



Introduction to *ACME* Special Issue on Sexuality and Gender: Sexed, Unsexy and Gendered Spaces of Inversions and Reversals

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When we first conceived of this collection, we hoped to bring together geographers whose research widened and expanded our thinking about spaces and places as gendered within the context of gender and sexuality. We weren't looking for pieces that were in any way definitive as to what constitutes geographies of sexuality and gender. Instead, we sought out work that engages multiple, critical viewpoints on gender and sexuality in relation to ability, class, ethnicity, nationality and race. We hoped that such inclusive works would link critical perspectives of space and place with theoretical advances in cultural studies.

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Moreover, we wanted theoretically-informed empirical demonstrations of complex conceptual arguments about space and place that draw on, contribute to, and enliven interdisciplinary dialogue about space, place, gender and sexuality. Although each individual article in this special issue may speak to our initial objectives only in a circuitous way, the final collection presented here addresses our overarching attempt in pulling together work that innovatively redraws the boundaries as to what constitutes the spaces and places of multilayered expressions of gender and sexuality.

For nearly two years, we sought out a publisher for our collection, only to find that those interested in it wanted something more like a “how to do research” book or a collection more suitable as a textbook because of the value of marketing textbooks for large undergraduate classes. Most of those we contacted responded with some measure of enthusiasm (even though guarded), who nevertheless could not find room for the edited volume we proposed. While we could understand the material reasons for the format suggested by publishers, it was not the vision of the project we had imagined being part of. In the end, we are grateful to the editors of *ACME* for bringing these articles to publication, especially the efforts of Lawrence Berg and late-comer Rachel Pain at *ACME*, who cajoled the collection to publication, as well as the many reviewers who we will not name but to whom we are appreciative. Five of the nine contributors to this special issue have been with us from the start – four years ago now – patiently giving their time and scholarship. We thank all the contributors, but Kath Browne, Robyn Longhurst, Heidi Nast, Richard Phillips and Matt Sothern have been with the project for a long time and we acknowledge their support.

As readers of this issue probably already know and concur with, *ACME*'s wisdom reflects many critical geographers' growing interest in the themes of gender and sexuality, whether the work engages directly and explicitly with the issues of sexuality or gender. The vibrancy of Association of American Geographers (AAG) specialty groups, such as Sexuality and Space and Geographic Perspectives on Women, showcase the growth within North America anyway, as well as the proliferation of paper and panel sessions devoted to gender and sexuality at upcoming and recent AAG meetings. For example, at the 2005 annual meeting, where many of the contributors to this issue made presentations on the articles in this issue, we heard over and over again about the excitement at seeing multiply linked sessions on gender and sexuality. The AAG's annual meeting in 2006 confirms a growing trend. Unsurprisingly, the term “gender” appeared 466 times in the abstracts, whether in the title, as a keyword, or in the body of the text. More surprisingly, however, is that the term “queer,” appearing 55 times, having overtaken “sexuality” as the most popular marker of geographies of sexuality, appearing 39 times. While perhaps the total number of sessions devoted to gender and sexuality make up a minority of sessions organized at the AAG, this informal survey captures the infusion of gender and sexuality in papers, not only in sessions

specifically devoted to these topics, but as an indicator of sub-disciplinary growth of gender and sexuality in geography and a boundary crossing of sorts, whereby the topics of genders and sexualities are more prominent in geography.

Geographies of sexualities tend to focus on “work on lesbian, gay and bisexual sexualities within geography” (Binnie and Valentine, 1999, p. 175). *Mapping Desire*, edited by David Bell and Gill Valentine (1995), focused primarily on Queer and sexy spaces. Increasingly, though, geographers are querying (and queering) heteronormative spaces, straight places and unsexy sexual practices. How is it that sexuality and gender come to manifest and be represented in and from these spaces and places?

Since the early 2000s, critical geographers have conceived more widely the various manifestations of gender and sexuality in space and place, especially those spaces where compulsory heteronormativity quietly reasserts itself. When those spaces are further recast as sexed and unsexy, extensive possibilities emerge as sites through which to investigate the articulation of sexuality and gender with ability, class, ethnicity, nationality and race. The articles in this issue reflect an engagement with these concerns, inverting conventional notions of sexuality – even within critical thought – and reversing the habitual conceptualizations of what is considered to be a topic for critical investigation. They provide a variegated set of connections with sexuality, gender and geography that challenge predominant understandings of sexuality and gender by inverting conceptions of sexual privilege and reversing notions of gendered positionings.

As Richard Phillips notes in his contribution to this issue, that since the 1995 publication of David Bell and Gill Valentine’s edited volume *Mapping Desire*, geographers working in the area of sexualities have begun to think more broadly about the many manifestations of gender and sexuality in space and place. The articles by Kath Browne and Matt Sothorn included in this issue are significant extensions of and contributions to the work begun in *Mapping Desire*, with nuanced analyses of very different concerns – genderism and HIV/AIDS – in two diverse and multiply gendered, homosexual populations.

Genderism, sexism and homophobia are connectivities that trouble heterosexual and homosexual relations, and Browne situates her analysis of women mistaken for men at the dichotomous gendered boundary of women and men. She locates, quite precisely, the process of undoing gender and remaking it at the moment of the encounter, reversing the starting point of gender performance. Instead of focusing on agency and individual bodies, in contrast to much of the literature about transgressing binary constructions of gender through queer theorizations, she focuses on the relational constitution of gender. Using insights from data gathered in interviews with nine women who were mistaken for men in public places, Browne stresses the linguistic play between sights and sites. Dissonance between sighting women as men when women site themselves as

women can elicit acts of physical violence and verbal abuse and feelings of hurt, embarrassment and discomfort – all of which lead to women feeling out of place. Re-siting these gendered bodies as out of place through common everyday practices such as bathroom use, render women's spaces as off limits, leaving women with no place to feel comfortable with who they are. These wounding moments for women who have been re-sited through the sightings of strangers are painful reminders of how gender itself is constituted relationally.

In another inversion, Sothorn addresses the need to transform identity politics in the context of heteronormativity. He uses the term 'AIDS-as-post-crisis' to signal two dramatic shifts that the cultural politics of being HIV+ and AIDS has undergone: an increase in new antiretroviral drugs feeding into a cultural politics that recognize HIV+ as a chronic, manageable illness, and a re-focusing of efforts by AIDS service organizations toward research funding and advocacy and service provision for Persons Living with AIDS (PLWA). As a result of this re-focusing of political efforts, Sothorn maintains that the bodies of PWLA are the site of a contradictory identities – they are *and* are not 'just like everyone else.' His critical reading of "Negative Role model," a HIV prevention campaign launched by the New Zealand AIDS Foundation is an attempt to overcome this contradiction. His reading suggests that the campaign fails because it rests on "a liberal political logic of family, nation, and self-responsibility" while at the same time this logic refuses to acknowledge the structural impact of race, class, homophobia and displacement. He argues that thinking non-identity is a limit of identity politics and that focusing attention on the transformation of institutionalized structures will be more effective as a political strategy than reproducing identities that sustain injustice.

In this issue, we find geographers building upon what Binnie and Valentine suggested in 1999, that is, 'queering' of heteronormative spaces such as, travel, weddings and pregnancy in the contributions of Richard Phillips, Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst, respectively. In doing so, these contributors invert normative and non-normative landscapes of gender and sexuality. Phillips argues that the construction of hegemonic sexualities exists not only at points of contestation, but also at quiet, unobtrusive points in everyday practice that may in fact appear liberating for individual women, as for example in safe, chaperoned travel. Using historical documents from the Travellers' Aid Society (for Girls and Women) (TAS) in London, England, from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He highlights the importance of understanding the ways in which the moral codes of 'normal' sexuality were promoted informally. TAS circulated handbills and posted notices directed at young women on how to recognize and avoid sexual dangers. The Society also kept records of women entering London by train and ship who were traveling alone, often identified by staff at ports, terminals and stations. Through this process, TAS facilitated the regulation of sexual 'normality' by valuing chastity traveling through practices of respectability, as for example, promoting the use of chaperones for travel and encouraging young,

country women to stay out of London. Theoretically, he contends that in order to understand sexuality and space, instead of focusing on sexual deviance and the over-sexualized spaces, researchers need to look at unsexy spaces, those where taken-for-granted sexualities hidden in plain sight.

Like Phillips, Longhurst addresses the negotiation of boundaries in the creation of moral geographies but is unlike the previous example in that she focuses in her discussion about a sexualized and sexually explicit association between birthing and pornography. She draws on Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection to conceptualize the boundary between the (pure) self and the (defiled) other that results in feelings of fear, loathing and disgust. In a poststructural reading of media reports, she examines the range of public responses to the proposed filming, and the canceling, of a live birth as part of a pornographic film. The film was to be about the sex life of a pregnant woman, concluding with Nikki, the star of the film, giving birth. Longhurst's reading of the public's reactions, including those from news reporters, government officials and lay-persons, provides insights into how the topography of a moral geography of women, pregnancy, bodies and sex takes shape. She notes several discourses that feed into the moral framing of the issue, as for example, civil liberties, innocence of the unborn child, human rights, freedom of choice and fetishism. She argues that these discourses, publicly mediating the distinction between what is 'normal' and 'perverse', constitute what we come to understand as normative (hetero)sexualities, thereby drawing our attention to how non-normative geographies reveal their Others.

Johnston addresses the constitution of heterosexuality through the heteronormalizing acts of weddings. In her investigation of New Zealand as an increasingly popular tourist destination for heterosexual couples to marry, she examines the representations of weddings in a documentary of a wedding planner's work in a wedding tourist company and through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, brochures, web pages and company portfolios. In the discourses she identifies in the narratives of her data, she finds that the primary component of the marketing aspect for travel is New Zealand's natural, exotic and pure landscape. Working from the premise that weddings consummately signal heterosexuality, Johnston wends her way through multiple examples of attempts to link romance, love and marriage to the New Zealand landscape as beautiful, exotic and pristine. She demonstrates that place and heterosexuality are mutually constitutive as natural, normal and 100% pure. Her argument contributes to our understanding of the processes through which heteronormativity is naturalized as part of a moral environment – romantically and physically.

We think that each of the authors in this issue draws from and reaches beyond the initial parameters of late-1990s research on genders and sexualities into current critical literature to generate innovative readings of sex and gender. Queer

theory is compatriot to postcolonial theory in extending our analyses of gender and sexuality, especially regarding issues of race and privilege and their emplacement in the performances of gender and sexuality in transnational spaces and places (see Puar 2006, 2002). The theoretical influences most prominent in this collection, draw from feminist postcolonial theorizing on gender and sexuality, especially that which examined “white” female subjects in postcolonial settings (see Blunt 1994, Mills 1991, Stoler 1995, Pratt 1992).

In her analysis, Nancy Cook reverses the traditions of privilege between positionings of both race and gender. She examines issues regarding gender and sex both discursively and materially in a contemporary postcolonial setting, drawing upon extensive empirical data to demonstrate how a discourse of the sexualized male Other informs Western women’s spatial negotiations of their dealings with Pakistani, specifically Gilgiti men. She argues that women view themselves as vulnerable, fearful and at risk of sexual violence, particularly in public space, as a result of their own constructions of indigenous men in Gilgit, whom they personify as hypersexual, sexually repressed and desirous of sexual experience with Western women. The experiences of the women Cook talked with complicate the gendered, sexualized and racialized positionings each (temporarily) occupies as part of everyday life in relationship to local men, as for example, in the bazaar, on public transit, at expatriate dinner parties, and even in their own homes. Even though these foreign women’s actions in effect challenge the processes of making and transgressing boundaries, Cook comes to understand that *en masse*, the women’s acts continue to sustain and reproduce a sexual imperialism generated in the time of the height of European colonial rule and carried into the (post)colonial present.

In a rural and arguably postcolonial place, Kathryn Besio brings an autoethnographic sensibility to reading domestic and public spaces and although in a setting in close proximity to Cook’s, quite a different reading emerges. She draws on her research with women living in Askole, Baltistan, officially in Northern Pakistan, and part of the disputed territory of Kashmir, which remains effectively a colonized territory within Pakistan. In an attempt to make sense of gendered subjects, she reads the colonized landscape as a mixture of ‘unknown,’ foreign, masculinized bodies (primarily Pakistani police and military personnel, and western trekkers and tourists) and ‘familiar,’ local, self-aware feminized bodies (primarily women as Shia Muslims negotiating their daily lives in the domestic and public spaces of Askole). Through the metaphor of the child’s game, *Chutes and Ladders*, Besio provides the reader with an unfixed, changeable path through which to work out the complicated constitutive interactions between the social and the spatial. She shows how gradated interactions ensconced in layers of colonialism, gendered bodies and familial relations manifest differently in the public spaces of the village, for example, the campgrounds and in domestic spaces, through the organization of domestic space, indoor and outdoor seasonal spatial

practices, and household architectural transition. In this analysis, there is a spatial inversion of privilege whereby those masculine bodies most associated with contemporary colonialism and the privileges therein become excluded from village spaces, those dominated by rural males and females. Villagers' creative means of resistance, while only somewhat effectual in transforming power relations writ large, are nevertheless instrumental in producing new forms of gendered subjectivities.

Feminist theory, as Longhurst notes (2000, 2001) has been central in driving much of the theorizing and rethinking of gender, especially "how we do gender" (see Butler 1990), through various spatial manifestations of femininities and masculinities. This rethinking of gender is central in Malam's article on cross-cultural heterosexual intimacies in Thailand. Like Cook and Besio, Linda Malam is interested in the postcolonial present and takes up the issue of heterosexualized, intimate relations between Thai men working in the tourist industry and women tourists, which turn out to be effectively synonymous with white, Western women. She challenges binary conceptualizations of subject positions in sexual encounters between women tourists (seeking sexual adventures with local men as an exotic foray into another culture) and indigenous men (who are socially and economically marginalized, desiring tickets to promised lands overseas). In addressing the reversed normalized notions of sex tourism as male dominated, Malam suggests that although there is a sex for money impetus to these relations, the intimate relationships are nevertheless 'successful' in the intimate knowledge of Other worlds they exist within and continue to (re)produce. She argues that when cross-cultural sexual encounters are stripped of the discourses of morality, more possibilities for subject positions emerge. She focuses her analysis on the micro-processes of power through which she traces the shifts in one relationship between Sophie, a British child-care worker, and Nok, a Kho Phangan bar worker, in both public and private spaces. The temporal and spatial disruptions she identifies in their narrative, including Sophie's return to Britain and Nok's pursuing relationships with other women tourists in her absence, permit additional subject positions to surface outside normative definitions of what constitute intimate relationships.

Reminding us that human 'love objects' need not always be human, Heidi Nast's contribution, in fact, leads us back to the inherently complicated and sometimes contradictory nature of desire. As a foray into dissolving boundaries between people and animals, particularly dogs, as pets becoming family members, occasional companions and even lovers, Nast explores pet love as a commodified, spatialized and sexualized contemporary cultural phenomena. In her reading, we see that the intimate relations once the domain of human-human relationships are integral pet-human relations. Critical scholarship is increasingly focusing attention on 'the animal question,' that is, examining human-animal relations and, in geography, elaborating animal geographies. Nast recasts human-animal relations

as a process through which the exploitation of human alienation for commodification has been reasserted into the dominance-affection-love triadic relationship between pets and their owners, especially over the past two decades. She shows that people and society are investing emotion, time and money into animals as pets through, for example, dog dancing, dog yoga (doga), pet-animal science, celebrity pet culture, the no-kill movement and furry fandom. These phenomena infuse everyday practices of people in public and private spaces just as they bring into focus kindness at a micro-scale when there is an escalation of human cruelty to human. She provides a series of analytical insights as to why in this post-industrial age, when human-human connectivities are eroding, the welfare state is disappearing, and the gap between the rich and the poor is ever-increasing, that the pet-animal industry is booming.

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Bringing together the contributions for this issue is a way to show how these authors invert topical dominance and reverse what we have come to understand as critical knowledge. These inversions and reversals take different paths, but all challenge critical theorists to review, rethink, and revise their approach to understanding the processes that constitute the topographies and geographies of femininities, masculinities, moralities, and sexualities. What is most exciting about these analyses is not that they begin and end with gender and/or sexuality, but suggest surprising articulations between privilege, difference, identity and subjectivity. We suggest that these geographies with more sexualities and genders provide insights on the continuing and surprising ways that gender and sexuality can turn critical analysis on its head.

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