

Doing gender: feminism, feminists and research methods in human geography

LINDA McDOWELL

Lecturer in Geography, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 3EN

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ABSTRACT

Recently, there has been a marked growth of interest in research methods in geography. Stimulated in part by the epistemological questions raised by feminist and post-modern critiques of 'scientific' method, this interest took a severely practical turn when the Economic and Social Research Council required a taught component, including methods, to be part of all postgraduate training. This led to the development of courses on alternative methodological strategies in geography and, especially for human geographers, an interest in developing teaching about feminist methods. In this paper, I discuss some of the issues that may arise from the adoption of explicitly feminist approaches to geographical research. Recognition of the positionality of the researcher and her/his subjects and the relations of power between them, as Pile argued in a different context in his recent paper in this journal, raises important questions for geographers that we are just beginning to address.

KEY WORDS: Feminist methods, Feminist standpoint theory, Gender scepticism, Partial knowledges

INTRODUCTION

This is a paper with a particular and limited purpose. It aims to raise a number of issues, each perhaps deserving a paper in their own right, to be provocative and wide-ranging and to suggest questions rather than provide answers. Its aim is to introduce a set of issues about research methodology that feminist scholars, working in particular in the social sciences, have been discussing recently. Thus, the main purpose is to review, and to provide an introduction to a literature that may be unfamiliar to geographers, but which addresses many of the same questions that currently are being raised by a number of human geographers, especially those interested in qualitative research methods. It aims to whet the appetites of those who, in the astringent terms of an anonymous reviewer of this paper, through every fault of their own have remained in ignorance about feminist debates. A single paper cannot hope to provide a complete introduction to feminist methodologies – introductory texts are available elsewhere although not, as yet, tailored to geographers' particular needs (Bowles and Duelli-Klein,

1983; Roberts, 1981; Stanley, 1990; Stanley and Wise, 1983). Nor in a single paper is it possible thoroughly to discuss feminist epistemology(ies). This latter task entails wide reading of many texts, some of which will be introduced here. It is an exciting task, as I hope that I indicate here. In little over a decade, the literature on feminist theories has grown exponentially in volume and in theoretical sophistication. Elsewhere, I have attempted a more complete review of feminist theories and geographical knowledge (McDowell, forthcoming). Finally, what this paper is not is a personal view of my own research experiences. That is a paper I have not yet written. Indeed perhaps someone might produce an interesting collection of papers about the turn towards feminist work by geographers.

In the last few years, there has been an exciting growth of interest in questions about what we do as human geographers and how we do it. Reflecting the general shift within the social sciences towards a reflexive notion of knowledge, geographers have begun to question the constitution of the discipline – what we know, how we know it and what difference this makes both to the type of research we do and

who participates in it with us, as either colleagues or research subjects. One of the reasons for this greater self-reflexivity lies in the coincidence of interest among feminist, post-modern and post-structuralist theorists in the social construction of knowledges and discourses and the relations of power embedded within them. An intrinsic part of these debates has been greater self-consciousness about research methods. In particular, there has in human geography been a shift towards what Sayer and Morgan have termed intensive methods (see also Allen and McDowell, 1989) involving detailed, often case-study based methods to uncover the social processes and relations of power that lie beneath geographical patterns. Thus a flourishing debate about the utility and validity of qualitative methods in geography has been initiated (Eyles, 1988; Eyles and Smith, 1988; McDowell, 1992a; Pile, 1991; Schoenberger, 1991). It is in this context that the recent ESRC initiative must be placed.

From Autumn 1992 all British geography departments that are recognized for postgraduate training to doctoral level must include a taught component in their PhD training programmes. This has given a severely practical impetus to the growing concern with methods. The timing of this initiative, to be applauded in its intention of providing a more satisfactory experience for graduate students, is ironic as it comes at a time when possibly there is a greater uncertainty than ever before about what the 'art' or 'craft' of a geographer might entail. Geographers have always been a notoriously self-doubting lot but it seems a particularly difficult time to have to develop a statutory training course. We are only now beginning seriously to get to grips with the idea that the division of geography into sub-areas (and its distinction from other disciplines) reflects merely a 'strategy' to divide up 'reality', that it is nothing but a reflection or outcome of struggles over 'truth' by intellectuals as a social group seeking power and domination over others. So, just as we are feeling our way towards a radical deconstruction of geographical knowledge, the ESRC demands that we define, outline and confine the discipline and instruct new entrants on the appropriate methods to investigate geographical problems. (I am aware of slight exaggeration here as the interrelationships of geography and the other social sciences are, of course, recognized by the ESRC.)

Departments and regional consortia thus have to devise courses to initiate diverse groups of aspiring geographers into the mysteries of our craft if they

wish to receive ESRC-funded students. As part of this exercise a number of them have begun to ponder the geographical implications of feminism, its critique of theory and methods in the social sciences and the relevance to geographical work. This paper is thus an introduction to some of the practical and theoretical issues that might be raised for research students pondering the advisability of 'doing gender' or feminist research work as part of their doctorate.

THE DIFFERENCE THAT GENDER MAKES

In recent years the work by feminist scholars, both within and outside geography, is at last beginning to get the attention it has long deserved. After years of either ignoring feminist work or assuming it is only for women, many theorists are now turning to feminist scholarship in order to examine the difference that gender makes to what we know and how we know it. Part of the reason for this is the shift of emphasis in feminist scholarship away from women towards gender, allowing issues about the social construction of and geographical variations in masculinity as well as femininity to be raised.

The body of work in geography that might fall under the rubric 'feminist' has a short history. Papers reflecting a feminist approach or even dealing with women as a group have been visible in the journals of the discipline for barely more than a decade. Since that date, feminists have been active in uncovering the gendered nature of the practice and substance of geography, in common with others working on similar social, historical and cultural questions. Although the initial project was framed in terms of 'not excluding half the human from human geography' (Hanson and Monk, 1982), it soon became clear that a critique of the very category humanity was demanded. As Susan Bordo (1990) has argued, starting this work was a 'cultural moment of revelation and relief. The category of the "human" – a standard against which all difference translates to lack – was brought down to earth, given a pair of pants, and reminded that it was not the only player in town' (p. 137). This was a critical moment for many geographers involved in the earliest work in feminist geography, a moment of staking a claim within a discipline that had either ignored women or constructed them as the 'other'. And, as Bordo suggests, 'students still experience this moment of critical and empowering insight when, for example, [...] they learn that the language of "rights" is not the ethical

discourse of God or Nature, but the ideological superstructure of a particular construction of masculinity' (p. 137).

But this moment of empowerment is also paradoxically for many students a moment of doubt when the enormity of the feminist critique of masculinist knowledge becomes clear. For research students, at the beginning of a prospective academic career, the decision to explore feminist scholarship is often a difficult one. Despite undoubted changes in the discipline, feminist scholarship is still regarded by many as a minority interest, as unrigorous or politically biased. This is hardly surprising. Feminism poses a serious challenge to those who have a stake in the unmarked, but masculine, subject of geography. Pointing out that the assumptions embedded within the range of social and political theories that are drawn upon by human geographers – from neo-classical economics through humanism to Marxism – rely on notions of humanity, rationality and science that are ethno- and phallogocentric is hardly likely to endear feminists to those who work within these frameworks. It means that, as Carole Pateman (1986) has argued,

feminist theorists place themselves in an exposed position. Their arguments are as potentially subversive of conventionally radical theory, including marxism, as of other theories, and those radicals who might be expected to be the allies of feminist scholars are as often as not hostile, or at best indifferent. To ask embarrassing questions about the relation between women and men, and to argue that sexual domination is central to, although unacknowledged in, modern social and political theory, is to touch on some emotions, interests and privileges very different from those disturbed by arguments about class (pp. 1–2).

The tempers raised by the Harvey/Deutsche/Massey/Morris debate is a recent geographical example of how these 'embarrassing questions' touch people to the quick (Harvey, 1989, 1992; Deutsche, 1991; Massey, 1991; Morris, 1992). To choose an oppositional path, to raise questions about gender relations at both an academic and personal level, frequently without the support of another person in the department, may be difficult for a graduate student. The purpose here is to raise some of the pitfalls that may lie ahead but, hopefully, also to give an indication of the intellectual excitement engendered by current feminist debates.

In this paper, I focus on some of the questions raised by feminist critiques of conventional social

science research methods, looking not only at how we do our research, but also at wider issues about what qualifies as an appropriate problem for geographical investigation, and at the assumptions embodied in such definitions. Here the critiques from feminism of the rationalist and universalizing assumptions of the modern project and its reflections in geographical thought, have been important. Feminists, as well as criticizing the notions of scientific method and objectivity that have influenced the practice of human geography, are now challenging the most fundamental presuppositions and categories of social theory and, in so doing, raising challenging questions. More recently, in a move related to the influence of post-modern social theory, some feminists have become sceptical of the adequacy of gender as an analytical category. At the end of the paper I try to give the flavour of some of these debates.

So, bearing in mind the huge terrain that feminist theorizing has straddled in the last ten years, what issues are important for new graduate students who hope to study women, or more accurately gender relations and the social construction of femininity and masculinity, from a feminist perspective? Are particular types of research methods and approaches more appropriate than others for aspiring feminist geographers? In addressing these questions I shall raise four separate, although related, sets of issues: first, questions about the social relations of research, about women and men as geographical researchers; secondly about women as the subjects of research; thirdly, about feminist approaches to research methods and fourthly about feminist ways of knowing.

SOCIAL/GENDER RELATIONS OF RESEARCH

The first of the four areas raises a number of questions about the context within which postgraduate research is undertaken. Research students enter as novices into a social context that is defined by the intersection of three sets of social relations. These are the particular intellectual practices that define the discipline of geography, a more general set of academic professional practices of student selection, staff recruitment, promotion, and publication that valorize certain types of knowledge and, thirdly the broader political circumstances at the time. These latter are reflected in the availability of research grants, the selection criteria adopted by research councils, the emphasis on 'useful' research, for example, and the pressures

to secure rapid and high completion rates. All these factors operate in an increasingly competitive environment in which departments are pitted against each other in a competitive ranking system that determines research funding levels.

A number of issues are important here: who gains access to studentships and research posts in geography departments; what are the patterns of social interaction within the department; what happens to the product – whose work is published – and who gains access to academic employment after graduation? Some of these questions are virtually impossible to answer. For the prospective research student who hopes to gain research council funding for her/his work, indeed for prospective supervisors, the allocation procedures that determine who is awarded funding remain opaque. Neither the grading scheme nor the research specialisms of the academics who operate it are public information, although an informal network ensures that most people pick up at least partial knowledge. Similarly, not knowing the research areas of successful compared with unsuccessful students means that it is impossible to ascertain whether prospective applicants interested in gender-based issues are more or less likely than other applicants to secure an award. No information is made known about the relative success rates of male and female applicants.

For many women, however, self-selection at an earlier stage excludes them from graduate work. Although women are well represented among undergraduate geographers, they are less likely to apply for graduate study. Here we need to ask questions about the socialization and training of women scholars and the organization of the research process. The old feminist dilemma of whether to argue for equality or emphasize difference immediately raises its head (Bachi, 1990; Phillips, 1987; Scott, 1988). Should women and men students be recruited and treated in identical ways or are there strategies that might be particularly appropriate in recruiting and retaining women? Whether or not it is important to have a 'critical mass' of women students is a question seldom addressed in graduate recruitment but might make a difference to success rates. There are also practical measures that departments might introduce to resolve the career pressures of women, often particularly acute for those women who are already mothers. But, the general atmosphere or 'culture' of different departments is also important in creating an environment free from destructive forms of stereotyping or harassment (McDowell, 1990). In the intensely

competitive environment of most geography departments women have to fight against their image as caring, nurturing, good at the 'soft stuff'. They need to ensure that they do not become cast in the guise of a surrogate tutor, mother or older sister, trapped into a counselling role in the department, or acting as a sort of 'social lubricant' in awkward social situations. Indeed, many graduate students, men as well as women, often find the competitive nature of the environment hard to cope with. The passage below, although referring to US graduate schools, documents a process that is familiar in Britain too.

Graduate departments are marked by a

process of one-upmanship characteristic of the masculinist tradition by which we learn to be critical thinkers. In graduate school we are taught that a measure of our intelligence is the extent to which we can show others to be wrong. Thus the best students are those who can offer the most masterful critique, pointing to methodological flaws, finding gaps in the argument, and using the most sophisticated language. One consequence is an enormous loss of self-confidence and self-esteem, so that it is the unusual student who emerges from a graduate program as a confident scholar who feels good about herself or himself (Andersen, 1992, p. 166).

The individual relationship between research students and their supervisor, as well as the overall environment of a department, is also a crucial factor in the success of a student and, given, the current gender imbalance among the academic staff in British departments, women students are likely to have a male supervisor. The relationship is inevitably one of power and patronage and consequently tends to reinforce gender inequalities. All research students, whether female or male, often find themselves acting as unpaid help, running errands, doing menial tasks but it is important to ensure that for women students these do not reinforce their traditional roles. How often do women students find themselves making the tea, finishing data analyses or baby sitting rather than collecting field data, attending a conference or co-writing a paper? These are issues that are seldom raised in research seminars or research manuals but which affect the everyday social practices of a department. The issue of sexual attraction/sexual harassment between (usually) an older male supervisor and a younger student is even less likely to be raised but the lure of intellectual work and academic exchange is powerful and seductive as many of us know, but do not acknowledge, and the position of a young female research student may be difficult.

A different set of questions are important about the other end of the research process – the presentation of papers at conferences and the publication of interim results and the end product. For many women the establishment of an authoritative personal presence in a predominantly male gathering is difficult. It is noticeable at the annual conferences of bodies such as the Association of American Geographers and the Institute of British Geographers that women are conspicuous by their absence in certain speciality sessions (GIS seems to be the notorious example) and evident in others. The establishment of specialist groups dealing with gender issues has increased the overall visibility of women geographers at conferences but the problem of gender sessions becoming female ghettos needs to be addressed.

Turning to publishing, the important questions seem not to be general ones about publishing work by women (there is no evidence that women in general have a harder time publishing their work than men in geography – indeed in Britain the official organs of the Institute of British Geographers – *Area* and *Transactions* – both encourage women to submit and the IBG's Equal Opportunities Working Group monitors submission rates), but about the impact of work that takes a specifically feminist approach. Does feminist/critical work have to reach a critical mass before it becomes a visible presence in the key journals of the discipline? How many papers have to be published before feminist geography becomes a recognizable entity/approach? It would seem that recently as evidenced by such publications as *Society and Space*, *Transactions* and the *Annals* that such a mass may have been attained but as yet there are no journals in geography that include feminism in their title or in their statement of aims. This absence will be remedied from 1994 with the publication of an explicitly feminist journal *Gender, Place and Culture* to be edited by Liz Bondi and Mona Domosh. How much difference will this make? How often are feminist papers cited – now one of the criteria of a successful geographer (Bodman, 1991)? Will the development of a specialist journal make this less or more likely? Are feminists obliged to cite the work of male authorities to be taken seriously? (It is interesting that perhaps the most cited recent paper that adopts a feminist analysis is one attacking a 'great man' of geography (Massey 1991).) Is there any evidence that feminists, who submit their papers to journals edited in the main by men, have had difficulty in getting their work accepted? Does it matter that, to judge by

the lists of referees which appear annually in the key journals of the discipline, submitted papers are reviewed in the main by men? At the moment we cannot answer these questions.

In the next three sections I want to turn to questions about the construction of geographic knowledge – looking in turn at the selection of research topics, at methods and at theory. To some extent, of course, these are artificial divisions as the three areas obviously overlap. The topics selected for research by graduate students reflect not only the dominant values and paradigms of the discipline or disciplinary sub-area but also the values and politics of individual researchers, as well as the framing of certain questions within particular theoretical and methodological approaches. As Judith Stacey (1988) has suggested, 'most feminist researchers, committed at a minimum, to redressing the sexist imbalances of masculinist scholarship, appear to select their research projects on substantive grounds. Personal interests and skills meld, often mysteriously, with collective feminist concerns to determine a particular topic of research, which, in turn, appears to guide the research methods employed in its service' (p. 21).¹

Thus, subject, theory and methods are interrelated. They are separated here for ease of discussion and also to try and make more visible the mystery Stacey refers to. I have also chosen to discuss them in this order as, to some extent, the issues raised under each heading reflect the chronological development of wider debates in feminist theorizing, especially more recently about the continued significance of gender as an analytical category (Bordo, 1990; Di Stefano, 1990; Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1983, 1986). As I shall suggest, the arguments in recent feminist scholarship about the construction of partial or situated knowledges raises immensely difficult, albeit exciting, methodological questions that have barely begun to be addressed.

THE RESEARCH TOPIC: UNCOVERING IGNORED TOPICS AND DATA ABOUT WOMEN/GENDER RELATIONS

One of the major, and earliest, achievements of feminist scholars in the social sciences has been to challenge the definition of what is geography, and hence appropriate topics for research, by adding in previously neglected areas. At any one time there exists a general agreement about what constitutes the subject matter of geography, although the justification for including certain topics while excluding

others is seldom made apparent. However, the constitution of any discipline is a contested matter, its focus may be challenged and the subject matter changes over time. What tend, somewhat dismissively, to be termed 'women's issues' were excluded from consideration for many years on one or several of four grounds – that they are trivial; that they are at the wrong spatial scale, for example the domestic; that the methods used to examine these issues are not respectable (not science, inappropriate to geography); that the work is biased, subjective or, worse, political. All these charges have been levelled at feminist scholarship at one time or another.

Redefining geography to include 'women's issues' was one of the major achievements of the first stage of feminist geography. A whole range of new areas become admissible for investigation. These included childcare, domestic power relations, housework, women's life cycle stages (single parenthood or widowhood, etc.) and their relationship to spatial behaviour, access to resources, male violence, women's health, friendship networks, the gendering of skills, women's informal labour in a range of societies at different stages of development, women's social mobility, the power relations built into urban symbolism and customs. And as the emphasis shifted from women to gender relations, other sets of issues were placed on the agenda – about the socio-spatial relations between men and women, about, more recently, the social construction of masculinity and its variation between places, about the relationship between sexuality and residential location choices, and, more recently still, work on uncovering the differences between women as well as between women and men (see Bondi, 1990, 1992, and Pratt, 1990, for recent reviews of some of this work).

Partly in response to black women's criticisms of western feminism as white, ethnocentric and middle class in its emphases and practice, an exciting body of new work is being published, at present mainly outside geography, and that attempts to explore the mutual constitution of gender, race and class. This work aims to go beyond the notions of additive dimensions of inequality as summed up in the phrase 'the triple oppression' which is used to place black, working class women at the nadir of a hierarchy of oppression (Spelman, 1988). As it is sensitive to the ways in which a woman's experience of, say racism or heterosexism, actually constitutes her sense of herself as a woman, this work seems to have a great deal to offer to geographers (see, in particular di Leonardo, 1991 and Mohanty *et al.*, 1991). Conversely, feminist

geographers surely have a significant contribution to make to feminist theorizing, as our disciplinary *raison d'être* is to explore diversity and spatial variation in, among other issues, the social construction of self and gender relations. The focus on differences between women, on the specificities of gender relations in space and time within feminist scholarship, has opened up an exciting coincidence of interest in the key concepts of our discipline. I shall return to a more detailed discussion of the theoretical significance of difference in the final section of this paper.

SEXIST BIASES IN RESEARCH METHODS: CRITIQUES OF CONVENTIONAL METHODS

One reason for the long exclusion of women's lives from geographical research, indeed from the social sciences more generally, lies in the methodological arena. Here a number of factors combine to inhibit the investigation of women's lives and gender relations. These include the absence of statistics that distinguish women from their family or that accurately record their waged work, let alone their unpaid labour; the choice of research methodology and/or, when using interview techniques, the choice of the subjects to interview. As these criticisms are now relatively well rehearsed (see Oakley and Oakley, 1979; Roberts, 1981; Waring, 1989) a few examples should suffice.

Many geographic studies do not question a focus on the household as the appropriate unit of analysis, nor the unproblematic definition of the male partner (where there is one present) as the head of household. This means that internal power relations within the household remain unexamined. Other studies focus only on men and exclude women altogether. Here the long tradition of ethnographic work is a salutary example. From the early monographs of the Chicago School in the 1920s and 1930s through to later texts men are the subjects. A good (bad) example is William Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1955), a project during the course of which he seemed unaware that he had interviewed only men. The contemporary classics of the 'youth' and 'popular culture' literature (Cohen, 1972; Corrigan, 1979; Hebdige, 1979; Willis, 1977) are no different. The respondents, 'the youth' on the street, are almost always male (although see McRobbie, 1991).

A different strategy has been to include women in the initial research design but to drop them from the analysis part way through. This is often because the differences between men and women seem to raise

intractable problems of classification, analysis or comparison. If women are included initially, in for example, studies of occupational mobility or housing inheritance, they tend to be dropped from the analysis because of the severe problems that are raised by trying to assign a class location to women. Should a woman's class location be based on her own job, if she has one, on her father's if she is single and on her husband's if she is married? This conventional solution – to allocate women on the basis of a man's social class whenever possible – raises problems of cross-generational inconsistencies when comparing women's social mobility, as the occupational structure itself has changed over time. So what exactly are we measuring by adopting these conventions? Perhaps, anyway, it is the household that should be the unit of analysis, if questions about social status, or about regional variations in living standards, are the focus of research. These complex difficulties have been the subject of long debate by sociologists (for example, see the exchange between Goldthorpe (1983, 1984) and Stanworth (1984)) although neglected by many geographers. Too frequently, the resolution is to exclude women and girls altogether. Not one of the classic social mobility studies (for example by Glass (1954) in the 1950s or Halsey *et al.* (1980) or Goldthorpe *et al.* (1980) in the 1980s) included women's experiences. These problems are not unique to sociology or geography. An interesting paper by Beverly Thiele (1986) includes a number of further illustrations of methodological and theoretical 'vanishing acts' practised by the 'grand old men' of social and political theory that have resulted in women's exclusion from most of the classic texts.

Conventional research methods in human geography especially those involving interviewing, have also been criticized on the grounds of the gender blindness of those administering the survey or undertaking the interviews. For example, male researchers may privilege male respondents without considering whether the information so obtained is systematically biased. And in certain circumstances, of course, male researchers are precluded from gathering certain types of information because of their gender. To take an extreme example men are precluded from research involving Asian women in *purdah*. Of course the reverse argument also applies and the work of women, too, is influenced by their own position (their gender, race, class, age, etc.) and that of their respondents. One of the lessons that feminist critiques have taught us is to be aware of this. However, this still leaves difficult questions of *how* we include our own

social location into the interpretation of our work. In what ways should we take it into account both in the conduct of the research and in the ways in which we write up our results? What are the appropriate methods for building on the advantages we possess as women researching women? These are questions that have received a great deal of critical scrutiny from feminist social researchers in the last few years.

FEMINIST METHODS

There is a lively debate between feminists about whether there is, or whether there should be, an accepted set of feminist research methods. Although there has been relatively little consideration of this question by geographers, a large literature by feminist scholars exists elsewhere (Bowles and Duelli Klein, 1983; Fuss, 1989; Oakley, 1981; Roberts, 1981; Smart, 1984; Stacey, 1988; Stanley, 1990). In general, there is broad agreement that feminists, within and outside our own discipline, are searching for methods that are consonant with their values and aims as feminists, and appropriate to feminist topics. However, beyond this broad axiomatic statement of aims, there is less agreement about whether there are particular methods that are peculiarly suited to feminist investigations or, indeed, whether 'conventional' research methods might be appropriate for feminist ends, albeit used critically. Where views have tended to coincide, however, has been on an insistence on collaborative methods – on methods in which the typically unequal power relations between a researcher and her informants are broken down. Thus there has been a challenge to the argument in conventional methods manuals that involvement with and participation in the lives of those who are being investigated 'biases' the results. In the collection of 'data', for example, it is not assumed that the researcher is objective or value-free, nor is she assumed to stay 'at a distance' from her subjects. As women interviewing women, commonalities of experience should be recognized and become part of a mutual exchange of views. Hence the assertion in the title of a paper by Ann Oakley – 'Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms' (1981). As Australian feminist Elizabeth Grosz (1986) suggests

the conventional assumption that the researcher is a disembodied, rational, sexually indifferent subject – a mind unlocated in space, time or constitutive interrelationships with others, is a status normally attributed only to angels (p. 199).

The most common strategy advocated by feminists in a search for a collaborative and non-exploitive relationship with the participants in their/our research project has been some variant of a qualitative methodology, either based on in-depth interviews or, less frequently, on participant observation and ethnographic research. Thus it is often argued that qualitative, detailed, small scale and case study work is ideally suited to women studying women. It is assumed that such a methodological approach draws on women's (purported) abilities to listen, to empathize, and to validate personal experiences as part of the research process. Further, it is suggested that this type of research allows the development of a less exploitative and more egalitarian relationship between a researcher and her participants than is possible in other methodological frameworks. Thus the interconnections and the relationships that might develop between an interviewer and her subjects are seen as a valid part of the research process, rather than something to be guarded against. Intersubjectivity rather than 'objectivity' characterizes the ideal relationship between a feminist researcher and her 'subjects' and many texts and articles discussing feminist research methodology have concentrated on forms of participant observation as the preferred method. As Duelli Klein (1983) has argued: 'a methodology that allows for women studying women in an interactive process will end the exploitation of women as research objects' (p. 95).

To what extent have these arguments about feminist methodology been influential in feminist research strategies throughout the 1980s? Have feminist sociologists, economists and geographers been able to draw on their reserves of empathy and concern to construct a different type of research from that undertaken in the mainstream? And has Duelli-Klein's very positive belief in the end of exploitation any validity?

The evidence, from geography in particular, is so far rather limited² and further, it is becoming clear that participant observation may not be as immune from the power differentials that mark conventional methodologies as was once imagined. It seems that the acceptance of subjectivity, involvement and interpersonal relationships in the research process is as likely to raise difficult ethical questions for researchers as do conventional methodologies, as well as posing difficult questions about the particular experience of those committed to feminist approaches in their geographical research. To date,

however, we know very little about the particular experiences of feminist geographers, despite recent, and welcome, attempts to demystify geographical research and to examine the problems, as well as the advantages, of a (re)focus on qualitative methods in geography.

In two recent collections that are widely used in undergraduate teaching, little attention was given either to feminist methods or to the particular position of women as researchers in geography. In Eyles' *Research in Human Geography* (1988) I was the sole woman contributor and I ducked the chance to write a personal piece, raising instead general issues about feminist approaches. In Eyles and Smith's collection *Qualitative Methods in Human Geography* (1988), despite a number of thoughtful contributions by women, there is a surprising absence of direct discussion of gender issues.³ Smith, for example, positioned herself as a white East Midlands woman and made it clear that her geographical 'otherness' as an East Midlander studying the West Midlands was at least as significant as her gender. And indeed, she was, as a whole, curiously absent from the drama she described in her chapter despite her subtitle 'the analysis of self in everyday life'. Donovan (1988) mentioned in passing her race, but not her gender, and it was left to Cornwall (1988) to raise questions about how the research process is determined by the social relations of the academy and the field. She explained how her gender gave her privileged access to networks of women informants, but once so positioned she found it difficult to gain access to similar informal networks of men via women. Direct approaches to men, presenting herself as a powerful individual (i.e. as an academic) were more successful. Evans (1988) was the exceptional male contributor to this collection who raised questions about his social position as a researcher, explicitly locating himself as a male 'insider' studying his own community.

In other disciplines there is also surprisingly little discussion among feminists of the particular problems that are raised by the adoption of an explicit attempt to open up the research process, and to overcome the inherent inequalities of women in privileged academic positions studying women who usually, but not always, are in less privileged circumstances. In the mid-1980s an excellent stream of books and research monographs appeared by, in the main, feminist sociologists and economists who adopted some variant of a qualitative or ethnographic research methodology. These studies include Ruth Cavendish's (1982) work in a car components factory, published as *Women on*

the line; Sallie Westwood's (1984) sensitive investigation of gender relations and ritual on the shop floor in a Midlands hosiery factory; Cynthia Cockburn's (1983) now classic study, *Brothers: male dominance and technological change*, addressing issues of masculinity and work practices among print workers; Rosemary Pringle's (1988) work on sexuality and power in the office published as *Secretaries talk*; and Judith Stacey's (1990) ethnographic study of two working class families in Silicon Valley, California, *Brave new families*.

In all cases the research involved detailed interviews, participant observation or in Cavendish's study, actually taking a job in the factory and sharing the monotony of women's everyday work lives on an assembly line. Sallie Westwood, while not actually working for the textile firm that she examined, also spent many hours with her informants sharing their lives not only on the factory floor but also participating in extra-work activities such as a hen night. These two case studies seem to me to be among the best examples of how to do gender-aware research. In both of the resulting books the reader gains a vivid picture of the women's lives. But even here the authors remained relatively hidden. Whilst Cavendish writes movingly of the effects of the monotonous work on her abilities to combine intellectual and manual labour, neither author addresses the affects that their presences had on the interactions between the women workers and between themselves as a researcher/worker and the other women. It would have been interesting to know whether Cavendish (actually a pseudonym for Myriam Glucksmann!) revealed her 'true' identity to her co-workers and what they felt about it, as it would in Westwood's case. Each author remains relatively absent from her text despite working and socializing with the women she studied.

The extent to which scholars are able to reduce the barriers between themselves and their subjects⁴ and the ways in which this influences the power relations of the research process as well as the form of the final text is, perhaps, raised more clearly if the example of Westwood's more recent research is taken. Here, she is not a woman interviewing women, with all the baggage of assumed commonality that goes along with that, but a white, middle-aged, middle class academic interviewing 'the other'. Her subject is the social construction of black masculinity on the streets of a city in the Midlands (Westwood, 1990). It involved hanging out with young Asian and black men, talking about football, girls and so on. I wanted

to know a lot more about their reactions to her than she revealed in the published results. How much difference did it make that she was so different from the young men she interviewed? And by what criteria should we judge what she reported in her paper? Similar questions are raised by the interesting recent work of Cindi Katz (1989; 1991), which is perhaps more familiar to geographers than Westwood's work. Katz is challenging conventional definitions of appropriate subjects for geographical research by investigating the everyday lives, rituals and resistances of children and young people in the Sudan and in New York City. But again in her work she tends to draw a veil over the implications of her own position and the effects of her involvement on the rituals she records. Yet she surely is less than invisible in both of these 'foreign' fields. We need to begin to turn our attention to such questions as the difference that it makes who does the research and how to 'speak for' (speak with? but it is the researcher who ultimately controls the text) our subjects who may be very different from us. Are we forced to abandon the notion of an empowering and equitable dialogue that feminists envisioned a decade or so ago?

SOME DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Feminist-inspired notions of doing research 'with' or 'for' rather than 'about' women (or other 'others') seem admirable and are becoming widely accepted within human geography (at least by those who hold to a notion of emancipatory geographies). However, it is becoming clear that the adoption of qualitative or ethnographic methods alone does not release the scholar from exploitative relations, or even the betrayal of her subjects. As I read the feminist texts on methods (and attempted to adapt them to my own work on landlords, and more recently on merchant banking), certain feelings of unease grew stronger. These were partly clarified while reading Pile's recent *Transactions* paper (1991) on interpretative methods. There Pile, influenced by psychotherapy rather than feminism but coming to similar conclusions, argued for the construction of a 'research alliance' rather than the more conventional 'distant' or uninvolved relationship between researcher and subject(s). He argued that, in building an alliance, despite the unequal power relations inherent in most interview situations, 'both interviewer and interviewed try to come to an understanding of what is taking place around them' with the intention of 'developing the

trust that allows people to share their experiences and feelings in a safe and supportive atmosphere' (p. 459). This seems to me a highly dubious general statement which ignores the importance of the context of the research and the differences in social status, power and resources between the interviewer and subject(s). In the (perhaps atypical) circumstances which Pile and most feminist inspired discussions of research methodology seem to ignore, that is where the inequalities of power and prestige favour the research subjects, it is the researcher who is vulnerable and open to exploitation. Are we therefore permitted here to use the 'tricks of the trade', including 'feminine' wiles, to persuade our informants into confidences that they would prefer not to reveal? How, as women, do we appropriate particular versions of femininity in our presentation of self in different circumstances? And which masks of conventional femininity are most suitable for which circumstances? Is it ethical to be 'honest' with the relatively powerless women respondents that we study in certain circumstances, while disguising our purpose from others (often powerful men) whom we know would refuse to speak to us if they could read our minds? In such cases, revealing our own values and judgements may make it less, rather than more, likely that our informants would trust us. Clearly Pile's idealized notions are not uniformly applicable. Erica Schoenberger and I have recently debated this and other issues involved in interviewing the powerful (Schoenberger, 1991, 1992; McDowell, 1992a).

Even taking the (more typical?) example of relatively powerful academics interviewing less privileged informants, a number of questions continue to puzzle. Is it a realistic aim to endeavour to empower the subjects of our research or does this in itself reveal contestable notions of domination? (Lather, 1988). A more appropriate aim may be to provide the means towards empowerment, ensuring that as we do so we do not make public information or strategies that may compromise the less powerful. But this still leaves us in the position of the judge of the utility/validity of our findings. Sometimes we may not know the implications of our decisions. And what do we do with the knowledge that we gain from our respondents that we would much rather not have? Research guidelines are not always helpful on these difficult ethical issues. Judith Stacey (1988), for example, although self-identified as a feminist, found that, in her own recent study of family relationships in California's Silicon Valley, she came to question the advice of the many feminists, and others, who

advocate interpretative methods to reduce the distance between the researcher and subjects. She found that in detailed ethnographic fieldwork work she was more, not less, likely to become bound to her informants in a network of exploitative relationships, abandonment and betrayal than in her earlier work. Thus Stacey argues that, 'Precisely because ethnographic research depends upon human relationship, engagement and attachment, it places research subjects at grave risk of manipulation and betrayal by the ethnographer' (pp. 22-3). She described several situations (a lesbian affair, a secret paternity case and illicit activities) which all place her 'in situations of inauthenticity, dissimilitude, and potential, perhaps inevitable betrayal, situations that I now believe are inherent in the fieldwork method' (p. 23, emphasis added).

Patai, in a similarly thoughtful dissenting discussion of the possibility of 'empowering research methodologies' (1991), has identified similar problems. There are dangers when, as she puts it, 'feminist researchers are unconsciously seductive towards their research subjects, raising their expectations and inducing dependency' (p. 143). Women doing gender research, usually although not always involving interviewing other women, are quite likely to find themselves in circumstances where they are more powerful, more affluent and with greater access to a range of resources than their subjects. It is too easy inadvertently to generate expectations of positive intervention on behalf of the women being studied, sometimes leading, as Stacey warned, to feelings of disappointment or even betrayal. There is no obvious way to resolve these problems. As Daniels (1983) concluded in her discussion of self-deception and self-discovery in fieldwork: 'It is in the nature of ethical problems that they are not generally clear-cut, readily or finally resolvable. It is in the nature of fieldwork that you are likely to find yourself up to the waist in a morass of personal ties, intimate experiences and lofty and base sentiments as your own sense of decency, vanity or outrage is tried' (p. 213). It may be that the ways in which these dilemmas arise and are resolved should become part of the training programme of aspirant scholars.

It is, however, becoming increasingly clear that the notion of non-exploitative research relations is a utopian ideal that is receding from our grasp. As Harding (1991) has argued recently 'knowledge is socially situated and scientific methods bind the knower and the known together in social relationships of domination and subordination typical of the

race-, class-, and gender-stratified society in which science is produced'. Thus we are forced to recognize that knowledge is always situated; that, as Stuart Hall (1991) has argued 'enunciation comes from somewhere. It cannot be unplaced, it cannot be unpositioned, it is always positioned in a discourse' (p. 36). I take this to mean that we must recognize and take account of our own position, as well as that of our research participants, and *write this into our research practice* rather than continue to hanker after some idealized equality between us.

Recognition of the difficult issues that this recommendation raises – of positionality, ethics, disclosure, power and representation – has not, of course, taken place in isolation within feminist debates. Methodological reflection has been part of a wider demand for critical theorists of whatever complexion to rethink their claims to knowledge in relation to their own positionality. This demand has arisen from a widespread critique of western enlightenment thought. Feminists, post-structuralists, post-colonial and queer theorists have developed a coincidence of interests in their project to reveal how the 'unmarked subject' of history embodies male, bourgeois and heterosexist assumptions. While this project has perhaps been the central purpose of feminism/s whatever their theoretical stance, it has also opened up an enormous challenge, as the centrality and the stability of the notion 'woman' and the taken-for-granted commonalities between women are subject to question too. In the paragraphs below I shall therefore attempt a virtually impossible task – a short history of feminist thought – for the (relatively) uninitiated. Here the specific purpose, as with this paper as a whole, is to orient those who are unfamiliar with the debates about feminist epistemology and to whet appetites for the substantial literature that is available elsewhere.

A HISTORY OF FEMINIST THOUGHT

The history of feminist theory, while like all histories of thought one of contested positions and contradictions, is a story of great, although perhaps immature, certainty now being replaced by a period of mature doubt. In little less than a decade feminist scholarship seems to be in danger of swinging from wild optimism about the prospects of the construction of a body of explicitly feminist thought associated with empowerment through knowledge, to extremes of self doubt about the validity of the category 'woman' itself. The range of positions that have

been evident over time in that (still small) body of knowledge that might be subsumed under the heading feminist geography/ies reflects this swing (McDowell, forthcoming; Penrose, *et al.*, 1992).

One of the most successful achievements of some of the earliest work in the post-Seventies feminist scholarship has been its sustained critique of the social construction of knowledge, and its division into bounded disciplines. Although it would be incorrect to portray the changing emphases of feminist scholarship as a linear progression, the general trend has been a movement from the correction of absence towards new theoretical constructions. The feminist critique of the social sciences – the demonstration that the exclusion of women has not merely been the result of empirical oversights, but the consequence of the dominance of certain theoretical assumptions – has had significant implications for our work as geographers. There now exists a substantial body of work demonstrating that a set of phallogocentric assumptions lie behind those key dichotomies that are a central element of the structure of Western social theory, geography not excepted. Feminist scholars have revealed the ways in which the mind/body, public/private, culture/nature, reason/emotion, abstract/concrete dichotomies are mapped onto gender differences so that the inferior of the two attributes is, in each case, assumed to be feminine *and* as such 'natural' and so excluded from theoretical investigation (Benhabib and Cornell, 1987; Harding, 1986; Merchant, 1983; Pateman and Grosz, 1986; Scott, 1988). The deconstruction of this 'naturalness' has been one of the most dramatic achievements of feminist scholarship to date. It also finds parallels in the ways in which other oppositional discourses have shown how other 'minorities' have been similarly constructed as 'natural' – for example 'savage' 'untouched' or 'uncivilized' in the case of non-white groups, 'childlike' or 'helpless', in need of a patriarchal protector, whether an individual man or the state, in the case of the old and the young.

Examples of the ways that these classic dichotomies structure geographical scholarship are numerous (see Sayer, 1989) who surprisingly omitted to discuss the gendered associations of many dichotomies), but one of the uniting features of social theory (especially the neoclassical economics and Marxism that have so influenced human geographers) is the way in which women have been excluded from consideration by their association with 'natural' activities of reproduction. Thus it is the nature/culture split and the relegation of all the activities associated with

reproduction to the former arena that has proved such an efficacious method of excluding women and gender relations from geographical research.

As many feminists have demonstrated, Hartsock (1983) and Nicholson (1984) among them, what is 'natural' ceases to require a social or political explanation. The irony of the theoretical exclusion of the social relations of reproduction, is nicely summed up by Mary O'Brien below (1981):

Clearly reproduction has been regarded as quite different from other natural functions which, on the surface, seem equally imbued with necessity: eating, sexuality and dying for example, share with birth the status of biological necessities. Yet it has never been suggested that these topics can be understood only in terms of natural science. They have all become the subject matter of rather impressive bodies of philosophical thought; in fact we have great modern theoretical systems firmly based upon just these biological necessities – Dialectical Materialism, Psychoanalysis and Existentialism . . . The inevitability and necessity of these biological events has quite clearly not exempted them from historical force and theoretical significance (p. 20).

Reproduction is thus banished to the natural or private sphere, and much of many women's lives along with it. The history of geographic thought demonstrates a remarkable focus on the public arena in its analyses. The world of geographic scholarship has been that of the public world of the state, the firm and the city. But here too phallogocentric notions succeed in relegating women to the sidelines. As Carole Pateman (1988) – an influential political theorist – has demonstrated, the individual or citizen that is the key figure of liberal theory is in fact imbued with characteristics of masculinity – a rational being unencumbered by bodily attributes, needs and desires, who is free to participate in the public arena of political and social life. These ideas find an echo in the previous focus of geographical theorizing on, for example, rational economic man and, more generally, in the ungendered individual of geographic research. Despite recent emphases on demanding questions of citizenship and nationality it is rare to find any awareness of the differential position of women in these debates (although see Smith, 1988, and Marston, 1990).

Feminist demonstrations of the phallogocentric nature of the key dichotomies structuring the social sciences have, however, born fruit in our discipline. Demonstrating that a public/private distinction, and an *implicit* association of the former with men, the latter

with women, lay behind the assumptions of land use planner, architects and urban designers, and housing policy was an early achievement of feminist analysis in geography (Harman, 1983; Little, Peake, and Richardson, 1988; MacKenzie and Rose, 1983; McDowell, 1983). Thus the ways in which the industrial western city structures gender relations became an object for geographical attention and research. Similarly feminist political geographers have contested the definition of politics as being solely associated with the public arena (Bondi and Peake, 1988), and economic geographers, working in both advanced industrial societies and the 'Third' world have shown how conventional definitions of work have excluded women from the frame of analysis (Brydon and Chant, 1989; McDowell, 1991; Momsen and Townsend, 1987).

A uniting feature of a large number of the early studies by feminist geographers was righteous anger and an appeal to liberal notions of justice. It seemed possible that by appealing to geographers innate good sense and belief in fair play, that demonstrating the blatant unfairness of excluding women (hedy the human race after all) would be enough to remedy the situation. In her outline of a chronology of feminist approaches, Di Stefano (1990) has labelled this phase one of 'feminist rationalism' (p. 66) and Harding, in her story of the developing feminist critique of science (Harding, 1986), a period of feminist empiricism. This period of hard empirical work, fuelled by anger, resulted in many of the studies referred to above. Working broadly within a 'social constructionist' framework, feminist geographers attempted to make women visible. In the effort to remove women from the realm of nature and to place them into geography as fit subjects of geographical theorizing, primary attention was directed towards the demonstration that seemingly natural gendered attributes reflected socially constructed notions of femininity and masculinity rather than biologically-fixed differences.

THE PLEASURE/DANGER OF INVERSIONS

At the same time as some feminists (in geography and elsewhere) were drawn to feminist rationalism and/or social constructionism, others found the strand in feminist theorizing that Di Stefano (1990) has labelled 'feminine anti-rationalism' more appealing. Here a stronger version of difference, with both biological and social roots, threaded through 'protests against the rational/masculine: irrational/feminine construct

and attempts to valorize, rather than overcome, traditional feminine experience, and to reconceive the meaning of *rational* [original emphasis] in a manner that will take into account women's traditional activities' (p. 66). In its more naive guise this feminist (and post-colonial) revalorization tended to take the form of an inversion of the binary categories that structure gender differences: reversing the positive and negative values associated with each opposition. Thus in radical feminist politics, assumed feminine attributes, values or talents – of nurturance, pacifism, tenderness and so forth – are seen as the superior rather than inferior category.

The tendency towards a feminist essentialism in this revalorization, or strategy of inversion, is, for example, evident in many feminist critiques of social science research methods. It has been argued that certain methods are *in themselves* masculine or masculinist and hence to be rejected in favour of feminine (assumed by implication to be feminist) alternatives. Thus a number of texts on feminist research practice suggest that 'hard', logical, quantitative approaches are inappropriate for feminist research and should be replaced by qualitative, unstructured methods that lead to empathy between researcher and her subjects (Stanley and Wise, 1983).⁵ But, as bell hooks (1991), an African-American feminist theorist, argues, it is not possible to merely invert or reverse old categories, rather we have to decolonize our minds and construct new alternatives. She suggests that women and people of colour cannot possibly be immune from hegemonic notions of knowledge. There is no position outside the social construction of knowledge where an unsullied 'other' might speak from. 'Others' too have internalized that set of Western philosophical dualist concepts that structure knowledge – internalized and, often, inverted the dualisms, reluctant to consider the possibility that work is not necessarily oppositional because it is created by women.⁶

FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY

Feminist standpoint theory, identified by Harding in her history of feminist thought as the second movement in a trilogy (feminist empiricism, standpoint feminism and post-modern feminism), partially maps on to Di Stefano's anti-rationalist distinction. It is, however, an attempt to construct a feminist epistemology that avoids the essentialist inversions

outlined above, theorizing, rather than taking for granted, the bodily dimensions of women's activities. For example, it is argued by Hartsock (1983) in her work developing a feminist materialist standpoint, that women have a different, and by implication, deeper or more rooted view of the world because of their/our relationship to the material social relations of reproduction and child rearing. This affects their/our view of the world, creating a distinctive female epistemology or standpoint. Hartsock draws on the work of object relations theorists such as Chodorow (1978) and Dinnerstein (1976) to argue that women's identity is constructed through relations with others rather than as is the case for men, through the separation of self from others. In these theoretical schema this gendered difference originates in patterns of child rearing where women rather than men are the key presence in early years.⁷

Sandra Harding's work on standpoint theories has also been influential. In her discussion of feminist critiques of modern science, she argued that feminist empiricism, in its critique of science as biased, fails to recognize the gendered nature of knowledge. Its inadequacy is addressed in her notion of standpoint science which recognizes the validity of the specific perspective of women. Like Hartsock, she argues that, in Di Stefano's paraphrase, 'the gender specific and differentiated perspective of women is advanced as a *preferable* [original emphasis] grounding for inquiry – preferable because the experience and perspective of women as the excluded and exploited other is judged to be more inclusive and critically coherent than that of the masculine group' (Di Stefano, 1990, pp. 73–4). However, Harding qualifies this 'strong' notion of a feminist standpoint by suggesting that the feminist standpoint approach is best seen as a transitional epistemology, existing in tension with conventional epistemologies in a transitional culture where the move towards alternatives is still in progress. This is a recognition of the tendency within standpoint theory to hold onto the notion of universal knowledge, if not for all, at least for all women. Her answer to her own question 'Is it [the notion of a *single* feminist standpoint] too firmly rooted in a problematic politics of essentialised identities?' (Harding, 1986, p. 27) seems to be 'yes'. She sets out the arguments for the construction of knowledge that recognizes differences between women – on the basis of class, age, ethnicity, sexuality and culture – in an epistemology of 'permanent partiality'. This knowledge is thus forced to grapple with questions of difference.

DIFFERENCE, POSTMODERNISM AND MULTIPLE FEMINISMS

One of the consequences of the recognition of differences between women has been the development of what Susan Bordo (1990) has termed 'gender scepticism' (p. 135). The excitement of an earlier period of optimistic feminist scholarship has been replaced by a more pessimistic period in which previous work, especially that by white Western feminists working within the academy, is seen as over-simplified generalization at best, or biased ethnocentric domination at worst. It is no longer acceptable to claim to 'speak for' feminists, let alone for women in their entirety. We may no longer assume a coincidence of interests based on our femaleness in all situations, but must build theories appropriate to particular circumstances and political alliances around specific issues. As Tonto once said to the Lone Ranger, 'who is this we, white boy?' White feminists have had to come to terms with a similar question from women of colour, as have straight women from lesbians, northern women from southern and so on. Thus there is no longer (if there ever was) a single unproblematic concept of patriarchy to uncover in our research, but rather a complex set of intercutting gender relations, specific to time and place.

The theoretical and methodological reactions to this proliferation of differences are complex. One of the consequences has been a shift from feminist critiques of science to autocritique. Thus Bordo suggests 'Where once the prime objects of academic feminist critique were the phallogocentric narratives of our own male-dominated disciplines, now feminist criticism has turned to its own narratives, finding them reductionist, totalising, inadequately nuanced, valorizing gender difference, unconsciously racist and elitist. It seems possible to discern what may be a new drift within feminism, a new scepticism about the use of gender as an analytical category' (p. 135). In some senses this has been a profoundly disabling turn: 'complex and unnerving, inhabiting a constantly shifting ground of emerging and dissolving differences' (Di Stefano, 1990, p. 68), seeming to cut the ground from under feminist science.

Thus in some hands, this gender scepticism and uncertainty about the use of gender as an analytical category has led to a profound pessimism about the future of feminism as either a theoretical category or as a political movement. But in other hands it is leading to an exciting new phase in the theoretical

exploration of gender difference. The recognition of difference, of multiple locations, and the inherent instability of gendered subjectivities, means that feminisms must replace a single feminism. It is becoming clear that adequate theorizing about women's position must simultaneously include racial, class, ethnic and other differences as they contribute to an unstable gendered femaleness in specific historical and geographical circumstances. This acceptance of difference, that the subject of Western thought, including feminist theories, bears the marks of its creators as gendered and positioned by race class and culture, has enormous theoretical consequences.

The moves within feminist scholarship to address these consequences parallel those within post-modern theory but with very different theoretical and political emphases. As Bordo has suggested, 'Post-modernism expresses the claims and needs of a constituency [white, privileged men of the industrialised West] that has already had an Enlightenment for itself and that is now ready and willing to subject that legacy to scrutiny' (p. 75). Feminism is addressing a different past – one of subjugation and exclusion. Thus, while the scrutiny within post-modernism is leading to a denial of the claims to authority of any group, within current feminist theorizing the similar recognition of difference and multiple subjectives is empowering rather than disabling. As Donna Haraway, a provocative feminist adherent of difference has argued:

While contributing fundamentally to the breakup of any master subject location, the politics of 'difference' emerging from this and other complex reconstructings of concepts of social subjectivity and their associated writings is deeply opposed to levelling relativisms. Non-feminist theory has tended to identify the breakup of 'coherent' or masterful subjectivity as the 'death of the subject'. Like others in newly *unstably* [original emphasis] subjugated positions, many feminists resist this formulation of the project and question its emergence just at the moment when raced/sexed/colonized speakers begin 'for the first time', that is, they claim an originary authority to represent themselves in institutionalized publishing practices and other kinds of self-constituting practice (Haraway, 1991, p. 147).

And, as she continues, 'feminist deconstructions of the "subject" have been fundamental ... [they are] necessarily political accounts of constructed embodiments ... [taking] affirmative *and* [original emphasis] critical account of emergent, differentiating, contradictory social subjectivities, with their claims on action, knowledge and belief' (p. 147).

The result of gender scepticism, therefore, should not mean the denial of earlier theoretical work, but a recognition that without it the current exciting feminist scholarship exploring difference, the work, for example, on the importance of fantasy in the constant reconstitution of identities, on the shifting and multiple construction of gendered subjectivities, would not have been possible. As Bordo (1990) has suggested 'We all – post-modernists especially – stand on the shoulders of this work. Could we now speak of the differences that inflect gender if gender had not first been shown to make a difference?' (p. 141).

CONCLUSIONS

This brief excursion through the history of feminist theory might seem to have taken us a long way from the type of questions that face graduate students as they begin their research careers anxious about the methodological implications of 'doing gender'. It seems clear that optimistic notions of bridging the difference between research worker and research subjects are not possible; that we, as scholars, cannot, nor should we aim to, empower our participants. That is a political task for them, or better, one that we might share together. The recognition of difference and positionality, of the embodied nature of knowledge, and the key theoretical advances here, make it clear, however, that the search for what methods text books call 'scientific' knowledge, for 'objectivity' and non-involvement in the lives and feelings of the people we study must also be abandoned. But nor do we need to succumb to the relativism of post-modernism – the notion that any viewpoint is as valid as another. Perhaps instead we might join in the attempts to construct what Haraway (1991) has termed 'feminist versions of objectivity' (p. 190), by which she means limited and situated knowledges, knowledges that are explicit about their positioning, sensitive to the structures of power that construct these multiple positions and committed to making visible the claims of the less powerful.

While Haraway continues to hold to a version of feminist standpoints (the plural is important) and argues that we have grounds to believe that the vision from below of subjugated peoples is a better vision ('they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge' (p. 191)), she also warns of the dangers of romanticism and/or of appropriating the knowledge of the

less powerful. These are real dangers that are inherent in our own position within the powerful institutions of knowledge production.

Self-identified feminist researchers within universities have to face difficult questions. Does our work challenge or confirm the hierarchies of power within the academy? What and where do we publish? Who is speaking for whom and for whom are we writing? Who judges the validity of our work? We also need to address our own position as producers of knowledge. Until recent epistemological shifts and the greater acceptance of the arguments of this paper about the situated and embodied nature of knowledge, women scholars who chose to study women were faced with a double marginality in the academy – doubly disqualified by their own gender and that of their research subjects. It was often easier to become a surrogate man – what Acker (1990) refers to as 'the biological female who acts as a social man' (p. 139), adopting the unmarked, disembodied ideal that was/is socially valued within academia. However, the ideal of a feminist version of objectivity that Haraway espouses demands that we deny this temptation, and make visible our own critical positioning within the structures of power.

It is clear that the construction of partial and situated knowledges from a critical position will not be an easy task. It is one that has just begun and there are few methodological guidelines. It poses a serious challenge not only to conventional orthodoxies, be they right or left, with their continued commitment to notions of a single progressive narrative, but also to post-modern versions of difference. But this aim – the construction of committed, passionate, positioned, partial but critical knowledge – is one which is eminently geographical in its recognition of the locatedness of knowledge. It is also one which has the potential to unite those of us working on feminist, post colonial, gay and lesbian geographies in a common project, albeit with different foci. The particularity of feminist geographies, in this wider project, however, lies, in Haraway's words, in its 'critical vision consequent upon a critical positioning in an inhomogeneous gendered social space' (p. 195).

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NOTES

1. The notion in physical or the more 'scientific' areas of geography that the choice of field area and methods is a rational one (less mysterious?) is challenged in a recent paper by Keith Richards, 'The field and fieldwork in realist physical geography', (available from the author, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge).
2. A forthcoming issue of *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* considers issues raised by the turn (back) to ethnography that is currently influential in geography.
3. The unsatisfactory association of gender with the women contributors while men escape as 'ungendered' should not have escaped the reader. This is too common a practice, relegating all discussion of gender and 'women's issues' to the ghetto of feminist approaches in geography. It is not my intention to continue this association, but at the present time, unfortunately, it tends to be female scholars in the discipline who are more attuned to questions raised by the embodiment of the researcher. For example, it was surely not fortuitous that it was women who pointed to the gendered assumptions in Harvey's book. However, male geographers are also – at last – turning their attention to the significance of their masculinity for their scholarship (see in particular Jackson, 1991 and Pile 1991).
4. The term 'subjects' for the people we study is an interesting one. I tend to use it in the sense of a subject/person, somebody with an identity or subjectivity, but, of course, it also has connotations of authority/colonialism – the subject of a regime. I find this double meaning provocative, and hesitate to replace it with the more egalitarian term, 'participant', as what is at question is just how much the people that we study to enter our work as participants.
5. Gillian Rose (1991) seems to hold a variant of this position, suggesting in her review of Harvey's *The condition of postmodernity* that certain types of knowledge, 'hard, logical, certain, oppressive', are masculinist by definition.
6. Massey's (1991) recent critique of Harvey's *The condition of postmodernity* (1989) seems to me to make this assumption. She elides, for example, women and feminists in the term women/feminists (p. 32) and assumes, rather than questions, a common response to the text by all women readers by virtue of their femaleness. She points out that women's responses to the illustration differ from men's as they are the subject of the (very definitely sexist) illustrations, but fails to point out that, in this text at

least, it is white women who are the objects of the male gaze.

7. Lynne Segal (1987), among others, has criticized Chodorow and other theorists for relying on idealized notions of mothering and family life that deny variety and ignore the interrelationships between class and race and mothering practices.

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