- Twigg, Julia. 2006. *The Body in Health and Social Care*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Twigg, J. 2004. The Body, Gender and Age: Feminist Insights in Social Gerontology. *Journal of Aging Studies* 18: 59-73.
- Twigg, Julia. 2000. *Bathing, the Body and Community Care*. London: Routledge.
- Ward, R., A. A. Vass, N. Aggarwal, C. Garfield, and B. Cybyk. 2008. A Different Story: Exploring Patterns of Communication in Residential Dementia Care. *Ageing and Society* 28 (5): 629-51.
- Ward, R., A. A. Vass, N. Aggarwal, C. Garfield, and B. Cybyk. 2005. A Kiss is Still a Kiss?: The Construction of Sexuality in Dementia Care. *Dementia* 4: 49-72.
- Wolkowitz, Carol. 2006. *Bodies at Work*, Sage: London.
- Wolkowitz, C. 2002. The Social Relations of Body Work. *Work, Employment and Society* 16: 497-510.
- Other references:  
ESRC Study. Reference to wider study: 'The Hair and Care Project' <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/my-esrc/grants/RES-061-25-0484/read>

# Questioning female subjectivity in Alain Resnais's *Muriel*

Mani Sharpe

---

*This snapshot will analyse Alain Resnais's 1963 film Muriel ou le temps d'un retour/Muriel or the Time of a Return, arguing that whilst deconstructing masculine patterns of spectatorship associated with hegemonic Hollywood cinema, the film nevertheless remains bound within normative notions of female identity, representing its central protagonist as a traumatised sign of national malaise as opposed to a speaking subject.*

*Keywords: Women, Spectatorship, French Cinema, Laura Mulvey, Trauma, Subjectivity*

---

Within the history of French cinema, the 1960s have often been viewed as a paragon of formal iconoclasm and sexual revolution, with stars like Brigitte Bardot and Anna Karina heralding the advent of a new conception of a female identity emancipated from the shackles of tradition and convention. Nevertheless, a number of theorists have recently adopted a more critical stance towards the period, with Geneviève Sellier (2008) illustrating how many of the films exhibit an underlying misogyny that draws from Romanticism in its masculine orientated narration. This snapshot will thus cast a retrospective and perhaps comparatively critical gaze over one of the defining films of this period, that is, Alain Resnais's 1963 work *Mu-*

*riel ou le temps d'un retour/Muriel or the Time of a Return*, which remains insofar untouched by feminist criticism (including Sellier's own analysis). Drawing from the work of Sellier alongside Laura Mulvey (1975) and Kristen Ross (1996), this snapshot will ultimately argue that that whilst the film destabilises traditional masculine viewing patterns associated with hegemonic Hollywood cinema through formal technique (editing, framing and lighting), the film is nevertheless highly conservative in its representations of women, portraying its central female protagonist as a traumatised sign of national malaise as opposed to an empowered, speaking subject.

The narrative itself dramatises the metropolitan lives of H el ene

Aughain (Delphine Seyrig), a single widow, and her ex-lover Alphonse Noyard, who attempt to rekindle a previous romance during a volatile few weeks in the port-town of Boulogne-sur-Mer (located in Northern France). The film therefore begins with Alphonse's arrival and introduction to Hélène's stepson, Bernard. Bernard, like Alphonse, has just returned from his military duty in Algeria, and, although apparently preparing to marry his fiancée 'Muriel' (to whom the viewer is at no point introduced), he remains at first uncommunicative and apparently disturbed by his experience in the colonies. Thus, in line with the subtitle of the film, '*the Time of a Return*,' the basic premise of the narrative concerns the event of a return; for Hélène, in Alphonse, it signifies the return of an old love interest; for Bernard, it represents his recent return from his time spent in Algeria as a French soldier to the highly gendered space of the family's modernist apartment.

### **Deconstructing masculine viewing pleasure**

In her article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Laura Mulvey famously outlines the gendered structures that underpin hegemonic Hollywood cinema, describing how female protagonists are 'coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey 1975, 837). Furthermore, Mulvey then

describes how these patterns of representation function in order to satisfy the unconscious voyeuristic-scopophilic desire of a heterosexual male spectator who is positioned as 'transcendental subject' (Metz 1982, 49), that is, in a position of scopio-epistemological and gendered privilege through the formal patterns of framing, editing and lighting. In Hollywood cinema, women are thus frequently framed in mid-shots or close-ups, allowing a (masculine) spectator to scrutinise the profile of the female figure consistently represented in the centre of on-screen (rather than off-screen) space, whilst continuity editing acts in order to construct an illusion of spatial coherence propagated through the perspectival space of Renaissance art and the 'proscenium space' of early cinema (Burch 1969, 11). Finally, classical patterns of lighting are often used in order to bathe women in a quasi-spiritual (virginal) 'white glow,' standing in direct contrast to representations of men, who are instead associated with darkness, disorder and desire (Dyer 1997, 87). In this way, the formal patterns of Hollywood cinema act both to reinforce a heteronormative conception of gendered relations and to ossify the gendered binaries inherent within patriarchal ideology, between an active, masculine spectator and a passive, feminine on-screen object.

In direct counterpoint to the formal patterns of Hollywood cinema,

*Muriel* instead draws from trends in oppositional (or ‘counterhegemonic’) cinema, including the work of the Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein and the Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu. This shift in formal approach (from realism to modernism) is perhaps crystallised in the opening scene of the film, establishing an aesthetic paradigm frequently used from this point onwards. Set within the domestic confines of H el ene’s apartment —which functions simultaneously as a showroom and living quarters— it dramatises an interaction between H el ene (who we are later told is an antiques dealer) and a female customer, who enquires about buying a ‘chest of drawers’ and a ‘Swedish teak table.’ Nevertheless, in place of a medium or close-up shot of either of the women’s faces, punctuated by invisible and infrequent match cuts and bathed in a translucent glow as within the classical Hollywood system, the two women remain largely within the obscure realm of off-screen space. Instead, Resnais visualises a dizzyingly close montage of domestic items located inside the apartment, whilst brief multiperspectival shots of the women preclude the potential for a (masculine) viewing pleasure based upon an eroticised female image. Furthermore, the use of harsh colours can be seen to privilege verisimilitude over a reified and abstract notion of feminine identity, dispelling the myth of virginity associated with the body of the arche-

typal Hollywood star. Crucially, the whole conversation lasts no more than thirty seconds, although comprises of over twenty-three cuts (figures 1-4). During this scene, rather than eroticised objects to be seen (as in Hollywood cinema), women are thus represented as fragmented parts of an undisclosed whole. This interpretation of the film thus begs the question— can Resnais’s narrative be considered first and foremost a feminist piece of cinema simply through its formal patterns?



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

**Figures 1-4: *Hélène (above) and her customer (below) discuss a purchase in the initial, highly disorientating scene (images courtesy of Eureka Entertainment Ltd).***

### **Hélène as a sign of a national trauma**

This snapshot has insofar argued that Resnais's film potentially represents a feminist piece of filmmaking in that it destabilises masculine patterns of spectatorship associated with hegemonic Hollywood cinema. Nevertheless, another interpretation of the narrative is also possible, both in relation to Hélène's behavioural qualities and her semiotic value within the film. As numerous theorists have illustrated, many of the

characters in the film display signs of pathological behaviour, from Bernard's Lazarian tendencies (Armes 1985, 115) to Alphonse's bad faith and his mistress Françoise's frequent bouts of narcissism and egocentrism. Yet it is undoubtedly Hélène who appears most affected by patterns of behaviour that I will now argue find their origins simultaneously within Resnais's longstanding interest in psychoanalysis and contemporaneous trends in post-war European cinema.

Appearing at points anxious, nostalgic, unpredictable, capricious, depressed, forgetful, erratic and neurotic, Hélène's behaviour in the film certainly bears witness to the presence of an underlying psychic disturbance, although the origins (physical or mental) and/or perpetrators(s) of this disturbance are at no point made explicit. Yet it is perhaps precisely this absence of origin that is most revealing about Hélène's symptoms, which certain theorists have loosely associated with the trauma victim (Greene 1999, Wilson 2006). The phenomenon of trauma has been involved in a long and complex history in psychoanalytic thought. In particular, the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot originally claimed that psychological trauma was the cause of the mental illness known as hysteria, a predominantly female malady (Showalter 1987), resulting in a tendency towards neurosis (delusional or hallucinatory behaviour)



and mythomania (compulsive lying). These two symptoms are both clearly applicable to H el ene's character and symptomatic of a wider trend in patriarchal discourse which equates 'female sexual pleasure with death in the archetype of the hysterical woman' (Austin 2008, 64). On the other hand, H el ene does not display the most prominent symptoms associated with hysteria, that is, sporadic attacks of physical contortion, posturing and paralysis termed *arc-de-cercle* by the psychoanalysts of the period due to the arched trajectory of the (mostly female) subjects. Rather, H el ene's behaviour subscribes to a comparatively contemporary conception of trauma, that is, the possession of a repressed memory relived repeatedly in the present through nightmarish visions and fragmented episodes (see Caruth 1995). H el ene is thus frequently dramatised as disorientated between bouts of amnesia and an-amnesia, at one point pictured lying on a divan sofa, eyes closed, whilst a male protagonist stands behind her— a particularly potent reference to Freud's famous blind 'talking cure method' of curing psychological disturbances (figures 5 and 6). Furthermore, Resnais's interest in psychoanalysis is also evident in his previous film *Last Year in Marienbad* (1961), which casts the central female character (again played by Delphine Seyrig) as 'a patient under psychoanalysis circling but denying some hidden event' (Prouse 1983,

30). In both films, I would thus argue that the central female protagonist emerges as a suffering, largely silent, and above all, passive victim of trauma.



Figure 5

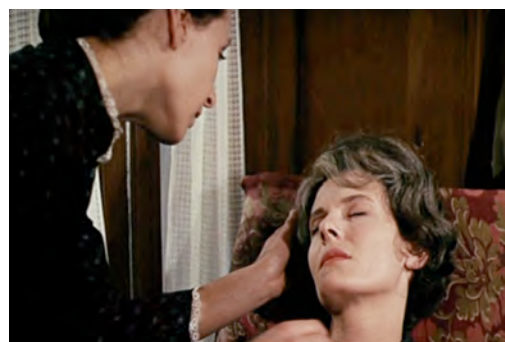


Figure 6

***Figures 5 and 6: H el ene as a sign of national trauma (images courtesy of Eureka Entertainment Ltd).***

Nevertheless, the question remains: what exactly is the origin of H el ene's trauma? This question can be approached in two ways. On the one hand, the spectator can interpret H el ene's pathological behaviour as a result of a private trauma, perhaps triggered by a past event or person within the diegesis (although



located in off-screen space). In particular, frequent, although indirect references are made within the film to Alphonse's potentially abusive tendencies, one scene focusing ominously upon his hand gripping forcefully around Hélène's wrist, before cutting to an imposing modernist monolith— a phallic symbol arguably indicative of (off-screen) sexual abuse. Yet another, potentially more persuasive reading of the narrative is also possible, especially if the figure of Hélène's semiotic— or, more precisely— synecdochic value is considered in relation to the socio-political and historic context that frames the film. In particular, as Kristen Ross (1995) has argued, 1960s French society was positioned at a somewhat fragile juncture, between the end of the bloody Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) and a dizzying period of modernization, producing a sense of 'emotional and spiritual isolation' (Betz 2009, 95) and 'alienation' (Sellier 2008, 149) within 'a traumatised nation' (Greene 1999, 105). In light of this contextualisation, is it not therefore possible that the figure of Hélène thus functions synecdochically for post-colonial France? This interpretation of the film is supported by Valerie Orpen's claim that 'the late 1950s and early 1960s seemed to be a time in film when female characters were an excellent means of conveying a general post-war societal malaise [...] adrift in society and detached from their environment

(Orpen 2007, 60).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this snapshot has illustrated how *Muriel* can be seen as ambivalent and contradictory in its representation of female identity. Thus, whilst the formal patterns used by Resnais can certainly be interpreted as a critique of the masculine spectatorship associated with hegemonic Hollywood cinema, the film nevertheless subscribes closely to patriarchal codes; depicting its central female character as a silent and passive sign of a traumatised nation rather than a speaking subject.

### References

- Austin, Guy. 2008. *Contemporary French Cinema*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Armes, Roy. 1968. *The Cinema of Alain Resnais*. London: Zwemmer.
- Betz, Mark. 2009. *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Burch, Noel. 1969. *Theory of Film Practice*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Caruth, Cathy. 1996. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press.
- Dyer, Richard. 1997. *White*. New York: Routledge.

- Greene, Naomi. 1999. *Landscape of Loss: The National Past in Post-war French Cinema*. Princeton University Press. First Edition.
- Metz, Christian. 1982. *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*. London: MacMillan.
- Mulvey, Laura. 1975. Narrative Cinema and Visual Pleasure. *Screen* 16 (3): 6-18.
- Orpen, Valerie. 2007. *Cléo de 5 À 7 (Agnès Varda, 1961)*. London: I.B. Tauris
- Prouse, Derek. 1984. *Last Year in Marienbad*. In Ann Lloyd ed. *Movies of the Sixties*. London: Orbis.
- Resnais, Alain. 1961. *L'Année dernière à Marienbad/Last year in Marienbad*. Rialto Pictures.
- Resnais, Alain. 1963. *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour/Muriel or the Time of a Return*. Argos films/Eureka Entertainment Ltd.
- Ross, Kristin. 1996. *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonisation and the Reordering of French Culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press
- Sellier, Geneviève. 2008. *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Showalter, Elaine. 1987. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980*. London: Viagro.
- Wilson, Emma. 2006. *Alain Resnais*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

# Women, marriage and selfhood – why change names?

Rachel Thwaites

---

*The aim of this snapshot is to consider name changing in Britain and what reasons women give for doing so. Name changing on marriage, in particular, is a highly gendered phenomenon as women are the ones usually expected to make the change; name changing remains the norm within Britain and there is a social expectation that women will conform to this norm. Here I will use the testimony of a small number of participants from my wider study on women, naming practices, and selfhood to look at four reasons they give for changing names: love, 'oneness', tradition, and societal expectations.*

*Keywords: Gendered Identity, Marriage, Naming Practices*

---

Name changing remains the norm for British women when they marry: a European-wide study conducted in 2001 found that 94% of British women changed names and that 71% of Britons thought this was the best option (Valetas 2001). Names are a way of organising people within a bureaucratic world, but also a way of organising people into groups within our own minds based on societal norms and assumptions. In this way last names can have connotations of class, ethnic background, religion, nationality, place, and so on, and are important markers of identity, social structure, and social relations. They link us into the present, marking out our immediate family group or those we

are meant to look to for care, as well as linking us into a past via ideas of lineage and family tree. They collect together facets of identity under one symbol, masking often ongoing work at maintaining a coherent identity. Women in all four countries of the United Kingdom have been expected to change names on marriage since at least the nineteenth century thus marking out the unequal relationship between husbands and wives and the relations of care and protection expected to exist within this relationship.

The aim of my wider research is to look at name changing and name retaining on marriage, divorce, and widowhood within the British context and see how these practices

impact upon a woman's sense of (gendered) identity. The study uses mixed methods, albeit with the qualitative element dominating. I conducted a closed and open question survey in which 120 women initially showed interest and 102 valid responses were returned from women who can be generally described as English and Scottish (thus I focus on Scottish and English naming practices only), with 75 'name changers' and 27 'name retainers'. Within this snapshot I intend to outline four reasons given to me by participants for *changing* names: love, 'oneness', tradition, and social messages, as well as the importance of exploring such taken-for-granted practices.

### **Love**

Within my research, women discussed name changing in terms of showing love and commitment towards their husband and their marriage, for example, 'I love my husband and am happy to have his name' (P47) and '[Name changing was] a sign of commitment to my husband and marriage' (P68). The public and obvious symbols of love, of which name changing is one, were to be taken on by women, and participants rarely questioned this idea. It can be seen that ingrained within the heterosexual love relationship is a patriarchal element of women giving up a part of their personhood for men. This unequal action is masked by the word 'love' and hence this kind of sacrifice is

usually not noted, or is naturalised. Love is therefore not an egalitarian emotion, as it is often taken to be (May 2011). As Arlie Russell Hochschild has said, women work to do the 'emotion work' (Hochschild 2003, 165) of marriage, as well as what I would like to call 'conspicuous commitment' through name changing. In this way, the 'affirming, enhancing, and celebrating' of men rather than women which Hochschild describes in her work (2003, 165), requires women to deny their own self while affirming his (through using his name and getting rid of her own), enhancing his sense of selfhood as a husband with a (symbolically at least) dependent wife, and celebrating his selfhood by using his name and adding a link to his lineage and family tree, rather than her own. In doing so she 'conspicuously commits' by moving away from her own family (symbolically), becoming a part of his family, and continuing that line. She must, as part of her gendered love work think carefully about the feelings of others when she comes to marry: changing her name is a symbol of love and commitment, and a way of ensuring her husband and his family feel valued and deferred to over her own.

### **'Oneness'**

Oneness is connected with love, in that participants felt that they become a 'unit' or a 'team' with their husband on marriage and through name changing. They wish to share

everything with their partners and make the boundaries of selfhood less distinct: '[Sharing a name is] part of the process of accepting that you are part of a unit and working together with someone else towards a joint future' (P82). This wish extends further to any (future) children: participants spoke of feeling a sense of pulling together as a family against the world and of children feeling secure knowing they belonged and had clear roots. The feeling of belonging was strong within these discussions. The ontological security engendered through the relational acts of love and marriage, and the symbolic act of name changing and sharing, brought peace and happiness to many participants. They felt 'at home' (May 2011, 7).

Love and 'oneness' have obvious connections: they are relational in a supposedly individualistic age. Ulrich Beck and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim have argued that women are in an in-between position between individualism and relationality (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2010, 56) and, when considering marriage and name changing, this would appear to be correct. Women continue to think largely in relational terms of what would be best for their partner, family members and (possible) children, often over and above themselves and their own feelings. Women also situated themselves within a wider society, the part they play within that, and would go on to play as wives; the following two sec-

tions look at this wider social role.

### **Tradition**

The idea of keeping a lineage alive in a traditional way was observed by name changing participants as a positive thing: they were happy to continue, and share in, their husband's line. They referred to this action as fitting in with tradition: 'all part of the tradition' (P55). Such accounts ground women in a wider history and connect them with a past and future lineage. The 'tradition' of name changing is actually rather different in the four countries of the UK: for example, Scottish women did not lawfully change names, keeping and using their own (or both) until the nineteenth century (Barclay 2011: 98); English women, on the other hand, have changed names for centuries (Erickson 2005, 11). However, tradition was an idea used by participants wherever they came from, confirming that today's 'traditions' come in the main from nineteenth-century ideas when various traditions were invented (see Hobsbawm 1987), and naming practices became homogenised. Participants who had changed names often observed that, at least on the point of marrying, they were not very controversial people – they themselves were 'traditional' - and to not change names would have been unexpected behaviour: 'I am traditional in my belief that the woman should take her husband's name' (P64). In this way we can see the

messages of society beginning to *explicitly* creep in to women's accounts, highlighting what is acceptable and unacceptable.

### **Social Messages**

Here I will discuss only the social messages *explicitly* mentioned by name changers in my research. Reflecting on their decision, some name changers questioned the need to adapt their identity on marriage and that this might imply a social acceptance that they are less important than their husband. Wendy Langford has noted women feel they are lesser than men and use marriage and love as a means to boost self-esteem and status (Langford 1999). I would argue that Langford's findings can be applied to name changing, with the name symbolising a woman's new access to her husband's (male) prestige. A small number of participants mentioned wishing for this status through marriage and becoming clearly someone's wife, via the name change: '[I] wanted to be married and have the status of a married woman' (P61). Significantly though, participants were often shown they had achieved a different status via the reactions of other people, for example, perceiving they received more respect at work.

Further to this, women were often explicitly told by family, friends, and their partners, that not changing names would be a snub to the husband-to-be and his family. Women

were expected to put these feelings first when it came to making a decision about their name. A man was quite able to refuse to change his name and yet insist his wife did so for the sake of their 'unitedness'. The gendered nature of naming becomes clear in this action: women are required to think about the feelings of others and give up this symbol of their selfhood, while men are allowed to retain this symbol of selfhood and to think of themselves as the autonomous 'head' of the family. The reaction of husband's to wives who did not want to change names shows the emotive and integral part names play in both masculine and feminine identity. For example:

He wanted us to share, but wouldn't take my name.... He also said children would be affected... I was disrespecting his family, and that my mum had been proud to change so I should be too, which is not true. ... He didn't take my suggestion to change to my name seriously. (P8)

The patriarchal context of name changing, both historically and in the present day (see Pateman 1988), means that there remains a social element of status inequality with women having to adapt and change their selfhoods in a way men do not.

These four reasons given by name changers show the many complex and overlapping trains of thought that are a part of name changing - some more conscious



than others - and how much work women do in situating themselves in a relational manner within family and wider society, considering what will and what will not be acceptable to others, often even before themselves.

### **Conclusion: The (Un)Imaginable**

To conclude I wish to reflect briefly on the importance of studying taken-for-granted practices. As Jenny Hockey, Angela Meah, and Victoria Robinson argue in their study on heterosexuality, dominant categories are often not named and are therefore more recent objects of study (Hockey et al 2007, 1). It is hard to 'see' these categories because they are taken to be the norm: whiteness, heterosexuality, able-bodiedness. In my study, name changing is the norm. Participants could find the reasons for name changing hard to articulate, for example: 'I just changed my name because I was getting married!' (P4). Citing tradition and history become useful in dealing with this lack of language – they are commonly accepted narratives for explaining name changing and do not require the woman to ask too deeply of herself about her personal situation - but probing questions were required to force some participants to really consider their decision for the first time.

The articulation of accepted norms and their justifications is hard work and is meant to be so: the power behind such taken-for-grant-

ed practices is usually strong. Relations of power in patriarchy place women at a disadvantage in being able to demand to keep their names for their sense of self. Their sense of self is considered less important than that of men's *because they are women*, and as such they are in a disadvantaged power position within society (Hochschild 2003, 162). What is and is not imaginable is therefore very important and attention should be paid to such practices to understand their social importance. In my wider study I hope to address the norm of name changing and the gendered power imbalance involved in it to consider how gendered selfhoods are being created through this practice. As well as this I will focus on the smaller group of women – smaller both in my study and in society at large - who retain their original name, and I will consider what this means for these women as individuals, as well as for gendered societal structures. In this way, another taken-for-granted practice will be opened up to study, and the gendered everyday realities of our lives explored.

### **References**

- Barclay, Katie. 2011. *Love, Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650 – 1850*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Beck, Ulrich and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim. 2010. *Individualization*.

London: Sage.

- Erickson, Amy Louise. 2005. The Marital Economy in Comparative Perspective. In Maria Ågren and Amy Louise Erickson eds. *The Marital Economy in Scandinavia and Britain 1400 – 1900*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005: 3 - 20
- Hobsbawm, Eric. 1987. Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870 – 1914. In E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger ed. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 263- 307.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2003. *The Managed Heart*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
- Hockey, Jenny, Angela Meah, and Victoria Robinson. 2007. *Mundane Heterosexualities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Langford, Wendy. 1999. *Revolutions of the Heart: Gender, Power and the Delusions of Love*. London: Routledge.
- May, Simon. 2011. *Love: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Pateman, Carole. 1988. *The Sexual Contract*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Valetas, Marie-France. 2001. The Surname of Married Women in the European Union. *Population and Sociétés* 367: 1-4.

# Gender Studies: an academic insight

Compiled by Amy Burns and Clare Wiper

*Contributions from Dr Rachel Carroll (Teesside University), Professor Gabriele Griffin (University of York), Dr Tracey Jensen (Newcastle University), Dr Ruth Lewis (Northumbria University), Dr Julie Scanlon (Northumbria University) and Dr Angela Smith (Sunderland University).*

---

Whilst this supplementary edition of the GJSS has focussed in large part on the contributions that post-graduate students are making to events and debates taking place in North East institutions and to the field of Gender Studies more generally, this culminating snapshot explores the on-going work of six academic researchers from across the region. The snapshot is compiled of selected extracts from these researchers' responses to an informal questionnaire. The questions given were designed to elicit discussion about the significance of researching 'gendered subjects' in the contemporary moment, and these six academics provide a valuable insight into current research on women, feminism, men and masculinities.

**Reflecting on contemporary research in Gender Studies, which topics do you deem most important and relevant to current times, and which topics excite you the most?**

**Professor Griffin:** There are enormous amounts of gender research going on which in itself is both exciting and satisfying, especially for someone who started her career when research in this area was limited. Work on human-non-human and human-material interactions continues to interest me, as does research around technologies (in their myriad forms) and gender. I think there is a real need for a new feminist economics that reinvents how we think about 'growth'. There is also need for further research into the brutalisation of everyday culture, and around questions of social interactions/structures as functions of change in the material and technological world.

**Dr Carroll:** I am currently working on a paper about representations of disability in relation to reproductive sexuality. I think that disability studies, and the medical humanities more broadly, is a very interesting field and set to become a crucial one in the near future. Its relationship with feminism is fascinating and

deserving of special attention. I'm also very interested in transgender studies – this reflects my broader interest in frameworks which question conventional categories of sex and sexuality and which in some ways challenge the foundations of second-wave feminism. It is also a good antidote to the preoccupation with normative femininity which seems to define much work around postfeminism.

**Dr Jensen:** The gender research which excites me the most is that which takes gender as but one axis of difference and which attends to the intersections between gender and social class, race, ablebodiedness, sexuality, and other forms of privilege and oppression. The power of this intersectional gender research is that it uses gender theory as a tool to dismantle the broader, complex, knotty webs and networks of multiple injustices and oppressions. The challenge is to take this difficult research into the broader world and show how gender, far from being an out-dated, irrelevant or niche issue, constitutes a potent starting point for disrupting and interrupting the coagulations of multiple forms of power.

**Dr Lewis:** Developments in feminist theory excite and dismay me. I worry that academic feminism is – or is seen to be – too far removed from critiques of the gender order in people's lived realities. If academic feminism isn't useful for activists, commentators, those challenging

gender norms and gendered oppression, then it loses its value. A real strength of the history of feminism is of the dynamic engagements between feminists inside and outside the academy. I fear that recent feminist theory, and especially that which has got lost in postmodernist post-structuralist mazes, has caused a rift between academics and activists, which we should seek to mend.

**Dr Scanlon:** Recently I've been interested in work that reflects explicitly upon what we do and how we do it when we write criticism from feminist perspectives. This reflection at a meta-level helps me to think about my own work as part of a collective endeavour. I'm particularly engaged by work that addresses the operations of gender in relation to emerging trends, cultural phenomena and new media.

**Dr Smith:** The changes in feminism over the course of the last 100 years have only relatively recently come to influence performances of masculinity and as such, research into the dynamics of this is still developing. For example, certain strands of postfeminism (such as is personified by the 'ladette') have been seen by some feminists as being masculinity getting its own way with the compliance of women. Conversely, it has increasingly been seen as being an important part of a male politician's public persona to be a 'family man' who can appeal to female voters through his apparent

agreement with the aims of feminism.

**In the context of the current financial crisis - in which women are disproportionately disadvantaged - and in light of the challenges faced by postfeminism and anti-feminist sentiments, there appears to be a renewed commitment to feminism both within and outside the academy in recent years. What do you think has caused this resurgence of feminism? Where do you hope this renewed interest in feminism will take us?**

**Dr Carroll:** From my experience of teaching university students over the years I don't think feminism has ever gone away, as I have always found students receptive and enthusiastic (both male and female). The consciousness-raising and activist groups of the second-wave seem to have become defining models for our idea of what activism is, which I think is misleading and perhaps a generational blind-spot. The renewal of forms of activism which rely on collectivity and symbolic gestures in the public sphere is very interesting and can be put in a broader context of new social movements. I don't subscribe to the view that young women are not political or feminist and I think the feminism of many young men is also worth noting and celebrating.

**Professor Griffin:** I would love a renewed interest in feminism, if it

exists (although I'm not entirely sure of this), to lead to strong interventions in the areas that threaten our existence at present – of which there are many, from the preservation and just distribution of resources to the re-thinking of how we imagine the future. Feminist organising remains fragmented and often hidden or low-key; it would be great to see much stronger public feminist presences again.

**Dr Jensen:** Although I do sometimes despair at the way gender research and feminism continues to be (mis)represented in mainstream media, I am encouraged by the resurgence of interest from young women and men in feminism, which I saw at its most creative and angry peak in the exhilarating Slutwalks of 2011. The absolute centrality of gender to current anti-cuts movements, which have powerfully documented the gendered impacts of government austerity projects, are similarly encouraging. These events and movements seem to me to constitute something of a light-bulb moment for a lot of sex-positive and/or socialist-minded people who spoke of recognising (in some cases for the first time) the damages and toxicity of gender tyranny and gendered economic injustices. I am also hugely optimistic about the ways that gender researchers, activists and writers have made new opportunities in online discussion environments, forums, blogs, fanzines, journals, digital media spaces and

archives. These are great places to publish research and develop public conversations.

**Dr Smith:** Following the ‘successes’ of second-wave feminism, the feminist movement rather lost its way and fragmented into special interest factions. By the 1990s, the dream of equality had been realised in some ways but the ‘having it all’ agenda was proving impossible. The Labour government from 1997 onwards raised ‘women’s issues’ as an institutionally relevant issue with a ‘minister for women’ being appointed and various pieces of legislation passed by Labour raising the issue of families and fatherhood too. Therefore gender was already institutionally high profile when the Coalition came along in 2010 and started to dismantle the legislation aimed at encouraging equal parenting, and then at demolishing the public sector which traditionally has a high number of female employees. So, in Britain, issues of gender have resurfaced as political, and international issues of feminism in its wider context - such as the ‘Slutwalks’ – have gained momentum. The rights won by the mothers and grandmothers of today’s young women were taken for granted, but are now being seen as being under threat and the more aware of today’s young women are starting to wake up to this.

**Dr Scanlon:** I hope this resurgence will result in some good, old-fashioned consciousness-raising. The majority of students I teach tend

not to see the relevance of feminism to them or to today’s world at all. The more commitment and visibility there is, both within and beyond the academy, the more it will hopefully enable them to reflect. I have been invigorated by seeing young people in the North East recently take up the fight and organise events and actions. This gives me hope that gender inequality has moved back up the agenda, where it belongs.

**What are your thoughts on the development of research into men and masculinities? How does this feed into your research or your thoughts on wider gender issues?**

**Professor Griffin:** Far too few men are engaged in research on masculinity, particularly critical masculinity. We live in an age of a new conservatism in which very conventional hetero-masculinity remains absolutely dominant. This must be a real concern for feminists.

**Dr Carroll:** I think the investigation of masculinity is absolutely essential but I find that some of the work badged as ‘masculinity studies’ is quite poor – although the same can be said of some work flying under the feminist flag of course. I think masculinity in all its forms needs to be theorised much more rigorously and the category of ‘men’ interrogated, especially in relation to race and sexuality – but I would see all work on sex, gender and sexuality as belonging to one spectrum.



For me however, queer theory is the more essential reference point.

**Dr Lewis:** I am rather ambivalent. I worry about research about men and masculinity that doesn't address power and the ways in which men and patriarchy have exerted power at women's cost. Research that simply reflects on the state of masculinity or the experience of men, without setting it in the wider political context is not part of the feminist project, in my view. There does seem to be a trend amongst students to engage with research about masculinity/men in a non-political way, which is a worrying development as it ignores the valuable history of feminist thought.

#### **Why is the interdisciplinary study of gender important or significant?**

**Dr Carroll:** I think it is essential given that the frameworks which we use in gender and sexuality studies are not discipline specific – some of my most important reference points have come from books published within the social sciences field.

**Professor Griffin:** Gender as an identity category (however contested on both counts) is a category of enquiry (as much as a lived experience or a performance) that is not bound by discipline and in its complexity and articulation requires inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary engagement. 'Interdisciplinary' and 'collaboration' have become research mantras in our age, and

for very good reasons. Knowledge boundaries shift as knowledge changes and this also goes for knowledge about gender. Hanging on to discipline too tightly always strikes me as a sign of anxiety since it closes down avenues of understanding.

**Dr Jensen:** The debates around gender 'as a discipline' are complex: on the one hand gender should be present everywhere throughout the academy since it is absolutely fundamental to how our world is shaped, textured and experienced. On the other hand, being the academic who 'does' gender (or even the department that 'does gender') often permits others to defer all gendered questions to you. So should gender researchers be arguing for specific spaces and centres for the study of gender, or for gender research to be everywhere? My instinct is to argue for the latter; to take gender research on the road, to make gendered interruptions, and to be, if necessary, the 'killjoy feminist'. I am fortunate enough to be in a department which does take gender seriously and which does not impose responsibility for that upon female colleagues.

**Dr Lewis:** Gender doesn't happen within disciplinary boundaries! The disciplines are useful and valuable in terms of their approaches to developing knowledge (for example in conventions about conceptualising problematics, methodologies and developing theoretical

approaches) but can create limits or boundaries to the further development of knowledge. The topic – gender – is more important than the discipline.

**Dr Smith:** ‘Gender Studies’ is inherently interdisciplinary, with interesting research being carried out in media studies, cultural studies, sociology, literature, linguistics, education, psychology, and so on. It would be virtually impossible to carry out any sort of study of gender without drawing on the work of other disciplines to provide a more rounded argument.

### **What role do postgraduate researchers play in the field of Gender Studies?**

**Professor Griffin:** It is impressive to see how much organising there is among post-graduate students in relation to research – though this is, of course, also driven by the current neoliberal academic climate with its impossible demands on post-graduate researchers and its accountability culture.

**Dr Smith:** Post-graduates can offer new and exciting approaches to academic study. Several of the books Dr Claire Nally and I are commissioning for the I.B. Tauris series are by doctoral students whose studies are bringing innovative approaches to gender to bear.

**Dr Lewis:** They are the future of the endeavour so are vital. Their involvement in not only their own

studies, but also wider activities in the field, like this supplementary issue on the theme ‘Gendered Subjects’, is essential to keep Gender Studies alive.

### **This special edition of GJSS has a focus on current research within North East institutions – what are your feelings on our highlighting this?**

**Dr Carroll:** I know there is a lot of very interesting work going on in universities in this region but I don’t really have an overview of it – so it’s great that this issue can provide this!

**Dr Scanlon:** Thanks for doing it is perhaps the first thought! There is a lot going on in terms of gender in the North East and this kind of pooling together should happen more often. It helps to keep us on the map, geographically and conceptually – and it helps to keep us informed about just what is going on across the different institutions.

**Dr Smith:** There is a lot of research into gender going on across universities in the North East, as there is nationally and internationally. This field is highly interdisciplinary which means that not all researchers will be clearly identified, so your special edition will bring together in one place information about what is going on regionally for the first time.

**Please use the following links to view the academic profiles for each of these individuals:**

Dr Carroll: [http://www.tees.ac.uk/schools/sam/staff\\_profile\\_details.cfm?staffprofileid=U0011005](http://www.tees.ac.uk/schools/sam/staff_profile_details.cfm?staffprofileid=U0011005)

Professor Griffin: <https://www.york.ac.uk/inst/cws/staff/gabrielegriffin.htm>

Dr Jensen: <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/sacs/staff/profile/tracey.jensen>

Dr Lewis: <http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/academic/sass/about/socscience/deptstaff/lewis/>

Dr Scanlon: [http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/academic/sass/about/humanities/englishhome/staff/englitstaff/j\\_scanlon/](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/academic/sass/about/humanities/englishhome/staff/englitstaff/j_scanlon/)

Dr Smith: <http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/faculties/es/ourfaculty/staff/culture/angelasmith/>