

# Editorial: Gendered Subjects

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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